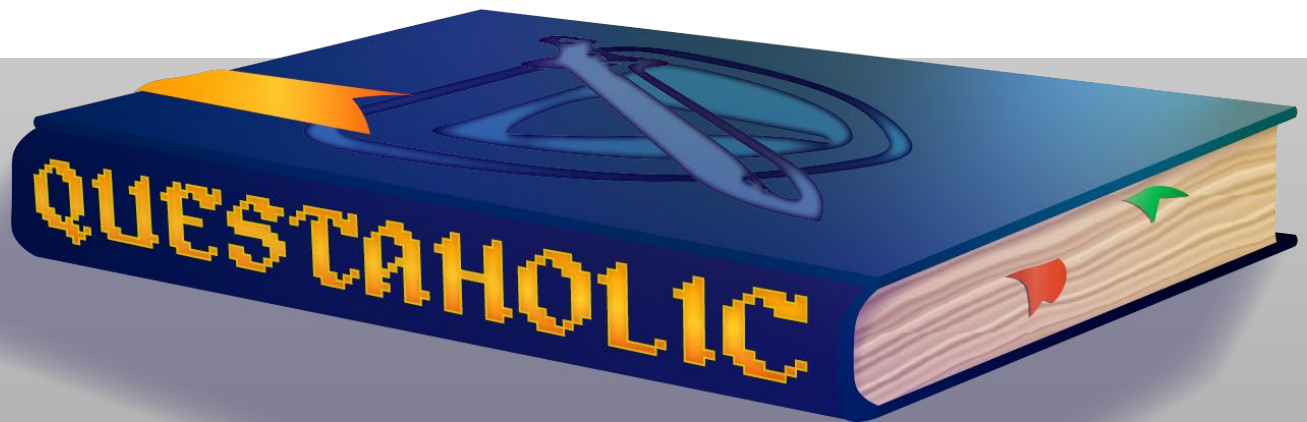




Team Rookies

QUESTAHOLIC

Game Design Document and Postmortem



Doc by Meagan Couture, Lead Producer of Questaholic
10-17-2021

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Credits

Producer/Project Manager

Meagan Couture

Assistant Producer

Mig Mrizek

Lead Programmer

Mig Mrizek

Lead Artist

Meagan Couture

Lead Writer

Sam Smyth

UI Designer

Ilia Kowalzik

Additional Programmers

Meagan Couture

Ilia Kowalzik

Writing Editor

Mig Mrizek

Assistant UI Designer

Meagan Couture

Special Thanks

to Professor Phelps and to all of our friends, family members, and partners for helping us through this difficult but rewarding design process.

Questaholic was produced for the *GAME 620 Making Meaningful Games* course at American University by a team of four members, together known as Team Rookies.

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Preproduction and Production Notes:

Artist's Statement

Questaholic

"Life is an adventure, don't try to experience it all at once."

Artist's Statement:

Workaholism, Completionism, Perfectionism: the triad of -isms that seemingly seeks to control our lives, searching for each remaining drop of effort at the expense of everything else. The more they consume us, the more our *work* becomes our *worth* and whatever our best efforts may be may never seem good enough as we continue reaching for that unattainable high that is always one rung further up the ladder than we can reach. The world *feels narrower* as our vision focuses in on the next task that must be done... and the next one... and the next, until the point where at times work is all we can see and we feel as if we are *dragging ourselves* through mud and fire, *slowing down* with each step. We may forget to take care of ourselves, our relationships may go neglected, our sleep may be chipped away at for just a few more hours of work as we tunnel vision into what begins to feel like life or death. In our desire to do it all, we become so bogged down by everything we are doing, that either the journey is an unenjoyable struggle through and through, or we become unable to attain that goal.

In Questaholic, we sought to experientially emulate this particular perception of the concept "Workaholism" through the mechanics of the game, while narratively positing its solution - balance. By placing the player into a classic adventure game, the player is implicitly told that they should take as many quests as they can, but the mechanics tell a different story, slowing down the player as they take on too much baggage at once. Each quest, and all of the work that it entails, is its own weight. The narrative of the story pushes the player to respect their own limits, to drop some of that baggage when it is needed, and to live and work at one's own pace.

