

Project Post-Analysis and Afterthoughts

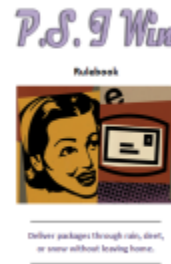
Project: P.S. I Win

Date: Spring 2010

Genre: Board Game

What is it...

P.S. I Win is a board game and my third non-digital project, featuring the tag line, "Deliver packages through rain, sleet, or snow without leaving home." As the title and tagline suggest, the game's theme is package delivery. Each player represents a package delivery company. They are given money with which they can buy little package delivery pieces. There are different kinds that have different abilities, so they are priced accordingly. For example, a runner, which costs \$400, can move two spaces per turn instead of just one, and a hiker, which costs \$300, only moves one space per turn, but they can take advantage of hiking trails, which are shortcuts through the board. The players then pick up little pieces of mail from the mail spots. Each piece of mail has an address number on it, and players must get the mail to that spot on the board, which is a map of a neighborhood. The player interaction feature of the game is that if a player without mail lands on the same place as a player with mail, then that player without mail can take it.



As with my other projects, this one was made by hand. Everything including the box, the board, the rulebook, the money pieces, the mail pieces, the delivery pieces, and little flags to denote which piece belonged to whom had to be built for the game. I made everything out of either cardstock or cardboard. The board was simple cardboard taped together, covered with brown paper, and then I put the actual map on which the players moved on top of it. The box was created from a plastic silverware box that I wrapped in brown paper. I then stuck a stamp on it and put a label on it, making it look like a package. It was an easy way to get the box to thematically match the game.

What went right...

The concept was probably the best thing about the game because it made everything about the game make complete sense. The players immediately knew what they were doing because mail delivery is a real life, universally understood happening. Players made their choices and would jump right into the game. Once things got going, they started getting competitive. Interesting strategies formed based around players personality types, which is something I had wanted to happen by having different kinds of pieces. The aggressive players would spend their time going after the other players to get their mail, and the more passive players would spend time managing all of their pieces.

What could have gone better...

The board ended up being a bit awkward to construct. I wished I had practiced on some spare cardboard before actually getting to the final piece. It was surprisingly difficult to get the pieces to fold correctly. It's not something particularly difficult, and the board that I made was perfectly fine and totally usable. I just wished I'd practiced in order to get it more aesthetically pleasing, as some of the edges didn't quite match up when it was folded.

One thing about the game was that it was a bit slow to start. Once players bought their pieces, the first few turns were just them moving around to get somewhere. I haven't really been able to think up any particular solutions to the game that would make the beginning more fun. Perhaps something like starting out with multiple pieces might be helpful, but the game would have to undergo rebalancing for that.

Also, like with my card game, I never really got to see my game get played to full potential as I only had the chance to playtest my game with two players. It was still a surprising amount of fun for just two players because they got to see the effects of their choices as the game panned out, and the interactions of mail-stealing was fun. Still, I never got to see how the game would react with three people. It may have been even more fun, and I never got to see.

What I learned...

I learned that systems in games don't have to necessarily be complicated in order to create opportunities for player strategy. I've never been much of a strategy person, and I've always thought that creating those kinds of systems required being a super-mega-chess genius kind of brain. It really just takes asking a question and letting the player answer it. The question doesn't have to be that hard. In the case of my game, the question was simply, "What kind of piece do you want?"

I also learned how empowering movement was. It can really make the difference in how the game progresses if a player can get somewhere twice as fast. The prototype version of the game found that a player who bought the quicker moving piece right away would have a bit more of an advantage over the player. Although the other player who'd taken a different strategy and bought two pieces would actually not be all that far behind the other player, I didn't want any dominant strategies to form, so I altered the gameplay. I changed some of the pricing so that players couldn't do this. This ended up changing the way players played because some players would save up their money to buy the nice pieces and others would spend right away on other pieces. It provided another layer of strategy while keeping the game fair.

If I were doing this project again...

I would definitely have worked harder on getting the board to be of a higher aesthetic quality. Everything else about the game, I would have kept the same actually. The mechanics worked out very well, even for just two players. Testing the game with three players would have been nice. Also, taking the time for one really long playtest session would be a good idea because I never got to see how things balanced out after many, many turns.