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CART 415

A Pink Sky: Final Project Report

Website link: https://catweng.wixsite.com/cart415-pinksky

Throughout the semester, I worked on this game project together with Yasmine Roy. As described on our website, our game is:

"A simple 2D platformer with an emphasis on interactivity and exploration, with a focus on a colorful and therapeutic 8-bit pixel art style. The game itself would consist of several "villages" located in a diverse set of geographical environments, like forests, canyons, snowy mountains, and so forth. The player would be able to swiftly move between each village, with their ultimate goal to move "east", or to the right of the screen. Interactivity is a major element in the game; however, it is not a required goal. Indeed, the player always has the option to interact with other characters or objects to try to learn more about the protagonist and the world around them, but it is never imposed like other open-world games."

The idea for this game was to create an environment a player could easily become immersed in with a rich storyline, but also more agency in their journey through the fictional world. We didn't want to shoehorn players along in a dragging storyline, but let them explore and discover at their own pace. The game has a very relaxed, casual attitude conveyed through interaction with game elements.

Our initial idea in coming up with this style of game was made with the time restriction of the semester, and several other classes in mind. We decided to go with more straightforward gameplay mechanics so we could focus on the content and the artistic choices that went into it. As Yasmine focused on the coding aspects, I focused on the art and writing. We both agreed that we were really into creating a game that focuses on the art, even if that meant sacrificing some gameplay complexity. We had a very strong and relatively achievable vision from the start so I think overall, our objectives were pretty solid and stayed the same throughout.

Moment 1
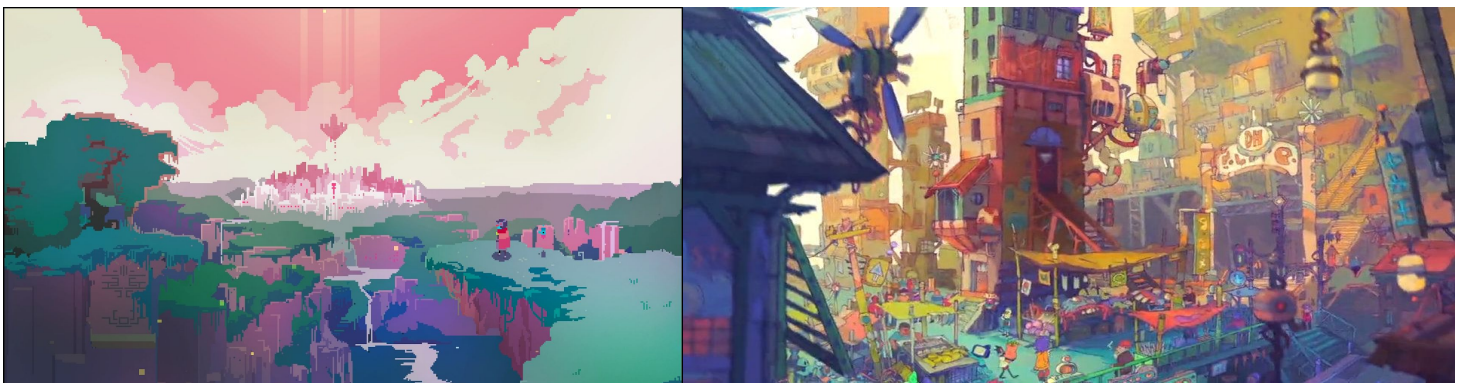
Since we had a pretty concrete idea of what we wanted our game to be like, we were also inspired by games similar to what we envisioned. Pictured on the above left is Hyper Light Drifter, which ended up the main artistic inspiration for our game. I really liked how a few shades in several colours could create such a feeling of depth, and the amount of detail in the relatively simple art. Although I never noticed it before, the final scene for 'A Pink Sky' actually looks very similar. On the right is Eastward, which is still pixel art-based but highly detailed and really beautiful. I wanted to meet a balance between a limited palette for simplicity but creating enough detail to be visually interesting. Other inspirations include Journey, which I liked for the clean visuals and strong monochrome palettes and Hollow Knight, with its side-scrolling mechanics and moody atmosphere.
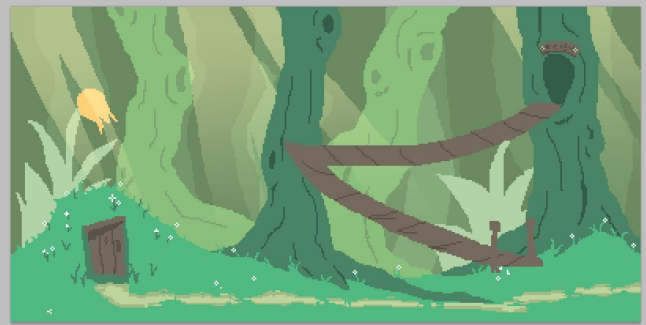
At this point and being in charge of art, I made a few sketches as to what our map should look like. We decided that a forest themed map would be a good choice to create something interesting from a player perspective and from ours as well. The above image was the first iteration of what would eventually become our forest map on the bottom left. With a focus on making the game appealing to a wide audience, we kept the colours vibrant but elegantly shaded, along with highly stylized art for a cute look. The top left image was a *very* rough sketch of what a potential map layout could look like, with the sample in the bottom left corner for scale. We also threw around some sprite designs at this point and settled on one created by Yasmine that we felt best represented the idea of the player as an unknown figure, discovering themselves through exploration.

