RogueGen

A PCG ADVENTURE
PLAYTESTING

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Changes after the Alpha Presentation

After the alpha release we wanted to adjust some points based on our own testing before play testing the game with others. The following lists the big changes we made beside some bug fixes:

MENU

To instantly observe what the brightness setting does we added a live preview in the menu. It updates when the brightness slider is changed and shows the selected player count.

During the map generation we also show the button layout (also possible to open during the game), so the game is playable without any explanation.

HEALING STAFF AND GENERAL COMBAT BALANCING

The combat of the alpha was very unbalanced. To improve this, we first added a healing staff (only for the players). With this we can reduce the HP of the players in a way that he couldn't tank trough everything, but still survive multiple enemy and boss encounters.

In order to not trivialize it the healing staff can only heal a part of lost heath (the yellow part of the health bars).

We also added a respawn mechanic. When one player dies he falls on the ground and can be revived by another player. The reviving player must pay a part of his own health for this. (this was done to prevent death + revive as a tool to heal yourself).

CHARACTER HIGHLIGHTS

During our tests and the Alpha presentation, it was very hard to understand what was happening. To make it clear who was playing what character we added colored circles to the player models.

QUEST CHANGES

In the alpha version the player first must find the ice wall, and then find the fire mage. To reduce unnecessary backtracking in already explored areas of the map we added a crater at the location the fire mage will spawn. Now the player must remember the location of the crater in case he finds it before the ice wall.

AUDIO

The play testing version now has audio. There is ambient music and basic sound effect for all the different weapon and skills.

Playtesting

We conducted different playtesting sessions, each with groups of different background w.r.t. gaming. These are listed below:

SOLO GAME TEST WITH SPLAMY (EXPERIENCED (PC) GAMER)

In-game:
- How do the controls feel?
    - Controls are okay
- How does the movement feel?
    - Movement is also okay
- General observations:
    - Liked the enemy and general movement system
    - He abused the knock back of the shield
    - Enjoyed the possibility to freely select weapons
    - He was confused about yellow part of health and thought it was regeneration
    - No way to go back to menu without restart

Post-game:
General
- What was your first impression?
    - The live change in the menu is nice (player count and brightness)
    - Nice art style
    - Audio/(music) fits to the setting
    - General weapon system was liked
    - General style and feeling was good

- Frustration:
    - Enemy balance needs improvement (fire mage probably op)
    - What to do after finding the ice wall? Go back?

- most boring parts:
    - Running around
    - No incentive to kill anything when you have weapons you like
    - Big world but empty

- Most exciting thing:
    - Weapon System
    - fire mage fight

- Game duration: too long, too short, just about right.
    - Too long for the current amount of content (in the world)

- General comments:
    - Quest not always obvious (the fire mage crater was not obvious)

Formal
- Was the objective clear all the time?
    - In theory yes but in praxis you don't look at the quest description
- What was your strategy for winning?
    - "volles Pfund aufs Maul" (note: to beat the game solo I made him nearly invulnerable)
- Most difficult choices in the game:
    - Weapons selection: 2 ice staffs or melee weapons
- Would you prefer to play alone/with AI or with human players?
    - With other human players
- What elements could be improved?
    - Better story/quests
    - improve combat
- Loopholes:
    - When you "climb" an enemy and he bashes you with a shield you can fly over walls and go to the second area.

Dramatic Elements
- What do you think about the story and narrative?
    - Quest based story. Very empty
- Any dramatic climax in the game?
    - Liked the beginning
    - Fire Wizard
    - final boss to weak
- Any story improvements?
    - Fill world with more unique elements
    - add more and deeper story
    - quest line is more work than story

Procedures, rules, interface, and controls
- Were the procedures and rules easy to understand?
    - Yes, mostly clear or easily learnable
- How did the controls feel / did it make sense?
    - yes
- Could you find information you were looking for?
    - Yes
    - BUT later comment: not obvious what weapons do (and cooldown)
- Anything clunky or awkward?
    - Menu not controllable by controller
    - 3d factor of fights (when the player starts to jump or fly)
- Any feature suggestion?

