

Annesia

- THE DARK DESCENT -

-Challenge #Fight System Design-

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Amnesia: The Dark Descent

I have decided to choose *Amnesia: The Dark Descent* because it **hasn't weapons or any form of combat system** in itself.

Amnesia: The Dark Descent is a game released in 2010 by "Frictional Game" an independent Swedish video game developer who has also recently developed *Soma*.

Amnesia: The Dark Descent is a **first person single player puzzle survival horror** about **immersion, discovery and living through a nightmare**.

Gameplay Overview

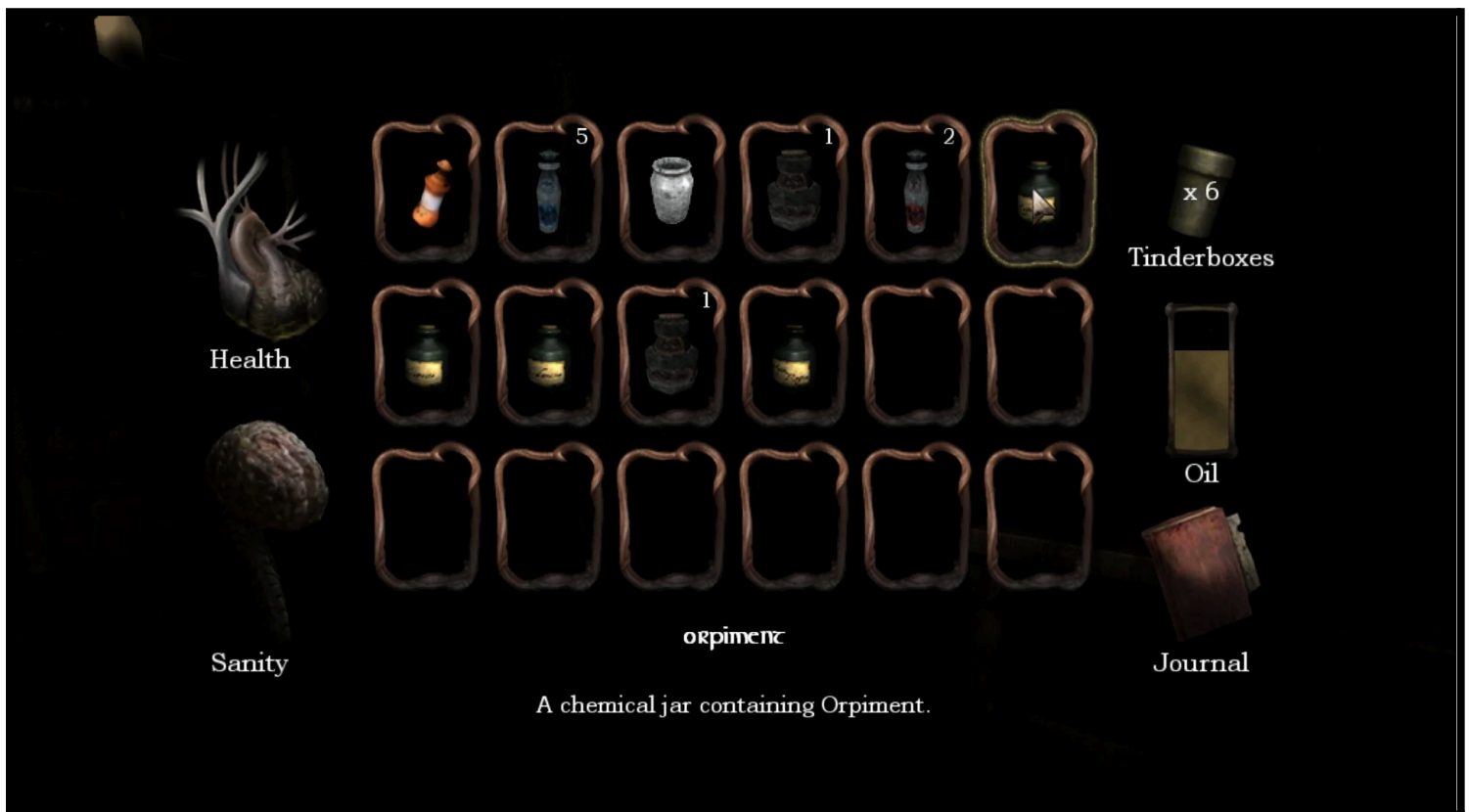
I will describe the different main mechanics of the game that influences the player and his way to play.

