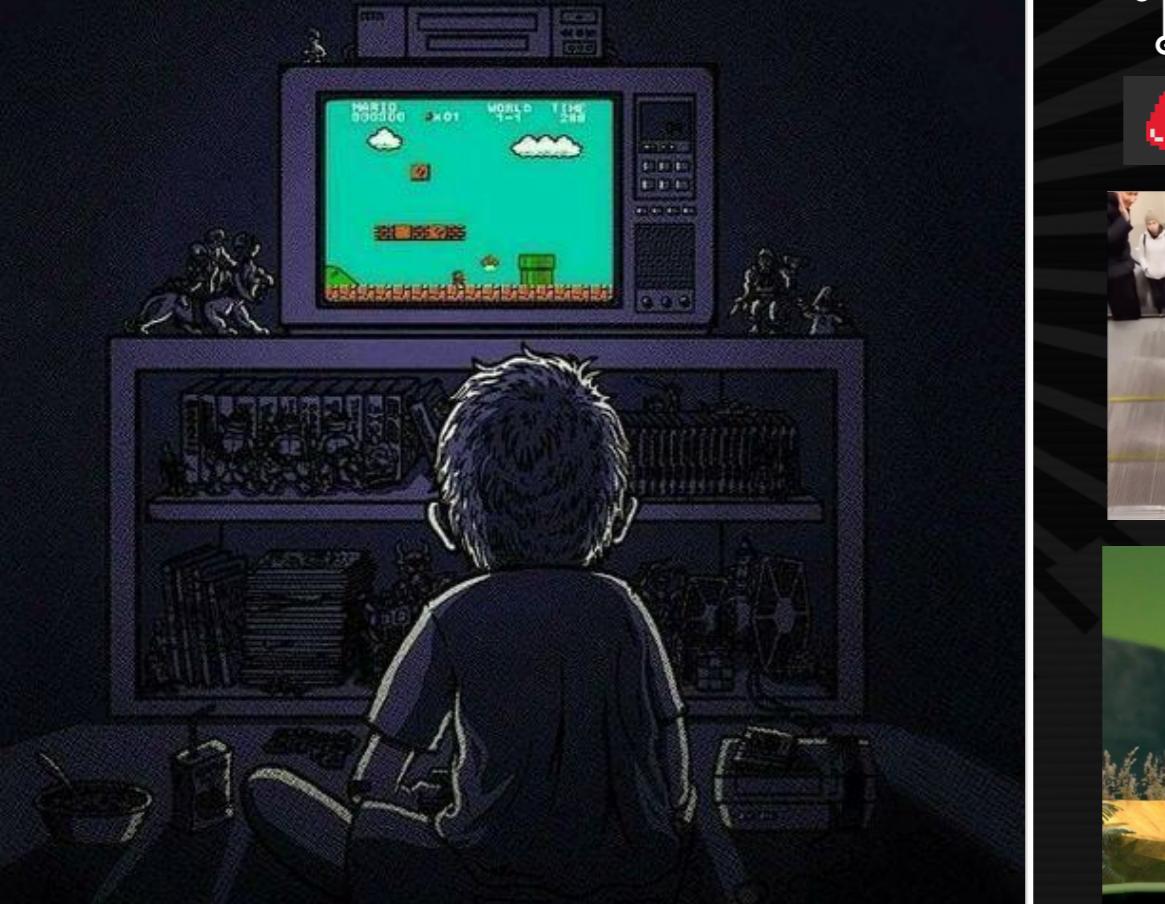


Are You Alive?

Individual Project
Game Design

June.2024 - August.2024
[Link](#)



Abstract

The myth of Sisyphus, a hero condemned to eternally roll a boulder up a hill only for it to roll back down, serves as a deep exploration of life's value and tragedy. Inspired by this myth and my own life perspective, I've developed a personal game that challenges players to consider their self-worth and existence. This Metroidvania-style game uses repetition to simulate the protagonist's struggle, encouraging emotional engagement and introspection. It allows players to confront challenges and choose their own narrative endings, reflecting their values and beliefs.



Insights

The Myth of Sisyphus Returns to the Spotlight



Sisyphus Meme on Tiktok



Getting Over It with Bennett Foddy

Who is Sisyphus?



The gods:
They give Sisyphus an eternal punishment.

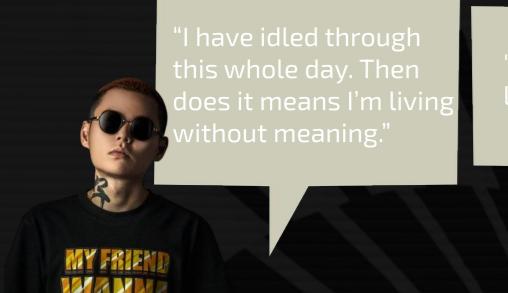
Sisyphus:
Sisyphus needs to roll the stone day by day up the mountain.

