

Struggle Itself

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Overview of *Struggle Itself*

A man finds himself in the same position as Sisyphus from Greek mythology, with nothing to do but roll a boulder up a mountain just to watch it fall down again. But through hardship, investigation and discovery, he begins to understand why he's been burdened with such a task.

Struggle Itself is an allegorical third-person walking/balance simulator based on the Greek myth of Sisyphus and inspired by the mechanics of *Death Stranding*.

Players must repeatedly roll a boulder up to the summit of a mountain, with each completion revealing mysterious narrative progression, philosophical insights, collectables, new mechanics and game modes.

However, no two ascents of the mountain are alike, as animals, plants and changing weather conditions will force the player to play with tact and creativity.

Struggle Itself has a self-aware tone. The protagonist, Son, serves as a playful and humorous narrator of the game who questions his own actions in a meta way that may echo the thoughts of the player and remind them of such games as *The Stanley Parable*.

Name	Son
Age	26
Height	178cm
Sex	Male
Eye Colour	Blue
Build	Initially slim but gains muscle
Hair Colour	Brown



Character Traits:

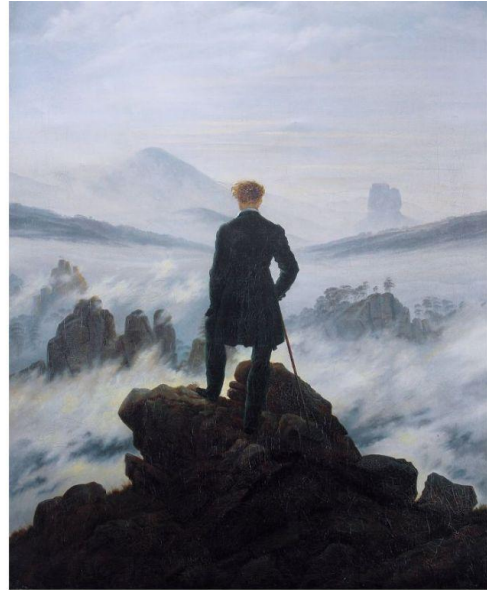
- Witty
- Slightly melancholic
- Intellectual
- Strong
- Adaptable
- Caring

Biography:

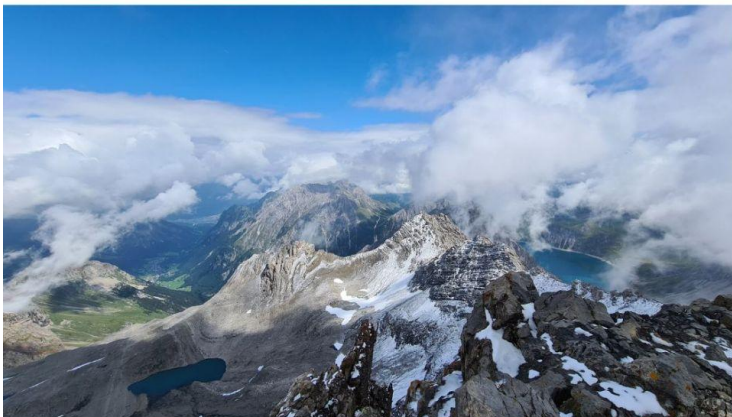
Son woke up in a canyon at the foot of a mountain with a huge boulder beside him. Surrounded by untraversable terrain, one of the few things he can do is push the boulder up the mountain. After being crushed by the boulder and waking up again under the fig tree, **Son** realizes that he really is stuck there. Our protagonist's backstory is a mystery, however there is the implication that before his current circumstances, the challenges of life had defeated him and he'd pretty much given up. But in this challenging new world of isolation and struggle, he will slowly garner a different attitude towards life. An attitude of gratitude, perseverance and acceptance. His witty remarks serve as friendly company to the player, and to guide their experience through the narrative.

