

2010

UNSTABLE TALENT

Playtesting report



Bayer Jeronimo, Kiser Thomas
Game Programming Lab – ETH Zürich
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1. INTRODUCTION

In this chapter we want to show our results of the playtesting phase. The purpose of this phase is to get feedback from potential players to recognize problems which we, as developers, are not aware of.

This chapter was only done by Jeronimo and Thomas. We didn't get anything from Matthias regarding the playtesting phase. We do confess though that we are tired of chasing after him to get any contribution.

2. THE PLAYTESTERS

We recruited various people we supposed would like to spend some time playing a new game.

Some of them did already know some little things about the game, most of them didn't. Three of the playtests were done face-to-face, two through on-line media, i.e. instant messaging. To protect the tester's identities, we have anonymized this document.

Individual playtesting sessions

2.1. TESTER A

Our first playtester is a 26-year-old programmer with casual playing experience on the pc. At the point of his test, the tutorial was not yet finished and we explained the most important features beforehand. After that we just asked questions and let him enjoy the game without much disturbance.

His main critique was the "horrible" menu and the crashes which came with it. He really liked the game as a whole. The features complement each other very well and he liked the riddles. There was a problem in the cave painting levels that he didn't see the exit and thought that this level has none.

2.2. TESTER B

As the second tester we had an 18-year-old programmer, who is quite an experienced player on the console. The first feedback we got was a scream as a reaction to the menu. The second one was a grumble that the controller settings were odd. It seems that the standard jump button is A and not one of the triggers.

After that he quite enjoyed the game. He was a bit confused about the balls which he could throw into the scene, because they have no particular use.

2.3. TESTER C

Our next tester is a 22 years old female player, who never played an ego-perspective game before. Additionally she doesn't like riddle games at all. Never the less she thought that this game could really be fun, if she would be into this sort of games. She liked the player model and hated the menu.

Although she was really confused at the beginning, she managed to understand everything after some runs in the tutorial. She suggested that the throwable bunny spheres should be deactivated in the default setting, since they are not doing really much. But since they are fun, she would like to have the possibility to activate them per menu.

2.4. TESTER D

This tester is 16 years old. He plays a fair share of flash games, including puzzle games. Tester D has a limited English vocabulary, therefore the contents were translated to him. This playtesting was conducted on the PC using mouse and keyboard.

After struggling to get through the menu, D found himself in the lobby. It took him a while to find out how to select a level. He then spent some time idling in the tutorial level while trying to figure out what the possibilities are. He apparently did not pay that much attention to the hints that were displayed.

He quickly figured out how the isometric rotation feature works and soon came to the conclusion that occluding a hexagon will make it immutable. Surprisingly, he was having trouble with one lesson as he did not recognize the meaning of the ladder textures. Another lesson was also giving him a hard time since he did not know where to paint a ramp, and the hints displayed were a little misleading. We quickly counseled and decided to change the hint's wording, which we then told the tester. Once he knew where to put the ramp, he successfully performed the ramp jump in the second attempt.

The other levels did not pose that much problems to him, except that he first skipped one larger and fairly crowded level without even looking for the exit. He later returned to play that level.

Other things we found out are that he didn't like the impressionism shader, and that he didn't realize that the ramp painting action can be cancelled.

In his case, the achievements and timing features were an incentive to replay levels, he spent a whole day playing the game without getting bored. He also found out that the spheres one can shoot can be used to perform a kind of rocket jump, which allows for faster speed runs. He had a lot of fun with this feature.

2.5. TESTER E

Tester E is 24 years old and is also studying computer science at ETH. He is a casual player of ego shooters on the PC (notably Quake). This test was also conducted using mouse and keyboard.

This tester was also struggling to get through the menu (we had to tell him how to get to the game). In the lobby, he did not find out how to start a level until we told him to aim at the picture.

Once he got past the introductory text, he apparently clicked the right mouse button which shot one of the bunny spheres. Being a computer scientist, he recognized the Stanford bunny we had put into the sphere and called it "cool".

