

Game Design Document

THE MERCENARY OF KNOWLEDGE

(working title)

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Overview

The Mercenary of Knowledge is an action-adventure 2D platformer and partially souls-like game. It takes place in a fantastical world inspired by the Islamic Golden Age and the middle ages as a whole. The player will take control of a mercenary warrior as they travel across the land in search of a rogue sorcerer whom they've been tasked with apprehending. The players will traverse through deserts, canyons, mountains, dungeons, castles, seas, and a host of cities and settlements on the journey to capture and defeat the sorcerer. The mercenary is an expert warrior and has the opportunity to learn martial art skills, magic, and holy powers across the game. Skills learned can be used for both platforming and combat as the game bridges the two concepts together into one unified gameplay style. There are a host of different skills and methods of playing the game, either be a sorcerer, a holy man, or a simple warrior, each archetype has its own skill tree that the player may choose to level up. The game explores themes of religion, faith, science, and history in an effort to create a cohesive and intriguing game world as well as to implore players to think about the world, history, and religions around them. The game will be moderately difficult, but will remain approachable to all, however it will test the players more and more as it progresses and only the determined may be able to complete it.

Story

Outline:

In THE MERCENARY OF KNOWLEDGE the story follows a former mamluk (slave soldier) who has become an independent mercenary. He starts his journey doing various missions such as raiding a castle and hunting down bandits. Along the way he encounters a mystic occult scholar and a holy man cleric. Both of them teach him of their ways and their beliefs and he learns of the usages of magic and god. After completing some missions he is beseeched by the Sultan of the capital city to hunt down a sorcerer who has stolen an artefact from the Sultan's personal museum. At this point the mercenary is confronted by both the occult scholar and the cleric and he must make a choice who to ally himself with as they both seek to assist him in apprehending the sorcerer (for different reasons of course). This is the point where the player chooses which skill tree they wish to align themselves with. The choice made here also affects the second-to-last boss as the player will fight the one they didn't align themselves with at the end. Across the mercenary's journey he learns that the sorcerer intends on summoning down an archangel to gain unlimited power and his quest becomes more dire. Depending on the path the mercenary chooses (i.e. which skill tree the player upgrades most) he will seek to defeat the sorcerer to either seize power for himself and ascend his power, to keep god's servants in heaven, or simply collect the bounty on the sorcerer's head.

Structure:

It begins with a cutscene explaining the mercenary's background and current profession as well as alluding to the sorcerer and his intentions. The first sequence takes place across

several levels from a castle to a desert to a cursed town and finally to the capital city. The second sequence takes place across the desert, a canyon, a mountain-pass, and a small town. The third sequence continues from the town to a port city to a sea/ocean level to a beach level and back to a city level. The fourth sequence takes place from another desert to an ancient abandoned mega city that takes place across several levels and across several settlements composed of mystics and bedouins. The fifth and final sequence takes place across mountains and ancient abandoned temples until the final level within an ancient cave-temple where the mercenary confronts the sorcerer and the archangel the sorcerer is able to summon.

Characters & Creatures:

The Mercenary: His name is Al Murtaziq (literally the mercenary in arabic). He is the protagonist and is a former mamluk. He simply wants money and land to settle on, but his only knowledge is on fighting and surviving, thus he became a mercenary. Across the game he develops either to becoming a religious and pious man, or a sorcerer and power-hungry man, or as someone who realises the futility of it all and simply wants peace.

Occult Scholar: His name is Ibn Bunya. He can be either a companion character that helps the mercenary learn new spells and sells him useful items or he becomes an antagonist that the mercenary fights right before the final boss. He is a clever and creepy man that cracks dark jokes. His ultimate goal is to attain unlimited knowledge. His morals are questionable and depending on the route the player chooses, they may get very

different impressions of him. On one route, he may appear as a loyal and kind, if not slightly off-putting, ally. On another, he may appear as an evil and spiteful enemy.

