

Project 5D

Game4: Elder Strolls: Dungeons of Dementia

Report written by Eevi Korhonen

The team

As per the name, we had five people: Henri Kuismin, Joni Rissanen, Jori Kemppi, Tero Koskela and Eevi Korhonen. Everyone worked on-site every day.

Schedule

This game was made between 5th and 9th of July. We started late on Monday afternoon, which meant that we had to work later on two following days. We wrote the post-mortem on the following Monday (12th July).

Original Game Idea

A defenseless old man is lost in dungeon. At least, almost defenseless. Hack and slash your way through nine unique monsters, pick up the coins, potions and equipment that explode out of their bodies as they die, and try not to run out of breath. And if it gets really bad, open up the store and buy some more potions.

Day by day

Monday 5 July

We only had a three-hour day to start with. We came up with the game idea, which in the original pitch was NetHack but viewed from the side. We stripped down the features quite a bit, so with the essential features and heavy re-use of old code, we should manage to finish the game.

We finished the main character and the basic movement, though the jump doesn't work yet. Joni is trying to crack the preloader problem once again, but the problem was sent for Mikko for review as we still can't figure where it goes wrong.

Tuesday 6 July

We finished main character and almost all the enemies and their animations (save death). Lots of features were coded; item drop, item generation, enemy randomization, character commands, but they're still in unfinished. Character movement is finished save for some odd trouble with animations cutting short.

Wednesday 5 July

Again, lots of progress. Most of yesterday's code implementations are either finished or very close to finished. So we got a first playable with all the (current) enemies and their animations. Practically no placeholder graphics. We also implemented some of the sounds. Working on pause function, but it is rather hard to make. If we get that to work, we could make a shop and level-up screen, but we're not holding our breaths.

Thursday 5 July

More and more progress. Programmers implemented the block move, new enemies, sound effects and some game balancing. Plus we actually got the pause to work, which means we now have a shop feature too. Art-side, we made a bunch of new enemies, which vary the gameplay quite a bit (the rats who also attack from behind, amazons with spears and a boss-type cyclop). We did have a small problem with the pause: if you keep pressing the keys after you've been paused (when getting a new

item), the animations would keep playing on even when they were supposed to stop. It's only cosmetic and most players will not see it, but it is damn confounding.

Friday 5 July

Finished the game! Everything went pretty smoothly. Some minor last-minute bugs, so again we didn't have time to balance the gameplay.

Overall view

Best game so far and with the smallest amount of work, this could be the best of the deluxe lot too. The experience from the three previous games is starting show across the board.

Making of...

Code

This game was the easiest to make so far. We had no major problems and with the learning curve. We figured out the problem with the embedded fonts (which was just down the fact that Henri's comp didn't have the font). Parameter use was improved. We did have a bit of problem with a class that had the same name as the previous class, which was made early in the production with almost the same function, so naming or planning the classes beforehand would be simpler. Pause and shop were new in this cycle, and they were made without major glitches. The only problem with this game was that there wasn't time to balance the probabilities, which is quite important for an RPG.

Graphics

Scale was much better this time. Font size was different all around, but we didn't have time to affect that too much. There was little time wasted with some of the monsters; some were made facing right and some facing left. Communication and planning would solve this easily. The monster animations were made simple from the start which saved time. Tero also found out that Photoshop sucks for making pixel art.

Sound

On technical side, Jori learned how to use the lambda value on the pitch shifter, which will be useful in future productions. On design side, testing the sound balance early on was again found to be critical for success. Taking account the game design in sounds was also something new in this cycle. If there are a lot of monsters on screen at the same time, it makes sense to produce shorter sounds for each one, in order to avoid cacophony.

Production

Personal report: Eevi Korhonen

Monday 5 July

Only a three-hour day today, but after the long vacation it could be better to ease into things a bit slower. We came up with the game idea, and though the theme is a little vague and probably prone to change along the way, the mechanics are clear and defined. This time I spent most of the day looking at the tasks ahead of us, and the possible design issues e.g. what happens when the character is hit and what do the different stats do exactly. It feels so much better to think of them right from the start than be surprised by them later.

After that, I tried to make one of the enemies (a troll/orc), but I was suffering from such a massive brain freeze that work was slow and not very good-looking. Will try to improve tomorrow.

Hours: 3

Total: 3/25

Tuesday 6 July

A much better day. We've made good progress and there doesn't seem to be any great problems yet. Mikko hasn't answered our preloader question yet, but I hope that he will. If he doesn't or can't, it's an easy feature to drop out.

Finished the orc with the walk and attack animations, which was really hard as I'd not worked on a humanoid characters (with this many pixels, at least) before. Started on the vampire, but had to redo it as I realized we don't have time to make complete walk animations for the animations. So they have just a silly two-frame "legs open, legs closed" animation. But it serves. Just goes to show that pre-planning does good in almost every situation.

