

Duplicity

Game Design Document

“There's never been a true war that wasn't fought between two sets of people who were certain they were in the right. The really dangerous people believe they are doing whatever they are doing solely and only because it is without question the right thing to do. And that is what makes them dangerous.” – Neil Gaiman

Overview

Genre:

Medieval fantasy with a small amount of magic, and a lean towards conspiracy and detective themes.

Category:

Immersive Sim

Similar Titles:

Dishonored, Deus Ex

Setting:

Riverton, the capital of a kingdom called Tonsk – which has been at peace for many years.

View:

First-person

High Concept:

Must a kingdom always sharpen its blades to remain safe at all costs, or should times of peace be cherished?

Duplicity takes place in a fantasy kingdom, in which all seems well on the surface. However, there is a dark conspiracy brewing as a long-forgotten cult seeks to return to power. The more you investigate it, the deeper the collusion seems to go. The aging king has fallen very ill; his word is supposedly delivered by his top advisor, but is that the truth?

A few soldiers uncover traces of this plot but must keep it secret, for fear that anyone could be a pawn of the cult. Will you choose to stop this plot, or will the kingdom's leadership be replaced by one that is much more brutal? Is the protection of the current leadership the best action for the kingdom's future? Playing as Alste, these are some of the questions that the player will consider.

Gameplay

The game will be designed to allow for a large amount of creativity in how the player can progress through environments. While the game will be divided into levels which take place in a set order, each level will have several potential solutions – some of which may have longer-term effects or consequences. The focus will be on smaller environments that are rich with details and interactions, as this will allow for a richer role-playing experience in this case than something like an open world where some level of detail would need to be sacrificed in favor of sheer scope.

Much of the player choice throughout the game will be in deciding on their approach to each obstacle within the levels. Consider a situation in which Alste must get across a bridge guarded by soldiers that are hostile to her – the player might choose to navigate the bridge in many unique ways, including fighting through the soldiers, using misdirection, or sneaking through. These decision-making paths will allow the player to feel intelligent as they navigate the environment, but each small obstacle has a few general planned paths around it to keep the challenges interesting and somewhat directed. This will be a level design challenge but is possible by keeping levels to a narrow scale, such as a mansion or a block of a few smaller buildings.

The player will be able to choose new skills – both physical and magical – to have Alste (the player character) learn. Upon the completion of every level or so, the player will be offered a choice of ability among a few. These abilities will allow the player to invest themselves more deeply in a particular playstyle. For example, a player could choose a new ability to increase their direct combat effectiveness if that is their preferred approach, or they could choose abilities that give them new movement options or advanced stealth. These options will allow players to customize how Alste engages with challenges, further investing them in their character and the challenges that she faces. Alste could be played as a straightforward warrior focusing on weapon skills, or as a stealthy assassin who sneaks around obstacles – dispatching foes quietly or avoiding them altogether.

Player choices throughout the game will have not just short-term, but also long-term effects on gameplay as well. Levels adapt to how the player tends to approach situations – the conspirators are paying attention to what is happening. If the player is directly fighting in most encounters, they will find enemies that are stronger and more numerous. If they are avoiding direct fights, there will be more traps and other obstacles guarding secondary paths.

Key Groups/Characters

- Alste – the player character, a reasonably experienced soldier. She is accompanied by:
 - Rolf, a fellow soldier and Alste’s childhood friend
 - Captain Rodrikson – their commanding officer, a guiding figure.
- The Cult of Hel, a cult who worships a god of death. They were driven out in the past, but are now vying for power once again.

- Henfrey, the king's advisor. He is a cunning and witty man. While historically loyal, Henfrey has secret ties to the cult and is their angle into the kingdom's leadership. Henrey – and many others now following the cult – do so because they believe that the kingdom's leadership has become soft and weak, and that others will end the ongoing stint of peace to take advantage of them. However, the cult only cares for their own power.
- The kingdom's people and military who are caught in the middle of this conflict, unaware that the seemingly regular orders given from the top are in pursuit of a coup.

Opening Cutscene

An opening cinematic introduces the setting and background. The kingdom of Tonsk is in a time of peace, but the king's health has been in gradual decline. Henfrey, his advisor, has taken a progressively larger role in delivering his word. Then, a transition through black where a bell is heard ringing, and the player character wakes up in the barracks with Captain Rodrikson ringing a bell to wake everyone up. Captain Rodrikson announces that there has been a murder, and that their company needs to hurry and investigate it. Alste and the others in the company are introduced on the way to the crime scene with some conversation that establishes roles in the group – Captain Rodrikson is the stern but well-meaning leader; Rolf is a close longtime friend; and Martin, Maline, and Gerald are cordial but a closer-knit group among themselves.

Key Missions

Mission One: The Investigation

After arriving at the scene, the player gains control of Alste. They can only walk around and interact with NPCs and objects initially, being escorted to the room where the crime

occurred. While investigating the room, Alste finds some key information including evidence that the individual killed was a high-ranking soldier who was investigating cult activity, and that he was killed using a parasite that was used in the past by the Cult of Hel. However, the three less well-known members of the group suddenly look possessed and begin to attack. This fight serves as a combat tutorial, teaching the player about how to approach combat. After the three are sufficiently hurt, they will try to escape. The player is given the choice to either continue going after them, or to let them get away. Allowing them to get away results in Henfrey being more prepared later (more on that later), but continuing to attack and kill them causes the others in the group to comment on your ruthlessness. After the battle, Alste, Rolf, and Captain Rodrikson discuss their next move. Alste mentions the information that was found, and the captain decides that investigating the area for the signs of the cult that the letter mentioned is the next natural course of action. Captain Rodrikson elects to stay behind to attempt to cover up the findings for the time being, for worry that the Cult of Hel could have agents anywhere (this is also useful in that it allows the player character – Alste – to get away from the existing leader of the group, giving the player more agency in decision-making).

