# A Torch in the Dark: Using Creative Direction to Light the Darkest Dungeon

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Development is a dungeon crawl...

# What is it?

*Creative Direction*

The thematic and conceptual core that defines and drives the experience;

The place where Art, Design, and Narrative overlap;

Heart and soul of the game.

*Creative direction is not often discussed in practical terms;*

**This is a missed opportunity**

# Introduction

Indies with small teams and small budgets can't afford to do 'everything';

We referred to, and relied upon, creative direction at *every step* of development.

## Part 1: Defining the Vision

We established a strong creative core & built outward

1) Roots: Raw inspiration & drivers, disparate influences;

2) Trunk: Consolidated and clearly defined vision;

3) Branches: Disciplines grow outward from the Trunk: Art, Design, Audio, etc.

**Part 1: Defining the Vision**

**Darkest Dungeon is...**

...an uncompromising gothic roguelike turn-based RPG about the psychological stresses of adventuring. A low fantasy Lovecraftian adventure that f... players to make the best of... difficult trade...

Darkest Dungeon DNA

creepy medieval woodcuts

Mike Mignol...

sombre, still, gothic beauty, ruins

Guy Davis

Miniatures!

We clearly defined and articulated our 'trunk';

Reference art/DNA doc;

Conversation, debate;

Short synopsis;

Be cautious of over-reliance of the 'lovechild metaphor'.

# Part 1: Externalization

*Creative **Director**: Bruce Wayne*

*Creative **Direction**: Batman*

Separate the game's identity from that of the developers;

Externalizing creative direction keeps the game safe from shifting trends and changing personal tastes.

If you love it, let it go!

# Part II: Lighting the Way

**Creative Direction in Action!**
Being confident in our creative choices lead to some surprising decisions

- Art Style
- Presentation
- Writing Style/Lore
- Trailers/Marketing
- Informed Cuts
- Breaking the Rules

# Part II: Creative Direction in Action

*Art Style:* Pixel Art is trending!
Jump on board!

Communicated 'retro/charming' above all;

We needed something more melancholic, morose, ***black***

Reinforced the pervasive theme of 'imperfection'.

Consistent looseness also meant greater production efficiency;

# Part II: Creative Direction in Action

*Presentation:* Top-down/Isometric view is generally standard for the genre;

Wide angles robbed the game of claustrophobia and tension;

Focus needs to be on the characters;

Side-scrolling in dungeon paired with combat, same assets.

# Part II: Creative Direction in Action

*Comprehensive Lore and World-building
are crucial for an RPG*

Writing style is overwrought and verbose, risky for consumer uptake and localization;

Elaborate backstory distracts from the player's own narrative, limits their imaginative input;

Horror thrives in the absence of certainty;
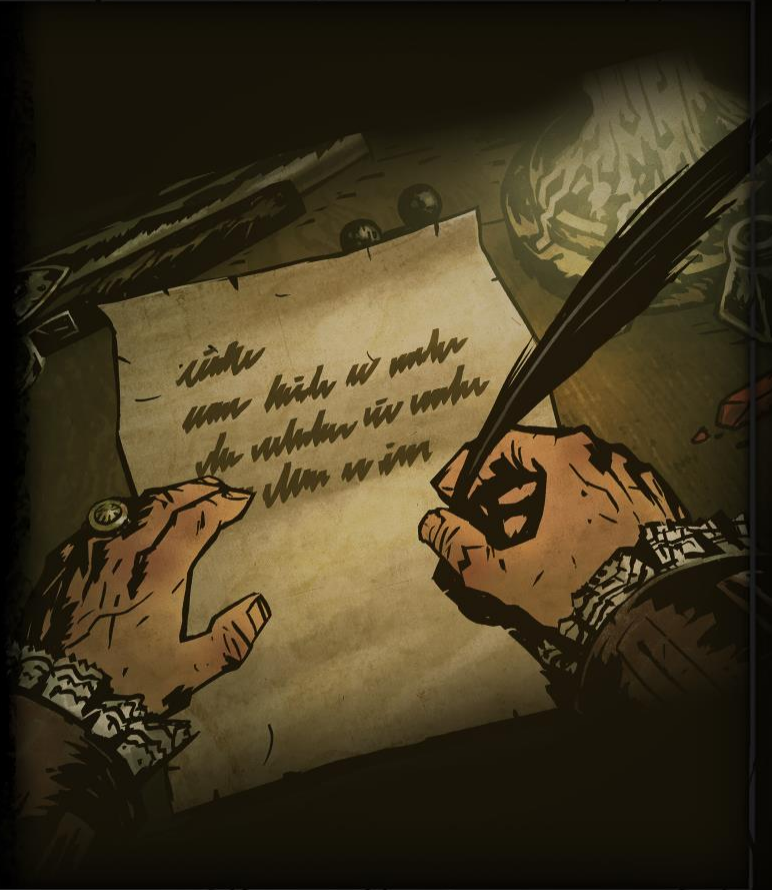
# Part II: Creative Direction in Action