World Image References

1st
Stage View



2nd
Stage View



3rd
Stage View



Canyon
where
Son
wakes up



Rest/philosophy/
poetry tree



Modifying/health/damage
fruit shrubs

World Description

The world of *Struggle Itself* is filled with natural beauty. In the canyon around the mountain where **Son** finds himself trapped, there are bushes and trees scattered around the dry land.

One special tree in the canyon is the Bodhi tree. After dying, **Son** respawns here, and when he does, the player is shown lines of philosophy or poetry.

After the main plot is complete, fruit will appear on some of the shrubs in the canyon which can modify the gameplay experience if consumed by **Son**.

From the top of the mountain, **Son** can view a beautiful vista that changes appearance depending on which stage of the main plot they are at and the weather conditions.

Son encounters animals through cutscenes, but encounters with snakes, birds, bees are common in the canyon and whilst climbing.

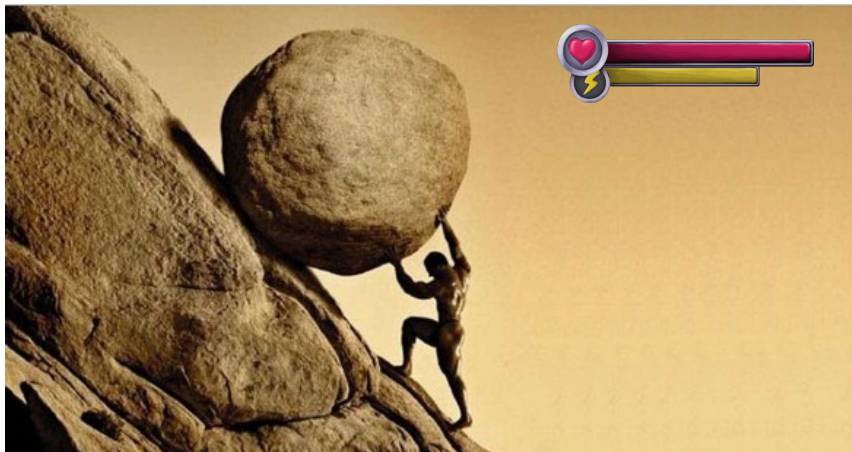
Mechanics Outline

- Walking/Balance Simulator

Struggle Itself is a physics-based walking simulator.

The player must try to balance the rock as they push it up the face of the mountain.

In a similar vein to *Death Stranding*, if the player moves in one direction too quickly, they may fall in that direction. Therefore they must press the correct key to counterbalance themselves before they fall and drop the boulder.



Stamina: As the player ascends the mountain their stamina will slowly decrease. When their stamina reaches 0, they will fall over and drop the boulder. This will encourage players to climb strategically.

Stamina Recovery: Players must occasionally rest the boulder in crevices or lips while they recover their stamina. This can be done by intentionally overtipping the boulder in the direction of the lip or crevice.

Stamina can also be recovered at the base of the mountain by resting under a tree, or when reaching the top of the mountain.

Health: If knocked over by the boulder, or when moving over or through sharp terrain, the player will obtain damage and limit their maximum stamina. Upon losing all health, the player will view one of a collection of death cut-scenes and will have to start again from the base of the mountain.

Health Recovery: Eating fruit from trees in the canyon or along the mountain will partially recover health. (Eating fruit while carrying the boulder will limit their control over the boulder by 25% and increase the instability of the boulder by 25%.)

The protagonist's **strength** will increase incrementally every time he surmounts the mountain but will max out after 15 increases. The increased strength will allow the player to move more quickly up the mountain and balance the boulder more easily.

- **Weather**

For the first 15 ascents of the mountain, the weather conditions will vary according to the plot. After that, the weather conditions will be randomised.

Weather conditions affect the difficulty of the ascent, for example:

Rain = less balance
Snow = less speed + balance
Sunny day = quicker stamina depletion

- **Animals**

Son will encounter animals during cutscenes, however, they will also pose a threat to him during his ascent:

Snakebite = health loss + blurred vision + less balance

Bee swarm = disorientate

Bee sting = health loss

Bird attack = health loss + disorientate

The player can swat away the attacking animals with a 50% chance success-rate, however, they will limit their control over the boulder by 25% and increase the instability of the boulder by 25%.

