

Design Doc Part II
Professor Cody Van De Mark
5/12/16

Sour Cream Dream Team presents:

Unnatural Selection

By:

Alia Gestl, Kevin Gibson, Katherine Harrison, Joshua Martin,
Nicholas Palumbo, and Noah Parker

Game Title and Logline/Objective

Unnatural Selection: Survival of the Weirdest: the board game in which players evolve their creatures to collect various tokens before their opponents.

Summary

Alia Gestl

Our game is a two to six player evolution-themed board game that focuses on using character movement in order to achieve certain cards that trigger events, cause mutations in the player, or give the player special adaptability to certain zones on the board. The adaptability gives the players the chance to obtain zone tokens; once a player gets all four zone tokens and reach the end spaces they win the game.

Our three initial ideas were a game based solely on random environment changes and the ability to adapt to them, a game that was based on achieving adaptability to different zones on one mainland, where each subsequent zone was more difficult to adapt to, and our current game. We picked our current idea because it allowed for more player interaction than the other two and was easier to add certain aspects of the other two ideas without totally changing the game.

The theme of our game is adaptability and evolution. It takes place in an unidentified location, with many different biomes and habitats for creatures to evolve in. The objective is to obtain one token from each habitat area and to reach the end zone without tokens being lost or taken by other players along the way. We chose these mechanics because it gives the incentive for players to evolve in order to either steal each others' tokens, defend against attackers, and to move quickly to their end goal.

Theming

Alia Gestl

The style of our game is upbeat and has a wide variety of gameplay options. The variety of gameplay options is embodied by the variety of creature types, habitats, and mutation cards. The player also has choices for different combat styles. These choices lead to gameplay that is not usually the same each time, and interesting to participate in.

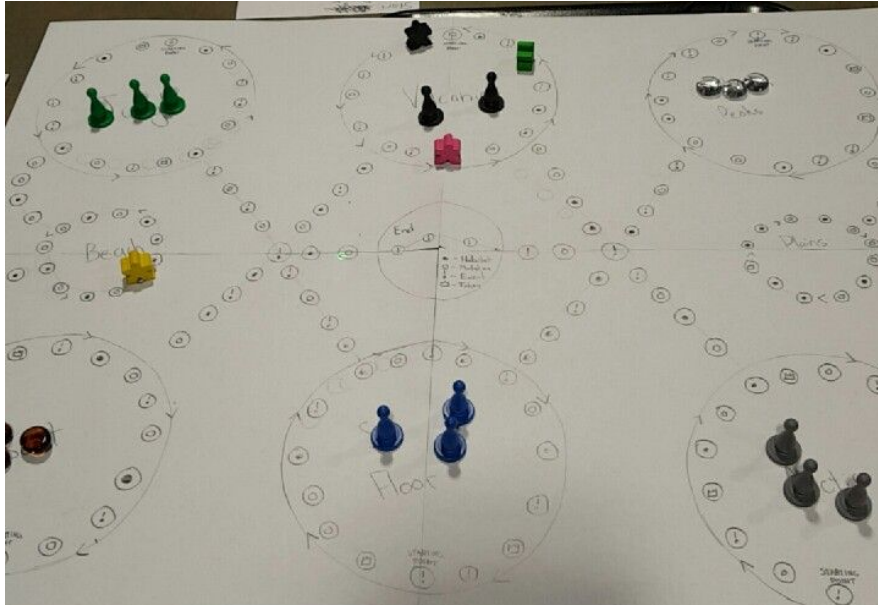
The inclusion of combat also gives players the option to interact or not to interact. Interaction has become more likely as we have tweaked the game in its developing stages, but players always have the option to avoid initiating combat.

All of these aspects lead to our theme of adaptability and variety in gameplay. Players can stick with a strategy or try new things, but they will have a different experience each time.

