Critical Critters: Heuristic Evaluation (Oct 2018)

# Summary

Greetings, valued e*valued*ator. We at Sudden Death Studios greatly appreciate your extrinsically-motivated-but-totally-voluntary participation in the evaluation of the Critical Critters user interface.

Before and during this process, please be aware of the following:

* When writing a note in a heuristic domain, please **write it in the format:** [*severity*]:[issue], where *severity* is a rating, between 1-5, of the severity of the issue, and *issue* is a description of the issue of concern.
  + For example: “2: The rainbows are missing an ultraviolet band. I’m a bee and this impacts my rainbow experience.”
  + For example: “5: The game crashes and deletes itself out of frustration when I annihilate every player at once. Including myself.”
* Feel free to suggest possible solutions in your issue(s)
* It is recommended to **note issues as they crop up**, instead of attempting to linearly complete the form start-to-finish
* The *italic* suggestions in the Heuristics column are simply food for thought when assessing a domain. **You are not required** to address every single one.

# Evaluation

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| **Heuristic** | **Issues and Notes (severity: issue)** | |
| **Enduring Play**  *- The players finds the game fun, with no repetitive or boring tasks*  *- The players should not experience being penalized repetitively for the same failure.*  *- The players should not lose any hard won possessions.*  *- Gameplay is long and enduring and keeps the players’ interest.*  *- Any fatigue or boredom was minimized by varying activities and pacing during the game play.* | 3: Pidgeon gameplay leaves the player dead a lot of the time. Offset by interesting and fun gameplay and the short death timer. | |
| **Variety of Players and Game Styles**  *- The game supports a variety of game styles.*  *- The game is balanced with multiple ways to win.*  *- The first ten minutes of play and player actions are painfully obvious and should result in immediate and positive feedback for all types of players.* | | 2: Asymmetric gameplay design is interesting but could be balanced better as pigeons inherently spend more time dead/respawning than the rabbits. | |
| **Player’s Perception of Control**  *- Players feel in control.*  *- The players have a sense of control and influence onto the game world.* | | 3: The pigeon controls are somewhat confusing at times, and the inability to hover or control speed of flying makes navigation hard. | |
| **Coolness/Entertainment**  *- The game offers something different in terms of attracting and retaining the players’ interest.* | | No Issue: Interesting and unique feeling gameplay and environment. | |
| **Humor**  *- The game uses humor well.* | | 2: Potentially controversial depiction of “suicide bomber pigeons”. Otherwise, use of humour is very well executed. | |
| **Immersion**  *- The game utilizes visceral, audio and visual content to further the players’ immersion in the game.* | | 2: Further graphical detail could help to add immersion, particularly less static scenery (moving grass/trees)  4: Lack of audio is the largest problem here, leaving the game feeling somewhat empty. | |
| **Documentation/Tutorial**  *- Player does not need to read the manual or documentation to play.*  *- Player does not need to access the tutorial in order to play.* | | 4: No obvious tutorial or control explanation. Although the controls are fairly obvious to those familiar with the genre, there are several functions such as starting the pigeon timer that are difficult to figure out alone. | |
| **Status and Score**  *- Game controls are consistent within the game and follow standard conventions.*  *- Status score Indicators are seamless, obvious, available and do not interfere with game play.*  *- Controls are intuitive, and mapped in a natural way; they are customizable and default to industry standard settings.* | | 1: The controls are not fully consistent as the different characters have different controls, however their functions are similar enough that it is intuitive once the user understand what the controls are. | |
| **Game Provides Feedback**  *- Game provides feedback and reacts in a consistent, immediate, challenging and exciting way to the players’ actions.*  *- Provide appropriate audio/visual/visceral feedback (music, sound effects, controller vibration).* | | 3: Lack of audio feedback makes the game feel quite flat and unimmersive. The addition of sound effects, especially for weapon sounds, would greatly improve the feeling of excitement and interactivity. | |
| **Burden On Player**  *- The game does not put an unnecessary burden on the player.*  *- Player is given controls that are basic enough to learn quickly, yet expandable for advanced options for advanced players.* | | 2: The controls are not particularly easy to figure out, and the combat can be tricky, however the principles behind the game are very simple and easy to understand, allowing room to improve as the player’s skill level increases. | |
| **Screen Layout**  *- Screen layout is efficient, integrated, and visually pleasing.*  *- The player experiences the user interface as consistent (in controller, color, typographic, dialogue and user interface design).*  *- The players experience the user interface/HUD as a part of the game.*  *- Art is recognizable to the player and speaks to its function.* | | 2: The text channel output is somewhat small and a little hard to read. It’s positioning also distracts the player by making them look far from the centre of the screen when checking the killfeed. | |
| **Error Prevention**  *- Player error is avoided.*  *- Players should be given context sensitive help while playing so that they are not stuck and need to rely on a manual for help.*  *- All levels of players can play and get involved quickly and easily with tutorials, and/or progressive or adjustable difficulty levels.* | | 1: As there is no matchmaking, it is very possible for players to compete with much stronger or weaker players, however, the nature of the multiplayer means that it will most likely be groups of friends competing anyway. | |
| **Communication**  *- Poor support for text or voice chat; poor communication interface; not enough breaks in game play to use supported communication channel* | | 1: Good text communication, could be a little bigger/easy to read and could allow the player to scroll to view older messages. | |
| **Awareness**  *- Does not provide enough information on others’ actions, locations, statuses, or availabilities* | | 3: Showing enemies’ health bars could prevent frustration from being unable to tell how close to death an enemy is and not knowing how much effect their attacks are having. | |
| **Game play balance**  *- Some teams, weapons, or units are too powerful; maps give unfair advantages to some players* | | 2: Despite the power of the pigeons, their drawbacks mean that they do not feel too overpowered.  4: Severity of this issue depends largely on the intended interaction between teams. However, killing other pigeons when playing as a pigeon is very difficult, and killing pigeons as rabbits much harder than killing other rabbits. | |

# Sources

Heuristics in this evaluation have been derived from the following sources:

1. H. Desurvire and C. Wiberg, *“Game Usability Heuristics (PLAY) for Evaluating and Designing Better Games: The Next Iteration”* in *OCSC '09 Proceedings of the 3d International Conference on Online Communities and Social Computing, San Diego, CA*, *19-24 July 2009, pp. 557-566*
2. David Pinelle, Nelson Wong, Tadeusz Stach, and Carl Gutwin. 2009. *“Usability heuristics for networked multiplayer games” in Proceedings of the ACM 2009 international conference on Supporting group work (GROUP '09). ACM, New York, NY, USA, 169-178.*

These were cherry-picked based on the core values of the game sought by the developer. The former resource by Desurvire and Wiberg focuses on core gameplay, ‘fun’ value and feedback. The latter resource was developed for online games, and focuses largely on the balance and interactivity. The two were selected to provide a balance of player-oriented and multiplayer-oriented heuristics. Networking-specific elements from the latter resource were omitted as the evaluation of the took place on a LAN connection, where network optimisation is unlikely to cause concern.

Candidates for removal were: lowest-priority heuristics removed due to the limited evaluation time, irrelevance to the game or style of the game, non-applicable in the evaluation context, clashing with another heuristic, or complex in a way that threatens the validity of the evaluator’s responses.