- **Modifying. Health and Damage Plants**

Modifying plants (also referred to as ‘modifiers’) affect the way Son can ascend the mountain.

Some include:

Increase speed + reduce stamina

Increase balance + reduce speed

Visual enhancer + reduce balance

Along the face of the mountain, there are also randomly positioned health and damage plants that will change place after every summit.

When passing over health plants, Son will regain some health. Whereas when passing over damage plants, Son will lose some health. This will force the player to play strategically and cautiously.

Time Run + Leaderboard

After the main plot is concluded, a timer will appear every time the player begins the ascent of the mountain. Their completed ascension time will be added to an online leaderboard through which they can compare their times to players worldwide.

Each modifier has its own leaderboard.

Tally

Every time the player successfully ascends the mountain, the protagonist will scratch a mark into the face of a rock. The IDs of the players with the most successful completions can be seen above the rock.

Words of Encouragement

Along the journey players will be encouraged to share some positive words with other players. They can be left as notes on the face of the mountain. As a result, players may stumble across words of encouragement on their journey up the mountain. An example may be:

“Remember, it’s about the journey, not the destination.”

Core Loop

The core loop is ascending the mountain whilst balancing and rolling the boulder.

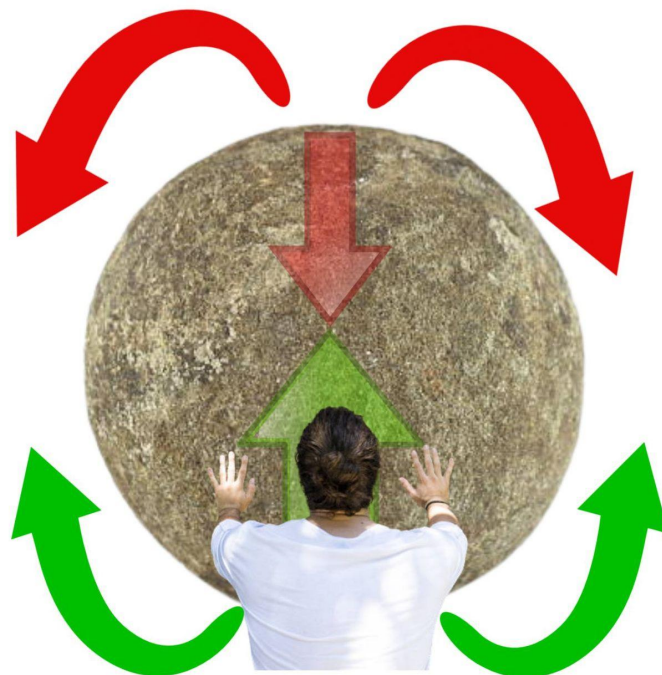
Different conditions and game modes affect the play style:

The difficulty of the ascension will vary depending on which side of the mountain the player starts, which route they take and the weather conditions.

Collectables will encourage players to take more challenging routes up the face of the mountain.

Competitive time-runs will encourage players to ascend the mountain as quickly as possible to rank highly on the leaderboard.

Modifying fruit shrubs (also referred to as 'modifiers'): increase speed + reduce stamina, increase balance + reduce speed, visual enhancer + reduce balance.



The image above demonstrates the gravity and balance physics.

Events

- **Main Narrative Event Triggers**

The first 15 times the player reaches the summit, a short novel cutscene will occur (see real-time scripts and dialogue on page 19 for specifics).

Then the player will fall asleep by the boulder, but be woken up to the sound of it rolling back down the mountain (this will be skippable after the first time).

- **Side Narrative Event Triggers**

Collecting certain items along the face of the mountain will trigger events upon arriving at the summit.

