Party Evolution

Part of the team testing the round-based prototype

Physical Prototype

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Introduction

As we want to play with transformable characters we decided to do our prototype with Play-Doh (modelling clay). With the physical prototype we wanted to find out, how the avatars should be composed (parts), how the level design works and if the game is fun to play and suitable as a party game.

We made two different test runs, one in real-time to get the feel of the playing speed and one in a round-base setting to work on gaming mechanics.

Functionality & Rules

Statistics Keeping

- The time was counted either in seconds until a player was hit or in rounds survived until a player was hit.
- The goal is to get the highest count possible

Environment:

- Playfield is restricted to the area of an A4 sheet. The ground is on the table, the airspace above is on the wall behind the table.
- Small boxes were places to simulate environment features

One person plays the environment (computer):

- May remain idle whenever he like and let the players walk and jump around with their avatars
- Signals coming catastrophe (e.g. by making noise)
- Place “meteors” above game field such that the players know where the meteorites are coming from
- Let the meteors fall, first only from straight above, with increasing difficulty also from more unusual angles

Three people steer the players:

- Every player has an avatar, some may have special abilities (e.g. the orange avatar is immune to meteors).
- All can jump around and move on the ground
- Players have to move around and avoid to die from environment scenarios
- Players may use their special activities (e.g. jump into the meteor to block it from hitting another vulnerable player)

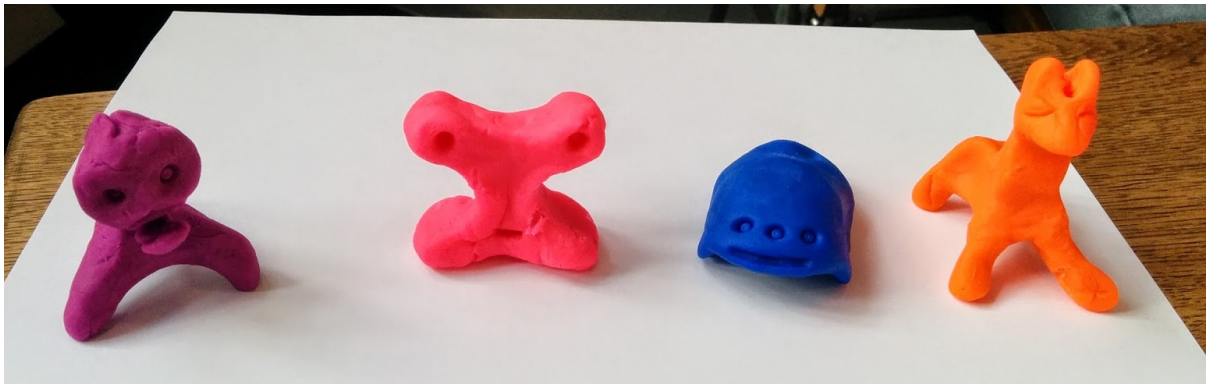

Figure 1: Selection of modelled avatars embodying different characteristics used in the prototype game.