Initial Pitch and Final Implementation Notes:

Initial Pitch:

“A classic adventure game wherein the player runs around collecting and completing main quests, side quests, and all of those little points to do each quest juuuust right - just like any other adventure game. EXCEPT, unbeknownst to the player, there is a maximum number of quests they can complete set randomly at the start of each day, and the closer the player gets to this maximum number, the slower they become, and the faster the world around them seems to be, even until the point where the player character passes out. Therein - the game I am pitching to you is an experiential deep game based on my perception of Workaholism, Completionism, and Perfectionism.”

- pitched by Meagan Couture.

Genre and Themes:

The aim of Questaholic is to create an engaging 2D adventure game based on the themes of workaholism, completionism, self-restraint, and expectations [both internal and external].

Game World:

The game world, known as Qestion (a portmanteau of question and quest) will consist of a central hub where the player lives [the Adventurer's Guild]. Branching off the central hub are a small handful of themed areas (e.g., training yard, woods full of enemies, town square, etc.) where the player engages in quests and socializes with NPCs.

- *An Adventurer's Guild* which houses the Guild Master and the Main Quest line.
- *A Training area* where the player is housed, can gather more quests, and can see the different types of monsters they may fight.
 - [Removed in the final implementation due to time Constraints]:
 - where the Guild Master will give you quests to learn new moves, try out quest types, etc.
 - This area was intended to correspond to 'Education' or 'School life' in this initial pitch.
- *A Forest area* where you fight monsters and complete fetch quests.
 - This area corresponds to 'Work life'
- *A Town area* where you can converse with NPCs or complete townee quests.

Townee Quests in the final implementation refers to Delivery and Fetch Quests.

 - This area corresponds to 'Community and Social life'

Game Play and Core Mechanics:

Technical Specifications:

- Game is made using Unity Version 2020.3.17f1
- Game runs solely on PCs and does not have a high graphical requirement.

Artistic Specifications:

- Art implementation is designed to replicate the feeling of a classic adventure game, pulling on classic asset styles, formats (top down), and layouts (layout of UI, layout of village, etc.).
- The art style makes use of free and purchased assets online in order to save on development time.

The player will be able to walk around the world and engage with NPCs to find quests. These quests are able to be accepted easily or denied with more effort (multiple refusals needed). The game world and NPCs urge the player to take on as many quests as they can.

[Note that both the Multiple Days system and the randomly generated maximum number of quests were scoped out due to time restraints. This was replaced by a simple increase in number of quests effecting your World Effect (see below). Fainting due to overexertion was also removed.]

The World Effect:

The effect of:

- *the player slowing down* to simulate the weight of their workload
- *the camera zooming in* to simulate the narrowing focus of the player character
- *the game world getting faster, blurrier, and less colorful* to simulate the strain this focus causes to the player and the feeling that it becomes more and more difficult to keep up with everything the more weighed down you get. **[This last point was scoped out due to time restraints]**

The ACRD System – Accepting, Completing, Rejecting, and Dropping Quests:

- **Accepting** - increases your quest count closer towards max. The closer you get, the slower your character gets, the faster the world gets, and the blurrier the world gets. This is now referred to as the 'World Effect' (see above), which can 'get heavier' or 'get lighter.' The quest is then added to the Quest Log.
 - This is meant to simulate the taking on of additional work and how taking on too much can be both physically and mentally taxing.

- *Completing* - Player gains xp (experience points) [seen in the final implementation as player damage and player levels, *simulating the gaining of experience through work*] and reputation. 'World Effect' gets lighter. Quest is removed from Quest Log.
 - [The following was removed in the final implementation] If a quest is completed perfectly, additional rewards and xp is gained, along with a higher boost in reputation.
- *Rejecting* - 'saying no' to a quest takes multiple attempts. Has a slight *perceived* 'reputation' negative, but the 'World Effect' gets lighter.
 - This is meant to simulate how it can be exceedingly difficult for a workaholic to deny work, making them feel like they have disappointed the other party, but in actuality acting as a win for respecting one's own personal limits and life balance.
- *Dropping* - Abandoning a quest is a difficult and major decision in this game. It has a high perceived drop in reputation. However, the 'World Effect' gets significantly lighter. The Quest log also gets slightly less messy.
 - Similarly, this is meant to simulate how it can be extremely difficult for a workaholic to acknowledge when they have taken on too much, making them feel like they are actively disappointing all involved parties, but in actuality acting as a win for respecting one's own personal limits and life balance.

