



PLAYTEST IS THE KING

BY DMITRY SERGEEV & CATHERINE CHUDINOVA



LET'S MEET



Dmitry Sergeev

Narrative Designer

10+ years in Game Development,
making PC, Mobile & Board Games
that bring joy millions players
worldwide.

Pissourians



Catherine Chudinova

Game Producer

Games we've made:

BLITZKRIEG 3



TRAINING GOAL

Create a board game that will help:

- build new connections between people
- bring together people from different cultures, backgrounds, and interests
- include people with disabilities through accessible and inclusive design
- have fun! :)

GAMECHANGE: COURSE STRUCTURE

Day 1

BECOME A GAME DEVELOPER

- ✓ Learn Game Design theory basics
- ✓ Turn a real social problem into a clear “game mission” checklist
- ✓ Create a concept of the future board game

Day 2

BUILD A PROTOTYPE

- ✓ Build your first playable prototype
- ✓ Create narrative conception of the future game
- ✓ Test your game inside the team

Day 3

PLAYTEST IS THE KING

- ✓ Let other students play your game (and watch what REALLY happens 🐱)
- ✓ Collect the honest feedback
- ✓ Upgrade your game: filter, transform feedback in a game improvements

Day 4

POLISH & PITCH

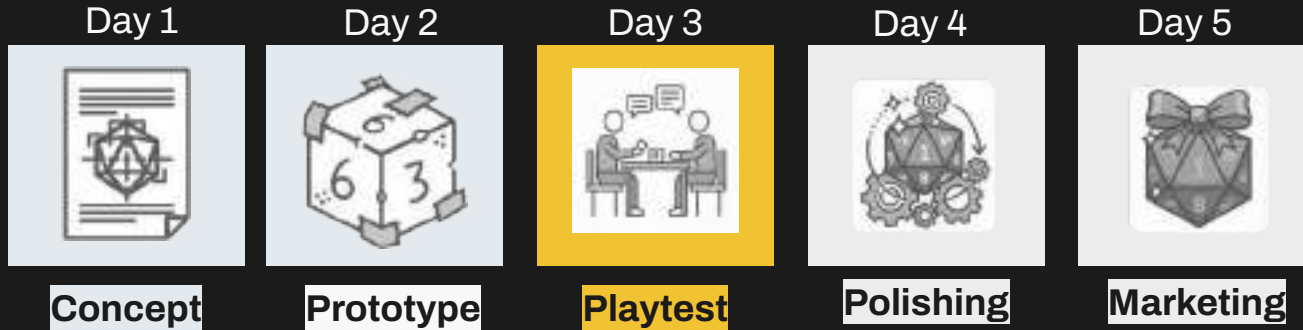
- ✓ Polish your final version so it looks clean and professional
- ✓ Improve the gameplay so it feels fair and exciting
- ✓ Prepare a short pitch: explain your game in 30 seconds like a creator

Day 5

FINAL GAME EXPO

- ✓ Present your game to everyone + show how it fights the social problem
- ✓ Let others play your final version (demo mode!)
- ✓ Vote for the best game and celebrate your finished project 🎉

GAME DEVELOPMENT STAGES



Collecting honest feedback from other players

Improve your game

TODAY'S TASK: *PLAYTEST YOUR PROTOTYPE*

- ✓ Let other students play your game (and watch what REALLY happens 😈)
- ✓ Collect the honest feedback
- ✓ Upgrade your game: filter, transform feedback in a game improvements

WATCHING YOUR GAME IN THE REAL WORLD

Today you will see:

- The mechanic you love ignored.
- The rule you thought was obvious misunderstood.
- The “strategic depth” solved in 3 turns.
- The pacing collapse.
- The exploit discovered immediately.

And that is the best thing that could happen to you.



WATCHING YOUR GAME IN THE REAL WORLD



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Game design = designing human experience, not mechanics.

THE EGO PROBLEM

When someone plays your game and struggles:

Natural reaction:

- “Let me explain.”
- “You misunderstood.”
- “It works if you...”
- “That’s not how you’re supposed to...”

This reaction destroys the test!



DURING PLAYTEST, YOU ARE NOT A DESIGNER

You are:

- A researcher
- A behavioral observer
- A data collector

You are not:

- A teacher
- A defender
- A co-player
- A fixer

The moment you start correcting players, you stop testing the game.



