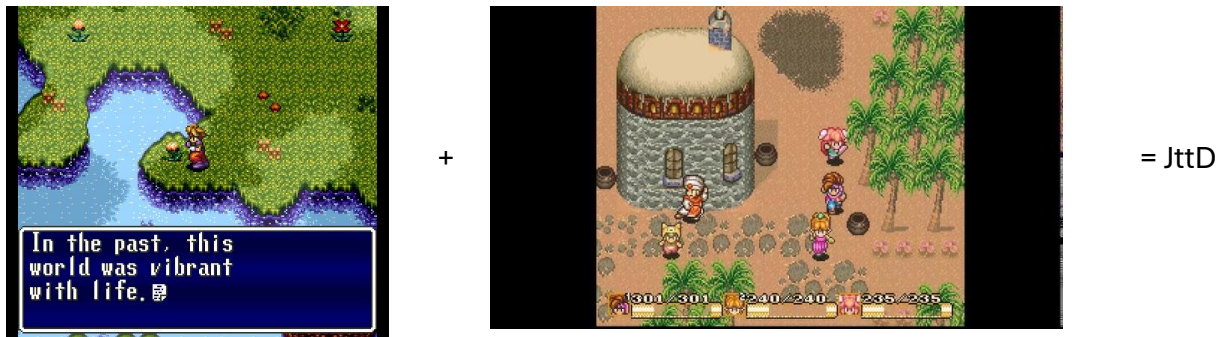


Game Design Document by Ralf Schiegerl

What is „**JOURNEY THROUGH THE DARK**“?

Journey through the Dark is an action role-playing game and utilizes an action-based real-time battle system that allows the player to perform the attack. The game puts the player in control of its protagonist, Abelmir Tiberius Paré, a young mage, and is viewed and controlled from an overhead perspective. The goal is to explore the high fantasy game world, gaining experience points to increase the protagonist's level and his maximum hit and mana points, and to demystify an ancient curse with a unique "time travel mechanic." The game blends some elements of popular Action-RPGs – like *Secret of Mana*, *Terranigma* and *Zelda: A Link to the past*.



Design Pillars: ***What is central to the experience?***

I use design pillars to focus my design choices as I move through the project. For the purpose of this project, I want my design pillars to identify the types of fun or enjoyment which are key to the user experience.

Power	Discovery	Narrative	Drama
Satisfaction will come from players seeing their hero become powerful as gameplay progresses.	The game rewards players for exploring the world, recognizing patterns, and finding and combining connections.	You are immersed in an unfolding story in the style of "One Thousand and One Nights" that will confront the player with moral dilemmas.	Some elements of the story will give players opportunities to feel the weight of others' past actions.

PLAYER GOALS:

- Experience an emotional and dramatic story about duty, obedience, and blind trust in authority figures
- Explore the game world
- Eliminate enemies
- Uncover the truth about "The Last Refuge" (only here does the time mechanic exist as part of the puzzle or in the context of the narrative, as the Last Refuge is cursed).
- Solve time-dependent puzzles

LOOK AND FEEL:

- **Art Style:**
16-bit pixel art from the SNES era
- **Mood:**
Dark, Action, Mystical, Melancholic, yet adventurous
- **Color palette:**
Brown, beige, green, blue, red, purple, indigo, orange, gray, black, and white
- **Inspiration:**
Secret of Mana, Terranigma, Zelda: A Link to the Past

AUDIENCE AND MARKET

The game is designed to be played online and offline as a single player experience via Steam or GOG. A multiplayer or competitive elements will not be made available.

The game will contain some questions about philosophy, as well as some serious questions towards obedience and the consequences of one's actions. It will be aimed at retro gaming enthusiasts, fans of classic rpgs and story-driven games in general as well as at teen-adult audience.

CORE GAMEPLAY

The player manoeuvres their hero around the gameworld by using WASD controls or uses the mouse by using point-and-click controls.

The player interacts with the gameworld by using E button or by clicking the LMB. These actions could be attacking an enemy, opening a chest, talking to an NPC, etc.

