Cthulhu Saves the World Design Document

Overview:

Retro-style RPG where the main character is Cthulhu from H.P. Lovecraft's mythology. He loses his power and has to go on a quest to regain it. In the process, he saves the world multiple times. Eventually, he regains his power and splits in two – traditional evil Cthulhu and heroic Cthulhu and the player has to lead heroic Cthulhu to save the world from himself. We changed the ending.

Development Goals:

* Release the game in August (development time approximately 3 months). Behind schedule. Probably finish at the end of October. Actually finished in December.
* Increase quality sufficiently from Breath of Death VII to justify a price increase to 240 MS points ($3 USD).
* Increase awareness of Zeboyd Games and our products through improved marketing.

Major improvements and changes from Breath of Death VII:

* Improved graphics (trying for more of an early 16-bit look ala Final Fantasy 4 rather than the enhanced 8-bit NES look of Breath of Death VII) – specific improvements include backgrounds in battles, parallax scrolling in exploration, and more animation.
* Improved music with more songs and a single talented composer for greater unity.
* Improved User Interface with scrolling menus.
* Improved map system with backgrounds and multiple level functions.
* More monsters allowed in battle (variable sizes).
* 7 playable characters (BoDVII had 4). 4 max at a time – additional characters can be switched in at save spots. Actually, we have 7 main characters and 1 extra character in one of the bonus modes. Actually actually, we ended up with just the 7 main characters in the original version, but then we added more characters in the enhanced version.
* Increased accessibility – save ability on world map, retry battle when defeated once (only in Normal mode). Save feature at any time. 1-Up items let you restart a battle if you fail. Teleport back to safe area feature.
* Insanity System – Using certain abilities decrease character and enemy sanity points in battle. When sanity reaches 0, the character or enemy transforms to their insane version (which may be beneficial or detrimental depending on the character/monster and situation). This version turned out to be too complicated (as an indie title, you have to hook the player immediately) and too difficult to balance without drastically increasing development time so we replaced it. Now, insanity is a negative status that you can inflict on enemies (100% success rate) and it decreases their defense, but increases their offense. Also, some characters have abilities that take advantage of insanity, like "+10% Strength for each insane enemy."
* Higher quality hard mode – More interesting difficult adjustments like new monsters rather than just the flat changes in BoDVII. Although accessibility is a big deal with us, we don't want our games to just be for beginners. We're experienced gamers ourselves, so we want players who enjoy a challenge to have fun as well. Hard mode & some of the post-game modes like Score Attack are our way of catering to the people who really want to master the game.
* Increased length – Approximately 50-100% longer than BoDVII. Ignoring bonus game modes which will increase replayability drastically for some players, it'll probably end up being about 33%-50% longer. In actuality, I've heard that it takes about 10 hours for most people to complete so about twice as long as BoDVII.
* Greater depth to combat – more interesting abilities, greater variety of monster arrangements.
* Humor less reliant on references.
* More story & dialogue.
* Ridiculous "Dating Sim" segment(s) between Cthulhu and the heroine. We ended up getting rid of this due to time constraints.
* More interesting and refined implementations of the LV-Up Choice System, the Combo System, and the Random Encounter reduction System from BoDVII.
* More interesting dungeon designs with some simple puzzles or transforming dungeons (like triggers when you approach certain parts of the dungeon like a path closing off).
* Better gameplay balance and difficulty balance.

Target Markets:

RPG fans, fans of Breath of Death VII, retro game fans, indie game fans, people who like a good deal. It is believed that our target markets will not mind the increase in price, assuming that the quality increases to match, since the home console RPG market is underserved.

Gameplay Flow:

1. Underwater Palace of Cthulhu - Begins with control of Cthulhu in his powerful evil state. An easily won battle with a group of heroes serves as an introduction to combat. Basically, let the player have fun being very overpowered right at the start of the game to give them a good demo experience. After the battle, cutscene where it sets up the premise of the game (loses his power, has to regain it). Whole thing should only take a couple minutes (want the player to have some time in the first real dungeon). Some of this stuff got cut – we only have 8 min trials with XBLIG so we want to get them playing ASAP. Actually, all of this got cut.
2. World Map - Game proper begins with weakened Cthulhu (LV5) on an enclosed part of the world map. The only way out is through the first dungeon - the Beach Cliffs Dungeon. Actually, his starting level was lower. And you don't start out on the world map.
3. Beach Cliff Dungeon (Dungeon 1) – Begins with Cthulhu rescuing the heroine and her joining his party. A few forced battles act as tutorials for the Combo system & Insanity system. After that, the player has to go through the actual dungeon – part of it will be on the beach, part of it will be in some caves, and part of it will be on the cliffs w/bridges. This is our big chance to wow the player in the demo so we want to go all out with the visuals and show off our new map code (parallax scrolling of the horizon in the cliffs section, going under bridges showing off our multi-level map system, and just generally good variety with tiles). Music should also be very strong – heroic, energetic, good mood – to make the player more likely to buy the game.
4. World Map - After the Beach Cliff Dungeon, the player makes his way to the 1st town of the game which is not very far away.
5. 1st Town – Townspeople are initially hostile to Cthulhu due to his appearance. In town, the player discovers their next goal – the Shrine of Heroes – which holds a powerful weapon that Cthulhu believes will help him break the seal on his power. We ended scrapping the hostile townsfolk idea.
6. World Map – Travel to the Shrine of Heroes. Moderate distance from the 1st Town. Shrine of Heroes is on an island in the middle of a small lake (lake is surrounded on most sides by mountain), reached from a bridge.
7. Shrine of Heroes (Dungeon 2) – Shrine dungeon with traps (to show off our more dynamic dungeon designs early on). At the end, you discover the shrine holds a powerful sword. However, the sword is sentient and can not be wielded. Cthulhu convinces the sword to join his party (3 characters in party now). Traps got replaced with a lever/door puzzle.
8. World Map – Travel back to the 1st Town.
9. 1st Town – With the heroic floating sword on his team, everyone trusts Cthulhu. Dating sim-esque cutscene in a cafe to trigger the next plot point. Messenger from the 2nd town arrives and tells that the 2nd town has been overrun by zombies and they need someone to save them. Southern bridge has been repaired allowing access to the next town.
10. World Map – Travel to 2nd Town. Primarily southern travel. Rather long journey with the potential for a few wrong turns, almost like a mini-dungeon.
11. 2nd Town (Dungeon 3) – Right after entering town, you rescue the 4th party member (a goth necromancer girl) from a horde of zombies, before running into a safe room with a save/restore spot. Once you leave this room, you can't return. This will be an interesting dungeon to design since it has to serve as both a dungeon and a town. Use rubble and zombie hordes to block off paths and provide alternate lengthier routes that you wouldn't normally be able to access in the dungeon mode to give it a good length. The town itself comes into parts – an eastern part (initial) and a western part (end), separated by a river (this will also serve as a means of letting the player access the next part of the world map). The town feels more advanced than the other towns (more of a modern city). In dungeon mode, we'll put a visual overlay on the map to simulate darkness and maybe rain (we could make a short video with darkness and rain and I could overlay it on the screen with a transparency effect). I think a jazzy soundtrack punctuated with zombie noise might be a good choice for the music. After defeating the zombie boss, the zombie menace is defeated and the town reverts to its normal state. Our world map layout was changed after the design document, so you actually start in the western end of town and end on the eastern end. Also, we thought a modern setting might be too big of a clash with the rest of the game so we lowered it down to simplified steampunk.
12. 2nd town (Not dungeon) – The player has freed the town and is able to take to the townspeople and buy equipment. The player finds out about an alien invasion in the 3rd town and sets forth, thinking that the aliens will have all sorts of powerful technology that might break the seal. You don't find out about the alien invasion until later.
13. World Map – The player continues on the world map from the western part of the 2nd town. In order to get to the next town, the player has to go through the ghost forest.
14. Ghost Forest (4th dungeon) – This is a relatively short dungeon compared to the others. Trees, bushes, rivers, boulders, tombstones, and cliffs. Think advanced Graveyard Mountain pass tileset, but with more trees. Mist effect on screen. Mysterious music.