Holy Cleric: His name is Ibn Fadel. He can either be a companion character that teaches the mercenary about God and religious scripture and sells him useful items, or he becomes an antagonist the mercenary fights right before the final boss. He's a wise and calm man that enjoys preaching and praying. His ultimate goal is to be a pure and pious man that will enjoy the grace of God. However, he has a dark streak in his treatment of who he dubs as heretics and shows little mercy to them. Depending on the route the player chooses he may appear to be a kind and wise teacher, while on the other he may appear as a cold and intolerant enemy.

Sultan: The sultan is a rich and decadent ruler who only wants to appear as a wise and knowledgeable philosopher but in actuality is a rather ignorant and foolish man. He appears at the beginning of the game and sends envoys to the mercenary throughout the rest of it. He is slightly foolish and is a somewhat comedic character and is continuously insulted and poked fun at by the mercenary in his inner monologue.

Sorcerer: The sorcerer is a mysterious and insane figure. His one goal is to attain god-like powers and will stop at nothing to attain this goal. Little is known about his identity or background, but his few appearances would showcase his madness with him cackling constantly and creating destruction everywhere he appears.

The Rival: The rival is another mercenary intent on apprehending the sorcerer. His name is Ibn Mamluk. He appears in three sections of the game, first he is alongside the mercenary when they are recruited by the sultan to capture the sorcerer, then he appears

following the mercenary in the desert where they have a short clash, and he finally appears in one of the ancient cities where he is defeated by the mercenary once and for all. He is of nearly equal skill to the mercenary and acts as a mirror of the mercenary. He is distinct in that he changes in no way throughout the game (motivation wise) and his one goal remains money and fame.

The Warlord: A warlord the mercenary fights and defeats at the beginning of the game (tutorial boss)

The Bedouin: The boss of the bedouin warriors the mercenary must defeat in order to gain passage to the ancient city. He uses a spear and curved swords to fight, as well as his camel. He is dressed in blue, white, and black.

The Snake: A giant king cobra snake the mercenary encounters in the desert.

The Djinni: A mystical spirit the mercenary encounters in an abandoned town. It is an evil spirit that seeks the souls of humans and does not obey their requests or commands.

The Serpent: A giant sea creature that attacks the ship the mercenary is on. It forces the mercenary to navigate a sea cavern before he comes into contact with it and defeats it.

The Bandit: The leader of a band of brigands that attempt to rob the mercenary.

The Philosophers: This comprises several characters the mercenary meets on his journey. They sell him knowledge on human erudition and scientific items (i.e. actual medicines, throwing knives, etc. no supernatural or holy powers). They pose questions to the mercenary about his journey and serve as a method to get players contemplating ideas about the game and (hopefully) reality as a whole.

Art

Overview

THE MERCENARY OF KNOWLEDGE will have a pixel art style that leans into some realism. Its art style will not aim to be wholly realistic and may be slightly stylized however it would not have a style that would be too cartoonish. The style should not clash with the tone of the game, the game itself is somewhat serious with moments of brevity and humour spliced in throughout. As such, the art style will reflect this as well as the overall gameplay style and setting of the game. Considerations should be made for the movement of the player and the type of enemies they will encounter, as such the art style will reflect this.

Cutscenes

The cutscenes in specific, will be highly detailed pixel renders of characters and scenes. They will reflect the tone of the game but will remain distinct from the gameplay, as to add more emphasis on them.

Gameplay

The gameplay will have a slightly more simplified art style. It will be something between the art style of Shovel Knight and Blasphemous (will make some renders of it at some point soon). The protagonist will take up a small portion of the screen, but his position will remain clear to the players as he will stick out compared to the more washed out backdrop. Still deciding on whether black outlines should or shouldn't be utilized in the game. They help for cartoonish art styles but may not compliment the game's tone.

Key Art

The key art will undoubtedly be influenced by mediaeval and 19th century etchings such as those used to depict historical figures and events. They will be black and white ink pen depictions of the characters and scenes. It will be used for the box art and some promotional material as well, although some posters and renders may include colour.

Gameplay & Mechanics

Game loops:

- Meta game loop: Upgrading skill trees, purchasing items and resources that are used in the core game loop, and story progression.
- Core game loop: Going through platforming challenges and fighting enemies. Collecting resources/currency to be used for purchasing items or using incantations throughout the level, from either dead enemies or from coffers. Each level ends with a boss fight that rewards the player with an upgrade point that may be used in their skill trees.

