

Making Of: Reign of King Jante

Development Log

By Amalie Kaeseler. (BA) Gamed Design
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About this Document

Since it's first idea stage, *The Reign of King Jante* has had many different forms and shapes.

This document sets out to describe the journey, from the very first conception of the idea to the final product as of May 2019.

This is both a window into the development process, and into how I plan to continue development after the assignment deadline on the 23rd of May, 2019.

Throughout these pages, there will be sketches included. These are all from my own notebooks, made as brainstorming-pieces, while the project took shape.

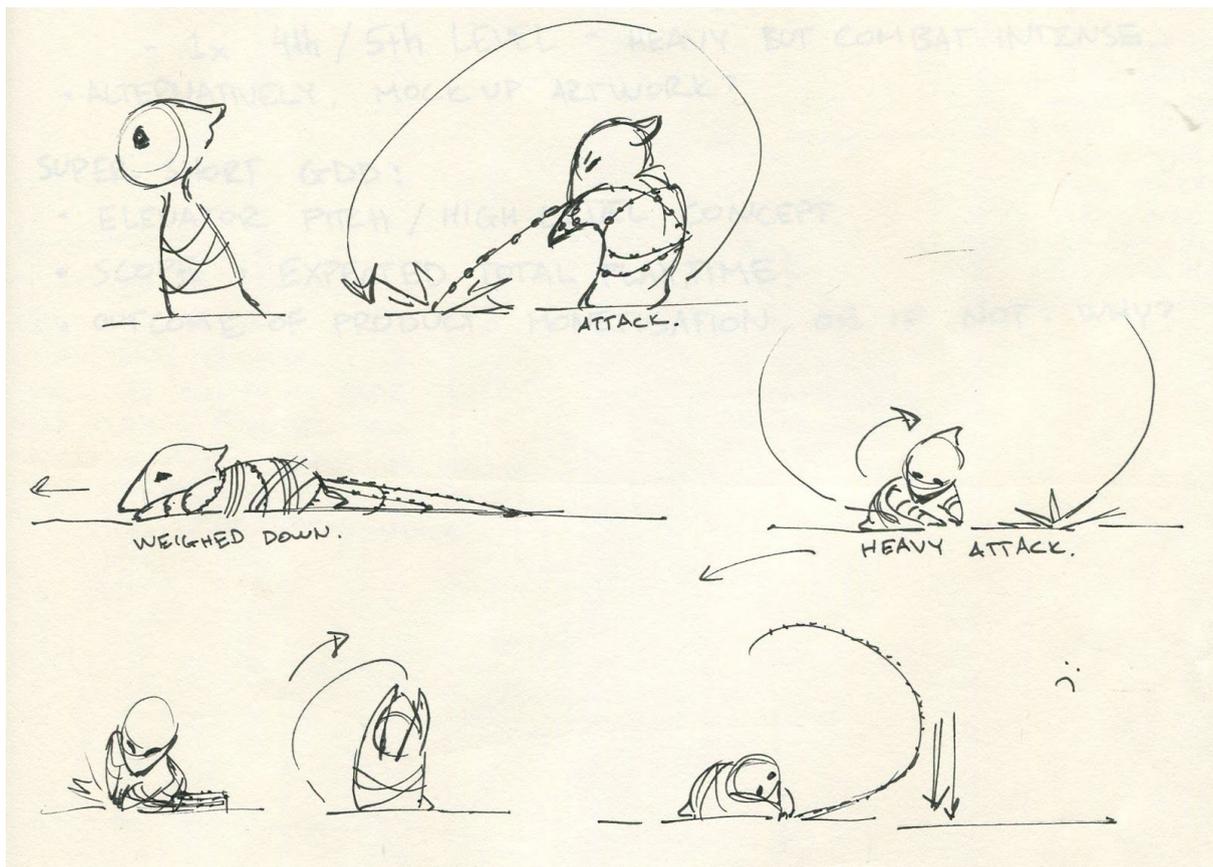
The Philosophical Idea

As described in the attached *Game Design Document*, the idea for this game came from a concept known as The Law of Jante, created by Aksel Sandemose in 1933. (See *Game Design Document* for more information).