15. World Map – After the Ghost Forest, it's not much farther to reach the 3rd town.
16. 3rd town - Small hick town. Equipment and information.
17. World Map – Travel to the ranch (very close to town).
18. Ranch – Wait 'til nightfall by the cattle. Alien ship pulls up cattle with a tractor beam along with your party.
19. Alien Ship (5th dungeon) – When the aliens discover your party, they throw you in a containment cell. You are rescued by an alien cat who disagrees with the rest of the aliens plans to destroy the planet. Alien cat joins the party (5th party member). Think more sophisticated laboratory dungeon from Breath of Death VII for tileset (less mazy though). Sci-fi sounding music. See planet below as background when exploring. Alien ship crashes when you beat the dungeon.
20. World Map – Alien Ship crashes into a river, creating a path to a new part of the world map. Travel to next town.
21. 4th Town – This town is ransacked by poiso*n*. Nearby shrine is said to contain powerful healing water deep within its depths. Cthulhu sets out thinking that healing water could restore his powers.
22. Water Shrine (6th Dungeon) – Water themed shrine. A priest seeking the healing water is at the entrance and joins your party (6th party member). Some puzzle elements, pushing buttons to lower and raise water level, for example. Healing water does not heal Cthulhu but does save town.
23. World Map – With the village healed, you can take a ferry to the next part of the world map and to the next town.
24. 5th Town – This town is being threatened by a volcano. A powerful demon is said to be at the bottom.
25. Volcano (7th Dungeon) – Fire dungeon. Fire background. Start at top, work your way down the floors. Tough dungeons, a bit of a maze, not really any puzzles. Not sure what kind of music. After defeating the boss at the end, the town is saved and the boss (a dragon) joins the team. Actually, we reversed it – you start in a cave at the bottom of the volcano and you climb up. The last map is outside on the volcano rim (so that we can make a Dragon Quest III intro reference).
26. World Map – Can use dragon to fly around on the world map. This allows access to the last town/dungeon as well as some optional content.
27. 6th Town – This town is located on a small island and is filled with members of the cult of Cthulhu. Turns out this cult was responsible for all of the disasters that have befallen the world so far. Cthulhu attacks their headquarters under the premise of stopping their evil, but he actually wants to see if they can restore his power. We changed this drastically – this town is now Innsmouth to fit in more with Lovecraft. When you get there, your party members say you should stay in the Inn. You're attacked there in a parody of the inn scene in The Shadow over Innsmouth. Turns out the cult here used to be fans of Cthulhu, but they've ditched him for Dagon. In anger you go to the adjacent dungeon – the Innsmouth Marsh Gold Foundry.
28. Cult Headquarters (8th Dungeon) – When you first get here, you're brought in to see the leader of the cult (no battles). There, the cult leader uses magic to unlock Cthulhu's power. As Cthulhu regains his power, he splits into two – evil Cthulhu and heroic Cthulhu. Heroic Cthulhu and your party members are thrown in prison and evil Cthulhu goes off to enslave the world. Escape the prison is the 8th dungeon. Enhanced Castle/Prison dungeon tileset. Probably use the Evil Foreboding music as the dungeon music. Innsmouth Marsh Gold Factory dungeon – This map is heavily inspired by the Magitech factory in Final Fantasy VI. 1-way conveyer belts make the maze a bit more complex than normal. At the end of each floor, there's a switch that will turn off the conveyer belts to make backtracking for treasure easier. At the end of the dungeon, there's a shrine to Dagon. You kill Dagon, thus becoming a true hero and regaining your powers. At this point, the player has a choice – plunge the world into insanity (Ending 1) or listen to his party members and spare the world. If you choose to spare the world, a new threat arises - R'lyeh rises from the ocean depths and you have to go and stop the inhabitants thereon from destroying the world.
29. World Map – Darkness overlay on the graphics to show the evil state that the world has fallen into. Cthulhu's palace has risen from the sea and is the final dungeon.
30. Cthulhu's Watery Dungeon (9th dungeon) – Octopus/Tentacle theme. Writhing walls and tentacles appear to block some possible routes when you near them. For music, I think something like the final dungeon theme in Lunar: Eternal Blue would work well – foreboding but with a sense of hope (Here's a link to the song - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sGvDi54VbBA>). Defeat the evil Cthulhu and the game is won. R'lyeh dungeon – You fight your way through R'lyeh. At the end, you find a Golem-Cthulhu who is in charge. Defeat Golem-Cthulhu and the true enemy is uncovered – Azathoth – who you fight in any area similar to the ending of Final Fantasy IV (crystal floor in space).
31. Post-game – After beating Cthulhu and saving the world, there will be a ? chapter just like in Breath of Death VII where the player can go do optional content that they didn't finish before the game. Also, additional game modes like Score Attack will unlock.
32. Optional – Like Breath of Death VII, there will be various optional mini-dungeons scattered around the world map with treasures.

