In order to survive, many will perish.

a game by August Orlow, Jiayu Liu, Rick Menasce and Suhas Murthy

# playtesting goals

Following a solid, two-week period of prototyping, the team began an effort to compile the recorded observations, data feedback, and numerous other aspects regarding the next stage in development for our game, which remains (tentatively) titled Left Alive. In a brief summary, the team spent two weeks conducting roughly ten playtests and open prototyping with new individuals who had never seen or heard of the game in action. The team also conducted about a dozen internal playtests which restricted the game to the developers alone.
We initially held three questions and hypotheses that we would take into the playtesting phase, that among these are:

**1. Could we retain our aesthetics from the introduction of a 6 player game instead of 4 (which we had previously played with) and the in-game balance resulting of that? (resources, night cards, how they respond to a 6-player game).**
**2. In what specific situations do people lose way more than they build?**
**3. Are there any new player interactions besides trading that we could add into new iterations.**

To delve into a handful of specifics, it is necessary to reflect on our previous goal, established prior to the prototyping phase. Taken directly from our last blog post, our initial goal for the final product was to have it so that, "In the end, the desperation of each player will have a profound effect on his or her survival, and only playing the game will show the player who faces the certainty of death, and who, finally, will be Left Alive".

Examining the details of this goal, it is apparent that our refined goal and vision for the project is inspired by the addition of empirical data following our playtesting periods. Using said data, we were able to formulate a new goal for the next stage of planning. We have refined our goal to state that **"survival remains the key component of this game, gained through desperation and problem-solving skills, however, if players are to die in this game, it must be from a direct result of their own actions or mistakes."** We also wish to have luck play a minimal role in the outcome of the game. After playtesting, the most lethal part of the game remains luck and chance, and we would like to balance less of that without compromising the remaining aesthetic. We discovered this after repeated playthroughs of the game, and grew increasingly dissatisfied with it, as luck began to dominate the games in almost every stage.

# the playtesting findings

When we began our playtesting outside of the developers' circle, and further invited 6 players instead of 4, a few things stuck out right away.

- Sometimes people didn't remember they had to roll 2 dice in the same turn;

  They didn't explore the areas that had already been explored, always trying to explore new tiles;

- Players were trading energy for other resources (we never thought about the possibility, interesting, but not in our plans so far)

- One player asked another one to share a tent with him. We thought this was a good idea for social interaction. We would like to make it more visible without written rules.

- Speaking of social contracts, players were making deals on trading.

- The open introduction (August giving a little talk on how they got there in a comic narrative) really got them into the game narrative.

For 6 players specifically:

- Energy cards run out quickly so we had to make new ones while playtesting.

- Someone said the game is fun to play with family, which is not the "feeling" we want (we want Lord of the Flies, not Gilligan's Island.)

- Excess of one resource (often Stone) was both common and frustrating for the other players.

- People's actions (collecting and spending) in this game were quite independent, not much interaction among players. Also, the only player interaction, which was trading, happened mostly between certain players who had more resources (not many players experienced that trading could save their lives at critical points.

- Many times, someone was far better off than others right on the beginning. This turned out to be frustrating for the others.

**First prototype iteration**

To recap on the playtest, we played the game numerous times with friends from our class to learn feedback, and one thing that particularly stuck out was the different dynamics that the players employed to try and survive. Some players were more fortuitous than others with the resources they were uncovering, however, they all managed to survive the first couple rounds. A few players died out when they sat on their resources, and gave us their advice (also some frustration) about how the game went for them. In one instance, a player was hit with compounding night cards (disease, thunderstorm, hurricane, etc), which caused that player to almost face elimination in one round of play, and if that kind of luck is in the game, we believe fixing those odds to be our number one priority in the interest of player enjoyment.

# solutions

Possible solutions to our problems in balancing and evolving mechanics are admittedly a bit broad, we will implement the following:

**(1)** Using a die to have the exact quantity of resources (e.g. rolling a 4 will give you 4 pieces of wood).

**Issue to be solved: more resources, easier to build structures and allow players to trade more, allowing more interaction.**

**(2)** Doing away with public night cards that affects all players, replacing them with Climate Cards. Starting at the first round, a player picks a Climate Card that could state: thunderstorm in 3 rounds (and its effects). On the third round the Climate Card will be resolved and other Climate Card should be picked, and so on.

