

Playtest Report

Beastmaker Evolution

Group 6

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Our playtest sessions were split into two parts, one with the actual game and one with just the physical cards. This was done because the scanner for the card input doesn't work yet, but we really needed feedback on the card design, layout and colours as well as the actual gameplay.

Session 1: Physical Cards

Participants

- Group 1: Susan Tschanen, Michael Strödmick
- Group 2: Joachim Gasser, Tobias Nilsson

Test Setup

The test sessions with the physical cards were conducted similarly to how we tested our physical prototype: we let two test subjects play against each other, while a team member took on the role of the computer by updating all the values (health, delay, position) on paper each round.

This approach yields relevant results because in our final iteration of the design the gameplay is pretty much exactly the same as it was presented in the physical prototype. The only thing missing from the experience is the visual representation of the characters on screen. A big advantage is that we can ask our testers specific questions about the playing cards, which are an integral part of the final product.

The players were given a short introduction to the gameplay, similar to what they would have seen in the tutorial for the actual game.

For the first few matches, player were given only the basic 8 cards, later the advanced cards were introduced by distributing them at random.

General Observations

- Some groups were confused in the beginning by how and when the delay is factored into the initiative of different abilities. Consequently there was some frustration when players expected their attacks to hit, but were told that they in fact did not. Some additional explanation of the rules was necessary, and we will include this information in our tutorial. We also believe that we should add a short animation to our UI where players can see how the initiatives are calculated each round and which ability "wins" (is executed first). Overall we need more cues for how and why the different values change.
- Other players constantly expected the higher initiative to win instead of the lower one, because they interpreted it as speed. We may decide to invert all the initiative values to accommodate this intuition.

- Another thing that players didn't understand at first was how the combo system worked, specifically how an attack must always be followed by a stronger attack or some other card type.
- We are pleased to note though that once players got past these initial difficulties, the gameplay seemed to be quite intuitive. About halfway through the session, one of the groups started to play completely without our intervention, tracking all the values by themselves as they went along. This means that the rules are not inherently flawed or too complicated, we simply need to explain them better in our tutorial.
- Movement is still a bit clunky and unresponsive because of the 3 turn delay during which the enemy's position is unknown. But the added ranged attacks and special abilities from the advanced cards make it a lot more dynamic and useful. Moving forward used to be a huge risk because it had the potential of running right into an attack (being delayed is actually an advantage for the other player in this case). We fixed this by adding more initiative for each step moved, but players complained that this makes the wording of the card very complicated.
- A few balancing issues became apparent during the session, they will be addressed by adjusting the numbers on several cards.
- Players with very little health left were still sometimes able to beat their opponent, so the game stays interesting to the end and isn't decided in the first few rounds. The combo system offers enough opportunities for the losing player to regain his footing and turn the tide of battle.
- In general the combo system seems to work well. Most players got to execute enough full combos (Weak Punch - Medium Punch - High Kick) to not feel like the strong attacks are completely pointless. On the other hand having all 3 hit is rare enough that it feels like a major achievement to the player when it happens. A few players have shown signs of frustration when being hit though, because usually when the first hit connects they know that they will also most likely take the other two as well (since they already know the next few cards that they played in advance), and there is nothing they can do about it. This is an inherent problem when playing 3 turns in advance and can't be changed without redesigning the entire game. Fortunately combos can be interrupted and are never longer than 5 attacks, so a player can't be pounded indefinitely with no chance to defend himself.
- The matches took around 15-20 minutes on average. We expect this to speed up a bit for the computer game and when players get more familiar with the cards. But some testers complained that the rounds took too long and were bored very fast, so we experimented with different amounts of health to make them shorter.

Interview

Q: "Do you feel like you have too many cards in your hands while playing?"

A: Most players thought the amount of cards was fine, because the colour-coding (red = attacks, green = movement, blue = block etc.) really helped to tell them apart. With all 5 evolution slots there are a maximum of 13 cards in the game for each player, but 3 of those

are always on the playfield. Some abilities have cooldowns, which further reduces the amount of hand cards.

Q: "Can you read the cards well or is the font size too small? Do you feel that you have all the information you need to make an informed choice?"

A: Our players liked the card layout, but said the writing was too small. Also we should probably consider using a different font for all the numbers, because they are difficult to tell apart (3 and 5 are way too similar). Someone also mentioned that the hit zone (low/medium/high) is a really important information and should be highlighted better.

Q: "Can you tell the cards apart easily, or does it take you a long time to locate the right one?"

A: Players found it difficult to tell apart the attacks, to the point where one tester frequently played the wrong one by accident. The problem is that the most prominent feature of the cards is the large initiative number, but this is not unique among the cards. For example, there are two very similar attacks with initiative 4 in the basic set, the Weak Punch and the Low Kick, that frequently get confused with each other. The card name and more importantly the little icon in the top left corner are designed to help players recognise the right card but they are way too small and need to be made more prominent.

