Breaking Barriers
Combat Accessibility in God of War Ragnarök

Santa Monica Studio

Adam Oliver
GDC 2023

Hi everyone, welcome to Breaking Barriers: Combat Accessibility in God of War Ragnarök! Thanks for coming by!
There's a lot to get through, so let's get started with an introduction and some background.
click

Who Am I?

Adam Oliver

Sr Combat Designer on God of War Ragnarök

Accessibility in Combat

Team Effort!

Santa Monica Studio

My name is Adam and I'm a Senior Combat Designer at Santa Monica Studio
click
I'm excited to speak with you today about some of the accessibility features that the team built out to reduce barriers within God of War Ragnarök's combat.
I'll be doing a deep dive on just a handful of our accessibility features and explain how they came to be.
click
The details that I'm presenting today is the result of collaboration between Combat Design, UX Design, Camera Design, Gameplay Engineering, and more. I'm presenting our work, to you. Let's jump right into it.
click

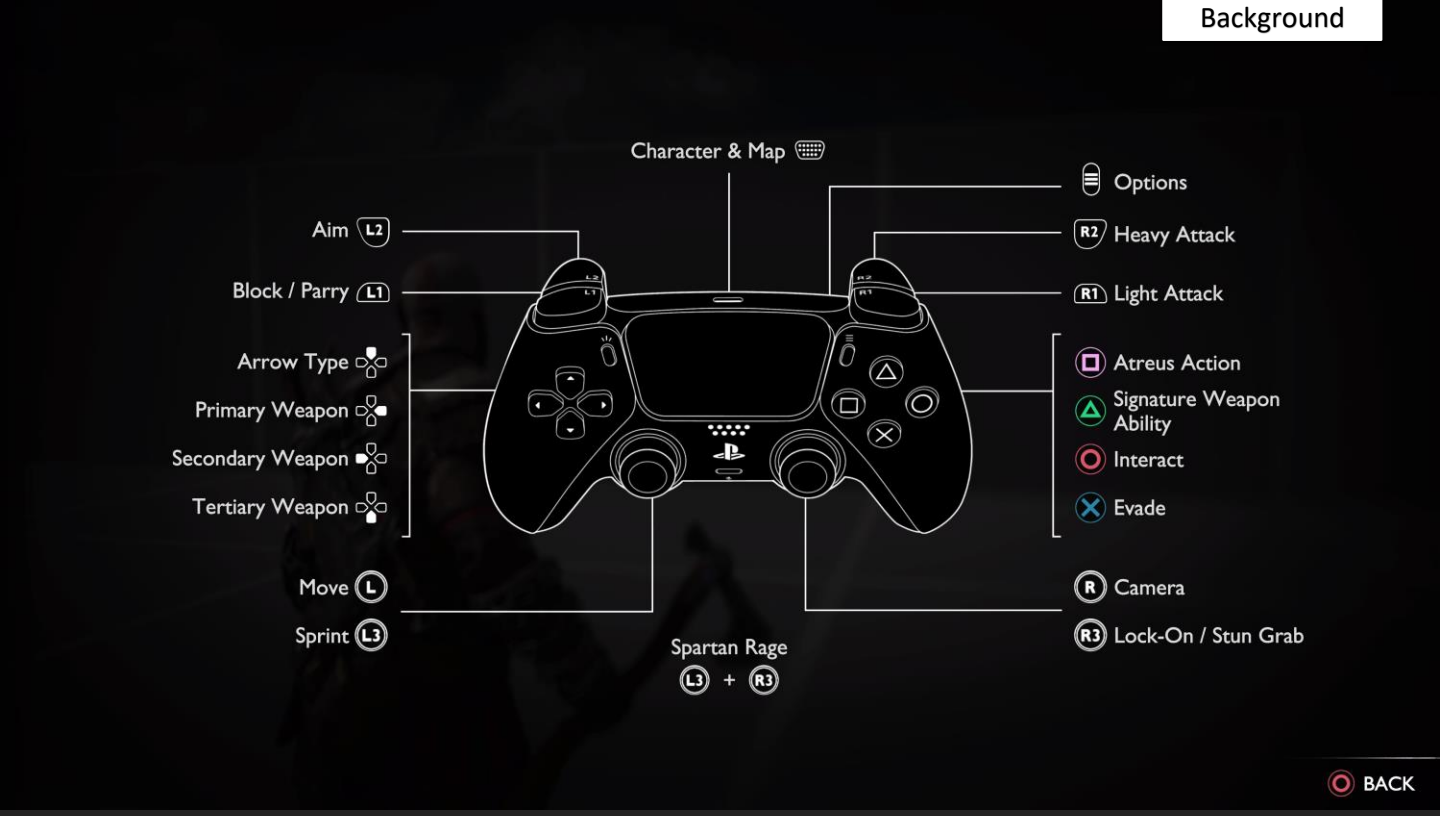
For those unfamiliar with the franchise, God of War's combat aims to deliver intense character action in an approachable way.
Despite approachability being a stated goal, there are aspects of our gameplay that proved to be particularly challenging to navigate as we aimed to expand accessibility.
We have many aspects of the game that are intentionally punishing in order to drive engagement
The player must keep track of multiple threats frequently and respond in real time with well-timed defense.
How did we balance keeping these aspects of the game and where did we find opportunities to make accommodations?
click

Accessibility & Motor Disabilities

- **Accessibility** is the practice of avoiding **unintentional barriers** that prevent players with varying impairments from accessing/enjoying the game, through design or bespoke accessibility features
- Games have several **intentional** barriers
- **Motor Disability** – disabilities relating to control and mobility
- Common game inputs can be challenging or impossible
- Fatigue can impact play session duration

I'll share a definition of accessibility and the types of disabilities I'll be focusing on today so we're on the same page.
click
Accessibility is the practice of avoiding unintentional barriers that prevent players with varying impairments from accessing/enjoying the game, through design or bespoke accessibility features.
click
Games constantly have intentional barriers – like needing to defeat an enemy or solve a puzzle to progress. With accessibility we want to avoid unintentional ones.
click
The primary type of disability I'll be discussing today, and how we designed for them, is motor disabilities – those relating to control and mobility. Some examples are limb amputation or tendonitis.
click
With less ability to engage with the game's controls, many common actions can become challenging or impossible.
click
In addition, some players experience fatigue, being only capable of playing for a short time.
Let's look at why motor disabilities can be a particular issue with God of War.
click

Background



Here’s an image of the controls screen.

