

This document is written as part of a university course in game design. At the time of writing there are no plans to actually develop the game proposed within. It represents a single designers vision of a game called Act of Creation, but lacks the detail needed to fully develop the game. It is just a vision. Nothing more. Nothing less. The target platform is anything with a gamepad and the ability to render 3d graphics. Current consoles, PSP and Nintendo DS being the obvious choices.

Act of Creation

In ancient times there was no separation of heaven and earth.

The spirits of the dead would walk among the living.

Eight demon lords held the world in chaos.

Only a god could make things right.

But sadly there was no god.

Until you showed up.

Game philosophy and inspiration

Act of Creation is a platform adventure, set in a unique mythic universe loosely inspired by different Asian myths. In terms of game mechanics it draws inspiration from the Metroid (Nintendo) and Castlevania (Konami) series of 2d platform adventures, though visually it is a 3d game - Pandemonium (Crystal Dynamics, 1996) is an obvious inspiration here.

Its design philosophy could be termed human-need-design, assuming the human needs are those of exploration, learning and understanding. The game will let the player *learn* new skills by means of *exploration*, and only by demonstrating *understanding* of the gained skills can the player succeed.

Story synopsis

The world is in chaos as its people lives alongside the spirits of their dead. The people can never fully let go of their loved ones, while the spirits are forced to eternally watch the lives of the living, without any means of directly interfering. It is world of grief, held that way by eight demon lords. Myth has it though, that the divine power to change the world will be granted to the one who has the strength to slay the demons. Many brave warriors have tried, but ultimately they all failed. Now the time has come for you take up the quest.

The game begins with you walking around a small village experiencing the grief and sorrow of the world. While watching both spirits and people crying, you hear the myth of how to gain divine power, and you figure out the whereabouts of the eight demons. Suddenly the demons attack, and kill most people. Among them your family and friends. They are turned into spirits, and while hearing them cry you grab your hunters bow. It is time to slay the demons.

Along the way you find areas of the world only accessible by the spirits, and after beating the fourth demon you realize that only by becoming a spirit yourself, can you reach the last four demons. Killing yourself seems like the logic choice. Only problem is, regular spirits are powerless and unable to directly interfere

with anything. Fortunately, myth tells of a way. The skills gained by beating four demons, enable you to reach the top of the sacred volcano Mount Baekdu. Throwing yourself in, will make you a supreme spirit able to interfere with the mortal world.

You make the climb and throws yourself in the volcano. After leaving the mortal world, you destroy the last four demons while still evolving your skills. Finally with the power of a god, you are able perform the act of creation - separating heaven and earth. This is done after an epic battle against the combined power of the spirits of the eight demon lords. In the end, you split the world in two, and the celebration would take no end.

Game play

Assuming the term *game play* should describe the experience a game delivers, Act of Creation is a unique reinterpretation of the proven game play of an exploration based 2d platform adventure. It has much more adventuring than most genre colleagues though, and less fighting as well. Puzzle solving and exploration is the central activity of Act of Creation.

Uniqueness

Act of Creation will stand out because of its novel setting, exploration and puzzle based game play, fascinating storyline and the unique visual look and feel caused by the much too rarely used pseudo 3d approach. Its tight focus on human-need-design is also worth noting, as it throws away symbolic, arbitrary reward systems like points, gold, xp, hp etc.. Exploration is rewarded with only immediately useful skills and relics.

Control and mechanics

The initial mechanics resembles those of most 2d platform games. While running and jumping to overcome obstacles, most players should feel right at home with the controls. Combat is performed with a fast shooting bow, using one button to fire and another to modify the direction of the attack, to enable diagonal shots.

The player character has no visual energy bar, but internally the game maintains one. The status of this is communicated to the player via visual fatigue on the character (blood, scratches, troubled walking etc.), and via color distorting visual effects. Energy is lost by taking damage in battles, by falling from high places and by touching things like lava and spikes. Energy is regained automatically when not in combat.

In addition to the physically dangerous obstacles, there are obstacles which requires more brainwork. These includes different navigational dilemmas: "*should I cross the broken bridge, or try to get around another way*" and "*should I take the easy route I took last time, or explore the unknown route*". Most important is the puzzles though. These are build into the level design, and could be of the following types: *acrobatic puzzles* where a certain way of jumping must

be figured out, environment puzzles where a change in the environment must be forced by the player, and finally abstract puzzles where a certain code has to be broken.

Central to overcoming the navigational obstacles is a map of the world, which gradually gains more detail as the player explores it. To begin with it is marked with just the approx position of the eight demons, enabling the player to seek out either of them. Later it contains detailed overviews of the different areas of the world, making navigating it optimally a lot easier.