Stone and Mountains:
But everytime stone reaches the peak, it rolls back down. He must get off the mountains and repeats the move.



The origin of the meme is now lost in the annals of time, yet it has exploded across the internet. While these humorous videos may appear to trivialize and deconstruct the core essence of Sisyphus' actions, focusing solely on the superficial aspect of repetition, the comment sections often reveal viewers who reinterpret the videos through the lens of Sisyphus' fundamental message. This underscores that his core philosophy is not only classic but also timeless, capable of being reinterpreted even today.

My Reflection



Xie Di, famous Chinese rapper

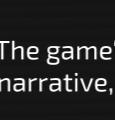
This reflection has motivated me to express these themes through video games, using this interactive medium to explore and interpret life's complexities.



Market Research



Hollow Knight



PROS

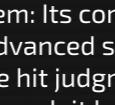
Storytelling: The game's Souls-like storytelling lets players piece together the narrative, offering a thrilling puzzle-solving experience.



SEER

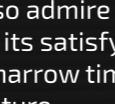


ELDERBUG

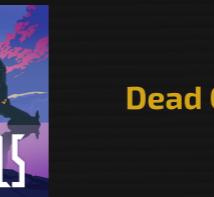


CONS

Combat system: Its combat system, focusing on basic attacks that evolve into advanced skills and spells, is simple yet remains engaging due to precise hit judgments and tough enemy AI. I appreciate the high playability, though it has a steep learning curve.



Parrying: I also admire Hollow Knight's challenging parry mechanic for its satisfying combat feel, but its limited practical use due to a narrow timing window is a missed opportunity for this great feature.



Dead Cells

Low difficulty ↴

Plentiful healing and moderate enemy damage



A lot of weapons viable, no need of mastering parrying



High difficulty ⚡

Ramped up weapon stats, enemy strength, and scarcity of healing



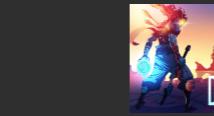
Parrying becomes essential—it negates damage and reflects projectiles



Key of making the game thrilling



Extract from games



Streamlined skill design



Roguelike playing mode



My addition



1. shorten game's progression and eliminate map randomness



2. Emphasize parrying for its symbolic of defying fate.

Interview



Huang

Q: "Have you heard of the story of Sisyphus?"

A: I'm deeply touched by this legend. I think Sisyphus is tragic. Even though he tries to struggle against fate by believing in his own happiness, his struggle is doomed to be meaningless, and his life will not change because of it. When placed in such a situation, his ending is already destined to be tragic.

Q: "What would you do if you were in his position?"

A: If it were me, I would see it as a mockery of fate. But I have no choice; I would have to keep pushing that boulder endlessly. I would numb myself because thinking would only bring me pain, and that pain is destined to be unsolvable. It might be a form of escape, but I think that's the path I would choose.

Q: "If there was a game that interpreted this theme, would you want to play it?"

A: I don't play games very often. But if it's well-made, I might give it a try.



Shang

Q: "Have you heard of the story of Sisyphus?"

A: Our teacher talked about it in high school. I agree with my teacher's point of view. I believe that even though Sisyphus was given a meaningless task by the gods, the meaning of his life was not negated. When he realized the meaninglessness of life and struggled against it subjectively, this act itself was enough to illustrate the fulfillment of all his self-worth.

Q: "What would you do if you were in his position?" I hope I could be as brave as A: Sisyphus depicted by Camus, pushing the boulder while maintaining inner happiness to demonstrate my value. But I'm not sure if I could be as strong as him. I think I would only know for sure if I really experienced it. Of course, that's just a joke.

Q: "If there was a game that interpreted this theme, would you want to play it?" A: I think it would be great. If there's a tangible game, I would like to experience it. I usually prefer games with depth that make me think.

Game Design

The game's setting depicts a world where humanity has fallen to demonic forces, with survivors imprisoned. A former hero, in his delusions, repeatedly infiltrates the demon castle to fight, symbolizing the Sisyphean struggle, which I've artistically heightened to emphasize the depth of the challenge.

