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Usability Playtest

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<u>Usability Test for *Before It's Too Late*</u>

The game that I chose to analyze this time was as in-depth as my last game. The game was a fast-paced shoot-'em-up inspired by old animation styles of industries like Disney. The core mechanic I chose to analyze was the level-design of the game since it almost only consisted of intense boss battles and very few traditional-looking levels. Therefore, I decided to make a game in the style of a boss battle, where little is known about the creature attacking you and the battle is difficult to figure out. The game then evolved into *Before It's Too Late*, a text-based adventure game where the player has a short amount of time to make a decision about what to do to escape a blood-thirsty monster in a foreign house. Their actions also have consequences, meaning that if they took a wrong turn, it's unlikely they'll make it out of the night alive. With the playtesters I managed to find during the craziness of finals weeks, I got some feedback I wasn't entirely expecting.

The first thing that is shown to the player when they open the game is a few pages of text that sets the backstory for why the main character is in the situation they're in. The reading can be quite long, but I assumed that since text-based games are usually quite specific and detailed in their descriptions, this could be where the player gets that traditional sense. The remainder of the game after the backstory is quick and slightly-specific sentences that give the player some idea of what they're looking at, so I thought the beginning was something that players could have

easily gotten through. However, while playing the game, my playtesters seemed to grow

tiresome of the text presented in front of them. They exclaimed multiple times "there's more?"
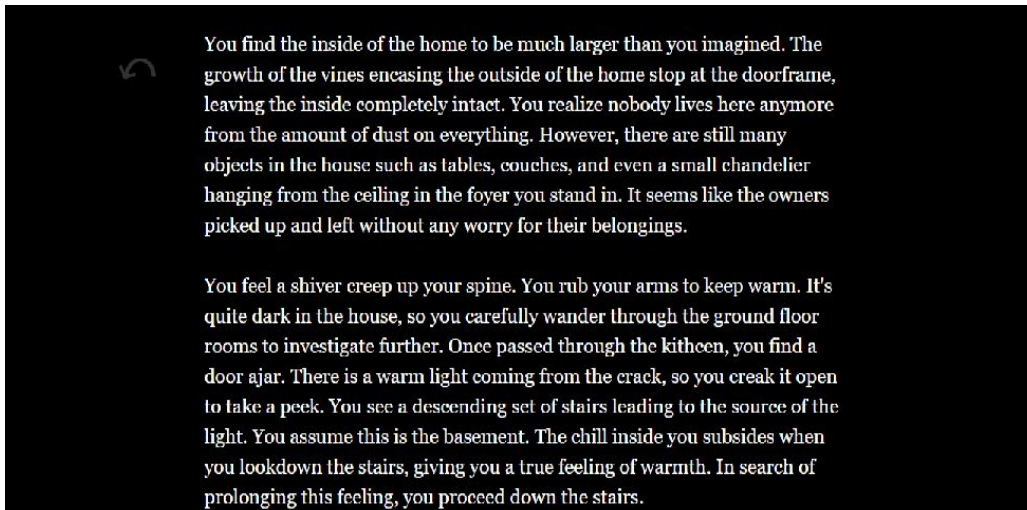
when continuing through the backstory, which is something that I didn't expect. This ultimately meant that

You find the inside of the home to be much larger than you imagined. The growth of the vines encasing the outside of the home stop at the doorframe, leaving the inside completely intact. You realize nobody lives here anymore from the amount of dust on everything. However, there are still many objects in the house such as tables, couches, and even a small chandelier hanging from the ceiling in the foyer you stand in. It seems like the owners picked up and left without any worry for their belongings.

