

Project Structure Document

Part 5 - Playtesting

Computer Games Laboratory

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This chapter will discuss our playtesting approach for Flee Fi Fo From, and the feedback that we received from our play testers. We will also briefly discuss some changes that we anticipate making as a result of these suggestions.

1. Playtest Setting

1.1. Scope

The focus of the sessions was on the overall experience including gameplay, theme, user interface, visuals and any other critiques. In order to standardize our playtest feedback across sessions, we used a stable branch of our project for all playtests. Due to network disconnections and issues with action syncing, we decided to omit the networking piece from our playtests. We also made a conscious tradeoff to incorporate a fully fledged priority system into our game at the expense of the inner castle and preliminary objectives that we had originally planned to implement. These pieces could be added at a later stage, not as part of this course.

1.2. Playtester Selection

Our game is meant to simulate a typical strategy board game experience, thus being a 60-90 sit down kind of exercise. Our target audience would thus be hobby and enthusiasts board gamers who would enjoy such an experience. We decided to focus our playtester selection criteria around our target demographic. This was done by playtesting with gamer friends, as well as relative strangers on virtual board game playtesting servers on Discord. In all, we were able to receive feedback from more than 15 individuals.

1.3. Testing Method

We used a combination of video conferencing and screen share tools to conduct our playtest sessions. This involved one single game instance being presented via screen share, and interacted with by participants via screen control. Contrary to blind playtesting experiences with digital games, where players are meant to find out information on their own, we adopted a slightly hybrid approach. We presented a brief introduction to the game including the theme and setting, as well as an overview of the possible actions available to the player. We believe that this was a necessary step that would be in line with playtesting actual board games. Most competitive board gamers would not embark into a game session without having at least a high level idea of the game.

Following the introduction, our players would jump into the game session. We would ask a few in-game questions if the opportunity arose, or else be silent spectators. We decided to rely on our in-game help messages for specific rule questions during play. Following the game session, we asked players to answer a brief post game survey, which included a few quantitative rating questions, as well as plot a quick response on a play matrix. Since our players were on voice chat, we collected most qualitative feedback in the form of a post game discussion following the survey.

2. Playtest Results

2.1. Play Matrix

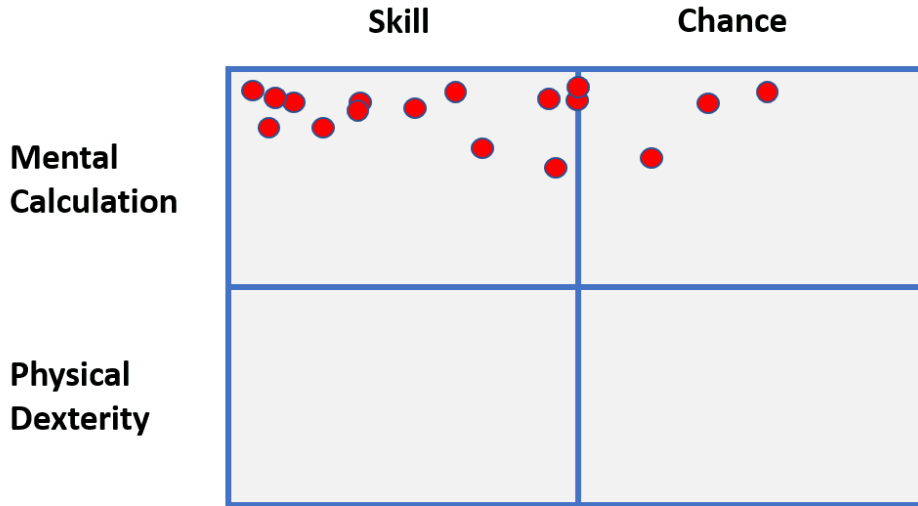


Figure 1: Play Matrix Results

Where players thought the game currently is:

As can be seen from the matrix, a majority of the opinions were in the Mental Calculation and Skill quadrant, which is what we expected for our game. However the opinion of the degree of Skill required appeared to vary across players, with a fair number of responses moving into the Chance end of the spectrum. On questioning the playtesters, we believe that this opinion stemmed from the presence of some randomness in the game with regards to the villager draw.