Players Mechanics:

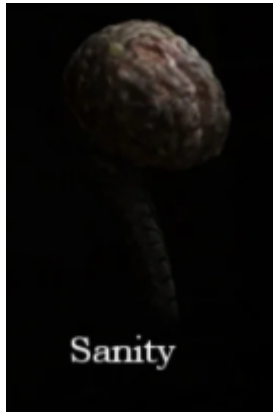
- **Standard actions**
 - Walk
 - Run
 - Crouch
 - Move the camera (Look at)
- **Hiding action**
 - This is one of two ways to **avoid being killed by monsters** the other being running.
 - Hiding can **only be done in a dark, unlit area**.
 - Hiding in a **dark place** for an extended time frame will slowly **drain sanity**.
- **Environment interaction**
 - *Amnesia: The Dark Descent* allows player to **pick any items and throw them**. It permits an **interaction with** the different part of **the environment**. Some current actions which depend on this can be the following: sometimes that can be useful to **resolve some puzzles** or just to **move a box** and see if an **item** was **hidden under it**.
 - The player can also **open or close the door** at its convenience.

- **Item utilization**

- The **lantern** is the **most important item** in the game, it used to **illuminate the surrounding area** and **restore sanity**.
- **Tinderbox** is used to **light candles, fireplaces and torches**. It's a common item mainly **used to conserve oil** for the lamp.
- **Oil** is used in order to **keep the lantern lit**, indeed the lantern will slowly **burn the oil** resource as time goes by. It's not a common item, it has a **middle level of scarcity** in relation to his presence in the game.
- **Laudanum potion** is used to **restore health** about one level higher.
- Other items are presents too, these items are often **used only 1 or 2 times** in the game. They are used to **resolve puzzle or progress** in the story.

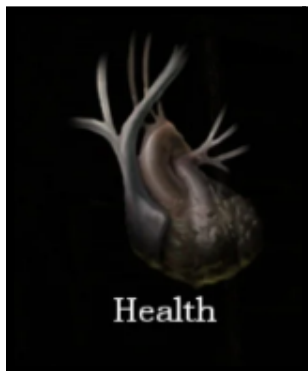


- **Sanity system**



- In Amnesia: The Dark Descent the player has to **manage a level of sanity** which will have a direct impact on the player experience. The level of sanity is **situated in the player inventory**.
- **There are 4 levels of sanity:**
 - **Level 1:** It's the **highest level** of sanity, that gives the ability to see **enemies glowing in the dark**.
 - **Level 2 & 3:** Dragging **blur effect** and **disorienting warping**.
 - **Level 4:** The **lowest level** of sanity, that makes the **player falling down** onto the ground while a **ringing noise** plays. This **alerts nearby enemies** and **prevents movement** for a while.
- **Condition to lose sanity:**
 - If the protagonist sees **disturbing events**.
 - If the player stands in the **darkness**.
 - If an **enemy** enters in the **field of view**.
- **Condition to gain sanity:**
 - If the player **solves a puzzle**.
 - At some point through the **progression in the story**.
 - If the player is **standing in lighted areas** for some amount of time.

- **Health system**



- The level of health is also **situated in the player inventory**.
- There are **4 levels** of health.
- **Condition to lose a health level:**
 - Stay in the **shadow's red organic**.
 - Be **hit by an enemy**.
- **Effect of losing a health level:**
 - **Quick red flash**.
 - **Bloody decal** appear off-center.
 - **Unable to sprint** during an amount of time.
 - **Death:** Fall to the ground and their vision will go black.
- **Condition to gain a health level:**
 - Health can be restored **over-time**.
 - Health can be restored by drinking a **Laudanum potion**.
 - Health can be restored by **entering in a new area**.