2.5.1. REACTIONS

- The tutorial pages get annoying when the level is restarted several times
- "whoa, this is weird" when seeing the crowded level with the Piet texture set for the first time
- "Well, that was easy. That wasn't the intended way to solve it, was it?" upon solving said level with a fairly simple approach. We were aware of this solution and find it ok since collecting the achievements is harder.
- "Whoa fuck" to the cave painting shader. We are aware that we should not use this shader for larger levels.
- "this is even worse than the other one" and "what is this, the epilepsy shader?" as reactions to the impressionistic shader
- "fucks my brain" to the isometric rotation in general
- "looks cool" to the graphics in general (with the exception of the impressionism shader)

2.5.2. ISSUES

- It took him a little to realize what objects can be rotated in the isometric state
- He didn't realize that ramps can be rotated (he did state though that he was too lazy to read the tutorial pages thoroughly)
- The particle effect visualizing the exit is faded out when the view is changed to isometry. He therefore didn't know where the exit is in some cases. Said effect is also too hard to see in the cave painting and pencil shaded levels.
- The player character was occluding the only rotateable hexagon in one level which does not allow any painting. Since there were seemingly no possible operations, he thought the level could not be solved at all. After we told him it could be done he realized that occluding a hexagon makes it immutable, and was able to solve the level.
- He was having trouble jumping on a particular cube in one level and created a ramp to get on it

2.5.3. QUESTIONS

- What is your most favorite feature?
 - The rotation feature is unique; I don't think I've seen it in any other game before
 - Stanford bunnies!
- What is your least favorite feature?
 - "The fucking menu!"
- Did you miss any features?
 - "The computer voice from Portal"
- What was frustrating?
 - The aforementioned cube he didn't know he could jump on
 - Finding the exit was hard in some cases
- Is there anything you found un-intuitive or didn't understand?
 - Not really. The isometric rotation is not really natural to begin with, but is presented in an understandable way

3. THE CHANGES

3.1. VISUALISATION OF THE EXIT

Due to the problems of tester A, we enhanced the particles in the cave painting and pencil shader. All following testers had a more clear visualization of the exit in those levels. We will probably enhance the visualization once more as suggested by tester #5. Also we will not fade out the exit in the isometric view.

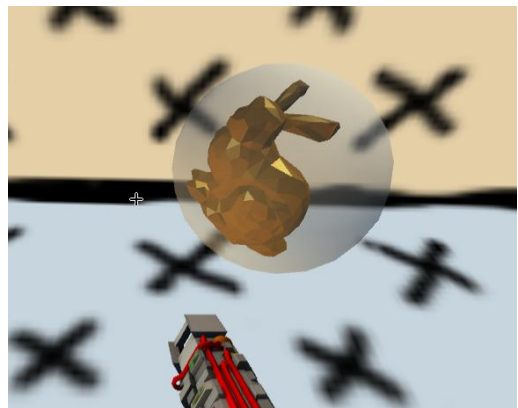
3.2. CONTROLLER SETTINGS

Tester B was quite valuable for us, because he was the only one who knew what the console players were used to. We will accept his critique and change the default controller settings as he suggested. The controls can still be changed via the menu.

3.3. THROWABLE FUNNY BUNNY SPHERES

These objects were initially cubes we had used to test the physics. We have now replaced them by spheres and added a nicer visualization.

The testers liked these spheres, but were quite confused in the beginning. We decided to deactivate this feature in the default settings, but leave it up to the players to activate it per menu. We have considered not counting any levels that were solved using the bunnies, since the "rocket jump" allows for simpler and quicker ways to solve levels. We decided not to, since they allow for some interesting speed runs.



3.4. TUTORIAL TEXT

The observations that we made showed us what the players found difficult. With this information we have changed and will change the wording of some hints in the tutorial level. Also, we will add some information about cancelling the ramp painting operation. Restarting the tutorial level should not start over the introduction pages. Only when re-entering the level from the lobby, the information should be displayed again.

3.5. SHADERS

Tester D and E didn't like the impression shader and most of the other testers were not that much convinced also. We therefore decided to change the shader for this style. We will probably use the edge detection shader with some different textures to give an impression of a painted world.

3.6. LOBBY HINT

Some testers didn't understand that they have to shoot at the canvas to get a level started. Therefore we will add a hint into the lobby, similar to those in the tutorial.

3.7. MENU

This is by far the least favorite aspect of the game. All playtesters were more or less appalled by the menu.

The two of us are aware of the issues with the menu. We talked to Matthias last Thursday, and told him what the problems were, some of which he didn't seem to be aware of. He committed some changes this morning, but doesn't appear to have tackled any of the issues so far.

In meantime, we have been perfecting other parts of the game. Although we have plenty of other work to do for the final presentation (e.g. trailer movie), we feel forced to break into Matthias' area of responsibility, because our hope that he will come up with acceptable results is fading.