

Playtests #1

Audience: Poetics of Gameplay Class

Number of players: approx 10

Number of moles: 4

Time taken: approx. 15 minutes.

Original Game for test:

Things were simplified for the first playtest in order to test our ability to lead players around campus and test out the qualities of live action games. A simple puzzle was laid out that led the players from Kraus Campo to the banana section in Entropy. 4 moles were used to create a collaboration among teams. We did deceive them briefly during the game with some false information.

Gameplay:

Players went to Kraus Campo and flew through the puzzles easily. However, they did not find the hidden clue in Entropy, and they followed the misinformation and took a lot longer to solve the puzzle.

Comments:

The puzzles were too simple and the players did not feel challenged enough. Also, the players did not see a reason for having 4 moles instead of just 1. While players did partake in accusing each other of being a mole, there was no penalty placed for false accusations and no reason for the moles to admit to being one.

In the end, the game was determined by a mole snatching the final message out of the informant's hands and running with it back to the moderator. No strategy was placed, just a race. And a couple players expressed distaste for being made to run.

Playtest #2

Audience: Members of Game Creation Society and 2 of Lindsey's friends

Number of players: approx. 10

Number of moles: 1

Time limit: 1 hr

Revisions:

Gameplay was extended to cover more campus ground and involve difficult brain puzzles in order to proceed. Puzzle pieces were added to the objective in order for the players to see the final goal a little more clearly (the puzzle pieces fitted together to form the final message which was the goal of the game). Players were guided from CFA to Hunt Library, to the campus dining facilities, etc. They were required to split up on one occasion in order to disarm a "bomb", which was given a time limit of 5 minutes.

The objective was to finish this puzzle to reveal a final message. One of the major pieces of the puzzle was held by the informant. The mole's objective was to "assassinate" this informant by making contact with her.

In addition, the mole was given 1 of the puzzle pieces. In this way, we hoped to force the players to uncover the identity of the mole out of necessity.

A time limit of 1 hour was placed on the game in order to reassure playtesters during recruiting that this would not take out a major portion of their time.

Gameplay:

The players were confused from the first puzzle and were unsure of where to go. 20 minutes into the game, the moderator decided to help and told them to go to Hunt Library. The 2nd puzzle was also not solved and the players used hints they found themselves instead of the ones we intentionally left within the letter. They activated the bomb. However, players were not able to organize a disarming effort in time and therefore lost the game.

Comments:

This time, the puzzles were too difficult. The players expressed a dislike of having to sit and figure out the difficult puzzles while having a time limit pushing them forward the entire time. Given the pressure, the players felt they had little time to concern themselves over the presence of a mole.

Meanwhile, the mole found he had little to do during the game since his objective was to "assassinate" the informant, and that would not happen until the end. The mole also expressed a desire to sabotage the other players, but had no ability to do so. Also, because he was constantly under watch, he couldn't figure out a way to contact the moderator to get extra information during the game.

Players were also unwilling to accuse each other of being a mole since the penalty of doing so would mean that they couldn't play anymore.

Players were also unwilling to run to key locations to disarm the bomb, despite having clear direction on where to go. Most players just walked "briskly."

Text messaging with time limits did not work since there were some delays in receiving some texts.

We noticed that one of the key differences between Playtest #1 and Playtest #2 is that the players in playtest #2 were more conservative than playtest #1. We think this has to do with their previous friendship bonds since several of the people in playtest #2 did not know each other whereas playtest #1's players were closer.

However, players expressed that they had fun and several approached the moderators later that they would like to play the game again if they could. However, since playtests require the players be unaware of the game's puzzles, we had to refuse.

Playtest #3

Audience: Lindsey's friends

Number of players: 5

Time taken: 2.5 hours

Revisions:

We used a group of friends to playtest this time. We believe that since there is already a comfort level among friends as compared to among strangers, the players will be less hesitant to call each other out on suspicious activity. This also plays with our concept of trust, since the aspects of the game force the players to test and betray their trust of each other.

The puzzles were made simpler and easy to follow in order to address the "difficulty" issue from Playtest #2. Also, by making the puzzles easier, we allowed the players to put more effort in discovering the mole, which was the main mechanic behind the concept of our game.

The mole was given a new objective. The mole now has access to several "hidden" puzzle pieces that he can find by texting the moderator the same clue that the players text. With these puzzle pieces, the mole can uncover the message before the players can, but since the players know the mole has these pieces, they will want to uncover the mole before he or she can do that.

There is no longer an informant. Instead, there are 8 puzzle pieces hidden on campus with clues at each location linking them to the next.

The camera documentation is being run by one of the moderators. In this way, if there is any confusion about game rules, one of the moderators will be present to address these during the game. In addition, the rules were printed out and a copy given to each player. Once they had read them, we went over the rules again together, and clarified a few more questions.

Gameplay:

Before the game even began, the players began plotting how to find the mole, by exploiting flaws in our rules. We had to add a rule quickly ("You may not look at each other's cellphone screens.") to prevent the game from ending too quickly.

The players solved the first three puzzles quite quickly, had a bit of trouble with the eateries clue, and ended up taking a break halfway through to eliminate the mole. They first guessed the two players who had been suspected from the beginning, and their second guess was correct. They were the first group to sacrifice a player in order to remove the mole. In fact, compared to previous playtests, they were much more focused on finding the mole; this was the most common topic of discussion during the walks from one clue to the next.

Once they reached the bomb, even with just three people, they quickly organized and disarmed all 4 fuses of the bomb. This was the first playtest that the players managed to win.

Comments

There were few negative comments. One player suggested a time limit as a means for forcing the group to split up. However, in light of the one segment with the bomb, he agreed that it worked well. Also, typing the character “1” in a text message takes a very long time for some people.

We were very pleased that our final Play Test was successful.

Final Comments

We used a live action game in order to explore the trust between people versus the trust we form during games. In games, the trust between players is mutually understood and restricted to the environment and time frame of the game world. Who we are in the digital world does not generally reflect who we are in the real world. What we tried to do is test those boundaries. With predefined groups of friends in daily life, the mutual agreement of trust extends further than a specific event. Trust has a different meaning. Live action allowed us to look at that boundary of trust by forcing the real-life interactions of people into a game and vice versa.

In order to do this, we created a cooperative team-based game in which the players would have to work together and trust each other's intentions in order to complete the objective. In order to test this though, we created 1 role which acted against the cooperation of the group: the mole. The mole, one of the members of the team, had a separate objective from the rest which pitted him/her against the remaining players.

In a group where trust is required among the players, having the knowledge that one of the players was not in line with the rest, we forced them to create a balance between trusting friends while suspecting them all at the same time.

The final message, which was the objective of all players, was a quote from Frank Crane: "You may be deceived if you trust too much, but you will live in torment if you don't trust enough." This quote summarized the concept of our game and the focus of our main mechanic, the mole.