

Task 3: Interface and Art

UI AND CONCEPT ART
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UI and Concept Art

What is UI?

UI (User interface) is the way that a user interacts with your game. These can be methods, like keyboard control and mouse control, or interface, like inventory screen and map screen. (Quintans, 2013)

Soul Reaver (Square-Enix Edios, 1999) – Gameplay UI

I am revisiting old games on purpose since in my opinion they had a huge impact in my gaming experience and where more focused-on gameplay rather than graphics. Today's games made huge steps forward and where improved both visually and in storytelling. But maybe if we observe again the basic UI we can reinvent or come up with something new.

Limited by computer power and storage, the had to design simple ye effective games. In Soul Reaver (1999) the UI is pretty strait forward.



Figure 1: Materialized Realm

Original Source from Soul Reaver (1999)

The only thing that you were interested while laying was how much health you have. The health spiral had two states. A smooth spiral while in the materialized world and an edged spiral while the spectral realm.

So, from the health bar itself the player can already tell in which state Raziel (the character) is and is giving the player the necessary information they need. In the materialized world, the life indicator is important since it continuously depletes by time and it also decreases by damage. It can be replenished by consuming souls from your enemies. When the spiral runs out of life, you will automatically reenter the spectral realm and by doing so the environment around you will, in certain areas, shift. It is

important to have control over the environment shifting so the health spiral plays a huge role in the material world.



Figure 2: Spectral Realm

Original Source from Soul Reaver (1999)

On the other hand, in the spectral world the spiral health indicator will regenerate by time. If it is fully charged and you find a portal you can switch between realms again. If it gets empty by enemy attacks, you will respawn at the Elder god room without losing any progress to regenerate.

It is impressive how such a simple icon in the UI has so many significances. Simple yet very effective.



Figure 3: Paused Menu

Original Source from Soul Reaver (1999)

If you press the “escape” key, you are presented with the Pause menu where the player can tweak various settings while also view Health power ups represented by the lower left icon and Glyphs Energy collected represented by the upper left icon. In modern games, you rarely see this kind of UI anymore. Rather a menu screen is more specific and ordered by category.

Honestly, I do not like this approach of having game related items in your settings menu.



Figure 4: Glyph Spell Menu

Original Source from Soul Reaver (1999)

Las menu in Soul Reaver is the Glyph Spell Menu which lets you choose different glyph powers. Glyph powers are obtained by solving puzzles at an Altar. This menu is very effective and it revolves on itself. The glyph in front of the player is the glyph that would be activated if the action button is pressed. Again, this is a very simple inventory but straight forward and effective.

Now let's visit a more modern adventure/puzzle game as Soul Reaver (1999).

Rise of the Tomb Raider (Square Enix, 2016) – Gameplay UI

The UI is much simpler than in Soul Reaver (1999), during game play the screen is absolutely blank. Probably this is done in order to leave the screen free for the scene and not obstruct it with icons.



Figure 5: Tomb Raider Gameplay UI

Original Source from Rise of the Tomb Raider (2016)

This may also help in immersion since it reduces hypermediacy. There is no Health bar indicator like the old one used to have, but the health is indicated by desaturating the screen. The less the colours the weaker your health.



Figure 6: Health Decreased shown by Desaturation

Original Source from Rise of the Tomb Raider (2016)

There is still the classic Pause menu where you can tweak setting so that to adjust the game to have a better experience.



Figure 7: Pause Menu

Original Source from Rise of the Tomb Raider (2016)

Unlike in Soul Reaver (1999), the pause menu is dedicated just for settings and other options that are not related to the current game story. We can still see a resemblance with that of Soul Reaver (1999), but this menu in my opinion is improved. The text is put on a side so that the scene is not obstructed and a

dark translucent backdrop is present to make it clear that you are in a different state of the game. Fonts are simple and easy to read and everything is categorised in order to make navigation easier.

When you change, or draw a weapon, new UI icons appear.



Figure 8: Weapon Select

Original Source from Rise of the Tomb Raider (2016)

This is to indicate the player of which weapon they selected and what type of ammunition the weapon has. Also, note that in Tomb Raider (2016) all icons are translucent so they obstruct less of the scene. Apart from that, it pops up in the centre of the screen so that the player will be able to view it quickly even if they are in the middle of a battle.

When aiming a weapon the UI changes again. This time a cross hair is visible that will lighten up in red if on target and an icon on the top right corner shows the type and how much ammo of the selected weapon is remaining.

To make things better for the player one can even switch shoulder on which side to aim, since sometimes aiming on a certain shoulder blocks your vision or pulls you out of cover.



Figure 9:Aiming

Original Source from Rise of the Tomb Raider (2016)

Concept Art

Concept art is a way of transmitting design, idea and or mood to use in movies, games, animation and comic books. Since to develop or create something costs a lot of money it is wise to preview and have an idea of what you are designing before you begin the production. Thus, will help you point out any flows or redesign aspects that might work better. The purpose is not to be highly polished as an illustration but to show new ideas and how the object would fit in production (Creative Bloq Staff, 2012).

Let's visit the concept art of our games mentioned above.

Characters



Figure 10: Razel

(Square-Enix Edios, 1999)

Varies ideas of the character look are drawn in simple sketches to get a feel of how the character should look like and looks like at the current concept stage. Tweaks will be constantly added and redefined until the character fits the game as desired and transmits the role played through its visuals.



