

Critical Play: Clash Royale

Creator: Supercell

Platform: IOS & Android

Four Types of Game Balance

Asymmetric: For the most part, Clash Royale is a very symmetric game. However, there are certain mechanics that create asymmetry in the game which can be very frustrating. Examples of this include getting access to legendary cards. When I initially started playing the game I didn't have access to the same cards as my opponents and it would seem unfair when I played against those cards. Another example of the asymmetry was the difference between troop levels. Higher troop levels meant more health and damage. When playing against a player with more leveled troops it would make the game a bit less balanced.

Strategies: There were multiple strategies for winning the game. Most of them revolved around choosing certain decks. The article mentions if one strategy is better than the rest, players will play the dominant strategy. This was not the case in Clash Royale as most of my opponents had different decks. There were some common strategies such as pairing certain troops together but they weren't too overpowering when playing against. Most decks in Clash Royale required certain types of troops. For example a "tank" is a troop that does little damage but has lots of health. Most decks required cards of this sort to balance other cards with low health but high damage. The strategy of choosing a deck required players to directly think about the intransitive relationships of certain cards.

Game Objects: This is probably the most important and necessary type of balancing Clash Royale requires. Players chose from a wide variety of playing cards to craft their decks for battle. Each card represents a troop. Some have special abilities, some can attack only air troops, others cannot move, and some are just spells. Furthermore, the cards differ in elixir which is essentially the cost of playing that card. These cards often had a transitive relationship between Elixir and ability. Oftentimes the more elixir a card costs the more powerful the card is during battle. For the most part, I think these cards were balanced and the variety of cards enhanced my playing experience. More cards allowed for greater creativity during battles. Since there was so much variety, it was rare that opponents had exactly the same decks which meant that each battle was different and required strategy rather than memorization.

Single Player: N/A.

Three Ways to Balance Game Objects

Target Audience

I would say the target audience of this game is 6 and up. I think the game can be fun for younger audiences with limited experience in strategy games especially because the fun card-like mechanics of the game appeal to younger audiences.

Formal Elements

The most important formal elements of this game are the players, objectives and resources. The formal element players is very important because this game is centered around player vs player interactions and strategy. Players react to the decisions of other players and try to outwit and outplay them. This leads into the second formal element of objectives. Players want to break down the towers of other players. This objective forces players to think about the cards they select when crafting their decks, and then how to use them during a game to win. Each card has specific advantages and disadvantages so when playing them players always think about how this card ties in with the objective of the game. Lastly, I think the resources in Clash Royale are overlooked. I think this is an important formal element because it drives how people level up their cards and towers. When the levels of players cards and towers are even, the game is balanced. However, without XP and gold some players battle others players with higher levels and troops. This makes the game unbalanced as higher level troops are statistically better than their lower level counterparts. The mechanics of XP and gold incentive players to keep playing or buy them from the online store. Furthermore, Elixir is an important resource in the game as it drives the flow of battle. Each player gains the same amount of elixir but can choose to spend it differently. The choice of how to spend it often dictates a winner.

Type of Fun

The main type of fun is challenge. Most of the fun comes from beating other players during battle. Players are rewarded and incentivized to do this because it means they get more trophies which are sort of like a status symbol of the game. The game meets the goals of creating a fun challenge game. One way it does this is by disguising luck for skill in many areas of the game. When a player wins a battle they often cite their win based on their raw skill. On the other hand,

losing doesn't feel like you got out skilled. Maybe you didn't realize they had a certain troop, or the troop you placed did something unexpected. Or maybe you had more skill but the players' troops were higher levels than yours. Therefore, the fun of the challenge is always there during a win, and pushed aside during a loss.

Success/Fails

I particularly liked the emoji's that players can use during the game. These animated reactions serve as an in game chat during battles and provide a fun aesthetic to the game. It also is a fun mechanic which leads into many fun dynamics. Good sportsmanship can sometimes come out of these emojis. Players can give thumbs up when they lose. Most of the time this mechanic creates a trolling dynamic where players spam the crying king emoji or the laughing emoji at the opponent. One moment of failure in the game is the complexity in understanding how certain troops react to others. Specifically, understanding where to place troops can be difficult and varies greatly for each troop. This can be frustrating at times because I would place a troop down only for it to go in the complete opposite lane that I was expecting.

Things I would Change

I would like to change the balancing of the game regarding its leveling up mechanics. I got particularly frustrated at going up against players with higher leveled troops and towers than me. This gives a really big edge to my opponent as their troops do more damage than mine. I would feel rewarded when I would win, but when I lost I felt like I couldn't do anything to win. No amount of skill could have combated the difference in troop levels. This mechanism incentives players to buy XP or gold but it frustrates players who don't want to spend money on the game. I think there should be a separate game mode where players can battle against other players with equal troop levels. Maybe this game mode doesn't increase a player's trophy count, but provides rewards in XP and gold. This would give an opportunity for players to level up without the frustration of losing to higher levels.