Experience

Scenario 1: Round-based gameplay

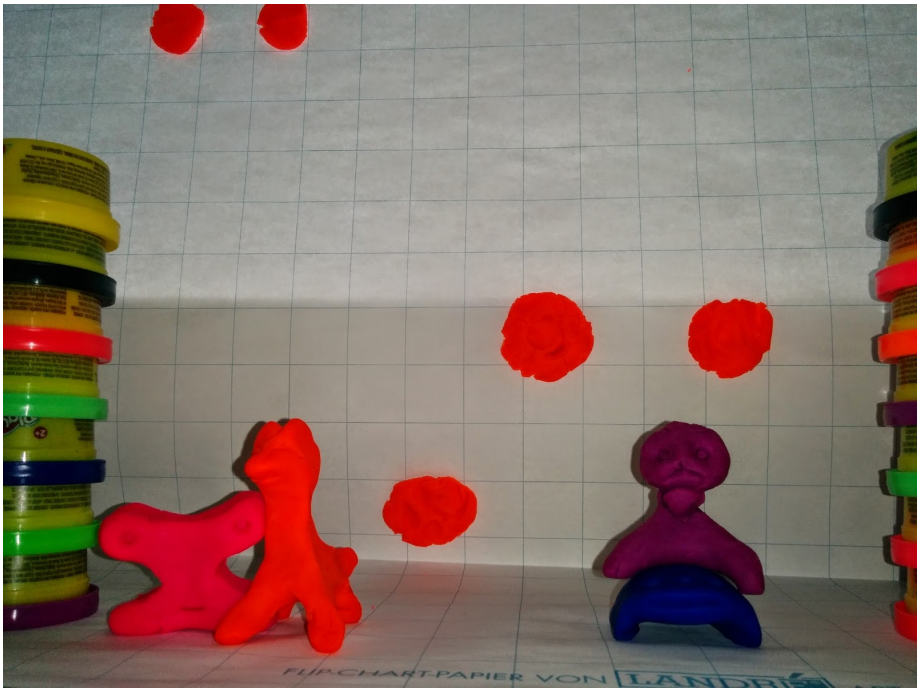

Figure 2: The scene is limited by the boxes to the left and right. The blobs on the wall move along the grid and simulate the meteors.

Observations

The round-based prototype was played until one player was hit by a meteor. The round-based approach proved to be difficult to evaluate as the critical component - the time sensitivity - could not be experienced.

Remarks

The meteor's simply dropping from above were boring and we decided that with increasing difficulty we would allow meteors to drop from different angles and also changing their path (e.g. along a curve instead of a straight line), or interact with other meteorites in an elastic collision.

