ACONY: Game Design Test – Harry Luck

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# 01 - Personal Vision Statement

I am passionate and capable. Ready for every day to bring me a new challenge. I have secured my happiness in work and in life.

In work I have furthered my skills and experience in the games industry to give me the ability to share my knowledge and help to lead others into new challenges without making the mistakes and pitfalls I have seen and experienced.

In life I have financial security, able to afford me a comfortable life and allowing me the time to enjoy them with those in my life.

# 02 - Elevator Pitch

## Pac-man

Imagine you are trapped… in a maze. The walls close in around you; claustrophobia sets in. You hear feint noises all around you. Ahead of you is a trail of breadcrumbs, behind you; more. Where do you go? You have to get out! You go forwards collecting the breadcrumbs as you go to ensure you know where you have been, you turn a corner… GHOST!

Pac-man is a fast paced arcade game that requires, but also teaches, quick reactions and spatial awareness.

Pac-man is constantly being apprehended by 4 ghosts that roam the maze’s corridors. You must avoid them at all costs! By collecting all the breadcrumbs in each maze Pac-man will be transported to another maze, as long as you don’t get caught by the ghosts!

Above all, Pac-man is fun and addictive. Once you start munching those breadcrumbs, you won’t be able to stop!

# 03 - Designing a Competitive Multiplayer Shooter

I don’t like the word rules… it implies everything is defined; that we cannot establish new gameplay paradigms or design philosophies. Rules suggest we create all our designs from a rigid list of set parameters and I simply don’t believe this is true.

In my experience, especially while developing both M.A.G and Nexuiz, there were several key challenges with respect to being an online competitive game.

#### Player Retention

What will keep players coming back for more? Is there enough depth to the gameplay? That doesn’t mean the game needs to be complicated… in fact, far from it. More so, it entails providing a player with a simple set of goals and ways to achieve those goals. The depth should come from allowing players to expand on those simple goals with skill. Skill is what sets players apart. However, it is also what makes us want to try again, try harder… be better!

Over complicating any online competitive game, especially fast paced shooters (COD et al) is the kiss of death. Players should be able to drop in and play with very little fuss, and on doing so find that there are better, cooler, more rewarding ways to achieve the challenges the game offers.

#### Longevity

Although similar to player retention, this is more aimed at making the game consistently appealing after launch and into the future. F2P is doing this more and more by adding content, items etc (TF2) through micro payments etc., but this is also true for any shelf game. COD/Killzone slowly lets the player gain items and skills, while sporadically releasing map-packs, new perks etc. Keeping the game feeling fresh is the challenge here.

#### Flow

This is more about level design than straight design, however, this plays into design by the gametypes the game has and in what maps those gametypes are possible. In team based gametypes you ideally want the players on the same side to work together without forcing them to do so. This is best done through level flow with some low level attribute boosts to players in proximity or assisting each other.

#### Instant Fun

This is an obscure one, but one I think is all too often forgotten. A lot of players want to simply play the game for an hour or two after work. They aren’t part of a clan, they aren’t playing 50+ hours a week. These players are a growing proportion of gamers in popular mainstream gaming. With that in mind it is best to avoid holding players up in the front end, having clunky UI or lengthy lobby’s and complicated lists. However, it is a challenging one to get right as you still want to add depth for the players that want it without turning away those that want to just jump in and enjoy the game!

# 04 - Concept/Feature Design

Designing a new concept/feature for a competitive, online, FPS really relies on the game style. Is it COD or Planetside, more team oriented or geared towards solo play? It also relies on knowing what the games goal is or what its core design principles are. I was left a little hazy about where to start with this task, so… I took a deeper look at Acony’s very own **Bullet Run** a little bit and will use it as the base for the type and style of concept/feature I design.

Please see the included document for my concept/feature design test. The design is a high level; more concept than feature, idea that builds into the notion of fame, or stardom using “Heat”. It is entirely possible that how these systems are actually tracked and built into **Bullet Run** are completely different to how I have perceived them and in places I am making assumptions. Please bear this in mind whilst reviewing.

