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Ascent from the Underworld

Overview

Theme / Setting / Genre

- 2D vertical-scrolling platformer with a dark theme; set in the underworld

The Elevator Pitch

Ascent from the Underworld will be an innovative 2D vertical-scrolling platform game set in a dark and unforgiving underworld; it borrows tactical combat gameplay mechanics from Dark Souls and combines them with traditional puzzle-like platform challenges for an interesting and new experience.

Influences (Brief)

- **Influence #1: Dark Souls**
  - Medium: Video Game
  - Dark Souls presents the player with a dark and mysterious world, filled with challenging monsters and little guidance. It teaches the player how to play effectively by encouraging the player to explore freely and learn from their mistakes when they die. Each enemy has its own distinct move set; the player must learn and adapt in order to survive.

- **Influence #2: Super Smash Bros. Melee/Brawl**
  - Medium: Video Game
  - The design of this game will be based on the stages Icicle Mountain from Super Smash Bros. Melee and Rumble Falls from Brawl. These levels feature floating 2D platforms, cycling through a vertical-scrolling screen. If the player can't keep up with the scrolling, he/she dies if dropped off from the bottom of the screen.

- **Influence #3: Thomas Was Alone**
    - Medium: Video Game
    - Thomas Was Alone exemplifies how interesting jumping puzzles can be incorporated in a game with very minimal, blocky graphics. Inspiration can be taken from its intricate 2D level design, which requires some degree of thought to navigate through effectively.

Core Gameplay Mechanics (High-Level)

- Gameplay Mechanic #1: **Jump**

The environment is filled with floating platforms in which the player can jump/climb to. The screen is constantly scrolling vertically; if the player falls off the bottom edge, he/she dies. The player cannot jump through the side of the screen. The edges of the "underworld" are concrete and do not loop to the other side.

- Gameplay Mechanic #2: **Health/Stamina**

The player has a health and stamina bar. Health is self-explanatory; it works in the same way it does in most other games (i.e. die when health reaches 0). The player uses stamina to perform actions such as attack or jump. When the stamina gets low the player's ability to jump and attack are lowered.

- Gameplay Mechanic #3: **Items**

The player can pick up items dropped from monsters or found on the map. They provide temporary buffs to the player and are expended after use. There can be multiples of each item, and they can be banked for future use.

- Gameplay Mechanic #4: **Bloodstain**

This game borrows the bloodstain mechanic from the Dark Souls series. See the detailed Core Gameplay Mechanics section for a complete explanation.

Targeted platform
- Windows/Mac

What sets this project apart?

- ● Reason #1:

This game will be designed to be more challenging than the average game; it doesn't hold the player's hand. It expects the player to experiment, learn from their deaths and mistakes, and try again. The increased speed over time also forces the user to get quicker with their decisions over time.

- ● Reason #2:

This game combines the style and mechanics of Dark Souls with the level design of 2D vertical-scrolling puzzle platformer games. Fans of one or both genres may find the gameplay to be innovative, and at the same time, fun.

- ● Reason #3:

Although the player is forced to only be able to travel upward by the nature of the scrolling mechanic, the player is given plenty of choice in how they want to play this game. For example, there will also be branching paths as part of the level design. This provides replayability for the game as well as expression for the player. This also allows for more puzzle minded players to focus on the more complicated parts of the level and for players that like to focus on fighting enemies to pick that route.

- ● Reason #4:

The game gives the player many incentives to keep trying again, despite initial failure. The bloodstain system encourages the player to go back to where they last died and keep pushing on further, and the permanent increases to health/stamina are not lost upon death, so that players feel like they are making progress, even if they die repeatedly. The level also has many different options for routes you can travel so the player doesn't feel like they are doing the same thing over and over again.

Player Interaction Patterns and Modes

- **Player Interaction Pattern**
  - Single player vs. computer

- **Player Modes**
  - Player Mode #1
    - For the majority of the game, the screen will be scrolling vertically constantly; while monsters/platforms appear from the top, the ones at the bottom are cycled away. The player needs to keep away from the bottom edge of the screen in order to survive.
  - Player Mode #2
    - For the final boss battle, the screen will no longer scroll. No more enemies/traps/platforms will appear. There will be a static platform for the player to fight the boss. The boss battle will be the final part of the game.

Objectives

- **Primary Objective**
  - Survive as you make it to the top of the map; defeat the boss and escape the underworld. This can be done by approaching the top of the level and defeating the final boss while accomplishing the secondary objective on the way.

- **Secondary Objective**
  - Defeat the enemies in the way; collect items to prepare for the boss. The secondary objective could also be to solve the way to get to the top most efficiently while still surviving.

Procedures/Actions

Move: Arrow keys
Dash: Hold 'shift' (costs stamina)
Jump: Spacebar (costs stamina)
Shield: 's' key (slowly drains stamina while held; takes stamina damage when hit)
Roll: 's' key + left or right arrow key (costs stamina)
Melee attack: 'd' key (costs stamina)
Ranged attack: 'a' key (costs stamina and ammo)
Use items: Number keys (1-5)

Menu: 'Esc' key
- Each menu item can then be accessed using the arrow keys and the enter key

Rules
- The player has only one life. If health is fully depleted or the player falls to the fire at the bottom edge of the screen, start over from the beginning, losing currently held items.
- The player begins the game (first time and after dying) with a set number of health potions (Ex. 3) and ammo (Ex. 10) and no other items.
- Upon death, all enemies will respawn to their original locations with full health.
- Items found throughout the map will be reset after each death.
- The player will lose health if touched by enemy sprite or enemy attack.
- The player will lose health if touched by a trap (i.e. spikes).
- The player cannot pass through walls or platforms.
- If the player does not have the required amount of stamina to perform an action, it will not be performed (the action button will not work).
- There is a maximum number of items that the play can carry (Ex. 3 of each type of potion, 20 ranged ammo)

Resources
The player can collect usable (expendable) items in this game. These items can either drop occasionally from defeated monsters or are found in certain areas of the game, typically on hard-to-reach platforms.

