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EECS 494

Elephant Escape: Research and Analysis

Elephant Escape is a 2D platform adventure puzzle game. The player plays as Ella, a mother elephant whose child is locked in a cage somewhere in the level. Ella must find a key and bring it across the level to the cage to be reunited with her baby. Elephant Escape was inspired in part by other popular 2D video games and some of its mechanics and design choices draw on these games. However, there are some exciting new mechanics and design choices that Elephant Escape uses to build on these games to make it a unique and fun experience.

Super Mario Bros. (NES):

When brainstorming ideas for Elephant Escape, Super Mario Bros. (released by Nintendo in 1985) immediately came to mind. As one of the most influential and popular video games of all time, Super Mario Bros. has quite a few ideas to draw upon. Elephant Escape uses a similar movement style to Super Mario Bros.. Similar to Super Mario Bros., the camera in follows Ella as she makes her way across the level. Similar to Mario, Ella can move left, right and jump up. This way of moving creates the ability to form complex multi-level puzzles in a 2D environment.

Super Mario Bros. uses this movement approach to create a fast-paced combat style game. Mario interacts with items and enemies in a race to get across the level as fast as he can. In contrast, Elephant Escape has a stronger puzzle emphasis. Instead of only interacting with items and enemies, Elephant Escape also features ways to change the environment. Ella is able to manipulate the structure of

the level she is in by manipulating objects such as trees and boulders to create bridges and stairs. Ella is able to further manipulate the structure of the level by physically changing elements, such as growing trees, by carrying water to them. Adding in environment manipulation provides an interesting strategic/puzzle element for the player.

This is the Only Level:

This is the Only Level is a simple, but entertaining puzzle game by Armor Games published in August 2009. The game features an elephant that needs to get across the level without touching any spikes. This is (usually) accomplished by pressing a button to unlock a gate. The exciting challenge is how something about the level changes each round. While the basic level design is quite simple, the changing movement dynamics make it fun and exciting.

While similar to Super Mario Bros, the Movement of This is the Only Level features an incredibly fast walking pace that is significantly more difficult for the user to manage than that of Super Mario Bros. In its favor, this is the Only Level also uses includes a 'bounciness' to the jump mechanism that adds some much appreciated juice to the 2D platform movement mechanics.

This is the Only Level inspired the 'key' required to open the cage in Elephant Escape by the button that (usually) is used to open the gates. Having two points the player must get to in the level provides a much more interesting challenge than simply having a singular goal the player must get to.

This is the Only Level inspired the more puzzling aspect of Elephant Escape. In This is the Only Level, the player would often be required to think about what has

changed in the level (such as the gate already being down on the 3rd level). In Elephant Escape, elements such as the trees used to create bridges will be used to make the player think about how to approach the level; in later levels, there will often be two choices for how to lean the tree bridge. Furthermore, the water Ella needs to change trees and put out wildfires will be an interesting strategic addition. Ella must get to a watering hole to have water and can only hold so much water in her trunk at a time.

Elephant Escape builds upon the ideas in This is the Only Level by including items, enemies, and pieces of the environment which Ella can interact with. In addition, instead of simply showing the entire level on screen, the levels in Elephant Escape will have a side-scrolling camera to allow for larger and more complex levels.

Overview:

Super Mario Bros. provided an idea for the movement and camera system. The way Super Mario Bros. handles the movement and camera in their 2D world allows for larger and more complex levels than other 2D games (like This is the Only Level). Elephant Escape will build on this by having items in the environment that Ella can manipulate to further complicate the player's interaction with the levels. This is the Only Level provided inspiration for a two-point (key and cage) puzzling level that the player has to think through to get across successfully. Elephant Escape will build on this puzzle idea by including items, enemies, and other things for Ella to interact with.