

Slippers Playtest – 11/15 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 11/15/2022.

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:

Intro Audio: Audio seemed to trigger late during the opening splashes, and end early during the opening cutscene.

Model Duplication: The player leaves a "clone" (a non-colliding player model) behind as gameplay begins

Understanding of Interactables: The first player didn't understand what the jump pad was at first, and both had issues with mislaunching – however, both testers used them well once they understood them. Using jump pads to retrieve health pickups was difficult, as the pickups didn't seem to connect with the player consistently. Players also felt that there wasn't enough health in the game, and had difficulty when entering combats with low health – one recommended possibly having checkpoints refill player health. One player also didn't recognize the purpose of a checkpoint until their third one, and had moments of confusion finding their way after respawning at checkpoints.

Environment Navigation: Players had some issues getting around environments and figuring out where to go – in particular, players got out of bounds and found a stray collider in Solanacea. One player praised the use of vines to guide players – perhaps this could be played up more?

Ambient Mushrooms: There were some instances of corruption (mushrooms, ground decals, plant corruption) not fully clearing after arena finishes.

Dodge Tutorialization: The first player found the teaching of the dodge mechanic to be out of place, being unnecessary to the encounter where it is introduced and more relevant in later scraps with big enemies. The second found themselves defaulting to the control key to try and dodge, not having absorbed this game's control.

Special Attack: There was one instance of the special attack having no effect on surrounding enemies. Whether this was due to it not firing properly or its area of effect being different than players anticipated, this should likely be investigated.

Unclear Attacks: Players found that getting hit by landmines or enemy projectiles wasn't always clear, being unsure of what hit them and how during encounters. One suggested indicating the path or ending location of enemy projectiles.

Transparency Confusion: The first tester was confused by set pieces becoming transparent to avoid occluding the camera. However, the second found this useful.

Hidden Enemies: In large arenas, remaining enemies can be difficult to spot, creating confusion and frustration when players believe they have completed an area and it doesn't clear. This is particularly notable in Solanacea (where an enemy tucked away in the back is regularly missed), Stargazers' Roost (where ranged enemies are tucked away and small enemies are hard to spot at a distance), and especially Antheia's Umbra, where I had to use a cheat to let the second player continue after neither of us could find who wasn't letting them continue.

Entering the Umbra: The first player made it into Antheia's Umbra by accident, missing a jump between the Pots of Polyidus and landing below, where they became quite concerned about potentially having skipped a section.

Enemy Clipping: A large enemy clipped through and became stuck in a pot in Antheia's Umbra.

Credits Triggering Early: The credits as they are currently timed cut off the end of the outro cinematic.

Test #1

Test took place at 11:59am, 11/18/2022.

Notes:

Starting up the application, there was a long pause before audio began playing over the splash screens, which seemed to confuse the player (given their apparent relief when the audio did begin). They complimented the design of the cursor, which they compared to a spade. They "really like[d]" the main menu, particularly the array of available options.

Starting the game, they were engaged by the opening cinematic, joking about it "slam[ing] my face into the door" on the fly-in and exclaiming at the VFX. They were less enthusiastic about the appearance of the player, giving a flat "alright" – whether this was due to lacking presentation (the audio did seem to cut out) or them simply shifting into "play mode" was unclear.

Starting play, they were quickly taken aback by the appearance of a "clone" – a t-pose character model remained in the spawn location. Moving on from that, they began to move around the starting area, testing various buttons to discover the various abilities, commenting on the special being "kind of cool". Moving on, it took them interacting with the "jump pad" to realize its function, and while they didn't miss the launch, it was "close." They paused to read the checkpoint name as it appeared before continuing into the Overgrowth.

They had no issue taking on the first enemy, and searched the arena for the “cause of the combat music,” seeming really invested in the combat (given their declaration of “murder, my favorite thing” and some rather demeaning and profane name-calling of the enemies). They seemed to enjoy the arena clearing animation, noting both the beauty of the purified area and the gratifying absence of fungus. In trying to find their way forward, though, they managed to get out of bounds of the arena, which they realized shortly before falling to their death (with a sarcastic “nailed it”), respawning, and making their way through the area as intended.

Starting into the Carmine Heights, they were caught off guard by the landmines, trying to attack them and finding that “oh, those hurt.” As they moved on and tried to recover, it took them multiple attempts to snag the health pickup while jumping, an issue which persisted throughout the game – though they did appreciate chaining jumps together.

Starting into Risen Langenlatter, when taught the ability to dodge, they stated “who needs to do that” – this did seem to be a “macho line” as they approached the ranged enemy, but it is troubling in terms of player teaching. They later confirmed that they found the introduction of the dodge here “awkward,” as it wasn’t needed to deal with the ranged enemies – while dodging “definitely came in handy against the big boys,” ranged enemies can just be zigzagged.