Hours: 6

Total: 9/25

Wednesday 7 July

So we have a name for this game – Elder Strolls: Dungeons of Dementia. We had a cool idea about how the screen and the enemies would change from a mine theme into hospital theme with nurses and doctors trying to restrain our main character. Let's see if we have time to implement. It slightly bothers me that there is no reason why the old man is in the dungeon killing monsters, and this would be the perfect reason. Then again, not all games need reason, but I think this would be a fun one.

Feels like I did nothing today but animations and tweaks to them. Photoshop's animation tool sometimes decides to completely mess my layers, but I'm not quite sure why or how it does it.

Fortunately it wasn't a big problem. As we've finished all the major stuff, I started to work on extra enemies.

Hours:6

Total: 15/25

Thursday 8 July

What a day! We seem to be getting more and more done every day.

To my very positive surprise, we got the shop to work without a hitch! Okay, the one tiny hitch was that the invincibility potion's indicator (stat turning red) seemed to get mixed up with getting hit with enemies. So if you'd drank a potion and the effect had worn off, the red color would return as soon as you were hit again. Henri managed to fix it in the end.

On the art department we got a bunch of new monsters done. I finished the rat, which I started yesterday but again ran into some trouble with Photoshop animation. Made the mock-up for shop, and the different potions for the shop. Mainly lot of game design decisions.

Hours: 5h

Total: 20/25

Friday 9 July

It's finished and it's pretty much the game we aimed for. I was bit worried in the beginning about the game lacking direction but it all came together. I still would've liked the idea of the game switching between the dungeon and the hospital view (so the old man would actually be a mental patient in real life, imagining a dungeon and monster but clobbering nurses and doctors instead), because it would be such a lovely twist.

Did some slight polishing, finished the instructions and extra bits here and there. Again, for the last few hours there wasn't much to do but watch Joni and Henri coding. Just as we thought we'd finished well in time, couple of small bugs turn up. And once again, it took some tries to get Flash to publish the damn thing properly.

The game is still unbalanced, which annoys me as we seemed to have so much time on Friday, but it's always the little bugs that you need to keep crushing. We've had the same issue before, but this time it's slightly more annoying this time as it is sort-of-an-RPG, but hey it's pretty good start for 25 hour game. Anyway, I'm happy with this game. It's just confusing how things seemed to get done almost on their own accord. Every day we'd get so much done. We got more content than ever, and the gameplay isn't riddled with breaking bugs.

Hours: 5

Total: 25/25

Personal report: Tero Koskela

Mon Jul 5

I pitched an idea about a two-dimensional rogue like -inspired game. The game behaves like a stripped down version of Nethack with a mario-like game mechanic. Eevi added some ideas about the main character (he ended up being an old man) and we pretty much got to work.

Today was a short day, so I spent the whole time designing the hero of the game. I went through several versions until realizing that a big nose and big ears were the thing that made him look really old. All I had time to do after getting the character right was drawing the animation frames for him swinging the sword.

Tue Jul 6

Today I continued with the hero. I added one frame to the sword swinging animation and drew the walk cycle, which took me the first half of the day. I'm actually starting to feel like this stuff has paid off and I've learned something, since the pixel art walk cycle turned out really nice, with really fluid movement in the legs. Cool! I also did some other small animations: jumping, standing and tired idling.

So far Eevi has made most of the monsters for the game, but I drew one, too. I created a skeleton and some small animations for walking and attacking.

I spent the rest of the day drawing the backgrounds, which turned out quite nice, too. I only used three colors for them, which gave them a really retro look. There's also one additional dark color for the floor and the ceiling, so the entire look of the game will be quite minimalistic and hopefully balanced, too. Since it's only Tuesday, this game seems to be going really smoothly. Either we've learned something or this is just good luck...

Wed Jul 7

I started the day by adding some background graphics, finishing them and exporting them into Flash. Then I started designing the title screen for the game and drew a logo, which took some time since I wanted to have some blackletter type and that took some time to create in pixels.

In the afternoon I started a drawing for the box art of the game, since I wasn't too sure about which elements of the game would be finished in time and I didn't want to end up drawing too much stuff that wouldn't get implemented in the game anyway.

Thu Jul 8

Today I continued with the box art, adding some texture and fleshing out the original drawing. I also made some mock-up stickers to use in the final image.

After lunch I started more enemies now that I knew they would make it into the game. I made a zombie for one of the more basic enemies and a cyclops for the strongest enemy in the game. They both turned out pretty good.

