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Superbrothers: Sword & Sworcery EP is a 2D, side-scrolling, point & click, puzzle adventure game. The game was developed by Capybara Games and Superbrothers, originally released in 2011.

This case study will focus on just the first designated play session of the game. The game starts with no exposition, it just drops the character and player into the game world. This is an effective way for the developer to make the player submersed in the game world purely through the game environment, and how they interact with it. The instructions initially provided are “Look, Listen, Tip Tap.” These are three very simple instructions to follow, because it doesn’t require anything more than using the senses. “Tip Tap” refers to tapping the screen twice to move the character to the place you tapped. The three instructions of the game are a good starting point to analyze the dynamic composition of *Superbrothers: Sword & Sworcery EP*.

“Look”

Analyzing Shapes and the Game Environment

Character Poses and Shapes

The player character has a tall, thin body, with sloping shoulders and thin arms and legs.



Character in Resting Pose

Visually, the shape of the character slopes down and outward from their head. This makes the character seem stable on the ground, and not top-heavy. The shield they are carrying on their back seems to almost balance the character out, as they are slightly hunched forward. The large square shape of the shield exemplifies strength and stability. In this sense,

having a character with a sense of confidence, stability, and strength is important. The player is about to embark on a mysterious journey into an unknown world. The player needs to feel purposeful and ready for adventure, to *want* to take on a hearty quest. If the character was visually represented as afraid or vulnerable, then the player may be reluctant to explore the game world.

When the character walks, they use a swaying gait at a moderate pace. Their legs curl and become semi-circles after each step, and they have a smooth sway in their shoulders. It is a very calm and steady walk cycle. This *also* works to emphasize the stability and confidence of the character. Even in this unknown place, the character isn't stressed and seems to enjoy the adventure. By using this effect, it makes the player more comfortable with the game environment and character.



Character in Combat

The character changes their pose when they enter combat. They pull the shield to their hand and squares their shoulders. The combat pose shows more stability; they have their legs shoulder-width apart, and their arms down and over to their side, weaponry in hand. The player puts their trust in the character to defeat any threats. With such steadiness, the player *can* trust the character.

In the first section of the game, the player only fights two enemies. One of them is a wolf, which can be spotted from afar, before entering combat, allowing the player to recognize that there is danger. The wolf's head sits well below his shoulders, giving him a menacing look. The strange proportions of his body are unsettling; his large body and skinny legs are off-putting. The wolf's head comes to a sharp point, forming a triangle, representing aggression. When the player sees this from across the screen, they are able to instantly recognize this threat from the way the wolf is



Wolf Enemy

designed. The character also has a dog NPC that follows them. In comparison to the yippy, bouncy dog, the wolf is a clear threat the player.

Environment Shapes

The game world is made up of square pixels, but the larger shapes in the game are not limited to squares. In this screenshot, the environment is made up of circles and squares. The circles represent the organic shape of the bushes and the treetops. Meanwhile, the



squares show the rock formations, cliffs, and a manmade structure. Rocks and bushes are both occurrences in nature. The combination of these two shapes provides a mood and helps in gameplay.

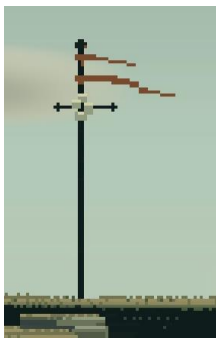
The bushes combine with the rocks to provide a good sense of depth in the world. The player can click on the bushes, and they'll bounce and jiggle, and particles flow throughout the environment. Even though they are limited by a set, square path, the player can still interact with multiple parts of the environment. The vegetation represents the vast wilderness; where the player can't go, while square rocks are normally placed near the given pathway. The circular shapes show the freedom and innocence of the nature around the character, and the square rocks define the rigid and clear path that the player must use to traverse the game world.

The pathways in the game are windy but straightforward. Bordered by rocks, the path



curves left and right up the cliff-side. Although the environment may seem perilous, the smooth swishing of the character as they traverse the path left and right does not make the player feel at