All the buttons on the controller are used!
Having a lot of actions and having reasons to use them all is part of what makes gameplay fun and engaging both in and out of combat.
This presents significant challenges for us as developers to provide an accessible experience. So how did we approach this?
click

Initial Uncertainty

- General desire to expand accessibility for “God of War Ragnarök”
- Some skepticism & uncertainty early on
- Evaluation involves:
  - **Player Value**

There’s some key context to consider from early in the project that impacted how and when we approached these problems.
click
Early on, while there was a push for expanded accessibility that many could be on board with conceptually,
click
like with anything there was also some healthy skepticism for a few reasons.
click
In evaluating features, we generally consider these three things
click
First, player value. Predicting value was initially tough, many didn’t know what the opportunity for improvement was or how players would benefit from some suggested features.
click

Initial Uncertainty

- General desire to expand accessibility for “God of War Ragnarök”
- Some skepticism & uncertainty early on
- Evaluation involves:
  - **Player Value**
    - **Volume** (how many use it) & **Magnitude** (to what extent it helps)
  - **Cost**
  - **Alignment with design**

I’ll break out Player value further into volume (how many players use this feature) and magnitude (to what extent does this feature transform the experience for those who use it)
click
Second, cost. We had a good understanding of what it takes to build a boss or an enemy after making many God of War titles before, but much less knowledge of what it takes to execute accessibility features. This made “signing up” for a robust set of features difficult.
click
Third, whether the feature conflicts with design intent.

Because of the first two issues being so significant on their own, exploring features that could conflict with the intended design was much less common early in the project.
So how did we move forward from this uncertainty?
click

Finding some early wins

- Explored features without design conflict
- Alternative controls/remapping

We looked at things that wouldn't conflict with the design that also had easier to understand player value, to "get our feet wet," so to speak. Some examples for us:
click
Highly expanded control remapping, which took a great deal of work due to the way our engine previously handled inputs and the sheer number of possible permutations.
click

Finding some early wins

- Explored features without design conflict
- Alternative controls/remapping
- Traversal Assist
- Show value with **partial implementation**
- **Player value** becomes more clear
- **Cost** estimates become more accurate
- Building toward more tricky problems

Things that we can semi-automate such as Traversal – We read the stick intent for contextual traversal that would previously require a button press.
click
These both showed value at partial implementation, even though full implementation took much longer. So even if full auto traversal is out of reach, automating mantles alone may be feasible as an improvement.
click
The experience gave us an understanding of the complexity in the space and confidence that we can succeed here, leading us to take on more.
click

Combat Camera Assists

Santa Monica Studio

That leads us to the first couple features I'll discuss – these are some of the trickier problems we tackled in enabling players with motor disabilities to engage with the combat, while not conflicting with the design.
click

Camera Control

- Use of both sticks in combat

Having a player-controlled camera is a significant motor disability issue due to requiring the use of both sticks frequently. Many players impacted by these disabilities can only really operate one stick at a time.
click

Camera Control

- Use of both sticks in combat
- Strafe Set
- Cannot aim attacks with navigation stick

Because Kratos uses a strafe navigation set and his attack orientation is generally relative to camera forward, players can't use the navigation stick to aim their melee attacks.
click

Camera Control - Issues

- Melee, Aiming, Then Melee
- Lock-On is **Optional**

Our playable character being encouraged to regularly switch back and forth between melee and ranged combat adds extra complexity to lock-on systems.
click
Players may choose to use Lock-On exclusively, sometimes, or never, so we needed to solve both cases while expanding accessibility.

