Level Design Techniques in Dishonored 2

Dishonored 2, Arkane Studios, 2016

In Dishonored 2 I noticed several key level design techniques woven within to guide and navigate the player through the game environment in an immersive and engaging way. Dishonored is a prime example of a game using consequences to drive engagement and navigate the gameplay through the player's own choices and playstyle. Due to the moral consequences of killing, this is what leads to the incentive to find stealthier routes to avoid raising the chaos level and making for a darker world overall. These stealthier routes give the player a better understanding of the environment and allow the player to obtain story items and objects of value along the way. An instance for example is a back alley put in place in order for the player to avoid confronting the enemies if they so choose, the alley leads to an indoor environment that you gain entrance to through a window, inside you travel to an upstairs vantage point of the enemies allowing you to stealthily put them to sleep or sneak past them to avoid the moral consequences of confrontation and ultimately murder. After getting past the enemies using either playstyle, you then gain entrance to the objective building.

The game navigates the player through the world with notes you find, telling you information to then guide you through the game's environment in an immersive storytelling way giving you context to the objective as well as clues for the next one. Lines and lights play a factor in guiding the player to areas of interest whether that be to an objective location or an area containing items of value. Dishonored also uses visual landmarks as a design technique to make sure the player does not get lost and can easily distinguish a place they have already visited so they can find their way back if an objective requires them to. For this reason, the game makes every objective building look different, consisting of different heights, colors, and structural designs. This technique allows the player to explore the environment and easily find the earlier objective checkpoints while also giving the player the sense of their own personal place in the map, making for a more immersive game experience.

An incentive used for exploration is the useful loot found in houses, safes, etc., loot such as health vials, ammo, useful information, or runes that lead to the player gaining new skills and becoming more powerful. These desirable aspects also give more incentive to a stealth playstyle as stealth heavily revolves around finding less obvious routes to the objective and ultimately leading to more exploration and collection of useful pickups. Another design aspect I noticed was Dishonored's use of entrance and exit placement, making sure they are not easily missed by players if they are important level points. There is also a common theme throughout the gameplay that supports player immersion and choice by having multiple entrances and exits to key locations to allow the player to access the objective the way they choose depending on how they want to play the game.

Dishonored 2 is an example of immersive storytelling communicated through its game mechanics and level design. The game establishes goals with choices and their consequences, as well as incentives for making those choices. This makes the player care more about the goals and the way they go about achieving them. The game, for this reason, gives the player personal stakes and lets them choose how they play the game. All techniques and aspects are important for making this game succeed as an immersive, interactive, and interesting gameplay experience that structurally makes sense and is easy for a player to navigate through because of the level design vocabulary set in place to guide the gameplay experience.

Push and Pull, Clement Melendez, Essays On Level Design, (2016),
https://www.clement-melendez.com/portfolio/essays

Dishonored 2, Arkane Studios, (2016)