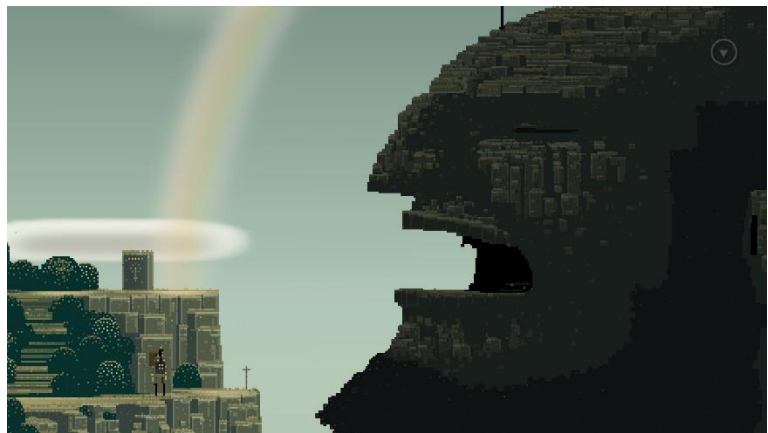
risk. The winding path and character animations keep the player comfortable with their actions of sending the character up this cliff.



The tone begins to change when the player sees this strange post. The thin triangle shape of the torn fabric instills a sense of danger to the player. The way it flaps in the wind is unsettling to see compared to the smooth shapes and animations of the player and environment. This is what the player sees first before they see the menacing wolf enemy that they must soon fight. The red

color, compared to the subtle pastel blues, greens and beiges, presents danger to the player, and they should expect danger to come.

At this point, the player reaches a cliff with a giant rock head across the gap. The contrast between the cliff the player is standing on compared to the head represents impending danger. The



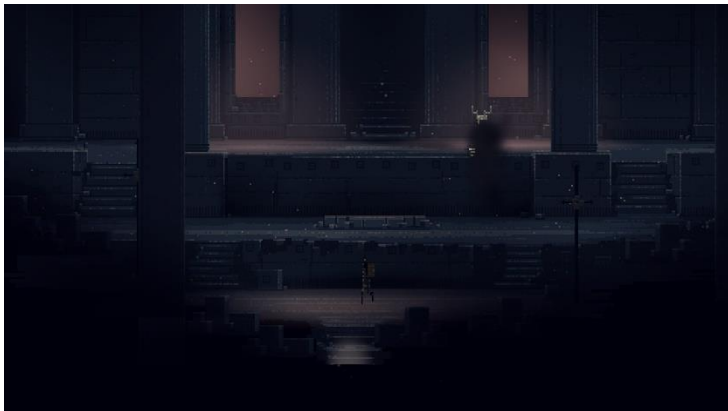
player may not know there is danger ahead, but this scene can instill an uneasiness in the player.

The chasm in the mouth of the face is dark and lifeless, giving the player a sense of mystery and ominousness.



The colors become very dull and bland when entering this new area. Another post with a skull on it greets the player. There are no bushes or foliage to complement the square pathways and rocks. At first glance,

the player may be hesitant to explore. It is clearly different than all other environments that the player has seen before. But, the character continues to remain calm and walk with the same confident swish as before, keeping the player invested in exploring this area.



After retrieving the item they came for, the character is chased back out of the temple. The setup of the area is shaped like a triangle, to funnel the player downwards, back from where they came. This ensures that

the player knows where to go. This is the first time the player is required to move to survive.

The only thing the player has experienced beforehand was wandering around wherever they wanted along the given pathways. This funnel shape makes it easy to quickly identify the way out of this area.

By soaking in these shapes of the characters, their poses, and the game world, an overall tone is set for the player to feel. Expressing the feeling of a confident character makes the player ready to explore the game world. The game world is pleasing to look at, with shapes that make

the player feel comfortable and calm, influencing the player to *want* to explore. The player can experience the game and world at their own pace. It is clear to see when the game's tone changes by the way the environment is shaped and expressed. When the player is expected to do something specific or different than normal, it is clear what to do. By listening to the game, the player understands a whole new sense of the game world.

“Listen”

Analyzing Audio Design and Dialogue

The sounds of *Superbrothers: Sword & Sworcery EP* are pretty realistic. When the character is dropped in the game world, they are standing next to a pond near a field of sheep. If the player closed their eyes, they would be able to get a good sense of where the character is. The soothing ambient noise of crickets chirping and leaves rustling is very calming. Stepping past the water into a small puddle results in a splash. Each action is complemented by a soothing noise. Even though the game does not look realistic, with strange proportions and scenery, the sounds of the game bring it all to life, and make it believable.