- o Keyboard/mouse controls
- o Aim assist for controller

End of session
- What is the game selling point?
    - o Randomness
    - o Exploration
    - o Coop
- What was missing?
    - o Improve combat
    - o Add more story elements and world interaction
    - o Random weapons
- What is the target audience in your opinion?
    - o Roguelike fans
- Would you gift the game to someone?
    - o Probably
- Would you purchase this game?
    - o No, only for free

GROUP TESTING WITH 10 PLAYERS, DIVIDED INTO 3 GROUPS

Profile:
- Non-gamers between 20 and 30
- Some familiarity with video games from the childhood

Feedback Analysis:
Developer perspective (In-game):
- People got into the "flow" zone
    - o Lost track of time
    - o Talked loud and excited
    - o Laughed a lot at occurrences in the game
    - o Concentrated
    - o Got involved in the game
    - o Wanted to learn the controls
- Combat System
    - o People did not understand many features at start, most had to be explained to them
        - ▪ No attack with torch
        - ▪ Possibility to change both weapons

General

- What was your first impression?
  - Game was set in a horror film ambient, with lots of combat and magic
- Positive and enjoyable aspects:
  - It was fun to play
  - Variety of weapons, each with its own strong and weak points
  - Each time the game started, the world changed
  - Ambient music gave the game the right feeling
  - Players travelling together made contributed to immersion
  - Combat moments were exciting
  - In general, simple to play and most features could be learned intuitively
- Negative and frustrating aspects:
  - Game was too hard at first try, group could not survive more than two encounters with the enemies
    - Health was raised by 5 times the original value and solved the problem
  - At start, it was hard to understand what the objectives were and how the game played out
  - Lighting made everything too hard to see
  - There is no character selection
  - Healing mechanics were not clear
- Most exciting thing
  - Combat system combined with the procedurally generated world and atmosphere
- Game duration
  - Was just about right, although more levels in one play session would be a nice addition

Formal

- Was the objective clear all the time?
  - Group 1: yes, but finding the fire wizard in the ice quest was too hard
  - Group 2: not always, when the objective changed, people were looking at their characters and did not notice that the quest had changed
- What was your strategy for winning?
  - In general, just walk and spam buttons like crazy with any weapon
  - Some preferred using beam weapons to kill enemies
- What can you say about character interactions?
  - Other than healing/reviving and walking together, there weren't any more interactions
- Would you prefer to play alone or with human players?
  - Human players

- What elements could be improved?
    - Add a minimap for navigation
    - More things to do other than fighting
    - Add sound effects when a weapon is picked up
    - Add shader and sound effects when walking on water
    - Increase perceivable differences between player characters and enemies
    - Give light to players even without torches
    - Add a warning when the player health is low
    - Make it clear from the beginning that the game is about cooperation

Dramatic Elements
- What do you think about the story and the narrative?
    - Pretty much non-existing. The game needs a better story world and background
- Any dramatic climax in the game?
    - Major: when the fire wizard boss started
    - Minor: when each group of enemies appeared
- Any story improvements?
    - Add introduction to contextualize players in what they are doing in this world
    - Change music during intense battles and important events
    - Improve special events, like boss fights, through special effects
    - Make the ending more significant, not just load the main menu
    - Ice wall quest:
        - Navigating was in general hard without any visual cues or minimap
        - It was also not clear where the fire wizard would spawn, what the ice wall was, and what the fire staff was

Procedures, rules, interface, and controls
- Were the procedures and rules easy to understand?
    - In general, it could be learned by playing. Once learned, they were easy to remember.
- How did the controls feel?
    - Most of the time responsive, but some visual indication of what is happening would be good
- Clunky/Awkward aspects:
    - How to use the right stick could be interpreted wrong
    - It was not always clear when you could attack or not
    - The direction towards which a character was facing could not be recognized
    - Healing mechanics with the yellow bar was not explained in the game
    - At start:
        - Healing mechanics needed to be explained by developer
        - Color confusion: who am I playing?