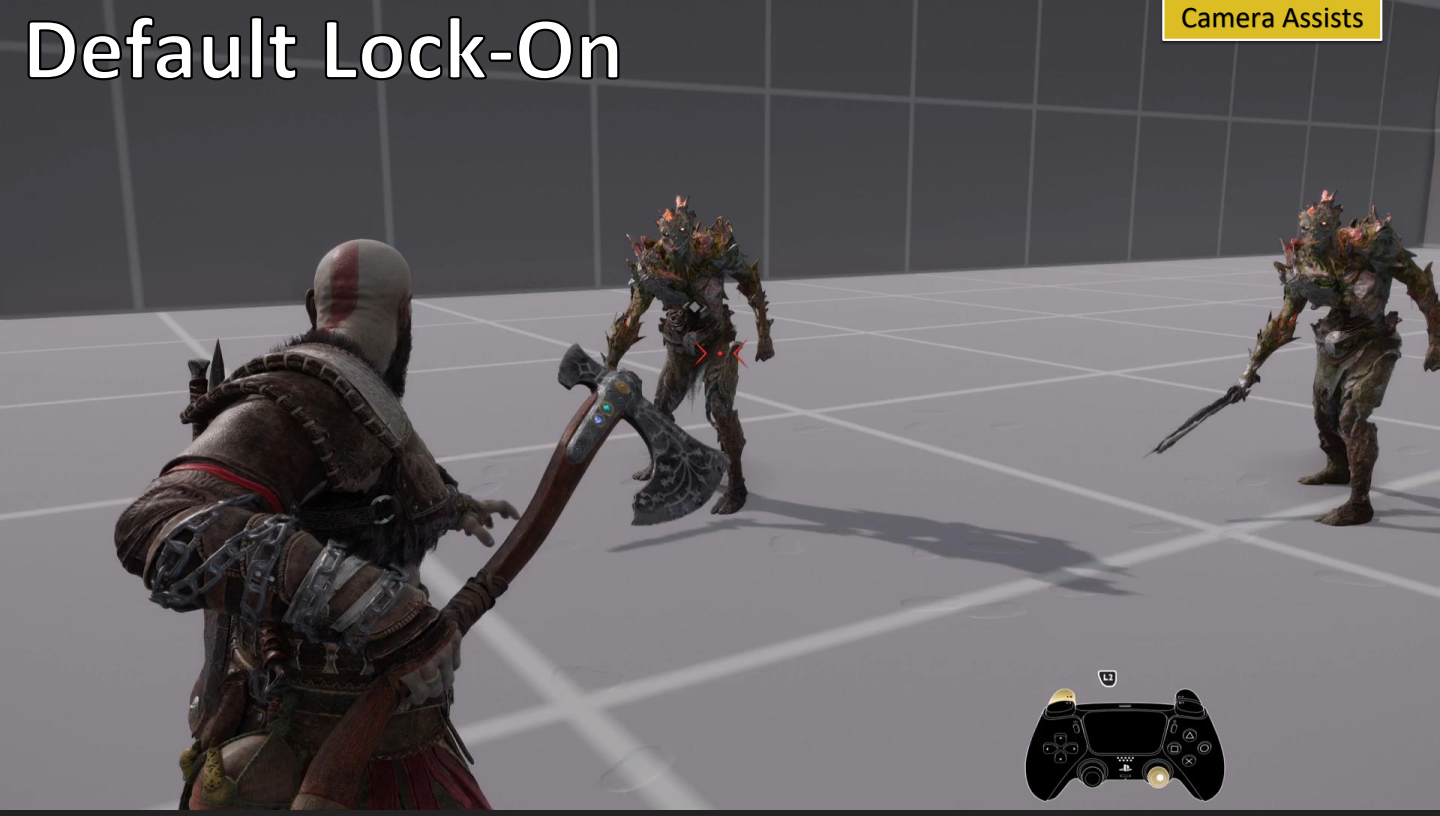
Camera Lock-On

- Entire combat system is designed WITHOUT Lock-On
- Many players use Lock-On 100% of the time… **and that's OK**
- Needs to work well in as many scenarios as possible

The entire combat system is designed to work without lock-on, and the player can disengage at will.
click
Many players decide to use it 100% of the time.
click
So, it's key it works well in as many scenarios as possible.
Regular Lock-On has a lot of things that are important to it working well in the system.
click

Default Lock-On

Camera Assists



In a game where you often want switch back and forth between melee and ranged combat… It's natural to be locked on to an enemy and then pull aim. And we allow you to freely aim even while locked on, to support managing fights with multiple enemies. When aim is released, camera snaps back to the retained target, which you can see in this video as I incapacitate an enemy with the axe before re-engaging with the lock-on target.
click

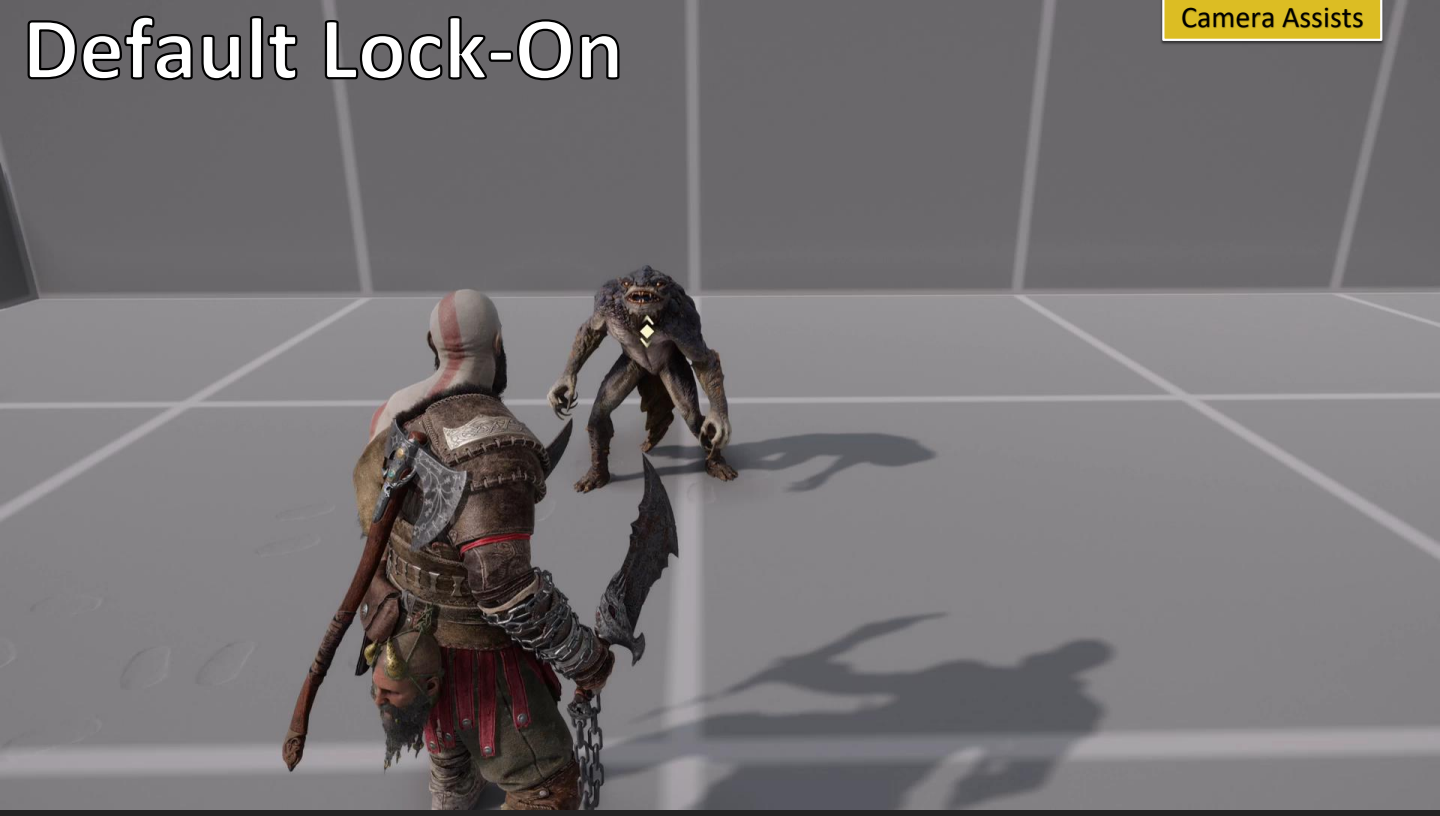
Lock-On – Accessibility

- Camera Lock-On proved to be valuable for players who have trouble utilizing right stick in the heat of battle
- Issues in context of accessibility
- Repeatedly having to re-acquire a target
- Off-screen targets