Working through the rest of Langenlatter, they seemed to experiment with combat encounters – they discovered pushing enemies off of ledges (though they weren’t initially sure that they had truly “died”), and skipped certain ambushes when a larger goal presented itself further on. There was one particularly concerning moment during an encounter with various small enemies, where the special attack “did nothing,” having seemingly no effect on the swarm, possibly due to them being largely around back of the player character.

Moving into Solanacea, they took some time to jump on the leaves (appreciating the bouncing animation) and look around the arena, before getting spurred on by a shot to the back. Their general strategy was to take out the ranged enemies first, knocking them off the edge of the platform where possible, before clearing out the small enemies. When approaching some of the rangers, they seemed confused by objects going transparent for player visibility, asking “where are the rocks going?” As the arena finished, they noted “that was a lot of corruption cleared,” seemingly feeling accomplished.

Entering the Hollow Hermaic, they noted the approach of “a big boy” as its spawn animation played, seeming intimidated as they sized it up. They tended to dodge around it as they went after it, noting how it “does a lot of damage” when it did hit. They paused to use the special to clear out the small enemies before returning to the big, but were sidetracked again by the ranged enemy who “need[ed] to die.” Distracted with attacks coming from both the ranged and large enemies, the tester did die, though while they were frustrated in the moment, they quickly respawned for their “take 2.” Focusing in on the big enemy, they dodged through the attacks, getting into “his weak point, right up in his face” (which the tester found amusing) and using the special attack to clear space when cornered. With the floor cleared, they moved on to dealing with the ranged enemies. Where their first attempt at the arena had ended in death, they lost no health on this second run.

Moving on through Scala Gloriosa, they resumed their enthusiastically profane trash talk of the game enemies (which apparently connected in part to their own distaste for mushrooms). They found jumping across the leaves “slippery,” falling three times before reaching the edge. If their exclamations were any indication, they found dodging the landmines around the launches up to Stargazers’ Roost to be a tense challenge.

They missed the initial launch into the Stargazers’ Roost arena, apparently being so distracted by surveying the enemies laid out before them that they forgot to aim their movements properly (“I was so focused on looking at the big dude I fell off”). They dealt with the ranged enemies first, the discovery of each being frustrating but in a way that motivated them (“Oh what the hell, there’s one up here? You need to die, good sir.”). With that done, they moved to the center to handle the large and small enemies, clearing them out with the special attack. While looking for the last small enemies to clear, they used the jump flowers both to gain a better vantage point and grab health pickups.

Moving on through the Pots of Polyidus, they missed a jump between them, but landed in the next intended area, the Umbra, much to their confusion and bemusement (“Wait, was this meant to happen? I thought I was just an idiot!”). They were put off by the amount of big enemies, but had lost no health after clearing three of them. They seemed to have a good time running around tracking where ranged enemies were stationed (half-joking that they hoped all the ones they had knocked off platforms earlier weren’t here for revenge), though had difficulty finding the last one, as it was not firing. As the final arena clear played (during which ambient mushrooms did not disappear), the tester asked again if they had skipped an area or if their path was intended – they later figured that, given that they had “won,” they had done as they were meant to. They seemed engaged by the ending cinematic, though the credits still deployed early.

In their final thoughts, they found the game “very beautiful,” praising the cutscenes, transitions, and effects. They also greatly enjoyed beating up the mushrooms (as, again, they “hate mushrooms”).

Test concluded at 12:14pm.

Test #2

Test took place at 12:44pm, 11/18/2022.

Notes:

While opening the game and checking the settings, the tester did note that they had played a previous version of the game, but this was several months ago.

Watching the opening cinematic, they seemed engaged – they commented on the enemies' blend of "adorable" and "creepy," understood the statue asking "help me," and responded to the player character spawning in with a "woah." Starting the game, they took some time to try out various buttons and discover abilities before moving on.

Entering the Overgrowth, they paused for a moment as the checkpoint deployed. Seeing the arena, they skipped over the initial ambush and eagerly sought out enemies as the combat music began. They initially didn't seem impressed by the enemies ("they're so tiny, what do they do?") but changed their tune when they found out "they're jumpy." They cut through them and used the special attack to finish them off, and was surprised by the end of arena animation. While they seemed to understand the purification, they seemed concerned that some "goop" didn't disappear, though eventually concluded that it "looks clean enough" and moved on.

It took them a moment to find the jump platform they needed, and they nearly missed the jump into the Carmine Heights. In regards to the controls, they commented on believing their last playthrough was with a controller – possible, but not likely (while the game didn't have official controller support before the current semester, Unreal accepts certain inputs by default). They were surprised by the landmines, learning after a painful encounter that they "cannot defeat those things."

Their first attempt to jump into Risen Langenlatter failed, but they quickly returned after respawning. It was only at this third encounter that they seemed to realize that the checkpoints were, in fact, checkpoints. They seemed to take offense to being hit by the ranged enemy ("hey!") and talked to it as they approached ("Do you have a melee? Yes you do."). They missed the jump to the small ambush once before realizing they needed to sprint, and had trouble locating the following ranged enemies ("I can't see the guy shooting me"), but caught on and adapted quickly, and used the dodge roll quite a bit to maneuver around the small enemies. They seemed engaged with the enemies, telling the small ones to "come here" as they fought, taunting the ranged enemies ("I've got you now, oh you're dead!"), and approaching the edge of the pots to try and see them fall after being pushed off. Now that they understood the landmines, they simply ran right through them. They enjoyed both discovering that they were invincible during the special attack and that parts of the environment would go transparent to maintain visibility.

