

ShatterSoul

PLAY WITH YOURSELF.

A GAME TREATMENT

*AUTHOR(S): KAPISH SINGH RAWAT, CHIP HILSBURG, JAY AUSTIN, RUSHABH SHAH,
ANDREW KANE AND DAVID HUYN*

Short Description:

The main protagonist in *ShatterSoul* is Karm - a soul wanting to live again. To do so, he must travel through the worlds of the afterlife and gather soul fragments. Obstacles in these worlds are tackled by splitting his soul using two main mechanics: Reversal and Concurrency. In Reversal, the player controls both souls over the same time frame by guiding the old soul first and then rewinding time to guide the new soul. The new soul will be able to benefit from the actions of the old soul over the time frame allowing teamwork. In Concurrency, the player can split up and swap between the two souls at anytime. However, if the second soul comes into the first soul's line of sight it will shatter and end the game.

Tone words: Hide, Soul-Splitting, Death, Afterlife, Deception, Time Manipulation

I. GAME CONCEPT

Shatter Soul is a 3-D, puzzle-based, action adventure game in a semi-fantasy setting. It follows the journey of the protagonist, Karm, as he tries to find his way back to Earth from the afterlife, YamLok. To accomplish this, Karm must retrieve soul fragments, which are distributed throughout the various planes of YamLok (levels). Each level has a number of combat and puzzle elements that are solved with the creative use of Karm's ability to split his soul. However, the souls are limited in that the old soul (Karm) must not see the new soul (the additional soul spawned when splitting) or the

old soul will shatter and the game will end. The puzzling nature of the levels arise from the benefits and drawbacks that come from taking the form of two souls.

There are two ways that the player can split Karm's soul. The first way is known as "Reversal." In the Reversal mechanic, the player can perform actions during the same time sequence with both halves of his soul. The player begins reversal with the old soul, and goes about recording its actions over a period of time. When they are finished acting (or time has expired), the actions are saved and the new soul spawns. Time is then rewound, and the new soul can perform actions over the replayed time period. The behaviors of the old soul during this time period will be visible, which allows the souls to work together and benefit from each other's actions. This mechanic is used to solve puzzles such as a gate that can only be opened when one soul continuously rotates a handle-like switch. To solve this, the old soul must rotate the handle continuously, while the new soul passes through the gate.

The second mechanic is known as "Concurrency." Concurrency allows the player to split Karm's soul and control each half soul independently. That is, the player swaps back and forth between each of the souls. The benefit of concurrency is that the souls are free to roam and explore, unbound by time and the demands of synchronization. An example puzzle could begin with separate gateways that only 'Half -Souls' can enter, and require one half soul to be the eyes of the other half soul. Additionally, the player may be engaged in a boss battle that requires Karm to attack from multiple places at once.

A final mechanic is the choice and use of ability granting items. As the player proceeds throughout the game, they collect items that give them additional abilities. For example, equipping boots allows for double jumping, while a rope allows one soul to haul around the other half soul. The player is limited in the number of abilities they can use, however. The full soul can be equipped with six abilities from the inventory while the half souls each get three. The half souls are also forced to choose their abilities on splitting, and not choose again till they are recombined. This mechanic injects an

element of planning and strategy, along with forcing the player to choose between the more versatile whole soul, and the distributed half souls.

CRITICAL PATH

The game progresses in a fairly linear fashion. The completion of each level unlocks the subsequent one. There are a few branching paths such as side-quests, which will enhance the narrative experience and add some game abilities. These side quests reward the player with more information on YamLok and items of varying, but never critical usefulness. Towards the end of the game, the player can make a story choice which is what to do with the Soul-Splitter. Their decision to destroy it, preserve it, or steal it is based on their personal understanding of Karm, and will reward them with one of three different endings.

Mission/challenge Structure

YamLok is a pseudo-open world because each section is only unlocked after the previous one is completed. The gain begins with two training levels to acclimate the player to the game. After the training levels are complete, the first 'actual' level is available. There are several portals around YamLok where these levels can be accessed. Once a level's Soul Guardian has been defeated, the player gets a key to open up the next portal. However, the previous portal will remain open to allow the player to enter again in the future.

Apart from the strict level structure, the player can undertake side-quests offered by the NPC's. The challenges in each side-quest will vary from retrieving items, to rescuing NPC's, to clearing an area of Anti-Souls. Some side-quest levels are also entered through portals.

Each level itself contains both combat sections and puzzles. Sometimes these two elements may be combined. The combat consists of defeating Anti-Souls or Soul

Guardians. In addition, there are also certain areas in a level where only Half-Souls can pass through. Defeating a Soul Guardian requires a combination of combat and puzzle elements.

Objectives

As Shatter Soul starts, the objective of the game is clearly implied - to help Karm 'live' again. However, the player has a choice to ignore the objectives and end the game prematurely by following the path towards Destiny's Destination and letting the gods decide Karm's fate immediately. This option is left available throughout the entire game.