Concept Design



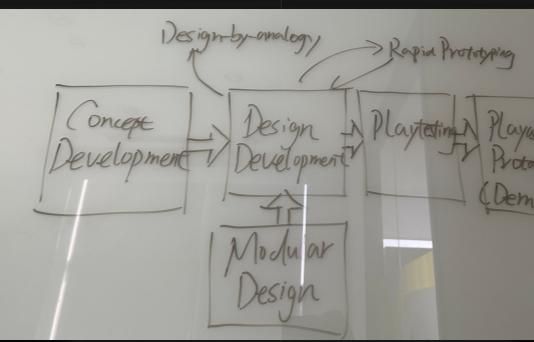
I created a castle entry scene and poster with Adobe After Effects, using effects like red warnings and vintage textures to set a creepy mood. The game, with a 1960x1080 resolution, has a dark, cool-toned atmosphere. Players respawn at the castle's entrance after death, facing a cycle of challenges and enemies, echoing a Sisyphean struggle for an intense experience, deviating from the usual Metroidvania format.

Game Flow



Design Process

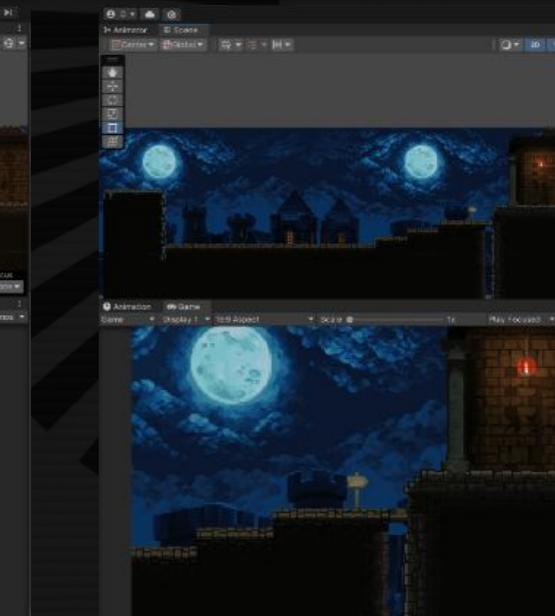
March 1st - March 7th, 2024:
Design the game concept and create the poster



March 7th - March 10th, 2024:
Prepare art assets and establish the visual style



Initially, a brighter color palette was chosen.



Local lighting was added to make it darker and more eerie.

Design Process

March 10th - March 17th, 2024:

Revise the original concept (the originally designed three-level castle was too long for a game where players start anew each time), modify the starting scene, shorten the game flow, implement the basic combat system, and build the game framework.

March 17th - March 24th, 2024:

Add several new game scenes.

March 24th - March 30th, 2024:

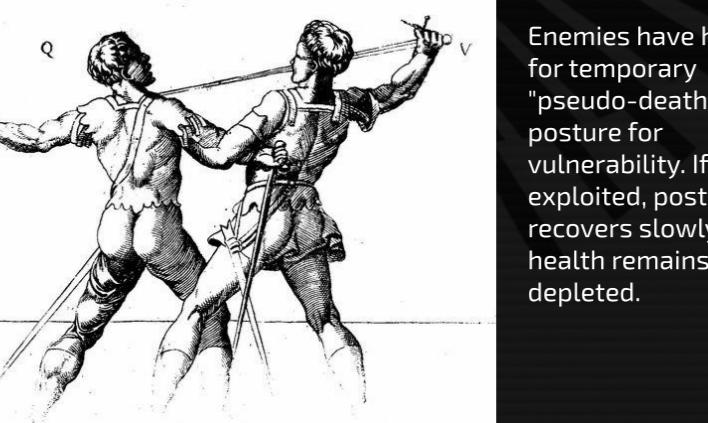
Refine the combat system, adding features like the posture gauge and perfect dodge. Complete the game and produce a concept demo showcasing the gameplay.

Gameplay Design

PARRYING

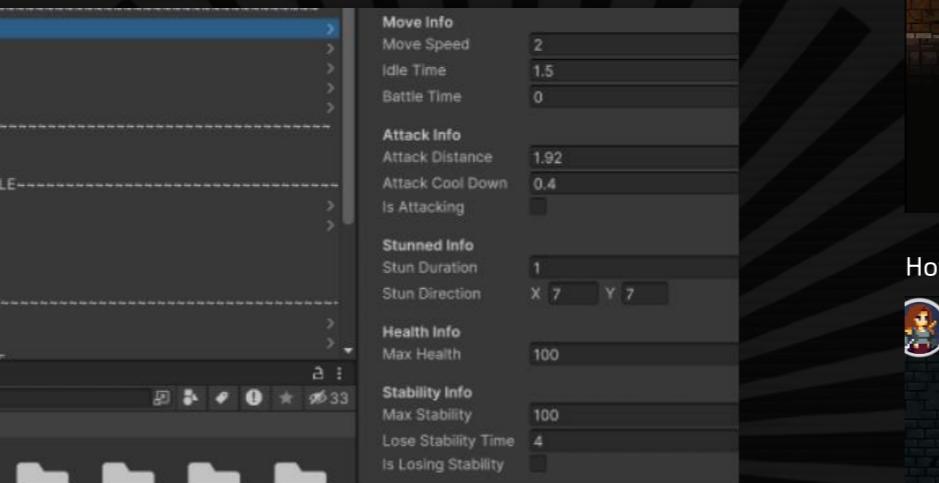
-Core design to kill monster

I've focused the game on parrying as the main mechanic. Enemies can only be temporarily incapacitated by attacks and will revive unless players parry to lower their posture value, leading to a "vulnerable state" where a final strike is decisive.



