

Design Consistency

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Diagnosis



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Introduction

The objective of the Diagnosis

This phase is the first step in the “Design Consistency” analysis. It is the first time the game is tested and the gameplay mechanics are used. Its aim is to collect the first spontaneous impressions facing the game, controller in hand, and to highlight potential discrepancies and flaws felt. Conversely, this phase also allows to highlight the game’s strong points.

These points are then discussed with the studio and put into perspective with the game design elements and original intentions to validate if they are real discrepancies, deserving particular attention during the Design Deepening phase. This discussion could also reveal elements that were missed during the test.

In light of and after this discussion, the studio is provided with this written report of the test and a quote for the possible Design Deepening phase that may follow this Diagnosis.

Test conditions

The Diagnosis was performed on the 2.1.00.beta version of “Fallback”. This version includes the future “Uprising” update of the game. This is not the first time that the game is tested by XPLoading. The goal of this Diagnosis is to analyse the changes that will be brought to “Fallback” by this update and to put them into perspective with the previously tested versions.

The test lasted 8 hours and was carried out on a PC with a PS4 controller. The language was French, the game was full screen, in high quality and the difficulty was “Classic”. VSync was disabled.

Three classes of characters were played, the Sapper, the Seismologist and the Technophobe. The Foundry was completed once, the heart of the Rift too, and the first door of the Old entrance to Eden was opened.

Results

These results will present the understanding of mechanics, the goal and the experience that "Fallback" wants to convey in order to define the point of view that was adopted to carry out this analysis. In light of these elements, a formulation of the promise of the gaming experience made by "Fallback" to its players will be suggested. Thus, the observations resulting from the test session will be distributed according to their impact, positive or negative, on this promise.

To facilitate the writing of the results, the described feelings, and subsequent interpretations on game design are considered true and turned into assertions. As "Fallback" has already been tested by XPLoading, in a previous version and in a different way than the present analysis (in particular, no Diagnosis was performed on the previous version of "Fallback"), the feelings, interpretations and elements of comparison resulting from the previous test are also considered true.

To distinguish between the two versions, the previously tested version will be called "Fallback" and the version currently tested in this analysis will be called "Uprising".

Understanding of "Uprising"

Lore and narration

"Uprising" presents a world where humans take refuge underground, in a place they have called the Eden, because the surface has been destroyed by mankind and its survival is no longer possible out there. These humans are part of a rebellion against robots, with a will of their own, that prevent humans from returning to the surface to bring a technology enabling them to live there again. These robots were created by the Vesta corporation to help humans to live in the Eden. Having heard about this technology and the plan of humans to return to the surface, the robots turned against their creators, enslaved and imprisoned them in the tunnels. The technology discovered is a plant. We incarnate a new member of the rebellion, called "Bearer of the Plant" (called "BP" in the rest of this document), whose mission is to travel through the different districts of the Eden to bring, by force, the plant he carries with him to the surface and save humanity. He must free the rebel leaders on his way to help him in his mission. It is the second attempt of the rebellion to reach the surface, the first having failed and forcing the rebels to move in the very depths of the Eden, where they cannot be found by the robots. The lore between "Fallback" and "Uprising" has not changed. The game was not finished during the test, an end cinematic was present in "Fallback", it was not seen for "Uprising", so it is not possible to say if it is still present or if it has been modified.

The lore and the universe of "Uprising" are highly developed : they are exposed in the first 10 minutes of the game, through cinematics and dialogues with NPCs. The lore is omnipresent and regularly recalled in the game through its narration: we can discuss with the rebels and those we free in the game and the great majority of the dialogues remind this situation of imprisonment and the liberation that it would be to reach the surface. It also seems that these humans have created a religion/belief in this environment, referring to

"The Great/Holy Surface", swearing by "the depths" and giving a providential status to our character by celebrating his coming as the "Bearer of the Plant".