**Issue to be solved: less players dying prematurely due to high amount of energy lost with unexpected cards, also giving them predictability to be prepared to that. Resulting in less likeability factor and more strategy one.**

**(3)** Using movement cards to move around the board. Thirteen (13) card will be dealt to each player. Those cards have numbers between 1 to 3, which indicates how many moves the player can make each round. It depend on which card he uses each round.

**Issue to be solved: rolling dice was unpredictable and caused many frustrations with double zeros. Also players lost track of the second roll, so eliminating that factor may help the pace of the game. Not only that, it gives a strategic factor on when to use each card wisely to make a move.**

**(4)** Lowering the numbers of tiles but keeping the same percentages of resources.

**Issue to be solved: players tend to only go to undiscovered places. This mechanic should help them make use of the whole board as it may be all discovered sooner.**

**(5)** Different skills randomly picked by each player. They should be balanced between them. (e.g. builder: structures cost 1 less wood).

**Issue to be solved: it gives players a differential and a character to relate with. Also it may open door for some interesting social interactions not yet tought by our team.**

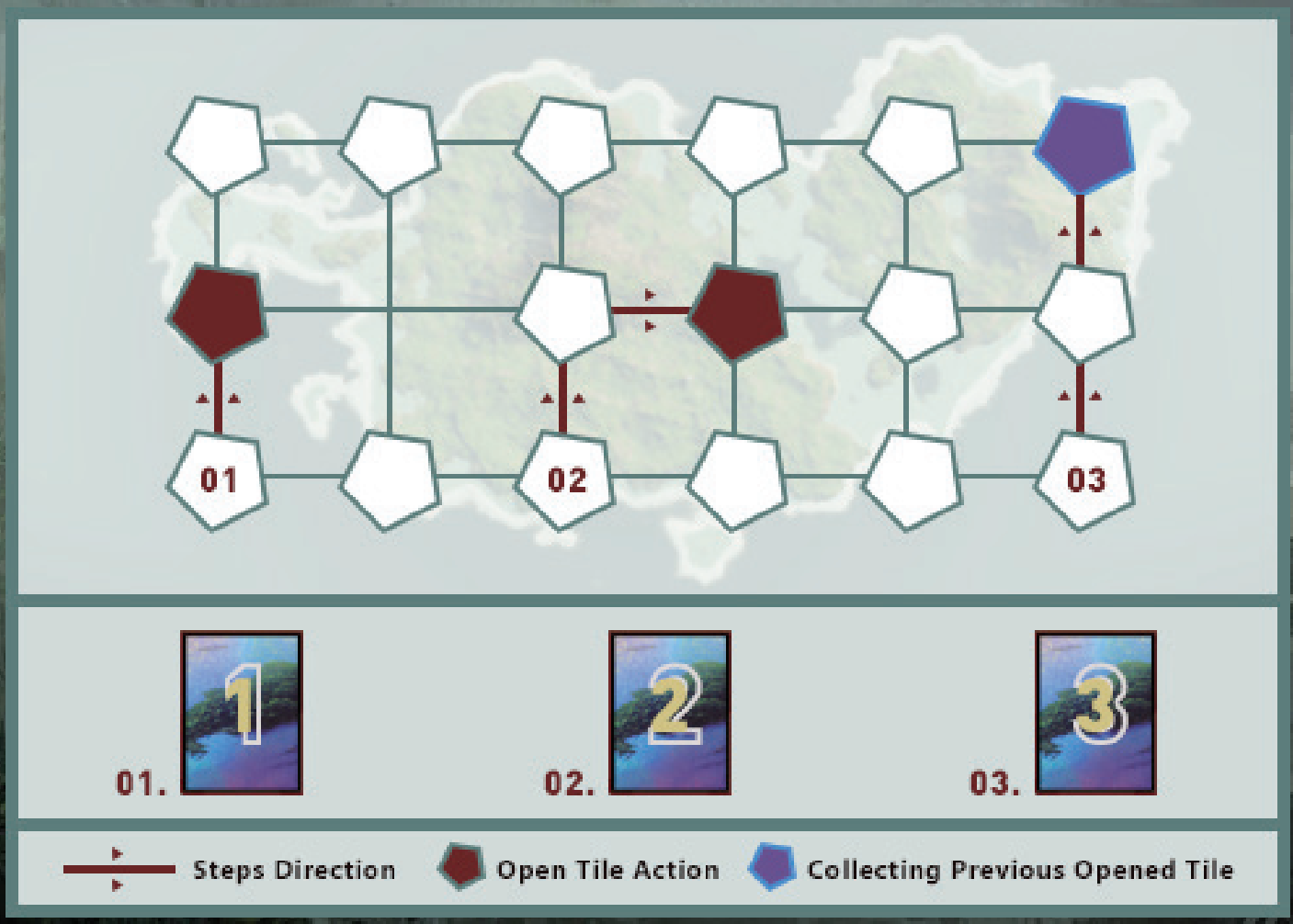
**(6)** Now people that get into the same tile can fight each other, being the one who entered the attacker and the one already there the defender. The fight happens using a single 6-sided die where the attacker, if win, gets the number rolled in resources and, if not, loses one (1) energy.

