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Roll for Learning:

51 Micro Tabletop Role-Playing Games to Use in the Classroom

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Original or Adapted System: Original system
Brief description: This game is about identifying flaws, or "Fun Killers," in a game design and taking steps to resolve those issues and create a more sound game concept
Main content area(s): Game design
Target audience(s): Suitable for players 13 and up
Recommended number of players: 2 players minimum, at least 4 recommended up to 12, with teams of no more than 5 players.
Components needed to play: Paper for taking notes and keeping score, Two six-sided dice
Estimated time to play: 30-40 minutes

KILL THIS GAME!

SCENARIO

You are employed at a small independent game company that has fallen on hard times. The good news is that two new clients are interested in hiring your company to make innovative new games; the bad news is that the clients are not experienced in game design and sometimes introduce problematic design flaws! Players begin the game by playing as if they are clients by including key flaws in their proposals; then, players switch to the part of the designers to make the best game possible.

The point of the game is to have creative, communal, humorous fun while 1) thinking up terribly broken games and 2) taking on the challenge of rehabilitating flawed games into fun/humorous/cool concepts. Scoring is more for structure than competition. One of the goals is to crack up both your teammates and the other team!

STAGE ONE: CLIENT'S GAME DESIGN ORDERS

Players break into teams of no more than five players each. In the first stage, teams assume the role of an eccentric client developing a concept for a game they want made. Unfortunately, the client has not designed a game before and has unknowingly included what Tracy Fullerton (2018) terms "Fun Killers," problems that can make the game decidedly *not* fun, and Ian Schreiber's additional Fun Killer, "random systems connected to other random systems" (Schreiber, personal conversations, 2014-2018).

Players can choose the format, genre, theme, and their two fun killers, or, to increase the challenge, each team generates each of the four categories randomly. They roll 1d6 to determine the *format*; then they roll 2d6 and add them together to establish the game's *genre,* and they repeat the process for the game's *theme*. Finally, they roll 1d6 two times to identify two Fun Killers. If both dice are the same number, reroll until they get two different Fun Killers.

They develop a game concept, replete with a silly title, and present it to the design team. If there are more than two teams, players should present to the team sitting to their right.

The design team scores the concept, awarding one point for each time they answered yes to the following three questions:

1. Was the concept funny? Be honest because the point is to elicit laughter.
2. Is there a core mechanic (action the player repeats to head toward their goal) and a goal (desired outcome)?
3. Does the concept have some internal cohesion such that you can imagine playing the game? Does the idea have actual merit?

Teams can earn up to 3 points.

FORMAT (roll 1d6) – 01, 02, 03: Digital | 04, 05, 06: Tabletop

GENRE (roll 1d6+1d6) – 02: Rhythm | 03: Fighting | 04: Stealth | 05: Survival | 06: Adventure 07: Sports | 08: Role-play | 09: Resource management | 10: Strategy | 11: Puzzle | 12: Cards

THEME (roll 1d6+1d6) – 02: Superhero | 03: Alien invasion | 04: Urban fantasy

05: High fantasy | 06: Space opera | 07: Post-apocalypse | 08: Cyberpunk

09: Military sci-fi | 10: Steampunk | 11: Dystopia | 12: Time travel

Fun Killers (roll 1d6 twice) – 01: Micromanagement | 02: Stagnation | 03: Insurmountable Obstacles | 04: Arbitrary Events | 05: Predictable Paths | 06: Random Systems Upon Systems

FUN KILLERS DEFINED

Micromanagement

Giving players too much control over minute details causes average players to be overburdened with unwanted chores, resulting in a degraded player experience.

Stagnation

Nothing new seems to be happening for a long period, and choices stay at the same level of importance and impact. Types: repetition without progression; the balance of power without an element to tip the balance; and cycles of rewards with penalties.

Insurmountable Obstacles

Obstacles are either truly insurmountable or seem that way to a significant number of players, which can lead to frustration and even leaving the game.

Arbitrary Events

Random events that cannot be planned, responded to, or strategized around.

Predictable Paths

Games with only one path to victory can become predictable.

Random Systems Upon Random Systems

For example, a die roller linked to a spinner outcome. These cause the player to get lost in chance and pushed away from volition and choice.

Each team has 10 minutes to **develop a game concept** in the format, genre, and theme provided that includes some core game mechanics (the key action that the player takes to achieve their goal) and a win condition. The game mechanics must include both of your random Fun Killers as a central part of the rules (see example below). The players choose a team to work on the project and explain their brilliantly inherently flawed concept. Note: Players may not make a "roll and move" game, where players roll a die or dice and move a token forward.

STAGE TWO: GAME REHABILITATION THROUGH IMPROVISATION and ITERATION

The design team takes the concept and begins iterating revisions to eliminate the Fun Killers and make the best game possible. Teams must incorporate all the elements the client included in their description of the game they want. Players may add or alter the client orders but not delete them—think of the "yes and" of improv comedy. Teams have 15 minutes to outline the game, solving the Fun Killers to the best of their ability.

