A Corporate Adventure Played Through Email

REX FURUM

By Felix Park

The Assignment

Rex Furum stemmed from my thoughts on social media games.

I thought that too many social media games weren't nearly social enough – while allowing you to recruit other people's avatars to complete tasks for you, or notifying others of things happening in game, or indirectly competing in rankings, I thought that social games lacked a very meaty, tangible social aspect to them, one which uniquely leveraged their (mostly) asynchronous models. I think that asynchronous gameplay is incredibly cool, at least in the loose definition of "players not needing to play at the same time."

To that end, I thought of games like Diplomacy, where players could plot out moves, submit them, and allow things to unfold. But instead of Diplomacy, what about a game that could take place within a normal workday? And so I came up with an idea for an asynchronous board game that had a specific number of rounds, a definite time limit, and had as its inbuilt goal, to make every player that plays it try their hardest to backstab and cheat and lie to one another. Because I felt that, there is nothing more social – or personal – than a game that rewards such behavior.

Shortly after submitting the prototype of Rex Furum, I realized that to conduct a game potentially as busy as this, that as a gamemaster I would be going crazy from having to keep track of so much data. In lieu of making a very complex and helpful Excel spreadsheet, instead I decided to try and program it in Unity, running it on a computer and making it a physical installation players had to travel to and visit. Ideally it'd be near the water cooler or kitchen where people tend to congregate, that way it wouldn't be too unreasonable for them to leave their desks every so often.

I programmed for 5 days, and wrote over 1,500 lines of code, all in Unity's GUI library. When I finished it and ran it for the first time... it was absolutely no good. The game logic itself was incredibly buggy, and it would remove players from play, criss-cross messages and send them to the wrong players, and sometimes even outright confuse the simplest actions. To debug it would take more days, and that would be not counting the time to rewrite most of it, in trying to integrate changes made because of playtest feedback. The latest version of it is still here: (http://felixpark.com/files/Build1.zip)

So with that on my shoulders I decided to return to simply running an email version, setting up rexfurum@gmail.com to personify the gamemaster, and I wrote a very complex and helpful Excel spreadsheet. Of course, that was half the battle – the other half was finding playtesters to participate in a game lasting close to 4 hours (if counting the period I gave to let players get familiar with the rules) during Softs prep week, coinciding with Carnival.

Eventually I finished all the playtests, and now have this report.

(To see the full records of what occurred in these games, go to the rexfurum email account at Gmail:
Username: rexfurum
Password: rexfurumrexfurum
and read the emails received and sent.
There are over 340 sent emails and 176 received emails over the course of 5 playtests.)

Final Ruleset

REX FURUM

Story

Four companies vie to be the leader of the industry, and will stop at nothing to attain the title. These four companies are:

Alpha Ohrun Heavy Industries (알파 오른 중공업) (ALPHA)
Betapoulos A.E. (βήταπουλος A.E.) (BETA)
the Gamma-Merck-Xiang Group (GAMMA)
Delta Telavara Armaments (DELTA)

They go so far as to hire unscrupulous corporate executives, the greediest and most conniving sharks the world has ever known... you.

What is REX FURUM?

REX FURUM is an email-based social and diplomatic game, wherein you email actions to a gamemaster during timed rounds. It can be likened to a game of Chess played over mail, where moves are written in notation, then sent as a letter to another player. In the case of REX FURUM, you need to send your notated moves by a certain time to a gamemaster instead of other players, and this gamemaster will evaluate everyone's moves at the same time and then notify everyone individually, what the consequences of all the actions were and the updated statuses of the players. It is also different in that as a player you will have little information as to what other players are up to, and it is your job to find that out either through communicating with other players or using actions that will reveal what they do – this is only half of the game, with the other half involving using this information to plan strategies, make alliances, backstab, and gain money.

Goal

Be the richest player at the end of 10 rounds.

Success means lying, communicating, cheating, strategizing, embezzling, trusting, tricking, helping, dropping promises, and most of all, playing.

Set-up

Rounds

There are 10 rounds (round1, round2, round3 . . . round10) of play, each 20 minutes long. Rounds are strictly timed, and you will always be given the exact time of when the round ends and the next begins.

Companies

There are four companies that players can be a part of, Alpha, Beta, Gamma and Delta. At the beginning of a round you will always be told how many people are employed at these companies, but you won't know who. Complicating matters is that working for multiple companies is not only allowed, but in some cases will present a distinct advantage. **But remember:** The companies are not in themselves important – but what company a player works for and how many are employed at one determines many outcomes.

Players will always start at one randomly assigned company at the beginning of play. Through actions players may be hired, quit, or fired from a company.

Salary

Employed players (players working for at least one company) will always receive the set amount of $10k at the beginning

of a round. Unemployed players receive no salary at the beginning of a round.