**Issue to be solved: more social interactions between players. They can make alliances and attack together someone or just play by themselves.**

[1] Picture 01 on page number 06

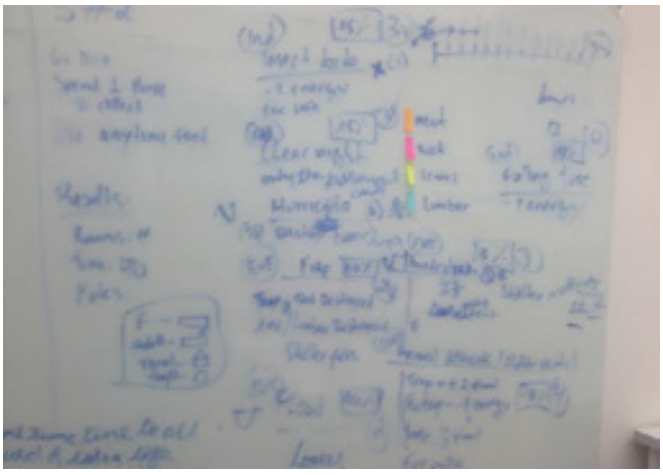
In a more concrete way of noting what we shall choose, we've prepared tables with some scenarios nailed down (see attached). Our plan is to playtest our game iterations one at a time within the next day or two, seeing which things we like, and which we would rather not implement yet. One of the most shocking and problematic discoveries that we made within our game came after playtesting it ourselves following a public prototype. We discovered that a meager amount of the game (5% to be exact) benefitted from good luck, (Clear Night cards, for example) whereas, bad luck had a substantially higher chance to occur. At this point, it wasn't even a matter of luck that something bad was going to happen to you, and while that helped maintain an Aesthetic of frantic, desperate measures defining gameplay, we resolve to to better those odds in the interest in improving the latter for the players. In the end, we determined that some resources were cumbersome, and we plan to strip these down until the game feels less complex, with examples such as movement via rolling a die (replaced by movement cards for each day) or increasing player interactions via team play, player combat or class archetypes. Also, those changes stated earlier made the mechanics of the rounds different, and it changes can be seen on pictures 3 and 4. Our goal is to refine the game so it better defines the aesthetic, yet also proves to be a board game that players will not be tempted to flip over after the first two rounds.