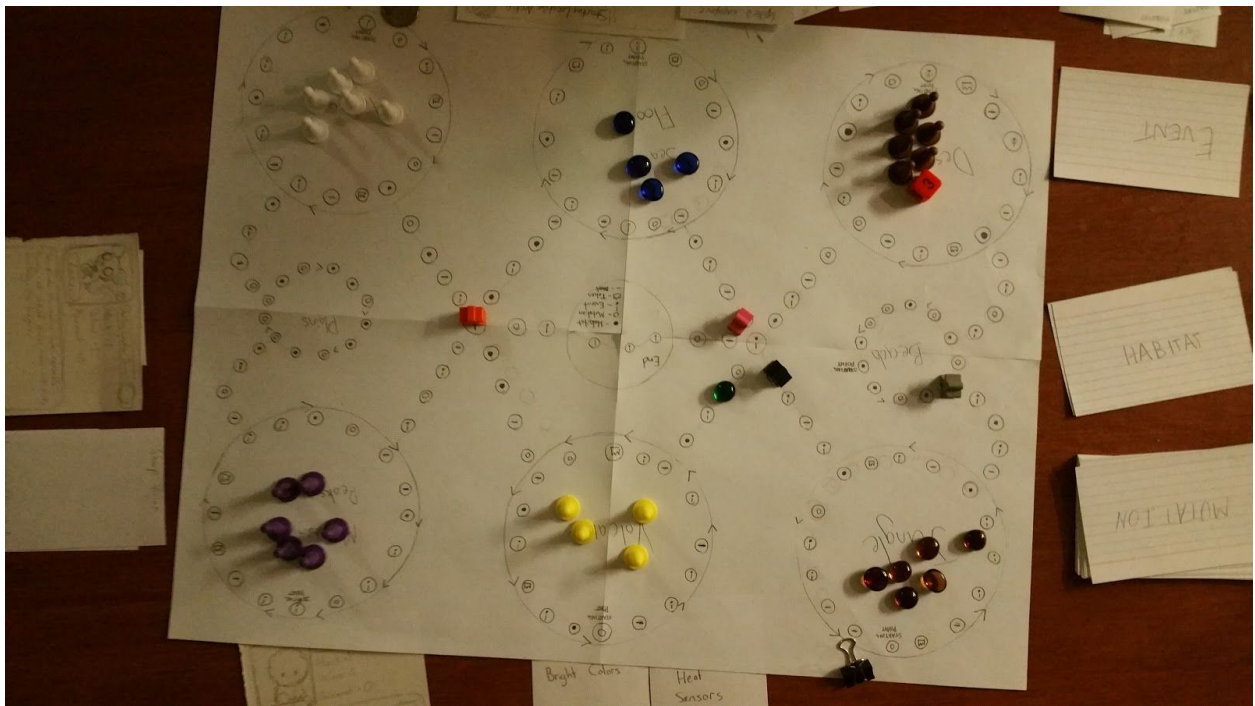
Playable Prototype Photos

Kevin Gibson Josh Martin Nick Palumbo

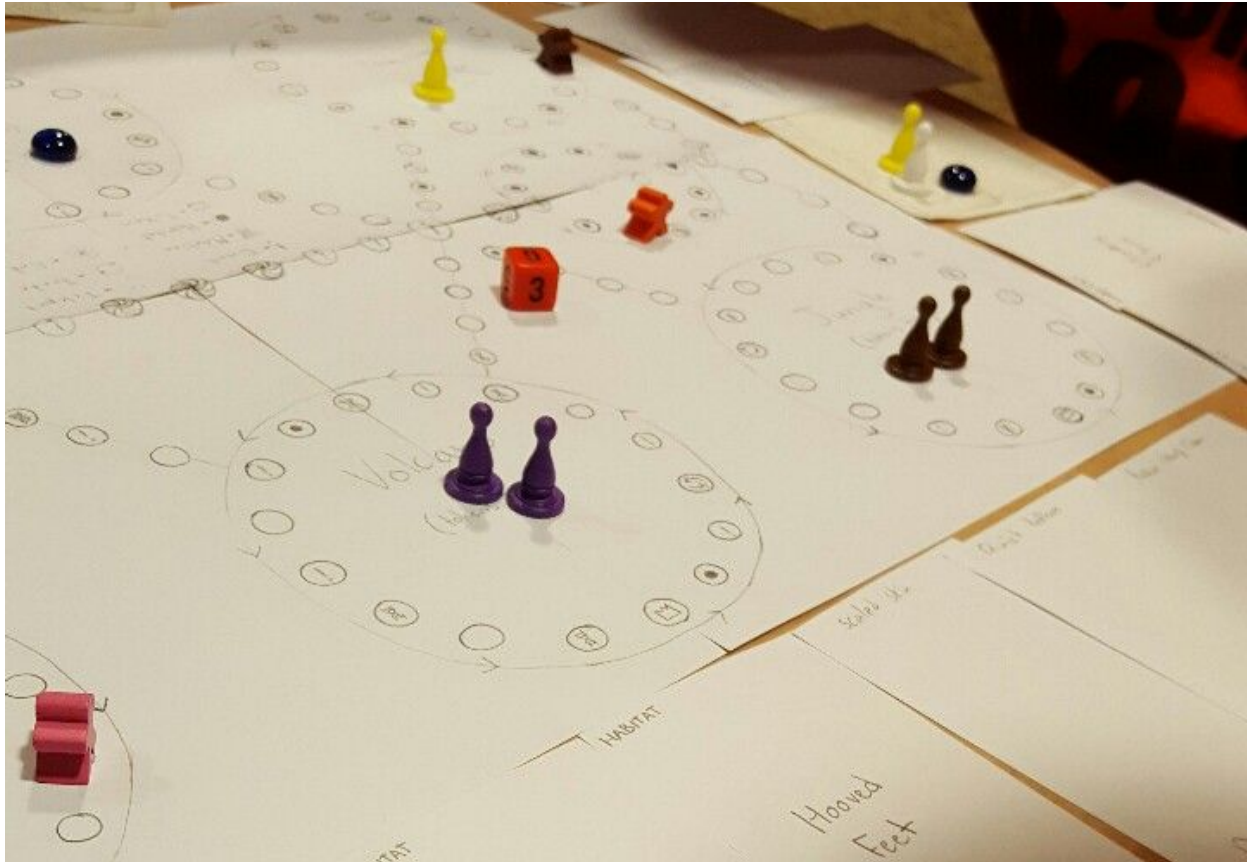
First Playtest:



Second Playtest:



Third Playtest:



Team Description and Roles

Alia - Lead meetings, wrote agendas and kept meeting on track, wrote the game summary, did art for the board and token pieces.

Noah - Wrote rules for the game, and watched over first internal playtest. Wrote history, antecedents, and related games section of design document, got pieces needed from Game Crafter

Josh - Created basic and advanced mutation cards. Played in internal playtests as well as running and writing about a external playtest.

Kevin - Took notes at team meetings, made the game board and habitat cards, wrote playtest reports and took photos of playtests.

Katherine - In charge of look and feel, created moodboard and concept art, did art for half the creature cards, wrote mechanic description.

Nick - Designed the event cards, observed and wrote about the third internal playtest for the design document.

Rules Sheet

Noah Parker

For 4 - 6 Players (Best played with 4), Ages 10+

Goal: The goal of the game is to **collect a token from each habitat** on the board then **land on an end tile** in the center of the board.

- **Collecting Tokens:** When a player lands on or passes over a Token Tile and they have a Habitat Card or Natural Habitat corresponding to the Habitat they are currently in, they may take the token for that Habitat.

Setting up the Game

- **Setting up the Board:** Put the Event, Basic Mutation, Advanced Mutation, and Habitat cards into their respective piles. Then put down the tokens inside their respective Habitats. The number of tokens to put down per Habitat equals the number of players in the current game.
- **Picking Creature Cards:** Each player picks a Creature Card from the ones available. Players may pick creatures with the same Starting Habitat and/or category (Attack, Defense, Luck, Movement). If multiple people want the same one, roll a 6-sided die and the higher number gets it.
- **Starting location:** All players put their creature pieces on the Token Tile of the Starting Habitat specified on their Creature Card.
- **Who goes first:** Each player rolls a 6-sided die and whoever gets the highest number goes first, then it goes clockwise around the group. If there is a tie, those players re-roll and the highest of those go first.

