Bonds

Interview, Observation, and Peer Review: Visual Style Testing

Triangulation: Observation, Peer Review, A/B Testing

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Reflection

Overall the process we took to create the visual style moodboards was extremely helpful. Even as I was creating the Visual Style with Yoshua, the results we got from our testing ended up helping immensely. It gave us clearer direction when balancing what was right from a standpoint of game designers and what an audience would be interested in seeing. I do wish I had interviewed more people to get more specifics of what people liked for each moodboard and I do wish we had more people who voted for each one, but we were left at the mercy of people being willing to vote as well as the limit of people in the OIL.

Summary

Our group created moodboards for the visual style of our game Bonds. We then discussed each one in the group, held a vote within the OIL for which ones were liked or not, and I interviewed 4 people directly for specifics of what they had thought. We then summarized what we would take from each moodboard as a group, using both our group discussion and what we got from testing. We had our own thoughts hold more weight in the decision as we needed to make sure our theming matched what the client wanted from us.

Collected data is as follows

- Summary of general thoughts from the group about each moodboard

- Statistics on the vote within the OIL as well as minor observational notes

- Summary of general thoughts from interviewees who voted about each moodboard as well as their personal most liked and least liked moodboards

Current Situation

Our group Data Mage Studios is creating a game that tackles loneliness with young adults aged 14-19. We want to create a visual style for our game however are struggling coming up with a unified concept that balances our theming, overall ideas, general feeling, and have it all be reasonably able to create a demo for the June 5th showcase. Since this game would be 'publicly released' in theory, we decided to test what others would want to see from our game speaking strictly in visual style.

Process

We decided to split the process into parts to get a clearer timeline of how the research would go, rather than just blindly tackle the problem.

1. Discuss and create a unified idea.

2. Each create moodboards around the idea.

3. Discuss amongst ourselves what we thought of the moodboards.

4. Have people in the OIL vote, observe how they act when looking at the moodboards.

5. Finalize a choice.

Unified Idea + Creation of Moodboard

Library: Community Research

Workshop: Brainstorm

We first decided we should get a centralized theme for all of our moodboards. We had all agreed on a **low fantasy medieval cozy game in a low poly style** for a few reasons. Low fantasy and cozy allowed us to create a game that was overall comfortable for players to be in, while still being fantastical enough to gain enjoyment just by playing. Low poly also allowed us to create a product in a much simpler style, something that not only gives a nostalgic feel but also will be far easier to create. We then set off to each create a moodboard that envisioned what each of us thought of this prompt.

For my mood board I decided to split it into four sections, to give a clearer idea of what I was going for. I created- world style, model style, colours, and monster designs sections. It made what I wanted to try and show off easier to read as a whole, at the very least for me.

The kind of feeling I had when given this vibe for our game was something very foresty and comforting. I wanted to capture walking through the woods on a cloudy day, which is somewhere I find comforting and envision for a fantasy setting. I specifically drew inspiration from Efteling and Dutch castles. Since the prototype of the game was set in Eindhoven, I thought it would be fun to grab from real life inspiration of the country we were using. I also looked at a game called 'Wanderstop', which is a cozy game about a warrior resting for the first time in her life to learn to make tea. The art direction of the game has this warming glow and is comforting in just even the small area you walk around in.

For models, I actually took a look at artists on a website called VGen and looked at low poly models. The four at the bottom I chose were due to the 'chunkiness' of them, I really liked the way shapes were implied and created using very little and ultimately thought it would be helpful for our game. The top two were more direct inspirations from actual games, to show how these models would look in motion. 'Skies of Arcadia' on the left was an example to show shape language implication in the models, and 'Sushi Ben' on the right had a supplemental video for

the group to show how the models could move in space as well as how a lack of shaders on the model gave the game a certain feel to it.

For colours, I just picked quick ones that gave the kind of feel I was looking for. A muted and earthy tealish green for forests and backgrounds, with the yellows / oranges peeking through to be the sun, with a final purple to represent the magic in the world.

Our game originally included hazard zones with monsters, so I decided to represent them with examples of very cute monsters. We didn't want to create a scary or stressful game, so I opted for more creaturistic designs that did not seem threatening or upsetting to look at.

Discussion amongst the group

.For the discussion amongst the group we went around the table to each show off our moodboard, explain our thought process behind it, then get general feedback from each other about what we thought on each moodboard. I took quick and general notes about common sentiments about each moodboard from the group. For this document I am going to summarize the general sentiment as follows -

Moodboard 01 - Ashley

Very well liked, the visual style was simplistic and the angular buildings were commented on multiple times in a positive light. However, the roundness of the characters would be very hard to implement and were not quite what we were looking for. The 'chibi' style of characters was nice and something we all pointed out, alongside the colours being vibrant without being overpowering. Overall cute and comforting, which was a very good thing.