You feel a shiver creep up your spine. You rub your arms to keep warm. It's quite dark in the house, so you carefully wander through the ground floor rooms to investigate further. Once passed through the kitheen, you find a door ajar. There is a warm light coming from the crack, so you creak it open to take a peek. You see a descending set of stairs leading to the source of the light. You assume this is the basement. The chill inside you subsides when you lookdown the stairs, giving you a true feeling of warmth. In search of prolonging this feeling, you proceed down the stairs.

players that

(Figure 1, shown is only a small portion of the amount of backstory provided)

tested my game did not like the descriptive nature of the backstory and preferred to have

something easier to read and quicker. However, most of my players were also not avid

text-based-adventure-game enthusiasts, so that may have contributed to their reactions as well.

The best option for me to make this game more enjoyable might be to shorten the length of the

backstory and allow players to get to the game quicker. It would also help to find playtesters that

actually enjoy this type of game before allowing them to playtest, just to see how this game

would fair in the intended demographic.

Another issue with my game was the length. When creating this game, I had to deal with

many conditional variables that would take the player to different texts if they met those

conditions. When looking at the seemingly-giant web of variables and sequences I created, it

seemed overwhelming with how many options there were. I felt that what I had created was

enough plausible endings and scenarios for the player to experience to make the game challenging enough. The purpose of this intricate web was to make players replay the game multiple times. I wanted to make the game hard enough so that players would most likely not be able to finish it in one try with luck but also make it interesting enough to make them want to restart and get to the end. However, when I began playtesting, it shocked me how quickly players managed to blow through the game. I made three endings for the players to win with, and all of my playtesters managed to find at least one of them. I wanted to create a game in which players learned from their mistakes and thought about their decisions and how they lead them to victory or defeat in the long run, but this sadly did not happen. At most, my playtesters restarted the game once due to either a careless mistake or a choice they genuinely thought was the best for their character. This isn't what I had anticipated at all. This means that I should create longer storylines for the player to follow since the choice web may look intricate on the outside but can be relatively short to the player. This would include more endings for the player to
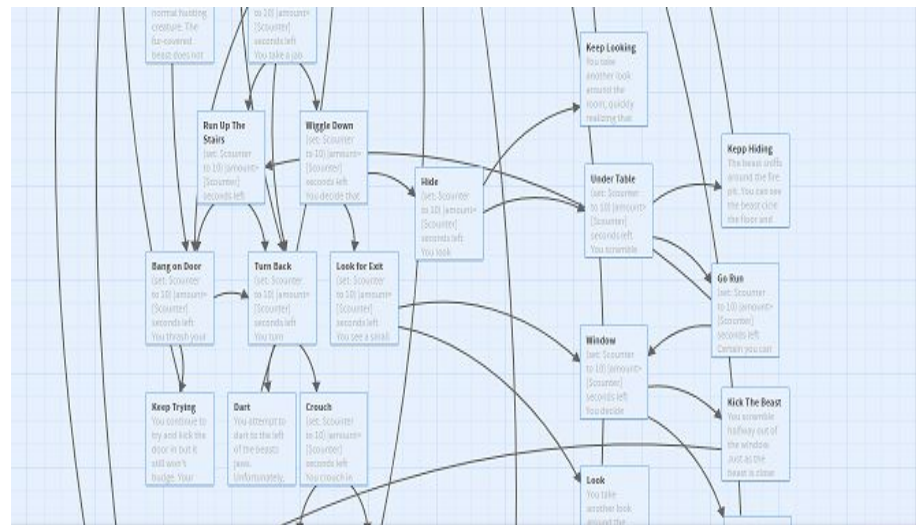
(Figure 2, shown is a portion of the web of choices in the game)

die and possibly fewer endings for the player to survive in order to make the player play for longer and prevent them from getting through on their first try.