Gameplay

- **Turn Structure:**
 - **Order:** A player may choose to start their turn by attacking another player. Afterwards, a player rolls and moves. Then they follow the instructions for whatever tile they land on. Then, the player can choose to end their turn with an attack (if they did not start with an attack).
 - **Movement:** The Player rolls two 4-sided dice then move that many tiles. The player can then choose to add all or none of their movement bonuses. Only the final tile landed on is regarded during the player's turn.
 - **Movement backwards:** Players cannot move backwards from the way they were going.
 - **Movement in a Habitat:** While in a habitat, a player must follow the arrows around the habitat. Also covered in 'Habitat' section.
 - **Movement in Pathways:** Players must maintain their movement direction until they reach a crossroads. At a crossroads, players can go any direction except the direction they came from.
 - **Two players on the same tile:** Players can share a tile.

- **Landing on a Tile:** When a player lands on a tile, do as the tile says. Look at the 'Tile' section for specifics on each tile.
- **Attacking other players:** If a player is in the same habitat, or in the same pathway as another player (no crossroads between the players), then that player has the option to attack the other player. Look at the 'attacker, defender' section for more info.
- **End State:** Once a player has collected all four tokens, they must land on one of the end tiles in the center of the board. Then they win and the game is over!
- **Combat:**
 - **Range:** A player can attack another player in the same habitat or pathway (no crossroads between the players) as themselves.
 - **Attacking and defending:** The attacker and the defender each roll a 6-sided die. The attacker adds their attack bonuses to their roll and the defender adds their defense bonuses to their roll. The higher number wins.
 - **Attacker wins:** The attacker chooses one token to take from the defender and the defender loses that token.
 - **Defender has no tokens:** If the defender does not have any tokens, then the attacker may choose one mutation or habitat card to take from the defender.
 - **Defender has no cards:** If the defender does not have any cards, then the defender goes back to their starting habitat and the attacker draws a basic mutation card.
 - **Defender wins:** The defender picks a card for the attacker to discard. The attacker cannot attack again on their next turn.
 - **Attacker has no cards:** The attacker goes back to their starting area and cannot attack any player for one turn.
 - **Tie:** Nothing happens if the attacker's attack matches the defender's defense.
 - **After:** After combat has occurred, an attacker cannot attack the *same defender* on their next turn.

Cards

- **Creature Cards:** Shows the creature and its abilities. Each creature is different.
 - **Starting Habitat:** At the beginning of the game players place their creature piece on the Token Tile of this Habitat.
 - **Natural Habitat:** The Natural Habitat is equivalent to a habitat card for that habitat. Think of it as a habitat card that can't be removed.
 - **Creature Abilities:** Each creature has four tiers of creature abilities. Each creature starts with the first tier unlocked automatically.
 - **Gaining/ Losing Tiers:** Each time a player gets a token, they achieve the next tier. If a player loses a token, they lose a tier.

- **Event Cards:** Once drawn, they go into effect immediately.
- **Mutation Cards:** These cards give the creatures new abilities.
 - **Max Cards:** Each player can have a **maximum of 3 Basic Mutation and/or Advanced Mutation Cards**. Players may discard Mutation Cards in order to take new ones.
 - **Getting them:** After landing on a Mutation Tile, the player **draws 2 Basic Mutation Cards and chooses one**, discarding the other.
- **Advanced Mutation Cards:** A stronger subset of Mutation Cards.
 - **Getting them:** When a player lands on a mutation tile, they can discard two Mutation Cards, draw three Advanced Mutation Cards and pick one. The other two are discarded.
- **Habitat Cards:** These cards allow a player to get a token from the habitat specified on the card.
 - **Max Cards:** Each player can have a **maximum of 2 Habitat Cards** at a time. Old Habitat Cards can be discarded to take new ones.
 - **Getting them:** These cards are acquired from Habitat Tiles. Once drawn, the player can keep or discard it.
- **Deck is out of cards:** If there are no cards left in a deck, take the discard pile of that deck and shuffle them into a new deck.

Tiles



- **Event Tiles:** If a player lands on this tile, that player draws a event card and its effect is immediate unless otherwise specified.



- **Mutation Tiles:** If a player lands on this tile, that player **draws 2 Basic Mutation Cards and picks one**, discarding the other. **OR** discard two Mutation Cards, then **draw 3 Advanced Mutation Cards and pick one**, discarding the others.



