

Rebecca Jones - Game review

by Rebecca Jones

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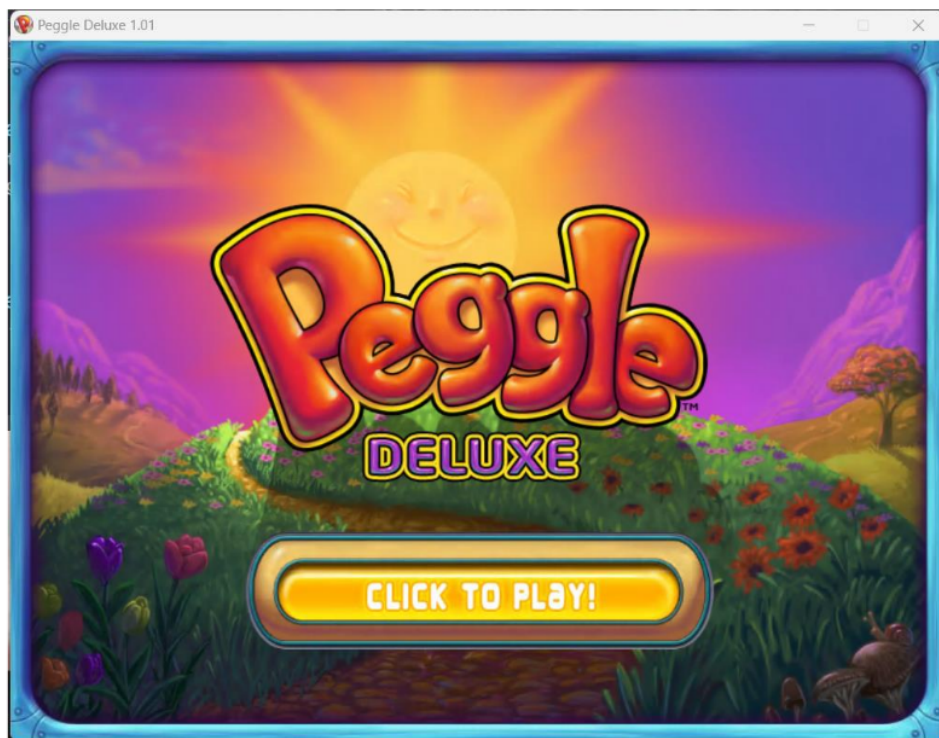
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Game Design and History

Individual Academic Report (Game Analysis/Review)



For this review, I will be covering casual puzzle game, “Peggle Deluxe” [1]. I intend to analyse distinctive features of the game in order to understand why certain features have been implemented and compare with existing game design media.

Peggle Deluxe [1] is a casual puzzle game developed by PopCap Games and released originally for PC in 2007 [2] before branching out to other platforms. The game [1] is heavily inspired by pachinko, a game which is essentially the Japanese version of pinball. This information comes from a PC Gamer interview with PopCap co-founder, Jason Kapalka and Peggle’s designer, Sukhbir Sidhub [3].

At first glance, both Peggle’s [1] visuals and imagery appear to be aimed at a much younger audience, evidenced by the game’s [1] use of colour, its unicorn mascot, cartoony graphics, and PEGI 3 rating [2]. Though, in a “Rock, Paper, Shotgun” interview from 2008, PopCap’s co-founder and Chief Creative Officer at the time, Jason Kapalka, talks about PopCap’s research on the audience for casual games [4]. PopCap’s research on the audience of casual games at that time showed that it naturally skewed towards an older “(89% of players are aged 30+), female (76% are female)” audience [4]. Peggle’s [1] nature as a casual puzzle game means that the game is very accessible to any prospective player as the type of game which is easy to pick up and put down without too much involvement required, making it very suitable for non-hardcore gamers. Because of this, I believe the game [1] falls into the same category as a game like “Tetris” as a game that is easy to learn and play but difficult to properly master.



Aside from certain challenge levels, each level will provide the player with ten balls and the goal of hitting every orange peg in a level. As an example, the first level of Peggle Deluxe [1] (pictured above) there are a total of ninety-four pegs and twenty-five orange pegs. These balls serve the player as ammunition and as a sort of life counter/health bar, as if all balls are depleted without hitting every orange peg the level will end and a game over screen will appear encouraging the player to “Try again!” The level will need to be reattempted before more progress can be made in the adventure game mode.