What changes the players would like to see to get it to where we want:

The Chance quadrant responders mentioned that they would like some degree of probability control over the villager draw in order to be able to choose what got added to the queue. Furthermore, they felt that the queue movement was not always consistent across players, and that sometimes limited the reset options they had. We will be considering these opinions to see if we would like to make any changes, or whether we are comfortable with the elements of luck in the game. A second critique that began to emerge from this stage was that although the mental calculation of the game was quite high, the reward for it was not necessarily at par with it. We will discuss this further in a later section.

2.2. Quantitative Feedback

We asked our testers to rate the different aspects of the game on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being Terrible and 5 being Terrific. The results can be seen in Figure 2 below.

On a scale of 1 (Terrible) to 5 (Terrific), how would you rate the following aspects of the game?

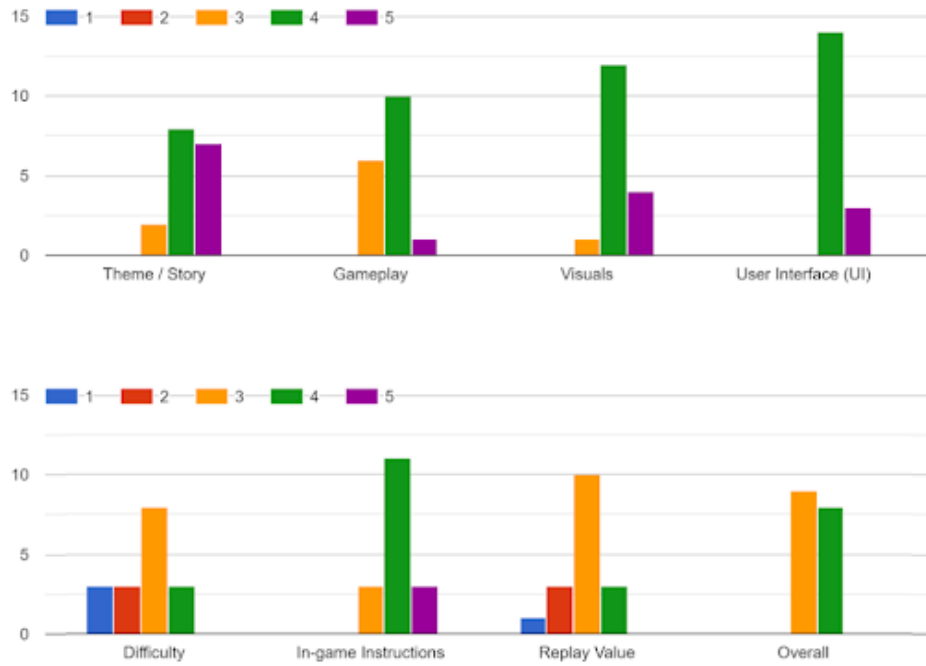


Figure 2: Ratings for Different Aspects of the Game

When looking at the positives from the above ratings, we can see that the theme was consistently well received. The gameplay trended well, with its unique aspects and mechanics being noticed in particular. The visuals and UI were generally well received, while no issues were found with in-game instructions. In fact several players found the in game instructions to be more helpful than what they could have received with a tabletop experience.

When looking at the negatives, what stands out is that the replay value of the game was deemed to be below par. The game overall trended at slightly above average, which is lower than what we would want it to eventually be. On further discussion, we found that this overall rating was heavily influenced by the lack of strategic choices and replay value, which we will discuss later.

We also included survey questions to gauge the audience’s perception of their fit for the game, as well as what they thought about the game length and difficulty. The results are summarized below.