A Reputation System [External: Real | | Internal: Perceived]

This system correlates to the ACRD component and to the end of the game. The player has an actual [external] and a perceived [internal] reputation where they only see the internal reputation [until shown at the end of the game, where it will always be more positive than the internal reputation, *simulating the high expectations and often deep self-criticism experienced by workaholics and perfectionists*]. This system correlates to the Theme of 'Expectation.'

Some NPCs may feed into this expectation while others may be reassuring. This is shown through the tone of the NPC dialogue.

Basic Quest Types:

Monster Quests:

Quests that require the player to kill a randomized number of a randomized monster. Monsters vary in strength, in order of Giant Rat, Slime, Ghost, Bear, and SkeleWolf. These quests are contained in the Forest Area [*synonymous with work life*] to represent the daily tasks of one's job. With each success of these quests the player is granted a reward of increased strength and positive reputation.

Delivery Quests:

Quests that require the player to deliver parcels to the post office and report back to the quest giver. These quests [in addition to the Fetch quests below] are contained to the Town Area of the game [synonymous with community and social life] in order to represent the social duties and needs that are present in everyone's life. With each success of these quests, the player is granted a reward of increased positive reputation.

Fetch Quests:

Quests that require the player to search through the game world to find randomly generated lost objects. With each success of these quests, the player is granted a reward of increased positive reputation.

The *Main Questline* is discussed in the Story section of this book (see below).

Player Combat:

Player combat is very minimal and serves only to function as a goal for the Monster Kill quests. The player can swing their sword by pressing space bar. Player damage output increases with player level, which increases with each quest that is completed by one. Different enemies have different amounts of health but do not attack the player in the final implementation of the game. If a player runs out of health, they respawn in their temporary home at the Adventurers Guild.

Story and Characters

Story Overview:

The Main Quest of Questaholic is *Striking a Balance* and it contains the full story of the game. It is given out by the Guild Master once he is approached at the start of the game and is the only long-term quest. This quest is framed narratively as a fantasy quest in terms of how the Guild Master gives the quests to you, the names of their stages, and what wisdom you receive at the end of each stage. While the names are not reflected in the final implementation, their themes are. In order these are Strength, Kindness, Patience, Burden, and Balance. On the surface, the Guild Master frames the idea of balance as balancing which types of quests the player should take on, however, the goal of the Guild Master becomes clearer through the mechanics of the game where it is not about balancing the types of quests but rather balancing the number of quests.

- Due to time constraints, the Main Quest was paired down for each stage. The main task of each stage of the Main Quest remains the same, but each stage originally required to balance the reputation of other areas of questing in addition to the main focus of that stage.

Intro:

Welcomes the player to Queston and the Adventures guild and starts the main quest, referred to in game as the “Adventuring Authorization Process.” During the introduction is when the Guild Master introduces the idea of balance to the player.

Strength:

Sets you off on your first set of quests, Monster Killing Quests. The strength in this stage refers to the classic adventure mechanic of fighting monsters.

Kindness:

Sets you off on the second set of quests, Delivery Quests. The kindness in this stage refers to the willingness of the player to run errands for members of the community with no promise of reward.

Patience:

Sets you off on the third set of quests, Fetch Quests. These are the final introduction to the different types of quests in the game. The patience of this quest comes from the unknown location of the missing object the player agrees to find. They must use their time to search the entirety of the game world to find these lost items.

Burden:

The fourth set of quests assigned to the player is two of each type of quests. The burden of this stage is being presented with a long task list the player needs to work towards. The success of this stage comes from the player not stacking all the quests they need to at once but to complete a few then return to the town and pick up a few more. Leading to the final stage of...

Balance:

The final set of quests assigned to the player is one of each type of quests. This stage is mostly used as a cool down stage to the game where the player takes the lesson of balancing the quests they can take on.

Characters:

Player Character:



The player character is your classic blank slate main character and is framed as an outsider entering the town in order to join the Adventurer's Guild and become a *Certified Adventurer*. In order for the player to do this, they must go through the main questline and learn to pace themselves along the way. Once this is achieved, the player will complete the Adventurer Certification Process.