How to Play

Round Beginning Email

Near the beginning of the round (possibly a few minutes after the round starts) each player receives a personalized email from the gamemaster, which includes the following information:

-Total Net Worth
    How much money each player has at the beginning of the round.
-Earnings Last Round
    How much money each player earned last round, including salary.

-Salary
-Player's name
-Employment
    Which companies a player is a part of – if they're part of a company there will be a "1" underneath the company name, if they're not a part of a company there will be a "FALSE" underneath the company name.
-Company Employee Totals
    This is the number of employees at every company.
-Time when the Round ends

Actions

While working and talking with other players is the main action outside of the game, inside the game all you will do is send the gamemaster actions via email. These are the bread and butter of Rex Furum, and knowing them as well as their ramifications is essential to successful strategy.

Players have **three** action points per round, with some actions taking up 1 action point, two action points, or even none. All the actions have specific notation that the gamemaster will read, and sending actions in this notation will help the game go a lot smoother. A typical email sent to the gamemaster will look similar to this:

bribe 4000 gamma
protect stephen
pinkslip arthur at beta

This means: Send a bribe offer of 4k so that someone may hire me into Gamma, give Stephen (presumably my ally) protection this round, and try to pinkslip Arthur at Beta (get Arthur fired from Beta).

Actions will all be evaluated by the gamemaster by the end of the round, and depending on what happens you will be notified of certain things happening in the next "Round Beginning Email."

Example:
Action name – number of action points
action notation
Description: Description of what action does

Offensive actions

Embezzle - 1 action

embezzle targetplayer (embezzle stephen)

Description: Embezzle 10k*(number of companies you are a part of) from targetplayer. If target is protected, your embezzlement will be announced to all players. You cannot embezzle from the same player more than once per round.

Embezzle is a very basic action in Rex Furum.

Outing - 1 action

out targetplayer (ex. Out tyler)

Description: Broadcasts to all players a person's company affiliations, as well as last round's moves. You won't be revealed as the investigator. If targetplayer is being covered up for, your name will be given to whoever granted them cover up.

Outing is a very rewarding and key move, as it can not only alleviate some of the mystery surrounding who works for what company, but also offer pivotal insight into what a player's alliances and intentions are.

Pink Slip - 1 action

pinkslip targetplayer at targetcompany (ex. Pinkslip arthur at beta)

Description: Attempts to fire targetplayer from targetcompany. Pink slip requires at least two players to do it in the same round in order to be effective, otherwise your attempt will be revealed to the targetplayer.

CEO extortion - 1 action

extort targetplayer at targetcompany (ex. Extort Amy at Alpha)

Description: Only affects targetplayer if they are the sole employee at targetcompany – if this is the case, you steal 60k from targetplayer. If more than one player is extorting, this is divided among those extorting. If the targetplayer is not the sole employee at targetcompany, you pay 30k in slander fees along with every other player who attempted extortion. If another employee joins the company that round, nothing happens and no money is exchanged.

Being the only player at a company is a very vulnerable position, but this could also be a very nice potential trap if planned correctly.

Crash - 2 action

crash targetcompany (ex. Crash gamma)

Description: Must be done for two consecutive rounds by the same player. "Crashes" targetcompany, which fires all players from it and gives 30k from each player to the crasher. You do not need work for targetcompany to crash it. Cannot be protected while crashing, and any protection attempts will fail.

Crashing is a very risky but valuable action, which leaves a player vulnerable. There is always the risk that players may quit a company beforehand, making the crash useless, but if played on a very populous company the profits could be

significant. The resulting empty company will also allow you to join it automatically afterwards. There is no stopping a player from crashing, but if they are not being covered up for, then embezzling could turn out to be a nice way of making a quick buck.

Backstab - 1 action
backstab targetplayer (ex. Backstab stephen)
Description: If targetplayer gives you protection this round, you steal 20k*(your combined number of companies). If they haven't given you protection, then the player will be notified of your attempt you will pay 30k to them. If two players backstab each other, the scandal will be so vicious that everyone will be notified, both attempts will fail, and each will simply lose 30k.

Backstabbing is a vicious, vicious move, one that can net you a potential fortune but at the same time destroying your credibility. Use with caution, but use it well.

Defensive actions

Protection - 1 action
protect targetplayer (ex. Protect amy) (ex. Protect self)
Description: Grants protection from embezzlement to a targetplayer. If targetplayer is the target of embezzlement, the name of the player who attempted it will be sent to you during the turn. You can't be protected and covered up for at the same time.

If protecting yourself, this will not fully protect from embezzlement – instead the entire amount you can be embezzled that round will be 20k, to be split among your embezzlers.

This is a powerful action, and in order to be protected you must rely on other players – but be careful, because there might be a backstab...

Cover up - 1 action
coverup for targetplayer (ex. Coverup for Arthur)
Description: Grants cover to a targetplayer. If targetplayer is outed, the outing will fail. Cannot target oneself. You can't be protected and covered up for at the same time.

