

Course: IT265-002-S2025

Assignment: IT265 Case Study - Personal Choice

Student: Fernando M. (frm3)

Status: Submitted | Worksheet Progress: 100%

Potential Grade: 10.00/10.00 (100.00%)

Received Grade: 0.00/10.00 (0.00%)

Grading Link: <https://learn.ethereallab.app/assignment/v3/IT265-002-S2025/it265-case-study-personal-choice/grading/frm3>

Instructions

Step 1: Pick a game you plan to analyze

Step 2: Playtest your game choice (or review streamers playing the game)

Step 3: Analyze, research, and review your chosen game. Collect resources (website links, etc that you used during the exploration) include these with the responses in the related sections. Fill in the responses of the below prompts/checklist/etc.

Step 4: Export the PDF. Upload it to Github and upload the same PDF to Canvas.

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Section #1: (1.25 pts.) Game Overview

100%

Task #1 (0.63 pts.) - Historical Context and Game Description

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Weight: 50%

Objective: *Historical Context and Game Description*

Details:

- Game's title, developer, publisher, platform, and release date.
- Historical context of the game's release and its place in the industry.
- Game's genre and how it compares to similar games of the time.

Your Response:

Title: The Binding of Isaac Publisher: Edmund McMillen, nicalis, team17, Headup Games Release Date: 9/28/2011 Historical Context: Follows the release of McMillen and Tommy Refenes' largest work: Super Meat Boy. Isaac is the result of a weeklong game jam made during a time when Refenes was on vacation and

McMillen had enough capital to destress with a low-effort game. Super Meat Boy's popularity meant that there was a large amount of attention on the indie-game scene, being relatively close to the release of Spelunky as well. This popularity also meant that McMillen was no longer feeling the pressure of rent, so there was a chance for this game to be developed before Mewgenics. The Binding of Isaac became even larger than Super Meat Boy, incorporating an addictive and refreshing gameplay loop via procedural generation. Genre: Roguelike action-adventure survival game.



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Task #2 (0.63 pts.) - Gameplay Mechanics

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Weight: 50%

Objective: *Gameplay Mechanics*

Details:

- Discuss the core gameplay mechanics and how they shape the player's experience.
- Explain how players control the game and interact with it.
- Identify and describe any unique aspects or creative elements in the game's gameplay.

Your Response:

Essential Mechanics:

- Player
 - HP
 - ☐ Can collect red hearts to replenish heart containers (max 12, start with 3). Gain containers via items.
 - ☐ Can collect soul hearts which are temporary containers.
 - Movement
 - ☐ WASD, can move freely using any combination of orthogonal vector. Allows you to dodge and kite enemies, making the game mechanically challenging.
 - Shooting tears
 - ☐ Arrow keys or mouse, can fire in any orthogonal direction.
 - ☐ Heavily affected by effects and items collected in game. Requires skill to be accurate, since it is typically a projectile-based firing system.
 - Active Item
 - ☐ A unique type of item you can collect with a powerful effect, which is activated with spacebar.
 - ☐ It is an item you can use to create synergies with.
 - Pickups

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Section #2: (1.25 pts.) Software Architecture And Technology

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Task #1 (0.63 pts.) - Technical Framework

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Weight: 50%**Objective:** *Technical Framework***Details:**

- Describe the game engine and any special software (middleware) used to make the game. Explain why these were important for making the game work.
- List the programming languages and software tools used to build the game. Discuss how these tools helped in creating the game's features.

Your Response:

The game was initially created as a flash game in Adobe Flash's ActionScript 2. Later, after it was developed into a real game (not on Newgrounds), it was created in its own proprietary game engine in C++. This the exact opposite of ActionScript2, which was heavy to use and always caused performance issues. Having its own dedicated game engine allows the game to feel smooth.



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Task #2 (0.63 pts.) - Innovations and Challenges

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Weight: 50%**Objective:** *Innovations and Challenges***Details:**

- Identify and describe any new or unique technical features in the game. Explain how these features made the game different or improved it.
- Discuss any major difficulties the developers encountered while making the game. Describe how they solved these problems.

Your Response:

The game uses a room layout similar to the Legend of Zelda dungeon style. Its movement/controls have been compared by McMillen as similar to arcade cabinet Smash TV. What makes Isaac unique is its complexities via synergies with particular items. Players can accumulate many different items, all of which can affect your controls (poison tears + frozen tears). Not providing any documentation for the many different items you can find means that you will have to learn how the items work separately and combined. The developers had issues creating the feeling of unique floors, so used procedural generation by choosing from a library of 200+ different pre-generated maps to create a floor. By switching to a proprietary engine, the game's performance issues were solved. When there were issues with Steam achievements, a new program was written with its own unique achievement system.