Combat

The combat of the game is fast paced and tactical. It requires the player to know how to space themselves from enemies and effectively dodge and counter attack the enemies.

The player themselves may learn skills and acquire items to assist in combat challenges.

Basic combat system of dodge, hit, jump, and counter. Different enemies have different attacks that should be dodged differently. Some enemies may deflect the player's attacks

and need to be defeated using acquired skills, specific items, or being attacked at certain weak points. Combat doesn't last more than a few dozen or so seconds, with the

exception of boss fights. Boss fights range from gimmick fights to proper one-on-one

duels. The player has a basic attack and a dodge-dash ability that can be used to create space or dodge an attack. A counter can be learned later in the game to deflect enemy

attacks although it is not necessarily a replacement for the dodge as certain attacks cannot be deflected.

- Summary:

Swift-paced combat, different combat moves may be chained together to create player-made combos, similar to a fighting game.

Many different skills may be learned over the course of the game.

Magic, Piety, and Humanity skill trees may each unlock differing abilities that impact the options the player has in approaching combat scenarios.

Platforming

The platforming sections rely on quick-thinking and a solid grasp of the movement controls of the game. The mechanics of platforming are as follows: basic movement (forward backward), jumping, crouching, dashing, and wall jumps/slides. Some sections require more methodical and thoughtful approaches from the player while other sections require quick and decisive action. Across the game new skills may be learned to assist in platforming or unlock new sections, depending on what skill the player has chosen to learn. The first sequence gives the player all the basic skills they need to complete the game, beyond that, it is at the player's discretion what they choose to learn, and that may affect how certain platforming challenges are solved and what levels/secrets they may discover or miss.

- Summary:

Level design and movement system that facilitates quick decision making and immediate action.

Movement pertaining to jumping, sprinting, dodge-dashes, and wall jumping.

Certain extra perks may be learned across the game for more efficient platforming and unlocking new areas.

Magic, Piety, and Physical skill trees may each unlock differing skills that impact the gameplay in different ways.

Union of Platforming & Combat

Platforming and combat will be intertwined with one another. They won't be distinct aspects of the game that occur separately but rather, will have a push and pull relationship. Some sections of a level may contain more combat scenarios while others may contain a stronger emphasis on platforming, but the majority will blend both together, with enemies being imbued in a platforming challenge and the player being forced to engage in combat and platforming simultaneously. The skills the player learns and the items they may acquire can be used for both platforming and combat. No (or at least very few) skills are applicable to only one or the other, they will have a complete unification.

- Summary:

Skills and abilities may be used for both platforming and combat. They are not mutually exclusive categories and they will be blended together. Here are some examples:

- *Dodge-dashes* are quick movements that cover a fair bit of distance while giving temporary invincibility to the mercenary during a few frames of the animation. They may be used for platforming and in combat. In regards to combat, it may be used for making space and dodging enemy attacks. For platforming it may be used for crossing certain obstacles and reaching far platforms
- *Overhead swings* are air attacks where the mercenary swings his blade over his downwards. They can be used to inflict powerful attacks on enemies but they can also be used to increase the ledge-grab distance so the player can “hook” their sword on a ledge slightly out of reach.

Skill Trees

Three skill trees exist:

The Erudition of Piety: pertaining to holy matters utilizing the powers of God through invoking his name, reciting scripture, and praying

The Erudition of Magic: pertaining to metaphysical matters utilizing forbidden knowledge and invoking spirits and using the occult sciences

The Erudition of Humanity: pertaining to corporeal matters such as martial arts and basic non-supernatural skills

Before going further the baseline skills must be laid out:

- Jump
- Dash-Dodge
- Normal attacks (will be a three hit combo, right slash, left slash, and a final middle slash)
- Wall climb/slide
- Item use (i.e. throwing knives, molotovs, etc.)
- Healing (base healing system is water from ancient springs)
- Stamina system (for dodges only, maybe work like tracer's blinks?)