- **Habitat Tiles:** If a player lands on this tile, they draw a Habitat Card and either keep it or discard it.



- **Combat Tiles:** If a player lands on this tile, they can choose to attack any other player. The other player can be anywhere on the board



- **Warp Tiles:** When a player lands on this tile, they instantly move to the other teleportation tile. The actual warping does not take any movement.



- **Token Tiles:** When a player lands on or passes over a Token Tile and they have a Habitat Card or Natural Habitat corresponding to the Habitat they are currently in, they may take the token for that Habitat.
 - **Multiple tokens:** A player can only have one of each token at a time.



- **End Tiles:** If a player lands on one of these tiles and they have one of each token, they win the game.

Any scenarios not specified in these rules are left to the discretion of the players!

History, Antecedents, and Related Games

Noah Parker

The theme of our game is adaptation. We interpreted that as something changing over time. We also thought about creatures changing so that became creatures evolving. Getting mutations that help them to adapt to a different environment as they go around the board.

We want our game to have the idea that every time someone plays it, they create something new and everything somewhat vague so that in someone's mind, the creature that they create, is up to them.

There were several games that we drew inspiration from. From the game *Spore*, we drew the idea of creature evolving and changing depending on the environment that they are in. And also in general the idea of evolution from *Pokemon*. We got the idea for the board from *Mario Party 7* and *Gremlins, Inc.* For the art style of the game we wanted to keep it moderately light hearted so we drew from *Adventure Time*, *Kirby*, and *The Wild Thornberrys*.

Because our game is made of zones that a player can go interchangeably through, we drew a lot of inspiration from a game that is similar, which we already stated previously, this game is *Mario Party 7*. Not only did we draw the idea for a similar map but also drew the idea for a similar style of movement and also the idea of tiles having effects on them. Of course we can't go as deep or complex as *Mario Party 7*, but, as stated, we drew things from it.

Mechanics

Katherine Harrison

The main goal of the players is to obtain the four tokens from the four habitats on the board. There are two ways to accomplish their goal: they can collect tokens by moving around the board and passing the token tile in each habitat, or steal tokens from other players during combat. Players are able to initiate one or both during their turn; to move they roll two 4-sided dice which determines the amount of tiles they move, and at the beginning or end of their turn if there are any other players in the same habitat as them they can initiate combat. During combat each player rolls a 6 sided die, and the higher of the two rolls is the winner. Combat is a relatively high risk-high reward action; players can stand to lose a lot but gain even more during combat, and allows players to directly affect each other's progress: defeating another player in combat at the 11th hour could even prevent them from winning.

As players make their way around the board the tile that they land on at the end of their turn determine what happens next. If players land on a habitat tile, they can draw a habitat card, which allows them to pick up the token from that habitat by moving over its token tile. Landing on a mutation tile allows players to draw a mutation card; there are two types of mutation cards: basic mutations and advanced mutations. Basic mutations can either modify a player's stats or give them a special ability that will help them achieve their goals. Advanced mutations are more powerful versions of basic mutations, and in order to obtain an advanced mutation players must trade in two basic mutations. There are also combat tiles, that allow the player to initiate combat with anyone on the board, teleport tiles that allow players to move more quickly across the board, and event tiles, that trigger a random event. Events can be good or bad or neutral, and affect either just the player who drew the event card or everyone playing. Whether offering boosts, set backs, or just random mix ups, the primary purpose of events is to shake things up and change the direction of the game, possibly forcing players to rethink their course of action.

Each player also has unique stats associated with their creature: a movement stat, attack stat, and defense stat. The movement stat is added to the player's roll when they are moving around the board, the attack stat is added to the player's roll when they are initiating combat, and the defense stat is added to the player's roll when another player initiates combat with them. Different creatures have different base stats but stats will change as the game progresses as players obtain mutations that modify stats and unlock their creatures' special abilities by collecting tokens. Different stats and build will emerge largely based on player choice; they choose their initial character and by extension the abilities that come with it, and they choose which mutation cards to hold onto and which to discard based on what suits their needs. This allows for a multitude of different strategies and types of players as well as helping the player feel invested in their creature.