Cover up is a nice way of hiding the action of crashing and taking other players by surprise. It is a significant sign of loyalty, but could be disastrous if there is enough embezzlement.

Company actions

Bribe - 1 action
bribe X targetcompany (ex. bribe 4000 beta)
Description: Send a bribe offer of X amount of money to join a targetcompany. Will be announced anonymously to all players in target company. Only a player who is employed at the targetcompany can accept it, and thus get you hired. The bribe will only be around for one round, after which it will be invalid. Your bribe cannot exceed your net worth.

Bribing is the only way to join a company with employees in it.

Accept bribe - 1 action
accept bribe X from targetplayer to targetcompany (ex. Accept bribe 4000 from arthur to beta)
Description: Accept a bribe offer of X amount of money from targetplayer to join targetcompany. You must be working for targetcompany at time of accepting in order to accept the bribe. If more than one player working for targetcompany accepts the bribe, it will be evenly split among them.

Enter empty company - 1 action
enter empty targetcompany (ex. Enter empty alpha)
Description: Targetcompany must have zero employees. You automatically start working for targetcompany. Multiple people can do this action during the round and they will all join the company. This can't be done in "advance" - the company must be empty when sending the action.

Quit Company - 1 action
quit targetcompany (ex. Quit gamma)
Description: Quit from targetcompany.

Whether to throw people off your tail or avoid crashings and CEO extortions, quitting can be a very strategic move.

Other actions

Investment - 0 action
invest X targetplayer (ex. Invest 20000 tyler)
Description: Target player receives X amount of money from you. Does not count towards actions done this round. Can only send one investment to each player per round, and amount is limited to under 100k. You can't invest more than your net worth.

Investment can be a quick way to show a player that you're their ally, and can also be effectively used as a feint to trick other players into believing betrayal has occurred among allies.

Action Precedence
Though all actions are de jure given attention all at the same time, actions do have an order to how play proceeds. The order is as follows, with the top being actions "done first":
-Actions that result in a change of employment for a player (in order: quitting, joining an empty company, accepting bribes, pink slip, crashing)
-Actions that result in a change of status for the round (in order: protect, cover up)
-Actions that result in a change in money (in order: embezzlement, bribing, investment, extortion, backstabbing)
-Outing

Initial Ruleset

Rex Furum - King of Thieves

Rex Furum is a diplomatic strategy game about corporate espionage and personal greed. Players are encouraged to work together, but more often are encouraged to work against one another. The winner at the end is whoever has the most money, and the only way to do that is by being the best thief and liar.

Story: Three companies vie to be the leader of the industry, and will stop at nothing to attain the title. These three companies are:

Alpha Ohrun Heavy Industries (알파 오른 중공업),

Betapoulos A.E. (βήταπουλος A.E.), and

the Gamma-Merck-Xiang Group.

They go so far as to hire unscrupulous corporate executives, the greediest and most conniving sharks the world has ever known... you.

Premise: Players of Rex Furum play as corporate executives working for companies. Their goal is personal greed – the best way to go about this is embezzling and working for multiple companies, which are both, of course, frowned upon, and punished with blacklisting and firing. Furthermore, everyone is equally ignorant of the activities of everyone else, making for a difficult situation.

The game is **12 rounds**, and each round lasts for **20 minutes**

Initial Play:

At the beginning of play, each player is randomly assigned to one of the three companies.

How to Win: At the end of the 10 rounds, be the player with the most money.

How to Lose: Be blacklisted (unable to work for a company) by all three companies, or be unaffiliated with a company for more than 1 round.

Turns

Every turn a player receives a salary from every company that they work for. The salary is $10,000*(number of executives who work for the company). This estimated salary is displayed at the bottom of the screen (but there is no guarantee you'll get it at the beginning of the round...)

During the rounds, players can do a total of **2 actions.**

Actions (Each of these is ONE ACTION):

- **Embezzle:** Player steals $5,000*(number of consecutive rounds they've been working for the company they are embezzling from). This can only be done to one company per turn.

  Example: embezzle from betapoulos

- **Bribe:** Offer a sum of money to another player to join a specific company they work for (This is the only way to start working for another company). If the player who was offered the bribe isn't actually working for the company, then they can still take the money.

  Example: bribe stephen 10000 to join gamma-merck-xiang

- **Accept a Bribe:** Accept a bribe from someone who wants to join the company specified. If you're not working for the company you can still get the money, but the person bribing will still not be hired.

  Example: accept bribe from jesse to join alpha ohrun

- **Quit:** Quit a chosen company. Players must always be working for at least one company!

  Example: quit betapoulos

- **Inform:** Inform a company about another player regarding their activities - if you suspect they may have multiple company jobs, or are embezzling this round.

  Example: inform alpha ohrun about gabe

6. A player who is caught red-handed will be blacklisted and then fired from that company, and have to give fees (salary for the next round). If that was their only company, they have one round to get hired by another company.