Significant player metrics:

- **Spatial**
 - **Throw an object** on an enemy in the hope to slow him is very hard, the player need to be **very accurate** because the **enemies** have a **small hitbox**.
- **Action metrics**
 - **Walk** in Amnesia: The Dark Descent is a very **slow action**.
 - An **object** is only **launched** at a **medium range**.

In relation to the reminders of the main mechanics of the game done previously, we can now conclude that the main player skill used is the following:

- **Mental Skill**
 - The **execution** still important but it takes a **second place** in relation to the uncertainty of the appearance of events. The player never knows what will happen with accuracy, they can **only suspect** them, **anticipate** them because the result **isn't often easily predictable**.
The game is mainly centered around the **tension** that depend of the **outcome of the action**, rather than the execution of the action in itself.

We can go further and try to split the mental skill in several under categories.

- **Tactic**
 - In order to **adapt to a specific situation**, the player must quickly take the right decision by **analyzing** observable **information**.
 - Example: When the player **hears** the sound of a **monster**, two possibilities are possible to avoid him. **Running** or **hiding**, that depends on different factors such as:
 - **The Level Design** of the piece (only one or two entries in this room).
 - **The environment** of the piece (any form of environment to hide in).
 - **The distance** between the monster and the player.
 - The player action at this moment will determine if he will survive or not, we can also find here a sort of **cleverness** (the player must gather information and string together clues to find a solution to a problem) that will orientate the result.

- **Management**

- The player must **organized his inventory and items utilization** in relation to the **scarce of items / resources**
 - Example: Oil is an item used to keep the lantern lit, but if the lantern is too much used, then the oil resource will disappear to the inventory and complicate the player's progress.

Now that we know the nature of the challenge, solve a situation under stress such as: should I flee the enemy or hide, should I enter the shadows or keep my lantern lit ?

We will try to design a combat system for Amnesia: The Dark Descent that respects the core gameplay.

Combat System Design

Before we start designing the combat system. I asked myself the following questions:

“How do the fighting systems of other horror games based on immersion and anxiety work?”

I started by analyzing several licenses such as: *Resident Evil / Evil Within* and other similar games.

One of the common points I found was the use of a weapon.

But the use was not the same according to the type of game analyzed, we can find:

- A rather **offensive** use of weapons as in *Evil Within 2* for example.
- Or a much more **defensive** use with a weapon that is sometimes difficult to use.

My design will essentially revolve around being able to "attack" the enemy with a "weapon" without breaking the player immersion or changing the overall feeling of powerlessness.

New mechanics & rules:

These are the different elements/rules that I decided to add to the game in order to create a coherent combat system.

As we can see, these different elements are more focused on the player's "physical skills", in order to add challenges regarding the tension related to the execution of the action, thus promoting the combat system.

- The possibility of attacking the opponent with a weapon.
- The ability to counter an enemy attack.
- Balance the slowing down time related to the collision of an object with an enemy.
- Add a new enemy.
- The possibility of creating a new "flaming projectile" weapon.

Now I will develop and explain how I thought and designed each element.

The possibility of attacking the opponent with a weapon.

I wanted to add a weapon to the game, but to do that I had to think about a few points:

- **What kind of weapon?**
 - I opted for a **defensive** and **situational weapon**, a big wooden stick. Because in my opinion an offensive weapon would not have made sense here, because you **can't kill an enemy** in *Amnesia: The Dark Descent*.
- **What effect does this weapon will have?**
 - Of course the weapon could not have the effect of killing the enemy because it would have totally disagreed with the core gameplay of the game.
So I decided to add the following effect: If the enemy is hit with a big wooden stick then he is **stun** for a few seconds.
- **How to balance it?**
 - I decided to make the weapon **breakable**, making it more **rare** and **precious**. This should encourage the player to **use** this weapon **intelligently** and **less frequently** than with an indestructible weapon.
A kind of **last chance** if it's too late to be hide or flee the enemy.
 - To remain in the **minimalist** spirit of the game, the lifetime of the weapon would be represented by two different levels:
 - Level 1: Represents the **maximum life** of the weapon with an image of the green one.
 - Level 2: Represents the **minimum life** of the weapon with an image of the one so red in color. Once the weapon is at level 2, the enemy's **slow-down time is reduced**. After attacking with a level 2 weapon, it is **destroyed**.
 - Finally, the big wooden stick would be an **uncommon** object in the game, the player could only find **one weapon per area**.