Apart from the overall objective, there are level objectives. The first two levels act as tutorials to help familiarize the player with combat and soul-splitting techniques. The subsequent levels have one main objective – to collect soul fragments.

There are also special objectives which include surviving Mr. Nag's attack and destroying the evil part of his soul once and for all. If the player fails, Mr. Nag will conquer the afterlife, gaining immense power over the dead, and Karm himself. If the player succeeds, they will get to decide the fate of the afterlife. There are also side quests, which have their own set of objectives.

Gameplay Progression

The majority of the game will be told through a few cutscenes, and dialog with the characters in YamLok and the soul worlds. The initial scene will show Karm leaving the bar and being killed by a drunk driver. He is then instantly transported to YamLok, where he meet the Gatekeeper who tells him where he is and what souls should do. This initial contact will act as a tutorial level, where the player will learn the basic controls like movement and jumping. The Gatekeeper will also give Karm a map of YamLok. This map will be continuously updated throughout the game highlighting the player's next objective and places of interest.

Next, the Soul Splitter will be introduced in the game when the evil YamLok resident, Mr. Nag asks Karm to retrieve the it. The Soul-Splitter is in a room near the

Gate, being patrolled by the Gatekeeper. If caught the Gatekeeper will kick Karm out of the room, but the player may try again. The player may also steal the 'Soul-Splitter' even before talking to Mr. Nag., though it won't seem so obvious in the beginning of the game.

Once the player returns to Mr. Nag with the 'Soul-Splitter', Mr. Nag will tell him how to use it. Mr Nag will first setup the Soul-Splitter so that it can only absorb "his" soul fragments. Mr. Nag will then accompany Karm to a few locations in YamLok to show him its functions. Mr. Nag will always stay behind Karm, but will offer hints as needed. These "levels" will be very short and they will serve as tutorials for the player to learn the Soul-Splitting mechanics.

The first level will introduce platforming sections and the use of the 'Reversal' mechanic. The player can still fail in these missions, e.g., by falling into a never-ending abyss, or by coming in the line of sight of the previous soul. However, this level will be fairly simple with numerous checkpoints. Mr. Nag will teach Karm how to both split and recombine his soul using the Soul-Splitter. The player must use the device on the previous soul from behind, and hence avoid being fragmented. Additionally, the person in possession of the device can only use it to combine his own soul.

The second level will introduce the player with the 'Concurrency' mechanic, a single weapon, and the Anti-Souls. The weapon will be a Sword which can be used to kill the Anti-Souls. The Concurrency mechanic will be introduced by placing doors through which only 'Half-Souls' can pass through. The level will end with Karm reaching a soul chamber, containing fragments of several souls. Karm then absorbs "Mr. Nag's" soul fragment. "Mr. Nag's" soul fragments will only be absorbed by one 'half-soul,' which is the new one.

Karm will then be on his own in the remaining levels. The end of each of these "real" levels will have a Soul Guardian that must be defeated to collect the soul fragment. This Soul Guardian will be of above-average difficulty and require use of the soul-splitting mechanics. Each level will also contain several hidden soul-artifacts which

can be absorbed to increase Karm's Soul-Health. The player will also acquire certain items along the way. These items will give special abilities to the player and help with combat and puzzles.

As the player continues to defeat Soul Guardians and progress through the game, his relationship with Mr. Nag will become increasingly important. Initially, Karm only cares about getting home, and does whatever Mr. Nag wants. But as time goes on Mr. Nag becomes more and more suspicious. The bosses and environment communicate this suspicion to the player who can choose to ignore it, or seek out more lore information through side-quests.

Towards the final levels of Shatter Soul, the players will have to deal with the 'deviating' behavior of the new soul, due to its accumulation of shadowy characteristics. From a gameplay standpoint, this means being especially careful when sneaking up on the old soul to recombine. The paranoia created by the shadow aura will make it much harder to sneak around.

After getting the last fragment, the player discovers that they have been duped by Mr. Nag. After a dramatic cut scene/battle with the evil god the Mr. Nag becomes, the player begins working for someone that calls himself the "old god." Part of this which is that Karm has his evil soul half replaced with a more powerful angelic half. The old god sends the player on missions to free the remaining good gods and bring them back to his abode. These missions are similar in style to the previous missions, involving the same three mechanics, but the player now has the augmented strength of the angelic split soul. When all of the gods are free, Karm must face Mr. Nag himself in a multi-phased boss battle that emphasizes combat with two halves. Karm will even have to battle the two halves of Mr. Nag individually. Finally, the player will succeed and defeat Mr. Nag at which point he can choose to either destroy, preserve, or steal the Soul-Splitter.

The game can end in any of the following ways:

Game Over: The new soul comes in the line of sight of the old soul. This causes the old soul to shatter.

