CHAPTER 25
Playtesting is all about getting peo- ple to come play your game to see if it engenders the experience for which it was designed

Playtest Question the First: Why?
A playtest is a kind of prototype — not a prototype of the game, but a prototype of the *game experience* (which is what we care about the most!). If you don't enter into your playtest with specific goals in mind, you stand a good chance of wasting your time.

Playtest Question the Second: Who?
Once you know why you are having a playtest, you can decide who you should be testing.

Playtest Question the Third: Where?
This question might seem innocuous, but a lot rests on exactly where you have your playtest.

Playtest Question the Fourth: What?
By "What?" I mean "What will you look for in your playtest?" There are two types of things to look for.

The First What: Things You Know You Are Looking For
These come from the questions in your "why?" list. Hopefully, you are going to design your playtest so that you can look for answers to these questions (that's why you listed them!).

The Second What: Things You Don't Know You Are Looking For
Anyone can find things they know they are looking for — but only a truly observ- ant designer, who has learned to listen deeply to players, can find the things they don't know they are looking for.

Playtest Question the Fifth: How?
So you've figured out why you want to have a playtest, who you will observe, where you will hold it, and even what you are going to look for. Those are great preliminaries, but the rubber doesn't meet the road until you decide *how* you are going to go about it.

Should You Even Be There?
There is a school of thought that believes it is dangerous to have the developers of a game present when it is tested. If you cannot stay objective during the playtest, and properly police your behavior so that playtest- ers can remain "pure," you definitely should not be there. If that is the case, it is a shame, because there is so

much more you will learn by being present in person at a playtest than you can get from just reading survey data or watching recorded vid- eos. So, though some design theorists might disagree, my advice is to find ways to restrain these corrupting impulses so you can be there in person.

What Do You Tell Them Up Front?

For some tests, you won't tell the players anything at all — you'll let the game speak for itself, particularly if you want to see if they can figure it out by themselves. But for the majority of playtests, you will need to tell players something to get them started.

What Data Will I Collect After the Play Session?

Surveys

Surveys are a great way to have players answer straightforward questions about your game that are easily quantified. Some tips for getting the most out of surveys:

● **Use pictures whenever possible**, when asking about game elements or scenes, to help ensure the player knows what you mean.

● **Online surveys can save you (and your playtesters) a lot of time**. Systems like "Surveymonkey" are easy to set up and very inexpensive.

● **Don't ask people to rate things on a scale from 1 to 10**. You will get more con- sistent results if you use a five-point scale, where each of the points is clearly labeled such as:
1. Terrible
2. Pretty bad 3. So-so
4. Good
5. Excellent

● **Don't put too many questions on your survey**, or people will start to tune out near the end, and your results won't be worth much.

● **Give them the survey right after they have played**, while things are fresh in their mind.

● **Have someone on hand to answer clarifying questions** that the testers might have about the survey.

● **Note the age and gender of each playtester surveyed**, so you can see if these have a connection to player opinions.

● **Don't take survey data as gospel**. It is unlikely that your survey is truly scien- tific, and playtesters tend to make things up when they aren't sure.

Interviews
A post–game interview is a great way to ask players questions too complex for a simple survey sheet.
- **Have a script of questions**
- **Interview people privately**
- **Avoid memory tests**
- **Don't expect playtesters to be game designers**.
- **Ask for more than you need**
- **Set your ego aside**

Lens #91: The Lens of Playtesting

Playtesting is your chance to see your game in action. To ensure your playtests are as good as they can be, ask yourself these questions:
- **Why** are we doing a playtest?

- **Who** should be there?

- **Where** should we hold it?

- **What** will we look for?

- **How** will we get the information we need?