In Jesse Schell's "The Art of Game Design: A book of lenses," this type of 'punishment' can be referred to as a "Setback" [5]. In which a game returns you to a previous checkpoint, or in this case the start of the level [5]. Peggle [1] may not seem like the type of game to have "punishments" initially, but the game does employ them as negative consequences for losing your balls without completing the objective. The "Try Again!" screen of peggle itself could even be considered its own punishment as it could just about fit into Schell's category of "Shaming" [5] or when the player misses the targets they aimed for and they lose a ball because of it, this itself could also be seen as punishment for the player's inaccuracy. The author talks about how the possibility of punishment increases the challenge of a game [5] and is therefore a source of enjoyment when the player overcomes these "challenges". This challenge creates a source of conflict for Peggle [1].

I believe the limited number of balls enhances the experience as it adds another layer of challenge and conflict for the player. It challenges the player to think strategically about how they use given resources (balls) to complete a goal (hitting every orange peg). If the opposite were true, and there were no restrictions on the number of resources given in each level, the challenge of the game [1] be entirely removed, as well as a primary source of the game's conflict. To support this, in the book, "Chris Crawford on game design," Crawford talks about how conflict within games invigorates challenge for the player [6]. "Without conflict, challenge is limp and passive" [6], (this could also apply to the previous point regarding punishment as an addition to challenge).

This is also supported by "Level Up!: The guide to great game design" [7]. As the author states that by limiting the options that the player is given, this forces them to think strategically as "every move counts" [7]. The need for "Precision" [7] could also apply within Peggle [1] as the player needs to aim accurately and strategically if they want to preserve resources. The author mentions that the need for precision can create tension and the possibility of mistakes [7]. This tension can also create extra challenge.



Peggle Deluxe [1] consists of four main game modes: Adventure, Quick play, Duel, and Challenge (pictured above, on Peggle's [1] home screen). Quick play allows you to replay any adventure level you have completed with any unlocked power, Duel is Peggle's [1] multiplayer versus mode, while challenge is an additional game mode that unlocks after all adventure levels have been unlocked/cleared.

Adventure mode serves as the game's [1] main campaign, containing fifty-five levels with different themes and a selection of ten powers to unlock. Every six adventure levels, a new "Peggle master" is introduced to the player, the following six levels will match with their theme and the player will be given a tutorial on a new power. For example, when an alien "Peggle master" is introduced, the following levels become space themed.



I believe this gives the player a sense of progression, as it feels as if progress is being made as the scenery changes and new concepts (the powers) are still being introduced. There are a total of ten powers and matching characters. In Schell's book, when talking about meaningful choices given to the player, he mentions that if the number of choices given to the player outweigh the actual desire for those choices, the player will become overwhelmed [5]. Its for this reason I believe that Peggle [1] slowly introduces powers to the player through its main campaign, giving players time to get to know each power through tutorials as opposed to immediately jumping into a "choose character" screen (as shown in the above left screenshot). It is only after all "Peggle masters" have been introduced in the player given the choice of what power they want in adventure mode, and by then the player will have the "desire" [5] to choose whatever power they favour the most. Other examples of "Meaningful choices" from Schell's book that could also apply to peggle include; where to spend resources (balls), what power to use or whether to play it safe or take a risk [5].



Both the feeling of progression and gaining of powers can also feel like rewards for the player, these are like some of the reward categories within Schell's book, "Completion" and "Powers" [5]. Though, another of Schell's categories also suits Peggle [1] very well, "Spectacle" [5]. In this instance, I believe Schell's "Spectacle" [5] could apply to the "Extreme fever" mode that appears when you finally clear the level of orange pegs. Victory music plays, and a series of pleasing effects and celebratory animations with sparkles, confetti and fireworks play to celebrate the player's victory. The name fever itself is also based on Peggle's [1] pachinko origins, as referenced by Sidhub in the PC Gamer interview [3]. "At certain points in some Pachinko games you get the ball in a certain slot, and it goes "Fever! Fever! Fever!" [3].

This "Extreme fever" also gives the player the opportunity to gain numerous bonus points, with "points" being another form of reward for the player. While I believe that this feature is important as it celebrates the player's success, despite this, when trying to make progress quickly this feature can tend to slow progress and Peggle's [1] "Ode to joy" victory music tends to get old quickly when playing a few levels in quick succession. If I were to amend this, I would add a slightly bigger range of 'victory themes', perhaps depending on how

successful the player was in the level. Though, this may backfire if a player is consistently getting similar scores.