Game Over: The player is killed by an enemy, Anti-Soul or Soul-Guardian. In this case the soul (Half or Full) will shatter.

Game Over: The player is killed by environmental hazards like deep pits, lava lakes, etc

Game Ending 1: The player decides to end Karm's journey by moving on to Destiny's Destination, where the gods will decide Karm's fate.

Game Ending 2: Karm decides to destroy the Soul-Splitter. He returns to Earth and lives out a peaceful life, and then is absorbed by the old god. Over the next millennium, the old god absorbs all of the world's soul and restarts the universe.

Game Ending 3: Karm decides to preserve the Soul-Splitter. He returns to Earth and lives out a peaceful life. Meanwhile, the old god becomes impatient and attempts to use the Soul-Splitter to purge the evil from the living world all at once. In doing so, he creates two afterlives, one of absolute evil and one of absolute bliss.

Game Ending 4: Karm decides to steal the Soul-Splitter. He returns to Earth and uses it for his own amusement, wealth, and eventually to help others. Upon his death, he joins the old god as a trickster god.

FEATURES AND CONTROLS

Splitting Mechanics

The Soul-Splitter has five functions built in it - a Start Time(S.T.) , an End Time(E.T.), a Cancel Reversal (C.R.), a Soul switcher (S.S.) , a Splitting Mechanic Specifier (S.M.S.), and finally the actual 'Split' button. To execute a split, first the splitting mechanic needs to be specified first using the S.M.S.. For performing 'Reversal', the

S.M.S. needs to set to 'R' and for 'Concurrency' the S.M.S. needs to be set to 'S.' When initializing a reversal with the player automatically sets the S.T. and begins the first journey through the time frame. When the player is finished with their actions, or a time limit has been reached (it is initially 15 seconds but increases over the course of the game) the E.T. and journey of the soul is set. Next, the new soul will have E.T. minus S.T. seconds to perform its actions. It will be able to interact with the old soul and will see any changes that the old soul makes as they are made. If the player makes a mistake C.R. can be used to revert any changes and start over at the beginning of either soul's journey. On splitting, the new soul will be created behind the old soul so that they don't make eye contact.

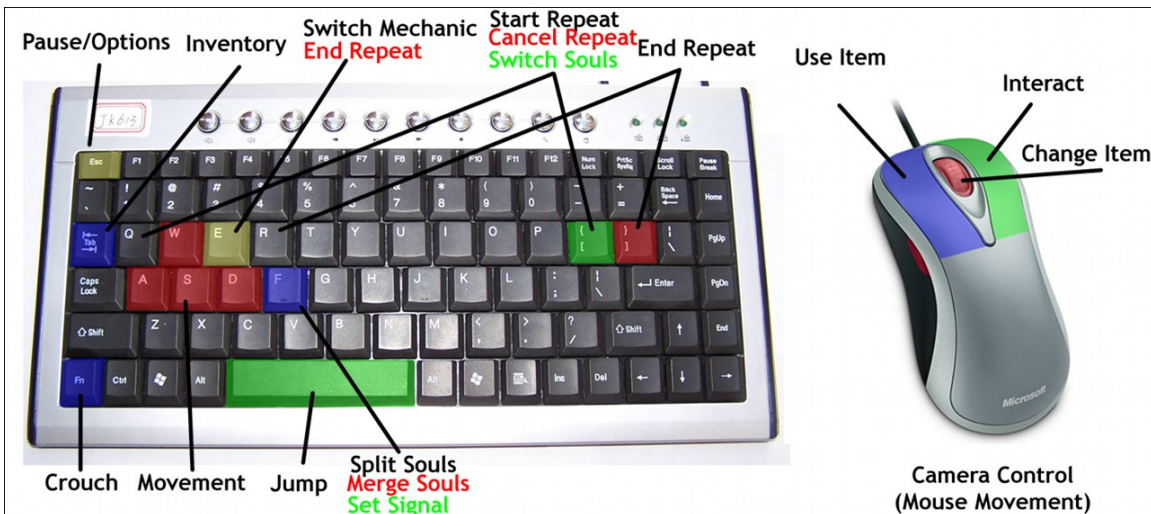
For using the 'Concurrency' the player spawns the two souls back to back. The player can then swap between Karm's souls using the S.S. function and pilot them independently. There is no limit on how far or how long they can be apart, but each half-soul will be limited in important ways. First, a half-soul only has half the item slots that a full soul has. Also, a half-soul cannot swap in or swap out items to change their abilities. Finally, half-souls have half the whole soul's health. These limitations force the player to make an important choice, and give the both forms unique powers that make them worthwhile and different.

Movement and Resources

Karm can perform basic movements in 3D space. A breakdown of the controls for the XBOX360 controller and the PC is given below.

