

Croaking Core

DESIGN DOCUMENT

By Balgrime for the 2025 Pirate Software Game Jam 16

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Introduction

Game Summary Pitch

“Croaking Core” is a game where you survive successive waves of enemies to achieve the highest possible score. You play as a central mecha that has landed on a planet, only to find itself under attack by the local wildlife -none too welcoming toward this foreign invader.

The game blends strategy, as you upgrade your rotating mecha with weapons that have limited batteries and can enhance each other based on their placement, a bit of randomness from the modules offered at each round, and dexterity to use those modules as efficiently as possible in combat.

Inspiration

Dome Keeper

Dome Keeper is a game where you upgrade your dome and collect blocks between each wave to improve it and achieve the highest score.



Vampire Survivor

Vampire Survivors is a game where you control a character fighting off endless waves of monsters. Weapons attack automatically, and the challenge lies in choosing the best upgrades and weapon combinations to survive as long as possible.

Platform

I created this game prototype for the Pirate Software Jam 2025, and I will continue working on it to release it on Steam soon.

Development Software

- Unity 6
- Photoshop, Rebelle, Blender, Callipeg, After Effects

Genre

RogueLike, Survival, Action

Target Audience

The game is designed for a diverse audience that enjoys strategy building and survival games.

Concept

Gameplay overview

The player starts with the building phase, where they are presented with three options. They then assign one of their three available activation keys to a module and position it in one of the eight slots on their Core. This is followed by a combat phase, where each damage dealt adds points to the player's score, while each damage taken subtracts from it. The phases continue, with the player's Core combining more and more modules, as increasingly powerful enemy waves last longer and become more challenging.

Theme Interpretation (You Are The Weapon)

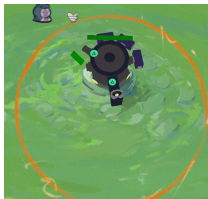
"You Are The Weapon"

This theme can be expressed in a number of different ways. Maybe you are cursed and become a weapon that other characters have to wield. Maybe you're an integrated organism that pilots a world destroying gun. Maybe you're Doom Guy. He's basically just a weapon, let's be real. Or even taking it a different direction maybe you're a weapon that kills things like viruses and saves people.

Croaking Core fits the **"You Are the Weapon"** theme perfectly : the player controls a rotating mecha that **is** the weapon, evolving by integrating modules to grow stronger. Survival depends on optimizing and adapting the mecha itself for battle.

Primary Mechanics

Mechanic	In Game (Art not necessarily final)
<u>Attack Module</u> An attack module to activate in the Core, its battery recharges at the end of each battle.	
<u>Bonus Module</u> A module that boosts adjacent modules, creating potentially devastating interactions against monsters.	

Mechanic	In Game (Art not necessarily final)
<u>Shielding Module</u> Defensive modules that can, for example, block or reflect enemy projectiles.	
<u>Core</u> The rotating Core can be upgraded, with its spin speed influenced by various factors. It can also acquire a shield for added defense.	

The local fauna

Mechanic	In Game (Art not necessarily final)
<u>Glognaar</u> Small crawling worms that can organize into swarms to attack the Core.	
<u>Glomurk</u> Tentacles emerging from the ground that periodically launch a projectile.	
<u>Glortark</u> Massive pests that advance slowly and deliver devastating blows.	

Art

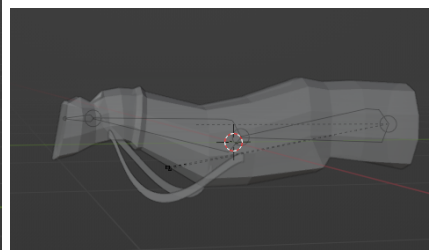
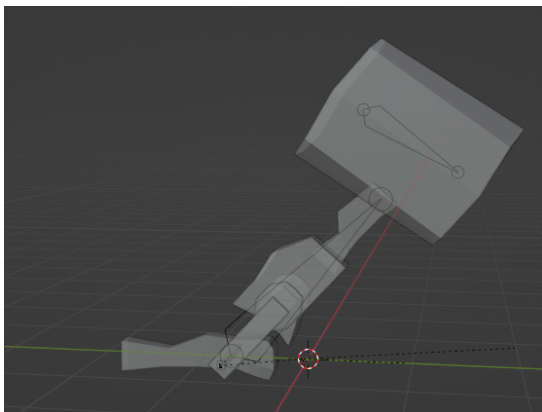
Moodboard



3D or 2D ?

For the game's art, I decided to create the Core and its modules in 3D, while animating all the monsters and effects in 2D. As I continue developing the game, I'll add many more fun mechanisms and machines with gears and other moving parts (similar to the current hammer in the game). I'm also considering expanding the concept, maybe giving the central machine multiple levels or other upgrades. For the background, I painted it in Rebelle.

Concepts



Audio

Music

I used **Machinations** by Kevin MacLeod, a track that effectively adds the desired tension to the combat phases, while I adjusted the volume for the building phases. For the final game, I may work with a composer to create original music that fits the title.

Sound Effects

For the SFX, I used sounds from Kenney and others found on Freesound.

Game Experience

User Interface

For the user interface, I went for a sci-fi/futuristic look (Kenney pack) with simplified bars for the Core's health and battery levels. In the final game, I'll add a lot more polish, including a start menu, module preview, and other improvements.

Controls

The game is played using the Space key, DFG keys, and the left and right arrows. Assigning modules to different keys allows for varied usage and interactions, preventing unnecessary ammo waste or letting players map a powerful module to a key they don't usually use in combat.

The game is currently compatible with controllers.

Development Timeline

I basically spent the first 10 days on coding and the next 4 on art and animations.

Not implemented yet

Due to lack of time, I couldn't implement for this game jam:

- a 2D animated introduction with the mecha landing on hostile planet
- a Pause menu with two sliders for music and SFX

The next steps

For the full game, I plan to add more weapons, make them unlockable through runs so they have a chance to appear in-game, introduce more creatures with interactive behaviors, and implement an online leaderboard that resets at the start of each month. Alternatively, I also considered a story mode where the player travels from planet to planet with score-based objectives.

Conclusion

I had a great time working on this prototype during the game jam, and I want to thank Thor and the Pirate Software Jam team for the opportunity to participate. Feel free to reach out and share your thoughts on the game—I'm excited to see the scores you'll achieve on the online leaderboard!