- - Weapon changing confusion: how do I pick up weapons? (not w.r.t to controls)
    - What abilities do I have? How can I use them?
- Any control/interface improvements?
  - Rotation could be redesigned or at least properly shown to the players on how to do it
  - Sound indication when the quest changes
  - Character faces the direction of movement when not using the right thumbstick
- Any feature suggestion?
  - New skills, like turning your character invisible
  - Map affects the player, like sinking into quick sand or lava burning the player
  - Jumping
  - Character personalization:
    - Select character at start screen
    - Give characters the same color palette as the player controlling it
    - Ability to change character clothes
  - Visual feedback for combat system:
    - Show whether a skill is in cooldown or not
    - Highlight enemies in red for some milliseconds when they are hit

End of Session
- What is the game selling point?
  - Teamwork to complete missions
  - If played alone, it gives the players a horror film ambient
- What was missing?
  - Story and narrative
  - Character customization
  - Environment hazards
- What is the target audience in your opinion?
  - Not for casual gamers because of the playing time
  - People that like to play with friends
  - Gender neutral game
  - Some, most likely due to cultural differences:
    - Men up to 30 years old
    - Young adolescents
    - Programmers and Hobbyists
- Would you gift the game to someone?
  - 9 - Yes
  - 1 - No, because I don't play video games

- Would you purchase this game?
  - 7 - No, because I don't own a console / gaming pc
  - 2 - Yes
  - 1 - Yes, but only if someone introduces me to it.

GROUP TESTING WITH 4 GAMERS
- 4 Participants
- Gamers between 22 and 27

In-Game Observations:
- People had fun
  - Talking with each other about the game / their tactic / their objectives while playing
  - Laughed at various game situations
- Confused about mechanics
  - Various features had to be explained (Note: This testing session was before the Controls could be looked up in game)
  - Not all weapons have 2 skills (Torch, Throwing Knife)
  - How to change weapons (the general idea of changing weapons was known prior to the testing phase)
  - How healing works (Yellow Health bar)
  - How reviving other players works

General:
- What was your first impression?
  - Art style: Cute, Dark, Foreboding
- Positive and / or satisfying aspects?
  - Generally fun
  - "Chaos of multiplayer"
  - Enemies dropping ALL their weapons (instead of chance, or only some)
  - Weapon swapping
  - Variety of weapons
  - Combination of skills due to 2 weapons per person
  - Atmosphere (graphic style, lighting, sound)
  - Replayability due to random generation (the group played multiple rounds to the end)
- Negative and / or unsatisfying aspects?
  - Healing was confusing
    - Yellow Bar
    - First skill heals only allies, second skill heals also enemies
  - No clear indication when skills that can be charged up are fully charged
  - Torch and Throwing Knife not having a second skill
  - No possibility to look up controls (this feature was later added)

- No possibility to throw away weapons without having to pick another one up
- At the beginning: not clear what the end objective is
  - Crater was found, but the connection that the Fire Mage spawns there after they found the Ice Wall was not made
- Low incentive to switch weapons when preferred weapons have already been acquired / no new weapons appear
  - What was the most exciting thing / aspect about the game?
    - Entering new areas and encountering enemies with new weapons and trying those weapons out yourself
  - Game Duration?
    - About right for one level, but either one or both:
      - … more levels in one session / a form of meta-progression was suggested (some character, story or other advancement between multiple levels).
      - … much larger level with a lot more variation of things to do in it.

Formal
- Was the objective clear?
  - No, but was figured out eventually without having to explain it
  - Changes in the quest indicator on top of the screen were perceived late or not at all
- How did you engage in combat?
  - For this, each player gave a different answer. The 4 players quickly made a relatively classical RPG group composition:
    - Player 1: Used shields and melee weapons as a frontline fighter / tank
    - Player 2: Played as a healer with the starting staff, picked up either shields or the buff sword
    - Player 3: Used any combination of arcane and cold staves, sometimes with a throwing knife as a ranged damage dealer
    - Player 4: Used two melee weapons or one melee weapon and one staff
- What about character / skill interaction?
  - Healing
  - Protecting each other through knock back skills or by blocking the way
  - General Team Composition
  - But, more interaction would have been preferred
- Exploration?
  - Fun to see what comes next
  - Few surprises (mainly just Ice Wall, Fire Mage, End Boss)
  - Areas of the same biome too similar to each other
- **Gameplay mechanic suggestions?** (Players gave these throughout the testing without ever having been explicitly asked)
  - Second Skill for the weapons missing them
  - Damage / Heal numbers appearing over enemies and players