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Section #3: (1.25 pts.) Gameplay Mechanics And Level Design

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Task #1 (0.63 pts.) - Mechanics Analysis

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Weight: 50%

Objective: *Mechanics Analysis*

Details:

- Explore and describe the main rules and actions that players use in the game. Explain how these core mechanics define the game's playstyle.
- Discuss how the game's core mechanics keep players interested and involved. Describe the ways these mechanics make the game fun or challenging.

Your Response:

You are guaranteed at least one item on the floor, which will make you stronger and more prepped for the bosses. You can collect as many items as you like. You get one bonus item per boss kill.

- Players will always see unique items, and find their playstyle shifted based on which items they collect. Most of them augment stats, but others will change things such as your tears or give you the ability to break the environment. This improves fun, but adds a challenge of learning.

There is always a shop on the floor which allows you to spend money to gain pickups or items that will help you in certain rooms

- Rewards you for living.

You always begin on an easy floor, and every floor has a set theme/enemy set (Basement -> Caves -> Depths -> Womb -> Chest -> Void) where enemies become more difficult via stats and unique mechanics.

- The difficulty progression allows players a chance to get stronger and gives players a way to strategize based on the upcoming floor.

Because the game is so random, there are very few certainties in the game with many more exceptions and conditionals. There is a ton of complexity and depth which creates a unique game loop for players.

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Task #2 (0.63 pts.) - Level Design

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Weight: 50%

Objective: *Level Design*

Details:

- Describe the design of the game's levels or environments. Focus on the layout, obstacles, and visual elements, and how they contribute to the game's setting.
- Explain how the level or environment design affects the way players play the game. Discuss how these design choices impact the overall experience, such as creating challenges, guiding the player, or setting the mood.

Your Response:

Every floor is a collection of rooms in the style of Legend of Zelda dungeons (Square rooms, connected orthogonally). The rooms are selected from a collection of different maps for a particular floor, with some rarer than others. This increases the entry level for the game, as knowing how a particular room looks can make the room easier than others. There is a lot of grotesque art in the game which makes it unique and fun to see the different kinds of monsters. The game's setting is underground, as Isaac is running from the surface where his mom is. As you progress through the floors, you go deeper, contributing to the increasing difficulty. Rooms are filled with particular layouts, meaning the same rocks, bombs, and enemies all in the same spots. The way that a room generates on a particular floor can cause the player to associate a floor with a particular room layout.



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Section #4: (1.25 pts.) Graphic And Audio Design

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Task #1 (0.63 pts.) - Graphic and Audio Design

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Weight: 50%

Objective: *Graphic and Audio Design*

Details:

- Describe the game's visual appearance and the artistic choices made. Discuss elements like color, art style, and thematic consistency, and how they contribute to the game's overall look and feel.
- Discuss the design of the game's characters and environments. Focus on aspects such as realism, creativity, and how they fit within the game's world. Explain how these designs enhance the player's immersion in the game.

Your Response:

The game uses smooth textures with highly detailed enemies that have grotesque features (blood, broken teeth, intestines) with simple obstacles. The backgrounds of floors are very detailed as well, and the game chooses to use dark/neutral colors (along with a lot of red) to give a sense of danger and intensity. Even on floors that contain water, there is a dark and grittiness to it that makes it feel intense. At the same time, designs for characters are cartoony and simple (isaac is just a circle with four prongs— essentially just an inflated stick figure). Thematically, it is consistent with the wackiness of the game, which is cartoonish but dark. There are rules in the game's design, such as the use of colors and particular sprites to tell the player what kind of attacks an enemy can do.



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Task #2 (0.63 pts.) - Audio Design

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Weight: 50%

Objective: *Audio Design*

Details:

- Examine the game's sound design, focusing on the music and sound effects. Describe how they are used and their quality. Discuss any memorable or unique audio elements in the game.
- Explain how the game's audio contributes to its overall mood and setting. Discuss how sound and music influence the player's emotional response and enhance the gaming experience.

Your Response:

The game has an amazing OST which is of the rock/heavy rock genre, adding to the grittiness of the game. It features dynamic music cues which let the player know when combat has started or finished (layered tracks). There are many sound effects related to particular tears, particular enemies, and particular item pickups, which can add to the player experience (hearing the many effects combine can be satisfying). One very memorable sound effect is the sound of Isaac dying, which is like a little child giving his last "oof" before curling and dying. For new players, this sound will be very familiar to them, adding to their frustration when they eventually die (including the sad guitar). For new players, these sound effects can lead to ragequits. However, it will also add to their satisfaction when they do try to win.