Expounding on the 3 Eruditions:

- Erudition of Humanity: Specific skills that don't have certain effects. That is to say they don't make the player do more damage, or have a higher defense, or heal the player. These skills are simply new moves the player learns and can apply in different sections
 - The mercenary learns martial arts and skills that allow him to use different attacks and platforming techniques. None of these skills are latent, they are actionable. For instance, the overhead swing may be learned in this skill tree, it offers a powerful attack (does not change base damage output) and allows the player to hook onto a far ledge using it.
 - Potential Skills:
 - Overhead Swing (Jump attack)
 - Deflect
 - Dash-Strike
 - Feign
 - Oriental (turkish) cut (changes combo, adds a fourth underhanded slash that most enemies can't deflect.)
 - Wide slash (an attack with a much larger hitbox)
- Erudition of Piety: Specific skills that may have certain effects. They can be used for healing, increasing defense, increasing jump height, etc. These skills may be more defensive than other skill trees.

- The mercenary learns holy verses and methods of prayer. This allows him to invoke God for assistance. These invocations may give the mercenary a higher vitality or may have a task done for him. For instance, the mercenary may call upon God to help reduce his pain (i.e. increasing defense). He may also use God to strike down an enemy, essentially God carries out an action instead of the mercenary having to risk fighting/wounding an enemy himself.
- Potential Skills:
 - Healing prayer (an extra heal on top of base healing system)
 - Defense prayer (increases defense)
 - Speed prayer (increases movement speed)
 - Clairvoyance prayer (gives a hint to how to solve a puzzle or defeat a boss)
 - Dexterity prayer (increase jump height, can allow for jumping over taller enemies or skipping certain platforms)
 - God strike (invokes god's power to strike an enemy, can totally eviscerate an enemy or just deal a good chunk of damage)
 - God assistance (invokes god's power to create a temporary platform that can be used for whatever purpose, maybe making a platforming section easier or gaining distance from an enemy. Would need to certainly be play-tested).
 - God cloak (uses god's power to make you temporarily undetectable to enemies)
- Erudition of Magic: Specific skills that may have certain effects. They can be used for healing, controlling enemies, increasing damage, etc. These skills may be more offensive than other skill trees.
 - The mercenary learns esoteric and occult knowledge. He is able to invoke specific spirits and use magic seals/talismans. The talismans/seals may be used to garner a specific effect and the spirits may be used to enact a specific request.
 - Potential Skills:
 - Strength talisman (increases damage)
 - Mind control spell (makes enemies hostile to each other)
 - Crippling spell (makes enemies unable to fight back for a short period of time, on bosses it only restricts specific attacks)
 - Healing talisman (very slowly heals the player up to 50% health when equipped)

- Violent spirit (invokes a spirit that sweeps the screen dealing damage to everything on screen in randomized percentages, albeit nothing that 1-hit kills an enemy)
- Beneficent spirit (invokes a spirit that buffs the player in one of several ways, either refills a heal, refills defenses, or refills the resource used for magic)
- Illusory spirit (invokes a spirit that generates a weaker copy of the player that assists in combat or platforming puzzles/challenges)

Levels

Level loops

Each level will follow a relatively similar structure, although they will remain distinct from one another. The structure is as follows:

- The player begins a level and the music and sound cues play to signify the beginning of the level.
- The first section of the level starts with a small platforming challenge that introduces the level's gimmick. Say a level has quicksand, the platforming challenge is centered around avoiding quicksand and walking on it for as short as possible in order to allow the player to understand how it works and its effects.
- After completion of the platforming challenge, the player is introduced to one or more new enemies. (Later in the game new enemies become less frequent so specific enemies suited to a level's design or tone will be used).
- The player then must traverse platforming and combative challenges throughout the level, while collecting currency and resources from the level that may be used for purchasing items and making invocations.
- There are several checkpoints in each level (the amount vary depending on the level and the difficulty, they are represented by a rug and a pillow to indicate time for rest and reprieve).
- There also may be one or more merchants in a level to sell the player items or upgrade skills during the level. The amount varies wildly and will be dependent

upon the setting and how relevant they are to the setting (for instance you wouldn't find a shopkeep in the middle of a scorching desert).