Collectables and triggered events include but aren't limited to:

Feathers = Beautiful murmuration

Bones = Wolf encounter

Pieces of parchment = Read about Sisyphus's story from his perspective

Quests

1. Push the boulder up the mountain.

(The player will push the boulder up the mountain, but is likely to fall quickly because they haven't been told the controls.)

2. Push the boulder up the mountain

Use L2 or R2 to balance the boulder if it tips over to one side.
(The player is likely to run out of stamina quickly and then fall down the mountain again)

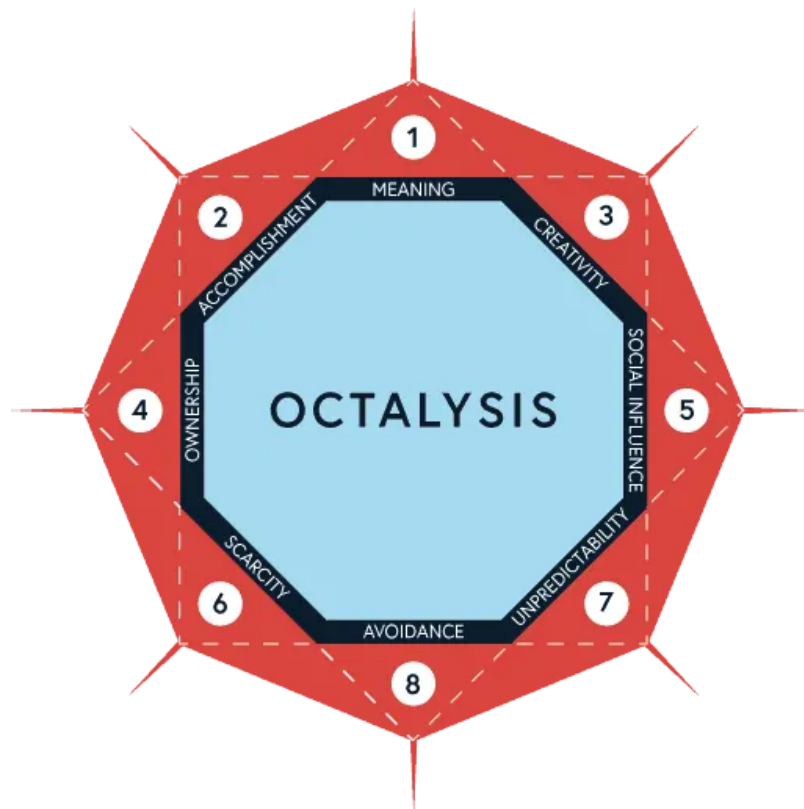
3. Eat the green fruit from the shrubs to regain health.

Press [button] to pick and eat the fruit.

4. Push the boulder up the mountain

Use L2 or R2 to push the boulder into a crevice for a while you regain your stamina.

Core Drives



Right-Brain Core Drives (Intrinsic Motivators)

Meaning

Throughout the game the player is reminded explicitly through philosophical quotes, implicitly through the narrative progression, and even more implicitly through the game mechanics and core loops, of the repetitive but beautiful nature of existence. A heavy focus is put on the ideas of accomplishment through persistence, emotional detachment from setbacks and appreciation of the present moment. Players can feel engaged with and committed to the game to witness the transformation of the protagonist, Son, but with the philosophical ideas in mind, they can also develop a new appreciation for life and associate that appreciation with the game.

Creativity and Empowerment

After becoming familiar with the controls and mechanics, the player will feel skilful as they ascend the mountain. The weather conditions, random arrangement of obstacles and appearance of animals will allow the players to exercise and expand their skills in many ways by forcing them to ascend the mountain in a new way every time. Modifiers will give players an opportunity to use their skills in interesting new play styles.

Social Influence

Players are more likely to continue playing if they are part of a community of other players. To enable this core drive, players will be able to leave/discover 'words of encouragement' for/from other players.