Internal Playtest Reports

Kevin Gibson and Nicholas Palumbo

First Internal Playtest - Kevin Gibson

(This was also in the previous design document.)

Our first playtest was held on Saturday April 2nd. The four players were all members of our group. We started with an internal playtest because it's the most logical method. According to Tracy Fullerton (2014), "self-testing is most valuable in the foundation stage of a prototype when you are experimenting with fundamental concepts" (p. 273). At the point that we playtested, we only had a very rough idea of our materials and mechanics, so self-testing was valuable to us in that way.

Right away it was noticeable that all the players were very engaged because they enjoyed the design of their creature cards and wanted to see their character succeed. This definitely made the game more fun for them, but it's hard to say if this was a biased reaction. The players were also the designers of the game, after all. It will be interesting to see if players from our target audience actually care about their characters in future playtests.

We also found that the players did not really strategize despite the fact that the board had the capacity for some degree of strategizing. They did not specifically seek out areas of the board where the spaces that they wanted were more abundant. It seemed more that a player would get a Habitat card and make a beeline for the token space that matched said card.

Speaking of tokens, it was definitely too hard to get tokens. Players got frustrated when they would pass by tokens over and over without landing on the space and actually getting it. For future iterations the rule will be changed so that tokens can be collected by passing token spaces rather than landing on them.

The players noticed very quickly that some of the mechanics were broken. A player who got the Padded Feet mutation card ended up winning the game because it allowed them to stop on the token spaces and gather the tokens at an alarmingly higher rate than other players.

Despite its problems, all of the players thought that the game was fun and well-paced. The main problems were that the game wasn't fair for all players (it was too luck based, the players didn't really care about the event spaces or land on them often enough, and the players didn't feel like they had enough choice or ability to strategize. These issues can be rectified by adding more event spaces, having mutation cards that allow for more strategizing, and making the board more clear so that players can parse it and form strategies better.

Second Internal Playtest - Nick Palumbo

(This was also in the previous design document.)

We held another internal playtest after making some big changes to the game. We also wanted to get some time stamps on important factors during play, as well as observing certain types of cards.

The total play time took around 50-60 minutes, which was slightly longer than we had hoped for so we were able to take that information to refine the game for the future. I also noted the amount of tokens, which are needed to win the game, that were collected at different points of the game. That information confirmed for us that we had a slow start, but eventually the game ramped up.

We noted a lot of important things that eventually led to changes in our game. We noticed a lot of early event spaces, which made them appear useless unless certain criteria was met. Since event cards have been heavily overhauled to allow for less negativity and more chance to occur. People appeared to forget to apply movement bonuses, and forgot to pay attention to global events that were occurring. Like in prior playtests, certain cards were seemingly avoided, but those have since been fixed.

During play, questions were asked about possibilities to build upon the game. We brought up the idea of a combat, or hunt space, which eventually evolved into a hunting event card and a combat space that have both vastly improved gameplay. We continued to play around with token spaces and their collection, so we also asked if landing on the token space would provide any bonus, but we ended up deciding nothing would occur. Extra notes that were observed included making event movement bonuses optional, but we decided they should not be, only your own buffs. We also noted that each deck was getting cycled through about one time. Early on we seemed to find a balance in the amount of cards so that shuffling could occur but not more than once.

External Playtest Reports

Joshua Martin, Katherine Harrison, and Kevin Gibson

First External Playtest - Joshua Martin

(This was also in the previous design document.)

The one external playtest we've run had five people playing the game. The two of our group that was in attendance was Noah and Josh. Both of us attempted to stick to saying as little as possible as to not interfere and to take notes on what was happening while watching the playtest take place. We weren't focusing on any particular part of the game when it came to the data we were taking, as it was an early playtest we made sure to write down any and everything that we could. After the playing finished, we asked everyone questions about the game and asked for any suggestions they might have, all the while taking notes on what they were saying.