For keeping a sense of direction, a map is available in the upper right hand corner. The player can use the map to setup a GPS system by identifying a destination that they wish to reach (when in the 'Map View' mode from the main menu). An arrow will then appear over Karm's head guiding him to the new location. Point of interests, like item locations, may also be highlighted on the map, depending on how much the

player has 'researched' about a level by interacting with the NPCs. Finally, the map will show the location of each soul when the player is split.



Karm's main resource is the 'Soul bar', which is analogous to a health bar. If Karm is hit by traps or enemies, it will deplete. When the Soul bar is empty Karm's Soul will shatter, ending the game. If Karm is 'Half-Souled' (split), each soul will have half of the full soul's current soul bar. Karm can obtain health boosts to increase his maximum health by exploring the levels or helping NPC's, and can regenerate health over time by being in the whole soul form.

Karm's others resource is his inventory of ability providing equipment. Both the whole soul and half souls are limited in the number of items they can use at a time. Additionally, only the whole soul can swap items in and out when it has free time. The abilities are classed as one of two types: passive or active. Passive abilities are activated when equipped, while active abilities can be performed at any time after being equipped. Examples of each type of ability are:

- Passive: Gold Dust - the new soul can see a path leading to the old soul.
- Active: Smoke Screen - the player can setup a barrier between the two souls so they cannot see each other.

Stealth

Shatter Soul has extremely basic stealth mechanics, with a crouch button for making Karm tread softly. Stealth detection is based on the direction and speed of approach, along with basic distractions (sound or visual cues).

Combat

While combat is not the primary mechanic of Shatter Soul, a combat system exists to allow Karm to battle with anti-souls and soul guardians. Using an assortment of weapons (which the player can assign to Karm's ability slots) Karm will be able to attack his opponents. However, the player will also be given opportunities to use the environment to defeat enemies by leading them into environmental hazards and traps.

Combat will be possible in all stages of the game including when Karm is engaged in concurrency and reversal. Additionally there will be special opponents (most notably soul guardians) who will only be able to be defeated with the aid of the special concurrency and reversal mechanics.

Interacting with NPC's

NPC interaction is a fairly straightforward task requiring the player to move up to a character and press the action button to talk to them. Engagement with an NPC will only be possible when Karm is near the targeted NPC. An NPC who can interact with Karm will be outlined in a faint highlight to signify that the NPC is in Karm's focus. For NPCs like Mr. Nag, the Gatekeeper and special quest givers, a dialog tree appears allowing the player to ask specific questions and accept quests.

STORY / CHARACTERS

The protagonist in this story is Karm, a 24 year old college graduate. He is from an underprivileged home and has only found success through his own willpower. Karm values wealth highly and believes that the world owes him a mounting debt after his hard work and misfortune. The villain of the story is Mr. Nag, a man who was killed, along with his family, several years before Karm died. In YamLok (the afterlife), he was the victim of an ancient curse whereby he was duped out of half of his soul. This prevented him from joining his family in eternal rest, and forced him to find another victim. However, unlike the previous curse-bearers, Mr. Nag learned of an artifact called the Soul-Splitter that could be used to break the curse and grant him enormous power. Unfortunately, Mr. Nag is unable to leave YamLok to use the artifact for its purpose and is waiting for someone that he can manipulate into helping him.

The Soul-Splitter itself was created thousands of years ago by the singular "old god" to punish an angel's disobedience. The old god used the Soul-Splitter to capture

the good from the angel's soul and to destroy the evil parts, but was injured when the evil soul shattered and rained down across the universe. The angel was never heard from again, but the old god repaired himself by stealing half a soul in YamLok and beginning the curse. Since then, he has been absorbing souls to restore his power. Meanwhile most of his angels have been masquerading as gods, and absorbing what souls they can lure away. Some of these angel-gods possess fragments of the fallen angel's evil soul which empower and corrupt them.

In the current day, Mr. Nag tricks Karm into collecting the evil parts of the fallen angel's soul and reuniting them. Absorbing them into himself, Mr. Nag becomes the most powerful deity short of the original old god. He then tries to destroy Karm, who is shielded by the good part of the fallen angel's soul and taken to the old god's abode. Under the old god's instructions, Karm rounds up the remaining faithful angels and sacrifices them to gain the power to fight Mr. Nag. After the climactic final battle with both parts of Mr. Nag's souls, the evil soul fragments are destroyed, Mr. Nag is absorbed, and the player gets to choose what to do with the Soul-Splitter. Each choice results in a greatly different afterlife as described in the critical path section.

II. DEVELOPMENT SCOPE

Shatter Soul's man-power requirements are:

- 20 People
 - 10 Programmers
 - 5 for Game Engine.
 - 1 for AI Development.
 - 2 for Tool Development.
 - 2 for Scripting.