# attachments



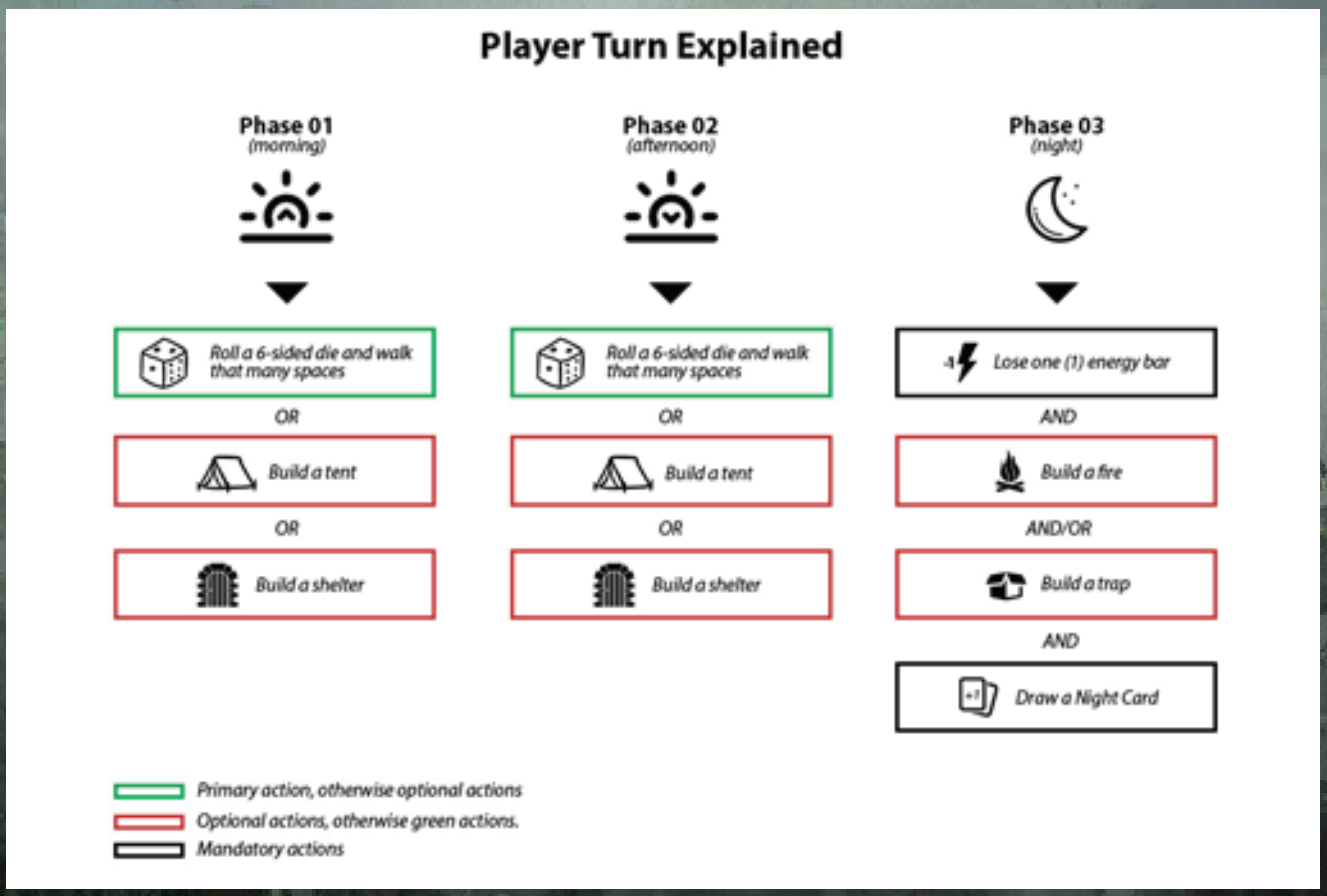

**Picture 01: Movement Cards**

Players receive 13 cards when starting the game. Those cards represents steps they take in order to move along the board. There are three (3) different types of Movement Cards: 1, 2 and 3. The numbers represents how many spaces they can go if using that card on that day. On the example above, the player use the card 1 and then moves one tile, discovering it when on it. The second example shows the same dynamic but with two (2) steps. What is interesting is the third example: if the player wants to collect an open tile he needs to use 1 step in order to do that, for that reason, the number 3 take 2 steps (2 tiles) and then use the other step to collect the resources.



