ABDICATION

Proof of Concept

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Abstract:

Modern video games follow a set of guidelines regarding player progression and difficulty that have become predictable and are limiting design space. By pushing against this design paradigm and exploring a method that merges the progression and difficulty dynamics, we can create a game that will captivate a core audience of gamers seeking new gaming experiences.

Introduction:

The modern gaming industry has settled into a well-established design methodology regarding player progression and game difficulty. The general structure is that players increase in relative power level as they progress through the game. Meanwhile, difficulty tends to be a setting - a slider or raw number that dictates how "hard" the game content will be. However, this results in an experience that pulls the player out of their immersion because these mechanics and systems exist separately from the game world (Simons, 2007). The goal of "Abdication" is to create a game world which dynamically adjusts game difficulty as dictated by decisions that the player makes as they progress through the game. This difficulty is related to the "reversed power curve" system, wherein the player grows relatively weaker as they progress in "Abdication".

A classic skill tree
Think about this, but in reverse!

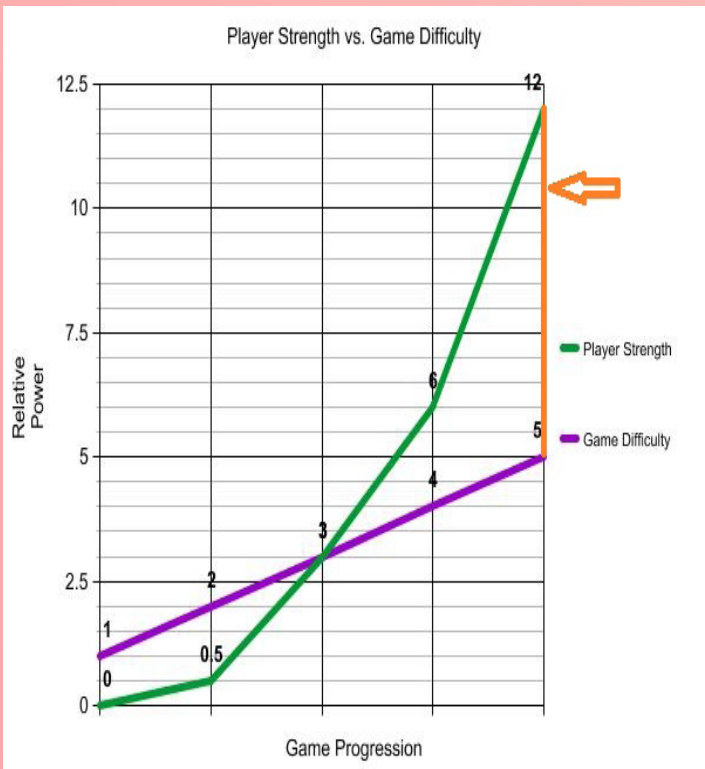
Materials and Methods:

"Abdication" is a game that can be created, start to finish, in the free independent third-party game engine "Unity 3D". Besides providing the tools necessary for building and running the game, Unity3D also has built-in analytics that can be used to measure any number of statistics, ranging from the number of players who are actively playing "Abdication" to the amount of time they spend in any given session of play. These metrics are invaluable in determining the success of the game, but the most important performance indicator of "Abdication" as it pertains to our goals is whether or not players find themselves to be challenged as a direct consequence of the decisions they make - that is to say, whether the players of "Abdication" find that their decisions directly impact their game experience in the form of increased difficulty as they progress. This will have to be measured separately, possibly in beta-testing, through the use of user surveys. These will supplement our raw data, allowing us to be sure that we are leaving the correct experience in the hands of our players.

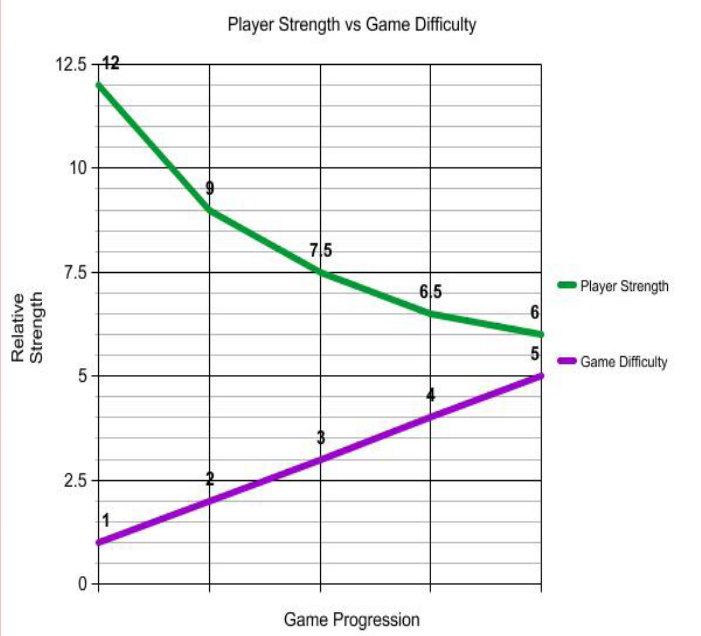
By utilizing Unity3D's many available free assets, our commitment to this project is minimal. With effectively no monetary investment, and the relatively small time commitment that is inevitably afforded to all indie game development (1-5 years, depending on scope), we can create a game that completely breaks away from the norm and stands out as a unique and dynamic experience, one in which the player is fully immersed rather than, as Simons (2007) puts it, an "external observer."

Discussion:

Building a game which aims solely to subvert and reinvent an existing, popular structure in game design requires fundamentally rethinking basic systems and mechanics. In "Abdication", the player starts with all of their abilities and items - in a sense, they are "maxed out" at the very beginning. Through the process of playing through the game, the players will make a series of decisions regarding which abilities and items they want to lose. Sacrificing their in-game strength then gives them a means to progress further through the game. However, this system doesn't come without it's own risks. While there is intrinsic "glory" and "access" rewarded to the player by progressing through "Abdication", the other two fundamental reward mechanisms of "sustenance" and "facility"are inherently given up (Gazzard, 2011). Since "Abdication" forces a player to grow weaker in-game and also prevents them from facilitating new options and paths, we must ensure that there is sufficient external and internal reward mechanisms to make up for these sacrifices. However, there is another way to look at this system.



Modern Paradigm



Abdication's Paradigm

Conclusion:

"Abdication" aims to redefine the existing progression and difficulty paradigms that are endemic to the current gaming industry. By showing that progression doesn't need to be linear and that difficulty can be dynamically adjusted by the player's own decisions in-game rather than as a series of buttons and sliders, we can build a game that will fully immerse our players and prevent them from becoming "external observers", a degree of player immersion that is and has always been the purpose of all game design.

Next Steps:

- Secure funding from any interested investors
- Acquire a team of developers that are either experienced with Unity3D or capable of learning
- Begin development by drawing out a roadmap and cataloging assets that will be necessary

Works Cited

Gazzard, A. (2011). Unlocking the Game World: The Rewards of Space and Time in Video Games. *Game Studies, volume 11 issue 1*. Retrieved from http://gamestudies.org/1101/articles/gazzard_alison.

Simons, J. (2007). Narrative, Games, and Theory. *Game Studies, volume 7 issue 1*. Retrieved from http://gamestudies.org/0701/articles/simons.