These elements put the player in a uchronic and dystopian universe that is very present and meaningful for the game experience, taking up codes that exist nowadays and depicting a potential anticipation of the future of today's Earth in terms of the consequences of current environmental and societal issues. The atmosphere created by the universe is dark and hostile. Players can easily identify themselves in this world.

Menus

Title screen and main menu: the visual is simple, it sets the atmosphere of the game and suggests the lore elements and the objective to be reached in the game. The sub-menus that can be opened are clearly identified. "Fallback" got the same screen.

"Options" menu: the modifiable options are clear, sufficient in number, easy to modify and all useful. "Fallback" got the same screen.

"Difficulty choices" menu: is useful and gives a foretaste of the incoming challenge. It did not exist in "Fallback".

"Pause" menu: allows modification of the same options as the "Options" menu on the title screen, gives access to the game credits and to exit the game directly to the desktop. "Fallback" got the same screen.

"Skills" menu: accessible at the rebel base. It presents the technology tree. This menu is different from the one in "Fallback": the skills path is not the same shape, there are less skills, they are not all the same and it was not possible to upgrade a skill unlocked in "Fallback".

"Equipment" menu: accessible in run, it shows the specificity of each class through the first module on the left and displays the modules purchased during the runs. "Fallback" got the same screen.

"Skills [class]" menu: accessible from the "Equipment" menu by pressing the "Next" or "Back" button. It allows to unlock and upgrade skills specific to each class, to unlock new attacks and new classes. This menu did not exist in "Fallback".

"Module station" menu: accessible in run, it is used to buy modules modifying the BP's characteristics or giving him bonuses. "Fallback" got the same screen.

Character selection menu: accessible after dying during a run in the Eden. It shows each class by its name, level, basic characteristics and a description of its specificity. It is used to choose a BP class for the next run. It is different from the one present in "Fallback": the screen is entirely dedicated to the presentation of one class at a time, the skins have been modified and levels did not exist in "Fallback".

Replayability potential: the menus themselves, mainly the "Skills" and "Skills [class]" menus, suggest a high replayability potential (skills that can be upgraded to level 50, additional classes to be unlocked, without knowing how many).

The gameplay

Game genre: action, platformer, roguelite, RPG.

Camera: mostly side view, moves in 3D.

Graphic design: 3D, realistic.



Level design: 2,5D.

Gameplay loops and game structure: "Uprising" having roguelite mechanics, the game sessions are cut into runs, with specific gameplay loops during and between runs. A run ends when the BP dies. The gameplay loops and the game structure were the same in "Fallback".

- During runs (in the Eden): move the BP in a chunk, destroy the robots on his way by attacking them with his sword (to get collectibles) and evade traps/obstacles so as not to die, buy modules in the module stations in the chunks, upgrade his class skills, move on to the next chunk. Each chunk fits into a district. In each district there is a chunk with a teleporter leading to a closed room with a boss to defeat in order to reach another teleporter to the next district and so on until the end of the game.
- Between runs (at the rebel base): choose his BP class, buy or upgrade skills from the technology tree and enter the Eden to start a new run.

Game mechanics:

- The basic characteristics of the BP classes: each class has 4 characteristics: its damage, its health, its critical chance and its shield. Each class also has a reserve of fury. The value in yellow below "100%" varies depending on the class. It is not explained why. Fury did not exist in "Fallback".
- BP's movements: move in all directions in 2D, jump and double jump, roll or propel himself forward in the air (allows him to pass through enemies and makes him invincible during the time of the action), hold on to interactive elements (indicated in yellow and by an arrow).
- The dodge: making a precise roll at the moment when an enemy should hit the BP triggers a dodge which seems to slow down the enemy and give an opportunity to attack him more easily.
- The basic attack: accessible from the beginning of the game, usable without restrictions, it is used to do basic damage to the robots and to raise the fury.