By using I button the Inventory pops up. By using the M button the local map is showing the player.

Using a game controller is analogous to using a mouse and keyboard: the left stick or left D-pad allows the player character to maneuver through the game world, while the X button represents the player's interaction with the game world.

The WASD controls directly control the Player character, and the Enemies and non-player characters will use AI-pathfinding.

The core gameplay revolves around action RPG elements, including exploration, combat, character progression and a unique time-related riddle similar to *Zelda: Majora's Mask*.

This list is considered the MVP (minimum viable product) version for the base game.



As the player gains experience, they will be able to access and improve a skill tree, similar to *Diablo 2*. This provides strategic choices, making gameplay feel different each time, while also increasing the philosophical theme by linking these skill tree choices to influencing the plot over time.

CONTROLS

WASD	– make player move
E	– Interact
I	– Inventory
M	– Map
C	– Character
Space	– Attack
ESC	– Main Menu
LMB click	– Melee Attack
RMB click	– Magic Attack

GAMEPLAY BALANCE & PACING

The game is an action roleplaying game and can therefore be played several times.

The combat rhythm should feel fast-paced, action-driven with multiple move types and each move should have clear use cases and should feel impactful with a taste of tactical fines. In case of Magic Power Scaling – they shouldn't become overpowered if spammed. Leveling grants (high) stats boots.

The player should be invited to explore the world on its own (not in an open-world or sandbox manner) like *Dragon Age: Origins*.

In case of pacing there will be a strong chapter structure (Town → different types of voyages (River, Mountain, Dessert) → Main Hub / “Time-Riddle” → Finale). Throughout the game, players are ensured to develop an emotional connection to the game and the story.

CHARACTER DESIGN & ARTSTYLE

The art style of the game should be 16-bit pixel art to evoke the classic SNES look and feel. The player character and key NPCs have names and identities that give the player a sense of who they are. As part of the action-RPG genre, characters are stylized and clearly readable, with iconic silhouettes and distinct color differentiation between heroes and enemies.



The visual style of the game must be 2D.

SELLING A WORLD

The game will feature a hand-crafted world. There will be various hub areas that invite players to explore and discover. These areas will be connected by more linear areas. The idea behind this world is to establish a franchise that will set subsequent titles in this world. Therefore, this game will lay the foundation for a lore story (worldbuilding, how the inhabitants of this world experience magic and religion, etc.).

DRAMATIC ELEMENTS

Narrative Setup:

A young mage is on a study journey across the land. To reach the next significant milestone of his research, he must cross the Raza Desert, for which he joins a local caravan led by a seasoned guide in a tavern. The underlying theme follows the **classic hero's journey**.

Challenges / Motivation:

On the surface, the goal is to **reach the destination**. However, the journey itself becomes the true purpose, as the player faces various challenges along the way that test skill, observation, and moral choices.

Player Characters:

Focus lies on the **player character (name freely selectable)**, who is the **only controllable figure** throughout the game.

STRUCTURAL ELEMENTS

Game Structure:

The game is divided into **five clearly defined chapters**:

- The City
- Journey through diverse biomes
- The Desert
- The Desert Fortress (main plot)
- The “Salvation” of the Fortress

Levels:

Each chapter (except for the first) contains a **dungeon-like section** with gameplay-specific challenges.

Phases:

Transitions between phases are both **narratively and gameplay-wise noticeable**, marked by major story events (e.g., a sandstorm or betrayal).

Sections / Maps:

A detailed world map includes cities, villages, and varying landscapes across regions to be traveled. However, the game **does not feature a freely explorable open world**.

INTERFACE ELEMENTS

Visual System:

Classic **menu interface and ring menu** with clearly readable icons and a clean UI layout.

Control System:

Direct, responsive controls with a **broad range of movement options**. Designed for **precise dodging, positioning, and attacking**.

Meta-Information:

In-game maps, item descriptions, quest journal, and **narrative clues provided through dialogue**. There is **no tutorial** – learning happens **organically through play**.