

Project Post-mortem

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Introduction

This semester we were tasked to create a racing game. We opted to design this game as a class-wide team, split up to different levels with each role in each team. The game's platform, mechanics and style were discussed by the class, and decided to integrate a different style to each stage/level of the game. We chose three themes, and each of these themes and teams were formed around each. Within each team would have a concept artist, a level designer, a modeler and an Unreal engine operator. The three chosen themes were:

- Neo-Tokyo
- Industrial
- Overgrown

My role this semester was mainly level designer, but I also made the rig for the animations. However, I plan on using next semester to make animations myself.

Research Evaluation

For level design, I gathered inspiration from the film "Tokyo Drift" (The Fast and the Furious: Tokyo Drift, 2006) which has both scenes in a built-up city and in the mountainous area. I planned to include Tokyo city landmarks, as well as Chinese style architecture to give a setting to the player. To carry out my tasks, I already had experience with rigging from first year, and used resources from Moodle (Moodle.uwtsd.ac.uk, 2019) and notes from previous lectures. However, I did use YouTube for new techniques to increase efficiency. With this information I created my own take on the tail rig. Then improved the rig dynamically based off the feedback I was given. While carrying out this research I used the "Script Editor" within Maya 2018, which significantly reduced the time it took to orient some of the joints within the rig. However, some joints did require manual orientation additionally.

Games Design Theory

When carrying out the Games Design Document section of the assignment we used the "10 Pager" format found in "Level Up!" (Rogers, 2010). We chose to use this format as it was a structure that we could all access and abide by easily. It included contents for each section and allowed us to carry out team discussions to break down what we needed to decide on as a class e.g. Mechanics, levels, controls etc. We had access to the book via the library and with a copy within the lecture room. This allowed us quick references if anyone was stuck in their sections.

Technical Research

For my level design research, I already understood the theory behind integrating focal points to ensure the player's stimulation when playing. However, the creation of the level organically grown. I made a basic layout, and through feedback and playtesting I modified dynamically.

Regarding my rigging however, I used a variety of sources to carry out this process. I already had experience with the whole process from last year but looked for additional information on how to make the process more efficient. Using a combination of YouTube videos that I accessed last year from the course (YouTube, 2018), and new videos that helped reduced the time to accomplish a suitable rig. The use of Autodesk Maya 2018 Tutorial (Autodesk Maya 2018 - Simple Character Rigging Part 1 of 3, 2017) was key to cutting time off the process as I used a new control format and Maya features that are new to me.

I also used reference from Moodle (Moodle.uwtsd.ac.uk, 2019) to get naming conventions for my rig.

Contextual Research

Initially, the team were all assigned to carry out mood board for their desired level, I chose to make a mood board for both steampunk and Neo-Tokyo. These were the two styles I was interested in, as I enjoy the pollution and steampunk vehicle style, and enjoy the neon glow of the Neo-Tokyo style, both having unique colour schemes. I chose to work on the Neo-Tokyo level, as I already had an idea of how I wished the setting to look.

Game Research

For inspiration in the game we found a game that has a similar style which was the “Power Drive 2000” (Megacon Games, 2016). The aesthetics of this game was like the look we were going for and the colours used are very good at capturing the theme we are going for with the neon.

Research Conclusion

The research I made was successful and I feel like I could have spent additional time with the level design aspect to incorporate some intricate corners and maybe do further research and use some corners from famous race tracks. For rigging, I feel like the time I had to complete the rig limited me, so I feel like I could increase that quality given more time next semester.

Technique Evaluation

This semester, I ensured that I had all my tasks listed in front of me and produced my Gantt chart as soon as possible as I personally work better off lists, as I can methodically complete each task. In conjunction with Gantt charts I used flow charts to help visualise tasks for my team, and the production pipeline of who to receive work off and who to pass the work onto. I have had experience with Gantt and flow charts and know they increase efficiency.

I was not primarily expanding my knowledge in the engine, as my role didn't require it. I was primarily using Maya 2018 for my tasks.

Identification & Suitability of Production Methods

To carry out the project we needed to be in consistent communication with each other and give access to files without being in university. This was made possible by using Google Drive with all team members connected to it. Along with that being our form of communication, I also used LucidChart (Lucidchart, 2008) to form my flowcharts.

Development of Techniques & Skills

I primarily used knowledge I gained last year, which gave me time to further research into making the process more efficient. This was the skill that I wished to develop and did so successfully through my research.

However, due to the size of the team, lead to some tasks being left to a later date because of the communication required to get everyone's input was not present. I plan to ensure that the high priority tasks are completed to avoid people being bottlenecked and unable to do adhere to their plan.