Guild Master:



The Guild Master is the primary quest giver and narrative through line for the game. He is characterized as an old man with shoulder length white hair tied into a ponytail and a wrinkled face with a large scar deep across his forehead. He dresses in simple clothing and has the crest of the guild on a patch over his left breast. That all being said, due to the character art style of the final implementation, he is simply a large old man with a beard. The Guild Master is a stern yet understanding man who cares mostly about producing well rounded and stable adventurers who do not run themselves ragged by taking on too much. He is the other side of the coin to the player: while the player has to manage many tasks and create a balanced life for themselves, the Guild Master has to manage the player and other adventurers, making sure he creates the kind of adventurer he believes is best for the world.

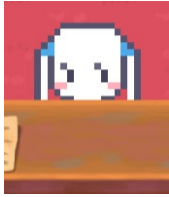
General NPCs:



NPCs include Monster Quest NPCs, Delivery Quest NPCs, Fetch Quest NPCs, and the Mailman. While the characters themselves are all generic and have no individual physical features, the three different types have different personality types as characterized by the way NPCs talk to you.

Monster Quest NPCs are affirming, short stated, but a bit harsh.

Delivery Quest NPCs are understanding and gentle



Fetch Quests NPCs are excited when accepted and very rude when rejected, dropped, or [sub textually] when talking to them before completing quests. They would colloquially be known as a Karen in 2021 youth culture.

Enemies:

All enemies are generic to the Classic Adventure Game genre and hold little to no intended symbolism in their implementation. Their primary purpose is to reinforce the Classic Adventure Game feel and to be a target for the Monster Killing Quests. They appear in ascending strength as Giant Rats, Slimes, Ghost Skulls, Bears, and SkeleWolfs. Their art implementation is featured in the *Art and Environmental Design* section (see below).

Art



Giant Rat:

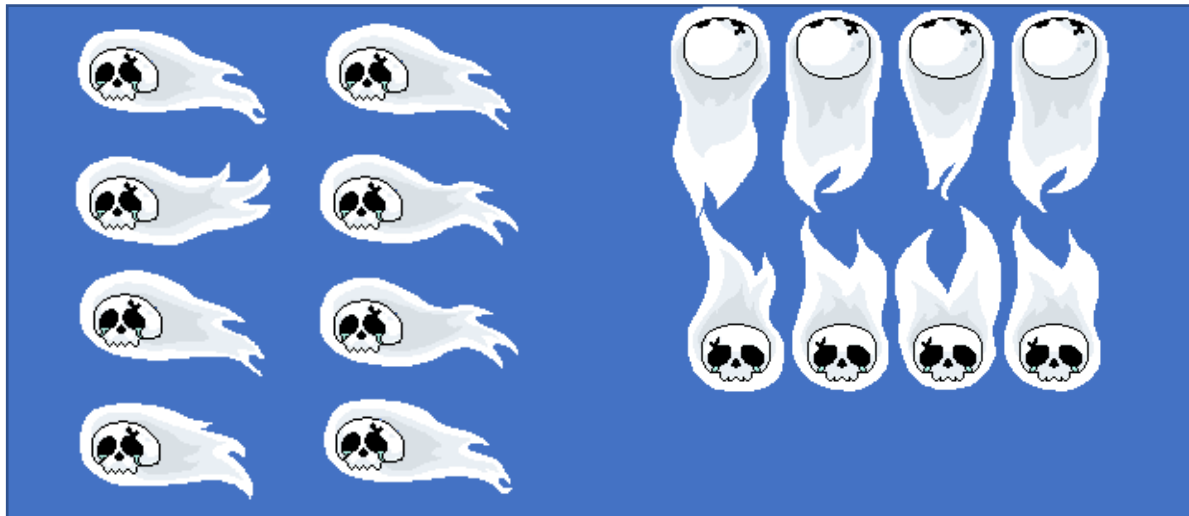


Slime:

Artists note: SlimeyBoi one is my favorite.



