SPELLBOUND: NOVEL INK

Game Design Document

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Chapter 1

Executive Summary

The game world can be split into two general forms: Books, which serve as self-contained levels; and the Library which acts as an overworld, providing access to the individual books. Each of these will be described in the following sections.

1.1 Books

Each book is a self-contained level. They are rather linear in design, and the player enters at a designated entry point, progresses through a series of puzzles, and reaches the final destination. Levels can vary in size, but most are relatively small, taking only about 20-30 minutes for the player to complete. It consists of one or two primary challenges, which lead the player to the end of the level.[1] In order to complete the level and return to the overworld, the player must defeat a boss using the same skills they used to solve the primary puzzles. Several opportunities exist to discover secrets in each level, but these will require the player to spend extra time on the primary puzzles in order to reach the hidden areas.

1.2 The Library

The Library acts as an overworld, providing access to the levels. This world is full of personality. Under the nose of an absent-minded wizard, friendly creatures have inhabited his study. The once organized shelves are now full of villages, passageways, and secrets. Books are accessed by exploration, though not all books are accessible in the beginning. Characters such as dust bunnies, insects, spiders, and other magical creations provide side quests and act as guards to restricted levels.

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[1]See the Section **??** for an example of such a challenge

Chapter 2

Detailed Description

2.1 Books

Each level is 3 dimensional and should take advantage of vertical space as well the traditional horizontal. Each level is an individual stage and self-contained; as such, it should be well bounded. The player should not be able to escape from the constraints of the environment. Accuracy of scale is arbitrary as the style can, and should, change for each book.

Every level in the game should have a consistent style, but each book should have its own distinct theme. Each theme will be dominated by a particular color. Since our game associates color with particular powers (for instance, yellow::flying), each book is essentially dominated by a power. The main goal of each level is to redirect the flow of this color (or "power") in order to be able to use it when and where it is needed. This "redirection of power" can take many forms, it is not limited to a simple, pipe-like puzzle. It may require several secondary puzzles to be solved, or for the player to complete a platforming section, etc.

In addition to the book's primary ability, there may also be the opportunity for the player to use secondary abilities.[1] However, these abilities may need to be "unlocked" by having the player use his primary ability in an interesting way, or by solving an additional puzzle.

Secrets are an integral part of each book. There should be several for each level. Secrets may require the player to deviate the flow of power to an area of the level which is not on the main path to the objective, in order to use the player to solve a secondary puzzle. Upon gaining access to a secret area, the player must defeat a "quasi-boss", using the primary power of the level. These enemies should be relatively easy to defeat, their primary purpose is to encourage the player to use the power in interesting ways. The player is rewarded for finding and defeating these secret enemies, both traditionally with power-ups, but also with increased knowledge about how to use the power which may help them defeat the final boss. This is the game's only form of traditional "combat" besides the boss battles.

These levels are devoid of characters. The only conscious beings are the player, the boss, and the secondary "quasi-bosses" which are hidden throughout

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[1]See Section **??** for an example of a secondary power

the level. The personality of the level comes from the interactive objects, the puzzles, and the beauty or uniqueness of the environment. For large or confusing environments, small black splotches of ink on the landscape can be used to direct the player in the right direction. Once the path to the boss has been unlocked, the player must channel this ability to defeat the boss. Upon their defeat, the player is returned to the overworld.

Once the boss of a book has been defeated, the primary color (and hence its ability) becomes available in all other books. This is represented visually by using color saturation. For example, a level may have a section where the grass is green, but is very desaturated. This shows the player that they will not be able to use the green ability at that time. But once they defeat the Green Boss, they can return and the grass will be a bright, saturated green color.

2.1.1 Example

Picture a meadow with a river running through it. This meadow is bounded on two sides by rocky escarpments, behind by a steep hill, and in front by a sharp cliff featuring a dried up waterfall. Small splotches of black ink point the player in the direction of the waterfall. Being in the water (being "blue") provides the ability for the player to act as part of the liquid, and to redirect its path. Rocks and other obstacles are used to change the path of a river. The player uses his "blue" ability to redirect the flow from one trench to another.