**Informed Cuts:** *Gear System and other 'cost of entry' features are mandatory*

Used Creative Direction as a razor to measure the relative value/importance of features;

Gear system is resource/production intensive and our focus was the psychological angle;

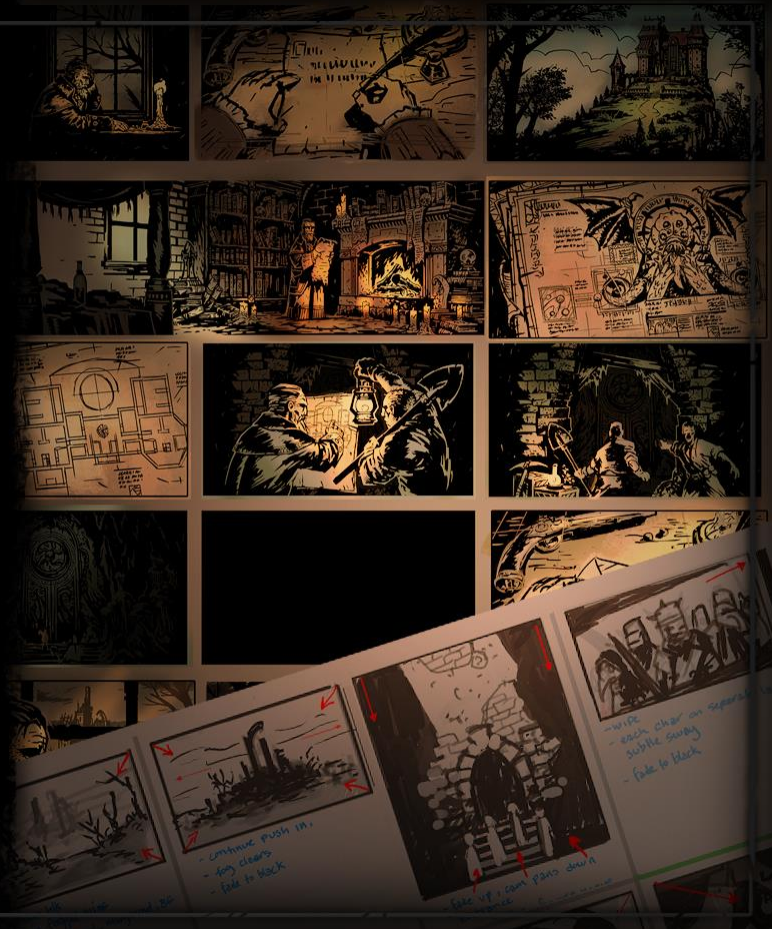Limited to 2 equipment slots, but blew out the number of available items.
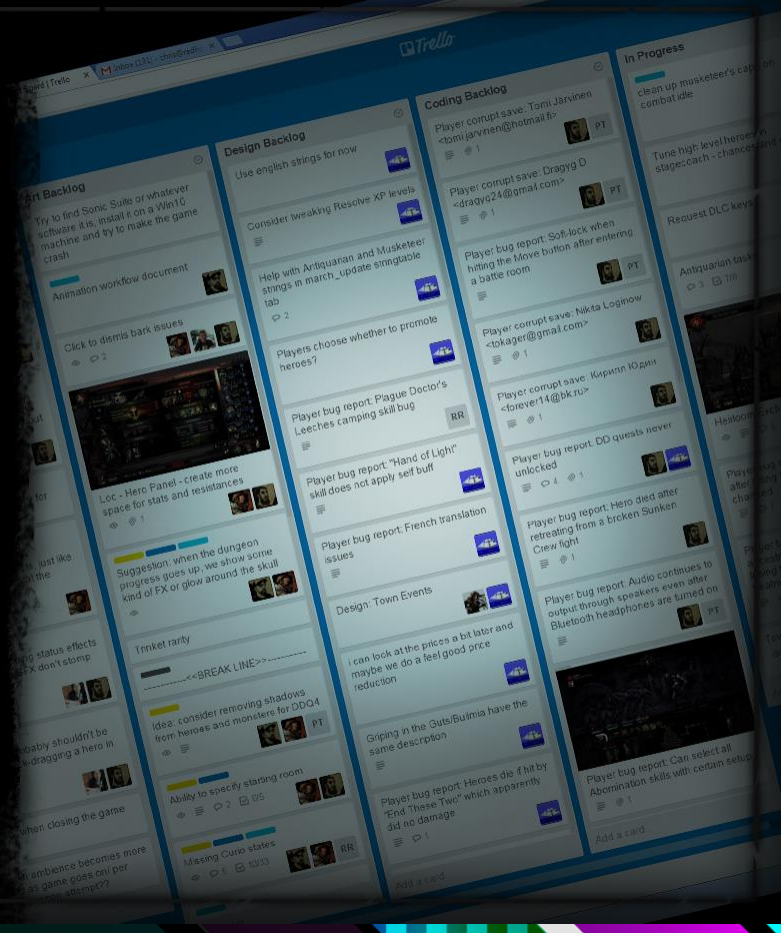
# Part II: Creative Direction in Action