The idea of making a game surrounding the concept of The Law of Jante did - as a result - have the inspiration at its centre of focus throughout the entire process. No matter how the game design and premise changed, Sandemose's concept was always the bedrock, from which everything else rested on.

An Emotional Platformer, and a Little Bird

The very first game idea I explored was the notion of a 2D platformer, in which a character was held down by chains. Each of the 10 commandments in The Law Of Jante would be represented by a literal metal chain weighing the character down. The more chains the character piled on, the less it could move, but the more damage it would be able to do to its surroundings.



The dramatic elements of the character design took on the shape of a bird, since the analogy of flying signified spiritual and mental freedom.

In the beginning, the character would be able to fly and jump - soar through the air! - but as the chains got piled on, the character would lose the ability to jump entirely. Eventually, the character would even have to drag itself over the ground, dragging the heavy chains with it.

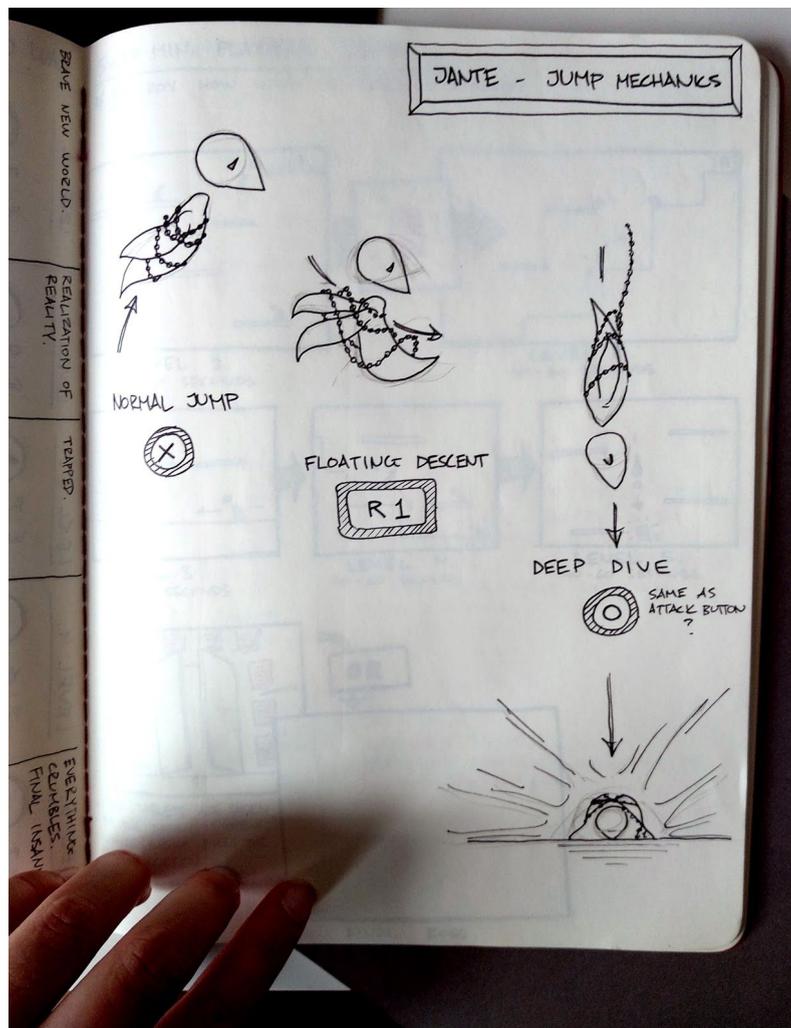
The chains signified how the character's freedom got increasingly weighed down by a discriminative society.

***Notes on Prototype 1:**

Included in the folder *Early Prototypes*, you will find a Unity build titled 'jante_prototype01'.

This early prototype was created to try and establish a feel for the 2D character moving. While the prototype is quite unstable in terms of platform-colliders and quite unpolished in terms of camera movement, the focus of this little snippet of gameplay was to attempt to convey the feeling of flying, and jumping to incredible heights.

