

An Analysis of 'Diner Dash 2: Restaurant Rescue' **By Anuja Parikh**

Diner Dash 2: Restaurant Rescue is a casual strategy and action game created and developed by PlayFirst¹. It one of the top played games on the internet several gaming sites^{1,2,3} today, and was given a high rating of 4.5 out of 5 stars by 33,585 users on Yahoo Games. Fast paced and full of action, I believe it is the clean Disney-style 2D graphics, straight-forward storyline, and the simple instructions with challenging critical thinking puzzles that make this game fun to play.

Characters

The main character, or protagonist, of Diner Dash 2 is Flo, a restaurant entrepreneur who is helping her friends (four restaurant owners) revive their flailing restaurants. They entire game is based through Flo's eyes, which the player of the game controls completely. The villain, or antagonist, of the game is Mr. Big, a malevolent and greedy business man who wants to demolish these small and unique restaurants and replace them with the "Mega Multiplex Food Plaza".

Other characters in the game include six different types of customers; the young lady, the family, the cell phone addict, the bookworm, the business woman, the joggers, and the kindly senior. Each of these characters comes with strong personalities that dictate how they behave in the restaurant towards each other and Flo. Below is a chart that represents each of the different character personalities.

Customer Type	Rate of Ordering Food and Eating	Personality	Noise Tolerance	Tip Giving
The Girls	Moderate	Patient	Moderately Dislikes Noise	Average
The Family	Moderate	Moderately Patient	Noisy When Unhappy	--
The Cell Phone Addict	Fast	Not Patient	Always Noisy	High
The Bookworm	Slow	Very Patient	Dislikes Noise	Average
The Business Women	Fast	Not Patient	Moderately Dislikes Noise	High
The Joggers	Moderate	Moderately Patient	Doesn't Mind Noise	Average
The Seniors	Slow	Very Patient	Moderately Dislikes Noise	Low

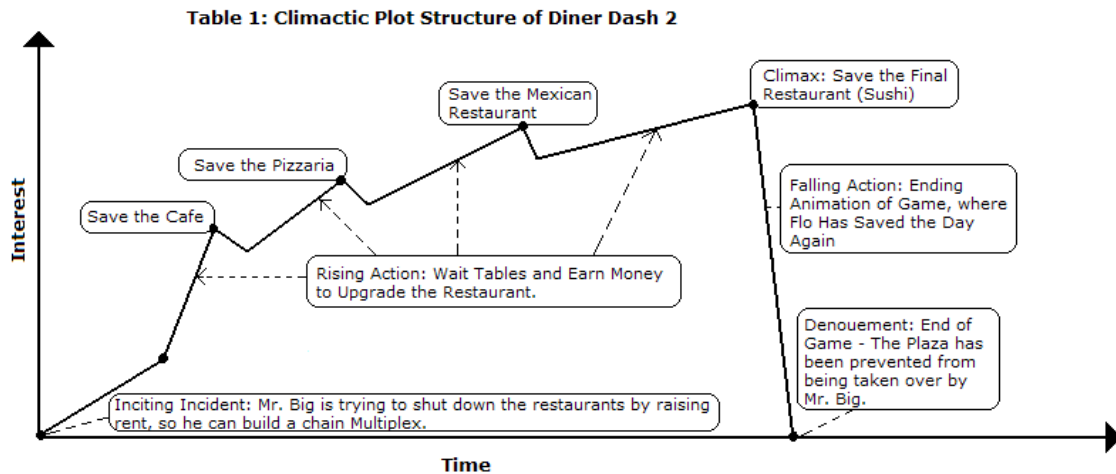
When playing the game, the player has to pay attention to which characters get along with other characters. For example, cell phone addicts and families tend to make a lot of noise, so when bookworms are seated near these people, they quickly become annoyed by the noise, and leave. On the other hand, joggers are always listening to music on their headsets, and thus don't make noise or are not disturbed by the noise, so they can easily be seated next to noisy and quiet customers.

One of the reasons this game has such wide appeal may be because audiences are able to sympathize and identify with the characters. I know I identify with "the Girls", because I am pretty patient with the waitress, take a moderate amount of time ordering and eating food, get annoyed with families that end up sitting next to me whose baby cries the entire time. I have also experienced meeting the other customer types at restaurants, and the accuracy in which they are portrayed makes the game even more amusing.

Plot

Diner Dash 2 is a story with a simple plot – the basic premise is to save the restaurants from the evil Mr. Big by raising money to improve the restaurants. Thus,

the main basic conflict is between a man (or in this case, woman) versus another person. The story begins when four restaurant owners are outraged that Mr. Big has tripled the rent on their restaurants so that he can put them out of business. They send a plea out to Flo to help them revitalize their restaurants so that business starts booming again. Just as Mr. Big is about to demolish the first restaurant, Darla's Café, Flo comes with her waitressing expertise, and takes over the restaurant until they have created a solid customer base through redecorating the restaurant and through offering better and quicker service.