Enemies have health for temporary "pseudo-death" and posture for vulnerability. If not exploited, posture recovers slowly while health remains depleted.

After a successful parry, players enter a brief period of invincibility, allowing immediate follow-up parries. Conversely, a failed parry triggers a 1-second cooldown to discourage errors and reward precise timing, as parries must be executed within the initial frames of an enemy's attack.

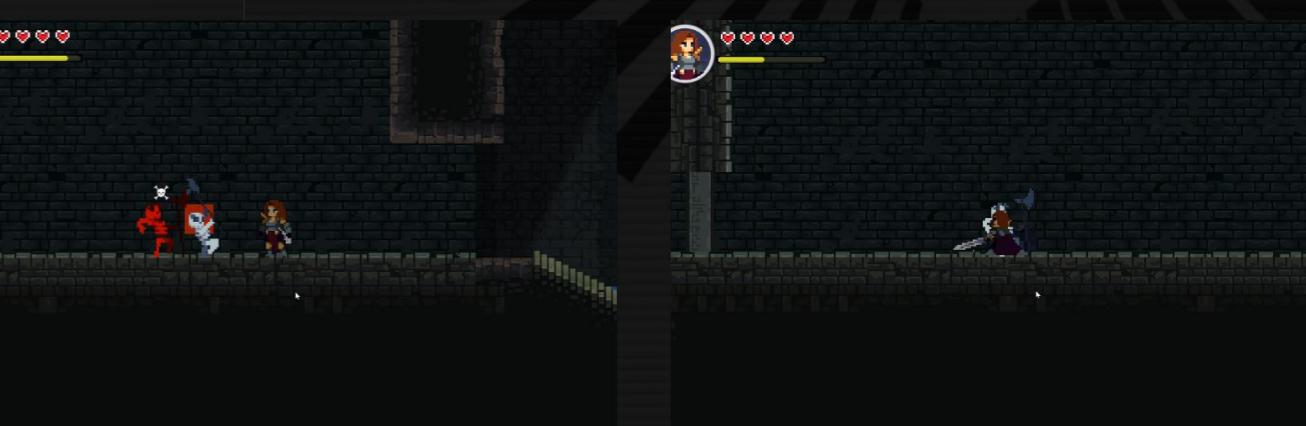


Setting screen for life value and stance value

Using regular attacks, enemies will temporarily die but subsequently revive.



However, after parrying an enemy enough times, it will enter a vulnerable state, allowing for a killing blow.

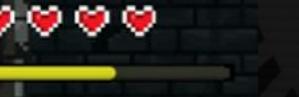




At this point, the enemy is defeated for good.

I didn't want to discard regular attacks, which are fundamental for establishing gameplay feel and practice. Therefore, I retained their functionality but made them less of a primary attack method.

1. Posture Gauge Creation



This yellow bar decreases with each successful parry, with a slow natural recovery rate. Perfect parries slightly reduce it, while failed parries deplete it significantly. When the posture gauge is insufficient for parrying, players can resort to regular attacks.

2. Unique Killing Rules for Different Enemies



Skeletons:

Three parries, regardless of the attack type, expose their vulnerability.



Night Devourers:

Continuous parries cause them to teleport during parries. Thus, alternating between regular attacks and parries is necessary to make their attack patterns unpredictable.



Slimes:

As soft-bodied creatures, their attacks cannot be parried with swords, necessitating the use of regular attacks for defeat.

This approach ensures that regular attacks remain essential, teaching players that mastering parrying isn't enough to defeat all enemies; they must also discover effective strategies.

†Dashing†

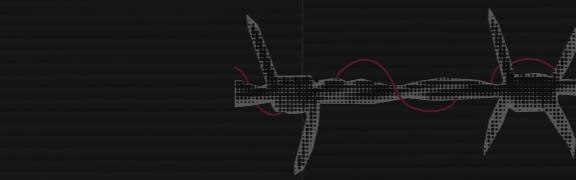
Dashing is a straightforward mechanism, so I've implemented a basic dash system: It accelerates movement, provides invincibility frames, and has a cooldown period. Beyond standard functionality, a perfect dash (performed within the first few frames of an enemy's attack) restores a portion of the posture gauge.