THE SILENCE RULE

If players misunderstand a rule



✓ Let them misunderstand.

If players make a “wrong” move



✓ Let them make it.

If the game collapses



✓ Good. That’s data.

The more uncomfortable you feel,
the more valuable the test is.

DIFFERENT PLAYTESTS HAVE DIFFERENT GOALS

Silent Playtest



Designers do not explain.

Rule clarity
Player independence

Guided Playtest



Explain once → then observe.

Flow
Pacing
Engagement

Stress Test



Players try to break the system.

Balance
Exploits
Dominant strategies

BEHAVIOR IS MORE HONEST THAN WORDS

Players say:

- “It was fine.”
- “Yeah, I liked it.”
- “It’s interesting.”

But their behavior reveals:

- Confusion in your rule structure
- Lack of tension in your core loop
- Imbalance in your reward system
- Weakness in your interaction design

Playtesting is not psychology.

It's system diagnostics through human behavior.



COGNITIVE SIGNALS = RULE & SYSTEM FRICTION

Look for:

- Re-reading rules → Rule structure unclear
- Repeated questions → Information hierarchy weak
- Hesitation before simple actions → Too many conditions
- Silent confusion → Hidden assumptions in design

Ask yourself:

- Is the rule too complex?
- Is the information presented too late?
- Is the turn structure unclear?

Cognitive friction = design friction.



EMOTIONAL SIGNALS : TENSION & STAKES

Watch:

- Leaning forward → Tension working
- Leaning back → Low stakes
- Phone checking → Downtime too long
- Laughter → Successful interaction
- Silence after a turn → Low impact actions

Ask:

- Are decisions meaningful?
- Are stakes visible?
- Does the game create anticipation?

Emotion reveals whether your system generates tension.



DECISION SIGNALS : DEPTH & AGENCY

Ask yourself:

- Do players compare multiple options?
- Do they plan 2-3 turns ahead?
- Do they discuss trade-offs?

Or:

- Is there one obvious move?
- Do players act immediately without thinking?

If turns are automatic:

→ Your system lacks meaningful choice.

If players feel stuck:

→ Your system lacks clarity or agency.

Decision behavior reflects design depth.



THE ENERGY CURVE = PACING & STRUCTURE

During playtest track the energy of gameplay:

Beginning → Is onboarding smooth?

Middle → Does tension escalate?

Endgame → Is there climax or collapse?

If energy drops in the middle:

→ Core loop repetition problem.

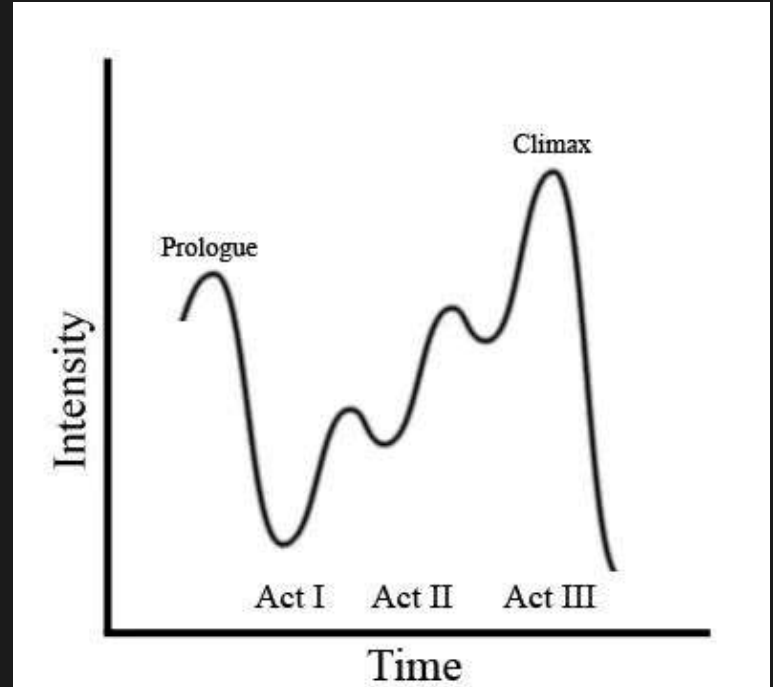
If energy spikes randomly:

→ Poor pacing control.

If end feels flat:

→ Weak resolution design.

Draw the curve. Then connect each drop to a system element.