7. If the other player has not embezzled from that company last round, and is only working for one company, the informer will pay slander fees (salary for the round) to the accused.

8. If the company informed is one you work for – you get a one-time bonus of a doubled salary next turn.

- **Fact check:** Ask for a dossier on an individual player, who they are working for, if they have embezzled that round (Costs half the amount of salary received that round)

  Example: fact check on felix

- **Protection:** Get protection from a fact check (any inquiries will fall flat) (Costs half the amount of salary received that round)

  Example: get protection

Marketing Sheet

REX FURUM, the KING OF THEIVES

A new game meant to inspire

GREED

PARANOIA

ANGER

and

BETRAYAL

in you and your friends!

In REX FURUM you and your fellow players take on the role of

corporate executives out to make a buck in any way necessary –

extortion, embezzlement, bribery, backstabbing...

anything that will make you rich.

But there can only be one King of Thieves... will it be you?

- Easy to set up and play: Just need email and dedication.

- Simple to learn: With only 13 actions, Rex Furum can be picked up in 5 minutes, but that doesn't mean it isn't...

- ... Deep with tactics and mind games: Combine actions and work with others to form strategies and tricks that no one has thought of... or is able to defend against.

- Cooperative... or Competitive: Make allies and enemies, stab them both in the back and then get them on your side. It's the only way to survive.

- Designed with the busy in mind: A game of Rex Furum can be played in a single without needing to devote massive amounts of time... turns can be taken in as little time as it takes to write one 3-line email.

Playtests

Playtest 1

Participants:

Lillian Chan, Tom Corbett, Michael Capriso, Wai Kay Kong, Dave Bennett, Thom Och, Anthony Palma

Date and Time:

Monday April 11th, 2:20 PM – 6:50 PM

Observations During Playtest

Need for some sort of automation - while maybe writing a program to handle all the logic is unfeasible, there needs to be a bit more automation when doing things, other than an uncrafted Excel spreadsheet. Way too much stress! Was busy the entire 4 hours just typing and writing emails.

While expected, the amount of player non-participation is frustrating. Need a way to get players involved and interacting.

Player Feedback

Lillian

- Got confused about bribing, ambiguous wording.

- Stopped doing actions when top-ranked - too much suspicion to do anything else.

- Thought, "I can win by not playing" - made her not participate.

- "Confusing, but I felt I was getting into it after round 4... but it died again at round 10"

- Likes the idea of finding out who is out to get you.

- Dave, Lillian and Wai Kay didn't talk much despite being in the same room as they were playing.

- Felt it would have been much more fun if it was automatic and didn't have me sending emails.

- Both forms of bribing would be good - bribe to join, bribe to get people to join. "Then we can form teams."

Anthony and Thom

- Winners who did the least got rewarded.

- Rules seemed ambiguous on certain situations and configurations.

- It needs something to "keep people from sitting on their money."

- Once you're at the bottom, low incentive to do anything.

- Needed more motivation for doing things - if there was that, more stuff would happen.

- Needs more ways to come back.

- Impossible to make offensive move against someone playing it straight, or "honestly."

- It was pretty fun, and Anthony was checking his email constantly for the update.

Thom

- "It is possible that money times employees in company is not a good way to do salaries, since the top three finishers were all making more money from the beginning, unless I'm mistaken."

- "[Needs] Some way to get into a company that is closed..."

- "[Needs] Some way to lure someone to another company..."

- "Overall, I had a lot of fun playing, but it mostly became as much fun when Anthony and I started being in cahoots. "

- "I would definitely play again."

Analysis

Many tester comments were spot on, especially in regards to motivation issues within the game. A huge problem with this playtest was that Tom and Michael were leading almost the entire game with the exception of Lillian, because their company had the most people from the get-go and they received enormous salaries because of it - salaries that enabled them to not really have to do anything, and indeed, Tom only did 2 actions the entire game and Michael accepted one bribe and then did nothing else, eventually coming in third. The most active players were the most punished.

While blacklisting was a major concept of the game, blacklisting and even being able to "lose" the game seemed faulty. Dave was the only one in the playtest who lost, and the game felt bereft because of it, since, after all, this is a game primarily about people. Cutting people out just shortens the list of possible interactions that could occur each round.

Changes between versions 1 and 2

For greater flexibility, allowed for 3 instead of 2 actions per turn. Constrained already a bit too much.

Removed losing and blacklisting, which was taking away from the game's attribute of having as many players as possible to exploit and manipulate.

12 rounds felt a bit long – scaled it back to 10 rounds, as 12 had the last few rounds see players less engaged.

Removed informing, as it was far too passive and punishing for a very minmal reward(rendered moot also because blacklisting was also gotten rid of).

Added fourth company, Delta Telavara Armaments, linked to changing the salary to number of companies one was a part of – people need to make money, and I want to avoid a situation like everyone being a part of all of the companies.