These basic operations form the game's combat system.



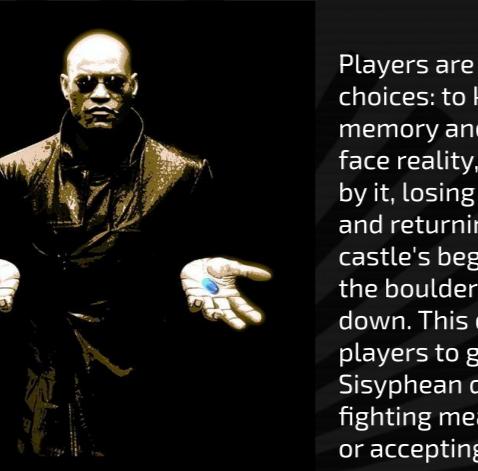
I've contrasted warm firelight with cool tones to emphasize a feeling of comfort and safety.



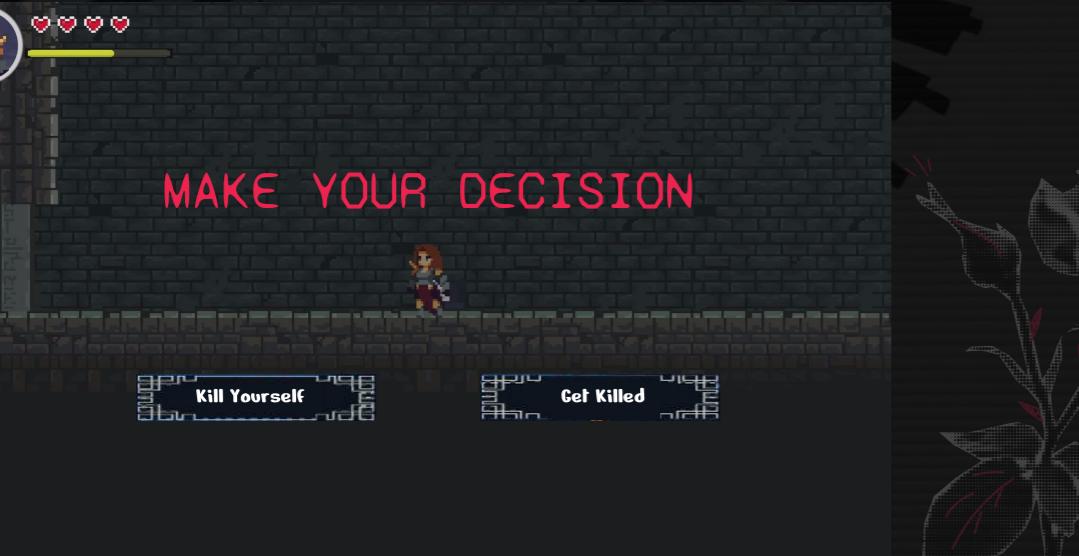
†Ending Design†

-Protecting player's perspective into the game

Upon reaching the game's conclusion, the hero discovers that the "demon king" is a fabrication, and instead confronts an alternate version of himself, revealing that the entire journey was based on his own memories. The hero learns the harsh truth that his physical body is unconscious, and he's been living in a spiritual fantasy.



The Matrix (1999)

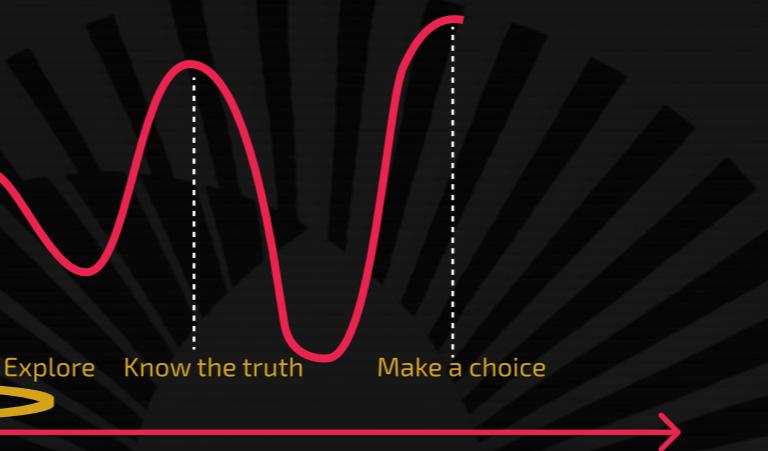


Players are then given two choices: to kill their deep memory and awaken to face reality, or to be killed by it, losing all memories and returning to the castle's beginning, akin to the boulder rolling back down. This decision forces players to grapple with the Sisyphean question of fighting meaninglessness or accepting fate.