As for the gameplay, we were very ambitious about where we wanted it to go but still kept our expectations realistic for what was actually achievable. Namely, the complex dialogue and quest system that would set our game apart from others. We wanted to

make NPC interaction a key element in conveying the story behind the game. At this point our workflow was about getting the core mechanics together and functional, and then expanding on the content would be much easier.

Moment 2

By this point, we had divided up tasks and had an organized workflow between the two of us. It was here we really settled on dividing the tasks between art and working in Unity, in part due to Unity's habit of not cooperating between versions. We also divided tasks in terms or urgency and priority so we could get the most important parts working first. We did this on a shared Trello to keep things simple and facilitate updates.
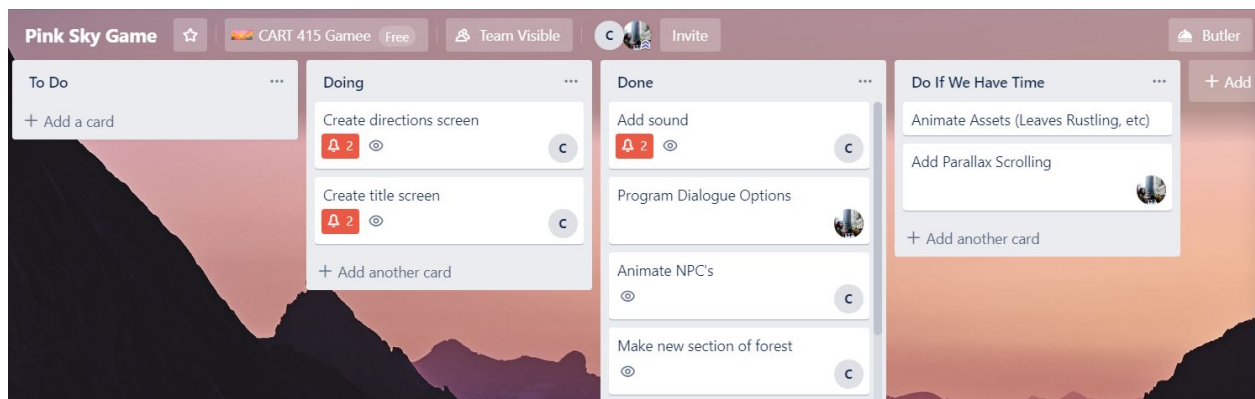
It was here we decided on the name "A Pink Sky" and I put together an extremely rough version of the scene that would become the game's namesake. A comparison can be seen at the beginning of Update 3.

