

Playtest Analysis

Playtest 1:

Time: 2/14/2015

Playtesters: Christian Karrs, Emily Chang, Haley Yang (as map master)

What Tested: Stage 1, events of Object 2 and 3, moving on 7 x 8 board, Playing Cards with 3 numbers on them.

Take Away:

1. Main mechanics (moving and fighting) worked, but needed tweaking.
2. Events worked but needed balancing.
3. Map was a little big. Too many cities but didn't bring many choices.
4. Need to work on what happens after Stage 1.

Notes:

Rules/Overall:

[Emily] The movement is confusing (numbers on the cards).

[Christian & Haley] When a player fights with the people in a city, the winner should leave (rather than being discarded). Otherwise, the player always loses cards on opponent's land.

[Emily] Turn order is confusing, especially when to call and to use the event.

[Christian] Wanted to capture cities.

[Haley] Change the number indicating Direction to arrows.

[Some] Maybe limit the number of turns of Stage 1.

[Haley] Players didn't find much strategy moving on the board.

[Haley] Players asked "how many cards do you have" a lot during play. Maybe try using the D20 token as a counter showing number of cards in hand. Not sure.

[Haley] The play lasted too long. The overbalanced between two lands made the game endless. The concern of running out of Playing cards was unnecessary.

Events:

[All] Players and some observers liked the long and fancy Event names.

[Some] Some Events need tweaking.

Map/Board:

[Haley] The map might be a little big. It was not fun and tiring putting up cards each turn.

[Christian] Maybe reduce the size of cities to decrease the work of putting up cards each turn.

[Emily, Christian] The border of each city wasn't obvious enough.

Analysis & Changes:

First, I made some changes on the cards: Changed the first number, Direction from "1, 2, 3 and 4" to arrows. Got rid of the last number, Attack Attribute on the Playing Cards. Because arrows would be more straight forward than numbers indicating "North, East, South and West". Having too many numbers added too much work for a simple movement. Using the second (the only) number to indicate both the max movement and the attack value when fighting can not only make the cards easier to read, but also gives the player some choices on which city to land on.

I found no fun filling cards on the cities at the beginning of each turn, which also made the game longer than it needs to be. There are two ways to solve the problem: 1. Reduce the number of cities by making the map smaller. 2. Making the cities smaller, so that only the first few turns require much work placing cards. I prefer the first one, because I want to keep the diversity of cities on board and solve the problem for all the turns. Also it doesn't matter too much for the later turns if I only need to add 1 or 2 cards on board. In addition, if this process only happens in Stage 1 and Stage 1 is only 5 turns, this wouldn't be a big problem. The initial thought on this part was drafting cards. Maybe just define some cities as "growing" ones that have new cards being put on each turn, but some cities are not.

Events. We only tested the events of Object 2 and Object 3. I changed Event 2-1. Because it potentially made the phase endless without adding much fun. Also, my rule about getting events was that the player doesn't stop until getting two different events. But during the playtest, I noticed that they always got the same event. Rolling the dice twice didn't necessarily add more fun or change too much. Also, if the player always got the Event 2-1, which helped them getting more events, it was hard to track the number of events and which was the same with which so what number of events were left to be determined...

Turn order, especially when to use events. Current turn order:

1. Put up a card on each city on board (unless the city is full).
2. Zi rolls D6 twice to determine event pool and claim which event to use.
3. Xiu rolls D6 twice to determine event pool and claim which event to use.
4. Zi plays a card to move. If necessary, fight against a soldier of her choice and see if she gets to collect the cards.
5. Xiu plays a card to move. If necessary, fight against a soldier of her choice and see if she gets to collect the cards.
6. Check for the end of Stage 1.

I went through all the events. Tried to put them into categories, such as "Instant", "Movement" and "Triggered/Non-instant".

Rules:

Changed some tiny rules, such as, allowing players to move any steps they want \leq the number on the card.

What's Next:

[Medium priority] What happens after Stage 1 needs to be designed.

[Low priority] Objects for each set of Events need to be designed.

[High priority] New map.

[High priority] Change/Balance Playing Cards since the last number was removed.

Playtest 2:

Time: 2/21/2015

Playtesters: Haley Yang, Haley Yang'

What Tested: Everything

Take Away:

1. New map worked better than the old one. So did the new card design.
2. Categorizing Events into different types made things clear (e.g. when to play, when to trigger).
3. Worked out Stage 2 and completed the game, which supported the story (not perfectly but fair enough for now).
4. Refined score system.
5. Added Capturing and Duel mechanics.