Added many new moves, including a way to enter into companies with bribing, place contract and committing inside jobs, which will hopefully encourage players to work with one another, and outing ,which let's everyone have access to more information so they can make better less arbitrary decisions. These moves are built to be completely offensive,

Salaries changed from being how many people in a company to how many companies one was a part of, and prevents people from being too passive by just standing on the sidelines, letting people join the company and reaping the rewards.

Greater transparency: At the beginning of a round players now have access to each company's amount of employees, as well as the earnings players made last round. I think players felt a little too in the dark with this playtest, and need more logical basis towards selecting their actions outside of communicating with other players.

Playtest 2

Participants:

Chenyang Xia, Eric Butler, Anton Strenger, Zeina Tasar, Pei Hong Tan

Date and Time:

Wednesday April 13th, 1:25 AM – 5:41 AM

Observations during playtest:

Need example move lists in the instructions - people are getting confused.

Contracting upon target who is the only person in a company and only part of that company equals an auto-win for the target, unless another player joins to secret attack. The contract money also vanishes into thin air.

Bribe amounts vanishing if they're not accepted is ludicrous - the situation where accepting has no repercussions isn't necessarily a bad thing.

Need a reminder that if a player can't afford something but could accept a bribe that will allow them to afford it, then they are allowed to buy it.

Need way to really attack entrenched single-person companies.

Thought: Do I need to outlaw contractors from attacking?

Should I change bribing to enter a specific company instead of person+specific company?

Player Feedback

Eric

- Diplomacy is cool because it has in-person communication, but "email communication is mad awkward". You have to know players, which Eric didn't.

- He had no idea what anyone else was doing. "Oh, that person is in that company" is useless info. He felt people were constantly watching one another, and that for taking the lead, "gonna get sniped at the end, if I'm powerful midgame."

- Thought that 3 moves per turn was good.

- He protected every round, and did a lot of watching. Protecting every round isn't a bad thing, he felt.

- Watch is beneficial to no one but other people ."You break even," and that it is only advantageous for other players.

- He only made serious money from salary.

- Knew that whoever was in first would get screwed, and if screwed, you were done. (same dilemma as Lillian).

- "The punishment for getting a contract reward is too much, that the entire net worth being taken away just ruins a dude."

- Accepting contracts is a bad move - the contractor will be making at least twice as much as you.

- Inside jobs are useless in a 5 man game.

- It is very, very risky to attack others.

- Watch is overpowered, and discourages people. Too cheap – a player can affordably watch someone constantly, using a watch action every other round Suggestion: 40k as possible new watch price.

- Embezzling is really the only practical screw-over move.

- No real rivalry, mostly random and chaotic matches. until it became guy on top vs. everyone.

- Diplomacy had a great bit where everyone's moves are revealed, all at the same time. The revealing of it doesn't help the idea of the game as something you need to lie about for a good part of the story.

- Maybe focus on things that embarrass? (Same concept as Diplomacy – it was just fun to see what players have been up to and what Backstabs they perpetuate it. "Catching people doing backstabby things via monetary loss is great, but through shaming is better." Very heavy on schadenfreude.

- Suggestion: Put risk of exposure for moves at roughly 20-25% so people will be prone to betrayal with not too great of a risk.

- Suggestion: Maybe it necessary to backstab or quickly lose footing

- Enable picking individuals to screw over? (Right now embezzle will do it to everyone in a company)

- Talked to no one, except Anton (who was physically present).

Zeina

- Talked to Pei, and only then for a little bit.

- Didn't really understand that communication outside game boundaries of was possible/allowed.

- Confused about contract, and whether contracter needed to be in the same company as target.

- Watch and outing were confused together - watch is a poor choice of words, rather "inspecting? perhaps"

- Had to keep track of watches, confusing.

- Had fun, but it petered out midgame.

- Didn't know that Anton was helping Eric, which is great.

- "Game was interesting...."

Anton

- Fun, reminded him of playing Risk in high school and college - frustrating because he "sucks at those type of games."

- No communication really, he did more prediction of how risky others were going to be and adjusting accordingly.

- Not a lot of motivation to contact others.

- Would be fun as Mafia-type game where people sit together, but with a number-cruncher to automate things.

- Email is impractical for communication since there needs to be some back and forth

- 20 minutes is fine, but he wasn't doing a lot of wheeling and dealing

- Whoever was visible was a target. Early on it was him because he was outed, then Eric.

- Felt powerless without money. "Like being in the backseat"

- Game needed to be more clear that everything was simultaneous action.

- Would play again

Analysis

Far more involvement and action from players this time around. The fact that the playerbase was so small might have contributed to this. (5 vs. 7)

After reaching early lead, Anton was pretty much a target from then on out, with so many things happening to him he quickly reached the bottom of the rankings in terms of net worth. Eric also emerged as a target towards the end of the

game. The only noticeable alliance was between Anton and Eric, and even then, there was a "lord-serf" relationship, since Eric bailed Anton out of the negatives in exchange for loyalty, which was a development that I appreciated.