†Emotion Curve Design†

The emotional curve I designed is as follows:



I hope that the emotional experience of players can also be a part of the interaction with the game, forming a complete experience of the game: players empathize with the characters and experience ups and downs together. When they reach the final destination, they are not judged by a third person, but rather make their own choices about the outcome based on their own inner feelings.

†Display of other details†



Climbing the wall



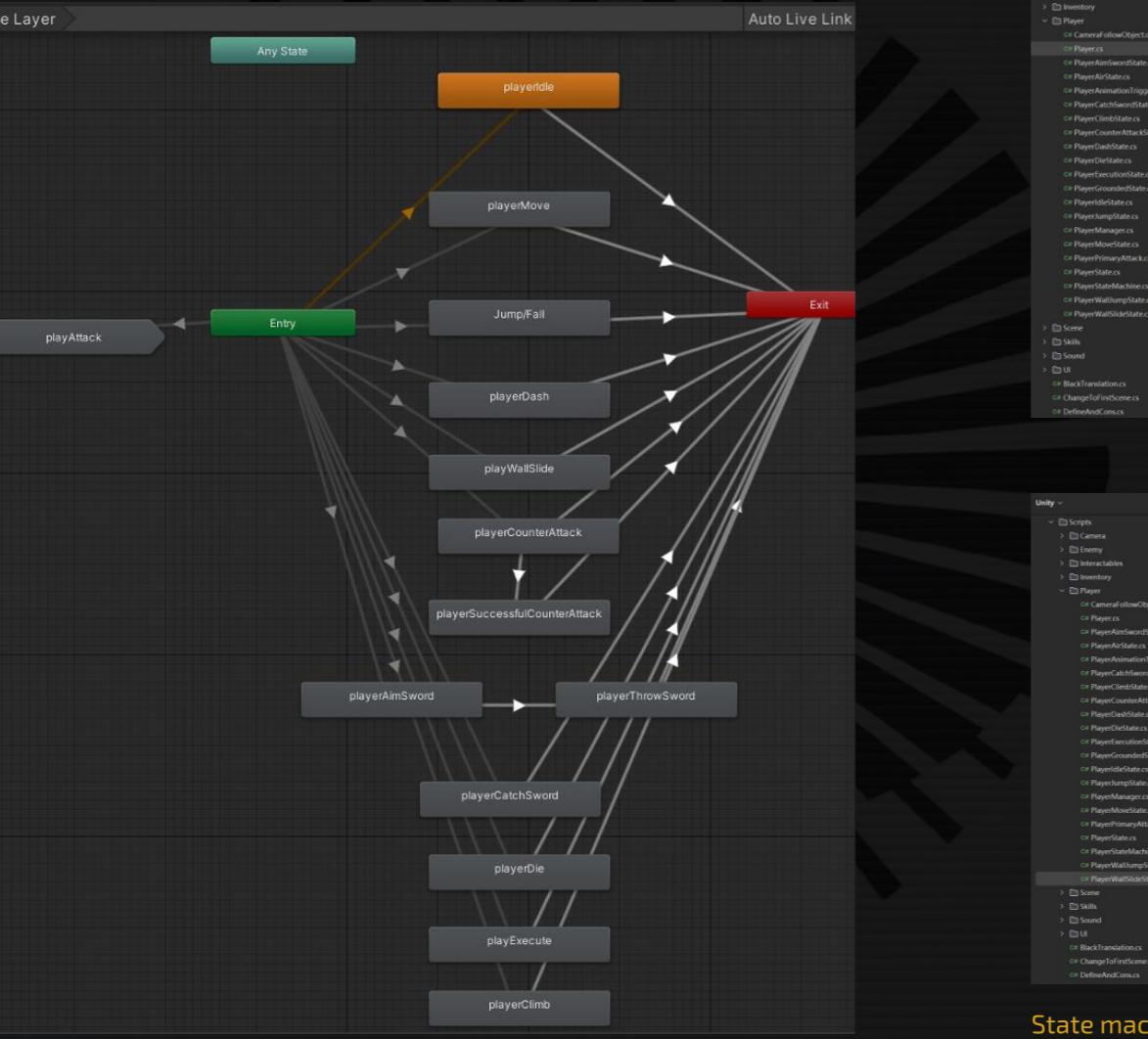
Dialogue



Basic UI

Development page display†

completed all the development work alone, using software design patterns such as the singleton pattern and state machine in the process of building the code.



I realized that I could use the graph's structure to optimize the animation system without making the graph a mess.

