

Successes

As a central pillar of our design, we wanted our players to be motivated to talk to their teammate and coordinate strategies. From this pillar arose the idea of asymmetry between teammates, as this would encourage players to work around their different capabilities. We incorporated four unique abilities, making sure each of them was interesting to use and interesting to play against. We also balanced each ability to the degree that they all feel useful.

Another major success was made in the aesthetics of the game. The character detail, environmental features, UI, and visual effects are visually impressive, immersive, and serve to convey the themes of the game. Every player starting the game knows right away that Equinox is a stealth game. The defenders know they are lethal soldiers hunting down intruders, and the infiltrators know they are specialist spies attempting to evade the guards and access secret data.

Problems

The biggest challenge of making Equinox was one that we anticipated from the start. With the multiple axes of asymmetry (both between the teams and between every character), we knew it was going to be difficult to make the game fair and fun to play for both teams and players of every skill level. Though we managed to make the game fun for most players, most of the time, we never quite achieved a consistent level of balance between the teams.

Making Equinox approachable and intuitive for new players was an arduous task. Our tutorial requires players to use all their abilities at least once, but it fails to thoroughly convey the mechanics of the game. Part of the reason for this is that we had to limit the length of the tutorial, as each match of the game is somewhat long for a showcase game. We wanted to put as much guidance as possible into each round of the game, but we also wanted to avoid interfering with the players freedom to choose how to play. The best-of-five round-based system give players a good chance to figure out the game before losing, but the limited in-game guidance means some players get through three losing rounds before fully understanding their abilities/goals.

During the process of iterative development, we ran into issues with hard-to-maintain code. Though we assigned various components of the game to each team member, the interface between components was not well defined. This resulted in a significant amount of spaghetti code that impaired our ability to rapidly iterate and modify game components

Lessons Learned

To avoid spaghetti code in the future, I will make defining code style rules, standards, interfaces, etc. a central part of the start of a game project. I will also put more focus on developing effective but non-intrusive in-game guidance systems, as well as more thorough but time-efficient tutorials. Finally, though I do not regret the level of asymmetry in Equinox, I will apply asymmetry in multiplayer games with a greater respect for the challenge of balancing those systems.