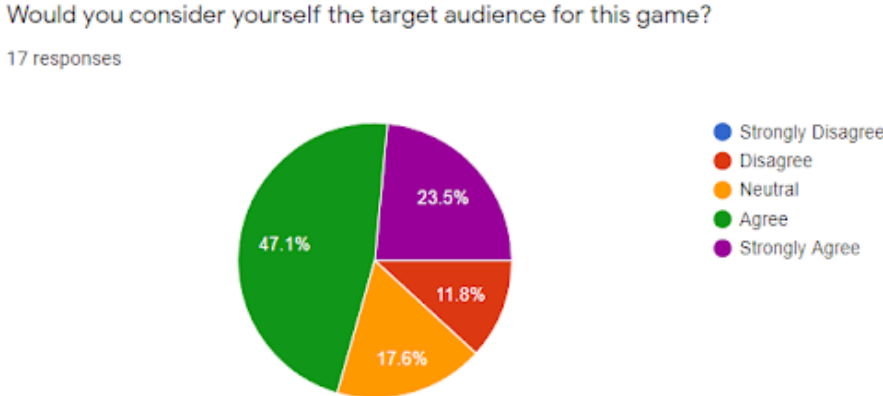


Figure 3: Target Audience Fit

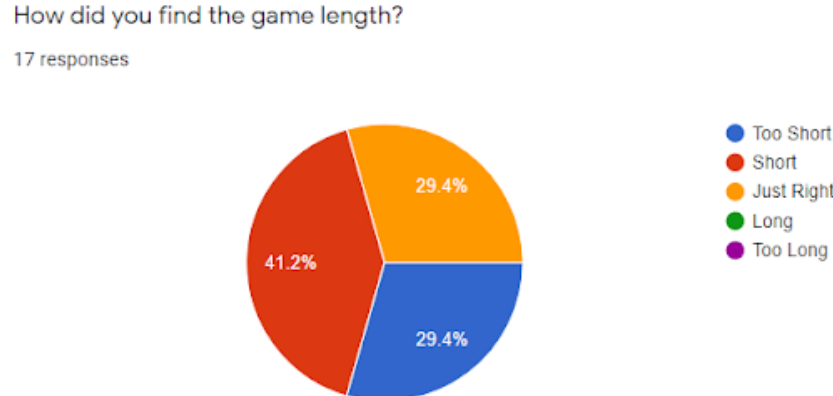


Figure 4: Game Length Rating

From the above two figures, as well as the difficulty rating in Figure 2 earlier, we can make a few observations. Firstly, the selected playtesters were an apt fit for our game, since they tend to be experienced board gamers who play often. Secondly, the difficulty level of the game (Figure 2) varied a bit across players, however in general it was considered to be on the easy side of the spectrum. In fact, one player remarked that “The math is not difficult, but it doesn’t feel worth it”. Finally, a majority of the respondents found the overall game length to be shorter than preferred. We think these are good pieces of feedback to have, because it shows that we have plenty of room to expand on the difficulty level and game length by adding components that would provide more strategic value. We will discuss this further in the section on changes and next steps.

2.3. Qualitative Feedback

We followed up from our survey questions with a post game discussion. We generally asked our participants questions regarding their most and least favourite aspects of the game, as well as things that they found frustrating or that they would like to change. The exact mode of the questions varied based on player responses, and resembled more of a conversation.

In general, we found that players really enjoyed the theme as well as some unique aspects of the gameplay. They found the UI and visuals to be clear and polished to meet their requirements, and felt that the help messages improved their experience over a traditional tabletop setting. Some specifics are listed below.

Theme:

As mentioned above, the players were able to connect well with the game setting, and believed that it represented the Chaos and Order theme well.

