



HEART OF THE HEALER

Game Design Document



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Introduction

Game Summary

Heart of the Healer is a 2D text-based RPG about time skips – where you reincarnate forwards and backwards in time to find ways to rid the world of the Demon King.

Inspiration

Going into this game jam as a solo developer, I tried to recall all the solo projects I have ever done as a reference. In the end, I decided to go for a 2D text-based RPG with visuals for flavor, as my very first game in my first game design course is also one. By going for something simple, I believe I would have a better chance of completing a prototype while juggling multiple roles at the same time.

Player Experience

With the 2D text-based RPG concept in mind, I have designed the game to be navigated through minimalistic buttons and mouse controls – using number keys and spacebar for map and dialogue navigation, and mouse for spells. There would be various still images depicted on screen to prompt theater-of-the-mind engagement

Platform

The game is going to be released on windows PC.

Development Software

- Unity
- ProCreate
- Audacity

Genre

Singleplayer, 2D, RPG

Target Audience

As this would eventually lean towards a narrative focused approach, the target audience would be quite broad, aiming for at least casual game players, as well as those with a soft spot for narrative RPGs.

Concept

Gameplay Overview

The player is an Alchemist chosen by Lord Time to put a stop to the Demon King's plan to take control of the four elements and reshape the fabric of reality as he sees fit. By journeying across the shattered land and helping their people, the player will acquire base ingredients for alchemical spells, as well as fate charges to empower their reincarnations. The main goal is to accumulate enough fate charges to slowly reincarnate backwards in time – to before the Demon King's coronation – as an unconventional way of problem-solving.

Theme Interpretation (Shadows and Alchemy)

As someone that enjoys reading about philosophies and metaphors, I have decided to focus on more metaphorical interpretations rather than literal ones.

I have always wanted to explore the concepts of time skips and reincarnations through video games, as I believe it to be the perfect medium to create interesting sensations and tell stories of such nature. I particularly want to ask questions about their effects on the human mind. How would humans, creatures that have always experienced time linearly, respond to time skips? How would they feel when they must face the cruelty of time as people disappear and events unfold in their absence? How would the feelings of powerlessness arising from these things transform the human mind?

Here is where I got my inspiration – to ponder on the **transformation of human minds (Alchemy)** – namely the player's – when their deeds are lost in the **shadows of civilization, history, and time (Shadows)**. It is my hope that through this game prototype, I would have a better idea of the direction the game should take to ask the implied philosophical questions in a fun and engaging way.

Many animes, movies and games have inspired the arrival of this interpretation, including Frieren: Beyond Journey's End (immortality, grief, relationships), Fullmetal Alchemist (Law of Equivalent Exchange, human souls),

Groundhog Day (Time Loop), The Arrival (Non-linear time flow), and my personal favorite, Final Fantasy XIV Online.

Primary Mechanics

Reincarnation. This is the primary feature of the game – players will have limited actions in each lifetime to accumulate fate charges. Once that runs out, they would have the opportunity to use said charges to reincarnate faster to race against the clock, or reincarnate backwards in time, and use acquired knowledge to their advantage.

Timeline. Key locations would remember the player's deeds, but only if they do not go back in time, thus rewriting history. In the full game, this would affect how advantages are accumulated, as certain magic and powers gather strength through time.

Secondary Mechanics

Alchemical Resources. Just like in Fullmetal Alchemist, players can cast magic using basic ingredients, although this is not the main focus of the game, mechanics or interpretation wise.

Art

Theme Interpretation & Design

As I am not an Art-focused game designer, I decided to draw inspiration from my own weaknesses for justification of the art style used ("Send it to Narrative!" as my best friend always says). I incorporated the Curse of Forbiddance to explain away why the player has no way to communicate beyond alchemical spells. As such, the simplistic and childlike doodling of visuals are there to support the idea that the world cannot remember the hero's deeds. I chose brushes and color that mimic rough drawings and rough parchment as the main aesthetic.

As for the reincarnation interface, I have opted in for a galaxy-like color palette to reflect the unknowable and almost eldritch horror presence of the gods that sent the hero on their quest.

Audio

Music

The looping music “Everlasting Sorrow” is a theme I composed 2 years ago after a heartbreak and would have been the background music for my team’s game entry for the Global Game Jam 2023 if not for the scripting errors on my part. As Heart of the Healer deals with themes of grief and sorrow, I believe this piece would fit the feeling, as long as you don’t mind the audio quality from my phone’s recording of my piano.

Sound Effects

For the audio feedback, I made a simple thud sound by tapping on a hard disk wrapped in a piece of fabric.

Game Experience

UI

I positioned the dialogue box to be on the bottom of the screen, which is very common with modern RPG practices. Conversely, visuals are positioned on the top half of the screen, with the spell book UI accessible on click of the book-shaped button, due to situational relevance.

Controls

Controls are mostly relegated to number 1, 2, and 3 for movement choices, spacebar for more mundane options like passing through dialogues, and mouse click required only when the spell book needs to be used.

Final Thoughts

I went into this game jam with the main goal of finding out what kind of game designer I am, as well as my strengths and weaknesses. As someone that went into pursuit for game design later in life than most, I don’t have as many refined and specialized skills. I tend to be more generalist – truly a Jack of all trades. So when it comes to group work, I have a tendency to see the values others bring to the table, and often don’t know what my place is within the group. I guess this is what people

call Imposter Syndrome – I felt like a fraud at times. And feeling like there're countless impossible mountains to climb to get to where I can proudly call myself a game designer.

So when I saw some friends sharing the link to the game jam 3 days before the start, I felt empowered somehow. With the generous duration of 2 weeks, I felt that even I could manage something by myself, as well as the opportunity to expose all my weaknesses, and with luck, strengths.

While it didn't turn out the way I expected – lots of mistakes, technical or managerial – I grew a lot of confidence in myself. While I'm not a specialist like my peers (yet), my basic understanding of how each discipline work individually and together allow me to communicate with my various selves. Having them all in one brain definitely helped a lot, but it didn't make the work any less intense. I believe I could definitely become more efficient, especially managing my creative impulses and affects. But this game jam lay bare my strength as much as my weaknesses, with some surprising discoveries!

I definitely need to do more game jams. Part of the reasons for my sludge-like mood and momentum since my graduation was the lack of hard-hitting challenges. And if I am to improve beyond what I am at right now, I need to seek them out. Here's to an even more productive rest of the year!