Lock-on is helpful for players who can't use both sticks in combat.
click
But when viewed as an accessibility feature, there were issues
click
When targets die, having to find a new target was a big ask. Player needed to press R3 again, an input requiring force that's even on the right stick.
click
Enemies had to be on-camera to be a valid Lock-On target, so if you physically cannot control the camera, this is counterproductive.
click

Default Lock-On

Camera Assists



Enemies disengage lock-on in certain cases like to enforce camera control as a skill.
click

Default Lock-On

Aim causing lock-on to temporarily disengage presents a barrier for players with low dexterity to use ranged attacks – enemy could move out from underneath the reticle by the time they could throw their weapon.

Opportunity to expand this further for players with disabilities
Goal was to keep the default Lock-On as is, and allow players to opt-in to more help, which comes at a tradeoff
click

Auto-Target/Auto-Target+

- When a target dies, we acquire a new target
- During aim, we continue to completely lock to the target
- Enemies can’t disengage lock-on except in very rare cases
- Lock-on reacquires after traversal
- Auto-Target+ does all of this while factoring in off-screen targets

So what did we do to improve lock-on for accessibility?
click
When a target dies, we acquire a new target.
click
We continue to be locked on to the target even during aim.
click
Enemies can’t disengage lock-on except in rare cases like enemies going completely above the screen.
click
We were also pushing mid-combat traversal a lot this game, which reorients the camera. We needed to introduce the concept of disengaging lock-on and then reacquiring the target afterward.
click
Consider off-screen targets.
click

Auto-Target Lock-On
Early Iteration

Completely locking to the target introduced a problem.
In this video the Right Stick does nothing while locked-on and aiming.
But many players play with Lock-On always engaged 100% of the time
Meaning, we needed to provide access to precision throw gameplay even with these Lock-On settings enabled
That's where Sub-Target Aim Flicking comes in.
click

Sub-Target Aim Flick Iteration

- Initially wanted to allow Aim Flick when it would be helpful to the player
- Raised a lot of questions and made things complicated
- Moved to a more generic solution that was easier to templatize
- Allowed player **experimentation**
- Auto-Target helped find targets and with precision aiming

Initially thought we'd only allow you to flick when it would guarantee a positive result, a common instinct when building assists
click
This raised a lot of questions, made implementation complicated, and required we made assumptions on what the player wanted to do which could prove false
click
When we moved to a more generic model, this became easier to implement – we could share data across characters more easily.
click
Also important is that this granted access to experimentation; nothing prevents you from trying to headshot or trip an enemy that doesn't support those hitreactions under free aim, so there's not a great reason to do so here either.
click
In addition to solving the need of reliably finding a lock-on target, we also turned a largely analog endeavor (precision aiming) into a much less demanding activity for the player.
click

Auto-Target Lock-On Aim Flicking

With Auto-Target, we don't have access to free aim while locked on
If we pull aim, and then move the stick up or down, you can flick to various points of interest – Typically this is a creature's head (headshot) or legs (trip).
Melee-focused games rarely do this except on very large creatures, but because of our emphasis on fun enemy hitreactions, this worked well for us.
And when precision throws were mandatory in certain sequences, this feature was there to help.
click

Recenter Camera On Attack

- Expanded camera feature for use when Lock-On is not engaged
- Close camera made orienting camera toward a target for the player very valuable
- Players using one stick can’t attack and move camera
- Had Recenter On-Hit already in previous game
- Opportunity to expand this feature for players with disabilities

A player may not want to use lock-on due to its trade-offs or its input, so let’s get into a feature that helps players who are playing without.
click
Our close, intimate 3rd-person camera results in enemies being “off screen” in scenarios they’d typically be visible in other games.
Kratos always orients his attacks to camera forward, so you can’t use the navigation stick to aim at enemies.
click
Some players with motor disabilities were able to either attack or control the camera, but not do both at the same time.
click
In God of War 2018 we had a setting that recentered the camera toward our target when we successfully hit an enemy, which we knew helped beginner players with a less frequent need to rotate the camera manually.
click
But we could expand this into an accessibility feature by always doing it when the attack begins
So, how’s that work in practice?
click

Recenter Camera On Attack

Camera Assists

Here's a video of Kratos fighting some Draugr with this feature.
The player can focus on attacking and defending, without the need to control the camera – a perfect fit for this type of player.
Even if an enemy is behind Kratos, the player can simply attack to rotate around and strike.
If managing Lock-On was cumbersome or itself posed a barrier, this would be a strong alternative.
click

Playtest to Validate

- Accessibility consultant tried out the game with these features
- Lower-level quadriplegic
- Overall, a great success

Just like anything else in the game, we also need to validate the design of our accessibility through playtesting.
click
We had a consultant with a motor disability test out the combat with these camera assists and other features
click
Lower-level quad - Could still use their hands to some extent but also utilized their chin to engage with controls.
click
The feedback was highly positive – and I'm going to share some direct quotes from the player.
click

Playtester Feedback

- *"It was hard for me to orient myself in battle in [God of War] 2018. The features really allowed me to overcome the combat myself."*
- *"It helped me try different things I wouldn't normally try. When I felt comfortable with battle, I could focus on using more of it. Let me try using Atreus now."*
- Less frustration led to engagement with **combat depth**!
- **Player value** again demonstrated
- Feedback pointed to further accessibility opportunities

