

## SECOND CHANCE - EVALUATION

Second chance was, above everything else, an attempt to revive the hotseat gaming genre. Most gamers would agree that the amount of entertainment generally increases exponentially, as more people play in the same room. There used to be an incredible amount of games that allowed people to do this in the past, but the numbers have diminished with the PC becoming the gaming computer. Playing games started to be accepted as a solitary act with no socializing involved. However, this has not always been the case. Games used to be there for bringing people together. Games being viewed as an addiction is also partly due to this. It is one thing to meet with a few friends every day to play, and another thing to sit in your room by yourself every day and play games. Maybe with other people, online. But it doesn't make a difference from an outsider's perspective.

Thus, Second Chance wanted to break this commonly accepted "fact", by being a game that focuses on social interactions between players. For starters, the game can only be played if you have a friend around. There is no singleplayer mode. There is no way to play it with the AI. Additionally, the players rely on each other to survive. Most secret rooms and bonuses need to be unlocked by your partner before you can use them. In addition, any mistakes you make have their toll on your partner. This forces the players to cooperate. Players will need to hone their social skills to get better at playing the game. Communication skills, most importantly.

In addition, the game setting serves a different purpose. It helps promote "temporal awareness", or the ability for players to understand long term effects of their choices, and their place in the "big picture", the 4 dimensional one. It is quite educational in cause-effect relationships, as players see an effect in one timeline, and need to figure out what caused it in the other. This tries to make the game more than a hack and slash, for players who want more depth out of the game. However, the option to play a more combat oriented short action game is still there.

This is one of the focuses of Second Chance - flexible gameplay. Multiple game modes to accommodate many types of gamers. If gameplay tries to appease everyone with a single game mode, it needs to make compromises, and does not give a player everything he wants, in order to make other players happy as well. In addition, the settings are all configurable. This includes key mappings, screen layouts, sound setup and basically everything else in the game that is part of the interface. A hardcore player can completely customize his way of interaction, to make it more intuitive for himself. However, a beginner would be more than happy with the default settings. Proper categorization of options menus make sure a beginner does not get swamped by an overwhelming amount of details, when, say, he just wants to turn up the volume a little.

While the game offers depth for hardcore gamers, it is hidden, and a beginner can simply play the game without worrying about the details. A player can thus choose when to play, and when to learn more of the game. This helps ease the learning curve, and more importantly makes the game playable for people at all locations of the curve. This is further improved by the fact that game areas are separate, so players of different skill levels will be playing quite evenly. The experienced player will be able to support his friend a lot better, meaning there will be one good player with poor support, and one poor player with good support. Thus, the worse player will not get frustrated from his friend doing all the work, he will still have a part to play.

The "Join In" feature is something that was worked on a lot. Many problems surface in multiplayer games with a progressing story. One such problem is the character restrictions. In many games, once a game is started, the characters are set, and new characters can not join.

This makes it hard to finish the game, as the entire scenario needs to be played by the same two people. Other games however, allow anyone to join in whenever they want, with different characters. Generally, arcade games do this best. One such problem with this join-in-progress feature in some games, is that the person who got replaced will stay behind in levels, and will not be able to play with his friend later on, because of the level gap. This however, is irrelevant in *Second Chance*, as explained in the previous paragraph.

Another issue is saving progress. Most games associate characters to saved games, making it problematic for new players to join. Some of the better games save the characters, but still allow the players to switch to a different character when he loads the game. Additionally, some games autosave on key locations, like the beginning of each chapter, or subchapter, to increase replayability. So players can choose to hop in to a chapter in the middle to go through an entertaining fight again, or repeatedly go through the final chapter to replay the most challenging fights and earn more experience.

Last but not least, allowing players to replay chapters is pointless, if the chapters do not scale in difficulty depending on the player character's level. On the other hand, the scaling should not be too noticeable, or it takes away the feeling of accomplishment from the player, as he never actually gets "stronger". Some of the better games increase the difficulty in broad levels, so the player keeps getting better and better, and after a certain threshold, he passes to the next difficulty.

By taking all these observations and combining them together, the "join in" feature was created. Any character can join, chapters get unlocked, levels scale with difficulty. That is basically what principles the feature is based on.

*Second Chance* aimed to do as much as possible with a minimal amount of resources. This was to prove the quality of gameplay is not related to the budget at all. There is no need to choose between graphics and gameplay, and there is no reason a game can't have both. That was what the design aimed to communicate to the publishers.

The Nintendo DS is a great platform for small hotseat game development. Its popularity made game development for it appealing for publishers, which in turn opened up opportunities for fledgling companies to show what they are capable of creating, on a small budget. Its download play feature is one of the best methods of flexibility offered to players looking for multiplayer gaming, and its dual screen was also perfect for *Second Chance*.

One of the most important ways of creating the demand for a sequel is to have a compelling story on the first game. That is one of the reasons *Second Chance* tries to have a well thought out story with a few twists in unexpected places. One of the reasons the main character is not referred to by his name is to preserve the suspension of disbelief. In addition, some parts of the metagame fit the theme of the game itself: The way a player can play random levels from different segments of the story, and eventually try to finish the gaps in between to make sense out of the story, is quite similar to the process the character has flashbacks and remembers memories from different time periods throughout the story. Playing some levels a few times in a row might make the player feel like they are in a loop, similar to how the main character realizes he is stuck in a loop at the end of the story.

Overall, *Second Chance* aims to offer original content and a social game experience. However, the biggest challenge is to actually get this content into the hands of the gamers. Without a reasonable budget, a game can never be developed fully. Yet persuading a publisher to accept a game with unique settings and gameplay is difficult. Thus, even though the game design itself might be highly innovative, what are the chances of the project getting enough funding to make itself heard?