- 5 Artists
 - 2 for Character Models.
 - 3 for Environment Creation
- 3 Designers for Character and Level Design
- 1 Writer/Designer for Dialog & Story
- 1 Producer for Business Management

The game will require a total of 24 months for completion, and with an average salary of \$10,000 per man-month, the game will cost \$ 4.8 million. Looking at the game's technical aspects, Shatter Soul consists of an open world, YamLok, and several levels that need to be traversed from different locations in this world. The game's art has to distinctly capture YamLok and its 'soul-like' environments effectively. For this reason, a good amount of programmers and artists (including sound engineers) are needed.

Initial development time (around 6-8 months) will be spent on creating the game engine and art resources. During this time, the designers will conceptualize the levels, puzzles, and game mechanics. They will constantly be in touch with the programmers to understand the limitations of the game engine, i.e., whether the ideas can be realized in the game or not. The story will also be etched out to fit in with the gameplay. The story and dialog are an important part of the game so a professional writer is also required.

Once the core of the engine is complete, the designers will start building the levels, puzzles and gameplay mechanics on it. The art team's resources will be used and new resources may need to be created. The development team will continuously tweak the engine improving the graphics and usability. AI programming for the Anti-Souls will be done. Any changes in story may also be done. This will take another 6-8 months.

The rest of the time will be for bug fixing and testing the game on the XBOX 360 and the PC. Initial focus will be on the XBOX360 release which will be complete in 21 months. After that, the final PC bug testing will be done. For the PC, both retail and online versions will be available.

TECHNOLOGY FEATURES

We are looking into developing an in-house engine or perhaps purchasing a 3rd party engine. Whichever choice is made, the engine should contain the following features:

- High detail (to utilize our platforms' high-range graphics)
- Ragdoll Physics (to improve immersion and reactions to environmental weapons, e.g. a rope clothes-lining people)
- Post-processing Effects (to improve immersion and additional visuals for abilities)
- HDR Visualizations (to improve visuals)
- Cell-shading and non-realistic rendering (as we are looking for a psuedo-comic style for our game).
- Simple NPC AI (the NPCs are mainly scripted agents of the puzzles).
- Sophisticated action buffering and state management (to allow time reversal and interactions between time streams).

POTENTIAL TECHNOLOGY ROADBLOCKS

Potential roadblocks we could encounter during development are multi-core processors, which will be mostly alleviated by the .NET and XNA libraries, multi-core and 64-bit optimizations, as most modern machines have these and we want to be able to utilize their power, and finally the reversal buffer management, as we need to monitor the size and memory consumption of our reversal mechanic's recording time.

PLATFORMS

Shatter Soul will be made for the XBOX 360 and PC. The XBOX 360 release will be made first, followed by the PC release. Any other platform may be considered after the

product sales, but the main concentrations will be for the XBOX 360 and PC platforms. These platforms were selected because of the natural transition between them as facilitated by the XNA framework.

III. BUSINESS CASE

With the current market, about 26.6% of video game sales for 2007 fell under the super-genres of action and adventure.[1] Also, 7.6% of computer game sales fell under the same super-genres.[1] Action in total has the highest percentage of sales in video games.

Shatter Soul follows in the footsteps of recently successful action games. In Shatter Soul, players engage in combat with Anti-souls and Soul Guardians utilizing weapons, items and the “soul-splitter” mechanic to overcome obstacles and enemies. These elements of combat, while representative of the action genre in a broad sense, will provide a new twist on already solid gameplay. Another genre that Shatter Soul borrows from is adventure. Elements of adventure include exploration, puzzle-solving, and investigation. Throughout the game, players will be able to explore different planes of YamLok while completing challenging puzzles using the “soul-splitting” mechanic. Player may also embark on side quests which will further enhance the story of the game and reward the player with new abilities.

We expect Shatter Soul to be popular with males, which amount to 60% of the game playing population[1]. But additionally, we're looking to expand our audience beyond the standard action game player through the inclusion of the more broadly entertaining elements of story, themes and fantasy.

Due to its theme and mild fantasy violence, Shatter Soul will fall under the ESRB rating 'T' for Teen.[2] The age demographic for people playing video games for 2007 according to ESA is[1]:

- 49% ages between 18 and 49
- 26% ages over 49
- 25% ages under 18

Games with this rating had a market share of 28%, second highest after 'E' for Everyone (45%) in 2007.[2] We're looking to target people from age 18 and 49 as it makes up almost most half the game-playing population; but with an ESRB rating of 'T' we can reach out to younger audiences as well. Though our layered plot may not be fully comprehended by a younger audience, our action gameplay will still resonate.

During our 21st month of development, we will have an initial console launch followed by a PC launch later on. Each console unit will sell for \$60 and each PC unit will sell for \$50. We will also be looking into online distribution services like Steam, Zest, etc. Successful titles from the past such as Legend of Zelda: The Ocarina of Time, and Prince of Persia have sold over 7.5 million copies [7], and 4 million copies[3] respectively. Audiences looking for a similar title with a new spin will definitely give Shatter Soul a try. Even with sales that are a quarter of these successful titles we can expect at least a 900% ROI. However, given the initial console release, we expect to sell around 2 million copies followed by a later PC release at an additional 1 million copies. This will be an estimated \$170 million in revenues with an ROI well over 500%. These sales expectations are based on competing with, but not displacing genre favorites, which means that greater sales are possible.