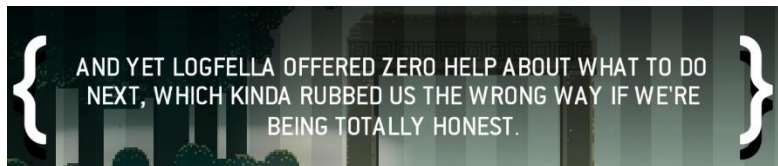
Having familiar sounds makes the player more comfortable in the environment. They are able to realistically expect a splash noise from stepping in a puddle, and it sounds real. Contrary to common form, this pixelated game does not have harsh bit-crushed noises. When walking across a bridge over a waterfall, the rush of water is realistic and loud, passing between each ear as the player crosses. Using stereo sound adds a greater sense of depth in the game. It continues to add to the realism that the sound design proposes. This realism makes the player more familiar with the environment, because they can relate real life experiences of sound to what they are doing in the game.

The music does not take the forefront of the player's attention. Instead, it complements the scenario and environment. The sounds of peaceful and soothing flutes and strings emphasizes the calm environment the player is dropped in, exemplifying that there is no active threat to be afraid of.

When interacting with a game environment, it is obvious to the player when an object is activated, such as tapping on a locked door: a deep resonating tone plays as the camera pans to focus on the object. On-screen text then tells the player that the door is locked. The player then presses a big button to close the text, to a satisfying tone. Tapping on a bush makes it jiggle with a smooth swish sound of the leaves.

When entering the scary chasm and temple, the music and sounds change. The cave has an ominous moaning to it, accompanied by the squeaks of bats. The contrast emphasizes the danger of the environment that character is in. Before entering the fight with the wolf, a loud crescendo sets the tone of danger and fear.

The dialogue in the game is humorous and playful. It contributes to the mood of the game. The player is supposed to be comfortable and happy in the game environment. The silly



dialogue is informal, helping the player connect to the game and characters more. For example, when the player taps on a man outside a house, a dialogue shows up that says "The Wood-Chopping Woodsman Chopped Wood." Visually, it is not entirely clear what the man is doing as first glance. But, when the player activates this dialogue, it seems pretty obvious what the man is really doing, and feels silly that we can just call him LogFella, because he chops logs. The player can't help but to chuckle at the situation. Many different dialogues appear when the player interacts with objects.

“Tip Tap”

Analyzing Player Gestures

The player interacts with the environment by double-tapping (“tip tap-ing”) objects and objectives. The character moves to the point that you double-tap. Though, the player is only limited to the set pathways in the game, most of the game environment is still able to be interacted with. Tapping makes bushes bounce, and water splash. This feature makes the game world more lifelike and realistic. In real life, if you hit a bush or throw a rock in water, it has the same effect that it does in the game. The realism contributes to the player’s perception of the game world. The developers did not want to limit game interactions to just the given pathways so they made almost all of the viewable objects interact-able. When tapping on certain objects such as doorways, signs, or people, on-text dialogue will appear.

This mechanic allows players to simply tap objects to learn about or use them, without needing to walk up to something, wait for a UI to pop up, and then let the player press a button to learn about it, like in many games. As soon as an object is tapped, the character runs up to it and the on-screen text automatically appears. The very simple controls allow the player to do everything they need to do. Keeping it simple helps the player understand the game better, and the controls don’t get in the way of submersing the player in the game world. The controls help the game world become more realistic and alive.

Usability in *Superbrother: Sword & Sworcery EP*

The shapes in *Superbrothers: Sword & Sworcery EP* and the mood/feelings they represent are almost perfect. The game world is very convincing, enjoyable to look at, and fun to explore. The sound design is fantastic, it capitalizes on the moods of settings and solidifies the realism when interacting with the game world. The one issue with the game would be the gestures players need to perform in order to play the game. The game was originally developed on iOS, for use with touch screens, and was later ported to PC and consoles. The current control scheme is great for physically tapping the screen to interact with objects. But, needing to move the mouse around and double-clicking it to move the player around the game world is not as intuitive without a touch screen. For PC, the game would be more enjoyable and interactive if the character was directly controlled.

Having WASD or arrow keys would be a better form of movement. The game would still function well with the mouse. The mouse would be used to interact with objects, while WASD would be used to move. Using direct controls would give the player more purpose and control over the character and the game world. Double-clicking on objects would still bring up dialogue about the object.

Combat could also be improved by adding the use of the keyboard. Currently, combat is just two buttons: a sword and a shield button. When an enemy attacks, you must block their attack by clicking the shield, and then clicking the sword. This gesture must be timed when the screen flashes and a sound plays. This could be changed to a quick-time event style of gameplay. A random keyboard key will appear when the player needs to block an attack and must press it before the attack lands in order to block it. Attacking could work similarly. There could be a block phase and an attack phase, where different quick-time events happen.

Bibliography

Superbrothers: Sword & Sworcery EP. Capybara Games, Superbrothers. Capybara Games. PC
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