My game design ideas

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# Overview

My game is a real time squad-based RPG. You can have 1 – 4 characters in a squad and you’re in a world with several factions at war, trying to fix problems (I’ll come up with a main story arch later but it’s somewhat irrelevant atm). It will feel like a top down MMO with concepts like tank, healer DPS but each character can use anything you like. You can also witch to taking control of any character in your squad and an AI will take other your existing character.

It’ll be a somewhat low poly game (I’m not 3D modeller / artist) with Sci-fi themes, similar to Cloudpunk I guess. I’ll try and make something that resembles a functional environment with factory areas, farming areas, civilian and military etc. The AI will almost be playing an RTS game against each other, whilst you’re going round messing things sup or siding with some AI etc.

# Broad Ideas - Genre / Basic Gameplay Aspects

This section covers well know / defined gameplay features that most people should be used to. I’ll give a brief explanation of how I intend to use it my game with examples from other games.

## Roguelike

1. Replay ability / Permadeath – During the game, you can unlock gear / abilities that can be used in the next playthrough. There will be a max limit per playthrough as to how many things you can unlock. There will be research stations, maybe one per area and they will be hidden in secret rooms (*This might hinder the sense of progression and move away from the norm of roguelikes if the player fails to find them or is aware of them*)
2. Weapons / Abilities – I want to make everything in the game have a fixed damage / healing value and balance the weapons / abilities around what pros and cons they have. I do not want different levels of weapons or abilities but simply different ones

## Squad Based

You will control a squad of varying size, for instance like in Dungeon Siege 2, Broken Lines, Final Fantasy etc. The only way this will work is, if you get stronger based on how often you do things and having less members in a squad means that you’ll get stronger faster, as each member will have to pull their own weight more. One person may take a while to get stuff done but it should still be possible, and four members should just have more variety and maybe better at dealing with different situations.

## Tactical

I want this game to ***require you to think about your approach to a situation***. So many games have slows, knockbacks etc. and they just don’t get used cause damage is always a better option. I want to make CC and different ways of dealing damage that should all feel equally rewarding. A key feature I want is ***abilities that can be interrupted and intercepted***.

Like in MMOs you should have an ability with every member that can interrupt a skill the enemy is “casting”, therefore stopping a key ability entirely. I always want the players to be able to body block enemies’ attacks. If your healer is about to be sniped, physically moving another character in the way should make them take the hit instead.

A few games that come to mind are:

1. WoW, ESO etc. where interrupts and crowd control can be used to disrupt enemies
2. Borderlands has status effects that either weaken the enemy or allow your class to do more to them. Maybe you have a bleed and an ability that heals when you hit a bleeding target etc.
3. Sniper Elite has a lot of environmental objects that can be used to set up some great kills. I’d want to put in some recurring objects that can be used to achieve this as well

Something else I want to be a more critical part of the game is, making it so bosses are just players with higher health and different weapons. I personally hate games where the bosses don’t obey the rules as the player unless it makes sense. If I headshot a “person” in an RPG, boss or not, they should die, or at least have an exceptionally good reason not to.

## Event Driven

I want to make the general outside world feel very interactive and therefore want the outside to ***act regardless of the player***. I’m going to have ***several factions constantly fighting it out around the player, performing various and actual tasks that they would if it were real life***.

I don’t want to make it so this is just ongoing and one side never wins, I fully intend to give somewhat random events that occur to one side that might massively shift the power balance and ***cause one side to loose***.

When the player does join in, they can influence the fights and cause events to happen, either directly or indirectly. If you kill a random mini-boss out in your travels, you might find out later that he was about to attack an enemy base and you just allowed the other side to win. However, you might not know this at all as he was a general gun for hire and didn’t reveal his orders.

This should make the player feel like they’re in an actual functional world in conflict and they can still do things within it. I like the idea that you could help one side to victory and then turn on them and kill them as well.

A game which I’ll be taking a lot of inspiration from, although doesn’t do quite enough for what I want, is The Division 2. You have 4 main areas with outposts that are controlled either by one of 4 factions or you. They have supply lines that move from one outpost to another, but nothing really happens when they get there, or not that I’ve seen, and outposts only seem to grow in strength when the player influences the surrounding area.

## Random Generation

## Top Down

## Low Poly

## Skill Tree

# Specific Ideas – more unique to my game (I think)

## Character Switching

One major feature I wanted to take from my inspiration for this game, Dungeon Siege 2, is character switching. The main idea is, you make “your” character and throughout the game, you find others to add to your party. Like a normal top down hack and slash style game, you control one character directly, moving with the mouse and pressing a button to attack etc. and your party members follow you around.

However, ***you can take direct control of other party members and have AI play your character***. This works well, and you can have your character still being what you made it, but you can basically switch to a completely different playstyle (Tank, Healer, DPS) at any time. Got bored of killing things? Change to healer and let the AI kill things.

This is a system I got working in my first attempt and with some minor improvements could be exceptionally smooth and hopefully work better than in Dungeon Siege 2.

## Intelligent AI

This isn’t a “new” idea, but I think a lot of games have really dumb follower AI and in Dungeon Siege 2, some were next to useless, forcing me to constantly pause and tell them what to do directly. The AI in my game should be able, with an amount of decision making, be able to use any weapons and abilities you’ve given them without issue.

It’s important to note that this will be needed anyway to make the normal enemy AI and the only real difference is making the normal AI less intelligent and therefore not feel like your playing against a bot that is always being 100% effective.