Against one of the rocky escarpments to one side of the meadow is a patch of dead grass. Redirecting the flow of water close to this patch, the player squirts water on the dead grass. It then recovers to a bright, saturated green, illustrating to the player that that patch now contains the Green power. The player stands on this newly empowered grass, which allows them to climb walls, and climbs to a small grotto where a "quasi-boss" is waiting. They run to a saturated blue puddle in the back of the cave and use the Blue power to squirt the enemy, defeating him.

Returning to the primary task, the river is eventually redirected to flow over a waterfall which was once active, restarting a waterwheel which opens a door to the cave where the boss resides. When battling the boss, the player must actively direct the flow of water in the cave so that he can use his liquid abilities to climb up the boss (using capillary action) and damage him. Upon the boss's defeat, the player captures his essence and is returned to the overworld.

2.2 The Library

The Library, or Study, is the Wizard's primary place of residence. He's a quite a busy magician, so he doesn't have much time to keep his study clean and tidy. As such, and right underneath his (rather large) nose, a whole world of creatures has moved in. Among the bookshelves and furniture of this magical library, creatures have constructed tiny villages, temples, passageways, etc. In other words, they've been busy.

The Library is obviously a three-dimensional environment. More so than in individual books, the vertical dimension plays a huge role. Because of the vertical nature of bookshelves, the player must use his abilities and the constructions of the Library's residents in order to climb the shelves and access new books.

The scale of the game is also extremely important. As an ink based character, you stand just an inch or two tall, perhaps about the same size as a Lego character. The other inhabitants of the world are about the same size as you, though some, such as the Wizard's cat, can be much larger. Accuracy of scale is not terribly important, since this is not a particularly realistic game, and the world has a whimsical quality to it. For instance, Bookworms may be about the same size as your character, even if they may be smaller in the real world.

Time passes only when the player returns to the Library after successfully completing a level. Upon their return, the player may find that the state of the world has changed. This is most noticeable by watching the actions of the wizard; while he may have been stargazing before entering the book, he is sitting thoughtfully upon their return. The state of the inhabitants may also have changed, for instance, the spiders may now be threating the cockroaches, where once there was peace. This presents the player with new opportunities for interaction with the game world based on their progress through the game.

The inhabitants of the Library are divided by race. Most of their societies are tribal in nature. Small groups live together under a religious rule. This leads to interesting relationships between the communities, such as the Spiders threatening the cockroaches. Each race has a very distinct building style, which gives the Library quite a bit of variety. They consider the Wizard to be their god, though their perceptions of him differ. As such, each group has their own temple which always holds a special significance for the player. These temples are built around a particular book, their holy book. These books, or levels, are very large and contain many puzzles and secrets. Most of the secondary puzzles and secrets will not be accessible the first time the player enters, they will have to return after defeating Bosses and unlocking new powers.

The "rogue ink", which has escaped and entered certain books, has upset the religious balance of the Library's inhabitants. These inhabitants provide the player's primary access to the books. Through interactions with their cultures, the player learns of the books which he needs to enter in order to continue.

Concerning visual style, very large objects such as the wizard, his cat, or distant shelves should appear to be out of focus. Consider that the camera is focused on your tiny character, while the large world behind him is far away. This will emphasize your tiny stature as well as direct the player to the areas which are actually accessible. The library should have a magical feeling: dust motes glittering the air, interesting objects sparkling, and unusual things littering the environment.

As a Magician's Library, one should not be surprised to find floating platforms or other such strange occurrences. These challenge the player with interesting platforming sections, but the player should always be presented with an easier alternative route upon completing the challenge.

Appendix A

Physical Dimension

1. Yes, the game occurs in a three-dimensional world. This is important to establish a sense of scale in the overworld and to provide for complex puzzles in the levels.

2. There are three dimensions. Movement is possible to an arbitrary degree in any dimension, though the player lacks any means to fly early in the game.

3. The size of the world varies depending on the where the player is. The overworld is not very large in real-world units — it is a single room — but because of the player's small scale it is large indeed. Level size varies, but levels are generally many times the size of the overworld, taking place in an open, outdoor environment. Accuracy of scale is not important, except that it must be consistent within an area (a level or the overworld).

4. Scale is not necessarily consistent between levels (with the level designer dictating the size of the avatar). The player's avatar may vary between between being inches in height and having the stature of a normal human being. In the overworld the player is inches in height. This determination is made by the level designer.