Entering Solanacea, they noticed the platform at the back end of the arena while coming down and wondered about it being a secret location – their investigation distracted them from the impending battle and prevented the relevant enemy from spawning while they were present. Entering the battle and dealing with the ranged enemies, they wondered if the landmines would damage the enemies and experimented with knocking them back into the mines, before realizing “it just kills me” and moving on. While going around the edge, pushing off enemies, they encountered a “weird invisible collider” which prevented them from moving as they had intended. They tended to use the special attack to clear swarms of enemies (noting being “glad I’m invincible” during the attack). After seemingly clearing out all the enemies, they were confused when they were not let through. Searching for the final enemy, they tried looking into the spawn point (which triggered some land mines, teaching them “don’t go in the hut”) before discovering the enemy in the area they had investigated at the very beginning. As the arena cleared, they showed excitement (with a hint of sarcasm) – “huzzah, I can see the tomatoes again, I love tomatoes!” While exiting the arena, they commented on the set dressing, liking the shovel reminding them that “this is a garden”.

Entering the Hollow Hermaic, they seemed initially confused by “the boss” spawning animation before it fully showed itself. They had some difficulty on their first attempt – they “[kept] trying to use Control to dodge,” got hit without knowing the source (likely a landmine), and had to keep extracting themselves from combat to grab health pickups (of which they found there weren’t enough). Respawned after dying, they commented on how “you peace out,” resetting to the last checkpoint. On their second attempt, they avoided picking up health, saving it for later, and used the dodge mechanic much more. They commented that they wished projectiles were clearer, with some indication of their path or where they would land. They also seemed much more confident, trash talking the enemies during and after engagements (“Didn’t even stand a chance”).

Moving into Scala Gloriosa, their experience seemed to blend combat engagement and artistic engagement – they trash talked the ambushing small enemies when they imposed on them appreciating the animation, and pointedly asked the ranged enemy “do you mind” when it hit them while they were experimenting with the leaf bouncing animation. They missed the jump to the ramp on their first attempt, commenting on there being no way to change acceleration in the air (they succeeded on their second attempt with a “fool me once...”). While heading up to the next arena, they apparently overlooked the second jump flower, realizing their mistake after landing on a ledge above and having to trigger the nearby landmines to get back on track.

Their start into Stargazers' Roost was a rough one, falling off the edge while trying to engage an enemy and getting confused about where they ended up on respawn. On their first proper attempt, they went straight for the big enemies, though they were concerned about being killed by the ranged enemies – a fear which was validated when, while attempting to retrieve a health pickup, they died. Starting again, they went in with an affect of overconfidence ("You can't kill me, I'm invincible") and tended to trash-talk their opponents more. They started by heading up to a ranged enemy's perch before it spawned so they could take it out early, commenting that it "seems like you need to get rid of rangers first". During breaks in the fighting, they would go to the jump flowers to gain distance and retrieve health pickups (which again had difficulty connecting with the player). After taking out the ranged and big enemies, they had to find and hunt down the last two remaining small enemies, which seemed to amuse them.

Triggering the fall in the Pots of Polyidus caught them by surprise, with them commenting that they "[were] about to try and make that jump" to the next pot to safety before landing in Antheia's Umbra. Being rather depleted at this point, they wished that checkpoints provided health. Being cornered by two big enemies, they managed to dodge out and go after the ranged enemies instead; later, one of the big enemies became much easier to deal with when it became stuck in the side of a pot. They commented based on the number of enemies that they'd "infiltrated your home" – not that this intrusion stopped them enthusiastically trash-talking the mushrooms. Moving around the environment, they commented on how jumping felt "really good," gliding around with a "woo".

After they seemed to defeat all the enemies in the Umbra, they were confused when the arena didn't clear. After some time searching the area for a missed enemy, I elected to use a developer cheat to allow them to continue. After locating their destination ("Where's the statue? There it is"), they proceeded up to the ending, while complimenting the use of vines to guide the player.

They celebrated reaching the ending cinematic ("Yay, I made it!"), and engaged with the content, interpreting the player's animation and curative FX as them blowing a kiss and offering a "woah" to the larger purification effects (though the credits still triggered early).

In their final thoughts, they found that "combat felt a lot better this time around" – indicators were much more effective and there was a distinctive rhythm to encounters. They did feel that the ranged enemies "just need[ed] something" to make them more engaging, noting how they are sometimes hard to see and generally need to be taken out first, making the combat encounters feel rather uniform. Art and sound were "great," and while they did note getting stuck in one place, they never felt lost, complimenting the use of the vines and roses as guidance.

Test concluded at 1:01pm.