

Project 3 Postmortem - Studio Libra

Holiday Hustle is a top-down 2D shooter game where players must traverse the dungeon, fighting off waves of enemies and collecting power-ups to help along the way. Defeat Jason and escape before the timer runs out!

Our initial idea was to create a top-down roguelike that featured three levels: a Halloween, Thanksgiving, and a Christmas/Winter level. The player would face a variety of themed enemies, for example monsters and ghosts in the Halloween level, turkeys and pilgrims in the Thanksgiving level, and snowmen, elves, and a final Santa boss in the Christmas level.

We came up with this idea during our first meeting. We first decided on the roguelike genre, since we were all familiar with the genre and felt that we could create a lot of interesting content in the form of enemies and weapons. We wanted to create an interesting theme, and we decided that creating a holiday/seasonal theme could create a variety of interesting enemies. Once we decided on a genre and theme, we came up with a story where the main character would have to fight his way through the three levels in order to take himself off of Santa's naughty list.

Our goals for this idea were not only to create engaging gameplay for the players, but also to create a silly and fun story to add a sense of humor to the game. A lot of popular top-down roguelike games have a more serious tone, so we wanted to create one that was more lighthearted.

In our first preliminary group meeting, we decided we wanted to create something similar to *Enter the Gungeon*. We first had to nail the core movement and aiming mechanics, as these would define the core gameplay experience. We decided we didn't want our player to be restricted to shooting in just four or eight directions, so we allowed the player to use the mouse to free-aim. This made animation a bit tricky, but we felt it offered the player more freedom and a more fluid experience. Early feedback called for us to refine the lighting system and the overall art style of the game. We originally were using hand-painted assets in combination with 2D pixel art, and we agreed that these clashed. As a result, we continued to add more custom 2D sprites throughout our iterations to aid in providing a more cohesive experience. Furthermore, we landed on a final lighting system in which the player held a flashlight that followed the cursor. The player's flashlight slowly lost battery and became dimmer, and the player had to collect batteries to charge up the flashlight. We felt this offered a more riveting experience for the player when compared to our previous low global light system. Our biggest changes came late in the development process when playtesters (and ourselves) thought the levels lacked content. As a result, we collectively decided to scrap the stages and focus on improving just the Halloween level. We decided to make our game a survival challenge in which the player had to race against a timer and fend off waves of enemies. We thought this offered a better challenge and the presence of limited resources (time and lighting) offered a more engaging experience to the player.

As for playtesting, we received feedback from the respective assigned groups of peer-playtesters as well as instructors during a given iteration cycle. Furthermore, we also reached out to friends and roommates to get some additional feedback. With regards to project management, there was a general trend of falling behind the eight-ball early on in an iteration, and thus having to catch up later on. The burn-down charts reflect this. Moreover, we found that as soon as we finished one task on a board, we would find more that needed to be done. This could possibly be attributed to our experience as novice developers or perhaps the creative process as a whole. However, provided that we had to create our own time estimates we feel as though they were generally pretty accurate in priority and estimated time requirements throughout the development of our game.

Some things that went right during this project were splitting of tasks and code/version control. We were better able to focus on different parts of the project by having people work on dedicated parts of the project. For example, we had one member be the project artist, and other members would work on the player, weapons, enemies, or level design. Also, we were able to use github pretty well to keep all our code in the same place while also keeping the same version as close as possible between all teammates. We had a couple issues with merging, but they were relatively few and were handled very well by teammates familiar with git while losing only very minimal work, if any at all.

Other things in the project didn't go as well. Communication wasn't always constant between teammates. Occasionally, issues came up in member's personal lives

that would impede work, but would be brought up late resulting in surprises and scrambling to make ends meet too close to deadlines. To exacerbate this, work was often only done in the couple days before the deadline, adding to the same problems.

As such, an important thing to do for future projects is to communicate more often, and likely in person meetings as well. In person meetings make it much easier to communicate concepts to each other, as you can demonstrate ideas much clearer visually, while also making it easier to hold each other to assigned work. It becomes much easier to work with each other, as well as prevent cutting of content when doing work early.

One of the biggest takeaways was learning how to best use our time. Especially with a lot of really short deadlines, it was really important to use our time efficiently, not wasting time. For example, if we were stuck on something, instead of sitting there spending a ton of time trying to figure it out, we had to learn to put that task to the side and come back to it later while working on other tasks that we know how to do. Another big takeaway from this class is how important building good habits is when it comes to working on projects, especially group projects. It's really important towards the beginning of a project cycle to start building these good habits such as communication, time management and any other general working habits. If you build poor habits early on, those are just going to stay, or maybe even get worse towards the end, making it even harder to get back on track in order to reach whatever your current goal is.