A competitive element is also crucial to enable the social influence core drive, and so players will be able to do 'timed runs', after which they can compare their time with other players on the leaderboards (each modifier will have its own leaderboard and weather conditions will be shown on beside each player's score.)

Also beside players' names will be optional 'brag buttons', i.e. badges or tokens to represent accomplishments or unique play styles.

Unpredictability

Through the main plot, the player will discover novel developments in narrative that will reveal more about the mysterious protagonist. Aside from this, there will be many opportunities to discover interesting aspects of the world through

the collection of certain items which will have the players feeling curious and eager to discover more of what the world has to offer.

Of course, the interactable aspects of the world that will influence the gameplay, such as plants and animals, will be the most alluring to this core drive.

Achievements can be implemented into the game to reward players for, things that they thought may go unnoticed. For instance, spending an extraordinary amount of time ascending the mountain, for interacting with certain parts of the environment, etc.

Left-Brain Core Drives (Extrinsic Motivators)

Avoidance

The core drive of avoidance will be utilized in two main ways. Firstly, the player will feel reluctant to leave the game without discovering all of the secrets that are required by repeated ascensions of the mountain. This FOMO tactic can be enhanced through communities on social media that share their discoveries as they progress through the game. Moreover, from a narrative perspective, the protagonist will question whether he'll be able to leave after 100 climbs - thus encouraging the players to go the distance to feel a sense of completion.

Secondly, the player's tally score will gradually grow as they develop their skills in the game. To uninstall the game would be to lose a lot of progress that they've made in the game. Along with the suggestion of interesting narrative developments at higher levels, the player will be more likely to continue playing, or at least to keep the game installed and return at a later date.

Scarcity

Scarcity will most naturally occur in the game from the tally and leaderboard. Players will feel inclined to reach high tally numbers in order to gain certain achievements and experiences exclusive to those with enough persistence. Players will also be inclined to play over and over to reach the upper echelons of the leaderboard, and due to the random conditions of the mountain, even lower-skilled players will have a chance at ranking highly, thus motivating the greater majority of players by levelling the playing field.

A sense of scarcity can be lightly added to the game through updates that allow players to see unusual events on specific real-time calendar days.

Moreover, there could be unique badges or tokens that can be acquired through interaction with rare animals or creatures that when interacted with provide players with.

Ownership

Players will feel a sense of ownership after acquiring badges, tokens and a high tally score. Upon installing the game, these assets will be sacrificed along with the notes they left on the mountain for other players to find.

Therefore, if a player decides to uninstall the game they must first decide whether they're okay with their legacy being erased. For some who want to continue, this could be the motivation to keep the game instead of deleting it to free up space on their PC or console.

Accomplishment

Players of *Hades* will understand the feeling of accomplishment that *Struggle Itself* will offer. At first, players will get a great sense of accomplishment from their first time surmounting the mountain. But after they've fine-tuned their balancing skills, they'll seek higher and higher numbers on the tally and their wider exploration of and interaction with the world will be rewarded with achievements, badges, tokens and unique experiences.

Real-time Scripts

Introduction

(Important note: [button] is used as a placeholder for whatever relevant buttons will be used on PC or different consoles)

EXT. DESERT CANYON - AFTERNOON (INTENSE SUNLIGHT)

SON (25) wakes up in a canyon on a scorching summer day. He's disorientated as he gets to his feet.

SON

What the hell? Where am I?

He looks around and sees the dusty canyon, void of plant life. In front of him is a mountain. Behind him are hills of rock.

[Gameplay: the player can walk around the canyon and discover that there's no way out]

SON

(shouts)

Hello? Can anyone hear me?

How did I get here?

Son sees a large round boulder beside the mountain.

[Gameplay: As the player approaches the boulder, Son reaches out his hands and pushes it. It can be pushed around the canyon and up the mountain.]

SON

Well... nothing else to do here,
so I better... push this boulder

around? Why am I doing this?

[Gameplay: The player will likely lose balance and fall over]

SON

Oh sh...

Son falls backwards. The boulder rolls by his side.