COMPETITIVE ANALYSIS

There are many games in our mixed genre that have been successful. However, it is worthwhile to consider games with that share elements with Shatter Soul.

The Prince of Persia Trilogy is a fairly close example of a game like Shatter Soul, with its platforming, action and time manipulation elements. The first game in the Trilogy, Sands of Time, did fairly well (though the sequels did better). On the whole the full franchise, including the trilogy and PSP game has sold approximately 4.2 million copies (not including PC sales).[3]

The story in Prince of Persia (PoP) was told well, even though it had a definite ending and was a linear experience. However there were some complaints about the game's difficulty and the tedious fighting mechanics.[4] Shatter Soul on the other hand focuses more on strategy and puzzles. The fighting elements are very basic with simple and strategic weapons-based choices instead of the repetitive 'chained' combos in Prince of Persia. The time manipulation elements are also different from PoP with two instances of Karm being available at any given time. Shatter Soul's story is linear like PoP, but the end result will depend on the player's actions, giving them some control.

Another similar game, with more adventure elements, is The Legend of Zelda series. This franchise has been one of the most successful games franchises of all times, selling millions of copies worldwide. The Legend of Zelda: The Ocarina of Time, specifically has been critically acclaimed and won several awards[5]. It was also in the Guinness Book of World Records for the 'most advance orders in a game'[6] and sold approx. 7.6 million copies worldwide [7]. The Ocarina of Time contains platforming elements which are similar to Shatter Soul. The time manipulation mechanic in Ocarina of Time was very basic with players being able to go into the past or present only at specific places. Shatter Soul's splitting mechanics are significantly more expansive, however. The player of Shatter Soul will feel like time control is a fundamental part of their arsenal, instead of a gimmick for structuring the game.

Portal is a puzzle-based first person game developed by Valve as part of the Orange Box. As of Dec 3, 2008, it has sold 3 million copies in retail (not including digital distribution). The game's emphasis on solving puzzles by focusing on the portal

mechanics is similar to Shatter Soul's emphasis on using the Soul-Splitting mechanics. Though a brilliant game, it was criticized for having a short length and sparse environments.[17] Shatter Soul, on the other hand will feature standard gamplay length and rich environments due to game's setting in YamLok and the different Levels.

Another game which has almost similar time mechanics as Shatter Soul is the Blinx series of games made for the XBOX. The first game Blinx: The Time Sweeper is a 3D action game where the player is allowed to manipulate time to his advantage. There is a similar 'concurrency' mechanic in which the player can record his actions for 10 seconds and rewind time to have two instances of himself at the same time. The first Blinx was fairly successful and sold 156,000 copies by May 2003.[8] It was not considered a huge hit and received average reviews citing the unintuitive control system. It also had a flawed gameplay system with players having to replay the levels in order to get enough money to buy time manipulation skills.[9]

The second game in the series was also not very successful because the player never actually got to play the character Blinx, and instead created their own. It was criticized like the first game, having other issues like blatantly giving solutions to the puzzles and being 'completely devoid of personality'. [10]. According to VGChartz, Blinx 2 sold a million copies[11], not high for a game which Microsoft was considering to become its mascot.[8] Shatter Soul on the other hand, has more focus towards puzzles. The controls are more intuitive, explained early on with an in depth tutorial. The player also does not have to 'buy' an upgrade, the Splitting Mechanic can be used whenever required (except in YamLok). We intend to make the very act of splitting and changing time fun in and of itself. Also, looking at the story, one can say that the characters are more developed and have more 'personality'.

Two recent games made by independent game developers have had strikingly similar game mechanics. The first, is a game called Braid which is a 2D platformer made by the independent game developer, Jonathon Blow. It has been released in Xbox Live Arcade in Aug 2008 and sold 28,500 units in 3 days, which is good considering its scope.

[14] It has also won an award in the Independent Games Festival under the category 'Innovation in Game Design'. Braid is puzzle-based and employs time manipulation mechanics like rewinding time and even multiple instances of the protagonist at the same time with each instance doing the previous action.[12][13]

The Misadventures of P.B. Winterbottom is another game released in June 2008 and showcased at IGF. It is a flash based 2-D platformer with the unique art work of a silent film. It was made by students from the University of South California's Interactive Media Program. Like Braid, the player is able to record time and playback actions. The main objective is to collect pies, and puzzles are based on using these time-manipulation mechanics to get the pies. Players are even allowed to kill their previous selves and fight between themselves. [15][16] Unfortunately, sales figures are not available for the game yet as it hasn't been released yet.

