

Overview

'Gauntlet' is a restructuring of Horde mode that consists of a series of a blocks (or small maps) arranged in a randomized order with a start point. One can think of these as miniature levels/dungeons. They are suited to short play sessions but can also be adapted to longer stretches if player(s) continue to progress. Blocks will be divided by walls that either must be removed by completing the block objective or destroyed by other means. Each block has a compatible but randomly selected mission.

Objective

The reasons for shifting to a more linear, level based, roguelike structure are multiple:

- Every game is **different**, offering significant and necessary replay value to keep players engaged.
- Gives context** to the player, helps them feel like they are going somewhere, achieving something.
- Opens the door to more '**looting**' experiences, allowing us to throw in 'treasure blocks' or areas with specific, more unique rewards. i.e. more opportunities to reward the player.
- More variables** in linear progression allow us to explore creative designs, such as block gates, branching paths.
- Stakes**. At the heart of any great story, game, narrative. The cashout system (wherein the player can decide to stop and keep what they've earned, or push forward and risk it all in hopes achieving greater rewards) lets players tailor the challenge themselves, and increases intensity with play.
- Game **uniqueness**. Simply put, with a Gauntlet rogue-like twist, we'll stand out from the other horde and arena shooters and (hopefully) carve out our own place in the market.
- More **accessible**. This is personal conjecture, but I think many players are more accepting of linear, level-based gameplay over the more static, localized structure of horde/arena games.

Structure

Menu-wise, the game is identical to what we have now. You go through the armory, select your gear, then hit the play button. The game then generates a series of pre-made blocks in a randomized, linear order. There is a max of 31 blocks with the final block being a mega apocalypse armageddon block. (Block 30 is transition

The game is a strand of linear rooms, each one with a randomly assigned mission, modifier, and selection of enemies. Every 5 rooms, there is a *rest block/Vendor Connection*, an empty block with a portal (think open sewer grate) that takes you to a cordoned off connecting segment where the player(s) can purchase services from a vendor. (Explained below).

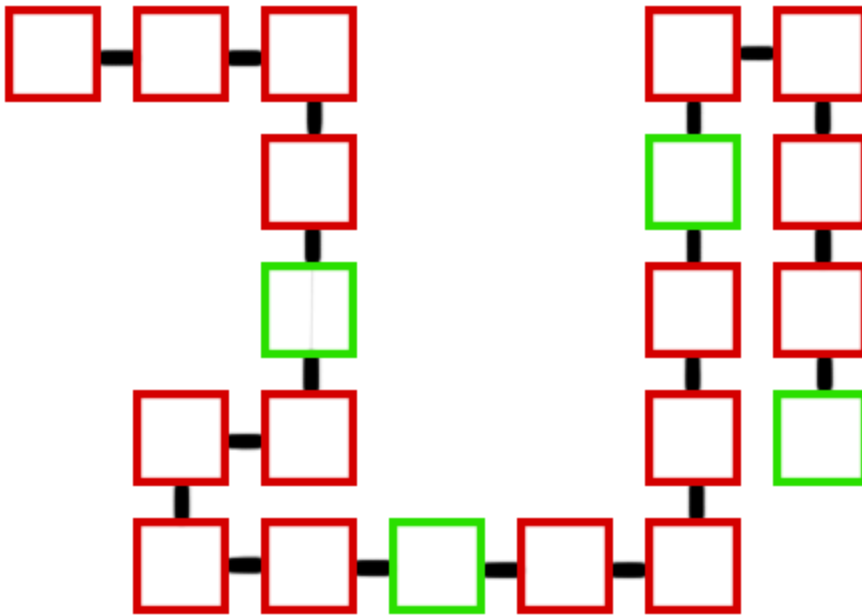
Block Arrangement

Blocks will come in a variety of shapes, the intention being to lead the player on a winding path and to instill the sense of exploration that a straight path cannot give. To achieve this, we'll need

multiple kinds of blocks, and various different modifications of those blocks (an estimate listed in parens).

- Left to Right/Right to Left (6)
- Top to Bottom/Bottom to Top (6)
- 4 corner blocks (3 of each)
- Top/Bottom "T" block (2 each)
- Left/Right "T" block (2 each)

After finishing a block, players will occasionally have a choice in which way they exit ("T" Block), with each option leading to different blocks with different missions/mods etc.



Example map layout. Green blocks are cashout blocks.

A standard combat block entails the following things:

-A compatible mission.

Blocks will be designed to be compatible with a set list of missions. Some blocks will only be compatible with one type of mission. The Gauntlet must pick a mission *at random* from the available ones in the block.

-A compatible mod. (Mods described below)

Very similar to missions, each block will have a list of compatible mods and the Gauntlet will select 1, 2, or 3 mods at random. It is possible for no mods to be selected and this is typically the case for lower difficulties.

-A compatible set of enemies.

Specific, multiple groupings of enemies are assigned to each block, to be selected at random (this perhaps is influenced instead by what mission is selected). One particular block might have 3 different enemy sets which it picks between at random: a Marionette set, Marionette/Secuutus set, or Secuutus/Pantheon set.