Now lying on the floor of the canyon again, Son gets up.

SON

Ow... that... really hurt. Okay,
well... glad no one saw
that.

An instruction fades onto the screen, reading: 'Use [x button] and [y button] to balance'

[Gameplay: player approaches the boulder again]

SON

Let's try that again. Don't ask
me why... who am I talking to?
That's typical of you to lose your
mind in the first 10 minutes of
being stuck in a canyon, Son.
That's what dad would have said.

[Gameplay: The stamina and health meter are low.]

SON

(heavy breathing)

Who would have guessed that
pushing a boulder up a mountain
could be so much work? I'm
feeling pretty tired.

[Gameplay: The player can't push anymore.]

Son falls back down the part of the mountain he's climbed. The boulder lands on him and crushes him.

CUT TO BLACK.
FADE IN:

EXT. CANYON - MORNING (SUNNY)

Son lies asleep in the shade of a fig tree. Scattered in the canyon around him are shrubs with green berries on them.

A caption fades onto the screen that reads:

"Man stands face to face with the irrational. He feels within him his longing for happiness and for reason. The absurd is born of this confrontation between the human need and the unreasonable silence of the world."

After a few moments, Son wakes up and gets up. The caption fades away.

SON
What the hell? Did I...
die? What's going on
here?

[Gameplay: Health is low]

An instruction appears on the screen that reads: 'press [button] to eat fruit'.

[Gameplay: Player approaches fruit shrub and presses [button]]

Son plucks a berry from the shrub, it's vibrant and juicy-looking.

SON

Looks good. Hope it's not
poisonous.

Son throws it into his mouth and chews.

SON

(chewing)

Wow. Oh my god. That's
seriously good.

[Gameplay: Son's health bar increases.]

SON

I needed that. Feeling better now.

[Gameplay: Player approaches boulder again.]

SON

Am I really doing this again...
after what happened last time?

[Gameplay: Player begins to roll the boulder.]

SON

Can't kill me twice. Well actually...
let's find out.

An instruction appears on the screen that reads: 'When fatigued,
hold [button x] or [button y] alone to push boulder into a mb

Ascending the Mountain

EXT. MOUNTAIN FACE - LATER

Along the ascent up the mountain, players will encounter health depleating shrubs...

SON

Ow! Come on. Gotta watch
out for that one.

They will also encounter bees...

SON

Ow! Oh god damn it! I would swat
you so hard if I wasn't rolling
this boulder.

Snakes...

SON

Oh no... stay back! Get out of here!
It bit me! Oh god no... I feel woozy.
Literally the worst time to get bit
by a snake.

And birds...

SON

Hey what gives. you lousy buzzard?
You're going to make me drop my boulder,
you stupid... get out of here!

But also health fruit shrubs.

[Gameplay: player picks fruit from shrub while balancing boulder.]

SON

Gotta be careful here.

Son eats the fruit.

SON

Mmmm, totally worth it!

Reaching the Top

EXT. MOUNTAIN TOP - LATER

[Gameplay: player pushes the boulder to the peak of the mountain]

At the peak of the mountain, there's a natural flat platform big enough to rest the rock and stand upon.

CUTSCENE:

Son rests the rock at top of the mountain, then, out of breath, looks up to the sky.

SON

I did it! See, Dad! I'm not
useless after all! I can push
a boulder at least.

Son looks out at the slightly eerie, but beautiful, cloudy vista.

SON

Wow. It's beautiful... Can I
leave now? I'm so tired.

Son sits down and rests his back on the boulder.

SON
So tired.

Son falls asleep against the boulder...

FADE TO BLACK
CUT TO:

EXT. MOUNTAIN TOP - LATER

Son accidentally pushes the boulder by sleeping on it.

Son quickly gets to his feet and turns as it rolls off the edge of the mountain and then down its face.

He rushes to the edge and sees it bounce down to the base of the canyon.

SON
Shit! All that work for nothing.

CUT TO BLACK