The rewards for passing obstacles are new skills for the player character. These are separated into skills gained before becoming a spirit, and after:

Examples of obtainable skills	
Higher jumping	Teleport to a previous destination
Faster running	Flying
Ledge grabbing	Vegetation manipulation
Wall jumping	Pass through solid objects
Fast reflexes ("bullet time")	Landscape shaping
...	...

Common for these skills are that they gradually open up the environment, to enable more and more exploration. In the end the player will have god-like skills to manipulate the plants and shape the earth.

In addition to these, are different bow upgrades and new types of arrows, which enable the player to focus on the exploration by making the fighting easier, while at the same time making the bow usable in solving puzzles. By way of example there are arrows which makes branches sprout where they hit, arrows making water flow from their point of impact and some which summons the sun to shine on them. And lots more - all connected to the creation theme. Further more, the special arrows is a sparse resource only found on sacred trees throughout the world, making it important to conserve the use of them.

The current goal of is always to seek out one of the remaining demons. Which one is up to the player. While an optimal route exists in terms of navigating the world, it is possible to begin with any one of the first four demons, and after those four are killed, the player is again free to chose which of the last four to kill first. To enable this nonlinearity, both the monsters and the demons will adapt their strategies in such a way, that the player is always able to kill them with his current set of skills. As an example of this fairness principle, really fast attacks which can only be avoided by using "Fast reflexes" is only used by the monsters, when the player actually has access to that skill.

Look and feel

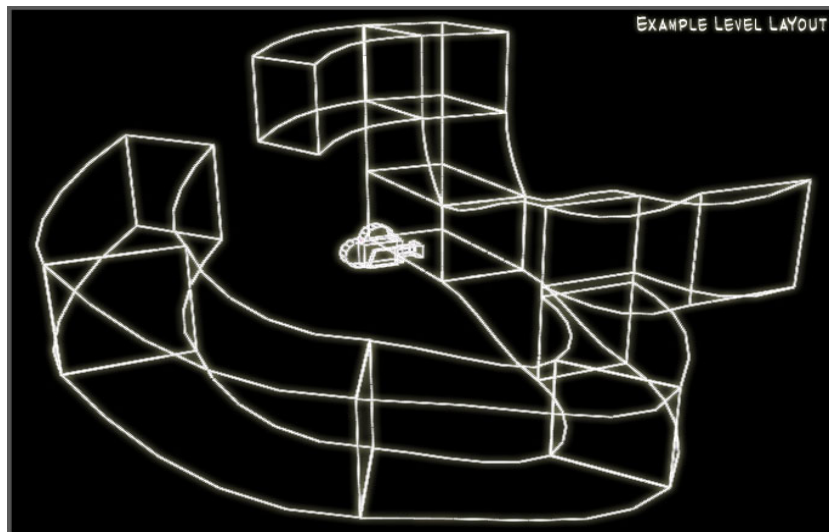
The game is viewed in a pseudo 3d perspective. A 2d surface twists and bends through a three-dimensional world, and the camera follows this in a locked 90 degrees angle. This makes the controls resemble those of a 2d game, while the 3d depth increases immersion and allows for a unique level layout.

The general look and feel of the game world should strongly express the grief of its people. It is a dark world, full of sorrow. It is also a world full of life, but it is

not happy life. The player will pass through several villages, but dialogue with the villagers is not part of the game. Instead they will show their sadness and express their state of mind to the player, give out hints and scream for help. A kind of background storytelling. The spirits are shown as ghostly figures. Until the player character becomes a spirit too, their visual expressions are hard to see but through their way to move and their screams, sadness can not be mistaken. The mood of the surroundings mirrors that of the people and the spirits - dark clouds, rain, thunder and a generally gloomy atmosphere rules.

Level design

The image below shows the layout of a small part of the world. The level bends around inside those boxes, while the camera follows the player character from a sideways perspective. Imagine that the image shows the camera positioned at the root of a tree, then the player would have the option of either climbing the tree, or wander right toward the twisting path. Either way will lead to the top of the tree (assuming the missing part connects the two dead ends). The player could also choose to go right, and then jump up to a ledge leading to the box seen in the right side of the image below. Navigating the twisting paths, is the essence of traversing the world.



Puzzles

Finally an example of an actual puzzle is needed. Lets take the tree mentioned before, and use that to create an environment puzzle. Imagine the player jumping up its branches, suddenly seeing that one has broken and only a small piece remains. There is no obvious way to get to the next branch. There are several ways though. Shot a magic arrow creating a new branch, use the high jump skill, use the flying skill or make the branch regrow using the vegetation manipulation skill. In general, all puzzles should have more than one solution.