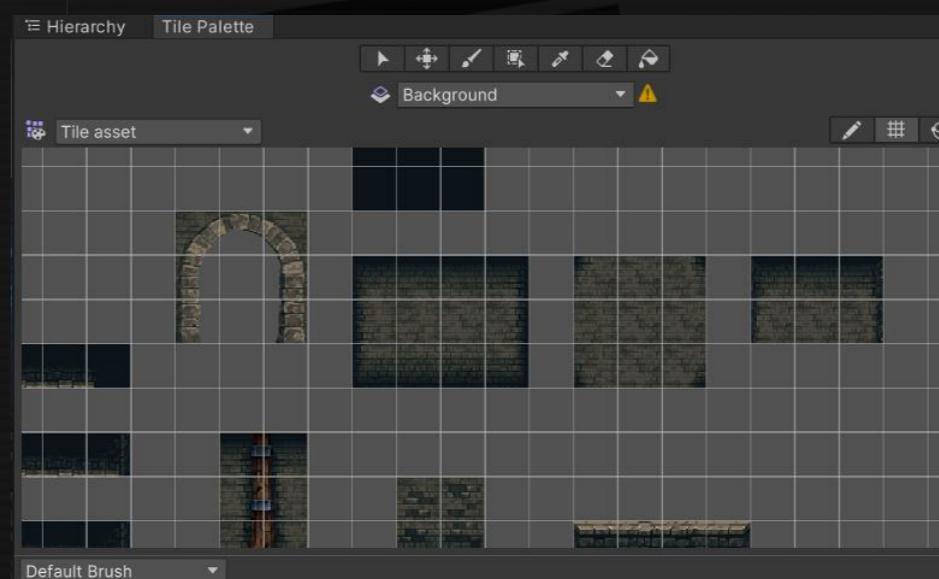
Realizing manager as singleton and controls
an easier way:e.g. CameraManager

in the player class

Realizing manager as singleton and controls an easier way:e.g. CameraManager

A screenshot of the Unity Editor interface. The main view shows a 2D game scene with a castle-like environment at night, featuring a large full moon and several glowing orange lanterns. In the foreground, a small character is walking across a path. The Hierarchy panel on the right lists game objects such as 'Enemy_Skeleton_4', 'Light', 'MainCamera', 'Player', 'ResourceFile', 'Rain', 'Ran (1)', and 'UI'. The Inspector panel shows the 'Rain' component with settings like 'Position' (X: 0, Y: 0), 'Rotation' (Z: 180), and 'Size' (X: 1). The Project panel shows a file named 'Census'. The bottom navigation bar includes tabs for Animation, Game, and Focus On Selected.

