

Slippers Playtest – 9/27 Build:

NOTE: All testers' identifying information has been removed.

Test Goals: Gauging the overall usability, engagement, and atmosphere of our game.

Object(s) of Test: A build of *Green Reaper* made 9/27/2022.

Method of Test:

The playtester was given a copy of the prototype and asked to open it and play through as much as they desired, while being observed by a designer. After the test, the player was asked questions about their experience by the designer.

Key Issues:

Focus Area – UI and Tutorialization: Menus are easily navigable by players, and testers report prompts as being well-designed. However, players routinely make little use of certain abilities (specifically dodge and the special attack), which, while possibly down to playstyle, seems to indicate by its consistency that these abilities aren't being effectively taught, either forgotten or never absorbed in the first place.

Program Efficiency: The game takes some time to open and load, and players continue to report frame rate issues, particularly in the highest levels. It has been suggested that said issues with frame rate may contribute to the difficulty some players have in timing sprints and jumps.

Navigation: As before, some players continue to have significant issues controlling the character's movements through the environment, misjudging jumps, falling off pots, etc. However, one recent test throws a wrench into this assessment, as Tester #1 seemed to have little to no issue until late in the game. This may support the theory that frame rate issues (which some have associated with later-game areas) contribute to navigational difficulties. However, one thing that all players continue to struggle with consistently is navigating the pot stairs.

Combat: Encounters seem significantly imbalanced, players struggling with any enemies stronger than the basic smalls. This may be connected to players' lack of use of dodge and special attacks which would improve their chances and open up new strategies. In any case, the structure of these encounters should be reassessed.

Element Clarity: Players seem to pick up on the use of jump flowers without issue. However, players consistently take some time to understand the checkpoints, thinking at first that they are emerging enemies. Health pickups, while not immediately clear in purpose to players, are understood when used and work as a form of guidance. Mushroom barriers may need more of an introduction in combat arenas, to ensure that players are not distracted from the intended conflict by trying to take them down themselves.

Enemy Resetting: Enemy encounters continue to not reset when players respawn, maintaining their locations and health values (which remain displayed no matter how far the player is from combat). However, based on player responses, we may want to consider keeping this as a feature, with players enjoying the sense of perseverance.

Visuals: End-of-combat animations need some work for clarity – it takes some time for players to grasp the effects of encounter completion (plants being cured, barriers going down), and the camera can be obscured by level decoration (clipping behind leaves and blocking the show).

Default Settings: Players routinely turn down the music and SFX shortly after entering the game, and find it necessary to significantly turn down the mouse sensitivity.

Test #1

Test took place at 3:28pm, 9/28/2022

Notes:

The prototype took some time to open and load. Rather than start the game immediately, the tester opened the art zoo (which they found to be “really cool”), though this seemed to be more out of curiosity than confusion about controls, as they had no problem navigating back to the main menu and starting the game.

Starting off the game, they praised the “camera angles at the beginning” – whether this referred to the opening cinematic or camera controls at the start of gameplay was unclear. They seemed to have no issue picking up the controls, understanding jumping before the prompt had appeared, and praised the movement as being “better than other student games.”

At the first checkpoint, they seemed startled by the rose animation, wondering if it was an enemy, but moving on after a moment. The true first combat encounter saw no comment, the player focusing on the action and getting through without issue. At the second checkpoint, they caught on to their purpose.

Approaching the pot stairs, they went the wrong way at first, it taking them a moment to figure out the intended path. Despite this, they referred to the level design and guidance as “pretty easy to follow along... where to go without being told.”

At the next level, they picked up sprinting quickly, showing none of the traversal issues of previous testers. They didn’t interact with the minesrooms at first, though ran into them at their second appearance, giving a startled “oh” at their animation and moving on quickly before they could damage them.

Entering the next enemy encounter, they gave a nervous “oh boy” in anticipation. They lost two hearts in the conflict, and had no issue picking up a health pickup afterwards.

The next arena, with the introduction of big enemies, was the one which really gave them trouble. Putting up a valiant effort, they died with an “oh crap” and quickly respawned from checkpoint. Reapproaching the arena, they wondered if their struggle was an issue of the game’s balance or their strategy and prediction. They proceeded to die again within around 30 seconds, remarking on how the “big guy is a little tricky” with its high health. They wondered if they were “playing this wrong,” and it was at this point that I noticed they hadn’t once used the special attack. While they did overcome the arena on the third attempt, the fact that enemies don’t reset on player death offered a great advantage in this respect. The final shot of this arena was rather anticlimactic, as the camera went behind some large leaves, blocking the bulk of the animation.

Moving between arenas, they referred to the game as “solid” and “cool.” However, entering the next arena, they quickly died once again to the big enemy. Returning, they noted a drop in framerate when the player moved up to the level of the hanging pots. They were surprised by a few enemies they hadn’t seen, and speculated while in combat with (and dying to) the big enemy that their damage output may be imbalanced. While trying to make their way across the hanging pots and engage enemies, they fell from the edge twice consecutively. At this point I called off the test.

In their final comments, they commented that the game was “really cute,” praising the raytracing and movement controls, which felt “floaty” but in a deliberate sense rather than detracting from usability. In terms of criticism, they suggested rebalancing the large enemies, examining their attack speed, damage, and health. They also once again pointed out the frame rate drop on the top level and the camera clipping behind the leaves.

Test concluded at 3:39pm.

Test #2

Test took place at 4:38pm, 9/28/2022.