FUN KILLERS - POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

Micromanagement

Simplify the system, combine microdecisions into a macrodecision, and set defaults to automatically handle the most important decisions.

Stagnation

Identify the kind of stagnation or its cause and work to break the cycle or loop to allow for player progression.

Insurmountable Obstacles

Providing clues, providing just-in-time information to the player when they are stuck

Arbitrary Events

Provide players warnings, action opportunities, and strategic responses for catastrophic events, less significant events require less warning and opportunity.

Predictable Paths

Allow players to choose from different objectives, have more than one path, or a path plus an open world.

Random Systems Connected to Random Systems

Disconnect them, use only one random system, and use it sparingly/strategically.

STAGE THREE: FINAL PITCHES

Each team finishes the game by renaming it (unless the old name was perfect!). The teams take turns presenting their game to their clients. The clients score the game, awarding 1 point for each time they answer yes to the following questions:

1. Was the pitch humorous? Be honest, did you have to try not to laugh?
2. Did the team successfully address *both* Fun Killers?
3. Would you actually play this game?

Teams can earn up to a total of 3 points.

To end the game, each team rolls 1d6 and adds the result to their point total. The team with the most points wins, has their game published,

and become billionaires. If teams are tied on points, neither game is published, and the clients start a fast food chain instead.

WORKED EXAMPLE

Rajeev and Samantha form Team A, and Josie and Charles form Team B. Team A assumes the role of the clients who develop a game concept for Team B. Rajeev and Samantha roll their dice and come up with **Tabletop (board, card, etc.) | *Adventure | Space Opera*** with ***insurmountable odds*** and ***predictable paths*** as their Fun Killers. They brainstorm and create a game concept with Fun Killers hidden within it.

It's a space-swashbuckling deck builder/battler (40 cards per deck) in which Lukewarm Tubwater and Princess Pea face off against Barf Crater and the Pooper Scoopers. Encounters include laser weapons, mentors in holograms, telekinetic powers, and large dog-like companions. To win, Luke must draw 12 weapon cards in a row that allow for conquest over the Pooper Scoopers; once they are defeated, the heroes may face off against the big bad: Barf Crater himself. Each turn, players draw up two cards. Card classes are weapons and travel. They call their game: *Save Us, Tubwater, and Pea!*

Team B needs to take the concept–*card game, adventure space opera*– and the core mechanics of the genre of deck builder/battler and then identify and fix the *insurmountable obstacle* and *predictable path* (not necessarily the ones Team A intended; Team B need only justify their choices). Then they identify the limited card classes as causing a *predictable path* (repeated draw of the same two card types) and the need to luck into 12 out of 40 cards as creating an *insurmountable obstacle*. They revise the game so there are more card classes, including rendezvous, allies, and meditation, to prevent *predictable paths*. They lower the necessity of 12 weapon cards to three and build in a way to build a weapon through meditation and allies, addressing the *insurmountable obstacle* of getting to the big bad Barf Crater. They call their revised game: *May the Barf Not Hit You*.

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BEST PRACTICES FOR PLAYING

Play for levity and fun and being silly is helpful. Consider guiding players to create higher-level concepts and genre choices and not get bogged down in detailed specific game mechanics. The goal is to identify the flawed "fun killers" and address them as best they can.

TIPS FOR RUNNING THE GAME, INCLUDING ALTERNATE PLAYING METHODS

Add extra rounds, and have the teams go back and forth. Have the first team do iterations to make the problems even worse, then even worse than that. Then after two to three exaggerations, hand the game to the next team. This can work with an unlimited number of players, provided teams have no more than five players, and the team that pitches the initial game concept is presented with another team's proposed solution to their concept.

GUIDELINES FOR CLASSROOM IMPLEMENTATION

It helps to have a debrief with the teams to talk through the strategies they had, both when coming up with a deliberately broken game and how they went about addressing the Fun Killers in the game pitch they received. It's important to note that teams are encouraged to find creative solutions to make the final game more fun; they do not need to fix the game in a specific way or in the way the team that made the pitch had intended.

ASSESSMENT AND REFLECTION

No one creates Fun Killers on purpose, and they can be difficult to identify while designing a game. It is a valuable skill to isolate specific mechanics that make a game less fun and use different strategies to rehabilitate it. That can be more efficient than redesigning the entire game; if the solutions are too complicated though, it can be better to start over with a clean slate.

POTENTIAL LEARNING OUTCOMES

Teaching the ability to identify and address Fun Killers teaches some core game design concepts. Learners' ability to identify areas of improvement in a game's design provides empowerment as designers. They no longer wonder why the game "doesn't work" they can find the "holes in the boat" and begin to address them. By practicing both the identification of the Fun Killers and addressing them, students practice an essential skill in game design and can enhance their game design literacy. Subsequently, students should be able to transfer these skills of identification of Fun Killers to see why games they are playing or designing are generating less than ideal play experiences.

RECOMMENDED BIBLIOGRAPHY

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