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Intro to Game Dev

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This Sucks: Psychonauts

Its actually very challenging to give reasons against Psychonauts, the game itself does have

flaws, their just pretty minor compared to the good aspects of the game. Psychonauts' creative director

is Tim Schafer, and the list of games hes created range form good to groundbreaking, but I've never

played a game of his that I found disappointing. That being said, Psychonauts flaws are very prevalent

in the first section of the game. Interface design, ambiguous fight design, and timing and balance are all

problems, and all do hamper the game in their own ways.

Interface Design:

Interface design is very important, and Psychonauts' is as a general rule very good, however it

does have some serious flaws. For instance, the only way to reach your inventory is never really told to

you, you have to stumble upon it. The first time I played the game I was convinced it had glitched out

and erased something I needed to progress; I found out later it had just been moved to my inventory,

and since I hadn't been aware of my inventory I'd restarted the game. Thankfully this was quite early on

and I wasn't really required to repeat to much of the story. But it was still an unfortunate turn of events

and one of the few things about the game that really bothered me. There are also a couple of other

issues with the interface, but none quite as serious. In the pause menu, where the collectible items are

listening, you never really have the option to see what unlocks are in which area, which in a game

where you aren't given any information about the unlocks is out of place, but given that Psychonauts

gives you a listing while you are in each area, it would make sense to give the player a list of how

many of each unlockable item are in each area.

Fixing either of these problems is incessantly easy. To fix the problem with the inventory all you

would really need to do is add a section in the beginning of the game with the rest of the tutorials, that just says in big bold letters: "TO ACCESS YOUR INVENTORY PRESS LEFT ON THE D-PAD." Not a very hard fix, but an important one nonetheless. Fixing the other issue is a bit more challenging and quite a bit less necessary. But I would imagine adding a comprehensive list of how many unlocks there are in each area and whether or not you had collected any of them. Considering the game gives you a section where it lists all the items currently in the area, I cant imagine it would be to difficult to build on this list and give it a tab in the menu.

Ambiguous Fight Design:

Ambiguous fight design isn't really so much a flaw as an annoying trend in games form this period. A lot of designers on the early XBOX and PS2 decided to make their boss fights have a certain puzzle element to them. This was not always a problem, but when the mystery of how to kill the boss is extremely ambiguous, no one wins. Now the boss fights in Psychonauts are not particularly challenging, so you do kind of have the option of running around and trying things before you die. So ultimately in Psychonauts the challenge becomes more, can you fumble into the answer before the slow moving invincible boss catches up to you. Not a horrible mechanic, but it does leave you lacking a feeling of accomplishment once you have figured it out.

Fixing this problem, or rather this design inconsistency, wouldn't really be too challenging, you would just have to make either all the bosses more difficult so that the ambiguity becomes part of the boss fight or to drop all the puzzle elements and make the bosses very simple to kill. Either way its really just tweaking, but making sure that the game has a uniform puzzle feel or a uniform battle feel is important in my eyes. Treading the ground between them is dangerous because you risk leaving your player unsatisfied. A perfect example of a game that achieved a good balance of the puzzle boss is Sony's Shadow Of The Colossus. The game made the player discover how to kill each colossus and because of this a feeling of satisfaction came about. If you could do the same thing with Psychonauts the game would be much stronger for it.

Timing and Balance:

My only other issue is with the way the combat is programmed. The combat is slow and sluggish at times, and can cause missteps pretty easily, which is unfortunate in a game with such strengths. The game itself doesn't really suffer from this problem, the slow awkward controls are there but they don't hurt the game overall.

A little tweaking is all you would really need to fix up this problem, speed up the controls or change the animation for your attacks so you can dodge away from the middle of an attack quicker. Or even just add in a cancel for the combat and the entirety of the combat would get a little faster and possibly even run much better.