The game was to consist of 5 different levels (each representing a new Law for the player to obtain), and each with a specific physical direction in mind, to signify the amount of struggle the character was going through. Starting with upwards and light, and ending with the character practically falling straight down in a freefall, out of control at the fifth level.



The Complete Design Overhaul

Working on the platformer game, it became more and more apparent, that while a lot of the allegorical narrative ideas could be conveyed through the control schemes and the overall level design... the more immediate moment-to-moment gameplay cycles were harder to design in a way, where they would stay true to the original inspiration.

The idea of a jumping platformer seemed too light-hearted and almost childlike in nature, compared to the heavy subject that was to be told.

Another concern of mine was the current market of indie games in which I would be entering this title. While admittedly only being a free-to-play demo portfolio piece, the undeniable fact is that in a world of similar games, it would be hard to stand out.

A few examples of recent games would be *Hollow Knight* (Team Cherry, 2017), with their similar 2D platformer fighting mechanics and gloomy visuals, and *Gris* (Nomada Studio, 2018) with the sense of flying and aesthetic game feel of movement.

Even smaller games - who initially inspired me - like *Mandagon* (Blind Sky Studios, 2016) - seemed to pop up everywhere, quickly drowning out any hope of both being noticed as a designer, and paying proper tribute to the original concept.

Making a platformer, was unusual for me, and - while incredibly educational and exciting - not necessarily my strong suit as a storyteller. I was nervous that my lack of knowledge surrounding game feel and platform level design would ultimately compromise the quality of the story.

And for all these reasons... I decided to rethink my game completely.

The First Iteration of an RPG

The next idea for realising the story of The Law of Jante became a dream-like world, in which the Law could take on a physical form. A fantasy kingdom, governed by an actual king, keeping his people in submission with the help of the 10 commandments. My game was now rethought as a fantasy RPG.

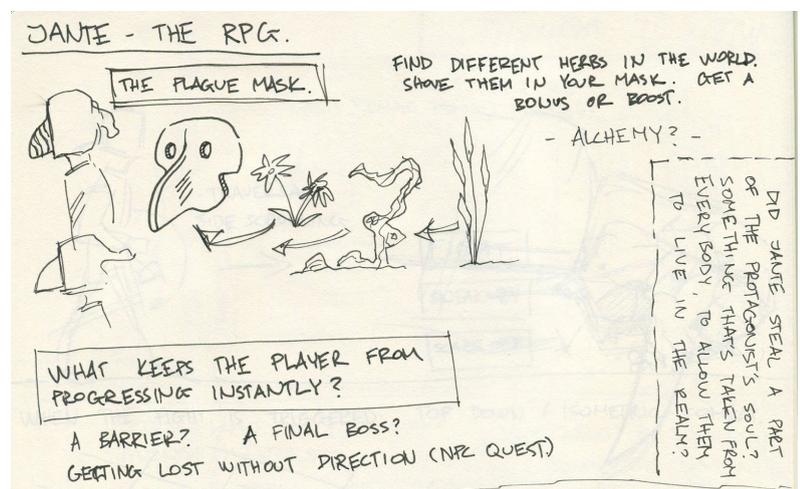
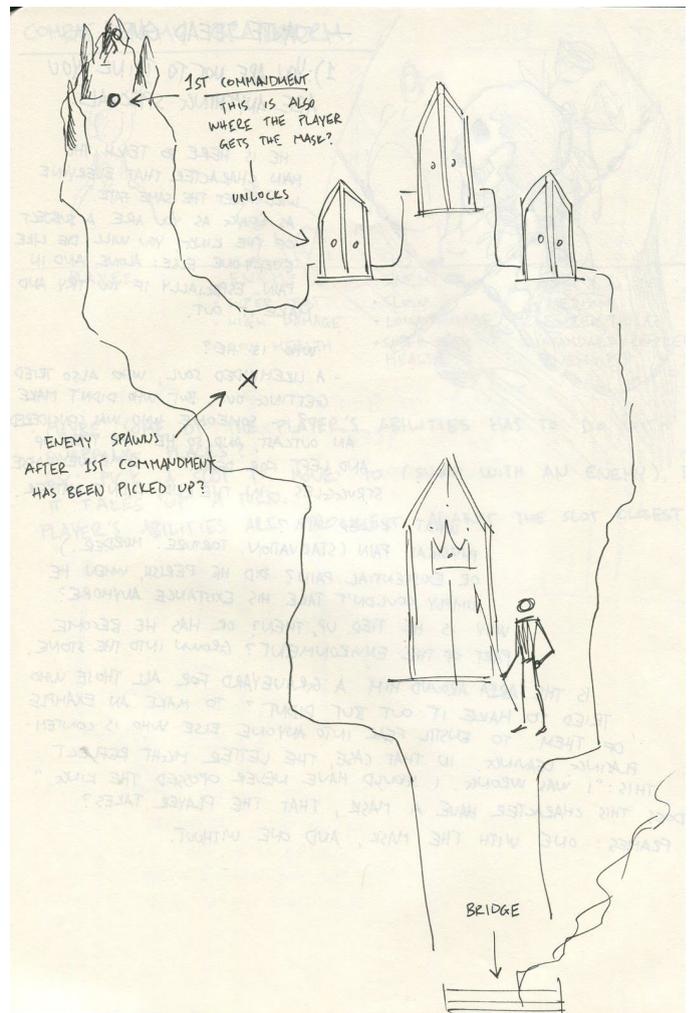
Narrative wise, I instantly looked to the idea of the classical hero.