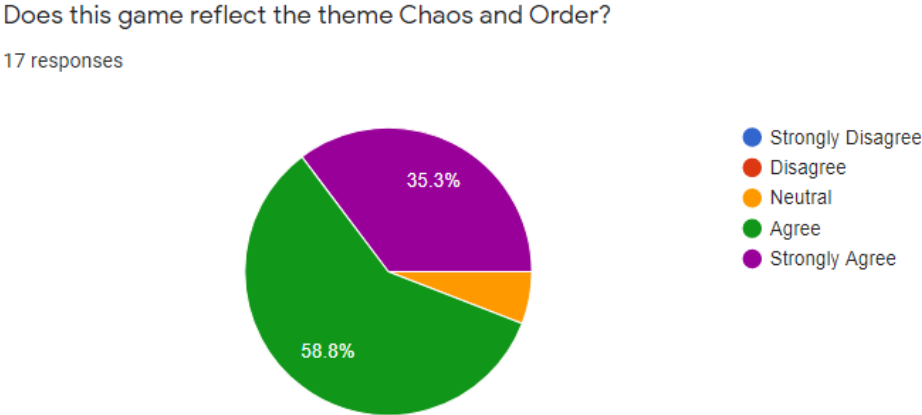


Figure 5: Feedback on Thematic Fit

The priority mechanic was very well received, and players felt that there was tremendous potential with this unique system. They also felt there was strong thematic resonance with real world aspects such as immigration and refugees, with some even suggesting vaccine priority queues as a linkage. The only significant feedback they had here was that there were even more opportunities possible to link the priority mechanic with other aspects of the game. One response stuck with us in particular:

*”I see some British humour here ...why are medieval people lining up in an orderly way in the middle of a **** storm..and being awfully polite about it”*

UI and Visuals:

Both the quantitative and qualitative feedback seemed to indicate that the UI and visuals for the game were polished, clean and intuitive to understand. The undo functionality was particularly praised, with players noting that mistakes were even easier to undo in our digital version than a typical tabletop version. The information messages on the screen at every game state were well received by the players, who felt that it greatly contributed to their understanding of the game. One playtester even remarked that *“This is a heck of a lot more useful than a rule book.”*



Figure 6: Example In-game Prompts

With regards to suggestions, the players felt that some of the buttons, in particular for the workers, were not always easy to see. They would have liked to see this slightly bigger, and if possible also ‘pop out’ better when they were interactable. In addition, they also had some similar feedback with regards to tile movement, in order to better indicate the selected tiles and possible forward movement for the next tile. We also received some paradoxical feedback, where a couple of super competitive players would have preferred that there was no live scoreboard in the game, similar to how it would be in a tabletop version. In their mind *“Seeing the scores makes it too easy to know when you’re winning. I like being forced to gauge the scores.”* We are not yet sure if this should be considered a disadvantage of our digital version, or whether we can consider it as a niche opinion.

Gameplay:

Finally, with regards to the gameplay, we received a fair amount of feedback in this area. On the plus side, the priority mechanic was very well received, with players believing that this could have great further potential. The double sided end condition of the game was also something that added a dramatic element and strategic nature to both sides (action and reset) of the gameplay. In fact, the action and reset concept in general was well liked by our testers, with multiple individuals noting that it significantly lowered downtime and increased player engagement.

We did however receive significant negative feedback regarding the overall strategic opportunities and the replay value of the game. Players were not always able to see the value of saving their knights, and also felt that there was not enough variety in the options that they could pursue. One remark that particularly stuck with us was when a tester said *“I think all the fundamental pieces are there to make this game really good, but it needs a bit more variety and oomph to it before I would play it again.”*. We are overall quite glad to hear this feedback, because it indicates to us that our game has the potential to be successful if we are able to incorporate some of the changes we are contemplating. There were also a couple of edge cases and negative play observations we made regarding the Poach action in the game. Players felt that they could be unfairly targeted by players within the game and left without resettable workers, leading to kingmaking scenarios. Finally, they felt that there could perhaps be a bit more Honor earning opportunities in the game, as it felt quite penalizing currently.



Figure 7: Broken Game Loop with Poach

3. Changes and Next Steps

We are considering several changes based on the feedback we received. In terms of easy wins, the edge cases and UI based feedback we received should be quite easy to fix, and we also plan to remove the Poach action from the game to prevent negative play and game loop breakages.

In general, we felt that the strategic decisions and replay value of the game would be dramatically improved once the objectives and inner castle are in play. This would also target the feedback around the game length and difficulty level currently, since we feel that we have plenty of room to increase both. While the inner castle was originally targeted for our alpha release, we made a conscious decision to implement a full fledged priority system instead. Based on the success and reception of the priority system, we feel comfortable with this tradeoff. We will likely implement a slight proxy buff to the knights' point values to simulate the inner castle for now.

Overall, our key priority is on resyncing the networking piece of the project and refining the components that we already have in place, in order to have a fully playable and polished version of our game for the final presentation.