Ghost Skull:



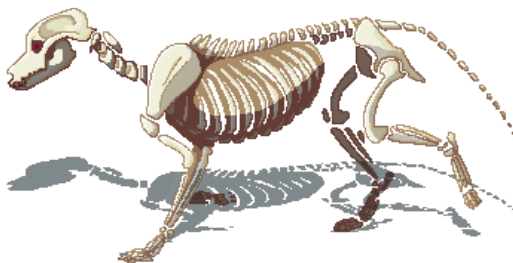
Bear:

The Bear only has a sprite. No animation was made due to time constraints.



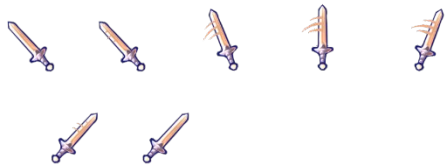
SkeleWolf:

The SkeleWolf only has a sprite. No animation was made due to time constraints.



Sword Animation:

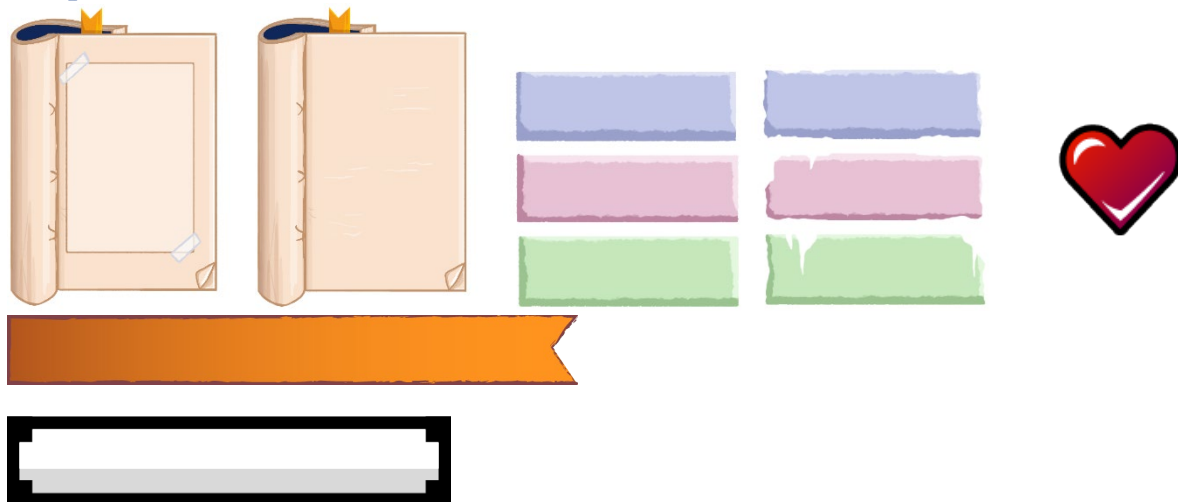
While the sword is an edit from the tilemap pack, the sword animation is original.



Guild Master:



UI Sprite Sheets:



Environment Design:



The tilemap design for Questaholic as carried out by the art director was designed to invoke a similar feeling to classic adventure style games such as Legend of Zelda, down the town being set off to the left of the hub. While the town side of the map is mostly blocked off by walls and rigid, the forest is free form and can be explored at most any angle. The interior sections of the Adventure's Guild, Player Home, and Mailroom are also included and are accessed via teleporting to and from them, thus making the entire map just one piece. Some sections of the map, such as the training grounds, go mostly under used, while others, such as the Hidden Lake [top] and Adventurer's Gossip Bar [Left of Adventures Guild] go completely unused but are left in and still accessible. The three areas are meant to feel self-contained, with only one entrance/exit that is purposefully out of the way as to subtly encourage the player not to go back [since nothing is there]. Each section is designed to feel somewhat maze like so they player may ADVENTURE FORTH to seek their monsters and fetch quests, running into many [needy] NPCs along the way.

Sound

Due to time constraints, there is no sound, but in an extended implementation of the game, sounds aligning to the genre of “Classic Adventure Game” would be implemented.