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Section #5: (1.25 pts.) User Interface And User Experience

Task #1 (0.63 pts.) - User Interface and User Experience

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Weight: 50%

Objective: *User Interface and User Experience*

Details:

- Describe the layout of the game's user interface (UI) and how it functions. Discuss elements like menus, icons, and on-screen prompts, and how they help players navigate and understand the game.
- Evaluate how well the game's UI communicates important information to players. Discuss aspects such as clarity, readability, and the ability of the UI to provide necessary game details without overwhelming or confusing the player.

Your Response:

The UI uses every corner for specific actions. Top left include *Active Item*, *Heart Containers*, and *Pickups* - *coins*, *bombs*, and *keys*, laid out in this manner:

(Active) (HP)(HP)(HP)

(coin) 001

(bomb) 01

(keys) 01

The bottom right has a single slot for consumable pickup items (cards, pills) which is not visible until you pick one up.

The bottom left has a similar invisible single slot, which will appear when you pick up a trinket.

The top right has a minimap, which shows you and the floor layout, but only as you discover them. It is a square which can be expanded while you hold "TAB".

The UI in the game is minimal (certain slots are hidden) because it follows the principle of "you figure it out as

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Task #2 (0.63 pts.) - UX Analysis

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Weight: 50%

Objective: UX Analysis

Details:

- Discuss the overall feel of playing the game, focusing on how different aspects of the game contribute to the player's experience. Analyze how these elements, such as ease of use, game flow, and feedback, affect the gameplay.
- Evaluate the design decisions made to enhance the player's experience. Consider factors like tutorial design, learning curve, and player engagement. Discuss how effective these choices are in making the game enjoyable and accessible to players.

Your Response:

The game feels smooth in terms of movements and physics, but can have some questionable moments when you have a lot of effects (something which is ameliorated by the in-house game engine). The game follows a "figure it out as you play" methodology, meaning that there is very little hand-holding and a lot of complexities which a new player would be unable to figure out. The only instructions given are the ones in the starting room, which are etched into the floor rather than a whole overlay. In a way, because the game loop is so different, it has a very steep learning curve. Basic controls are fine to use, but there is a lot of skill in positioning around the room, hitting enemies accurately with tear projectiles, and dodging enemy projectiles. If you take the time to learn the game, however, the game rewards you heavily and can make what seems impossible be a consistent win. The game flow is one of the biggest rewards in this game, but it is not easy to use.



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Section #6: (1.25 pts) Narrative And Storytelling

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Task #1 (0.63 pts.) - Narrative Structure

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Weight: 50%

Objective: *Narrative Structure*

Details:

- Describe the game's story, including its narrative structure, main plot points, and the setting in which it takes place. Discuss how these elements come together to create a cohesive and engaging story.
- Analyze the storytelling techniques used in the game, such as dialogue, cutscenes, or environmental storytelling. Evaluate how effectively these techniques convey the story and engage the player.

Your Response:

There is no dialogue, but there are cutscenes and hints in the environments of each floor to contribute to the main story. There is initially only one introduction to the story for the setting, which is:

Isaac and his mother lived alone in a small house on a hill. Isaac kept to himself - drawing pictures and playing with his toys as his mom watched Christian broadcasts on the television. Life was simple and they were both happy. That was, until the day Isaac's mom heard a voice from above. "Your son has become corrupted by sin. He needs to be saved." "I will do my best to save him, my Lord," Isaac's mother replied, rushing into Isaac's room, removing all that was evil from his life. Again, the voice called to her. "Isaac's soul is still corrupt. He needs to be cut off from all that is evil in this world and confess his sins." "I will follow your instructions, Lord. I have faith in Thee," Isaac's mother replied, as she locked Isaac in his room away from the evils of the world. One last time, Isaac's mom heard the voice of God calling to her. "You've done as I've asked, but I still question your devotion to Me. To prove your faith, I will ask one more thing of you." "Yes, Lord. Anything," Isaac's mother begged. "To prove your love and devotion, I require a sacrifice. Your son, Isaac, will be this sacrifice. Go into his room and end his life, as an offering to Me to prove you love Me above all else." "Yes, Lord," she replied, grabbing a butcher's knife from the kitchen. Isaac, watching through a crack in his door, trembled in fear. Scrambling around his room to find a hiding place, he noticed a transdoor to the basement, hidden under his rug.

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Task #2 (0.63 pts.) - Character and Integration

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Weight: 50%

Objective: *Character and Integration*

Details:

- Discuss the development of the game's characters. Describe their roles within the story, their personalities, and how they evolve throughout the game. Consider how the characters contribute to the overall narrative.
- Examine how the game's narrative and characters are integrated into the gameplay. Discuss how story elements are woven into the game mechanics and how this integration affects the player's experience.