Several levels of Peggle [1] may need to be replayed multiple times to pass onto the next one, this may be because the ball is not bouncing in the anticipated direction, or it may miss moving pegs. When the level resets, the orange pegs also change their positioning, meaning that no consistent strategy or game plan can be formed. This means an extra challenge for players, as well as the level never being the exact same each time you play, which aids in its replay value.

Within Peggle [1], the primary source of audio and visual feedback happens when the ball connects with the pegs in each level. When this happens, the peg will light up and a sound effect will also play, giving the player both a visual and audible response which confirms to the player that the ball has hit its mark. As the ball hits more pegs, the higher in pitch this sound effect will become. I believe this feature is greatly beneficial to the overall Peggle [1] experience, as the players real goal is to really hit as many pegs within a turn as possible, this feature highlights this fact and gives signals to the player that they have aimed their ball well. This also gives the feeling of having built a peg “combo” for points, “points” also being on the list of Jesse Schell’s types of rewards [5].

In the interview with “Rock, Paper, Shotgun” Kapalka is asked to what extent is addiction theory incorporated into games [4]. In response to this, Kapalka mentions how sound effects rising in pitch are associated with “combos” [4]. Its for this reason, and others, that I believe Peggle [1] contains addictive elements that give a sense a satisfaction to the player. The sounds themselves of the ball connecting with the pegs could also be a form of reward for the player.

When players unfamiliar with Peggle [1] pick up the game, they may initially believe that the game is primarily luck based, but as they gain familiarity, the game becomes increasingly more skill based and as players gain necessary skills, levels become more complex. Presumably to balance with the players increasing skill, balancing the scales.

Overall, I believe that Peggle Deluxe is an incredibly well-balanced game, and the more I learn the more I am convinced of this fact. To my knowledge, the game has no “dominant strategy” [5], (as referred to by Schell), and remains an incredibly engaging casual puzzle game with suitable levels of challenge, conflict, strategy, and rewards which are satisfying for the player, (such as “Powers”, “Completion”, “Spectacle”, Sound effects and “Points” [5]).

Bibliography

- [1] Peggle Deluxe. [PC], Redwood city, CA: Electronic Arts, PopCap Games, Inc., 2007
- [2] Electronic Arts, "*Buy peggle® – PC & mac – EA - electronic arts*," Electronic Arts, <https://www.ea.com/en-gb/games/peggle/peggle> (accessed Nov. 1, 2023).
- [3] G. Smith, "*The making of Peggle*," PC Gamer, <https://www.pcgamer.com/the-making-of-peggle/> (accessed Nov. 1, 2023).
- [4] A. Meer, "*RPS interview: Popcap on casual, Peggle & Valve*," Rock Paper Shotgun, <https://www.rockpapershotgun.com/rps-interview-popcap-on-casual-peggle-valve> (accessed Nov. 1, 2023).
- [5] J. Schell, *The Art of Game Design : A book of lenses*, 1st edition. Burlington, MA: Morgan Kaufmann Publishers, 2008
- [6] C. Crawford, *Chris Crawford on game design*. Indianapolis, IN: New Riders, 2003.
- [7] S. Rogers, *Level up! : the guide to great video game design*, 2nd edition. Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, 2014.

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GRADEMARK REPORT

FINAL GRADE

67/100

GENERAL COMMENTS

1. Engagement With Literature Skills

Evidence of research has been shown in both the written text and bibliography, with a good range of sources used from the game to related literature from Game Theory sources – this is good to see. IEEE formatting has been applied in the assessed work, which shows an ability to follow instructions outlined by the assessment brief.

2. Knowledge & Understanding Skills

Discussion of statistics has been included regarding the demographic of the game – this is interesting as the research goes beyond simple observations at face value and arrives at a very different conclusion.

A good appreciation of the purpose of the report is evidenced in the work – this is an objective review of the game supported by game theory literature rather than an opinion piece or 'grading' of a game experience. Good work.

3. Cognitive & Intellectual Skills

Links have been made between the number of attempts to succeed at a puzzle/challenge and resources given, once again citing published sources as references in the report. This is how all academic writing should be presented going forward.

Player satisfaction has been highlighted – this is something Peggle does well. A little more on this topic (particularly exploring the audio and visual feedback to a greater degree) might enhance the marks awarded.

4. Practical Application Skills

(Not assessed in this assignment).

5. Transferrable Skills for Life and Professional Practice

The work is presented well and has been submitted successfully to Turnitin by the deadline specified on the assessment brief.

Inclusion of imagery from *Peggle* is good to see as this helps add context to the report. To further enhance this it would be good to include captions under each image providing a brief description of the image's content – this would add further clarity.

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