However, I decided to flip the concept upside down, since the player would now be dealing with a corrupt world, in which the inhabitants would rather see the hero fail.

(See *Game Design Document* for more information).

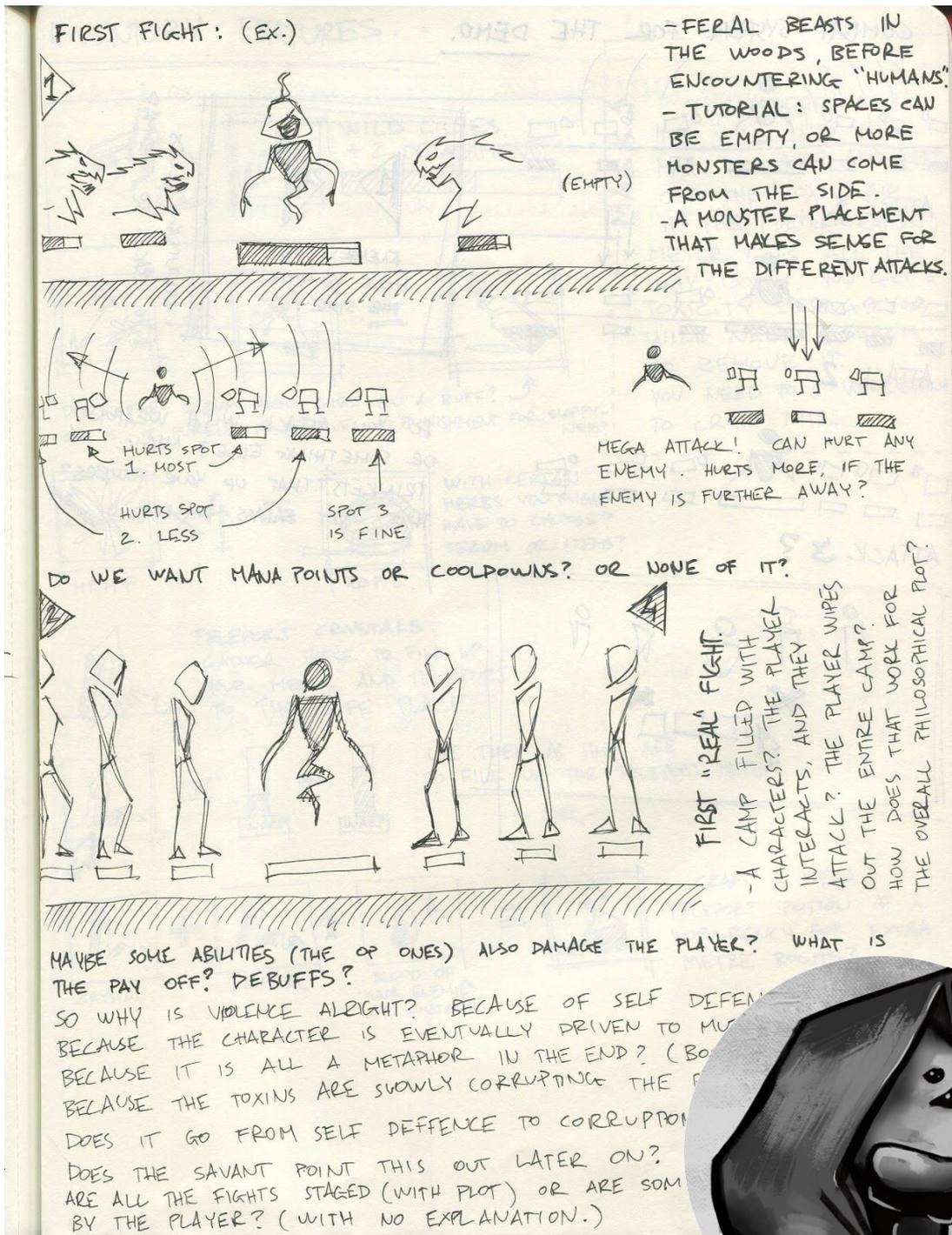
Furthermore, I decided to work with the idea of the environment itself being toxic to the main character.