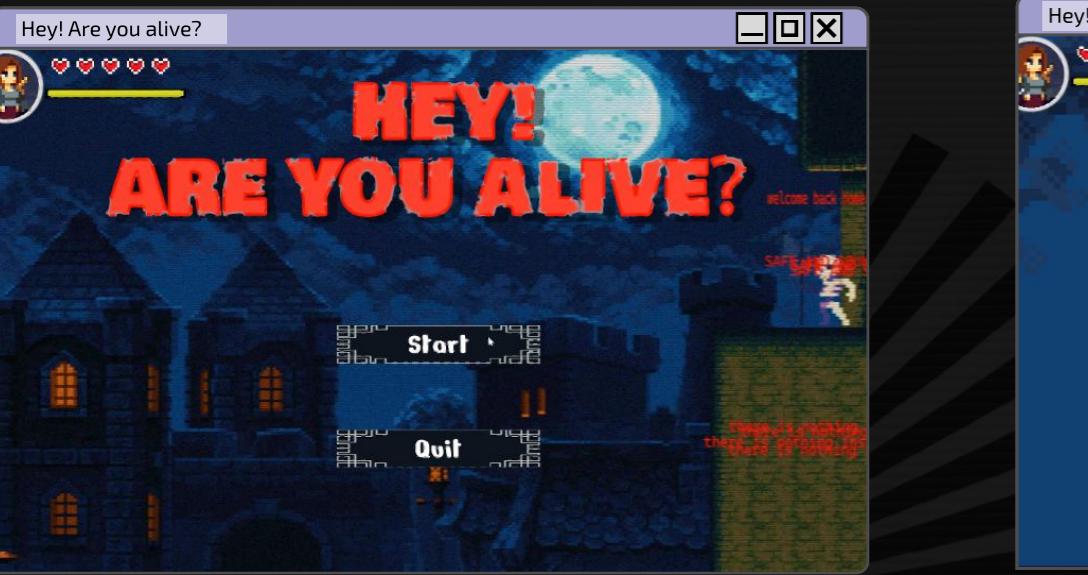
using a particle system to



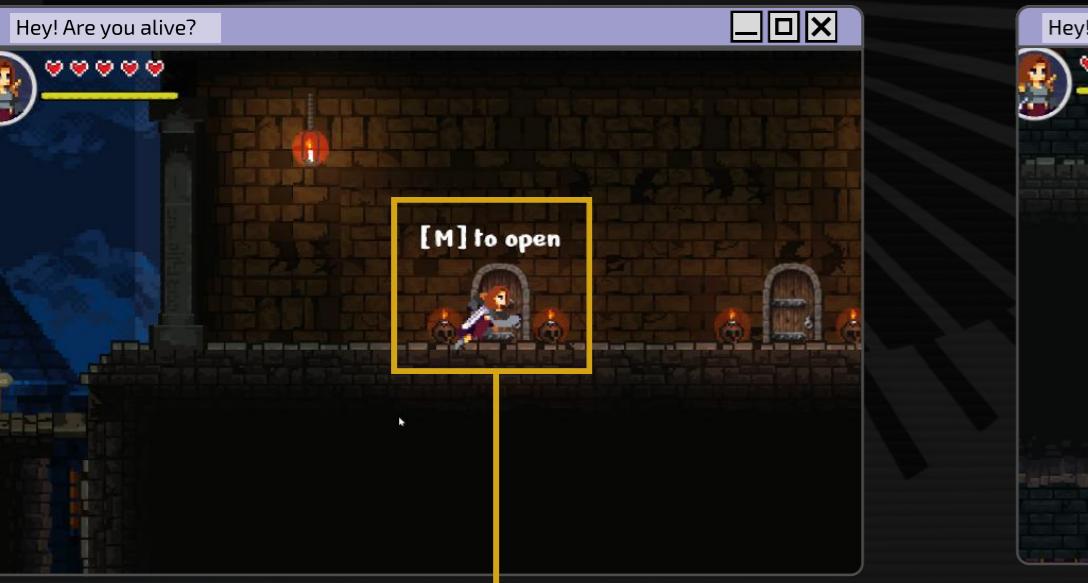
Default Brush ▾

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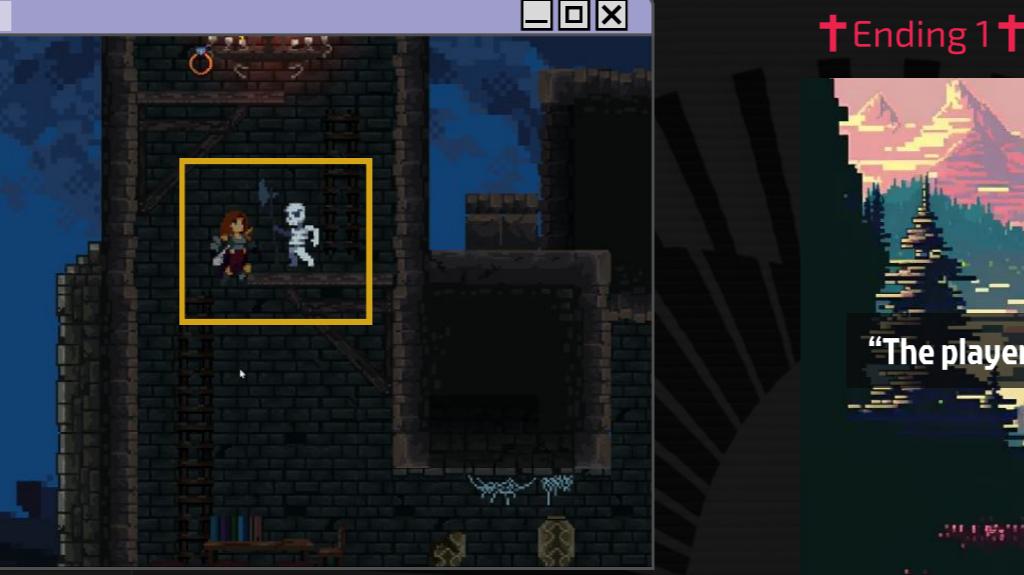
†Game results display†



Start



Before entering the castle, the player cannot block at this time
Then, we began to explore the ancient castle



After some processes, players have acquired skills such as blocking and
can fight against various enemies

When the game reach to the end, players can choose one of the endings.

†Ending 1†



†Ending 2†



"The player wakes up, sees the real world and the real
prison cell. But he smiles."



Feedback

After I realized the game demo, I distributed the demo to several seed players for game testing. Collected feedback and made modifications.

- Found several bugs
- The scenes are too few, need more contents of game
- The character can be customized or can be selected
- Needs more storytelling

I took the second and third advice as emergent needs, others will be developed after that.



Game update plan

- The game's scenes continue to expand.
- Optimize the camera performance of the game
- Fix bugs
- Add Chinese localization to the game