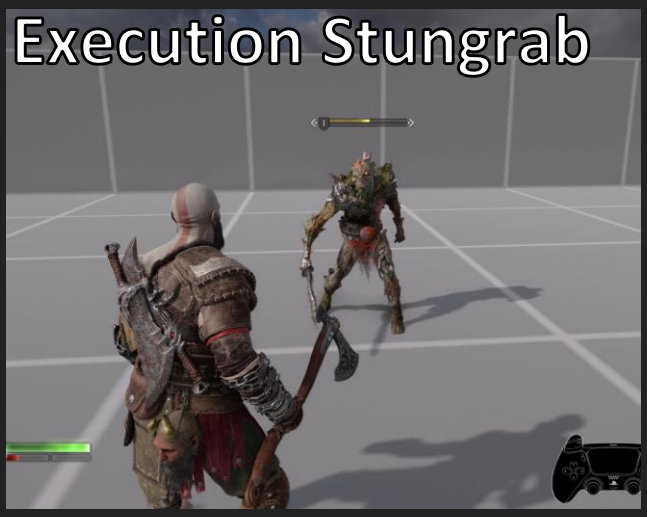
"It was hard for me to orient myself in battle in [God of War] 2018. The features really allowed me to overcome the combat myself."
click
"It helped me try different things I wouldn't normally try. When I felt comfortable with battle, I could focus on using more of it. Let me try using Atreus now."
click
Due to not experiencing as many barriers with the controls, they were able to engage more with systems like controlling the companion in combat. This is a combat designer's dream right here, an accessibility feature helping a player engage with the combat depth we've gone through great trouble to provide
click
Now that's some serious player value.
click
We used information from this and other playtests with players with disabilities to inform our next steps, like the next feature I'll be discussing.
click

Stungrabs

Santa Monica Studio

That wraps up the camera assists, and how they help a player target and attack enemies. But what about finishing enemies? To go over that, I'll need to discuss stungrabs.
click

StunGrabs



When a creature's stun meter gets full, they become crumpled, player can initiate a stungrab that would do either damage or execute the enemy based on their current HP. The input for this is R3 or holding Circle.
These stungrabs fulfill that Kratos power fantasy and are also absolutely required to complete many boss fights after depleting their HP. Yet presented a barrier for those with motor disabilities, due to the input.
There was an accessibility opportunity here!
click

More Accessible Stungrab?

- Automating the stungrab?
- Unmotivated action is jarring, especially if triggered by companion
- **Player intent** and choice would be lost

You might think we could automate the stun grab, and some on the team thought so too. Kratos becomes invulnerable after inputting one and during the grab itself, so why not?
click
But an unmotivated action can be really jarring with a close camera, and a stun state may even be triggered by a companion acting autonomously.
click
Player intent and choice would be lost. The player would have less agency, not more.
click

Additionally, we further pushed cases where you would want to wait to stungrab – deal damage to the enemy in the crumpled state, then initiate a grab when it becomes fatal
click

To drive the point home, here's a clip where Kratos and Atreus are fighting two Draugr. I trip one of them and punch him into a wall, which triggers a stun state. I then attack the other Draugr while that one is crumpled before initiating the stungrab, allowing me to convert what would have been one stungrab into two thanks in part to Atreus' help.
We wanted to somehow capture the player's intent even with this as an accessibility feature.
click

Move Stick Stungrab

- Stick intent stungrab – press stick toward a stunned enemy to grab
- Players already must use the stick to navigate

Very quickly moved to the idea of Stick Intent stungrab – later named Move Stick.
click
Player already needs to use a stick to move, so why not use that same stick to stungrab the enemy?
click

Move Stick Stungrab

- Stick intent stungrab – press stick toward a stunned enemy to grab
- Players already must use the stick to navigate
- Learnings from Traversal Assist

Successes with Traversal Assist also reinforced this idea.
click

Move Stick Stungrab

This gave the player access not only to stungrabs, but also the fun and depth around the stungrabs if they want to do something else before initiating one. Having this stungrab check running repeatedly while holding the stick also helped identify technical issues with the setup. The accessibility improvement led us to improve the implementation for all players
click

Recenter Camera On Attack and Move Stick Stungrab

By now we've had some accessibility wins and tackled those first two issues I brought up
Player value was clearly demonstrated
We had more knowledge of what it took to realize these features.
That third thing – aligning with design intent – would start to come up a lot more often.

Even when there could be a conflict with the intended design, would the opportunity be great enough for us to explore it anyway?
click

Miniboss Checkpoints

Santa Monica Studio

One example where the accessibility feature began to conflict with the design was the extremely popular Miniboss Checkpoint feature.
click

Boss Checkpoints

- Main Bosses checkpoint you during phases
- Clear discrete phases, typically with a transition

For Main Bosses, we often use phase transitions to deliver narrative/emotional beats of fights, checkpointing afterward.
click
Checkpointing in a boss fight allows us to make each phase longer and more challenging than if we required you do it all in one go
click

Minibosses

- “Minibosses” require you to deplete the entire health bar in one go
- Introduces problems with fatigue
- Opportunity to introduce HP checkpoints on minibosses
- Restricted on highest difficulty setting to retain design intent

This is not the case for “minibosses” – enemies with a large amount of health often used as an anchor in a group fight or as 1v1 challenges.
click
We had gotten feedback from accessibility consultants about long duration fights leading to fatigue, and that losing progress was particularly problematic in this context.
click
So there seemed like an opportunity to improve for these players who needed it by adding optional checkpoints
click
We knew we wanted to restrict this for the highest difficulty setting. Playing correctly for an extended duration is a design goal of this difficulty.
click

Problems

- Got it implemented, selectable in playtest
- In the Gameplay section of the settings menu
- Player awareness was low
- Players would turn this on then play the whole game without realizing when or if it activated

With that one stipulation, we got these checkpoints working in game, and they were selectable in playtests.
click
It was in the main Gameplay section of the menu, so almost every player would see it. This is where problems arose.
click
Player awareness was low – they'd turn it on because sure, who doesn't like checkpoints? and then play for several hours or days without realizing it was still on or when it activated
click

Repeat!

