

Creating Levels for Action Henk

During the first two weeks of my internship at RageSquid, I was given the freedom to create my own levels in order to get accommodated with the custom tools they built for Unity, as well as the level design workflow for Action Henk. Colleagues were willing to test my levels and provide feedback on the different iterations, and through this process I learned more about the lesser-known mechanics of Action Henk, allowing me to incorporate them to increase the depth and skill ceiling of my levels. The first two levels I made were somewhat different from the levels found in Action Henk, as they were deemed to be more focused around shorter and quicker gameplay sections focused on precision and manoeuvrability instead of the longer, flow-focused ones created by my internship supervisor; the levels were considered to be fun and appropriate nonetheless.

After completing my first two levels, I was given the long-term goal of designing levels for each difficulty in Action Henk (Beginner, Easy, Medium, Hard, and Insane) to learn how to design for each type of level. Instead of immediately trying to build a level and piecing things together, I started by studying all the levels available for the level difficulty I was working on to understand their pacing, length, flow, and limitations. This was followed by concepting level sections on paper before building them in Unity, making adjustments wherever necessary. I decided to focus on flow in these new levels to make them more akin to existing levels in Action Henk.

The five levels I previously made were released during the game's September update; they were well-received and praised for their high skill ceiling and depth, but were also called much more complex than earlier existing levels, due to the amount of level segments. Since then, I've scaled down the amount of sections and shortened the length of levels. Instead of working on a Hard level, I was tasked to create the Halloween levels for Action Henk's October update.

I spent a lot less time on the creation of the five Halloween levels than the previous batch of levels, giving me more time to playtest and polish the levels. I believe it is the result of cutting down the length of the levels and becoming familiar with my personal level design workflow. I was praised for using level geometry to increase the aesthetic appeal of the Halloween levels and was asked to perform art passes on other newly-created levels as a result. The Halloween levels I managed to create are some of my favourite ones so far, due to the greater emphasis on timing and continuous flow between level segments. All Halloween levels were implemented as part of the game's October update.

I continued to create levels for Action Henk, specifically levels for the Disco batch and the new Bonus levels. The levels for the Disco batch consisted of several regular levels, as well as my first challenge level. The first challenge level I made proved to be challenging, as the first version of the level turned out more similar to a normal level. The level eventually ended up in the game as a regular level instead of a challenge level. It turned out that challenge levels were designed to have a much slower tempo and to be more punishing than regular levels, containing several points where players are able to catch up while racing against their AI opponent. I was more successful at my second attempt, and managed to create a challenge level that was considered fitting.

The bonus levels were an interesting new addition to Action Henk that I got to work on, being a coin-collecting game type instead of the regular races. The level designs of the bonus levels are more 'sandbox'-like than traditional race tracks, with flow between different sections/lanes in the level being

the most difficult part. To my surprise, bonus levels took relatively little time to create when compared to regular or challenge levels.

In my final month at RageSquid, I worked on the Jungle, Beach, and Night levels. I produced twelve levels during this period, which is the most I've done in any of the previous months. I was expected to create levels at a faster rate (1-2 days instead of 2-3 days), and successfully managed to do so, mostly due to me spending more time planning the levels on paper and switching to digital whenever I got stuck. Unlike previous levels, I had to focus more on showing off the different environments created by the artists, cleverly drawing levels around certain points of interests to make them visible or stand out during gameplay.

Conclusion

I feel very positive about my working experience at RageSquid. I spent the majority of my time creating levels for Action Henk, making about half of the content that will be included in the game's final release. While I might be less involved with the game design than I expected to be, I do think that I managed to contribute to improving the game (aside of level creation/polish) by providing feedback on the game's editor and other minor areas. Working at RageSquid has also allowed me to take a closer look into the life of an indie game studio, and meet developers from other studios located in the Dutch Game Garden.

Although making levels might have felt like a drag at certain points, I do think that the practice and repetition has given me insight into my own level creation process, allowing me to design and iterate faster than before. Other difficulties that I encountered was that at certain points I felt creatively drained or fell into designing sections that resembled pre-existing ones.

I feel that I've become more confident in my level design skills, and will be more likely to take the role of a level designer in future projects. When it comes to improving my skills as a level designer, I feel that I should focus more into the design of 3D levels and encounter design, as these are areas of content creation where I want to gain more experience in.