Changes between versions 2 to 3

Got back to 3 companies as opposed to four to accommodate new changes - makes game more claustrophobic, more players being in the same space.

Altered so that bribe money wouldn't vanish after not bribe accepted - instead now bribe money is not subtracted from an offer and is only taken away once the bribe is accepted. (Was kind of ludicrous to begin with.)

Replaced entering bribe with a new version that simply allows a player to offer a bribe to join a specific company. (Makes getting into different companies easier, which makes it less of a big deal and allows people to take more risks that would fire them.)

Players make 10k automatically at the start of every round, regardless of company affiliations. With company affiliations, people who happen to join 3 or 4 companies can then sit without doing any action and still be pretty highly ranked – but I want to make them work for it, instead of just coasting.

Embezzle now embezzles from specific players - embezzling power is linked to how many companies the embezzler is a part of. (10*number of companies, which provides a small reason why players would ever want to be in multiple companies.)

Protection changed to be inherently cooperative by being only able to protect another person. Hopefully this encourages people to seek out others to help them.

Placing contracts and inside jobs removed - complicated, and seemingly required too much communication given the time limit in order to pull off... Last playtest only saw the use of Contact once with Inside Job never being used.

Added quit company as a definite move - before it was ambiguous if it was allowed, as I hadn't included it in the actual rules.

Scrapped watch. I felt that it was too prohibitive of player behavior, that the paranoia of being under watch seemed way too restrictive. The risk of being fired was moot, also, since embezzle is now directed at players, which company would they be fired from? It'd be arbitrary to the actual embezzling action. It was also the last move needing money to perform, getting rid of it also makes all the moves consistent. Now money can only be traded, as opposed to disappearing into the void. We'll see whether this back and forth gets to be too much and be frustrating...

Outing has had its fee waived.

Protection has been changed to only be applicable to others, not oneself. Forces players to communicate in order to gain protection, while at the same time integrating them more and setting them up for (hopefully) backstabbing and underhanded moves. Whoever attempts embezzlement or outing will also have their names released to the protector.

Added new actions:

CEO extortion - 1 action. This eliminates people from simply sitting on their own companies, not letting people join and denying them.

enter empty company - 1 action. Now empty companies aren't just left to take up space, and encourages people to use "pink slip" (see below) for an easier time entering a company.

backstab - 1 action. Hopefully this incentives antagonizing partners.

pink slip - in lieu of watch being canceled, there needs to be a more direct method of firing people. Pink slip requires 2 people or more to target the same player, making people work together.

Crash & cover up - I still want there to be a big "heist" move, which requires planning and prep. We'll see if its too weak or too strong during testing, but I think it's a great chaotic move with a lot of opportunity to allies to turn against one another. Cover is also a much more personally involving move, stretching out the limits of loyalty and trust.

What I need to watch out for:

Constant back and forth cash flow - while this is suspenseful, it will become boring if it happens all the time - with the only new capital being injected the regular salaries, there is a real danger of people just casting out embezzles and hoping for the best - what I don't want is an arbitrary winner at the end who just happened to embezzle on the last round at the right time.

What might be considered: Making a move built for players who are working for all of the companies. Crash and cover up might need to be modified to be less/more advantageous. Some of these values are also wonky... 50k for a ceo takedown? it's the largest single sum... there is potential for abuse.

Playtest 3

Observations During Playtest

Anton brought up this situation: 1. A crashes alpha, B enter bribe into Alpha. 2. A crashes Alpha, A accept bribe Alpha - A accepts to let B in, B enters, gets crashed, then fired and fobbed of 20k.

Anton brought up the issue of action precedence, which my answer was "every move is simultaneous". Pressed further, there is actually a clearer answer which I added in the section "action precedence".

Should I make action precedence partially dependant on the order people write their 3 actions? (personally, at least)

What pros and cons of precedence being determined email received order?

Really want to see feinting with investments, i.e. a situation where someone is tricking everyone else by investing and then pretending they were backstabbed.

Anton and Eric completely involved with discussing other players and predicting/deciphering their movements, for almost the entire game.

Player Feedback

Eric

- No point to cover-up - just makes a fall guy, shifts money around without actually affecting anything. A very expensive way of showing allegiance
- Liked the length of it especially this time. Felt that 10 rounds could be separated into 3 sets of 3 rounds - build up, mid game, and end game.
- "Way better than the last game."

Zeina

- "Don't keep piling on debt until in the heavy negatives."

Pei

- "Pretty solid game!"
- Likes the length – maybe a few more rounds? Upped it to 12 or 15 rounds – maybe more long term strategy that way.
- Sometimes you have people who would get ahead and just sit on what they have, and then throughout last few rounds did gambles.
- it had the same fun of diplomacy without playing for 12 hours. Liked doing it over email – people can talk to each other without knowing who has spoken to who – advantage over diplomacy, since you know who's talked to who. This gives it that extra dynamic.
- Liked that he could work while playing.
- Feels both more randomly chaotic and in control than last game – tried out certain things, but hard to figure out what others are going for – personally was doing stuff that didn't make sense in order to spread confusion.