# 05 - Developing a Feature

One of the biggest design features I’ve had to work on was for a persistent MMO and was essentially a front-end and UI but worked as part of the game and it’s world as a whole. It was a way to tell a global storyline, to instantly see what was happening where, who had what etc. and how to achieve their goal(s). It was essentially an extravagant lobby… with attitude!

The biggest challenge to all of this was how to present all of this to the player without making it a huge overwhelming mess. How to show enough information and options to allow players to get all pertinent data, a place where they can upgrade skills, items and weapons, as well as showing the global balance of power. On top of this, we were also trying to develop the backbone of the game itself; how everything functioned at a low level, how the AI reacted to player actions, how each phase of the game would work, how the player was involved with each part and what he did when he was there.

In order to achieve this I, with the help of one other, started by designing a series of increasingly more complex table-top “games”. There was little too them in general, they were more of a focus test on how much we could throw at people before it all becomes too complicated and/or confusing.

After this step, we took what we’d learned and with one coder began creating a simple world with even simpler AI to test theories on how players in a persistent global conflict could react to the changes in the world, how to keep players focused on important elements while still having clear and obvious access to as many other areas of the game experience as possible. It was designed and built from the ground up to allow us to add and remove elements of the potential gameworld without completely destroying the design philosophies and ideas or changing too much of the base code architecture for this part of the game.

While doing this we worked in short 1-2 week mini-sprints (occasionally 1 month). At the end of each one we, as a team, looked over what had been done, tested it, and then essentially rinsed and repeated the process. After taking and tracking focus test feedback we would go back and make changes and, a couple of times, even went all the way back to the drawing board.

Eventually we were able to get down to only tweaking and/or changing minor aspects of the whole and then adding new features (in their base form) over the top of the infrastructure we’d already created to see how best to fit it all together.

It was a huge challenge, but one that was tackled in an interesting and collaborative way, and one that had a speedy iterative process while still being fun to work on.

# 06 - Leading/Managing other Game Designers

I have had a lot of experience mentoring others in both game and level design. I have good leadership skills but have shied away from lead positions in the past as, in my experience, you do lose the ability to do the job you are actually good at; tied up in meetings or databases etc. However, with age comes wisdom and I have realised how important it is to have people with experience in lead positions. It helps them better understand what they are asking people to do and how they will do it, how to better communicate issues and concerns, as well as get new ideas or designs across to a team.

Too often I have worked with leads who do not have, in my opinion, enough actual experience in the field they are leading to be able to do the job properly.

In answer to your questions:

* What were your responsibilities?
  + I was responsible for leading the level design team during concept and pre-prod while I was at Yager, ensuring we were approaching the design sensibly and within technical constraints. I liaised heavily with our second team (who were working on Spec Ops) as well as organising the design meetings and starting several fresh ideas for creating a better team understanding of design and level designs jobs. I have also been responsible for managing and keeping track of several wikis. Generally only being in charge of a few sections (the biggest one was the Level Design section at Yager), where I would create and organize documentation and make sure it is concise and useful to all depts.
* What tools did you use to manage your team?
  + In terms of software I have mainly used Hansoft and Outlook to organise schedules and work tasks. I have led Scrumm teams and been responsible for creating and keeping track of user stories as part of this process. I also believe heavily in simply spending time with people, not just in meetings, but at their desks, having a cigarette or a beer after work. You find out a lot more about interpersonal and office relationships and how to better bridge the gaps between departments and people.
* How did you communicate with other department leads?
  + See above ☺
* Did you directly report to Directors, Producers, or Project Manager? If so, what instruments did you use to communicate your team’s status to them?
  + I have reported directly to all of the above at one time or another during my career. Depending on the team, it’s size and style of management I have either worked with them directly or through emails and/or meetings. In order to communicate the teams status or even just my own, I personally like to use weekly team meeting updates as well as email updates of our work. Whenever there is a key direction change or design decision I like to do a mini presentation to make sure everybody understands the plan and why. Other ways I have done this have been through company social networking apps that allowed me to dump videos, images, documents etc. into plain sight for everyone on the team.