- Healing staff should either always heal enemies as well or not at all
  - Could add different healing weapons and change this on a weapon to weapon basis, but not within a single weapon
- General balancing, strong outlier: Ice Beam too weak, Ice Storm too strong
- More movement abilities: Teleports, Dodges, etc...
- More weapons/skills in total (the number of skills available at once was fine)
- Looking up controls (this was implemented after the test round)
- 1 Player suggested friendly fire on all weapons, 3 were strongly against it
- More surprises / different level elements when exploring the world

Dramatic Elements
- What do you think about story and narrative?
  - Story does not exist
  - General world building through atmosphere, but not nearly enough
- Do you think the / a story is important for this game?
  - Does not need to be the focus, but should be there
  - Lore and atmosphere, for example through environment and character design, is more important
  - The game needs to give off the feeling of an interesting world to explore, but the main plot does not need to be the most complex or incredible story ever
- Did you feel a sense of dramatic climax as the game progressed?
  - *Fire Mage was interesting, because...*
    - ... the fight was challenging
    - ... the explicit reason to fight was to get a cool weapon that one player gets to use
  - *End Boss was disappointing, because...*
    - ... the fight was too easy, especially compared with the Fire Mage
    - ... the game just ends after that, no new weapons to gain
  - But, both fights did not really present a story or lore behind the enemies

Procedures, Rules, Interface, and Controls
- Were the procedures and rules easy to understand?
  - Generally, yes, but some specifics had to be explained
    - Quest goals
    - Healing mechanics
    - Weapon switching
    - Some skills having cooldowns
- How did the controls feel? Did they make sense?
  - Controls made sense and where intuitive for the most part
  - Buttons for weapon switching and reviving had to be explained
- Are there any controls or interface features you would like to see?
  - Skill Cooldowns (very important)
- Equipped Weapons

- Possibility to look up what skills do
  - Immediate: The currently equipped skills
  - In general: Add a menu to look up all weapons / skills that have been encountered across multiple playthroughs
- Player health in the corner
- Damage / Heal numbers and condition changes as pop up text over the characters
- Select which character to play

End of Session

- What is or should be the main focus of the game?
  - Fun and interactive combat
  - An interesting, new world to discover every playthrough
- What is missing?
  - Story / Narrative / Lore
  - Interesting Quests / other forms of level direction
  - World structures / level elements (Castles, Towns, …)

Conclusion

Although the feedback sessions brought us new directions in which we could change our game, these features would take too much time to implement. Furthermore, we added before the playtesting essential features cited in "Changes after the Alpha Presentation". Therefore, we restricted our changes after the playtesting to balancing and fixing bugs.

Changes:

- Increased player health, so that players can learn the game before dying.
- Brightened the screen up, so that players can see better
- Added constant light to the characters, so that players can try out more weapons
- Tweaked weapon damage values for better balancing
- Show controls during load and on button press
- Respawn mechanic for players

Bugfix:

- Random enemies spawning at the start of a game
- Seeds not regenerating after a game is finished
- NullReferenceExceptions when dying and picking up weapons
- Quest steps causing unintended sound effects

Outlook

CHANGES FOR DEMO DAY:

- Sound playing after quest change
- Character walks in the movement direction when not using the right thumbstick
- Healing SFX
- Health bar for players different from enemies
- Simplify healing staff:
  - Skill 1: healing beam
  - Skill 2: healing aura, placed on the map (timed, after some time becomes smaller with the time and disappears
- Twin Final Boss
  - Current one (Knight)
  - Purple arcane staff + Dagger (Mage)
- Bigger bosses in general
- New textures for the current 3 bosses (Recoloring)

POSSIBLE FUTURE WORK (NOT FOR DEMO DAY):

- Improve Level Generation:
  - More unique areas
  - Structures (Tents, Castles, Towns, Mountains, etc...)
  - More landmarks for navigation
- Improve Story / Quests:
  - Vastly expand Quest system
  - Insert more story / narrative / lore elements
- Improve Combat:
  - Add more Skills / Weapons (perhaps generate them)
  - More Interaction between Skills
  - More Enemy Variety, especially bosses