Moodboard 02 - Nieck

A big note within the group was that it was too moody, and the larger sized characters looked very uncanny. The UI put in the moodboard also felt too much like a mobile cash grab game, and didn't quite fit what we were looking for. We also noted during this discussion we wanted a warmer palette for the game, as the night scene was calming but didn't feel very 'fun' to play in.

Moodboard 03 - Charlotte

The colours overall were a bit too dark, and was a bit too moody still. The castle and Dutch theming was nice, and it was mentioned that it would be nice to include as well as iterate on. The pokemon pacharisu was mentioned as a fun design inspiration but maybe not for the monsters. The style was viewed as nice, but not only not quite what we were looking for but also couldn't place what was working or not working.

Moodboard 04 - Yoshua

The cat NPC was very well liked and a few people exclaimed it could be a data mage cat, similar to our branding. The overall feel of the world was far too open and felt too much like a mobile game in a bad way. The puzzle cards were viewed as nice as well as the idea of talking sprites was very popular within the group. The rounder style of characters was once again not well liked and reminded a few people of brawlhalla.

Moodboard 05 - Leon

A common sentiment within the group was that pixel art was a no go, however there were a lot of well liked elements. The deer character had a well liked design and colouring to take inspiration from. The floating castle was an interesting touch as well, and was noted down

OIL Voting + Interviews

We then set up each of the moodboards on a whiteboard in the OIL, alongside a small explanation of what we were asking for and our poster of our game to explain what we were trying to create. Yoshua and I then went to every table in the OIL that day and asked them to vote for which they liked with an O and which they did not with an X. This would give us a quick overview of the ones that people liked and the ones that they didn't but at a larger scale then directly asking people would have. I also pulled aside four people to ask them specifically what they thought of each moodboard and asked which was their overall least and most favourite.
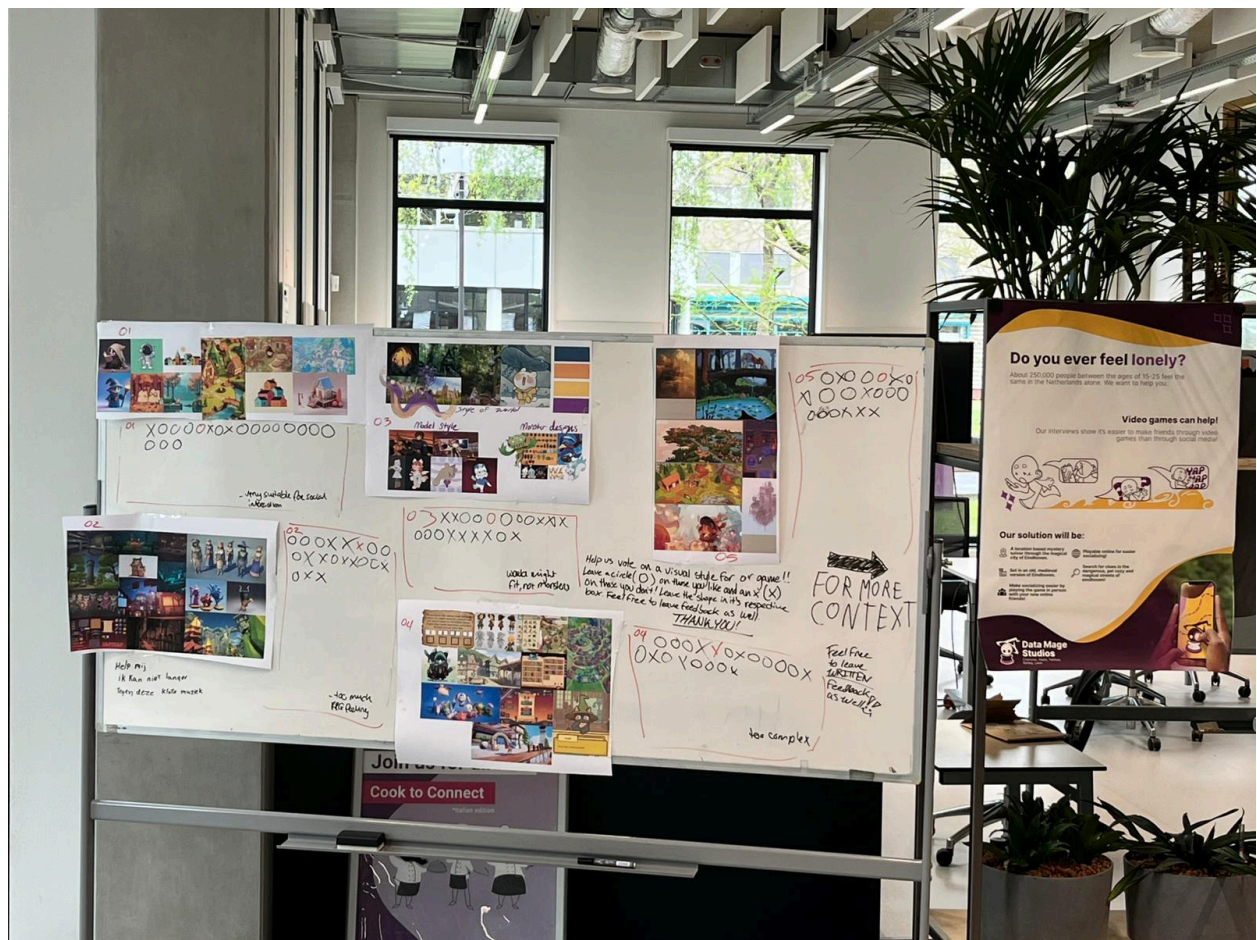
For the display of moodboards, we watched as people voted as well as took note of the total votes for each of the moodboards. Overall I noticed, people seemed to discuss 01, 02, and 04 the most. People took their time with these ones the most, though some people changed their votes last minute. They tended to change their mind on 04 and 05 mostly, though I noticed it as well once or twice on 03. For total vote counts we have the following-