We also needed an enemy with a more longer-range attack, and since we didn't have any female characters in the game we settled on an amazon woman with a long spear. You probably can't see it in the game with the animations running so fast, but her dying animation is some deeply brutal stuff!

Fri Jul 9

I started by drawing the graphics for the shop where the player can buy different potions. We decided on cheating a bit and just using four different images of the shop with different places highlighted, which probably saved a lot of coding time and I had the advantage of creating the design so that it looked exactly the same in the game. I created a falling trap, too, but in the end it wasn't implemented in the game.

I also finished the title screen graphics, again with the three colors I used in the backgrounds. The use of a really limited palette gives the overall design a bit of a Game Boy feel, which I'm really pleased with.

While the coders were finishing the game in the afternoon I finished my box-art mock-up for the blog. After some tweaking and distorting it looks pretty plausible!

I'm quite happy after seeing the finished game and playing it. There really are no major graphic glitches, but I wish I could have had more input on the overall design of the UI. The font sizes and placements are all over the place, although at least this time the font seems to have been successfully embedded. Everything I made except the falling trap seems to have made it into the game, so I didn't work too hard on anything that would end up not being used.

The only thing that bugs me about the game is the level of difficulty, it's just too hard right now. Anyway, this is the best game we've made so far and I think I've learned a lot about making graphics, especially pixel graphics which I'm pretty crazy about right now.

Personal report: Jori Kemppe

Day 1:

So, this time we're going to make some sort of platform/roguelike hybrid. Apparently the premise is that some old guy is wandering through a mine, killing orcs and such. Looks like musically this is going to be a bit of a challenge compared to the previous games. When you're making a game about poltergeists, robots or ninjas, it's quite obvious you'll want Elfman pastiches, electro, or oriental music, respectively. This time, there's no such obvious choice. The game is probably going to be a bit simple again, with retro-ish visuals, so some kind of bombastic orchestral fantasy music might be a bit stupid. I think I'll just have to go with whatever I can derive from the idea of an old guy adventuring underground.

Day 2:

What evokes an underground passage? I initially decided to go with a sparse arrangement of short notes – pizzicato, staccato and detache – on top of a legato contrabass, with lots of reverb and delay on everything. The result was way too dark and brooding, but I still liked the feeling I got from the pizzicato/staccato/detache instruments, so I decided to keep that element, taking it to a more upbeat direction. I added some flutes, a xylophone and a triangle to the arsenal and made some cheerful, marchy 3 / 4 music. I'm happy with the result, it really gives you the feeling of a light hearted adventure.

Day 3:

Made the menu music. Tried to make something more peaceful, yet with an element of expecting a great adventure. After that was done, I could finally get to work on the sound effects!

Day 4:

Whoa, there's going to be a lot of monsters in this one! Including an amazon warrior, for whom Eevi provided the voice, which I then pitchshifted down a few semitones to make it sound just a bit more masculine. I've been using the pitchshifter a lot over the course of this weeks, naturally, but now for the first time I tried out what the lambda variable does. Surprisingly, lambda 1 seems to give a more accurate timing result with less artifacts than the lambda 3 value I had used earlier. Don't ask me what lambda actually means, I have no idea.. just that apparently, at least with one-off sound effects, a lower lambda value is better than higher.

Day 5:

Did a couple of more sound effects today. Got them done quite early, which gave me a good amount of time to adjust the balance between all the sounds properly. Again, I'm quite happy with the mix. It really is important to get to test the game as soon as there are a considerable amount of sound elements in use. That way, you'll get to find out what sounds are the most out of balance, which you can then fix first and then move on to finer adjustments.

Personal report: Henri Kuismin

Day 1

This time we started with a shorter day and had only three hours of work so far. We were planning the game for about an hour and we should now have quite clear idea of what we are doing. The game is going to be an action role playing game where the player goes through a tunnel from left to right beating up monsters while improving a few abilities he has.

After that we made some more planning together with Joni about the programming and finally managed to do a little bit of code. The keys for moving the character and backgrounds are ok but I still didn't get the jumping to work so I had to leave it for tomorrow morning.

Hours: 3

Day 2

Everything is going well this far and I haven't had any big problems with the code. I got our character moving and using all the animations properly and then made a piece of code that we will use for the enemies to drop equipment, coins and potions. I used a lot of time in making the code that we have this far better and I think I will not have to fix a lot in them later on this time.

Tomorrow after Joni gets the enemies a bit further I can start attaching the collectable equipment to them and think more about how they will be picked up and used by the player.

Hours: 6

Day3

Today I programmed all the collectable items of the game so that they can be picked up and they will have an effect on the game. I also started to code some new animations for the player and fixed a few bugs that were found in it's movement.

In the afternoon I also made a pause functionality for the game that we might later use for a shop that would appear whenever the player presses a certain key. Everything seems to work quite like they should so far.