The ability to counter an enemy attack.

I wanted to add a possibilities to **blocked** an enemy attack, to do that I asked myself the following questions:

- **What type of object should be used to block an attack?**
 - I had the option of recreating a breakable object as for the previously designed weapon, but it would have made less sense and would have been redundant. That's why I decided that **all portable objects** in the environment by the player **could be used as a shield**.
- **What behaviour for the object against an enemy attack?**
 - Of course to balance the fact of being able to defend yourself from an enemy attack with any object, the action would be subject to the following behavior:
 - The player must **accurately place the object** in front of the enemy's attack to counter it.

The object would be immediately **destroyed after blocking** an enemy attack to force the player to take new initiatives.
- **How will the game experience evolve?**
 - I wanted to add this game mechanics in order to offer an **additional alternative** for the player. If it is too late to hide or flee the enemy and the player does not have a weapon, then he can **parry an attack before fleeing**.
To do this, the player must demonstrate several "**Physical Skills**":
 - **Precision**, the player must provide a precise orientation of the object in front of the enemy.
 - **Reflex**, the player must react to a fast and almost unpredictable stimulus. To block the enemy's attack it will be necessary to be fast in execution.

In the end it is **not an easy action** to perform, it is even prone to failure if the player takes it wrong. But if the action is executed correctly, it can **save the player's life**.

Balance the slowing down time related to the collision of an object with an enemy.

Amnesia: The Dark Descent is not originally designed to include a combat system, some changes should take place with existing mechanics.

There is an interesting mechanics already present in play that can be categorized as "combat".

It is the fact of being able to **slow down an enemy by throwing an object** at it, however this mechanism is very small, if ever used by players (Source: Youtube and various Wiki).

The points that make this mechanism is not used are as follows:

- Throwing an object away accurately is not easy.
- Taking an object and throwing it slows the player down.
- The enemy's slow-down time is too short compared to the time it takes for the player to throw an object at him.

My proposed changes to this mechanism are as follows:

- **Increase the slowing time** caused by an object thrown at an enemy.
- Making the **slowing time proportional to the object** being launched.
 - For example, if it is a hammer or a saw, the enemy will be slowed down longer than if it were a wooden box.

How will the game experience evolve?

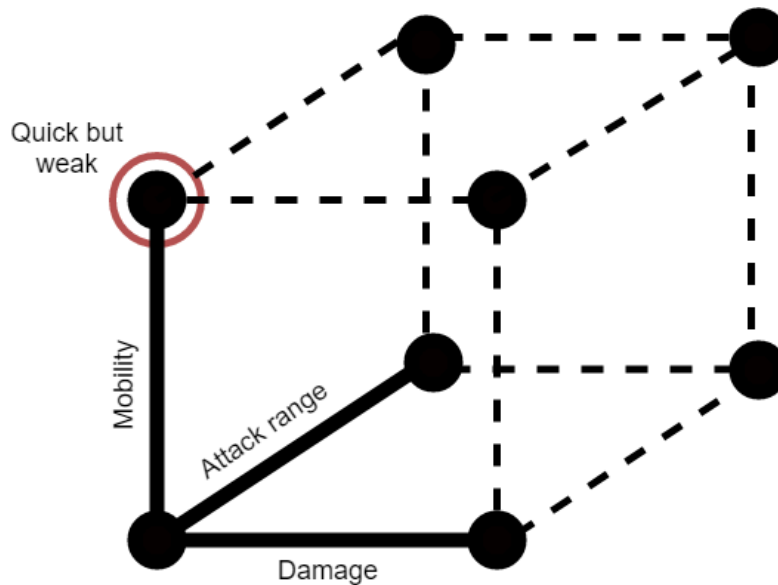
By making its changes, this game mechanic will be **less risky to use**, which will push the player to **use this mechanic more to facilitate his escape**. The game will however be simplified if the player is comfortable with his "Physical Skills".

