Playtesting Results

Abyssal Isolation

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Submechanophobia

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Test Sessions and Audience

We recruited mostly people from our personal lives, including:
- Family members
- Friends
- Friends of friends

We observed everybody closely while they were playing the game and talked to them throughout, while taking care not to give them many hints or revealing any upcoming features or events. For those people that one of us lived with, we observed them in a live setting, which had the advantage of gauging their reactions via face and body language as well as conversations. However, for most people we opted instead for communication via Discord, talking to them in voice chat while they live streamed their playthrough(s). Additionally to the direct communication we also prepared a survey (detailed below) that every participant filled out, partially before and partially after playing our game.

Survey

Pre-Game Survey

In the pre-game survey, our objective was to understand our audience better. We aim to evaluate their familiarity with video games, particularly horror games. Additionally, we're interested in their tendency to fear and their comfort level in narrow spaces. The questions in this section were designed to gather this information:

- How often do you play videogames?
- Do you frequently play horror games?
- Are you easily scared?
- Are you claustrophobic?

Many of our testers frequently engage in playing video games. However, most of them do not regularly play horror games. Additionally, about half of our testers have expressed that they are easily frightened and suffer from claustrophobia.

Post-Game Survey

This part of the survey was meant to evaluate our tester's opinion of the game after playing it. This includes their general experience as well as question geared towards specific gameplay elements (e. g. light system, monster design):

- How enjoyable did you find the game?
- Did you feel unsafe during the game?
- How 'lost' did you feel during the game? (Did you know where to go, what to do?)
- Did you think the design of the monster was scary?
- Was the level too dark or too bright?
- Do you think the game was lacking something? What should we work on next?

Feedback/Trends

Most testers reacted positively to the general atmosphere of the game, including many scared or threatened reactions (one person even quit the test due to being too scared, though that was an outlier) to both the map assets as well the monster's visual and sound design. Also multiple people stated a lot of potential for fun from our individual game elements, including the submarine management and exploration aspects.

However, there were also many points where room for improvement was suggested. A rather broad consensus was reached that the game quickly got very dark visually (although some people were also fine with the light levels, likely depending on different gamma settings on each tester's system). Additionally the management systems were also criticized as unintuitive, too complex (but once also too simple), and most importantly too unimportant compared to the survival horror aspects relating to exploration and the monster.

Suggestions & Planned Changes

- First of all, a separation of tutorial and actual game play would likely make the experience better. Due to all the mechanics starting at the beginning of the game death can already happen during the tutorial; this should definitely be avoided. A simple fix could be to only spawn the monster after the player has listened to the provided tutorials for the reactor mechanics.
- Conversely, in the later parts of a playthrough the monster can be somewhat absent when the player spends a lot of time in a different part of the submarine than the (randomly moving) monster. We already have some ideas on how to make the monster a bigger threat, e. g. giving it the ability to "teleport" around the ship via vents or giving it a chance to move specifically near to the player instead of randomly.
- Balancing the survival horror and the management aspects of the game needs some more work from us, as currently the reactor/electricity system is received as slightly too complex but ultimately unimportant.
- As a consistent opinion was that the game was too dark overall and this made orientation difficult, balancing brightness at different electricity and sanity levels is also something we need to put more work into. The best option would be to allow the players to customize the general brightness ("gamma") before playing the game, as is done by many other games. However, repositioning and rebalancing some of the in-game light sources will likely also be necessary.
- A rebalancing of audio volumes was also suggested, as some key elements (e. g. the radio transmission from the research base) were perceived as too quiet.
- Finally, adding feedback (visual, auditive or both) when the player successfully interacts with an interactable object would improve the game experience a lot.

Changes already implemented

Reactor Icons

First Ambient Light Correction (Gamma Customization still to be implemented)