The bulk of the data we got from asking questions was that we had too many event spaces on the board, as the players felt they were often being thrown back to their starting zones without being able to do anything. They also said that they were not getting very many mutation cards, so no one was very different from one another. Both of these issues led to them saying that the game was too long and that it took too much time for them to cross the board and get where they were trying to go. In order to fix this, we plan to replace several of the event spaces on the board with mutation spaces, and also make add some spaces to "teleport" from one side of the board to the other. This should cut back on the distance most people will have to travel, which should speed up the game considerably. One other thing that is being changed to speed up the game is only requiring players to pass a token space to collect a token instead of requiring them to land on it. This should make it much quicker for players to gather tokens, although it is possible that with the other changes being made that it will make things too fast.

Some other feedback we got was that there wasn't as much interaction between players happening, so we decided to add a new type of space to the board, trading spaces. Trading spaces allow the player to trade with any other player as long as they consent. We are also removing some of the functionality of the spaces on the pathways between zones, so the players should have less reason to be out of zones and more reason to be in them, which should hopefully group players together a little bit better.

Second External Playtest (Crash-Test) Katherine Harrison

On April 18th we took the game to Crash Test for playtesting where 4 random players had a chance to try out the game while one member of the team, Katherine, observed silently and took notes. The playtesters provided feedback and initial thoughts as they were playing the game, and when they finished the game they gave a more in depth report of their impressions and filled out a play test survey.

One of their biggest criticisms of the game was the lack of player choice; at that point all of the starting creatures had the same stats and abilities (or lackthereof), making the initial choice of character meaningless. From that point on mutations, habitats, and events are all random, making it hard for players to build their creature around a certain strategy and leaving them helpless to the roll of the die. They noted that combat seemed like an area that could allow for player choice and additional strategy, but the size of the board and the need to be within a specific range of another character made it too difficult to initiate.

Players also noted that the game is very slow to start. They attributed this to the size of the board, which is too large to allow players to quickly make progress, as well as the event cards which were meant to cause effects in certain situation, because they were too specific and often ended up affecting no one. Even as the game went on players reported a feeling of a lack of progression; events were often too punishing and even when players did manage to get a token it didn't feel like a suitable reward and wasn't exciting.

As for the more enjoyable parts, players liked the layout of the board which provided interesting movement options, and the ability to customize creatures, the latter of which they felt was underutilized. Players also complimented our clear, concise rule sheet which they were able to understand easily.

To fix some of these problems with limited player choice, we decided to introduce more variety to the creatures; each creature now has their own set of special abilities that allow players to more easily adopt different strategies. To give players more choice for their builds, we also introduced a "draw two, pick one" mechanic for mutation cards, where when a player lands on a mutation tile they can draw two cards and choose which one to keep, discarding the other, making the mutation selection process a little less random. We also made combat easier to initiate by vastly increasing the range players must be within to attack each other.

We also wanted to work on speeding up the game and allowing for more of a feeling of progression. To accomplish this we cut down on the size of the board by eliminating two habitats and added additional creatures that could start out closer to each other; making it easier for players to move around and reach one another. Each creature's special abilities, mentioned in the last paragraph, also continue to unlock as players attain more tokens, which helps players feel that they're making progress as well as providing additional

motivation to meet goals. Another feature we added was advanced mutation cards, which offer more powerful abilities than basic mutation cards. Players can trade in multiple basic mutation cards for an advanced mutation card, which helps players feel like they're getting stronger as they are able to get more mutations.

Third and Fourth External Playtests - Kevin Gibson

Our final two playtests were conducted in class on Tuesday May 3rd and Thursday May 5th. Our goal was to test our drastically altered game in order to get feedback on changes such as our advanced mutation cards, special abilities for the creatures, the push for more combat, and a smaller board. Both playtests had four players, which is the ideal amount for our game.

The first playtest really drew our attention to a somewhat neglected part of our updates, which was the rule sheet. While our mechanics were good, we realized while watching the players that our rule sheet did not properly convey them and so we had misinterpretations which drastically altered the flow of the game. Most notably, players did not realize they could collect tokens by simply passing over the Token Tiles, rather they assumed that they had to land on the tiles to collect tokens. Because of this it was hard to gauge the effectiveness of the board size, which we changed to try and speed up the game.