Hours: 6 + 30 mins

Day 4

I continued from where I was yesterday with the pause code and found a weird bug in it that somehow puts the player through all the animations in it's movieclip. I couldn't fix that yet and we thought that it's not that bad since it only happens rarely so I will try again only if we have the time tomorrow.

I programmed a shop into the game which allows the player to use the coins he finds from the monsters to buy different kinds of temporary boosts. I got it almost finished but it's still missing the

final graphics as well as a few pieces of code. I think this game looks quite finished already and we will have enough time tomorrow to test it and fix some possible bugs.

Hours: 5

Day 5

Well it took a bit more time than I thought yesterday but we got the game finished. We found a few bugs in the game that took some time to figure out but otherwise there were quite few things to add. I programmed the game to end together with Joni and finished the shop feature and the effect of the bought items. I also made the stats change color whenever one of the boosts is in effect.

I'm really happy with this week's game and actually think that it's a lot better than any of the previous ones.

Hours: 5 + 30 mins

Personal report: Joni Rissanen

5.7.

I was a bit late and when I arrived, the game idea was mostly already chosen. That shouldn't be that bad, since I was all out of ideas and this game idea sounded good enough. I thought we should make this game look more serious, since the previous games looked like we're just having fun in here, with all this random humor (dinosaurs with jetpacks, drunken ninjas etc.). I suggested the team to leave random humor away and try to make something that looks like we're not just laughing ourselves to death here.

I made the coding for basic screens (title, credits, game over) and the movement of the background. For the rest of this short day I tried to get the preloader working correctly, but it won't update itself before the whole show is completely loaded, so it doesn't show the progress of loading to the user. And that's the same if there wasn't a preloader at all. I already asked for help and see if I've received an answer to this by tomorrow.

(3 hours)

6.7.

Today was a good day. Although I weren't able to finish the preloader, I managed to make the text fields for player stats, text for picking up items and started making enemies.

At first I tried to make an external text file for the text field, which shows messages when player picks items up. After a long battle against flash I gave up and decided to write the texts (or at least placeholders, maybe someone should check them) in the code. Randomization of the text was surprisingly easy to make.

(6 hours)

7.7.

I'm starting to learn. Now there are three enemies with completed coding, background doesn't move if the player moves to the left (and enemies ignore player's speed in their speed when background isn't moving), game over -screen is almost complete and everything is fine. I think I also finished lots of smaller things, which I can't remember right now.

We're far ahead of schedule, or at least we would be, if we had a schedule. There's not much to be done, and it's only Wednesday. All in all, this was a good day. It also rained out there today, so I didn't even miss good weather sitting in here.

(6 hours)

8.7.

I finished and polished the enemies (two more and some new minor actions), only the amazon is still missing. We decided to change the appearing probabilities of different enemies by player's experience (= kills) and it took some time to realize how it should be done. I also made the coin counter system to the upper right corner.

We're running out of oxygen in here, and I'm completely unable to remember what I did before lunch break. Probably something extremely important, or some fixes here and there. I remember continuing my epic battle against embedding fonts, and there's some memories concerning utter defeat.

(5 hours)

9.7.

Now it's finished, and I think it's good. We didn't have time to test the game enough, so it seems to be quite hard, but most importantly, it's almost complete. There are still some minor bugs here and there, but what will keep me awake for a few nights is that I didn't manage to get the traps working, so they were all left out of the game.

Font embedding – surprisingly – worked as it should, not as expected. Which is pure victory for us. Looks like I forgot to embed the fonts in the game over screen, but it's not the worst problem there – it seems to always give the worst title for the player. Probably that could have been fixed in a minute, but as we made the coding for game over –system so late, we didn't have time to test it. Actually I just tested if it gave the worst title when player doesn't kill any enemies, since I was unsure of its working, but I left the other titles all untested.

Game also seems to be very hard. I think maybe it would have been a better idea to give the player items more often. Getting items is also the funny part of the game because of the ingenious item name randomizing system, so it should be more frequent. The game also gets more difficult as the player gets more kills, but it seems that even as I already made it go harder more slowly, it still gets hard too fast.

But even with its little imperfections here and there, this is definitely the best game we have made during this course. It's (almost) complete, and it's good. It also was the most fun to do, since ActionScript 3.0 and Flash – even though they still seem to be hostile towards us – are getting more familiar and coding is easier than ever.

If there's something we really should have done, it's a hell lot of testing. We tested parts of the game with player's strength going up to skies, and when the frequency of appearing of swords was reduced to the right level, the game was incredibly hard. We didn't test it enough, and now it bites back.

All in all, this game is approved by Joni Rissanen. Thumbs up.

(About 5 hours)