Play 1:

What Tested: Refined Events (Object 1 & Object 4) with type tags, Map v.1.2, cards v.1.2

Notes:

Rules/Overall (All from [Haley] of course!):

Two players didn't interact much on board (didn't care what each other was doing, no way to counterattack opponent's actions).

Maybe P2 should move first, since P1 already had much advantage on the land?

Events:

Object 4 fit P2's strategy well, while the Events were too weak; object 1 fit P1's, but a little too strong.

Changes:

P2 now move first.

Made tiny changes on the map.

Balanced some Events.

Play 2:

What Tested: Refined Events (Object 2 & Object 3) with type tags, Map v.1.2 (with tiny changes), cards v.1.2

Notes:

Rules/Overall (All from [Haley] of course!):

There were some interesting choices on Events.

Maybe only 3 turns for Stage 1?

Who moves first didn't really matter.

Changes:

P1 now move first again!

Stage 1 now have 3 turns (it was 4 turns).

Iterated on Events...

Added gameplay of Stage 2 and City Capturing.

Play 3:

What Tested: Refined Events (Object 2 & Object 5) with type tags, Map v.1.2 (with tiny changes), cards v.1.2, Stage 2, City Capturing

Notes:

Rules/Overall (All from [Haley] of course!):

How come it ended up with a perfect tie (18 cities + 12 minions for both players)?

Limiting the turns can change the pace of play effectively.

What happens if two players are in the same city? Any kind of Duel?

Changes:

Added Duel.

Refined what happens according to different results of Stage 1. (Different ending states of Stage 1 now lead to different starting states of Stage 2.)

What's Next:

Try to add some Duel elements to the Events to increase the chance of having a Duel.

Do the transformations from Stage 1 to Stage 2 make sense?

How does the two capital cities work?

Playtest 3:

Time: 2/21/2015

Playtesters: Janet Lin, Haley Yang

What Tested: Everything (V. 1.3) except Duel, ran Duel once after played through

Take Away:

1. There were some interesting choices and strategies.
2. The whole rules made sense according to the story.
3. Wanted to play Events of other Objects.
4. Maybe have different level of rule sets for different level of players.

Notes & Analysis:

Rules/Overall:

[Janet] "Not that hard to understand."

[Janet, Haley] Maybe provide different level of rule sets. For instance, Easy Mode rule set has no Duel gameplay. Advanced Mode has Duel. Or something about capital cities.

[Janet] How to track which city is being captured? (Very good point!)

Events-Duel-Score:

[Janet] Events are fun

[Haley] Since neither of us got Events about Duel. It was hard to trigger duel. We ran the duel once after the play.

[Janet] Understood how it worked and said it would be meaningful to the play.

[Janet, Haley] Should add the remaining Health to final score.

Story:

[Janet] If the game ends up with a tie, story: The two fell in love with each other, they married, and the two kingdoms became a whole. I thought it was a love story!!! (Agreed!!!)

Changes & What's Next:

Write up everything and see if there's a bug!

Made a tiny change on the map. It was too easy for P2 to capture cities from left bottom corner because of the city size. (Although now Ning's land looks symmetrical, it didn't kill the potential choices on where to go because of the asymmetrical design on Rong's land and Ning is pretty small when the game starts.)

Can I possibly end the game with an epic final Duel?!

How do I name the 2 Stages well? (What are the focuses?)

Playtest 4:

Time: 2/22/2015

Playtesters: Yan Jin, Haley Yang

What Tested: Everything (V. 1.3) including Duel

Take Away:

1. Overall the game was playable and fun but everything has pros and cons.
2. The systems were too closely connected with each other. It was hard to fix by simply tweaking something within a specific system.
3. It could be better if it was a video game since setting up and running through the flow were time consuming and programmable.
4. Maybe pick a core system, make it fun, and then modify the whole game around it.

Notes & Discussions:

Overall:

[Yan] 36 Events are fun. "I hope that I don't have to stick to one set of Events through the whole game. (Draw a new Object card every turn.)"

[Yan, Haley] Putting cards are chores. Either get rid of it, or balance between fun and convenience (ideally make it fun).

[Yan] "Maximum of 4 steps for each card is not enough, I want it to be 6 (the map was 6x6)."

[Yan, Haley] The combat made the players run out of cards quickly. It was problematic since cards were always required to progress in the game.

[Yan, Haley] The simplicity of cards made them easier to read and provided much freedom to the players. But meanwhile, it was not very fun playing them. A suggestion was to tie them to Events. Or instead of using cards to determine players' movement on board, setting maximum movement/steps and allow the players to move freely; and giving new and better meanings to the cards.

Conclusion & What's Next:

A simple fix on any existing system of this game can be hard. Maybe try changing some core systems, such as drafting, moving on board or combat. Also try some new elements, like deck building or city capturing.