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Usability Playtest

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Usability Test for *Burglary Bobble*

From my game analysis portion of this class, I chose a video game where its core mechanic involved rewinding time. I found it difficult to try and develop a new game on the same premise, so I decided to build a game around the feelings surrounding that mechanic; anxiety and stress. The game that came out of this was *Burglary Bobble*, in which the game centers around a three-dimensional model of a house with one person hiding keys and setting up the home at first while the other person then tries to escape said-home that they just built. The game is a time trial and points are rewarded at the end of each two-minute round. Since each playthrough only lasted so long, it was easy to see where the game could use some work.

Before playing, I presented players with a sheet of rules explaining how the game worked and also describing the story behind the game. I realized quickly that my rules may have not been blatantly clear since almost every person immediately had a question that I couldn't answer after reading the rules. Color-coordinating important things for the game could be helpful for players to latch onto what needs to be remembered. It could also be helpful to try organization with the rules, as the section of the rules that was labeled "IMPORTANT TO REMEMBER" was unfortunately positioned on the back of the paper, making it easy for players to overlook it. However, since this playtest only involved ten people in one sitting, more testing could be done with the current rules to see if they're confusing to most people instead of just a few.

Since most players had questions after reading, the set-up phase of the game had people playing the game completely wrong. In one instance, one player thought you had to hide all three doors in the house and only one key, instead of one door and three keys. I also found it common for players to stick their exit and entrance doors on the walls extremely high up so it looks unreachable since the only way I could allow players to keep their doors upright was to stick tape on the back of the doors. Along with this, they also tried several times to place keys on the outside of the three-dimensional board and make them unattainable for the second player. Rules regarding placement of the keys should be highlighted in the rulebook to ensure players wouldn't try this strategy and keep it fair for everyone.

The biggest criticism I received about the game was the hinges for the flaps that cover each room. Since they were not removable like I had imagined and were hinged on with tape, sometimes the flaps got in the way of one another. Sometimes, if players flipped the flaps too aggressively or quickly, more than one would open up, which is important for the player not to be able to do since they're only allowed to look inside one room at a time. Also, sometimes some flaps would collapse in on themselves at random, which also caused players to be able to see inside certain rooms they were not already in. If I were to create a better version of this game, I would keep the hinged-look of the room covers, but I would refine them more. I would ensure that all of the flaps were unable to fall into their respective rooms and that there was no overlap between any of them, which would prevent the players from accidentally flipping more than one open at a time. My biggest flaw with the game can be easily fixed with more time set aside to perfect what the game already has at its core.

Another piece of criticism I received involved how the player moved through the house. I designated the player as a little circular chip that the player can pick up and move around the

house so they understand where they are in relation to the objects in the house. However, since the box is relatively deep, I saw players simply sliding around the chip to make it easier for them to quickly get from room to room. Players reported that moving the chip throughout the house

was quite challenging for them. While this was an interesting and creative tactic, I don't want it to be possible if I were to make a final product of this game. One idea that would first help players move easier around the board would be to make the player chip

(Figure 1, the home invader is navigating through the house)

easier to grab. Making it more three dimensional, like adding height or width to it and making it more triangular, could help the player pick it up better and not feel like they need to scramble as much. However, this still leaves the question of what to do about players sliding their pieces around the board. My idea is to create places on the board that the player can only specifically go and force the player to abide by this restriction. I believe making little circular divots big enough for the player piece to settle into would fix this issue. This would be places where the player has to place their piece in order to mimic walking like a person through a home, as people can't just slide from room to room at break-neck speed. However, players thoroughly enjoyed how much they were able to customize the house with all of the furniture and where they could put the keys,

so I would need to make a grid system of the divots in all of the rooms so that both players are not limited by my design. Players decorating the house would be able to place pieces of furniture on top of the circles, as they should be able to click into place as well so the second player can't knock them over easily but easy to remove so they may look underneath for the hidden keys. This would also allow for some other problems, like the player trying to escape the house would be able to just throw the furniture around and not replace it and the player decorating the house would be able to box the player in at the beginning is so desired. Therefore, more rules would have to be in place that forces the player escaping to replace all furniture they move and the house decorator would be prohibited from blocking any doorway or exit door so the player is not stranded. Because of this mechanical flaw within the game, the board set-up may need to look much different than it currently does to allow for player restrictions that are encouraged but not fully in place yet.

(Figure 2, the homeowner is setting up their house)

Finally, I believe it's good to highlight briefly what seemed to work well with the game. After each playtest, I decided to talk to the players about their experiences and what they think could be done better if they didn't feel they could express themselves well enough in the survey. Many players said they liked the set up of the game. They enjoyed choosing between who they wanted to play as and they also liked how the board resembled the inside of a house. Players felt

that it was more fun to be the home invader but also agreed that it was easier to earn points by playing as the homeowner. Therefore, they felt there was a decent balance of difficulty and scoring. Players also felt the desired emotion while playing the game; stress. They reported that when navigating the house, they felt pressured by the time constraint to go as fast as possible, which is what I was hoping for when adding the time constraint. Overall, because of this playtest, I believe this game has a healthy balance of mechanics I can save and mechanics that need some reworking.

Did my playtesters have fun while they played my game? Yes, they did. However, did they also get lost more times than I can count on my hand? Yes, they did that too. I've found that my game's premise is what made players have the most fun, while some rules and mechanics made it easier for them to accidentally speed through it. Overall, I feel these playtests allowed me to see my end-goal a little bit more clearly and gave me insight on how I can get there.