*Trailers* *should be fast, punchy, exciting and focus on mechanics*

This approach would contradict the tone and mood we wanted;

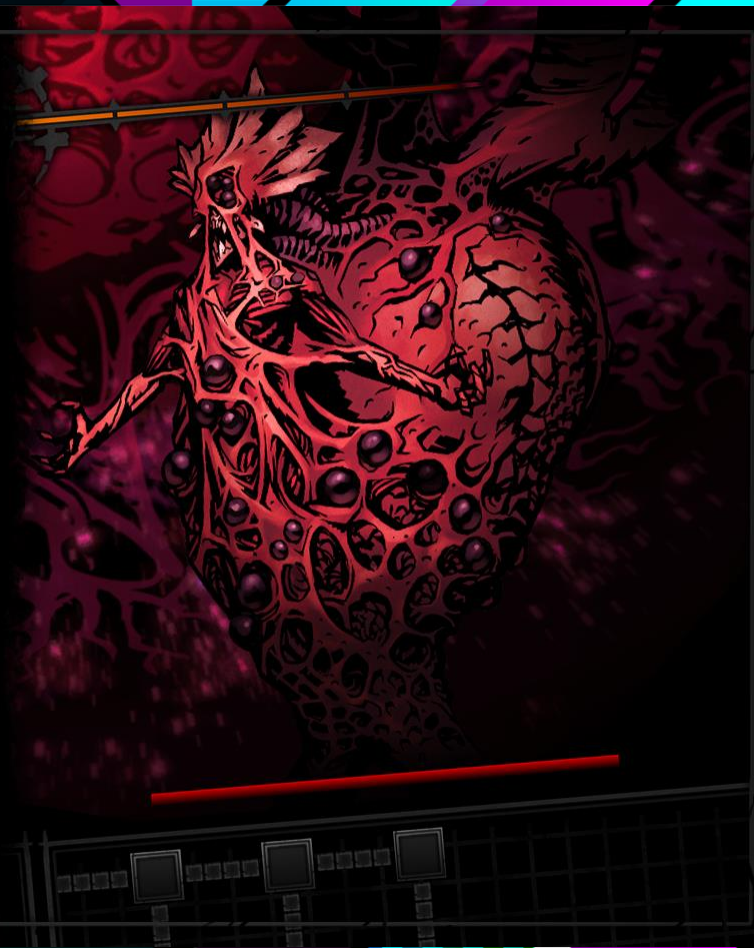Our trailers are longer, slower, deliver feeling over function;

