

Playtesting Summary and Analysis

CRISIS COMMAND: HOSTAGES

A few weeks back, when Sam was the substitute during class, I was able to get a few classmates to playtest my prototype. It wasn't a finished prototype which made it very helpful to have their input at that stage of development, and I received very valuable feedback. Sam only observed the playtesting sessions but he also had some informative critiques.

At the time of this playtest, the prototype was 75% complete but there was no documentation and the narrative directions were minimal. Overall, both of these things were evident in the feedback I received in the playtesting sessions.

Gavyn's Feedback

Gavyn was the first one to play the prototype and he left both positive and negative feedback which I appreciated. He almost immediately asked "Am I supposed to go in guns blazing," and then instantly died when stepping on the spike trap that was in front of the door. Then he continued by saying that it was very clean and satisfying because the enemies disappeared when they were hit/shot. Although, he did wonder if there was a way to feel even more satisfaction when enemies were shot. At the time of the playtest, I had a lot of the enemies outside the house and he suggested that I should move them all to the inside. It was also interesting to see that he saw the stairs, climbed them, and instinctively tried to crouch, which was not a mechanic that I had included in the game.

After his playtesting, he had suggested that there should be a reason for the player to clear all the rooms and having it explicitly stated would be helpful. He also had an idea that would solve this issue and encourage replayability. By having the hostage and main suspect respawn in a new location every time the player plays the game, it encourages the player to explore the map as they search each room looking for the hostage.

In addition, after instantly dying by stepping on the spikes, he expressed that they should possibly be a different color and implied that there should be a demonstration of what happens when the player encounters the spikes. He also proposed that music and sound effects would improve the overall player experience, but I explained that it was already being worked on. A few others' comments regarding set dressing and a way to quit the game during gameplay were also expressed.

Theo's Feedback

Theo's critique was mostly focused on the dynamics of the game and echoed some of the questions Gavyn had. He also wondered how the player should play the game. Is it a stealth game or is it a free for all? Should the player enter the house and sneak around in a methodical order to eliminate the enemies or should they try going in guns blazing? I had explained that, while the obvious choice was to approach the hostage and main suspect by entering through the front door, there were also two alternative ways to complete the objective. Players can make their way to the back of the house and enter from the back door (which would give them access to the main suspect), or they could shoot the main suspect from the loft on the second floor. Theo expressed that including a way to get players to see those other options/paths would make it clearer to the player that those options existed.

Sam's Feedback

Sam observed parts of the playtesting and he agreed with a lot of the feedback. Given that the class Sam was substituting was a lesson in UX/UI, he had some additional notes regarding the UI, and he had brought up the idea of having a diegetic UI. He wondered if there was a way to show health damage other than using a basic health bar, and we had discussed potentially showing on-screen blood splatter. Something similar to how Call of Duty indicates to the player that they have taken damage.

My Fixes

This was interesting feedback because having made the prototype, I obviously know the objectives, the mechanics, and the different win conditions, but clearly I didn't make it obvious to others. That being said, I realized a quick and simple way to improve the game in line with the feedback was to rewrite the initial report that is shown at the beginning of the game. In the report, I added "clear and secure the house so you can successfully negotiate and get Kevyn to safely release Ava." I also detailed in the report that there was a second floor and a back door. Therefore, prompting the player to explore the whole map while they eliminate the enemies.

I also added a narrative reason why there were spikes in front of the door. By placing them where they are, it forces the player to go around them, further encouraging the player to walk and discover more of the map. I think rewriting the report kills two birds with one stone because it encourages map exploration, hints at there being several ways to reach the objective, and indicates that the map could have other dangers like the spikes.

The comments regarding how I wanted the player to interact with the game were a little more complex to solve, as were the comments about replayability. I wanted to allow the player to play it both ways if they chose to. If players wanted to go in guns blazing, then I wanted them to have the freedom to do so. However, the negotiation mechanic countered that type of playstyle because it forces the player to slow down. In the end, I've decided that the best way to reach the objectives was to play with a more careful playstyle. It's not a stealth game, but some level of skill is required so that the player doesn't take too much damage and fail to reach the objectives. I added doors throughout the map so that you can't immediately see all your enemies at once, you have to actually enter the rooms to eliminate the enemies inside, thus slowing down the gameplay.

I've also decided that the replayability aspect will come from a points system based on player performance. Players should try and beat their high score because they're awarded points based on; the time it took to complete the level, the number of hostages saved, the method by which they completed the objective, the number of suspects eliminated, the number of objectives completed, etc. Weapons and other skills can be upgraded through a skill tree which will be connected to that points system. From a technical and narrative aspect, this seemed like an easier route than having the hostage and main suspect respawn in new locations each time.

Regarding Sam's feedback, my only concern was how I was going to indicate that the player's health was running low and close to death. I know they use this technique in AAA games but I didn't know how I personally was going to make it happen. I realized nothing was stopping me from having both an onscreen blood splatter and a health bar. So using a widget, I added some blood splatter on-screen when the player gets shot, and I

made the health bar smaller. That way the information is still available to the player but it's not taking up so much screen space. This change definitely helped with making the prototype more immersive.

Lastly, I made little changes such as adding sound effects, set dressing, and ragdoll physics when enemies get shot. I removed some of the enemies from the outside and only kept the ones that were close to the house. I included a crouch and sprint mechanic, and I added a way for players to quit the game by hitting the 'esc' key. It should also be noted that during his playtest, Theo ran and fell off the edge of the map, therefore I added a border around the map to ensure it doesn't happen in the future.