Q: "Is the game fun?"

A: We got mixed results here. Some said yes, and were very excited to play it again soon. Others think it's too complicated and exhausting. What they all agree on is that it is not a casual game, it takes a lot of thought and concentration to play well.

Conclusion

Overall we noticed that some players started to develop different strategies throughout the test, such as going full offense, employing hit and run tactics etc. None of these were pure winning strategies though and the opponents usually figured out how to counter them quickly, forcing their partner to adapt again. Other players complained that constantly having to think ahead 3 turns was cumbersome and made it very difficult to formulate a clear strategy. They said that at some point they always forgot what they were planning to do and just played random cards. On one hand we believe that this is exactly where player experience and skill can make a huge difference and can keep the game interesting for a long time, on the other hand we do not want our newer players to grow frustrated. Another problem is that the gameplay really hinges on trying to anticipate the enemy's actions, so sometimes even an experienced player can be defeated by acting illogically and playing random cards. This would obviously take a lot of the fun out of playing.

Session 2: The Game

Participants

- Daniel Gisler
- Michael Karli
- Tristan Bliggenstorfer

Test Setup

We gave the players our game on a PC with an X-box controller and ask them to play the tutorial. They were further instructed to just say whatever comes to their mind and tell us especially when something was not clear for them.

We asked them to play the tutorial, since this is our single player part and since this is where you learn the game and therefore is really important to be clear.

And to learn the game first is needed, before you can actually use the multiplayer part.

Results

- First of all it was really interesting to see that our testers did some things which I really would have never expected! So we found some small bugs which can occur when players doing unexpected things. For example you could kill the enemy in the tutorial levels rather than finishing the expected task leading to a victory screen as well.
- It was also interesting to see, how the players really wanted to test out things, and therefore even tested the other modes, and trying to come up with good strategies! We even had to tell them that in the card mode you are supposed to play the games with cards (and the same rules) because they got a little bit irritated because there it was actually possible to infinitely block not receiving any damage.
- The players did actually not really read the info we gave them about the attacks, which led to the players not really understanding what which attack is for-
- We got the suggestion that we add an use case for each attack as an example, what this attack is for, since this would help better learn the attacks!
- The player skill was totally different, one player thought the computer opponent was way too dumb, and one player got beaten three times in a row by the same opponent. Part of that was because he did not really understand the game.

- Our combo system was also not clear enough, so the players did not really understand, that they cannot use weaker attacks after stronger ones.
- The players thought, that the game looks nice, but the animations need to match better the timing etc. Which is something we knew and are working on it.
- Another interesting point where the player feedback was the same as our thoughts was about stepping back from opponents. They also felt, that there is some need to better use the game with the distance. We are working on the fully implementation of our next set of attacks, which include range attacks.
- They also told us that they would like to play the game in a later stage, since it was somehow obvious, that it is not really finished.
- After doing the tutorial again and reading the cards and trying what they are for, they got a grab of the game system and told us that it seems to be well thought and make sense, but we are not sure if normal players would really try the tutorial a second time if they do not get it the first time.
- The players also got a little bit confused, since this “fighting game” works totally not like a normal fighting game. We maybe should make it more clear, that this game is a mixture of a card game and a fighting game, this could help players better understand it.
- The players told us the game is “interesting” to play. This is not quite fun yet. But it shows some promise.
- The players also did not fully grasp the need of the Basic Block, this is also due to not having longer combos then three and making it not clear (with an example) that it can be used to break combos.
- One strange feedback was, that players could not really tell much about the game, when asked questions directly. (What should we change?, what do you think about the game?) Maybe this is because it is hard to compare to other games or, because it is just not really finished.

Conclusion

We need to improve our tutorial. We didn't wanted to make it hold hands too much, but it seems to really be necessarily for this kind of game. So a long tutorial mode (maybe with some small added story to make it less boring) is something we will need to implement.

Also we should really update the visual clues on what is going on. Also implementing the advanced set of cards is something which is necessarily to make the game more fun. It will grant more options making running away more interesting and with the possibility of longer combos it lets the two blocks feel more distinct!

We did not really make a full interview in this part, since we wanted know about the games clarity and our playtesters were really great and just told us on the fly what is not clear and asked questions.

We just ask what they think we should change, and what they think about the game. The rest of the feedback just came without asking.

I think we had quite good playtesters for this part since they really wanted to test everything and give feedback!

But it would be nice to somehow change the game, such that players can say more about it. Maybe this will be given when we implement more things.

We are doing some more playtests now (with also people not being “Hardcoregamers” but this will not be part of this playtest report).

Also one important conclusion is how important playtesters can be! They discovered some new bugs in a short amount of time!