In God of War, you can unload your powerful cooldown abilities to reach a threshold,
click
Die….
click
Respawn at full HP with all your abilities…
click
& then repeat the process. Players would constantly do this.
click

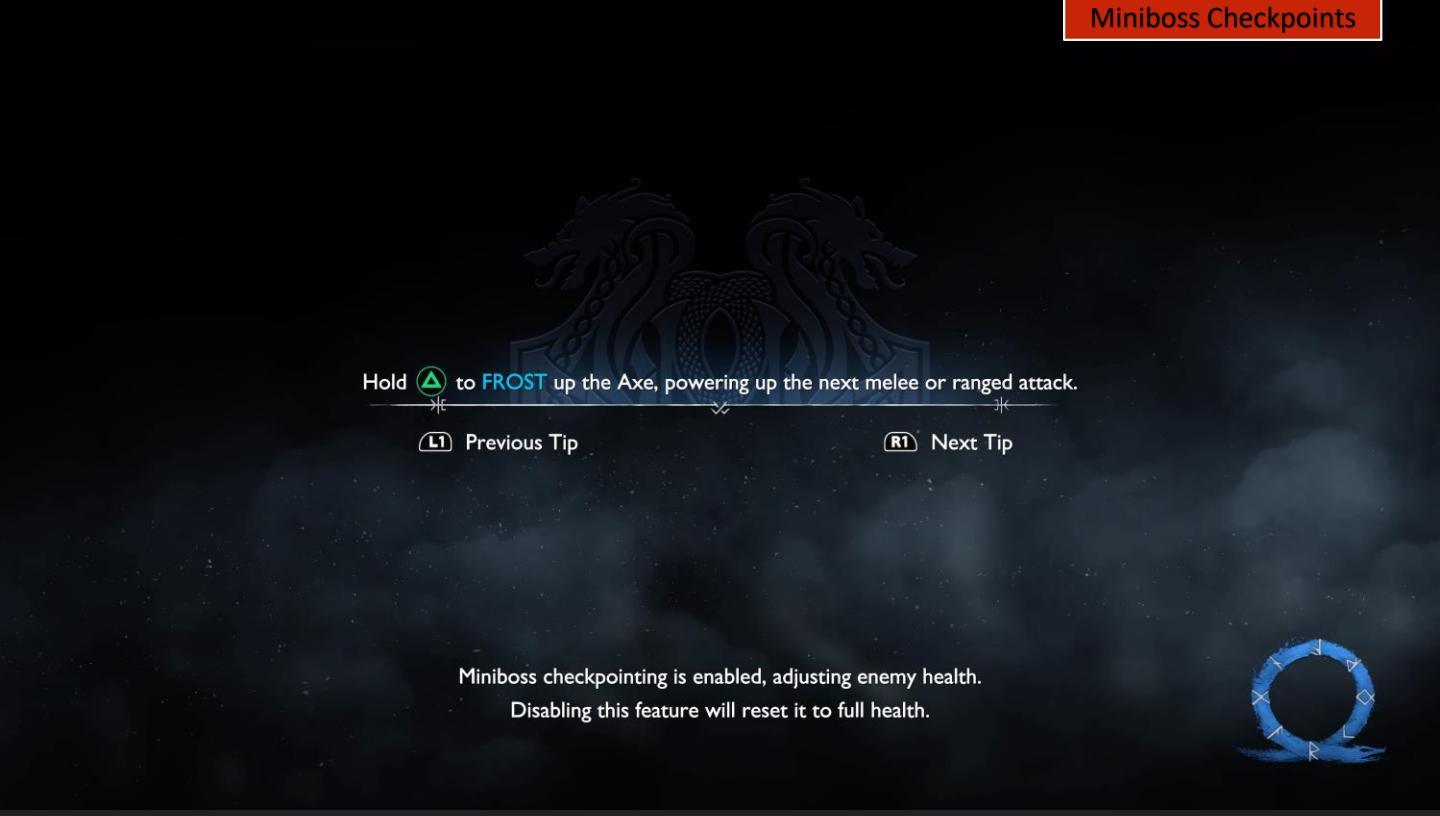
Underwhelming Miniboss

- Higher difficulty playtester feedback - “That boss was underwhelming”
- In truth, miniboss checkpoint prevented the desired challenge
- Could have resulted in unwarranted tuning on the miniboss
- Is this a **design conflict** here as well?

We had a player play through the game on a higher difficulty – so they had opted-in to a higher challenge – but had the checkpoints enabled.
click
They gave feedback that the miniboss was “underwhelming,” and after checking the tapes
click
we noticed that a miniboss checkpoint was triggered, trivializing the fight for them. They were robbed of the challenge they hoped for, and they didn’t know why!
click
This was a huge problem. Tuning on this miniboss could have been done to address this feedback. We would have harmed the design for players not using checkpoints, yet the core problem of miniboss checkpoint awareness would have remained.
click
We were now feeling that the setting could also be conflicting with the design intent of this difficulty, not just the highest.
click

Solutions

To address this problem, we moved this to the Accessibility menu so that players would mostly find this if they were really struggling and searching through settings for help.
We locked this out on both higher difficulty settings instead of just highest – the first step a player should take if they are struggling is turning down the difficulty.
With the improved messaging, better location in the settings menu, and locking it out on both higher difficulties, the feature retained its purpose while being far less likely to deny a player of their desired challenge.
click



We also give the player a reminder that the checkpointing is enabled on each death.
This improves player awareness of the feature and reminds the player it can be turned off if they aren't having any trouble.
click

Evade Assist

Santa Monica Studio

We’ve helped the player a lot with attacking and finishing off enemies, as well as dealing with those minibosses. But there’s also the problem of defending against incoming attacks, which this next feature did.
Importantly, there was a clear design conflict here from the beginning, which we’ve been building toward.
click

Evade Assist

Evades - Details

I'll quickly share some details about evades.
In this video, when Kratos is Blue, he's invulnerable.
Evades in God of War are split up into two parts – The sidestep and the full roll
In both states, Kratos is invulnerable for some frames and then becomes vulnerable to hits.
click

Evade fails because of direction

There’s also a directionality component. Here’s an example where I sidestep at the right time but get hit because it was done toward the enemy.
Some attacks require the player to evade to the side or backwards, not simply at the right time.
The player is often tasked with Evading frequently with a strict timing requirement
click

Evade Accessibility?