While the visual design of the main character had been a bird previously, the beak of this bird now became a mask, inspired by the plague doctors of Venice. The player would literally have to filter the poisonous air or suffer.



Another aspect of the new design was turn-based combat.

As the project progressed, it became apparent, that the character would be facing mental battles; possibly only taking place in the characters head as an embodiment of anxiety or trauma.



Simplification and Reining the Ambition Back

Initially, the ambition for the project got out of hand (as I have come to believe it does for any designer who finds themselves overly excited for a new project).

I envisioned a full crafting system, in which the player would learn to live off the poisonous land by creating items they scavenged. I envisioned a full three areas of the game, each with different sprites and assets. In moments of daydreaming, I even envisioned possible voice acting!

Of course, the more hours I spent on the project, the more things I knocked off my wishlist. This did, however, teach me very important lessons about simplicity and minimalism in game design: Does this game truly need voice acting? No. Would the story and the gameplay benefit from a full crafting system? Absolutely not!

By being forced to cut down on content and features, I got taught how to truly zone in on the most vital things to support the narrative vision and the absolute core of the gameplay. While I have heard this advice many times over (Fullerton, 2004; Rogers, 2014), being in this situation finally made the point sink in.

I will even go so far to say, that if I were to do this project again, I would completely overhaul which features were to go into the game, and which ones would be left out. I now believe that minimalism is key.

***Notes on Prototype 2:**

Included in the folder *Early Prototypes*, you will find an MP4 file titled '*jante_prototype02*'.

This video shows footage of an earlier build of the game. While the core gameplay concept is largely the same as the current version, the visuals are a lot simpler, and a lot of features have been either tweaked or cut out completely since then.

The video shows how different herbs found in the world were expected to have a different effect on the player. The way the player engages with combat is likewise different.

New Programming Concepts

Throughout the process of making this game, I have learnt quite a few new things, including new programming concepts, that will be seen all throughout the source code of the game. Some of these concepts include:

JSON saving system.

I had avidly been using singleton patterns to transfer information/state between scenes in Unity up until this point, but I found them to be unreliable and hard to manage in the long run.

While a few singletons are still found in the project (Examples: My UI Manager, and Audio Manager), the majority of the information is now stored and carried over using the JSON saving system.

The JSON saving system works by serializing variables and data into a JSON file, which can then be accessed by other scripts throughout the program's lifetime, no matter which scene is active.

The main JSON file is used by the script titled *GameStateManager*.

Interfaces.

I found inheritance to consistently be slightly confusing in its nature.

As a result, I have now decided to rely on Interfaces more often instead. I find their simplicity more straight forward, and I have come to depend on the luxury of referring to classes completely independent of their individual names. (Example: Abilities within the combat scene).

Coroutines.

While Coroutines is not a new concept to me, this project has pushed me to truly get to the bottom of the workings of Coroutines. Throughout this project, I have learned how to utilize the concept and everything it has to offer.

