BRING BACK WINTER!

Playtest Chapter

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Playtesting

As it was difficult for us to organize a playtest session with many people showing up at the same time and place, we let people download the game and play on their own. While this precluded us from directly interacting with the players, it also had some advantages such as testing on many different machines as well as clearly showing us some shortcomings in the controls.

Questions & Answers

The following shows the list of questions we asked our playtesters as well as a summary of their answers.

How do you like the title of the game "Bring Back Winter!"?

Overall the playtesters liked the name or did not object to it. One playtester suggested "Changing Seasons" as an alternative.

How do the controls feel, what makes sense, what makes no sense?

Some playtesters mentioned that the digging tool is too coarse in the game. Some wanted visual

indication when using the "place dirt" tool, something like changing the cursor to a bucket. There is one comment on rotating pipes, which can be a bit fiddly.

What was your first impression?

Overall the playtesters seemed to like the game, despite it being rather simple in presentation.

How did your first impression change over the course of the game?

The playtesters reacted positively to the game, they were drawn in, challenged and had fun.

Was anything frustrating?

Some playtesters were frustrated by one specific map, where there is very little room for deviation from the solution. At the same time this also seemed to keep players going, as they wanted to succeed. There was one comment about the pipes, which have no indication of direction (inflow/outflow). Again, there was one comment on the coarse digging tool.

How was the difficulty of the levels? Too easy, too hard, just about right?

Overall the playtesters liked the difficulty level of the maps and especially the progression there is, how new items are introduced etc.

Was the order of the levels OK?

Most playtesters felt that the order makes sense.

Did you have fun?

Yes, playtesters seemed to like our game very much. There is also a comment on the editor, which is fun to use and experiment with.

If you could change one thing, what would that be?

Some of the answers from the playtesters:
- Improve graphics
- Water should freeze when it gets winter
- There should be an indication when a new item is introduced

- Improve hit boxes of gates
- Less coarse digging

Other thoughts, ideas or suggestions?

- Deflectors could be used together with pumps to improve their versatility
- More properties for fluids like viscosity, gaseous state etc.
- Editor-like tools in game mode to dig rectangles/lines etc.
- Less hectic background (snowflakes)
- Particle effects
- More levels

Notable results

The playtesting phase proved to be useful in various ways:

1. We got to run our game on many different machines, which helped us to find bugs in our code. Most bugs resided in the GLSL shader code, which drivers can be picky about. Our initial alpha release did not run properly on machines with AMD graphics cards and showed strange rendering artifacts. A debugging session on a friends machine helped to find the reason for this, which was that our engine used more texturing units than the graphics card provided.

2. It seems that we succeeded in creating a fun little game. Feedback was mostly positive, the playtesters had fun playing the few levels we provided in the alpha release. Some ideas came up that we originally had planned to implement in our game (high and extra targets), which confirmed our game design choices we made in the planning stages.

3. We learned that our game probably lacks a little in showing the players how to play the game. There was at least one person who struggled with the concept of having to prepare the map by digging and then starting the simulation to see if they succeed. Instead they hit the "PLAY" button and were wondering why they cannot interact with the game!

4. Some playtesters were a bit frustrated with the coarse digging/bucket tool to edit the map. The maps sometimes require the player to make very narrow tunnels to slow down the water enough for their solution to work. Digging out these narrow tunnels is not a problem as long as you don't want to dig out two of them close by. In that case, making corrections to one of the tunnels is a hassle. Even when a map is not designed to require such narrow tunnels, players may still try to find a solution using them. There are at least two ways we can deal with this: Either we leave the tools as they are, and keep the level design in line with that limitation, or we adjust/extend the digging/bucket tool with more flexibility, using SHIFT key to switch to a fine brush for example.

Action

From the issues that we found during the playtesting phase, we would like to (if time permits) incorporate the following changes into our game:

- Extend tutorial screens to better explain the game mechanics
- Switch to a "bucket" mouse cursor when adding dirt to map
- Use SHIFT key to allow for micro editing in game mode
- Fix bounding box for gates
- Add more maps

We strongly believe that with these changes applied, our game will be nicely polished and have reached state of completion.