

Matthew Hicks

Combat UX Designer

Develop a simple blueprint-based combat system with a key focus on player accessibility in Unreal Engine 5, with a fully customisable setting UI that allows the player to: edit keybinds, difficulty scaling or specific combat changes.

Design Context & Industry Research:

Looking at combat and UX job roles in the industry from companies such as TT Games and CD Project Red, as well as GDC talks from combat designers at Santa Monica Studio and reviewing existing portfolios the expectations for junior Combat UX design roles include:

- Combat needs to feel impactful and eye catching with the use of animations visual elements and camera shakes
- They want unique combat behaviours that are distinct and clearly understood by the player
- They need you to be able to define and maintain documentation
- In terms of UX making sure to help shape an enjoyable, engaging consistent player experience
- As well as being able to collate and act on feedback

In reference to the GDC talk from Santa Monica Studio about 'God Of War Ragnarök' they show their enthusiasm towards accessibility in their games making games more playable for all. Through playtesting they can achieve a full immersive and enjoyable experience no matter your situation.

By developing a combat system with connected customisable setting menu, I am able to focus on making games more accessible for anyone through playtesting best options for all players:

- Build a cohesive combat system that feels realistic and impactful (this allows for a base line they the setting can internally edit)
- Create a simple yet challenging AI system to attack the player (this allows player to test their play style and what works best for them)
- Produce an easy to use setting menu that is focused on editing the accessibility of the game (controller key binds, auto lock on, difficulty changer and more)

Style

My project will allow the player to get the best possible experience out of the combat by targeting the gameplay to the player. You'll have at least one Ai enemy type that circles and attacks the player. The player will have a light attack, heavy attack and a ranged throwable attack to show the main aspects of a combat system. The combat system will feel real with the use of Unreal Engine's camera shake functions paired with animations and other visual elements. The player will be able to lock onto enemies with the right joystick. This will be a vertical slice of what the combat could look like for a full game.



Combat games have a big focus on the player feel, enjoyment and uniqueness of that combat system compared to others that might already exist. Combat feel also greatly relies on having a core theme for example God of war Ragnarök's (Santa Monica Studio, 2022) combat system feels slower as the character is bulkier and more deliberate with his attacks whereas Spiderman PS4's (Insomniac Games, 2018) combat system feels quick and snappy to keep players engaged; also fitting with Spider-Man's quippy personality.

My research on Santa Monica studios implies they like to keep a core focus on player accessibility in their combat system, allowing players to edit minor settings that could make or break the playability of a game for certain individuals with motor disabilities. (Oliver, 2023) I feel like player accessibility is something that is overlooked greatly in the games industry, so my goal is to create a combat system that feels similar to 'God of War', this allows for a baseline project to build on top off. A big portion of this will be my settings menu which allows you to customise the combat system to your liking for example making enemy lock on automatic, manual or not at all. Another thing I could add to the settings menu is key bindings allowing players to customise the input for different actions, this is useful for people who may not be able to reach certain buttons on a controller. Creating this settings menu ensures I am not the one who controls someone's playability of the game but the player themselves, allowing for a more inclusive and enjoyable experience for all.

Combat is a powerful way to test and prioritise accessibility due to most combat games requiring a high amount of skill to master.

The project I will be making is third person, I believe making this project third person allows for a more immersive experience compared to other game styles, this is because third person allows for a more open camera angle giving the player more information about their scene and situations especially when dealing with AIs. Another thing third person games excel in is their ability to show the character through animations and realistic impactful moments. This concept is something I would like to strive for as I'm not only creating something that can be either really easy or really difficult depending on the player but something that is also fundamentally fun no matter the setting or the player.



Deliverables:

- UE5 project: Completed vertical slice of gameplay
- Third person combat with light/heavy attacks and a throwable attacks
- AI system with strafing and 1 enemy type
- Settings menu for the game allowing you to customise player experience making the game more accessible for the player
- Video introduction to the game slice and all features in the setting menu

Schedule & Milestones:

Week 1	22/09/25	Research my main inspirations combat systems and what makes them feel impactful and fluid.
Week 2	29/09/25	Start creating baseline combat systems (attack, block and dodge) and strafing, attacking AI systems.

Week 3	06/10/25	Add visual elements, simple VFX, camera shakes, AI lock on, Add heavy attack and work on starting the ranged throwable attack. Playtest.
Week 4	13/10/25	Act on playtest, research what people with motor disabilities struggle within terms of games, start creating a setting menu. Playtest.
Week 5	20/10/25	Continue to research more accessibility additions I can include, implement accessibility additions to settings. Playtest
Week 6	27/10/25	Deliver first full prototype
Week 7	03/11/25	Possibly add movement features like climbing and parkour to increase accessibility in the slice.
Week 8	10/11/25	Testing & Polish
Week 9	17/11/25	Testing & Polish

God of War Ragnarök,God of War Ragnarök,References:

God of War Ragnarök, (2022), Published: Sony Interactive Entertainment, Developers: Santa Monica Studio, [Game]. [Website](#)

Marvel's Spider-Man, (2018), Published: Sony Interactive Entertainment, Developers: Insomniac Games, [Game]. [Website](#)

Breaking Barriers: Combat Accessibility in 'God of War Ragnarok', (2023), Oliver, A, [Video] Available at: [Website](#)

Senior Combat Designer, (2025), TTGames, [Job Application], GamesJobsLive, Available at: [Website](#)

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