



Final Hurdle

by Brad Buchanan

Hello from BarrelEye! We've had a wildly busy week on Torch as we push toward November 20th, when we will turn our game over to our client for evaluation. The game is definitely coming together, and we are now pushing content in as fast as we can and trying to fix any bugs that hurt the player experience.

Our week started with a playtest, as members of our client's team visited our workspace to try the game in its current state. We still find ourselves missing some of the important sounds and animations that communicate to the player, so we had some comments that combat was confusing, or people didn't notice the boss' HP bar. The feedback is always helpful because it tells us what sort of feedback players are expecting, and we can work on those elements first in the limited time we have left. Not all of our feedback was negative though – the client expressed pleasant surprise at how far we've come since we last demoed the game to them at halves.

Some of the key feedback we

received came from Rich Hilleman, Chief Creative Officer at EA. He suggested that we swap out the coins in the game for actual arrows pointing players in the right direction. Because we were using the coins for indirect control but they had no other obvious effect on gameplay, they were confusing to players. With the arrows we are using direct control and removing the confusion. We've implemented that change and are working on several others.

In addition to small changes like that, much of our week was consumed either adding character animations to the game or fighting with the technology! At this point our artists have created lots of content but the programmers only have so much time to put it into the game. We've done what we can to speed this process up, even writing a tool to simplify the import.

The new art goes hand-in-hand with some our technical issues though, as we have started hitting the video memory limits on the TV. Our programmers spent consid-

erable time adjusting our code to manage resources more efficiently, and make sure we only load the images that we need at any one time. This hasn't been easy, since by design the TV represents the "world map" view of our game, and shows lots of different characters at once – we've had to downscale some art to compensate.

Finally, we're putting together a whole cutscene system to allow us to script events that communicate more effectively to the player. This is a work in progress, and most of our cutscenes will have to be finished this weekend!

The team is ready for crunch time to be over, but we have a busy weekend ahead of us before we get to leave for Thanksgiving break. After that, we're ready to get back to a regular pace. Thanks for sticking with us through this process – Torch is turning into an impressive game, and we can't wait to show it again!