Revisions to Block Advancement

There now are **2 Timers**: The Mission Timer and the Doomsday Timer. When players enter a block, the mission is presented and the Mission Timer begins. If the mission is completed within the time limit, a series of chests open in the block. The player(s) then have *the remainder of the Mission Time* to explore the block and open the rest of the chests. The block gates also open, allowing players to leave early, if they so desire.

Once the Mission Timer expires, the Doomsday Timer begins. Regardless of if the mission was completed or failed, the block gates open, allowing the players to escape. Once the doomsday timer expires, any players left in the block are instantly killed. If all players are within the block when Doomsday timer expires, the game is lost. If the mission was completed and the chests are unlocked, they remain unlocked for during Doomsday.

If the mission was completed, all enemies despawn.

If the mission was failed, all enemies remain.

Completing a mission rewards you with a flat rate of credits.

Chest Collection

Chests are locked while a mission is in progress. Once a mission is completed, all chests are unlocked. Players simply need to walk up to a chest and hit 'E' to pick up the contents of a chest. The loot from chests go into a 'pot' that is shared between all players that survive to the next block.

For example, a set of 3 players complete a mission with 15 seconds to spare. They go out and collect 3 of the 4 chests (resulting in a pot of 3). Players 1 and 2 make it back to the exit while player 3 dies during Doomsday. Players 1 and 2 both get 3 chests worth of credits each, while player 3 gets nothing. Regardless of who picked up the chests. Player 3 could have picked up all 3. You get nothing if you don't survive to the next block.

Rest Block/Vendor Connection

Every 5 blocks, the players encounter an empty block with naught but a portal to a mini room in which a friendly vendor takes up residence. The Vendor offers a certain services that can assist the players. Once the players exit the Vendor Connection, they are spawned at the *beginning of the next combat block*.

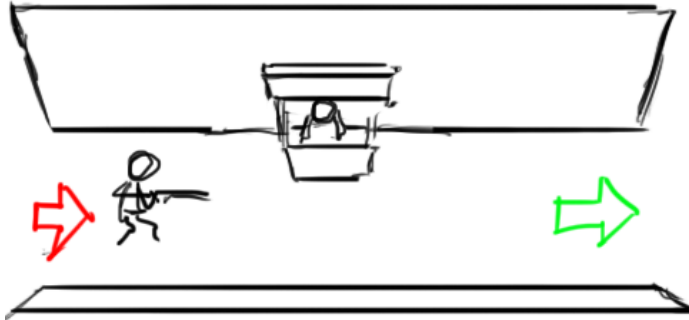
Vendor Services:

The vendor offers multiple services but does not sell items, gear or weapons. All services can be purchased with either *credits or BTC*. (prices are approximated with numbers 1-5, 5 being most expensive). Such services are:

-Health Refill (2)

-Ammo Refill (1)

- Item Stock Refill (5)
- Specialty Ammo (Takes effect when the player next fires) (3)
- Temporary Damage Reduction (Takes effect when the player is next hit) (4)
- Temporary Speed Booster (Takes effect when the player next sprints) (3)



Example Vendor Connection. It's pretty much a hallway with a dude in the middle.

Joining Games

Very much still a process that needs refinement, but I suggest we keep it simple and adopt a system similar to SAS 4: Zombies or ME3. After hitting the "PLAY" button from the armory, the player is given with 2 options:

- Matchmaking with randoms between three different difficulty levels (difficulty operates on a switch above this option)

This will stick the player in a lobby and queue up other players to start on the 1st room. If the game cannot find 4 players to fill the lobby within a time limit, it starts the game with however many there are (except if there's only one). If the game can't find enough players to start from the beginning, it searches for a game in progress. If a viable one is found, it inquires if the lobby players are alright joining a game in progress. Those who say 'Yes' are put into the game in progress.

- Creating a private match.

This will allow the player to invite specific friends or play by themselves. The host player can set the difficulty/location themselves.

The reasoning behind this is to streamline player experience. For this audience, we want to make playing the actual game as easy and streamlined as possible. No trawling through server lists yet.

We might also want to offer another option: *Endless Mode*. An endless gauntlet that tests how far players can make it. In this mode, players cannot join games in progress.

Difficulty Modes

Difficulty operates on a standard stat scaling basis. There will be (at first) 3 different difficulty levels: Standard, Hard, and Very Hard (we need to come up with specific names for them). Players stats are not changed between difficulties. Rather, it's the enemies/mods/environment that scales up in difficulty. Some initial thinking of difficulty parameters:

Normal:

Enemy Health: 100%
Enemy Damage: 100%
Mod Chance: 10%
Mod # Range: 0-1

Hard:

Enemy Health: 125%
Enemy Damage: 140%
Mod Chance: 35%
Mod # Range: 0-2

Very Hard:

Enemy Health: 165%
Enemy Damage: 180%
Mod Chance: 65%
Mod # Range: 0-3

Various difficulties can also offer various other changes such as certain types of enemies, loot, events only available in higher difficulties. There are various other variables we could toy with as well in higher difficulties, such as Vendor Connections being every 6 blocks instead of 5 and the max length of the Gauntlet being extended to more than just 30 blocks.