- JK was at disadvantage because he didn't understand some aspects of the game – also was distracted by doing other work. Probably big turning point was when Pei CEO extorted him.

- Pei fell asleep last two rounds, but honestly sounded very amiable about it! It was fun, a story to talk about.

- Like games like this cause its fun even if you don't win – you still get to really mess with people. "Satistfies my sociopathic streak."

- Pei thought of precedence like the way Magic the Gathering does the stack – certain kinds of actions happen before others. Understood that standing in the companies gets resolved before everything else. Credits it to Magic experience.

- Wondered about cover up – meant for protecting people in crash, or person crashing? Thought it had potential for adding extra depth to the game – needs at least 2 people to pull off something

- Wanted something like a protection-based backstab to add incentive to not protecting so much.

- Didn't realize the use of invest to feint – when Pei invested in Zeina for 50k, he then realized "Oh, this could be used to misdirect!!"

Analysis

Overall I am very careful to do adjustments now: the game seems fun and playable at this point, at least with the "regulars."

Human error on my part keeps happening (very relevant towards making this automated).

Realized that I need to limit on investing - prevents things like "give all my money in the last round so that x wins." This would probably quickly devolve all last rounds into picking a "champion" to represent certain factions and having money piled onto them.

Anton and Eric chose to become more of a griefing team - nicely enough, Anton also won the game, and both of them had a very fun time of it. I guess wanting to grief is actually a good attribute for being in this game. Should one of my new priorities be to make a game that encourages griefing? Is there a game like this around? (Probably.)

Regarding Anton and Eric talking about the game - right now the secret state of player employment and action allows for an odd set up, wherein because there is the earnings and number of employees information, there can be heavy analysis of the data to reverse engineer what actions were done last round (to a degree). I am generally all for this - the ambiguity in what your opponents are doing seem like a great contributor towards paranoia, and some skill can also be acquired in order to interpret the information.

Pei and Zeina were in an alliance, as well as Anton and Eric, this time as equals. JK was completely overwhelmed and lost by a significant margin by the end of the game, yet even he still had a fun time of it.

Exploitable tactics observed during this game : 1. Pink slip all employees of a company then do a CEO extortion on the solo survivor (who has no idea what has occurred). 2. Accept bribe then immediately crash company.

With the above exploitable tactics, that would be an ideal set up for a strategy game, where moves have these particular repercussions and the game mechanics enables these kinds of maneuvers - while alienating to newer players, I feel like it would bring more fun if there were tactics to explore.

Changes between versions 3 and 4

Added a definite order of precedence according to action categories.

Changed backstab to be more relevant – wasn't even used last playtest. Bribing was very seldom used, with investment probably being seen more often, but even then allies were too fierce in their loyalty to do anything. Protection was also troublesome, particularly because couples of players formed to protect each other almost every round... that sort of companionship is nice, but not fitting within the "lying, cheating" atmosphere of Rex Furum. If two players backstab each other, everyone is notified for the hilariousness of the situation (also good for feints).

Removed welcoming bribe and changed entering bribe to simply bribe. Welcoming bribe is somewhat useless – having more people at a company you are a part of is not really necessary unless you wish to crash it – and even then the level of play advances so quickly that people would quickly become wary of welcoming bribes. Was also never utilized in last playtest.

Cover up has been changed to 1 action to encourage usage. I think it's a particularly powerful move in terms of player experience – which is also why I'm making it more useful for the coverer to use, by removing the ability to out the coverer and crasher.

Playtest 4

Participants:

KP Pandurangaiah, Justin Sabo, Zeina Tasar, Antonio Santos, Luke Jayapalan, Eric Salim, Sean Brice, Christian Tsu-Raun, Matthew Stewart

Date and Time:

Monday April 18th, 6:12 PM-9:51 PM

Player Feedback

For player feedback, I made an email survey and sent it to the players
Playtest questions (fill these out if you could please!):

1. Did you have fun?

2. Did you ever communicate to any other players about the game?

3. Were there moments of planning, i.e. making strategies for several moves ahead?

4. Was the game fair?

5. Were there some concepts/ideas that you were confused with?

6. On a scale of 1-10, how confusing are the instructions?

7. How was the round duration? Was20 minutes too long? too short?

8. Were there rounds you opted to not participate in? If so, why?

Thanks again!
-Felix Park

KP

1. I had a lotta fun!

2. I did at the beginning of the round. Then realized could not trust anyone and hence stopped. ;)

3. Yes. Once or twice.

4. Yup. I feel so.

5. Investment Rule. I did not understand how that will benefit me if I invested on someone else!

6. 3.