- At the end of any given level there will be a boss fight, usually the boss will reflect the level's gimmicks and enemies. For instance a level full of wildlife may have a giant snake as the final boss, whereas a level full of human warriors may have a mamluk as the final boss.
- After defeating the boss the player obtains experience points that may be used for leveling either their piety, magical power, and/or humanity.
- Between each level there is a short sequence of the mercenary making camp and meeting with either the cleric or the occult scholar to upgrade a skill. Not every level has this, it could be after a string of levels (need to workshop this idea a bit more).

Level Sequences

There will be a world map that the player will have access to during different sequences to showcase the geography and the path they are taking in-game. Each sequence will be composed of different levels that will be tackled mostly linearly. There will be other optional and secret levels that may be unlocked in specific ways. For instance, a challenge level may become open to someone who has achieved a certain amount of skills in the erudition of magic skill tree that will allow them to then gain an extra skill in that erudition. Another secret level may be found within a level itself, for example, if a specific platform can only be accessed using a specific skill, it could lead to a new section or an entirely different, secret level.

Sound

(Note: I have little to no skills in sound or music composition so this section will inevitably be less dense than previous sections)

Sound Design

The sound design of this game is to be determined currently. It will either feature older style of sounds in video games, with limited chips, to really steep the game into the pixelated aesthetic or it will feature more realistic sound effects if the tone and art style are more steeped in the realistic aspect than the cartoonish one. Furthermore, there will be no recorded dialogue and instead there will be sound effects over subtitles. The game will also prioritize music over background (ambience) sounds. There will of course be foley and perhaps some walla sounds in certain locations, but overall music will take center stage and sound effects may be reserved for specific actions such as walking, jumping, attacking, enemy attacks, using spells, and boss sounds.

Sound Effects

The main sounds of note, aside from the basic sounds for movement and skills, will be sounds to indicate specific ideas:

- The restoration of stamina (as in the dodge-dash being refilled) will be telegraphed both visually and with a small sound effect.
- Entering a new level will have a little sound play, depending on the level it will change, for instance in a desert level it may play the sound of wind blowing to indicate the environment whereas in a castle level it may play war drums/horns to indicate the castle.

- Sounds will also play when a chest/coffer is opened and an item is discovered.
- A sound will also play when upgrading or learning a skill.
- The UI will also have basic select sounds to indicate the different select options.

All these sounds will be steeped in the old video game style aesthetic (for now).

Music

The music of the game may be chiptune but it will take inspiration from traditional folk Egyptian/Arab music as well as mediaeval music from Spain and the rest of the Islamicate world. This type of music generally utilizes a mix of vocals, chordophones, aerophones, and drums. Some examples include the Egyptian kawala, Egyptian mizmar, the qanbus, and the qanun. This type of music would exemplify the game's setting as it is what was played in the region the game is inspired by. There may be a chiptune aspect as mentioned before, to bridge the gap between traditional music and video game music. (This part is also debatable as I may opt to just use actual traditional music as I have zero proficiency in regards to music).

Platform Specifications

The main two platforms I am aiming for this game to be released are PC and the Nintendo Switch respectively. This is due to the fact that the Nintendo Switch is a great platform for my game due to the low specifications it requires to run as well as that the Switch is one of the best platforms for indie games. It will be released on PC as well due to the fact that it is an indie game and steam is the largest video game market place.

Given the low-end graphics, there should not be any issues for any computer or console releases in the last 20 years to run the game.

PC Specifications:

The resolution will be 1920x1080 on PC. There will be keyboard and controller support respectively. Graphical options and settings will be available such as a full screen toggle, different resolutions (1600x900, 1280x720, etc.), brightness level, and a general quality setting.

Nintendo Switch Specifications:

The resolution of the switch is 1280x720 therefore that will be the resolution of the game on switch. There will be controller support for the joycons, although the game will not function with them working independently (it must be one full controller). The screen size will be adjusted for the Switch's screen and there will be an option to tweak screen size so that it may be tweaked if needed when the Switch is in docked mode operating on another monitor.

Market

The target market for this game are people who enjoy indie games. The age rating would likely be around Pegi 12 or Pegi 16, as the game contains some mature themes as well as some blood. It would be marketed primarily online on social media such as YouTube, Instagram, Twitter, and Tiktok. We would avoid reddit.