- Critical hits: is triggered by making a basic attack, according to its critical chance. Deals more damages than the basic attack.
- Destroy robots: enemies have a life bar, attacking them with the basic attack does damage, enemies are destroyed when their life bar reaches 0.
- Collectibles: destroying enemies releases 4 different collectibles:
 - Vesta energy
 - some  (called "chips" in the rest of this document)
 - some  (called "experience points" in the rest of this document)
 - some health points
- To free prisoners: used to collect chips, 1 chip per freed prisoner.
- The technology tree: accessible in the rebel base, it allows to unlock and upgrade BP skills, passively active during runs in the Eden, by spending the Vesta collected in run.
- The modules: accessible in the Eden, in the module stations. At the beginning, there are 3 modules per station. These modules are purchased with the chips, have an increasing value according to their rarity (from 1 to 3 chips) and are only kept for the current run. Up to 9 modules can be purchased. Wanting to buy a new module requires the players to replace an existing module with the new one. They confer passive bonuses to the basic characteristics of the BP class. The modules have levels (from 1 to 5), the higher the level the more powerful the bonus conferred and they can be purchased directly or to replace a lower level module. These modules are very varied, some of them complement one another, so that the players can choose the build they want to create. The same mechanic was present in "Fallback", the pictograms were different. In "Uprising", opening a module station gives experience points.
- BP class levels: the experience gained by destroying robots fills a bar and increases the experience point counter (visible at the bottom of the UI), when the bar is filled/the counter reach the necessary value, the BP class gains one level and one XP

point, and so on up to the maximum level (which is not known). These level and XP mechanics did not exist in "Fallback".

- BP class skills: XP points earned are used to buy and upgrade BP class skills. These skills are passive bonuses, a secondary attack, an ultimate attack and a new BP class (the total number of classes was not discovered during the test). Each class has its own set of skills, making each class unique.
- The secondary attack: usable without restrictions, it does not deal damage directly but inflicts secondary effects to the enemies (some effects can cause damage). Secondary attack did not exist in "Fallback".
- The ultimate attack: provides an exceptional bonus (ex: invulnerability) and/or does more damage than the basic attack. Using it consumes the fury, the percentage of fury and the yellow value below decrease at the same time. Ultimate attack did not exist in "Fallback".
- Shield recharge: when the shield value reaches 0, after a few seconds without taking any damage, it automatically recharges completely.
- The life and death of the BP: robots and traps/obstacles deal damage to the BP. This damage is deducted from the shield value and then from the health value of the BP. The BP dies when his health value reaches 0. He can randomly regain health by destroying robots (indicated by a green number above the BP after having taken the cure).
- The rage: some modules allow to gain rage. This did not exist in "Fallback" and therefore seems to be a new mechanic.
- The random generation: the chunks' arrangement, the chunks, traps/obstacles, access to prisoners, modules, enemies, level design of the chunks are randomly generated.

New features of "Uprising":

- The "puzzle" chunks: make a clear break in the exploration of the districts, inviting to solve puzzles of execution and rythm/dexterity, of logic or to defeat a wave of enemies. Solving these chunks gives access to an underground room offering an exceptional reward in collectible or module.
- The districts' hearts: the entrance to the districts' hearts is in a dedicated chunk, these chunks can be discovered while exploring a district, but are closed. They are unlocked once the district is completed and are accessible in the next runs. They have the same structure and gameplay loops as the "classic" districts. The enemies are more powerful, so the hearts are more difficult. Bosses at the end of the hearts are the original bosses of "Fallback". After defeating a boss of a district's heart, an NPC is released. This NPC is essential to finish the game because he will open the doors to the surface when the player reaches the Old entrance to Eden.
- Doors that close: passages of some chunks are "traps" where doors close behind and before the BP with one or more enemies with him. The progression is blocked and the doors reopen when the enemies are all destroyed.
- The level design: many of the chunks in "Uprising" are different from those in "Fallback". They are more labyrinthine and many have a more vertical architecture.
- The new enemies: the enemies in the districts have been modified, as well as the bosses at the end of the districts. They seem to have less health points than in "Fallback" and are therefore easier to destroy.
- The "treasures": there are treasures hidden in the chunks or accessible after a platform phase that may require taking risks. Destroying these treasures offers a reward in collectibles.
- The teleporters: they lead to isolated chunks where there is an inevitable fight with a powerful enemy and prisoners to be freed. There may also be treasure.
- The "regenerative spheres": at the end of a district boss, there is a sphere that gives a great deal of health back to the BP.
- The abandoned district: directly accessible from the rebel base. The abandoned district has not been tested.