While Yasmine put together mechanics like movement, interaction and dialogue, I started creating assets for the rest of the game. I also did some research into pre-made dialogue Unity assets because it's such a common thing in games I figured it had to exist already. I started off with drawing all the potential NPC characters and creating a very basic interactive questline between them, one that sent you on errands through town looking for the missing resident squirrel. On the bottom left are the NPCs I created while bottom right is the dialogue options for one character that were implemented in the game. I tried to give each character a distinct personality within the limitations of the dialogue we could put in here.

Moment 3

This is where the project really started to come together. The mechanics were not quite perfect but they were more than functional for what we needed to have a game and Yasmine had finished implementing the dialogue system. Where the previous moments were about having the bare bones up and running, here we were able to flesh it out and turn it into a proper game. "Extraneous" things such as music, a title screen, extra animations, etc. We also created extra maps and allowed the character to enter different scenes, an important element to the exploration aspect of our game.

I also created a few sample scenes for different maps in the future if we so happened to want to expand on what we already created here as seen below.
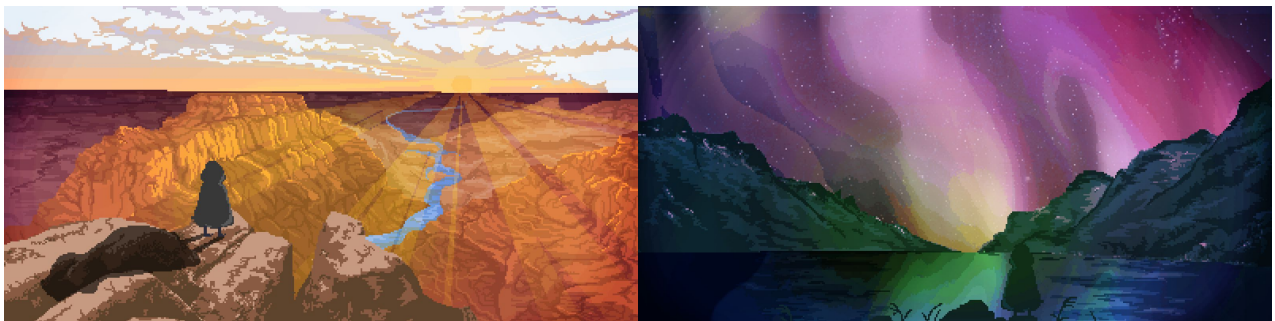
Although we have a start and instruction screen, as well as a complete quest line, we regrettably have no conclusion to the current scene as we weren't able to have that done in time. While the game is playable, the player has no goal to reach since the system wasn't fully incorporated.

Final Evaluation

I really enjoyed this collaboration between the two of us. Yasmine and I have worked together on other projects before, and found that we meshed well together but we also discovered a lot about each other through this class. We were able to play to strengths we both didn't know the other had. Knowing I had a partner I could rely on I feel like allowed me to work with more freedom on my parts of the game. Pixel art is something I've always been interested in making but I never felt like I had an outlet or goal in mind with it, so I never felt justified in exploring the medium. This was a good learning experience for the two of us. However, as we are both stronger in terms of art than in programming the road to the finish line was somewhat rocky. While the concept was strong and we knew what we wanted, achieving that was not so straightforward. Coding and game mechanics rarely work out as intended. For example, with mechanics such as having to run to cross certain bridges and the buggy climbing, I redrew the map to accommodate for the problems but it wasn't enough to remove them completely, and we had to implement workarounds. As I mainly focused on art, I feel like I don't quite understand the struggles Yasmine went through but I can definitely appreciate the passion, work and dedication that went into this project.

I think this project was a good challenge for Yasmine and I, and a chance to express ourselves through something we are passionate about seeing come to life. Our game was made with the potential for relatively easy expansion and I believe we are both interested in seeing where we can take this project going forward. It has a strong base to build off and we want to create a game with a narrative depth that many similarly styled indie games just don't have. It is definitely something to further develop and we are proud of our progress through the semester and the amount we actually completed compared to initial expectations. Although it feels like there's a lot we could improve on, we achieved something that we set to do and we can be proud of ourselves as game designers.