Scenario 2: Real-time gameplay

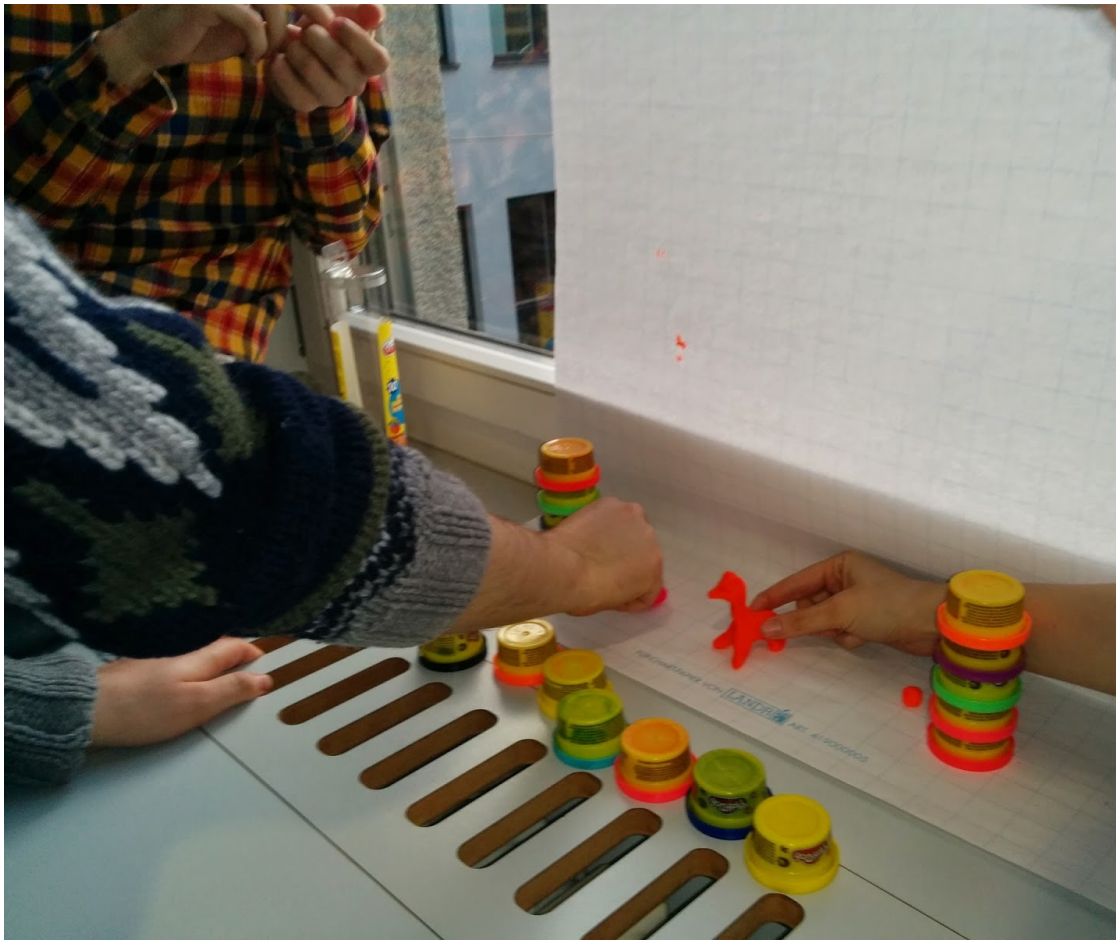

Figure 3: Testing the real-time version, note the landed meteor on the right

Observations

The real-time prototype was played several times until a player was hit by a meteor. The special abilities to protect other players was tested as well. The players were very engaged and additional rounds were started without a second thought.

Remarks

The real-time component made it hard to properly apply the rules, but the player were heavily engaged.

Learnings

Based on the several rounds of the prototype we played we gained the following conclusions.

Meteor Interaction

It is very easy to evade the meteors in the beginning, therefore meteorit should come from different angles to make it more difficult to predict where they will land. Additionally, collisions between meteorit could enhance difficult level.

The player action in the meteor level are limited to evading which is not necessarily a multiplayer action. Therefore we introduced immunity to enable one player to protect the other players causing interaction between players.

To gain the immunity we suggest that players must be close to the dangers (e.g. standing near to the meteor impact several times).

Group lives

It can be frustrating if the game ends, because one of the group members fails. Therefore we discussed the possibility of adding hitpoints or lifes.
Hitpoints are in general a good idea to insure that the players survive for a longer time, but a good balance between damage and hitpoints has to be found.
For lifes we came up with the idea of group lifes. Group lifes account for the whole group. If one of the group member fails to survive, the group life gets decreased by one. The advantage with this is that good players don't get dragged down by bad players to much, bad player have more time to learn to play the game.

Checkpoints

The player should be able to reach checkpoints to continue from when they play in order to skip the easier levels. The idea behind it is to keep the game interesting and to keep engaging expert players.

There should be also a hardcore mode where checkpoints are disabled.

Catastrophe prediction

One of the main components of the game is player guided evolution of avatars. To decrease the amount of randomness in order to let players adapt better to the game we thought of teasers. These teasers will let players know what catastrophe might come in future rounds. For example a rumbling let you predict that in two round a volcano will erupt, hence start the lava level.

Avatar interaction

Player interaction and communication is key for our game. To tackle this issue, we came up with some ideas. If player stack each other they walk slower, this limits players kiting other players.
Further, players are encouraged to define their role in the group (e.g. one player should try to be close to heat source to increase his heat resistance). The idea is that developing one skill will decrease other skills, hence not everybody can do everything.

Expert and Beginner gameplay

One of the big questions that arose was: “how would the play style of an expert player change compared to a beginner?“

While Beginner should try to survive each round individually, expert players should try to think a head. Therefore teaser might help to encourage a certain playstyle fitting to the catastrophes that will arise in future. Also the development of skills needs more attention (e.g. for the meteor resistance the avatar must be close to the impact point instead of just avoiding it) and therefore is more the domain for expert players.