- Strict evade timing came up as an accessibility opportunity
- Could the evade be made fully invulnerable?
- Timing requirement for evades is part of our design goals

Other games have accessibility features that let you become fully invulnerable during rolls, *click* and in fact team members suggested doing this for our evades, prompting consideration.
click
For our design goals, it's important that there's some risk and timing required. It keeps defense engaging over many hours of play.
click

In addition, because of the existence of a Companion in most encounters, the player can earn damage without paying an animation cost.
If you could stay invulnerable indefinitely, you could make progress and defeat enemies this way.
What were our design instincts telling us?
click

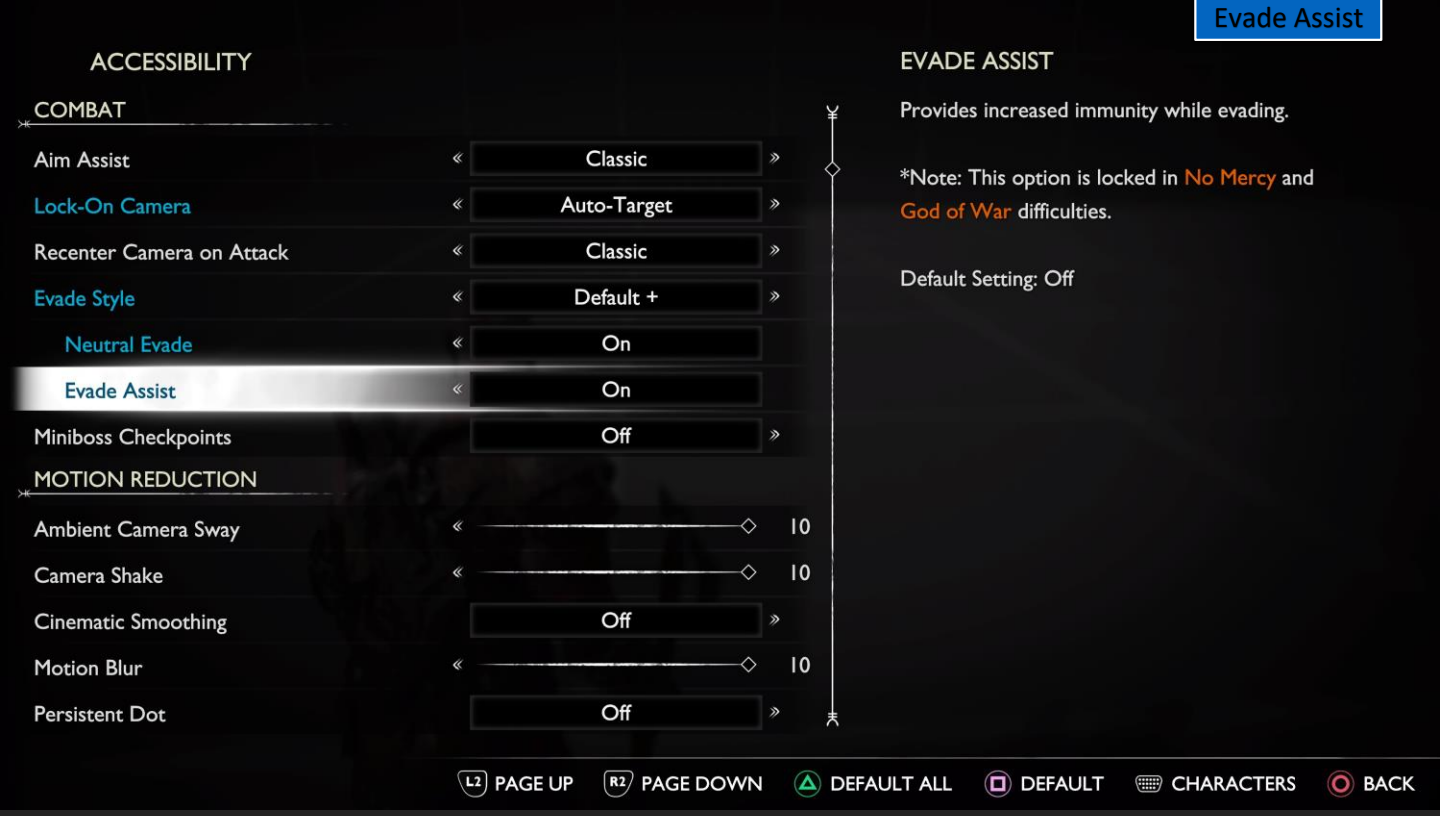
Due to the clear conflict with our design goals, our instincts were saying no, just like Kratos here.
The game and all its content is carefully balanced around the existing frame data, so a change like this would be detrimental to the combat.
click

…But what if?

- Do we know for sure that there's nothing to be done here?
- Focus on the **problem**
- Accessibility opportunity!
- Player is doing what we're asking of them
- If we could help them **even a little bit**, how?