- The end of run bonus: when a run ends, at the Old entrance to Eden, a table displays a score depending on chips, Vesta and XPs and a chest full of Vesta and experience points is present. It is not explained whether the table and the content of the chest are related.

Skills required by the players: observation, reflexes, resource management and decision-making, memorising, logic, perseverance, patience, being strategic.

Objectives of the game: to make the players want to master and evolve the different classes of BP to find their favorite one; to test, create and try to reproduce a powerful build and learn enemies' patterns to succeed in going through all the districts to finish the game. Play again to visit the abandoned district, reach the highest possible class and skill levels and unlock Steam achievements ("Fallback"'s achievements were already unlocked, it is not mentioned if "Uprising" will add new successes). Try to complete all districts in one run.

Players' rewards: watch the end-game cinematic (if there is one), the satisfaction of the "100% completion", a feeling of mastery and power facing the game, a more fluid and more assertive progression in the districts.

The promise of gaming experience for players

“In a dark and hostile world, where the stupidity of mankind has forced them to take refuge underground to survive, fight to get back to the surface and repair the mistakes of the previous generations !

The struggle will be fierce, master your favorite rebel, persevere, you will know these depths like no one else and save humanity !”

Observations on the game

What goes against the promise

- The use of XP and the existence of the "Skills [class]" menu are never introduced, which raises questions about this mechanic

As it stands, finding out how to use the XP is left to chance and the curiosity of the players, whereas this mechanic alone allows the unlocking of new classes of BP. But having the choice among several classes to find our favorite is at the heart of the promise of gaming experience that "Uprising" wants to offer and the studio's communication around the update (cf. the front cover of this report). The lack of explanation about XP, whose existence is clearly introduced in the tutorial at the beginning of the game with a first level rise and XP gain, puts the player in a state of dissonance: the game suggests that it is a useful element. In the unknown of its use, the players will intuitively look for an explanation in what appears, visually via the UI, the most obvious (ex: the chips, the cure number that appears after destroying an enemy) and be in the position of investigators, questioning the presence of this mechanic and being diverted from the game experience.

In this case, where "Fallback" and the other classes of BP with their own specificities had already been tested and were expected to be rediscovered in this analysis, the discovery of the "Skills [class]" menu was an illumination and a relief.

Moreover, once the mechanic is understood, many questions about the other mechanics of "Uprising" disappeared. For example, it is understood how the Sapper can ignite enemies and the interest of using the module that does more damage to ignited enemies.

Other negative criticisms

- Sector fights can be more complicated than boss fights

This provides a contrast that may seem surprising when you have more difficulty getting to the boss than destroying it.