User Interface and Game Controls

Control Scheme:

- Left Mouse Click - interact with Buttons
- TAB - Open Controls Menu
- WASD or Arrow Keys - Movement
- SPACE - Attack with Sword
- F - Interact with NPCs
- E - Open Quest Log

User Interface:



Quest Log:

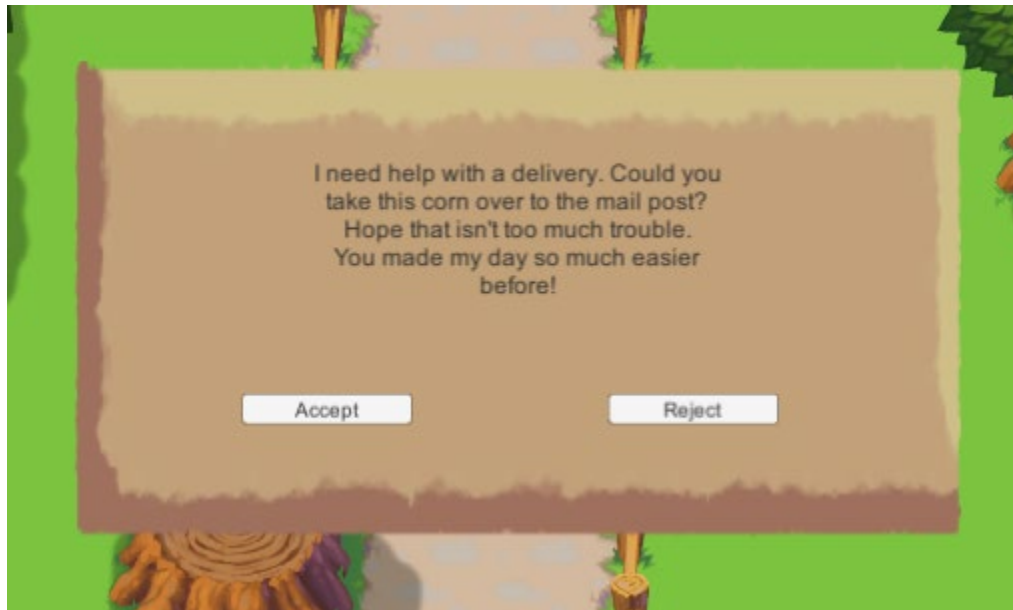
The Quest Log is a central implementation to the core of our game and is where all quests are housed. While the main quest is displayed on a bookmark coming off the side of the Quest Log, all of the pickup quests are in the center sheet. Player level (and subsequently the player damage) is also shown here as a marker of gained experience. It is from here that the players can see quest information and drop quests. The Quest Log is characterized as being somewhat raggedy and gets to be slightly more so as the player picks up more and more quests.

Reputation Bar:

The reputation bar, located in the bottom right of the screen, is displayed as both a negative -> positive slider and a text number and houses the *perceived* reputation of the player.

Health Bar:

The health bar, located in the bottom left of the screen, correlates to the players health.



Dialogue Boxes :

In their various forms, the dialogue boxes are the player's main interface with both the NPCs and the ACRD quest system's Accept, Reject, and Complete mechanics. These boxes intentionally cannot be closed without choosing to accept or reject in order to feed into that feeling of it being more difficult to reject a task. A player will have to reject at least three dialogue boxes before the Reject function fully works for a quest.

Postproduction and Postmortem

While the final product of this design is indeed quite rewarding, it should be acknowledged that the production cycle itself was unfortunately challenged by many uncontrollable outside circumstances. As a result, a larger portion than we had hoped ended up on the cutting room floor. The following final sections list out some lessons learned from our process as well as some of our many ideas as to where we could go from here.

Lessons Learned:

- While the original pitch came from one of our members, the idea itself resonated extremely strongly with two of us in fairly different ways. Due to a number of outside circumstances from the both of us making communication difficult and our opposing approaches at implementing the game's concepts, those being experiential vs narrative, this game suffers a bit from art by committee. As such a number of mechanics were altered back and forth throughout design without the other's knowledge until later on. Had we communicated better over time, I believe we could have reached a stronger footing together and created a more stable design for everyone to go off of, potentially leading to us cutting less from the final game. - *note from Producer*
- From a producer's standpoint, I feel the production cycle would have benefited greatly from me making MUCH smaller deliverable goals for each department, listing out things like "Implement Quest Log Dropping Mechanic" or "Implement WASD movement and Combat controls" rather than saying things like "Implement basic character controls." Due to this unclear wording, a number of things were put in that needed to be clarified and altered or removed later, while other things were forgotten about all together. - *note from Producer*
- If there were three things that this design cycle needed more than anything, they would be better overall communication, FAR more rigorous scoping, and MORE PLAYTESTING. The combination of these three problems led to quite a few headaches when it came to dependencies, misunderstandings, and last-minute fixes. Had we scoped down better at the beginning and playtested more frequently along the way, we likely would not have lost quite as much in the final result. - *note from Producer*
- While it seemed fun to have multiple enemy types, it likely was not necessary. Had I done this again, I would have chosen one enemy type with color variations, such as the slime, so that I could focus on getting a stronger implementation with that instead of many weak ones. - *note from Producer*
- Making two games in 3 weeks when everyone is very stressed is very hard and extremely ironic considering this game concept. - *note from Producer*

Where We Would Go from Here:

Throughout the process of this game design, many things were dropped on the cutting room floor due to time constraints. If we so choose to continue with this project in the future, we would be glad to reintroduce these elements and their associated meanings to deepen the concept and message of our game. Some of these elements include:

Individualized NPCs:

An updated form of the NPCs would give them more character, unique looks, and dialogue outside of them giving you quests. In this way, it is our hope that they could serve as a representative of community and social life for the player, encouraging the player to remember to make sure to make time just to hang out and get to know people.

With further updates, we could also have the NPCs drop hints about where they may have lost an item, give clues about places they player has not been yet, or even guide the player between locations. These NPCs might have their own homes or shops that they player could interact with, helping the player to care more about the people they meet and want to spend more time with them when able.

The Multiple Days Cycle and Fainting:

While cut from the final edition of the game, I [the producer and pitch giver] considered the aspect of overexertion and varying energy levels per day to be fairly important to the original message of the pitch, as these elements not only represented what it feels like when you've truly pushed too far, but they also represent the fact that one's energy - and ones best efforts - fluctuates from day to day, and that's okay. In a fuller version of the game, I would push far more strongly for this to be included.

Items to effect energy level:

During the brainstorming phase, a few items, such as most prominently a stamina potion to represent the workaholics ever faithful friend *caffeine*, were pitched that would be interesting to play with in a further implementation of the game.

More Areas:

As may be noticed by the darker designs of some of the enemies, other types of zones were considered other than the forest zone, particularly a mine area or a dungeon area. These kinds of areas, in an adventure setting, may correlate better to the “Work” representation than the final forest did, and the enemies would likely feel more natural in them.

Beyond more, it would also be great to flesh out the current areas more, especially the under used ones, such as the Gossip Bar, the Hidden Lake, and the Training area, and the unimplemented ones, such as the Potion Shop.

Increasingly Overwhelming UI:

As a part of the earlier design, it was decided that we would seek a way to make the quest log messier, more variable, tilted, and overlapping, the more quests were added to the list. This feature, while implemented in a minimal sense in the final implementation, would be a fascinating aspect to further explore and would serve to really drive home that overwhelming feeling that Workaholism and Perfectionism can bring with them.

Perfect Quests:

As a part of the representation of Workaholism’s brother in arms Perfectionism, quests were meant to have small variations that would allow the player to “perfect them” if the quests were done in a particular way. As this feature is something common in games, it may serve as an interesting commentary on our often obsession with doing everything just perfectly, even at the expense of becoming more exhausted or losing more time from yourself and from being with loved ones. Or perhaps we could use this point more towards the completionism factor itself. I am uncertain at this time but would be interested in exploring it further.

Sounds and Music:

It would be nice if this game had sounds and music to really pull the game together.

Resources

Scheduling location - [Team Rookies Trello Workspaces](#)

Game Coding Content Location - [GAME 620 GitHub](#)

General Drive Content Location - [Team Rookies Game 1 Google Drive](#)

Tilemap sets : <https://assetstore.unity.com/packages/2d/environments/2d-hand-painted-tilesets-bundle-175058>

NPC assets : <https://assetstore.unity.com/packages/2d/characters/top-down-2d-rpg-assets-pack-188718>

Fonts:

Alagard: <https://www.dafont.com/alagard.font>

Open Dyslexic: <https://opendyslexic.org>

