

Jester's Jackpot Alpha to Beta Phase Work Log

Jack:

- Head of Documentation
- External Test Coordinator
- Playtesting, Balancing
- General Support
- Design Ideation

Cash:

- Basic Game Concept
- Playtesting, Balancing
- Preliminary Work
- Final Card Edits
- General Support

Sei:

- Video Editing,
- Board Art, Design
- Playtesting, Balancing
- General support
- Script and Voiceover

Jesse:

- Balancing, Playtesting
- Card Art, Card Backs, Dice Art, Death indicator art, Chip art
- Importing and setting up in TTS

Initial Changes from the Alpha

Following our initial build of Jester's Jackpot, we found that there was an uneven flow in the game from player to player, with some players getting out of the game early on, having to wait prolonged periods of time for the round to come to an end. In addition to that, we were still in the process of trying to implement the bluffing mechanic. After some additional testing, we made some core changes to the game's structure that significantly helped smooth out pacing and keep the flow balanced across all players.

- Lucky Seven and Bomb icons - We found that even with the bounty cards granting chips, players' chip count would still diminish far too quickly and unevenly. On top of that, it felt like players' weren't risking much by rolling, outside simply not filling out a bounty card.

To address both of these issues, we made it so every lucky seven you roll earns you an additional chip, with every bomb card you roll taking a chip away. Even if it's part of a bounty card you complete, you still earn an additional chip.

- Later on, we balanced this mechanic out by shifting it so you would only get a chip if you rolled two 7 icons (with three = two chips, four = three chips). We found that just rolling one 7 gave people too many chips, even with the bomb to counteract it, so making it harder to gain more helped balance out the rate of received chips more.
- Changed the Money Where Your Mouth Is Card - Initially, the MWYMI card had a player steal 3 of another player's chips. We found that gaining 3 chips from another player allowed for people to stack up too many chips too quickly, while quickly diminishing other players' chips just as quickly. By changing it so another player simply loses their chips, with the dealer not gaining them, the card became much less broken and smoothed the flow of the game.
- Dropped Bluffing Mechanic - We tested the bluffing mechanic while we were in the process of implementing during the Alpha testing phase. We found that it hurt the flow of the gameplay. While interesting in concept, the bluffing mechanic slowed down what was otherwise a really quick and snappy turn to a halt. We also found that it could be more complex and confusing to understand, which played at odds with the intuitive and easy-to-pick-up rules for the rest of the game.

External Testing - Jack

Following initial changes from the Alpha version, we moved into the Beta phase of getting external feedback from playtesting. I got a group of 3 together, Drew, Brent, and I, to get reception and feedback on our game from people playing blind. It's worth noting that Drew has a history in playing, home brewing, and most importantly, making card/board games, so I felt his feedback would be really valuable as someone more experienced with the genre. Brent, conversely, was a more casual player who doesn't play as many games. I felt that with these two, I got a very good grasp on how both a casual and experienced tabletop player would engage in the game.

Testers: Brent, Drew

Length: Games lasted between 15 and 30 minutes

Notes/Suggestions from Testers:

- Liked slot machine references
- Give people fewer coins, and only pay when getting bounty cards
 - Pay the same price for pulling bounty cards blind, reveal cards at the top of each deck, which would cost 2 instead of 1.
 - Maybe drop the chip flip in favor of choosing between the 2 decks, and the top card reveal system.
- Maybe allow skipping turns by not paying.

- When writing rules, be clear on the order of operations (getting and losing coins in the same turn, etc.)
- Chip to signify status effect inflicted by player (Use 1 less die next turn, turn one side of next player's roll into a bomb, etc.)
- Heated in the middle, but swings a lot between people having too many and too few chips.
- When you reach the bounty limit, allow discarding.
- More cohesive theming (Note: This testing was done before all the final assets were imported and applied.)
- Overall, normalize it in values/find ways to introduce player choice

Overall, Drew and Brent enjoyed the game a lot. They liked the concept, and had a lot of fun with how much the game could turn on it's head, and how the balance of who had the upper hand could shift on a dime. They were able to pick up on all the rules of the game after a first, basic explanation, and made good use of mechanics and item cards all on their own. With that said, they did want there to be more facets for player choice, due to the extent of randomness. On top of that, there was still an unbalance in the game, with the games stretching on for a little long and getting stuck in a lack of progression, even with power dynamics between players shifting on a dime. There was still more balancing to do.

Potential Change notes:

- Pay 1 additional chip to discard Bounty card to draw again.
- Only grant lucky 7 chips if you don't fill out a bounty card in the turn
- Youngest player go first
- When winning 2 or more bounty cards, only reap the highest card
- Start with only 5 chips
- Dead players get a free turn where they can get 1 chip to revive if they roll 4 of the same icon.

Following the external testing, the team came together to brainstorm some potential ways of addressing some of the critiques brought forward. While a lot of the suggestions given by testers were difficult to implement directly, due to either off shifting the balancing, or being too big of a change to the game's overall structure, we tried to balance the game in the Beta phase the best we could with additions and tweaks that addressed most of the feedback given in by testers.

New Mechanics/Tweaks in Beta testing

Bounty Redraw - One of the suggestions raised by testers was the idea that you could redraw bounty cards. While part of their intent was for the bounty cards that the player drew would stick to them until they rolled them off, we wanted to find a way to give the player more agency and not get stuck in a scenario where they continuously struggle to roll any of their cards. Because

of that, we implemented a system where you could **pay 1 chip to discard a bounty card of your choice, and draw a new one from the deck.**

Lucky 7 Balancing - Even with the change in how the Lucky 7 icons granted additional chips, we still found situations where they could grant too many to a player at once, mainly through bounty cards that had the Lucky 7 symbol on them. To counteract this, we added a system where **you don't get the bonus chip if you manage to fill out a bounty card in the same roll.** This made it so players wouldn't win too many chips in one roll.

Bounty Card Balancing - Following the same train of thought of a player not earning too much from a single roll, we made it so that **when you complete multiple bounty cards, you only get rewarded with whatever the highest difficulty one is.** Any other bounty card that you filled out stays in your deck.

Chip Reduction - **We've reduced the number of starter chips from 7 to 5.** We've found that that allows for quicker, snappier games, ranging from 8-15 minutes instead of 20-30. We think the quicker, snappier rounds fit better with the lighter, faster pacing of the turn flows, and keep the game from feeling too drawn out and dull.

Revive Rolls - Another concern that we've gotten is that players who are out of the game don't have any means of participation. While we've managed to tighten up the pacing so the players getting out happen closer together, with games generally ending within a few rounds following the first player losing all their chips, we've also added a mechanic to let outed players participate with the chance to get back in as well. **On every turn of a player who's out, they will get a chance to roll the dice. If the dice lands with all 4 sides being the same icon, the outed player is revived with 1 chip.** This gives outed players a rare, but very possible, chance to make a comeback in the game after death.

In Class Feedback

Group 1 (Sebastian)

- Liked artstyle
- Found the quick and snappy game lengths appealing