	O votes (Liked Moodboard)	X votes (Disliked Moodboard)	Total Votes	Percentage Liked Approximate
01 (Ashley)	16	3	19	84%
02 (Nieck)	10	11	21	47%
03 (Charlotte)	10	9	19	52%
04 (Yoshua)	13	7	20	65%
05 (Leon)	13	7	20	65%

Overall the results helped us get a general idea of what people liked, and it was clear people liked the more bubbly style that Ashley had created. However, since we could only gauge general information from the voting I proceeded with interviews. I asked to sit down with four people immediately after they had finished voting so I could get their thoughts after having just seen the moodboards. I took general notes for each interview and classified each set of notes to a moodboard as well as the specific person. The general notes I gathered for each moodboard were as follows -

Moodboard 01 - Ashley

The colours were well liked by everyone, however three people felt some of the character designs were childish and would risk alienating some audiences. The overall roundness of everything was commented on multiple times though, as the shape language was

considered strong overall. One person did not like it at all however, and mentioned it did not fully fit our theme.

Moodboard 02 - Nieck

Three people felt the theme fit our project the best, however one said it felt far too moody for what we were trying to achieve with our goal. No one liked the more blocky / geometric styled characters with one person going as far as saying that N64 styled graphics are not something we should go for.

Moodboard 03 - Charlotte

For this one only 3 people responded, as the fourth felt like they had nothing to say about it. The other three felt the general concept was okay, but was missing something specific with one mentioning that it needed more context overall to them. The model styles were just seen as okay, though people thought the monster designs were cute overall without much more to add.

Moodboard 04 - Yoshua

Every single person mentioned how much they like the cat, however they felt it was more fantasy than medieval. Other then that there was not much people had to say overall.

Moodboard 05 - Leon

Two people viewed it as soft themed or cottagecore. The pixel style wasn't well liked, however two people said during this section that they did like the style and one remarked they were not sure why. The floating castles were mentioned once as something they enjoyed.

At the end of each interview, I asked which one was the person's favourite and least favourite moodboard conceptually.

	Most Liked	Least Liked
Interviewee 01	03 and 05	04
Interviewee 02	02	01
Interviewee 03	02 and 04 02 for the medieval and 04 for the fantasy	03
Interviewee 04	03 and 05 03 has more clarity but 05 has more promise	01 and 04

We also received the remark from the 4th interviewee that they felt it was hard to vote sometimes since the moodboards were so similar.

Results

Overall we will be taking certain elements from each moodboard, as there were good and bad things about each one. We are overall prioritizing the group's opinion about each moodboard, as we are more acquainted with how the game should be themed for the purpose of meeting new friends. However, that does not mean we are completely ignoring the interviews and Benchmark Test, as it gave us a better indication of what is going to be more well liked by the general populace.

The final things we will be taking from the moodboards are as follows -

Ashley's (01) Moodboard was the most well liked, with the general colours and feeling of the world they were designing fit our vision the most. Nieck's (02) gave us the most Medieval Fantasy feeling of all the moodboards so we are going to take inspiration as to how the world's

work from this one. My (03) moodboard has the general theming of Netherlands / Eindhoven we will be implementing into the visual style. Yoshua's (04) moodboard will have the cat and sprites taken from it. Lastly, Leon's (05) moodboard will have ideas for character design, and some worldbuilding elements such as the floating castle taken from it.