- The mechanic of "The rage" is not explained

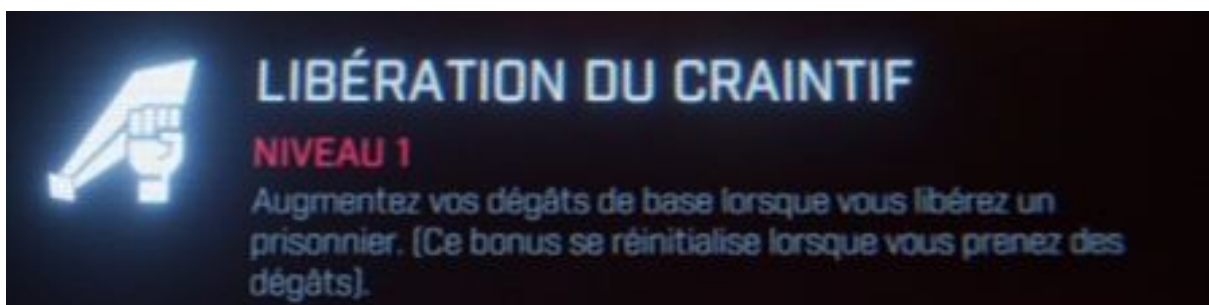
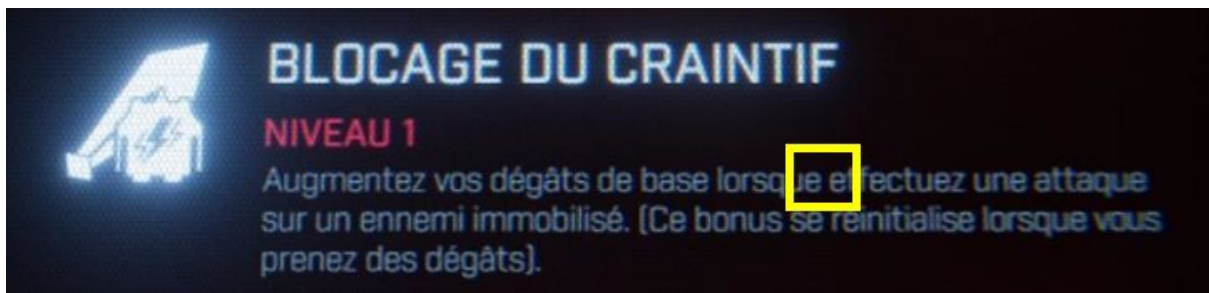
In some modules, a "rage" gain is mentioned, but the word "rage" is not used elsewhere in the game. Also, being able to "gain rage" suggests having different amounts of rage, so one would expect to find a gauge/counter somewhere that indicates that amount, but it is not explicitly present.

- The bar and the experience counter and the reminder of the different attacks are always displayed on the UI

The UI of "Uprising" is rather minimalist, these elements are more ostentatious than the other elements of the UI and load it with information that is not essential to have permanently on the screen.

- There are spelling mistakes and imprecise meanings in the texts

The modules "God of War" and "Block/Precision/Fearful Parasite" have faults (see screenshots); Wyanda mentions that "rebellion has become resistance", but she presents herself as the leader of the rebellion and there is no more mention of resistance in the rest of the game; the functioning of the "Release of the Fearful" module seems to be not very intuitive.



- The effect of the characteristic enhancements unlocked in the technology tree is not visible on the character selection screen

Players could expect to see, in numbers, the effects of changes in basic characteristics as early as the class selection screen to see the impact of the changes. This

absence may be disappointing (for example: the chance of criticism always remains, visually, at 0 even though we know we have increased it).

- The system for saving the game/continuing the game is not clear

Saving is automatic, but we don't know when it is done during the game, the file names are not editable and loading a previous game often restarts the beginning cinematic, making us think that we are starting a new game.

- The "Pause" menu is not intuitive and does not give the possibility to return to the title screen

The "Exit" option of this menu makes a direct return to the desktop, even when selected during a run, and it is unusual to be able to show the credits in game and not on the title screen.

- The mentions "[cross], [circle] etc..." give an impression of an incomplete game

It's unusual as a display and makes you think you are seeing written code directly in the game.

- We cannot always see well below or above the BP, which does not allow us to anticipate the obstacles we are heading towards

"Uprising" being a game where the traps are deadly, not seeing where you're heading sometimes leads to unpleasant surprises.

- Boss district end cure does not fully heal

Like the previous remark, starting a new sector with all his health in "Uprising" would help to calm down the players.