Figure 11: Razel First Concept

(Square-Enix Edios, 1999)



Figure 12: Raziel New Ideas

(Square-Enix Edios, 1999)

Apart from the main character, enemies are also approached in the same manner. Concept art of each enemy is created in order to make them fit their role while exploring colours, weapons and anatomy.

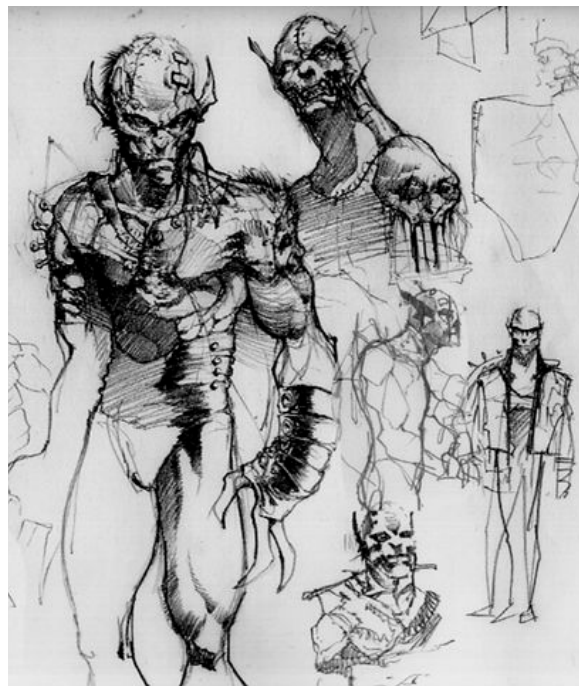


Figure 13: Enemies concept 1

(Square-Enix Edios, 1999)



Figure 14: Enemies Concept 2

(Square-Enix Edios, 1999)

Different colours and clothing are also put on the same character in order to explore further ideas. This is also useful if the character is visiting different environment like for example snow or desert. The character can be changed adequately to fit the scene it is into. By concept art there is no longer to imagine the scene but rather look at it and decide on what you are actually seeing.



Figure 15: Lara different Clothing

(Square Enix, 2016)

Concept art is also used to explore clothing and items. This will help the artist and developers to visualise how the item would fit and effect the character in both visuals and movement. The can also decide the texture and material of the items based on the character clothing and or environment.



Figure 16: Items

(Square Enix, 2016)

Environment

Apart from characters, concept art is also used to create levels, landscapes and environment where the character is going to be places. In Soul Reaver (1999) concept art colour is rarely used especially in level design and buildings. Since the game is quite old I had to refer to the in-game bonus material a lot since it was very hard to find original concept art.

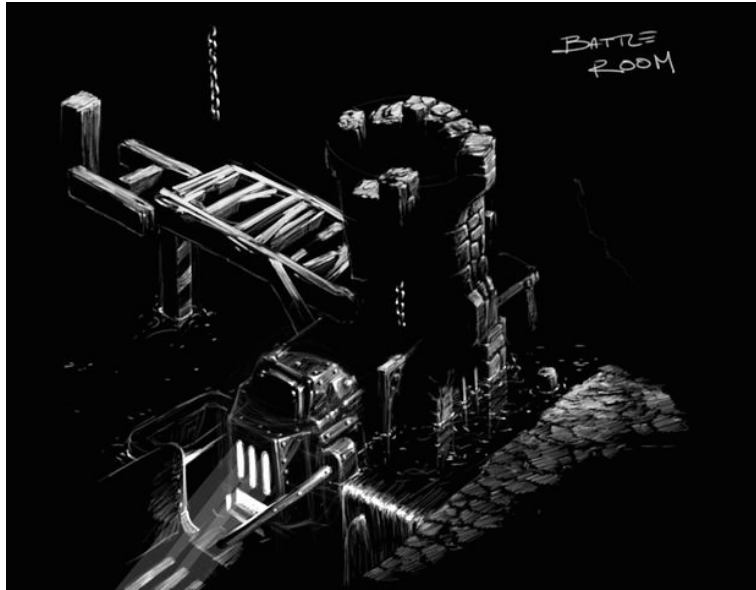


Figure 17: Level Design

(Square-Enix Edios, 1999)



Figure 18: Level Design 2

(Square Enix, 2016)

In modern concept art for environment colour is depicted to get an idea of the mood the environment will transmit. Apart from that, artist can already imagine what type of light, colour and particle systems they will be using in the 3D environment.



Figure 19: Lara fighting a bear

(Square Enix, 2016)



Figure 20: Environment Design

(Square Enix, 2016)



Figure 21: Environment Design 2

(Square Enix, 2016)



Figure 22: Land Scape

(Square Enix, 2016)



Figure 23: Land Scape 2

(Square Enix, 2016)



Figure 24: Under Water

(Square Enix, 2016)

By just looking at these images one can already get a grasp of the feel of the scene. The lighting shows clearly if the scene is warm or cold, urban or rural and even the weather and scale of the character related to the environment.



Figure 25: Buildings

(Square Enix, 2016)

Concept art also help 3D artist in knowing the detail and texture of the model they are doing from different angles and lightings.

I think that it is safe to say that concept art is a very useful tool in order to preview and review your work fast and cheap, rather than designing a 3D model and realise after that it has many flaws. Appar

from that it promotes idea generation and it is very easy to add or remove content from your design especially now a day in digital software.

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