5. The relative size of objects and people will not be distorted significantly, but generally conform to those found in the real world.

6. The overworld is bounded by its walls, which cannot be bypassed. Levels are also bounded in size, the edges disguised as appropriate for the level, for example by natural obstacles which may not be bypassed.

Appendix B

Temporal Dimension

1. Time is not particularly meaningful, changing nothing in the game world. As long as the player is not observed by an enemy the foe will continue on a scripted route.

2. Time does not change the level world, and thus will not have any effects. The only effect of time in the overworld is represented by the wizard performing different tasks.

3. Time does not affect the avatar, as the avatar has no needs.

4. The passage of time is mostly imperceptible and proceeds with the actions of the player.

5. There is no time scale, though time spent playing the game can be measured in real time.

6. There will be no skipped periods of time. If time passes without the interaction of a player it will be within a cutscene or represented by the overworld wizard moving about and doing things.

7. There is no day/night implementation though some levels may be dark or bright and sunny.

8. There will be no anomalous time, unless time passes in a cut scene.

9. There should be no need for the player to adjust time, other than to pause the game. As such, no such options will be provided.

Appendix C

Environmental Dimension

1. The overworld is set in a fantasy world where magic exists, but details of the world outside the wizard's study remain unclear and are not explored. The levels are set in unique, artificial worlds which incorporate natural elements from the outside world — rocks, trees, butterflies, etc., but in an abstract and stylized fashion.

2. There is a single person, a wizard. He seems to spend all of his time in his study, sitting at his desk, laying on his couch, or browsing the shelves. He is friendly and a bit tired looking. The social structures of the outside world are not relevant.

3. The player's avatar has no people. It is unique.

4. N/A

5. The creatures in the overworld have somewhat limited tastes. The mice enjoy hoarding colorful objects like marbles and scraps of paper, but the spiders and dust bunnies are fairly monochromatic.

6. The overworld features small societies of normally unnoticed creatures. These include mice, spiders, and dust bunnies. Given increased intelligence due to exposure to magic, they have formed tribes with appropriately themed cultures — spiders spin silken garments, etc. They live under and behind the furniture in the study, not having built accommodations of their own.

7. The overworld is indoors in the wizard's cluttered, unkempt study. It is a large room full of bookshelves adjoining a small study and work area, which features some benches with a stool and glassware on top. Against the opposite wall lies an opulent red couch, upon which the wizard frequently naps.

8. The style is colorful, whimsical, and slightly cartoony; the mood is friendly.

9. The overworld is be cluttered and dusty, though the details with which the player will be limited. Levels are spare, which serves to emphasize the objects with which the player may interact to solve puzzles.

Appendix D

Emotional Dimension

1. The game does not have a very significant emotional dimension. Emotions shown in the game world originate mostly from frustration on the part of the wizard.

2. Emotion is not a key element of the plot, and does not motivate the player or avatar.

3. Emotions inspired within the player will be those of wonder, and achievement. The sense of wonder will come from the level design and the achievement from overcoming obstacles and progressing towards the top shelf.

Appendix E

Ethical Dimension

1. There will not be reward or punishment for any actions performed by the player, nor will there be any moral choices.

2. The ethical dimension will be simply laid out by the wizard, since the ink spilled all of the droplets have gone 'rogue' and you are justified in consuming them.

3. There is no competition, though there is conflict between the player and the rogue ink. Violence is completely cartoon, represented by ink splashing on impact and the avatar getting smaller with less 'health'.

4. If the player chooses there are three approaches to dealing with rogue ink, bypassing them, backstabbing them, and directly fighting them. Ethically they are indistinct as there will be no penalties and rewards for using any method. The distinction between the approaches lies solely on the merits of the approach itself; many small blobs would be difficult and time consuming to destroy by stealth, whereas a large blob might be too tough to simply mêlée, bypassing a blob might be wise if you cannot defeat it by other means.

5. The victory condition is not defined by how the player achieves it. In the overworld the final boss of the cat/dog/dragon will not die.

6. There are no other ethical problems within the game world, as the wizard is the only character the mute avatar can interact with an only then through cut scenes.

7. There are no moral or ethical ambiguities or choices available to the player.

8. Violence is highly stylized to facilitate a relaxed feel, even more so than a show like Samurai Jack.