- The data in the bonus reward table in "The Old entrance to Eden" is unclear

We can see that the chips, the Vesta and the XP are taken into account, but the calculation is not explicit.

What keeps the promise

- The universe of "Uprising" is completely coherent, at all levels

The narration and the lore of "Uprising" are highly developed, maintained throughout the game, and the choices of artistic direction (visual and sound) perfectly complement the writing, down to the smallest details (example : the unique designs of the BP classes with the metallic and luminous elements, the depth of field in the chunks showing vast and industrial environments, the speakings of the humans with gas masks that can be heard blurred and incomprehensible for the players, the music played on the radio in the rebel base that gives a retro/steampunk effect reminiscent of games like "Bioshock" or "Fallout" that take place in similar uchronic/dystopian universes. The lyrics of this music seem to mention the word "Fallback").

Level design is also at the service of this universe, with chunks having very vertical and labyrinthine architectures (reinforcing the feeling of anguish and loss in these hostile undergrounds).

Even before starting to play, by choosing its difficulty and reading the associated comments, the game gives a foretaste of the challenge that awaits the players.

- The difficulty curve is balanced

The evolution of the difficulty in the districts is progressive and does not make death unfair. A peak of difficulty is still felt at "The Foundry". This evolution is due to clever game design and level design choices, as they bring more diversity to the game (example: different enemies and attack patterns, more and more labyrinthine chunks as you move through the districts).

- The handling of the BP is pleasant

The BP has a rich set of movements, the climbing/hanging up on edges is fluid, camera movements follow the BP at an adequate speed. Taking together, it gives a nice and fluid character to move.

- The routes in the same chunk, between two runs, are different

The arrangement of the different elements composing the chunks changes between runs, bringing additional diversity and maintaining the pleasure of playing.

- There are more replay elements and they are interconnected

Compared to "Fallback", "Uprising" adds replayability elements with class skills that have a direct connection to the modules during the runs and the technology tree skills. As the technology tree skills directly improve the characteristics of the BP on future runs, the need to upgrade them, and thus redo runs, is rewarding and not burdensome.

The hearts of the districts are also part of these elements and one is obliged to solve them all to finish the game.

Other positive criticisms

- The artworks and parallax used in the cinematics scenes give a very nice effect
- The character selection screen is better than in "Fallback" by highlighting the design of the classes
- The game is translated into many different languages
This allows a global diffusion of the game and shows an effort of inclusion.

Summary of the Diagnosis

The "Uprising" update of the game "Fallback" deeply modifies the original version of the game, for the better: the strong points already present in "Fallback" are reinforced and the weak points are corrected.

The most striking evolutions are the significant increase in the lifespan with the addition of numerous mechanics inviting replayability, in addition to the roguelite style of the game which, by essence, implies replayability. "Fallback" becomes a game with a more coherent and developed scenario and atmosphere, taking a strong part in the game experience. The situation experienced by humans underground is shared and lived by the players, who will find in "Fallback" a challenge of mastery and perseverance which, before being rewarded by the end of the game, is already rewarded by the art direction and game design. The design consistency of "Fallback" is not to be proven.

The experience, during the first hours of the game, will be tarnished by this lack of explanation about the level gains, which is highly questionable, as they are so much in evidence. Also by the writing mistakes here and there, few but enough to make you react when you come across them.

"Fallback" is thus presented as a game primarily aimed at an action-playing audience with a midcore/hardcore profile, which was already the case before the "Uprising" update.

Small test souvenir

There is more pleasant as a test souvenir, but it is still useful: a slightly frustrating bug has been found ;)

<https://youtu.be/8Mo4PGwkaNE>

The logo graphic consists of several overlapping, semi-transparent light green shapes arranged in a circular pattern around a central point. In the center, there is a cluster of black and lime green geometric shapes, including triangles and rectangles, some of which are overlapping. The word "ENDROAD" is positioned below this central graphic.

ENDROAD