Known Issues/shortcomings of the Game.

Teleport trouble:

The only significant trouble I have encountered while making this demo has to do with teleporting between the scenes using the orbs. More specifically how the three doors on the Main scene reacts to the orbs being used on them.

At times, the player will insert an orange orb into the second door, and the first door will open. At times, this will trigger the *End of Demo* screen straight away, despite the door not having received all three orbs necessary.

This is undoubtedly something that will need revision before the final upload to Itch and my website, as it makes the demo difficult and unreliable to finish in the intended way.

In a similar vein; there is a problem with the teleport panel graphic, as the game asks the player if they wish to go back from the Forest scene. Even though the player clicks the *No* button, the panel stays on the screen.

Player sliding bug:

At times - especially when the player character brushes against the wall or the objects in the scene - the player object will slide slightly. This seems to alter the speed of the character. While being rare, and not being game breaking, it does cause unpredictable behaviour, which will need to be fixed.

A Stubborn Mayor:

After the player defeats the Sphinx and returns to the Mayor character, the player is meant to receive the third orb required to unlock the second gate. (And thus progress).

Half the time, the mayor tends to refuse to hand over the orb, however.

A few lacking combat sprites:

Two enemies - The dark shadows in the intro fight, and the Sphinx boss - are still lacking individual sprites for taking damage, attacking and being dead.

Rare combat place-swapping bug:

Very rarely, when the player swaps place a lot in the combat scene, one of the enemies tend to move to the same slot as the player.

This happens very rarely, and I have as of yet had trouble recreating the bug, and/or recognising its pattern. As a result, I am still trying to find a solution.

The herb regrowth-timer resets itself:

If the player remains in the Forest scene for long enough, the herb plants will grow back to the state in which they can be picked again. (See *Game Design Document* for exact times). However, when swapping between scenes, the plants will pop out of the ground and reset their timers straight away.

I imagine fixing this will be a matter of every single plant remembering their own time remaining until regrowth, and then having them upload this number to the JSON file.

Skill Tree Pop-ups:

When browsing the skill tree screen, some pop-ups will hang out over the bounds of the screen. This will be a matter of dynamically changing the tooltip's pivot point, dependent on which skill is being viewed.

Performance issues with particle systems:

The game contains numerous particle systems, in order to add atmosphere to the game. More specifically, every ground tile within the game on the "Forest" scene has its own particle system emitting a fog texture.

