

Itzamná's Heritage

Mayan Red Light

Playtesting Report

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1 Overview

We performed two playtesting sessions with a small group of people - which were provided with snacks and orange juice. One was in a familiar setting at Silvan's place and another one with various computer science students we knew from some courses.

Our approach was to introduce the game in two steps to facilitate the process of getting familiar with the controllers:

- play the game twice without power-ups to get used to balancing and speed button
- introduce the usage of power-ups to experience the whole game

That way, the play testers could slowly adapt to the game play and were not overwhelmed by a bunch of complex control mechanisms.

After a few test matches, we encouraged an open discussion by the participants, followed by some more specific questions from our side. The overall results of those discussions can be found in the section 'Key Learnings'

Our general impression was that many testers were really enjoying the game once they were familiar with the handling of the various actions. There were close 'battles' indeed and the losers were not rarely asking for a re-match immediately. From the beginning, it was our goal to create a game with that kind of 'revenge effect' and we are glad to see that we are on the right track to achieve that.



2 Key Learnings

We summarized the key learnings in 4 categories: Control, Power-ups, Balance mode, Miscellaneous.

2.1 Control

As expected (and previously experienced) from our side, the handling of the various buttons and respective actions are hard to learn. The balancing, the constantly used power-ups provide a hard challenge to the gamer as he is required to perform various actions in a short amount of time, such as balancing and applying power-ups on any of the players. The difficulty to learn these things were reported by the tests as well as discovered from our side.

Another feedback was that the shoulder buttons are hard to distinguish. However, we do need the various buttons and cannot really get rid of them.

What seemed to be most confusing/annoying to the testers was the activation of the power-up mode by pressing the red button. Some were confused by the fact that you can switch power-ups with the top buttons, but still had to press the red button if one finally wanted to use it. A suggestion supported by many testers was to use the color button to directly trigger the current power-up without previous activation. This suggestion necessitates a remapping of our sprint-button (blue until now). Recommendations from the testers' side was to use the left shoulder for sprint and to switch power-ups with the right one. Alternatively, power-ups could also be changed with the right thumb stick.

We intend to evaluate and test both suggestions and eventually implement them into our game.

2.2 Power-ups

In general, people liked the power-ups and it was obviously the fun-factor number one! Some even suggested to only use power-ups and omit the eye watching the play field forcing you to balance (more on balance mode in the next section). They liked the effect, but also commented that some may last too long (e.g. stun which always resulted in being seen by the guard during the effect).

However, they would like to be provided with more information on the power-ups. Who slowed me, who confused me, etc...?

They wanted to avenge themselves and it was not always obvious whom to address the revenge to.

Various suggestions were made to solve that issue:

Suggestion	Pros	Cons
Moving icon from attacker to attackee	Clear visualization	Confusing on frequent use of power-ups (too wild)
Colorize effect icon (by player color)	Clear visualization	Not all effects subject to an icon (slow/haste...)

Both suggestions are tested and considered and further playtesting will provide us with the information which one to use.

Concerning the visualization of the currently available power-ups, people noted that they are sometimes hard to distinguish (especially on big screens). Therefore, we probably need to introduce some new icons.

For the moment, the punishment (by the guard) and the stunned visualization have the same effect icon (circulating stars) which is confusing. The testers preferred to have clearly distinguishable effect icons.

Our testers also proposed some new power-up ideas. Among others, they involve distant-dependent power-ups as for the moment the distance between players does not play a role at all.

Switch Players	As it says the position of two players are switched. In addition the user of the effect gets stunned for a short amount of time in order to also have a small drawback attached to this effect. Further testing will provide further clarification on that.
Magnetism	Players are dragged towards each other for a certain amount of time. An additional force is introduced to implement that.
Trigger guard	The guard can be 'triggered' with a new power-up forcing all players to go into balance mode.
Shock	Charges a player with energy and all nearby players touched during that time are being stunned. If two charged player touch, both will be stunned.

The testers also liked the idea of an initial backpacking screen, but they would not prioritize it and only implement it, if enough time available.

2.3 Balance Mode

The balance mode was considered not easy to master and needs time to get used to. The 'Evil Shader' helps a lot to be aware of the watching eye in time. While some suggested to even remove the eye (or at least provide a game mode without), others considered it essential to the game play, since the original idea is based on it. Since opinions were split on that point we could consider to introduce an additional mode with a deactivated guard.

When we set the pre-watch phase (the tolerance time to get into balance mode) to 0.7s, it was considered as too difficult. Setting it to 1.0s eventually pleased the testers and they almost always managed to balance. We are now considering to control the pre-watch phase by means of difficulty levels.

Another change that seemed to be appreciated by most players was to make the guard punishment push-back distance-to-goal-dependent, such that players close to the treasure are pushed back much more than the ones at the starting line.

Another idea was not to show the type of power-up, but only where it came from. That way, the player needs to figure out what he is affected by, but at least knows who to target for his revenge. Further playtesting will give further insight on that.

2.4 Miscellaneous

Further suggestions were made to improve the game play:

- Place players randomly on starting line
- Place walls dynamically
- Make walls move

We will probably introduce those ideas in order to make the game a bit less predictable and in a way that no standard strategy can be used already before setup.

The visualization of the finish line and a countdown (during the camera movement in the beginning) to signalize the start are highly appreciated and will most likely be implemented. Another suggestion was the visualization of the power-up duration, but we are not really fond of that, as we do not want to provide full information to the player and merely want the gamers to be ready to react quickly.

3 Summary

1) Controller

- Difficult in the beginning, needs some time to get used to
- Shoulder/Trigger difficult to distinguish
- Idea: power-up mode does not have to be activated first.
 - Sprint: left shoulder, switch PU: right shoulder
 - Sprint: left shoulder, change power-ups: right thumbstick

2) Power-Ups

- Good effects
- Difficult to distinguish the different symbols
- Visualization: show from where the power-up came
- Power-up visualization may be too wild
- Distinguish STUNNED and PUNISHED
- New idea: switch players
- Backpacking screen: good idea, do not prioritize

3) Balance mode

- Not easy to master
- Needs time to get used to
- Cannot be neglected
- Pre-watch phase must be longer
- Push-back distance-relative

4) Balance mode

- Place walls dynamically, make walls move
- Visualize finish line
- Start signal in the beginning -> 3...2...1...GO (during Bezier)
- Visualize duration of power-ups
- Do not show type of power-up, but only from where it came

4 Conclusion

We consider the playtesting sessions as really fruitful and we are glad that we have got new inputs. We are convinced that the game play experience can be enhanced significantly thanks to the precious feedback from our guinea-pigs. Another playtesting session may be necessary to further fine-tune the game mechanics.