A possible issue with this might be that the ***AI ended up being much better at the game than the player***, able to perfectly execute their abilities. For example, using a stun ability on a target about to use a high damaging attack, within 0.1 seconds of the AI starting that attack. This might make the player feel inferior OR allow them to have some fun on a single character whilst the team is still doing a good job.

For me personally, it’s like being a healer in an MMO with a team that doesn’t take any damage. ***Sometimes you must do something, but you can kind of do nothing and the game carries on without you.*** After all, the people in your party have a will to survive and it’s always felt weird to me when you have a character that is a professional X and Y and they either stand there and do nothing or what they do has very little impact.

I like this a lot and I think the key to success here is, ***to make fights where the AI will have issues without direct command.*** I.e. a boss that isn’t just, stand there, press damage attacks and heal / tank when needed. Make a boss that requires your team be standing in specific places, make adds that need to be priority and make use of the environment, maybe giving AI some tasks like, having to hold a lever to make a door open etc. during combat.

### AI Commands

To achieve the above, I’ll need to include a well thought out UI that allows the AI to do anything the player can do, without needing to take direct control of the AI. This is standard in these kinds of games and shouldn’t be hard to do.

***The key to this part is making context-based UI. Options appear filtered both on where / what you clicked on and what your team can do at that point in time.*** An example would be, you have two items you need to interact with at the same time, but one character is already doing this. When you bring up the menu on the other item, the character already doing something is greyed out. Another example is, you bring up the menu on a boss and it only shows you what abilities that you can do there and then first, with the other ones ***greyed out but you can select them to queue it up.***

## Environment changes based on the situation

A key idea I really wanted to have in my game, is making the environment change based on what’s happening. This would be things like, all the colours are bright and vibrant to start with and then as you get into combat, it slowly changes to darker colours. I also wanted it to be a ***new way to symbolise being on low health, where the ratio of red to black shifts towards black, the lower your health.***

I have managed to make this system work already and I’m hoping to improve upon it and make it work really well

## Levelling system

Experienced is based on how “effective” you are at your role. If your abilities heal, you gain exp based on how much you heal, if you tank, you gain exp based on reducing damage you take.

***Exp is not gained on kill but is gained on playing your role***

As enemies only have a finite amount of health, having 4 DPS with the same weapon, say an SMG and they each deal 25% of the boss’s health as damage, they all gain the same EXP. However, if one has a shotgun and deals 50% damage, that character gains more and the others split the remaining 50% between them.

This may seem like an issue at first, almost like kill stealing, but the shotgun is not going to be the best at dealing with sustained combat compared to an SMG and lacks range. Therefore, the next few fights, the shotgun may barely be able to get a hit in before the SMG does.

### Possible Issues

* If one weapon becomes unbalanced, by never having a “bad” situation, it will almost exclusively level up compared to your other DPS
  + Make sure weapons always suffer in 25% of all fights in some way. Always give them some downsides:
    - Snipers should be slow firing and reload – bad against swarm
    - SMGs should deal medium damage fast fire rate – Low ish range and single target
    - Shotgun – Very low range, high damage, AoE
    - Melee High single target, close range, slow attack speed
* Players could abuse tanks and healers by leaving a few mobs and standing there and just taking damage and healing it.
  + Enemies will get stronger alongside your characters “level” and therefore the next boss you face will still hit hard and you might find your DPS now suffer due to being unable to deal as much damage as they should be. You will still have a good tank and healer, but the fight might take a lot longer
* Using new weapons later in the game my feel inferior to existing weapons
  + ***The enemy’s “difficulty” is based on the level of your skills trees but only the ones you are using***. Therefore, switching weapon will lower the “difficulty” at least somewhat. This might cause issues in a 4-man squad with 1 member using a level 0 weapon and 3 using a level 100 etc.
  + Maybe I need to include up-scaling for weapons and skill trees. Let’s say I have the 100 and 0 example. I could scale the 0 to about 75 in terms of it’s strength but still level it as if it were 0. As you would be doing a lot more damage, you’d also level it up faster, to match the rest of your squad but still needed to put in the effort to do so.
  + Need to ask peoples’ thoughts on a “catch up” and ***scaling system***
* Lack of incentive to change weapon, due to needing to level it up and use resources on skill points
  + Make a ***catch-up system***
  + Make the skill point items purchasable late game
  + Make most weapons available in the first 2/3 of the game

# Factions

## Faction Wars

### Reasons to Fight / Incentives

1. Food
2. Water
3. Shelter
4. Space
5. Lack of units (***As my game will have robots, I can make factories that create more***)
6. Weapons
7. Greed

Key Claimable Locations

1. Food supply
2. Water Supply
3. Storage

### AI controlled AI – Dictator

I need a system that allows the AI to make decisions as a group / collective (hive mind) so that they can achieve their goals. I will need to add a sort of scoring system that when need > have, they go out and fix the issue. This would be like; the day rolls over and they don’t have enough food. The AI locates the nearest food supply and sends units towards it. ***I will need to make sure the AI does not just swarm the place with all it’s units and maybe have groups with assigned roles.*** Then the units it sends encounter the enemy faction and fight. They win and stay in the area for an amount of time. The gain another supply of food and each day gain an extra +10 food etc. Now their food needs are met, and they have a new area to defend.

The director assigns some unit to defend it, but this reduces the ratio of offensive and defensive units and may cause some areas to be reduced in power.