WHY TAKING NOTES PROFESSIONALLY MATTERS



During playtest you feel everything. But feelings are unreliable.

Without notes:

- You remember the most dramatic moment.
- You forget small repeated problems.
- You argue based on impressions.
- The loudest player influences decisions.
- Team members remember different things.



WHY TAKING NOTES PROFESSIONALLY MATTERS

Good Notes Allow You To:

- Identify patterns across multiple tests
- Separate facts from interpretation
- Track what changed between iterations
- Make decisions based on data, not ego
- Avoid fixing the wrong problem

Without documentation, playtesting becomes guessing.



BAD NOTES VS GOOD NOTES

Bad Notes

- “Players confused”
- “Combat weak”

Good Notes

- Round 3 – 2 players asked how damage is calculated.
- Turn 5 – Player said: ‘I guess I just attack again.’

Write observable events.
Not conclusions.

WHAT TO RECORD

During playtest, track:

- Game duration
- Average turn time
- Rule clarifications needed
- Moments of laughter
- Moments of silence
- Player quotes etc.

Details will reveal patterns later.



BETTER FEEDBACK QUESTIONS

Ask:

- When were you most engaged?
- When did you feel bored?
- When did you feel confused?
- Was there a moment you felt powerless?
- What felt unfair?
- What decision felt most interesting?

These questions reveal design problems.



PLAYERS FIND PROBLEMS, **NOT SOLUTIONS**

If a player says:

"You should add more cards."

Don't immediately add cards.

Ask:

Why do you want more cards?

Maybe the real issue is:

- Not enough choice.
- Not enough variation.
- Not enough tension.

Fix the root, not the suggestion.



SEPARATE 3 LAYERS



#1 Symptom

Example:

Symptom: Player felt useless late game.

#2 Player interpretation

Interpretation: "Game is unbalanced."

Suggestion: "Add comeback mechanic."

#3 Game Developer Solution

Solve the feeling of uselessness.

LOOK FOR PATTERNS



One complaint = opinion.

Repeated complaint = signal.

If 3+ players mention the same issue,
it is almost always real.

PRIORITIZE BY IMPACT

Fix first what breaks:

1. **Clarity** (players don't understand)
2. **Agency** (players feel powerless)
3. **Fairness** (game feels unjust)
4. **Pacing** (game drags or ends too early)

Do not prioritize:

- Aesthetic complaints
- Minor preferences

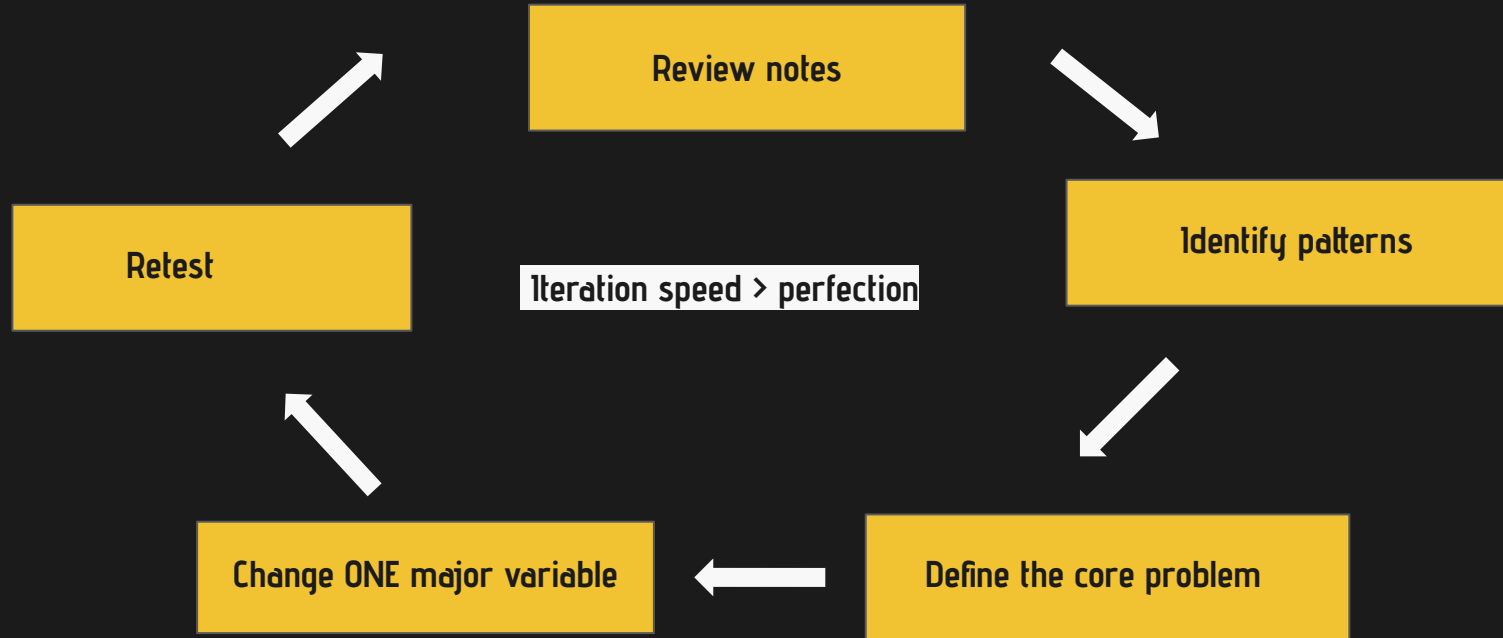


THE MOST COMMON MISTAKES

- Explaining during confusion
- Helping too much
- Changing multiple systems at once
- Testing only with supportive friends
- Ignoring pacing
- Not tracking time
- Taking criticism personally



WHAT TO DO AFTER PLAYTEST



THE REAL GAME DESIGNER SKILL

Anyone have an idea

A few can build a prototype.

Only a real game designer can playtest it:

- Watch calmly
- Accept failure
- Extract insight
- Improve deliberately

Playtesting is where designers grow.



REMEMBER!

- Stay silent.
- Watch behavior.
- Trust patterns.
- Fix causes, not suggestions.
- Iterate without ego.

Your game improves when you allow it to break.



EXAMPLES

How popular boardgames changed



CODENAMES – CODENAMES: PICTURES



- New version:
 - language independent
 - faster – no need to read
 - more opportunities for associations

7 WONDERS - 2ND EDITION

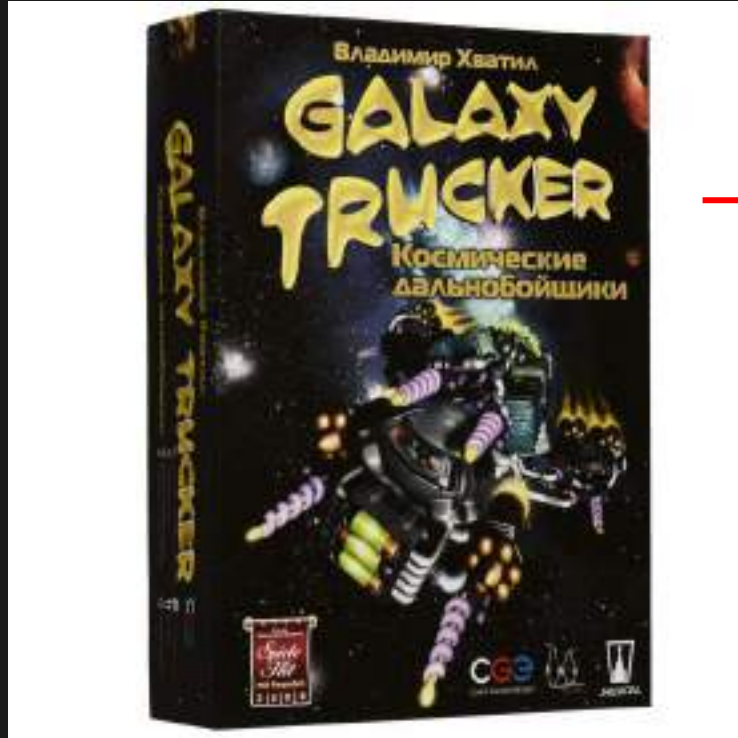


- Rebalance:
 - additional card wasn't such a big bonus as dev thought:



- cheaper to build
- faster to build

GALAXY TRUCKERS

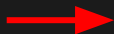


- Art was too serious for fun gameplay. They changed it!

ZOMBICIDE: 2ND EDITION



- You can choose the number of survivors



- TOO DIFFICULT
TO BALANCE



- 6 survivors
always

ARKHAM HORROR: 3RD EDITION



- Fixed map:
- every session the same

- Module system:
- every session is new!