But in discussions this notion was challenged.
Do we REALLY know for sure that any change here would ruin the intended design? How can we know that if we've never tried?
click
Let's focus on the problem *click* the timing constraint is an opportunity for an accessibility gain
click
And after all, they're doing what we're asking – which is to evade – but they're too early
click
If we could help a player out here, even a little bit, what would that look like?
Thinking of the problem from this perspective, here's what we produced.
click

With Evade Assist we add some more invulnerability to both states – here's a video of just the sidestep slowed down for demonstration purposes.
This may seem subtle, but keep in mind this is a game where one frame is often the difference between success and death. We're giving the player several here.
They still need to have timing and keep directionality in mind, so they're still engaged with the defense, but it's less strict
We were able to validate this as we did with the previous features through playtests.
click



This is locked on the higher difficulties. In the same way that defeating a miniboss all at once is an intended part of the challenge on higher difficulties, so too is the timing aspect of evades.
click

Challenge Bosses

Now I'd like to bring it all together by focusing on a postgame boss
click

The Ultimate Challenge

We have optional challenge bosses in the game, like the Valkyrie Queen here
They represent the culmination of all our systems and are the ultimate challenge for the player, providing the experience that veteran players (and many of us as combat designers) crave when we play these types of games.
They have a high power level, encouraging engagement with side content elsewhere in the game and to be deliberate about build choice.
click

Their attack sequences are balanced around Kratos' defensive abilities and their frame data.
They demand control of the camera, requiring players to keep up.
They have a high health pool and damage output, demanding the player play correctly for a long time while making minimal mistakes.
click

And at the end of it all, the player must input a Stungrab to finish the fight. Most of the assists I just discussed are global features, so they'd be usable here
click

We had even gone out of our way to allow the enhanced camera lock-on features to reacquire these bosses after they returned from going above the screen.
click

Checkpoints?

- Checkpoints on the challenge bosses would be a design conflict
- The player could rob themselves of the journey to victory by shortcutting the challenge despite being capable
- Search results could lead to using these as a shortcut
- Difficulty and Accessibility was becoming blurred

But allowing miniboss checkpoints on these challenge bosses was controversial – some felt we shouldn't support checkpoints at all due to this direct conflict with the intended design.
click
The journey of repeatedly failing, learning, and achieving victory is a highlight moment for many players, even on the lowest difficulty. This was at risk if it was shortcut with this feature.
click
We knew players struggling at retail could internet search for help at the first sign of trouble and find Miniboss checkpoints, rather than change their playstyle or upgrade their gear.
click
When the line between difficulty tuning and accessibility became blurred, so too became the path forward. We needed to consider this carefully.
click

Checkpointing – Arguments

- Player may shortcut challenge, but could also turn down difficulty
- This is optional content, but narrative is delivered after
- Player could rob themselves of the journey, but what if they need it?
- Checkpoints are earned
- Much of the design remains in-tact
- We don’t allow it on higher difficulties systemically

The player may shortcut this challenge in this way… But could also turn down difficulty. We already trust them with that decision, even if these are meaningfully different in a few ways (like those cooldown moves).
click
This is optional…. But narrative is delivered after these fights; locking some players out of these experiences could itself be a design conflict with the narrative goals.
click
Players may rob themselves of the journey…. But how do we know they will enjoy it less if they selected it? Or needed it due to fatigue or any other reason?
click
And to reach the checkpoint they need to first make progress, as opposed to starting them with reduced health
click
They’re only addressing the endurance part of the fight. Behavior and attack sequences remain.
click
Importantly, the two higher difficulties already disallow it.
click

Checkpointing

- More sensitive to accessibility gains than ever
- With the player awareness issue resolved, we could consider this
- Validated concerns
- Concerns remained
- More good than harm

We were now more sensitive than ever to accessibility gains after having seen huge wins elsewhere.
click
And if we hadn't resolved that player awareness issue as I described earlier, this would have been off the table.
click
We decided to allow 1 checkpoint on these challenge bosses which is significant considering they're tuned around no checkpoints.
click
Key to reaching this result and having a productive conversation was validating the expressed concerns.
click
While many of our concerns remained, *click* this checkpoint would do more good for the players who truly needed it than harm to a player who didn't.
click

Lessons Learned

In closing, this was a long and difficult journey. There's certainly still room to grow and improve, but we learned some great lessons from this experience. *click*

Lessoned Learned

- Early wins were key to building confidence – Value & Cost
- Playtesting with players & accessibility consultants was crucial
- Direct design conflicts were tricky & challenging but rewarding
- Validating concerns rather than dismissing them was key

Getting early wins built confidence in many areas, allowing us to push further.
click
Validating the design through playtesting with players and consultants with disabilities was crucial not only to ensure we were delivering the feature to the players who needed it, but also to find new opportunities.
click
The trickiest problems were when a promising feature posed a direct conflict with combat fundamentals and design goals
These were challenging but often the most rewarding.
click
It was important to validate concerns and be empathetic to the arguments against possible features, rather than dismissing them.
This kept teammates tackling problems together, rather than pushing each other away.
click

Lessoned Learned

- Early wins were key to building confidence – Value & Cost
- Playtesting with players & accessibility consultants was crucial
- Direct design conflicts were tricky & challenging but rewarding
- Validating concerns rather than dismissing them was key
- Question if an accommodation would *really* make the design fail
- Wins over time built sensitivity to more wins
- Broke barriers for the player and ourselves!

At the same time, it was important to challenge our design instincts and ask ourselves if we truly knew for sure that the fundamental design would fail if certain accommodations were made.
click
Throughout this journey, we became sensitive to accessibility wins, making us reconsider and earnestly push toward features we wouldn't have entertained at first.
click
Not only did we break barriers for the player, but also between each other as teammates, and within our design thinking. This made it very worthwhile.
click

More God of War Accessibility

- **UX Summit: Playtesting God of War Ragnarök Accessibility Options - Sue Pacete**
- **‘God of War Ragnarök”: Designing AAA Low Vision Game Accessibility** - Mila Pavlin

Santa Monica Studio

Before I wrap things up, I wanted to highlight a few talks that took place earlier this week at GDC about the game’s accessibility that will be viewable on the vault.
click
If you want to learn more about how we validated our accessibility through playtesting, check out “UX Summit: Playtesting God of War Ragnarök Accessibility Options” by Sue, Senior User Researcher.
click
If you want to learn about how we designed accessibility for low vision players, check out ‘God of War Ragnarök’: Designing AAA Low Vision Game Accessibility by Mila Pavlin, the game’s UX Design Lead.
click

Last but not least, we’re hiring for what’s next! If what I’ve gone over today excites you, please get in touch. Check out our careers page to see open positions.
click

Thank You!

adam.oliver@sony.com
@Strong_Badam

Santa Monica Studio

STUDIOS

And that's the talk! Thank you so much.
If I have time for Q&A I can start taking questions.