

ETH Game Programming Lab 2010

Odysseus' Quest

Race to Ithaca

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Playtest Chapter

17.05.2010

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1 SETUP PHASE

Our goal was to get an impression on how the testers felt while playing. Furthermore we were interested if it was too easy or too difficult and if the abilities could be / were used.

We made a short questionnaire with the following questions:

- How do you like the game idea?
- How do you feel about the pace of the game?
- How do you feel about steering?
- What part of the game made the most fun?
- What did you like least?
- General remarks.

These questions were meant to give us a general impression, and were a good entry point to start discussions about several parts of the game, which were quite interesting and informative.

Simply observing the testers on how they approach the game and what made them problems and what fun, gave also some good feedback.

We had one major test session in the company two of us are working in, with about 15 people. The group was a good mixture of novice and experienced players, and thus gave a quite good overview.

Furthermore we made some more testing with family and friends.

2 FEEDBACK

Some aggregated answers to our questionnaire form.

- How do you like the game idea?
 - Something new, funny, colorful and entertaining.
 - Very good, interesting, creative, has potential.
 - Nice, no shooter! Not aggressive.
 - Needs some skills
 - Rather little interaction
- How do you feel about the pace of the game?
 - Good, comfortable, not hectic
 - Can be "dosed" quite well
 - Rather slow, could become boring
- How do you feel about steering?
 - Lethargic (mentioned several times), a little delayed
 - A bit slow and indirect, turning in-place is lame
 - Oversteers, not intuitive (needed quite some time to adapt)
 - Precise
 - Difficult with high speed
 - For a ship quite natural
- What part of the game made the most fun?
 - It's not very easy, that's great.
 - Water/waves
 - The different abilities
 - Flying
 - Blend
 - Diversified gameplay

- What did you like least?
 - Reverse gear, turning
 - Indirect steering
 - Difficult to estimate the location of ambrosia. Would be better if they were directly on the water.
 - The ship disappears from the screen sometimes.
 - Islands could be diversified.
 - Water spume and the water itself.
 - Losing!
- General remarks.
 - More collisions
 - Visually very nice. What about fishes, sea gulls and some palms?
 - I'm missing the possibility to fire off the opponents.
 - Some texture problems, e.g. with sky box.
 - Use antic fonts.

Summarized we can say, that the testers liked the game idea and credited the pace. The lethargic steering was a topic in almost all discussions. But after the first feedback, most of the testers said, that it's OK for a sailing game. The animation of Hermes' flying ability was always the highlight of the game. On the negative side, there were several small votes, which we analyzed and then added in some form or another on our To Do list (some of them could already be removed again, because we completed them in the rest of the week).

3 CONCLUSION

3.1 INTERACTION

As each player can choose his own path, we were afraid that there may be too little interaction between the players. But the concerns were mostly proved to be wrong. If two players are in the same skill, interaction comes quite naturally. You cross mostly at the checkpoints, but often also just somewhere in-between the checkpoints. The water spume behind the ships gives often a good visual cue of where the enemy is. And as most abilities can also be used when the enemy is further away, some interaction remains even if a player is much faster than the other one.

3.2 CHANGES TO GAME PLAY

We added a new game mode which should bring the players more together: 'Master of the odyssey'. The goal is here for each player to be the first at most checkpoints. The next checkpoint is for all players the same. If a player hits the checkpoint, all players have to go for the next checkpoint.

As the steering was, especially for inexperienced players, difficult to handle, we added 3 difficulty levels. The hardest one is the one we had before testing. Then we introduced a medium level with slightly more direct steering and an easy mode with even more direct steering. To further balance out between experienced and inexperienced players, the difficulty level also affects the handling of the sailing part. In the easy mode the player does not have to care about sailing at all the sail is handled by the system, this should give novices an easy entry point. In the medium and the hard level, players have to strike and hoist the sail by pushing the B-button. In the medium level the player gets a visual hint in form of a red "B" left to the ship, while in the hard mode the player has to look on the mini map or the movement of the waves.



3.3 CHANGES TO USER INTERFACE

There is now a border around radar which shows the wind direction and changes its color with respect to the wind direction relative to the players orientation (if the player and the wind points in same direction, the border is colored green, if pointing in opposite direction the border is colored red). This replaces the wind rose like display of the wind direction we had before.

The arrow below the ship pointing in the direction of the next checkpoint is now better visible.



To reflect the ancient Greek spirit, we chose fonts that look more like that time.



3.4 CHANGES TO SCENE

To give the player a better visual perception of the location of the ambrosias and wind items wind power-ups we lowered them to the water level and made them floating on the water.



3.5 CHANGES TO ABILITIES

The abilities of the 4 gods were already quite balanced, and the interaction worked quite well. So for the abilities of Zeus, Hermes and Chronos only some minor tuning to the durations or the costs were necessary.

Poseidon is the one exception. The wave ability was a bit weak and could only be used when other players are nearby. And dive was nearly useless as it could only be used when another player used paralyze or steal energy and furthermore it felt just like a weak version of veto.

That's why we made the wave working on a bigger area and having a stronger effect. We replaced the dive ability with a "super steer" ability, Poseidon directs the sea to push the player in the direction he wants to. After having hit a checkpoint, the player often has to change direction by nearly 180 degrees, as this can be quite time consuming, this ability can give the player a good advantage.