

Prototype 4: Creepy Mansion

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Designing a game with one loser is almost turning conventional competition on its head. Instead of players directly competing to be the best, they focus on avoiding failure, that would result in them becoming the 'weakest link'. Thinking in terms of players avoiding losing, drove our thought towards having some force in the game putting pressure on the players. A theme we felt lends itself well to this kind of game is the Cthulhu/Madness themes. Players desperately trying to keep hold of their sanity, while paranoia erodes any trust they might have towards their fellow players.

Setting the stage for a game against the great horrors beyond, we thought about the experience associated with fighting off madness. A common setting is a group of people disturbing that which should be left alone, thus we took inspiration from *Betrayal at House on the Hill* a game heavily featuring exploration. Trying to create a tile-like exploration system would however result in a very slow/long game, so we opted for a more focused 'room' based exploration that is a mixture of *Clue* and *Lord of Waterdeep* allowing a player to try and find a specific room on the board, and if successful, retrieve the associated rewards/resources. The rooms are not all rewards however. Rooms can also contain events found by drawing an event card, possibly resulting in horrifying eldritch encounters, driving the players towards madness and thereby bringing them closer to losing. As day becomes night players barricades themselves in their separate rooms to avoid the horrors in the mansion.

Player to player interaction is central to any multiplayer game, otherwise you might as well play separate games. Often board games rely on dice and decks of cards to provide the basis for player interaction with the game. A game without established interplay dynamics would boil down to a player simply winning or losing depending on the cards they draw and the luck of their dice rolls. The game would not have anyway of players to pick down players doing too well, or for some reason have pity on another player and maybe do an unfair trade in exchange for later favours.

In an attempt to force interaction between players we introduced a form of trading. In order to keep up the barricades, players would have to find supplies. This would potentially make players trade in order to gain these supplies or trade them in favour of an item to help keep them sane. It is however hard to manage this economy, as players naturally think mostly of themselves and would have to be truly desperate to try to trade.

Scoping a game of exploration is no easy task. Having meaningful player to player interactions while trying to create an experience around exploration is hard to do when trying to keep the game length relatively short. A factor contributing to the problem is definitely the inspirations for the game. *Betrayal at House on the Hill* and *Lord of Waterdeep* are both games with somewhat large complex boards, and hefty game length. Trying to focus these concepts down to a manageable size might not be possible, as a big part of the exploration of *Betrayal at House on the Hill* comes from the deck of tiles used to build the house as it is explored.

In conclusion while we certainly made a functioning game, it does have issues with scale. The game does manage to capture some of the hopelessness associated with facing off against old dark horrors and moments of desperation among your fellow madmen to scramble enough supplies to keep the dark gods at bay.