**Picture 02: More prototype iterations, now using people outside developers cicle and some brainstorming**

# attachments




Picture 03: Old player turn


Picture 04: New player turn

# attachments

| | |
|---|---|
| Energy Bar | Each player starts with 7 |
| | Players lose 1 energy bar each turn |
| Board | Made of 60 tiles |
| | Space for Climate Cards |
| Tiles | 12 for food (collect on 6s die) |
| | 15 for lumber (collect on 6s die) |
| | 15 for leaves (collect on 6s die) |
| | 9 for rocks (collect on 6s die) |
| | 9 for night cards |
| Climate Cards | Affects all players |
| | Is draw everytime another climate card ends |
| | e.g. Thunderstorm in 3 days |
| Cards to Move | 13 cards for each player distributed randomly |
| | Three types of cards: 1, 2 and 3 steps. One card/day. |
| | Players can move forward only |
| Same Tile Players | 6-sided die: winner takes number rolled in resources |
| | If attacker loses, he lose one energy |
| | If three players, they can fight each other or create an alliance (they roll dice seprately and both count as attackers against the defensor) |
| Trades | Players can trade anytime they want freely |
| | Players can trade the safety of shelter for resources |
| Collect | Players use a 6-sided die to collect |
| | Player need to spend one move to collect in open tiles |
| Skills | Randomly distributed among players (6 different skills) |
| | e.g. Builder: -1 resource to build structures |
| Night Cards | Affects only one player |
| | Players draw every end of turn and reveal separately |
| Rescue | All survivors on the 13th day win |
| Spawn Point | Inside board, between four (4) tiles |

**Picture 05: #1 Scenario for playtesting**

# attachments

| | |
|---|---|
| Energy Bar | Each player starts with 7 |
| | Players don't lose 1 energy bar each turn |
| Board | Made of 60 tiles |
| | Space for Climate Cards |
| Tiles | 12 for food (collect on 6s die) |
| | 15 for lumber (collect on 6s die) |
| | 15 for leaves (collect on 6s die) |
| | 9 for rocks (collect on 6s die) |
| | 9 for night cards |
| Climate Cards | Affects all players |
| | Is draw everytime another climate card ends |
| | e.g. Thunderstorm in 3 days |
| Cards to Move | 13 cards for each player distributed randomly |
| | Three types of cards: 1, 2 and 3 steps. One card/day. |
| | Players can move forward only |
| Same Tile Players | 6-sided die: winner takes number rolled in resources |
| | If attacker loses, he lose one energy |
| | If three players, they can fight each other or create an alliance (they roll dice seprately and both count as attackers against the defensor) |
| Trades | Players can trade anytime they want freely |
| | Players can trade the safety of shelter for resources |
| Collect | Players use a 6-sided die to collect |
| | Player need to spend one move to collect in open tiles |
| Skills | Randomly distributed among players (6 different skills) |
| | e.g. Builder: -1 resource to build structures |
| Night Cards | Affects only one player |
| | Players draw every end of turn and reveal at the same time |
| Rescue | All survivors on the 13th day win |
| Spawn Point | Inside board, between four (4) tiles |

**Picture 06: #2 Scenario for playtesting with changes from SC#1 in purple.**

# attachments

| | |
|---|---|
| Energy Bar | Each player starts with 7 |
| | Players lose 1 energy bar each turn |
| Board | Made of 60 tiles |
| | Space for Climate Cards |
| Tiles | 12 for food (collect on 6s die) |
| | 15 for lumber (collect on 6s die) |
| | 15 for leaves (collect on 6s die) |
| | 9 for rocks (collect on 6s die) |
| | 9 for night cards |
| Climate Cards | Affects all players |
| | Is draw everytime another climate card ends |
| | e.g. Thunderstorm in 3 days |
| Cards to Move | 13 cards for each player distributed randomly |
| | Three types of cards: 1, 2 and 3 steps. One card/day. |
| | Players can move forward only |
| Same Tile Players | 6-sided die: winner takes number rolled in resources |
| | If attacker loses, he lose one energy |
| | If three players, they can fight each other or create an alliance (they roll dice seprately and both count as attackers against the defensor) |
| Trades | Players can only trade when 1 tile next to each other |
| | Players can trade the safety of shelter for resources |
| Collect | Players use a 6-sided die to collect |
| | Player need to spend one move to collect in open tiles |
| Skills | Randomly distributed among players (6 different skills) |
| | e.g. Builder: -1 resource to build structures |
| Night Cards | Affects only one player |
| | Players draw every end of turn and reveal separately |
| Rescue | No rescue, last player alive wins |
| Spawn Point | Inside board, between four (4) tiles |

**Picture 07: #3 Scenario for playtesting with changes from SC#1 in purple.**