Add a new enemy.

In Amnesia: The Dark Descent we have a **little diversity** in relation to the number of **monsters**, then I found interesting to create a new monster to **improve the combat system**. I asked myself the following questions:

- **What aesthetic?**
 - First of all I have decided to give a shape for my new monster, it wasn't maybe the best way to start, but it was more easy for me to represent it in this way. Then I have decided to give the following aspect to my new monster: They are **critters** of small size and their particularity lies in their **number**, they're viscous and teem all over the place. (I have some **Dishonored** inspiration for this design, in relation to the **rat** that have a similar aspect)
- **What behavior & attack design?**
 - The critters are **inoffensive**, but if the player stays too much time in the **darkness** then they gather together and grow as they add up and **start to attack** the player. The attack takes place over time, the critters will **follow the player in the dark** and after a certain amount of time deal him **one level of damage**. If the player **can't escape** them or **neglect** them then the critters will grow up and deal this time **two level of damage**.
- **How to avoid their attacks?**
 - To avoid their attacks the player must:
 - **Lit his lantern** (and use oil) to make the critters flee.
 - **Leave the dark** area and by consequent flee the critters.
 - **Flee** them and stay hidden during an amount of time, the critters will separate and leave the area.
 - **Find a flammable area to throw a flaming projectile** (with a tinderboxes), killing in this way the critters. The reward will be greater because there will be no more critters in the area where they burned until the next loading of the scene. (This is the next point I'm going to talk about)

I tried to realise a 3 Dimensional representation:



We have the following spectrum:

- Enemy focus on the mobility
 - High mobility
 - Low attack range
 - Low damage
- How will the game experience evolve?
 - The objective of this design is to:
 - **Counterbalance** the fact that the player may use a **weapon**.
 - Force the player to move all time and **go out of his comfort zone**.
 - **Increase** the fact that he **encounters enemies** as he will be less discreet.
 - Increase the difficulty in relation to the **management system**, because the player will have to take care about his **resources in oil and tinderboxes**.
 - Increase the difficulty of the game.

The possibility of creating a new "flaming projectile" weapon.

In Amnesia: The Dark Descent the management system have an important place, that's why I decided to link it to the combat system by adding a special utilization to the tinderbox.

- **How to get and use the object?**
 - It's not strictly speaking an object in itself, the player needs to **throw a tinderbox on a pile of wood** provided for this purpose to start a fire.
- **What is it used for?**
 - If the player throws a tinderbox on a pile of wood that will **burn critters** if they are in this area. If it's not the case they will just **flee during an amount of time**. Furthermore the light created by the flames will comfort the protagonist and make him **gain one level of sanity**.
- **How will the game experience evolve?**
 - This mechanic will offer **more choice** to the player and allow him to be **more polyvalent** regarding the situations:
 - Use a **tinderbox** but lose this scarce resource for another utilization such as light candles or torches.
 - Don't use it but take a risk with the critters enemies.
 - It's the only way to get rid of the critters, which makes it a powerful mechanism.
 - That will **favorise the exploration** to find the piles of wood.

Bonus Design:

Create a scrolling system which allows to swap between the different object. To do this I would only use the mouse wheel to keep the immersion.

Conclusion

Finally, I think that all these changes will allow a **balance** between these different **skills**, physical and mental. This should create a **functional combat system** which respect the core gameplay of the game and keep his main pillars unchanged. However some tweak should be made such as:

- Increase the frequency with which enemies appear.
- Balanced the number of weapon found in the game.
- Rework some part of the level design according to the critters enemies and piles of woods.

On a personal point of view, that wasn't easy to create a combat system in a game where there are none. But it was interesting to do the exercise of developed another perspective of the game and by consequent view how the game could have been designed in an other way.