Despite that mistake, the playtest did go relatively well. The players felt they had more player choice than previous players had. This was definitely a result of the special abilities, advanced mutations, and most importantly the more frequent combat. In previous playtests, there would be maybe one or two instances of combat in the entire playtest. This time around it happened about once every round.

In general, it seemed as though the players simply had more fun than usual. This was a welcome change from previous playtests, and we were excited to alter the rules in order to get a better overall understanding of how our finished product will play out and also test the pacing of our game more accurately.

During the second playtest, we had more of the same positive feedback. The players again felt that there was a sense of progression while playing the game and were satisfied with the board layout. Combat continued to be an important part of the game with seven total instances of it.

Despite the players' positive experiences, we once again found that our game went on too long. By the time the game had to be ended, there was only a total of five tokens collected between all four players. This means that our game simply isn't playable in the recommended timeframe for the project. Looking forward we would seek to rectify this by giving the players an advantage right from the start. They could maybe start with a Mutation or Habitat card or even a token. Alternatively we could have players start in their Natural Habitat so that it's easier for them to get their first token. Overall, it's clear from

these playtests that the two areas we need to focus on improvement are pacing and balancing.

Look and Feel

Alia Gestl

Our game is upbeat and colorful. We use a variety of saturated rainbow colors and organic forms to create visual interest on the board.



The final product (Landscapes by Alia Gestl, Icons by Katherine Harrison, Background and Layout by Kevin Gibson)



The initial mood board (By Katherine Harrison).

We used a lot of saturated and rainbow colors to emphasize the variety of options and to make our game look overall more upbeat and fun to play. We also chose these colors because generally when sampling from different habitats found all over the world, one finds a variety of colors (not to mention creatures, plants, etc.) We used organic and curved lines to emphasize the free-form feel of the game and to relate the game back to nature, where it is taking place.

A lot of the colors and forms are also intended to create visual interest, since the players are more often than not looking at the board, and we didn't want dull colors to lower the mood or give it a "too-serious" vibe.

Game Flow

Joshua Martin

Throughout gameplay the main event that keeps things going is rolling dice, whether it be for movement, attack/defence, or for an event card. Most player's turns will involve at least one dice roll. The general flow of a round is also based heavily on what the players choose to do, or more specifically who they choose to attack. If player 1 attacks player 2 on his turn, then on player 2's turn, he might be inclined to run away or fight back depending on how they are both built. Throughout a game this can cause players to form grudges with one another, which inspires them to interact with each other more often. As the game goes on, players are becoming stronger as they get more mutation cards and abilities with their tokens. This increases the drama of the game simply by having more things going on than there were earlier in the game. With more cards/abilities out, there are more possibilities for each player, and from those possibilities comes a strategy for victory.

Future Works

Nicholas Palumbo

Given the current state of our prototype, we need to put more work into balancing of the cards and creature abilities. We would also take time to further refine some of the art and design of the game.

Similar games to ours can do fairly well and can become popular, however they tend to have some sort of unique feature that keeps players intrigued and coming back to play more. We would need something that jumps out to players to make it become a more successful game.

If our game was to be taken forward and certain members do not want to participate, we established that some form of compensation or stipend would be given to those who are no longer involved, and they would be done with the project. Those who do decide to take it forward would split royalties evenly among all members.

By chance an outside party wanted to buy the license to the game and not all members agree to it, then an extensive discussion would occur until a unanimous decision is made. If no decision were made, then we would put the decision to a majority vote.

Any decisions that would be made about marketing and sales would be handled similarly to the license. An extensive discussion would be held, and if no agreement is made, then a unanimous vote will make the decision.

Three publishers that work with newer games, startups and smaller projects are Kosmos Games, Atlas Games, and Playroom Entertainment. We could submit a prototype, and other game information to get it reviewed and potentially produce the game. Our game cost around \$45 to buy from Game Crafters so we would likely spend anywhere from \$35 - \$60 on developing each game, depending on the quality and who we would go through. It is unknown how many people we would need to move forward with the game, but likely at least 2-3 of us.

Works Cited

Fullerton, T. (2014). *Game Design Workshop: A Playcentric Approach to Creating Innovative Games*, Third Edition (3 edition). Boca Raton: A K Peters/CRC Press.