Unlike both the games above, Shatter Soul is in 3D, limits Soul-Splitting to two souls and has some action elements. It also lays more emphasis on Karm's journey and how the players will decide his destiny. It has a more serious tone to its story unlike the comical elements in Braid and Winterbottom. To conclude Shatter Soul shares a number of successful gameplay elements with the games above, but the differences will set it apart from being 'just another Action-Adventure' game.

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IV. Appendix

Story Details

The main character in this story is Karm, a 24 year old college graduate. As the story begins, Karm lands the high paying job that he'd been dreaming of since he was a kid. After all his past struggles, it seems that life is finally going his way. To celebrate his great achievement, he takes some buddies out to the bar. Karm shows off his new wealth by paying for their drinks. Unfortunately, as Karm heads home he is tragically struck by a drunk driver.

Both Karm and the driver die in the accident, and their souls are transported to the gates of the afterlife, known as YamLok. The Gatekeeper of YamLok informs them of their deaths and tells them what to do next - follow the road that leads to Destiny's Destination and let the gods decide the fate of their souls.

Karm gets angry at the driver that killed him despite the fact that they both are already dead. Karm tells him how important it was for him to live, since he was the eldest in his poor family, though his true motives are more personal. The driver apologizes, but explains that there is no point in fighting now, and that it is right for the gods to judge their souls. The driver accepts his fate and follows the gatekeeper's instruction, urging Karm to do so as well. Karm rejects the advice, and decides to look around YamLok for a way back.

Mr Nag, a 'Half-Soul' finds Karm and explains that he knows how to return to Earth. However, he cannot go to Earth because the gods have bound him to YamLok against his will. He does offer to share the information with Karm though, but only in exchange for recovering the parts of his soul which have been scattered through the spirit realms. He agrees to lead both of them out of YamLok once he is complete again. He then tells Karm that he will need an ancient artifact known as the Soul-Splitter to collect the pieces of his soul. He tells Karm that it is currently held by the Gatekeeper.

Karm easily manages to steal the Soul-Splitter, getting nothing more than an ominous warning from the Gatekeeper. He realizes that the fact that Karm was able to move the Soul-Splitter at all means that it had some purpose for him. The Gatekeeper tells Karm that he may return it whenever he wants, but that it will probably be the Soul-Splitter that makes the decision of when that is. Karm takes it, and goes back to Mr. Nag who tells him about YamLok and the different areas where the fragments are kept. He warns Karm of the different Soul-Eaters, called Anti-Souls, lurking in the various areas guarding the fragments who must be defeated using the Soul-Splitter and other weapons found in the areas.

Karm then travels through the different areas capturing each fragment and defeating or avoiding the various Anti-Souls. Each area has a Soul Guardian who protects the fragments. Initially, these Soul Guardians look like normal demons and the like, but they aren't all evil. The second guardian, who looks like an angel, says that the fragments are dangerous and must not be released into the world. Karm is uneasy about destroying the angel, but takes her refusal to hand over the fragment as a rejection of his righteous quest to return to Earth. After returning to Mr. Nag, he asks him why the fragments of his soul are so meaningful. Mr. Nag explains that it's the gods' way of binding him, but dodges the question of why he was so thoroughly bound.

After defeating a few more guardians, Karm comes across one that seems to have a control over his ability to split. The guardian can break him into different souls and move them around so he has trouble staying together. When the guardian is defeated, he reveals that he was sent on the same quest by Mr. Nag over one thousand year ago. He also shows Karm that shadows are gathering around his soul and tells him to be careful. Karm returns to Mr. Nag and mentions that he saw something odd with his soul. Mr. Nag agrees that there is a corrupting effect to the shards and agrees to purge the fragments if he hands them over. Karm warily hands them over and feels better, but also feels that part of the shadows still reside in him.

As Karm defeats more guardians he becomes more and more paranoid about the darkening of his other soul, which he frequently inspects with the mirror given by the previous guardian. However, as the shadows take effect, he turns his suspicions upon Mr. Nag who he believes to be hoarding the fragments for some nefarious purpose. When Karm goes to defeat a particularly nasty looking guardian, the guardian remarks that they are both alike in that they are seeking power in the lost fragments. Karm disagrees, but the guardian continues explaining how the fragments are powerful, and points out that no one would tolerate their corruption without there being some reason.

Now sufficiently disturbed, Karm challenges Mr. Nag to reveal his true motives. Mr. Nag agrees and explains that he was once a powerful god, but he was chained here by the other gods for helping mortals escape the clutches of death. He says that he chose Karm to join him in YamLok because he was the only that could merge the broken parts of his soul together. He also explains that the fragments are very powerful, and have been corrupted over time to become evil. Only with Karm's help can he become the good God he was and rise up against the other gods.