Key Mission Two: Cult Hideout

Ideally, there will be another mission or two between the beginning and this mission in which Alste and Rolf split up to look for the signs of the cult that were mentioned in the letter. Once the location of a cult hideout is discovered, this mission begins.

Alste and Rolf arrive at the suspected location of the cult's hideout in the evening. Rolf says that he will stay back and keep a lookout – he was never as skilled at these kinds of tasks. This leaves Alste to attempt to infiltrate the building. The building will have several ways in, including the front door, slipping into a window on the side of the building that was left open, or

accessing the basement by entering the sewer through an access point nearby and entering a secret entryway that the cultists had included in their location. More cultists will be present if the three parasite-possessed soldiers were allowed to live earlier in the game. In this case, overheard dialogue could include mention of a warning to stay on guard from someone higher in command if Alste entered the hideout undetected.

After infiltrating the hideout, the player must search for information about the cult's activity and connections while navigating around the cultists and their protections. The enemies will follow consistent patrol routes and have ambient conversations to be heard by the player that could expand on their goals – the cult wants power, but under the guise of replacing a “complacent” leadership with “stronger” leaders who will be more ruthless. These goals will also be represented in the documents and other environmental details found in the hideout. While the cultists are “supposed” to be evil, environmental details including personal items of the cultists – such as letters from friends or pictures of their families – could help to humanize them and make the player consider their choices carefully. While they are serving a negative purpose, many of them believe they are doing the right thing for the kingdom.

Navigating the hideout leads the player to a larger office-style room. On the desk is a draft of a report, presumably to be sent to someone higher up in the conspiracy. Upon looking up from the letter, a cutscene takes over in which several sets of footsteps and some conversation can be heard. Alste hides, and someone in a fancier uniform than the others that you have seen – presumably the owner of the office – walks in with Advisor Henfrey and multiple extremely tough looking guards (Henfrey is a prominent enough figure to be identifiable. The guards look too strong to fight, justifying the cutscene – attacking would be a “wrong” choice). They discuss

some cult business in the area, and then Henfrey and his guards leave. How the player decides to exit the hideout (and whether they kill the leader of the hideout) is up to them.

Key Mission 3: Advisor Henfrey's Mansion

Eventually (after some in-between missions), Alste and Rolf reach the mansion of Advisor Henfrey. The house is guarded by several other soldiers, and Rolf once again keeps watch while Alste (the player character) must enter to retrieve proof of the advisor's conspiracy. The player can break in, fight, or try to convince the soldiers that they belong there. To convince them successfully, the player needs to have retrieved a fake search warrant from the hideout earlier (used for cult purposes before). Once inside, the key obstacles are traps in the mansion which trigger alarms – enchanted lutes hung throughout the house. These lutes are inconspicuous at first glance, because the advisor is known to be a skilled luthier. When this happens, a search will ensue to find the intruder. Evidence can be found in a few places, including hidden behind a painting, but are protected by traps that must be disarmed. The evidence indicates that the Cult of Hel is planning to make their move for power extremely soon.

After exiting the mansion, a brief cutscene will play where Alste looks to the rooftop where Rolf was watching from, and sees Rolf get grabbed from behind and taken away by a couple of hooded figures.

Key Mission 4: Deliver the Evidence

In the last mission, Alste needs to deliver the evidence to the king's council and reveal Henfrey's treachery. Alste knows that Rolf being discovered and captured will only hurry the actions of the Cult of Hel, requiring the evidence to be delivered as soon as possible. Though Alste is a soldier, most soldiers do not have access to the palace – which is where the king's

council meets. Once again Alste must infiltrate a location, this one being the most secure so far. The nearby soldiers will not stop Alste before she tries to enter the building if she has not been attacking many other soldiers. However, if they have caused a large confrontation – such as at the mansion – she will be attacked on sight. Once inside, the player must get to the meeting room, with many entry points, multiple floors, and environmental details like rafters in high ceilings to offer many gameplay approaches.

Alste gets to the meeting chamber and bursts in to deliver the evidence. Henfrey makes a subtle gesture, and time seems to pause. Alste perceives being in a new space, a room with Advisor Henfrey. He monologues about the purpose of his deception, and ultimately delivers an ultimatum: If Alste presents the evidence, Rolf will be killed. However, if she does not mention it, Henfrey will instead ensure she is freed from prison – she would be brought there for intruding on the meeting – and given status under the kingdom’s new leadership.

Endings

- If the evidence is given, Henfrey is ousted and the plot is foiled. However, Rolf is killed.
 - The council also judges the player’s methods – if the player killed few soldiers and innocent people, they are lauded as a hero. Otherwise, the events are kept secret from the public and Alste is exiled/put on watch.
- If Alste chooses to stay silent, she is initially jailed for trespassing. The cult frees her when they take power, and she is given a position of status. Rolf also lives but is furious with Alste for choosing him over the kingdom.