As the plot structure shows, the game offers four different restaurants, a café, a pizzeria, a Mexican restaurant, and a sushi place. The rising action occurs as Flo interacts with the customers, as she is trying to raise as much money by quickly serving them and keeping them happy before the restaurant closes for the day. Crises include unhappy customers that become dissatisfied if they are seated next to noisy customers or receive slow service.

The climax occurs when Flo is able to save the final restaurant, the Sushi restaurant. There is then a short falling action, as the game ends, and the player finds out that he or she was able to save the restaurants from their demise.

Theme

The main overarching theme of Diner Dash 2 was good versus evil, where the player worked to save the restaurateurs' business from being destroyed by the evil Mr. Big. In winning the game, good would win over evil, as the businesses would be rescued. If the player lost, evil would succumb, and the Mega Multiplex would be built – a symbol of "evil" in real life. This is representative of the real world, because everyday, small business who are known to be caring and concerned about their customers, lose to the massive profit driven business (such as Walmart) who succeed by ruthlessly taking over everyday through cheap labor and bad business practices.

Music

Diner Dash 2 used music, visual imagery, and different background ambience, rather than spoken word to create meaning within the characters, therefore there was no diction in the game. For example when families were unhappy with the slow service,

or if the baby was not given a high chair to sit in, the baby would start crying, disturbing the restaurant. As the graphics took precedent over the music in Diner Dash 2, the music was kept simplistic, played on the keyboard with interchanging refrains in the style of restaurant. For example, while the base music on the keyboard was the same, an overlay of the Spanish guitar was added in the Mexican restaurant, while an accordion overlay was added in the pizzeria.

Much of the other music was sound effects that added to the background restaurant ambience, such as the clinking of silverware, the sound of a general buzz of conversation in the room as the restaurant became more crowded, the pages flapping as customers read the menu, or a pen scratching sound while the waitress took the orders. Finally, arcade style sounds were used for arcade-like features, such as 'ding' or a 'boop boop boop' for power-ups or gaining extra points.

Spectacle

The spectacle of Diner Dash 2 was like the icing on the cake. The graphics were excellently drawn. They were simple, yet accurate and elegantly drawn. The scenery captured all aspects of a typical restaurant, and 2D cartoons effectively created a light mood, excellent for a casual gamer who wants to take a five minute break away from reality.

Interactivity: Immersion

According to Janet Murray, to create immersion is to "create a world that is more real than reality". Hundreds of people on the Yahoo forum wrote in their comments that Diner Dash 2 was very addicting. When I played Diner Dash 2, I felt the same way. I would spend hours trying to beat a level that lasted five minutes each, telling myself, "I've almost beat it. I'll only try this one more time." This is because the developers of Diner Dash 2 took full advantage of creating a totally immersive environment. Each level requires full participation and concentration as the player multitasks between seating customers, taking orders, giving the orders to the cook, serving the food, taking money, and cleaning up the tables. As the levels progress, the game becomes more challenging as the player is given other tasks that he or she needs to keep track of. For example, when a family comes into the restaurant, the baby needs to be given a high chair right away or else he starts to cry, disturbing the customers. In later levels, the customers may request appetizers, drinks, and desserts, which in turn give the player extra points in the game. The player also needs to keep in mind the happiness levels of the customer through quick service, and seating quiet customers away from the noisy ones. Finally the player receives additional points if he or she is able to seat customers in chairs that match their shirt color. By giving the player so many things to think about, the player is rewarded with things to think about, such as choosing restaurant décor options based on how many points you received.

In addition to becoming immersed in the tasks, the player receives an opportunity to play act as a wait person while in the game. Going to a restaurant is an activity that everyone is familiar with, but being able to experience the other side of it as the service worker is something most people have not done. Playing the game gives a glossed over view of waitressing, and players get to experience the positives and negatives without worrying about the extra details.

Interactivity: Agency & Navigability

Diner Dash 2 gave the player many opportunities to take meaningful actions through choices such as which customers to server or seat, or through a limited number of

power-ups, such as using a special one-time wait staff to help raise the happiness level of the customers. While Diner Dash 2's game play focuses on how many customers you can get before closing, it requires you to also keep them happy while in the game. Additionally, each level acts as a restaurant day, so each experience of playing the game is different. The player can explore the game by using the different power-ups at different times, creating a different experience or story every time.

Interactivity: Transformation

Diner Dash 2 was a game of endless transformation. It isn't possible to die in the game, so the player can continue to hone their skills by replaying the level until they are able to beat it. The levels get exceedingly harder as the game goes on, so to get to the next level, the player must practice his or her skills, learning from his or her mistakes. While each level begins and ends the same way, with the restaurant opening and closing, the choices the player is able to make in the game changes the way the game is played.

Conclusion

In general, as a casual game, Diner Dash 2 successfully offered players a highly interactive experience. Part of the success of the game may have been because the structure of Diner Dash 2 aligned well with the principles of the Old and New Poetics, which have been well accepted as a successful story structure for the last 2000 years.

¹ <http://www.playfirst.com/game/dinerdash2>

² <http://games.yahoo.com/games/front>

³ <http://www.arcadetown.com>