Mission Modifications (Mods)

Mission modifiers (Mods) are additional variables placed on a mission (on a per block basis) that affect how the mission plays out in either a positive or negative fashion. The mod only lasts for the duration of the block mission and does not persist between blocks. Multiple mods can be selected per block (up to 3). Blocks do not need to have mods.

Misc. Gameplay Changes

To mesh with the rogue-like aspects of the game, there are a few things that need to be altered on a core gameplay level:

-No health recharging abilities or indefinitely reusable healing aspects. All healing must be measured and limited. We could keep IV drip, but we'll have to make sure that players are never allowed to stay out of combat indefinitely (staying in Vendor connections for unlimited amounts of time).

-Increase the amount of health players start with. By a significant margin (possibly an order of magnitude). The idea being that each encounter isn't life or death, rather every fight leaves the players a little bit worse for wear. This is more a battle of attrition than a quick flash and burn while the players are desperately trying to make it to the next Vendor Connection.

-Heavier focus on melee enemies. We'll need more types of Marionettes as well as melee variants of the Secuutus and perhaps the Pantheon.

-Every ranged enemy MUST telegraph their attacks. Pretty self explanatory. No exceptions. If we're playing and you lose health and you didn't have a chance to prevent it, something needs to change. This includes both visual and audio cues.

-Camera Border Edges. In order to make the most of our tiny window, we need to remove any viewport waste. When the camera hits the edge of a block, it stops (with perhaps a small buffer zone beyond it). The camera border needs to be extended for the bottom side of the block so players can see themselves in the bottom corners.

-Reduced Text Chat. We don't need a dedicated text box for text communication. We can emulate common MMO's and SAS4 with this: Press 'Enter', type what you want, hit enter again. We'll need certain provisions like muting players and perhaps other commands like requesting certain actions.

-Pull the camera in closer. This will help for a variety of reasons, but might cause other problems. Since enemies telegraph all attacks visually, we shouldn't have too much of an issue with players taking unfair damage and this helps in terms of making the blocks feel larger and instilling a better sense of exploration. Also sort of solves the player occlusion behind objects.

Block Level Design

With the recent shift in design paradigms, navigation and environment interactivity is now a paramount part of the user experience. How will the player avoid enemies? How will they get the drop on them. What's the best method for tackling this mission. Aside from player deployed tactics (items, weapons, etc.) we should be striving to provide the player with constant options as to how to tackle their situation: Destructible walls, shock floors, exploding barrels, etc.

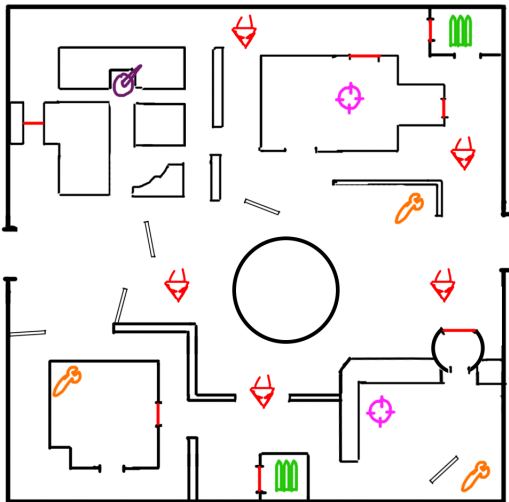
In this sense, the missions are really more about providing the player with a set of restrictions, rather than serving as the main vessel of fun. If the player is faced with two different missions, given the same block, viable solutions and player paths for completing each one should be wildly different.

One of the greatest assets to our game design we have right now is the timer. Since we know that players can only spend a very limited amount of time within each block, we can fill each one accordingly with enough stuff to require decision making. Does the player try to blast down the door to get to the treasure crate? Or does he set up the electric floor to fry the incoming Secuuti? The player never has enough time to do everything in a block. Ideally not even 2/3 of it.

Ideally, these choices should mesh together in a meaningful way. Player classes should ideally have unique ways of dealing with environmental obstacles and taking advantage of environmental aspects. Perhaps the Chemist is the only one who can utilize the canister of corrosive acid found in a building. Maybe the Sniper is the only one who can hit the switch located across a minefield to deactivate them. Block interactivity should not only add another layer of gameplay decision making for players, but give players incentive to play the game with various classes to see how they can take advantage of the map in different ways.

A basic list of interactive block elements (High impact, low effort):

- Deactivatable (destroyable) Walls
- Exploding barrels.
- Timed Damage fields (think like an electric fence that turns on and off intermittently).
- Triggered Damage fields (like a mine that explodes when anything is within proximity or when switch is activated).



Mechanic- Group Maintenance
Marksman- Enemy debuff/Group Damage
Chemist- Group Buff
Relic- Tank