Example items:
- Ammo: For ranged attack
- Health potion: Restore a set amount of health
- Full-heal potion: Restore health and stamina to max
- Regeneration potion: Make health regenerate slowly; make stamina regenerate faster than normal
- Fury potion: Increase attack power

- Shield potion: Shield costs no/less stamina to sustain; shield drains less stamina when hit
- Elixir: Small permanent increase to max health/stamina. Effect not lost upon death.

Objects/Entities

- Enemies: Ghosts, skeletons, demons, ogres, etc. Each has their own stats and combat behavior.
- Boss: The Devil; the ruler of the underworld.
- Player character: Humanoid trapped in the underworld
- Platforms: Mostly rectangular shaped; floating
- Walls: Placed on the left/right edges of the screen
- Items: Dropped from enemies; manually placed in level as rewards
- Traps: Spikes, lava pits, spinning fire windmills, etc.
- Fire pit: Placed on the bottom of the screen. If player falls in; dies.

Core Gameplay Mechanics (Detailed)

- **Core Gameplay Mechanic #1: Jump**
  - The screen scrolls vertically at a constant speed; new platforms cycle from the top of the screen, while the old ones at the bottom disappear (consumed by the fire at the bottom of the screen) If the player falls off the bottom edge of the screen, he/she is swallowed by the fire and dies. *We may change it so that the screen scrolls faster as the player progresses further; we are currently undecided about this feature.

- **Core Gameplay Mechanic #2: Health/Stamina**
  - The player has a health and stamina bar, which is displayed on the top left corner of the screen. The health bar does not regenerate; it goes down when hit by enemies and causes the player to die if fully depleted. The player uses stamina when performing any action other than basic movement. When the player does not have enough stamina, he/she cannot perform the action. The stamina bar regenerates automatically over time.

- **Core Gameplay Mechanic #3: Items**
  - Tougher enemies are more likely to drop items. Items provide temporary buffs (around 5-10 seconds) to the player and are expended after each use. There is a set limit on how many of each item the player can carry. See the Resources section for examples of the types of items that the player can pick up and use. Items can also be found throughout levels randomly. They are more common in difficult parts of the level.

- **Core Gameplay Mechanic #4: Bloodstain**
  - Upon death, the player starts over at the very beginning. All carried items are lost; the player begins anew with the starting items. However, the player leaves a bloodstain at the location of death (similar to the Dark Souls mechanic). The player has one chance to go back to the bloodstain in the next life to retrieve the lost items; if failed, the items are lost forever.

Story and Gameplay

Story
The player takes the role of a lone humanoid figure who is trapped in the underworld. The underworld is filled with vicious monsters and traps. One day there, an enormous pit of fire erupts, and it begins swallowing everything above it; sending the underworld into a state of crumbling ruin. The player will need find a way to travel upward and escape the underworld, battling through all of the obstacles in its path. The player character eventually defeats the ruler of the underworld and ascends into a better afterlife.

Gameplay (Brief)
The player controls a humanoid figure, providing action inputs (move, attack, shield, roll, etc) in order to defeat enemies and avoid traps while traveling upward by jumping from platform to platform in order to escape from a pit of fire at the bottom of the underworld that consumes everything above it.

Gameplay (Detailed)

The player starts at the bottom of the underworld. There are platforms leading upward. As the player moves upward, a flame pit ignites on the bottom of the screen, consuming everything it touches. The screen scrolls vertically, so that it appears that the flame pit is eating everything up, and the only way to survive is to keep moving upward.

New platforms appear from the top; some contain enemies/traps, and some contain items as treasure. The player can move/jump around, fighting enemies and climbing to higher and higher platforms. Some platforms will be difficult to get to, requiring a series of carefully planned jumps. Items/treasures are most likely found on these platforms.

There may be branching paths at times. For example, you can choose to climb the left series of platforms, which may contain a mob of enemies but the platforms are easy to jump through. Or you can choose the right side, which has no enemies, but requires you to make some difficult jumps through some traps.

The player can defeat enemies through melee or ranged attacks. Ranged attacks use up ammo, so they should be used sparingly. To avoid traps and enemy attacks, the player can roll, which gives temporary invincibility frames. Shielding is another option; but it costs stamina to sustain, and hits taken while shielded will still damage stamina. The player can use collected items as buffs to help defeat enemies.

The player will have to learn enemy attack patterns; where the traps/items are located; how to navigate jumping puzzles, how to manage health/stamina/items, etc. It will require some degree of thinking as well as trial and error in order to advance. Careless play and button mashing will not be rewarded.

At the end of the level, the vertical scrolling stops, and the final boss appears. It will have a unique, varied moveset and a large health pool. If the player manages to defeat the boss, the player avatar (spirit) will ascend from the underworld; essentially winning the game.

We may include an (optional) tutorial level at the beginning that teaches the player the controls and basic mechanics. If so, it will be relatively easy to navigate and may reward the player with a few items for completing it.

Assets Needed

- 2D sprites and tiles
- Audio (music and sound effects)
- Animations for enemies
- Background underworld image/design