Post-Game Modes:

Score Attack – Like Breath of Death VII, get more points with low LV characters

Highlander – Only 1 character in party for gameplay (Cthulhu). Cthulhu gains XP and LVs at an accelerated rate.

Overkill – Monsters give drastically more XP & gold. Super easy mode for people who want to replay but don't want a challenge.

Remake – Play through the game with a few changes here and there (like a different monster setup in a dungeon or changed treasure chests). This mode turned into Cthulhu's Angels – a mode where instead of the normal plot, Cthulhu is really lazy and sends 4 girls to try to restore his powers without him. October is the lead character, with Elona the healer in second and possessed Umi as the third. The third character is not in the main game – Molly the Were-Zompire from my e-book of the same name.

Characters:

Cthulhu – Evil, insane, and wants to save the world. He learns the value of friendship, love, and heroism during his journey to regain his power. He's strong overall with a mix of just about everything and is also the only character who is always in insane mode. Tentacle face. Humanoid body. Wields a sword. Considered making him wield a whip to go in with the tentacle theme.

Umi – Weird and quirky heroine. Loves the ocean and the creatures within. Has a crush on Cthulhu. Girl next door look. Long skirt & modest shirt. Starfish in long blue hair. More than a little crazy. Cutesy. Hybrid character who specializes in status effects with a little healing and direct damage spells. Good at reducing sanity in allies & enemies. Wields a trident.

Sharpe – Sentient floating sword. Black bushy eyebrows and a mouth on the blade. Has a noble knight sort of personality. Strong physical fighter who specializes in raising the combo meter. Can't purchase equipment – instead, he gains new "equipment" via LVing up. Scrapped the evolve equipment idea and just gave him blades & hilts as equipment.

October - Goth girl. Black hair. Skulls. Whip. Very pessimistic personality. The attack mage of the group. Wields a whip. Didn't go with the pessimistic personality in the end.

Paws – Alien Cat. Looks like a normal cat, but when angry or insane mode, looks like something out of Parasyte manga (skin stretching and distorting to form weapons). Intelligent personality but sometimes says strange alien things. Fastest character. Gameplay style varies drastically depending on mode – in sane mode, more of a healing, support character; in insane mode, more of a warrior type. Wields gun claws. Obviously the sane/insane mode isn't applicable to the finished version since we scrapped that idea for player characters.

Dacre – Priest. Stuffy, know-it-all type. Wants to talk the party into doing what's right but lacks the charisma to convince people to follow him. Best healer of the group, with some strong holy attacks, and buffs. Wields a staff. Ended up making him senile.

Ember – Dragon. Big, strong, slow. Craves destruction, but not actually evil (destroying bad guys is just fine). Powerful special attacks, but low MP to use them. Wields magical breath mints. Finished version of the game, he doesn't have equipment.

Molly the Were-Zompire. Only playable in the Cthulhu's Angels mode. She was just a normal grad student when one day, a portal to another world appeared. She entered and was immediately killed by a werewolf, zombie, and vampire thus turning into the world's first were-zompire. To control her dark powers, she went on a quest for enlightenment and became a Paladin. Depending on which LV-Ups the player chooses for her, she could end up as several very different combat style as far as gameplay goes.

Music (Tournament got switched to Big City) –

Battle – Regular

Battle - Boss (Already Done)

Battle - Victory Theme (After Winning. Gaining XP, Gold, and LV-Up)

World Map

Town - Village (Already Done)

Town - Big City

Evil Foreboding (Story)

Heroine Theme (Story)

Sense of Adventure/Hero (Story)

Dungeon - Mountain Theme (First Dungeon = Seaside Mountain)

Dungeon - Zombie Infested Town

Dungeon - Space Ship

Dungeon - Shrine

Dungeon - Volcano

Dungeon - Cthulhu Underwater Palace (Final Dungeon)

Dungeon - Cave

Dungeon – Forest

Several additional songs were added as we needed them - Battle Special, Battle Retro, Dungeon Retro (for the Breath of Death throwback hidden dungeon), Final Boss, and Gold Foundry.

Also, some custom music for an opening movie (before the title screen) or a game trailer might be a good idea, however, it would be best to wait for the visuals for said movie/trailer to be done so that everything matches up (sort of a music video sort of thing). The song used could be a modified version of a song or songs in the actual game.