Example Word Prototype: Obegron Trail

The lowest time-cost prototype option

Introduction

Introduce the player to the game with enough detail so they understand what they are playing. Also explain the concept of a Word Prototype.

Example

Welcome to the Word Prototype of Obegron Trail! A Word Prototype is a verbal exercise for us to judge people's enthusiasm about our game concept. We're going to play a mini scenario just by talking it out, and then I'll ask you some questions about it. Sound good?

In Obegron Trail, you play a group of space settlers in a very similar fashion to the classic game Oregon Trail. Only, instead of fording rivers and fixing wagon wheels, you are braving black holes and fixing fusion engines.

Are you ready to start?

Running the Playtest

Literally talk through a scenario with your player, with the intent of getting them to understand your game. It does not need to be complete or even make much sense. Remember that the whole point of a Word Prototype is to save you time! It's just to get enough information to choose what concepts you will spend more time on.

Example

You begin like many other space settlers, in a spaceport about to board your newly purchased shuttle. Your destination is Obegron XII, a brand new colony world renowned for its riches and easy lifestyle.

Created by Willem Delventhal for the Indie Game Academy Blog
May not be copied or shared without express permission
Reach out at: team@indiegameacademy.games

First, pick your class. You can be:

1. A Space Doctor. You get maximum money, but very practical little life experience.
2. A Space Mechanic. You can fix just about anything, but you don't have much money saved.
3. A Space Salesman. You are limited at fixing, with some money, and are a good sweet talker.

Great! You take off from the station in your shuttle on your way to Obegron XII. You are a little nervous but excited to get going. You bring with you a full crew, and three main assistants underneath you. What do you name these three people?

1: Joe
2: Jane
3: Jafeth

A few days of uneventful flying pass you by, when a scream wakes you up in the middle of the night! Assistant 1 has contracted Space Dysentery. It seems you have two main options:

1. Launch Assistant 1 into space. Can't risk the rest of the crew getting sick.
2. Try to quarantine and treat Assistant 1.

Option 1: You launch Assistant 1 into space. They weakly bang on the door, yelling at you about betrayal and how they will haunt you for years to come. The sound of whooshing air drowns them out, before everything goes quiet. While barbaric, the intense option works, and nobody else gets sick. You are free to move on.

Option 2 if Doctor: Your expert knowledge of medicine allows you to set up Assistant 1 in quarantine in their quarters. After a few days of isolation, medication, and a lot of water, the sickness seems to pass. Everyone lives. Assistant 1 is happy. You are free to move on.

Option 2 if not Doctor: You are sure you read something about quarantining in a textbook one time. You put Assistant 1 in their quarters, and give them some Space Aspirin. Unfortunately, you didn't seal the quarters very well, and a few of Assistant 1's friends visit them anyway. After a few weeks of awful Space Dysternary running rampant through your ship, six crew members, including Assistant 1, wind up dead. However, the worst of it seems to have passed and you are free to move on.

A few weeks more pass with minor problems and some technical glitches, but overall, everything is good. But then, just as you are about to start breakfast, the warning lights begin to flash red.

Created by Willem Delventhal for the Indie Game Academy Blog
May not be copied or shared without express permission
Reach out at: team@indiegameacademy.games

You are met with a dangerous asteroid belt ahead. It seems like you have two main options. You can:

1. Fly through the asteroid belt. You might not make it, but it's the fastest way
2. Fly around. It will add a lot of time you aren't provisioned for, but it's safer

Result 1 if mechanic: You manage to break through just fine. A few dings and scrapes make no difference to your practiced hand. You can easily put the ship back together faster than it breaks apart.

Result 1 if not mechanic: Your ship gets hit over and over and rocks back and forth with the impact. This isn't looking good! In mere moments, you go from an excited explorer to a dead one…

Result 2 if salesman: You go around the asteroid field into uncharted space. It is long and arduous, and there are no planets to pick up food. Your people come close to starving, but your smooth talking ways keeps them level headed and they agree to ration what they have, just making it to the next space station in time.

Result 2 if doctor: You go around the asteroid field into uncharted space. It is long and arduous, and there are no planets to pick up food. Your people come close to starving, but your knowledge of medicine helps you lengthen the life of what food you have left, and keep your people just barely fed.

Result 2 if mechanic: You go around the asteroid field into uncharted space. It is long and arduous, and there are no planets to pick up food. You can fix a machine like nobody's business, but people, not so much. The lack of food drives your crew crazy, and they mutiny, launching you out of an airlock. Better luck next time!

If they make it through!

The rest of the journey is easy! No major problems, and you reach Obegron XII in record time. Congratulations! You made it!

Closing the Playtest

Always close out the playtest with some simple questions. Start with open ended questions for new ideas and feedback. Close with very specific questions that will help you compare the prototypes to each other.

Created by Willem Delventhal for the Indie Game Academy Blog
May not be copied or shared without express permission
Reach out at: team@indiegameacademy.games

Example

What did you think?

Is this a game you would play?

What might you change about the game?

How excited for the real version of this game are you, from 1-10?

How much would you pay for the full version of this game?

Created by Willem Delventhal for the Indie Game Academy Blog
May not be copied or shared without express permission
Reach out at: team@indiegameacademy.games