The largest issue players expressed to me that they had with the game was the time limit. The time limit for the game was supposed to add stress and force players to make quick decisions based on the limited information they have. I wanted the players to ultimately feel like not enough time was given and this would make them slightly frustrated. When they playtested and filled out my questionnaire, players explained that they felt like the time amount was decent but was ultimately constricting, which seemed to be a success on my part. However, it quickly became a problem when players expressed to me outside of the survey that they genuinely did not have enough time to even read the prompts and felt like they were forced to make a decision based on no information. Skimming the prompts is not what I want to force the players to do. I only want them to rush their reading slightly as a result of the anxiety and panic that fuels the
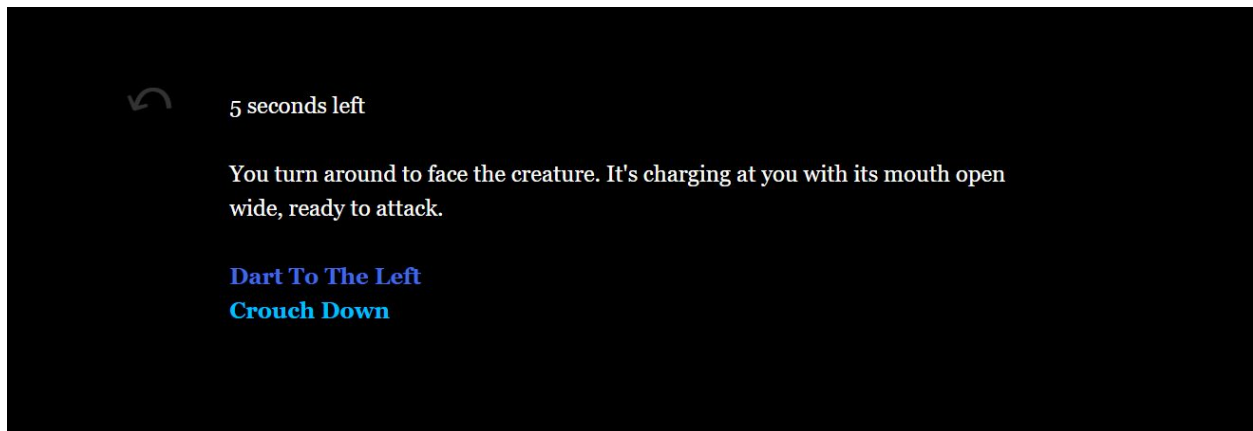
(Figure 3, only 10 seconds are provided to read and continue for the player)

gameplay. Personally, I thought that the initial ten seconds were enough, but that seems that that was not the case. I have one of two options in this scenario to pursue. First, I could listen to the playtesters directly and lengthen the time to around fifteen seconds. Then, I could run more tests to see how people fare under that time constraint. If it is still not enough, I could repeat the process until players feel more comfortable with the amount of pressure. If it is too much, I could also scale back to find the medium between not enough time and too much. The second option I

have is rewording the text prompts. The prompts are supposed to be much less descriptive and much shorter than text-based adventure games' prompts usually are. This is because I wanted players to be able to read the prompts quickly in the amount of time given. Since this is not being achieved, shortening the text could be beneficial to allowing players the feeling of having more time to read. I also recognize that some prompts are more descriptive than others, so shortening prompts with longer texts could shorten the overall experience.

With all of these things to improve on, my game also did some things right. Players reported feeling like the game was just the right amount of challenging to them. They reported that they were having fun while they were playing and didn't feel too overwhelmed by the story or the quickness of the gameplay, besides the time constraint. This lead to my players reporting that they didn't feel like giving up during their playthroughs almost at all, however this is mostly due to the fact that almost all players finished the game in two attempts or less, so changing the amount of time given and the amount of endings may change this discovery. Finally, players felt eager and excited to escape the beast and only few felt frustrated as they were escaping, which were exactly the emotions I was aiming for when I was making this game, which meant the implementation of the game worked well for players.

Overall, my game worked well for my playtesters. Most of the emotions they felt were expected and showed promise for the final development of the game. Minor changes that need to be made won't completely change how the game is played. Instead, it will only make it easier for players to enjoy the experience more. Essentially, this first draft of *Before It's Too Late* came pretty close to what I want the final draft to be like and that is an accomplishment worth noting.