Notes:

The game again took some time to open. When it did, the tester praised the “cover art” on the main menu. Their first action was to turn down the music and SFX volume before starting the game. As the game started, the loading screen froze up for some time around halfway through.

Watching the opening cinematic, they gave a distressed “oh no” at the “goop” on the statue. They noted how they were getting the sense that they were very small, which was confirmed when their character was revealed and gameplay began. As play began, they took some time to not only learn the movement controls they had been presented, wandering and swinging the camera around, but test out other behaviors as well, discovering the “basic attack” and the surprising, “pretty cool” special attack. Leaving the opening area, they paused for a moment, as they had landed on the edge of the plank ramp in what appeared to be a very precarious position.

Coming up to the jump flower, they were able to guess it's "boost" ability before using it, complimenting the conveyance of its purpose. The checkpoint, on the other hand, was not so easily understood, the player being surprised and wondering if it was an enemy when it appeared.

They seemed to enjoy jumping down into the first arena, letting out a "yahoo" as they fell. Reading through the prompts, they noted the "cool" inclusion of dodging – however, by my observation throughout the game, the dodge was never used, or if it was it was sparingly. They seemed to struggle with the first encounter, getting down to one heart before trying to remove themselves from the encounter and reassess the situation. In doing so, they ended up lost and confused in the decorative foliage at the edge of the arena. For some reason, the end-of-encounter animation triggered – they were confused about what they had done, but were excited about "obliterating the mushroom" wall. However, this was undercut by them promptly falling off the edge of the stage with a deadpan "oh."

Upon respawning, they took a moment to turn the mouse sensitivity down, which they found "much better." After dealing with the remaining enemies, they offered an amused "boing" while using the jump flower. At this point they understood the purpose of the checkpoint, remarking on how it "looked weird the first time I saw one of those."

Approaching the pot stairs, their first impression was that they had to destroy the pottery, then that it was a "parkour challenge," both of which they then assessed incorrect. They had some trouble figuring out where to go, looking and jumping around until they noted the health pickup. They were pleasantly surprised by the ability to heal.

Getting up to the next level, they found the sprint ability "nice," but promptly missed the jump between pots with a panicked "oh, do not!" They found the subsequent respawn "mighty convenient." Seeing the minesrooms, they were at first curious, but as the shrooms began to react to their touch they concluded that they were "maybe not something I want to touch" – and fell off the pot again while trying to get away. On their return, they wondered if the minesrooms were really something to avoid, as they hadn't taken any damage when first interacting with them, only to offer an unpleasantly surprised "oh" when their detonation took off most of their health.

Entering the next conflict, they gave a nervous “oh god” as they realized they were going in with only half a heart of health left. Their subsequent death kicked off an extended sequence of navigational difficulties. They were determined to get back to the encounter and “give these things a piece of my mind,” but in attempting to return they misjudged the jump and fell to their death three consecutive times as they became more and more frustrated. Respawning from checkpoint took them all the way back to the pot stairs, which despite their previous experience took them some time to get past both times they were kicked back. They misjudged a jump flower launch and landed on the wrong shelf, but were miraculously able to jump back to the launch point and retry, which succeeded. They fell another three times, but on the second they accidentally landed in a previous area (which they found quite surprising and interesting) and were able to follow the level and return to try again. Regarding this extreme difficulty with navigation, they speculated that issues they were having with the framerate were making moving accurately difficult – whether this was due to their machine’s specs or processes running in the background they were not sure. Eventually, they were able to make it back to the remaining enemies and kill them with a “good god” that seemed equal parts relieved and frustrated.

Moving onward, they made sure to avoid the minesrooms, not interacting with them when they could and quickly running out of range when they couldn’t. When attacked by a gaggle of small enemies, they were able to instantly kill them all with the special attack, which they found “cool.” Moving into the next arena, they seemed unsure if they could walk on the leaves until they saw a health pickup on one of them, jumping down to the next stage with an enthusiastic “hell yeah, brother!”

The encounter that introduced the hybrid enemies gave them some difficulty. A short while into the battle they briefly tried to cut down the mushroom barrier like it was another enemy. They were confused and indignant at being hit by projectiles, calling the responsible hybrid a rather rude name when they pinpointed the source. Going after the remaining hybrid, they had difficulty getting up to their elevated attack point, a delay which ended in their death. They promptly fell off the edge after respawning, but when on their return was determined to handle this final enemy (“alright, I’m killing you first,” apparently not noticing that other enemies hadn’t returned). Even with this being the only enemy, they barely survived close-quarters combat, finishing combat with one heart and a “thank god.” This is also the first time that they realized that they were “clearing the garden” as the animation played. They were quite relieved to find a checkpoint after such a difficult encounter, exclaiming “yes, I’m saved”.

The following encounter was even more overwhelmingly difficult. At one point, three hybrids became clustered on a single platform, which between their firepower and difficulty to hit killed the player fast. As they respawned, the player was quite taken aback by the appearance of the big enemy (“that guy is huge!”) – they attempted to be strategic, running out of range to assess the situation, but they were quickly dispatched once again. After their third attempt at this area lasted approximately all of twenty seconds, I called the test.

In their final comments, they assessed themselves as “not particularly good at this game,” remarking on the difficulty and how often they died. However, they appreciated that damage they did before their death stayed, creating a sense of perseverance and “chipping through.” They remarked on how they didn’t use dodge, being “not much of a dodger.” They found the game aesthetically interesting, with a good sense of small scale, and when asked about the tutorial prompts found them nice and unobtrusive.

Test concluded at 4:56pm.