With his fear not at all relieved, Karm agrees to capture the remaining fragments, but chooses to hold some of them back in his own soul until he can be sure of Mr. Nag's intentions. After collecting the last fragment, he returns to Mr. Nag and asks him for the secret to return. Mr. Nag begins to explain the secret as he arranges the fragments, but stops when he realizes that he doesn't have all of them. Looking at Karm, he notices the tainted aura around him and draws the remaining fragments from him along with half of his soul. Karm is weakened and falls to the ground as the evil part of his soul flows toward Mr. Nag.

Mr. Nag extracts the remaining fragments and explains that he is not a god, but the victim of a vicious curse. At the beginning of time, the original god struck down an angel who desired too much power. However, he couldn't just banish the angel because of the holy power still in the angel's command. Instead, he created the Soul-Splitter to recover the good parts of the angel's soul and to banish the bad parts. The Soul-Splitter did its job, but the angel's evil managed to cripple the original god, forcing him to hide away and recover. Afterwards, the fallen angel began looking for a way to salvage the scraps of his soul. The other angels figured he was powerless and decided to leave him to rot while they worked on what to do now that their leader was gone.

Eventually, the fallen angel had an idea to return to his previous form. He descended to YamLok and sought out one who could be persuaded to sacrifice part of their soul. Upon finding a person who wished to return to Earth, he tricked them out of half of their soul and departed to rebuild his strength. Since this time, nothing has been

heard from the fallen angel or the old god; but the curse continues to be passed on from half-soul to half-soul. Mr. Nag then explains that he intends to break this cycle and Karm momentarily looks hopeful. Seeing this reaction Mr. Nag laughs at him for thinking he meant to spare Karm's soul. Mr. Nag explains that he has no use for Karm's soul because he has recovered the evil soul of the fallen angel, but shatters Karm's soul anyway. Finally, Mr. Nag intends to destroy all of Karm now that he knows his secret, but is prevented when the holy part of the fallen angel's soul joins with Karm.

Karm is transported away from YamLok to the abode of the old god. The old god explains that Mr. Nag and the soul guardians are merely the remains of the original angels who had decided to fight for their own personal power. The infighting between them had kept them mostly harmless and inert since her left them, but with the fragments of the fallen angel's soul reunited, Mr. Nag has to be defeated. The old god says that they need to recruit the help of the remaining good angels if they are to succeed. Karm is sent out on a number of missions to recover the good angels before the final confrontation with Mr. Nag. His previous, evil new soul is replaced with the holy version acquired from the fallen angel.

After Karm has collected all of the remaining angels, the old god absorbs them and empowers Karm. Shocked by the sacrifice of the good angels, Karm demands to know why they were killed. The old god explains that it wasn't the fallen angel, but he that stole the first half soul in YamLok. After taking it, he realized that the absorption of others was the only way to recover his power and truly destroy evil. Karm objects, tired of being duped, but changes his mind when he see the drunk driver manifest from the body of the old god. The driver explains that he was asked to sacrifice himself to bring Karm to the afterlife and win the battle for good. He also tells Karm that he has found peace among the greater soul of the old god. Hearing this testimony, Karm partially forgives the driver and agrees to fight for the old god.

Karm battles and defeats Mr. Nag. Afterwards, the old god destroys the evil part of Mr. Nag's soul and absorbs Mr. Nag into himself. The old god then tells Karm that he

will absorb him as well after his sacrifices for good. However, Karm begs him to return him to Earth for at least a normal human life span. The old god agrees, though he mentions that we must all join him at some point. Karm is then returned to Earth, but before he goes back, he is allowed to decide the fate of the Soul-Splitter. If Karm destroys the Soul-Splitter, the old god eventually absorbs all of the world's souls and then collapses into fine point of light. Immediately afterwards, the point of light explodes and creates a new universe. If Karm convinces the old god to preserve the Soul-Splitter, the old god will eventually use it to purge the world of evil and speed up the absorption process. This leads to the fracturing of the afterlife into a zone of absolute evil and a zone of absolute good. Finally, if Karm decides to steal the Soul-Splitter, he will live out his life on Earth as a demi-god, tricking others for both personal amusement and the greater good of humanity. Upon his death, he will ascend to join the old god as a trickster god.

Most of the narrative elements in the story are based on Hindu and Christian mythology. YamLok, is the abode of God Yama, the God of Death. Nag, in Hindi means snake. So the deceptive nature of this character is highlighted through this. Karm in Hindi means 'action' or 'deed'. The whole point is that one must perform good actions or deeds without worrying about its effects. The game incorporates this thought and makes the player question whether Karm's actions are good or bad. 'Karma' is also tied to fate and this game is all about following or fighting fate.

The fallen angel is based on the character of Lucifer, who became the devil after failing to overthrow the Christian god. The old god is a mix of the Christian god (at the beginning of his life), and the concepts of reincarnation and merging with the divine (at the time of the game). The plurality of gods is taken from Hindu mythology with the original form of those gods (angels) being taken from Christian mythology. The three game endings are derived from the big bang, Christian heaven and hell, and the Hindu god Krishna respectively.