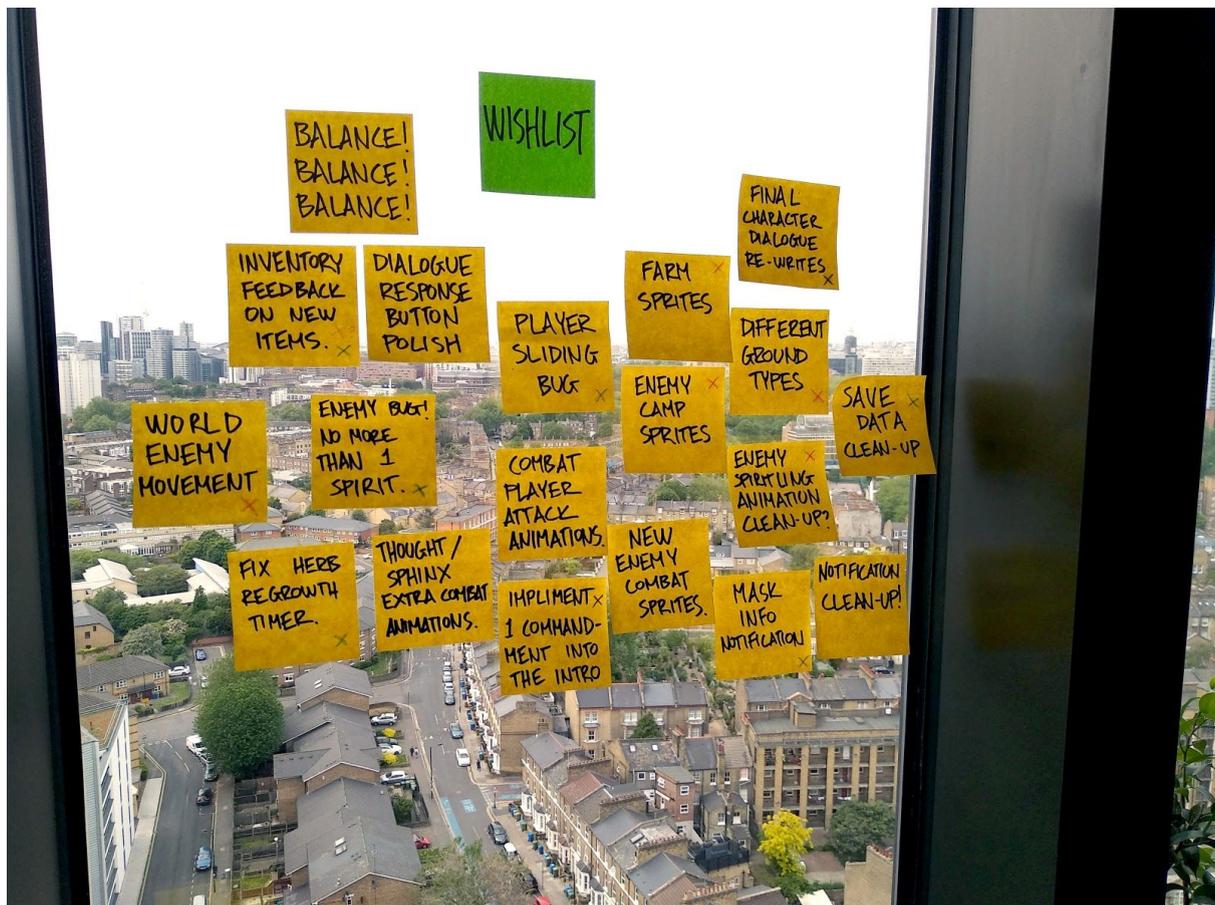
While this does indeed add atmosphere to the game, I have encountered trouble with performance when running the game on older or slower machines.

This is also why I have chosen to include an *Enable/Disable Fog Texture* button in the settings menu of the game and left the fog as being disabled at the start of the game. I consider this a temporary solution until I can make the particle systems less taxing on the program.

Future Aspirations for the Game

As of the demo (June 2019), this game will consist of two separate areas of the game: The introductory area, and the first level.

While I would love to see the remaining two areas added to the game (with their own enemies, assets, features and characters), I have chosen to focus on polishing in the near future.



My immediate focus is going to be on ironing out any bugs that may still exist in the code (Particularly the ones listed in the previous section). I will, likewise, attempt to ensure that the program runs smoothly on both PC and Mac, and on all the different machines I have access to.

Additional focus will be on optimising the UI. One important lesson I have learnt from this process is that an extremely large percentage of successful game design comes down to

how well you can communicate with the player. In other words: How great your User Interface is. As a result, I will make efforts to make the UI of the game more responsive, intuitive, and easy to understand for new players who may not have access to my instruction by word of mouth.

I will likewise aim to add animation to the many character sprites and give the dialogue a final polishing overhaul. This, once again, is with the aim to enhance the player experience.

In terms of actual changes to the gameplay, I am planning to work on the addition of a split narrative / level outcome, as mentioned on the last page of the *Game Design Document*. I believe this addition would benefit the feeling of player agency and immersion into the narrative and character interaction greatly.

Another gameplay change, will be to alter the introductory fight slightly. The purpose of this fight is to introduce the player to the two attacks given by default at the start of the game. However, with the current lineup of only one enemy type, there is no real need to use the second *Confrontation* ability at all, rendering the fight only halfway successful. As a result, I plan to experiment with an extra enemy type in this fight, nudging the player to use both abilities equally.

Before the game is to be showcased at the End of the Year shows at London College of Communication, a successful and solid build will be uploaded to both <https://itch.io/> and to my own personal website.

The end goal of this entire project is to have a strong portfolio piece that successfully showcases me as a generalist game designer and particularly the strengths that I have as a narrative designer and storyteller.

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