Your Response:

Isaac is always at a struggle with their mom, Satan, and himself. The endings you receive can show bad or good fates for Isaac, but you would not know this until you beat the game. Besides Isaac's struggle, other characters in the game (i.e Mom) do not really progress in story apart from becoming more horrific in art and in difficulty. There are certain choices in the game which heavily affect the ending you receive, but there is no real progression throughout the different gameplays.



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Section #7: (1.25 pts.) Impact And Reception

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Task #1 (0.63 pts.) - Reception and Impact

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Weight: 50%**Objective:** *Reception and Impact***Details:**

- Research and summarize how the game was received by critics and players. Include key reviews, ratings, and player feedback. Discuss any notable praise or criticism the game received.
- Analyze the game's impact on the gaming industry. Discuss how it may have influenced game design, trends, or inspired other games. Consider any lasting effects it has had on the industry.

Your Response:

This game received critical acclaim and marked an even larger step for the future of indie game development. As a procedurally-generated roguelike, it is one of the first to achieve success at a very large scale, and has received remasters and DLCs with its success. It now even has an online multiplayer feature (even though McMillen did not plan for it).

"All told, The Binding of Isaac is a deceptively deep game. That it only costs \$4.99 is nothing short of astounding. I don't see myself putting it down until I hit that magical 100% completion mark which is bound

astounding. I don't see myself putting it down until I hit that magical 100% completion mark, which is hours and hours away at this point. This is one trip that I recommend to everyone open-minded enough to give it a chance" ([Devore 2011](#)).

"Other developers, like Klei Entertainment and Subset Games, mirrored McMillen's interest in permanent death and severe consequences for failure with games like Don't Starve and FTL: Faster Than Light. These studios took the roguelike genre's principles and shaped them to fit their own needs, molding them to fit the game they set out to make. Roguelikes are no longer relegated to delving into deep dungeons" ([Mahardy 2018](#)).

At the time, games like Isaac were far and few in between. There is something not enjoyable about having to begin again. And yet, by making the game loop as addicting and accessible as it is, we are able to enjoy new roguelikes, like Hades for example.

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Task #2 (0.63 pts.) - Cultural Significance

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Weight: 50%

Objective: *Cultural Significance*

Details:

- Examine the game's cultural significance and the legacy it has left behind. Discuss how the game has been remembered over time and its status in the gaming community.
- Describe the game's presence and representation in media, such as films, books, or online content. Discuss its role in fan communities and any influence it has had on broader cultural aspects, such as art, music, or social trends.

Your Response:

The game continues to have a large fanbase, and is good to pick up every now and then. It is still remembered as a fantastic game with replayability. It remains a huge step in increasing the popularity of the roguelike genre, and its memorable soundtrack and artstyle leave gamers coming back for more (especially me).

The game has no representation in films or books and I think this is due in part to its graphic and religious content (which is a key point in the message McMillen is trying to convey). Online, there are plenty of YouTubers who create daily videos featuring a run of Isaac (its so randomized you can do this without having a single repeated run). There are plenty of modders and challenges to be done as well. In the peak years of its popularity, it had plenty of community engagement between the developers and players in the form of easter eggs, and it remains a large but niche fanbase.



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Section #8: (1.25 pts.) Reflection

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Task #1 (0.63 pts.) - Describe your personal experience playing the

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Weight: 50%

Objective: *Describe your personal experience playing the chosen game*

Details:

- Was it "fun"? What made it fun or not fun?
- Is this genre/game-type aligned with personal interests?
- What made you pick this game? Was it a good choice?

Your Response:

yes, it is extremely fun. I played it longer than I should have. The genre of roguelikes is something I have always been interested in and it is something I wanted to incorporate into my board game. I chose this game because it is one that I have heard of and seen youtube videos of, but never had the chance to really analyze while playing. It is a good choice.



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Task #2 (0.63 pts.) - Assignment Reflection

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Weight: 50%

Objective: *Assignment Reflection*

Details:

- What interesting or new "thing(s)" did you learn during your research and analysis?
- Did you find it was easy to come across the information you were looking for? What was your primary means of research/analysis?

Your Response:

I learned that Isaac is based on the original *Legend of Zelda* game, how much of the game is inspired by older ones, and how deeply the game is loved by its community. Information was very easy to come across, and my primary means of research and analysis was Google Search and YouTube, although in high school I had read

up on the history of the Binding of Isaac and Stardew Valley in a book on Indie developers for a research project. From there I had known that Isaac was an experiment gone right, and that replayability was the core aspect of the design—hence its popularity and addictive game loop. Overall, an amazing game that deserves the attention it does have.



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