As a result, they stood out from the crowd!

# Part II: Creative Direction in Action

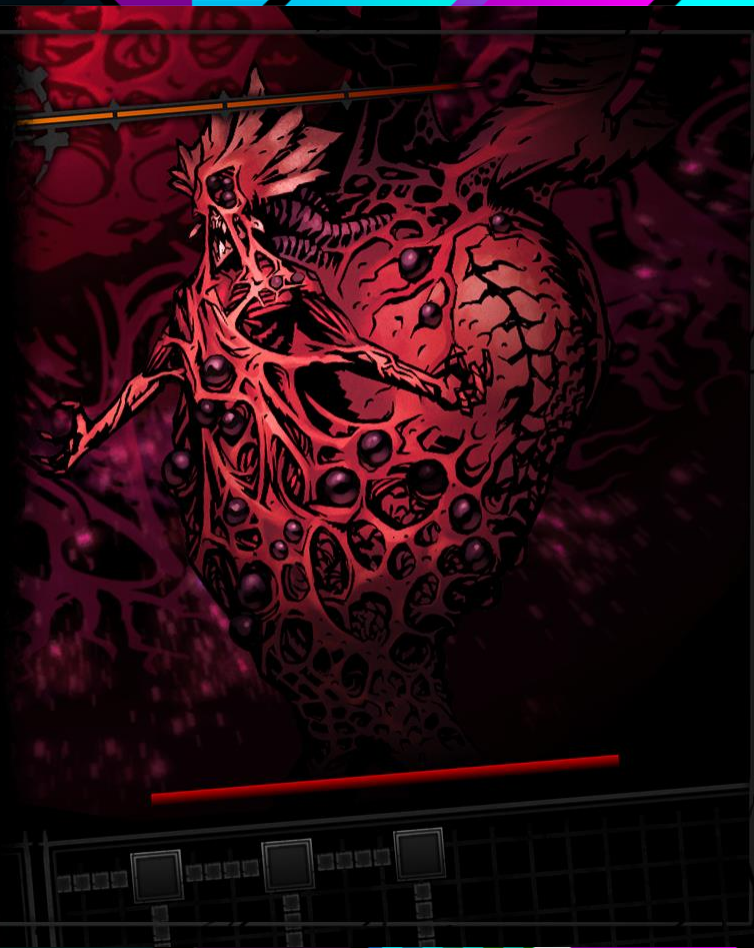*Never* arbitrarily take away something the player has worked for/invested in…

# Part II: Creative Direction in Action

Final boss in DD is a thematic compression of the player's experience;

We broke flow and were deliberately obtuse with UI in order to create the sense of dawning horror & uncertainty in the player.

Development is a dungeon crawl...

# Conclusion

Creative Direction is a practical and valuable tool in the developer's inventory;

A rallying point for the team, a razor to assist in decision-making...

...a torch to illuminate the darkened corners of development!

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