Overall Quality of Work Produced

I am satisfied with the standard of work I have produced this semester; however, the rig quality could be increased with more time. I did not emphasise the completion of orthographic high enough, and therefore only left me with a night to perform tasks that were projected for two weeks. For the future I plan to communicate and complete these tasks earlier, so the standard of work is to a professional standard.

However, I did give myself a buffer of time that would either be used to complete other high priority tasks or be filled with low-priority asset creation for the level. Due to this, I was able to complete most tasks I set out to do and a playable blockout was achieved.

Technique Conclusion

I now know the importance of communication is such a large team, and the importance of making sure that work is being completed to avoid bottlenecks, that will also prevent the domino effect from occurring down the production pipeline. I also learnt features within Maya to allow the rigging process to be carried out more efficiently. This includes features within the software such as script editor. Next semester, I will ensure that communication is consistent, and work is completed within time slots to allow myself and other to avoid additional stress.

Development Evaluation

For my role, I feel that I was able to complete my desired product to satisfy the brief. I set out to complete the rigging for our only character and produce a level design with the aesthetic that I envisioned.

The only major problem was with the orthographic, they came late and therefore required me to adjust my work load. It was solved by using some of the buffer time in my plan and completing tasks within one night to keep schedule. This led to the cut of my animation this semester but will be carried out next semester instead.

Creativity

I showed determination in the form of completing multiple tasks that were intended for weeks' worth of work into one night to make sure everyone else was kept on track. This was only done to avoid being a bottleneck and enabling my team. I ensured that the tools were accessible to them by the time I said they would be. I showed evidence of risk, as I made the executive decision to pass on the animation that I had projected for myself, to complete the higher priority tasks and communicate with my unreal team member Nathan, to capture how I saw the level. Creatively, I showed ambition through conducting various discussions and play testing sessions with Nathan to achieve good level flow. In addition, I had numerous brainstorming sessions with Connor to contextualising the mechanics and how they make sense in lore along with backstory.

Contribution within a group (group projects)

Due to the living situation I was able to communicate with Nathan, Connor and Harry easily, therefore meaning we could perform several playtesting sessions to achieve a level that flows and feels satisfying to play. Ensuring the player encounters staggered stimulation via the focal points within the level. In addition, we used Google Drive and Messenger applications to communicate with other team members. We used the Thursday sessions to conduct meetings for task distribution and completion.

Iterative Design Practice

There were several problems with my level found via playtesting sessions. The primary issue was the time to complete it. It was far too long and played out very slowly and got boring near the later stages of the level. Through discussions with Nathan, I was able to cut down the time and make the level flow smoother. With the addition of assets and the requirement to reduce time, I needed to redesign the level numerous times.

In addition, I received feedback from the animation team to add additional controls for the tail of our monster. This task I will carried out next semester.

Time Management

I feel like my time management and planning was well organised effective. I allowed myself a buffer of two weeks if an issue occurred. This early contingency plan allowed me to use that time, to carry out all work to a level I am happy to submit. Through the various plans and charts made, I was able to systematically achieve each task I set myself. In hindsight, I would have set the orthographic to be completed at an earlier date, to avoid the potential bottleneck and allow me to stick to my plan mid-semester. However, I was able to complete the tasks by my deadline, but at the expense of a single night of extensive work.

Development Conclusion

From this semester, I discovered the importance communication within a large team. It is most definitely harder in a group this size, to get together and discuss issues, but with proper communication this can be accomplished and even be more efficient for the completion of tasks when smaller deadlines are set weekly.

Analysis

Contextualising your work within a wider theoretical practice

This semester, I have found the playtesting sessions to emphasise the importance of focal points within a level. With a long track the game can feel slow and boring. From playtesting we minimised the amount of downtime the player will experience. Also, from the presentation of our game we discovered that players will not do what we intend of them, so we need to take precaution to ensure that we block out and design a level that only allows the player to go on the designated track.

Critique of the work you have produced

There were several issues that have been ironed out through the playtesting period. These include level clipping, track duration and down time within the level. These have since been reduced through modifying the level design. We also discovered that the level had some poorly block out sections, we will add additional assets to fill these holes within the level to ensure the player stays on the desired path.

Critique of your own practice (and action taken)

My work practices, I think I could improve my communication when regarding task completion. This would ensure less stress being present near the later stages of the semester. I could also increase my efficiency when rigging in general with more practice and more research. Next semester I plan on ensuring that my planning is manageable to reduce time constraints, and still have buffer time to safely complete all tasks.

I have received feedback from both lecturer and peers to improve my level design and rig, which I will use next semester.

In terms of the team as whole, I feel that the communication and task allocation was fair and achievable with smaller deadlines throughout the semester. The use of Google Drive and messenger applications allowed for good communication, however discussions in study time lectures need to be more structured.

Overall, the semester went well, and the team produced a good quality blockout across all levels in time for submission.

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