7. Quite long.

8. Yes. I wanted to observe how others are making their move.

Antonio

I'm sorry for not being able to be a good playtester. The lack of time and tiresomeness didn't allow me to experience as I should have. Just a few thoughts about approaching the game as a beginner: instructions were a little bit confusing to me, and I couldn't really establish a relationship between some of the actions, and I was not sure of the outcomes of some others. That may be because of some vocabulary issues :)

The turn duration feels fine in 20 minutes for players that are going to stay in front of their computers during the whole duration of the game. Once I was fired from the company with only 10000 dollars, I really didn't know how to keep playing, but as I said, that is mainly because my brain is not working properly after softs, haha.

Congrats for the game, it seems that the test was successful.

Zeina

1. This time it was less fun for me. It could be because not all of the players were playing, thus providing free resource sometimes. I think there should be a certain number of players, maybe related with number of companies.

2. I didn't communicate with other players as much

3. Yes, but mostly I was thinking about combining the moves in the same round, rather than combining them in two rounds.

4. It seems like it but at some point, it is not that easy to catch up with other players.

5. A little

6. 3

7. It was too enough if you don't talk. If you talk with one person, perfect. If you talk with more may not be.

8. Yes, seeing other players not doing move, discouraged me. Staying out of the companies actually not that bad, especially if I can find a friend whom we can protect each other.

Maybe there should be more perks for being in a company. Maybe, cannot protect someone if you are not in a company? Because of two people are outside of a company and keep protecting each other, they can still earn money easily by extort or cover+crash together. Or maybe being in a company should be more rewarding. Being outside of a company no salary at all? Which I think more sense. If you don't let players go negative, you may not need to have auto-salary to balance it. The companies get 0 employees really fast, but if it is not the case, the person who wants to get inside a company may offer, one of his action?

This game is really fun, if you can communicate. I think it should be played in the same room when possible. =)

Luke

Hey, Felix,

1. Sometimes. Mostly when I felt I was able to speculate and plan a move, but this certainly wasn't all the time.

2. No. I was tempted to at the start of the game when I encountered Antonio in the kitchen. But I was not sure what information it was important for me to protect, and so I wasn't sure how valuable alliances might be or how much risk there would be of later betrayal. Too bad, as I think I would have enjoyed the game more if I had talked with the other players while playing.

3. Several moves ahead, no, not for me. I did put some thought into each move, but in a more immediate sense only.

4. It seemed like it, as far as I could tell.

5. In the instructions, because crashing takes two action points, I wasn't sure if I should write "crash gamma" once or twice. Turns out it wouldn't matter, since you would parse this yourself rather than a computer.

6. If 10 is the most confusing, I would give them a 6. The issue isn't exactly that they're unclear, it is that they don't illuminate how these moves yield strategy. For example, protecting a player and covering a player only make sense if I am already thinking in terms of alliances. At present, you have only these two sentences to address what is at the heart of the game . . .

    "Success means lying, cheating, embezzling, tricking, dropping promises, and playing crooked. Success means communicating with people who may stab you in the back."

    . . . and these are good, succinct sentences. But it would be nice if this aspect of the game were reflected more

in the instructions for each move. Not sure how to do this. Maybe you could classify moves by type:

```
-------------------------------
Alliances (formed and destroyed)
-------------------------------
Protection - 1 action
Cover up - 1 action
Backstab - 1 action
---------
Take down
---------
Crash - 2 action
Pink Slip - 1 action
```

Etc. That might help players understand the big picture of the game better on their first playthrough.

7. It seemed okay, especially if people will talk to each other in-between. If enough talking happens, even longer than 20 minutes might work. But if people just try to multitask the game in the background of other work, then it could be argued that the rounds are too slow.

8. I don't think so. I did miss one, but mainly because of a phone call.

Sean

- Didn't play because he could not understand the instructions at all.

Analysis:

I think a major hurdle of this playtest were players simply not understanding the game and its mechanics, because of how obtuse the instructions were. This has been a problem since the beginning of the game, and now that I'm on my last playtest, I'm going to rewrite and fix it.

For a very substantial part of the game Zeina and KP weren't employed, quitting early on and kind of just sitting there – KP actually came in to win the game in the last three rounds – two companies were empty, and with proper luck and timing he managed to embezzle from multiple people, quit the company before he could be CEO extorted, and collected the slander fees.

Many players were not active at all. Sean and Christian were completely non-participative. Seeing actions from a majority of other players was rare, also. Eric and Antonio were also fairly inactive. I think that the combination of having only 20 minutes to decide on a move, the instructions, and the fact that people were kind of busy at the time of the playtest all contributed towards this lack of activity.

Changes between versions 4 and 5

Instructions almost completely rewritten, with side commentary on actions, a different layout, and clearer wording.

To encourage players to actively seek employment, salary isn't given unless a player is employed in at least one company.

Playtest 5

Player Feedback

Jake

- (On incentives for multiple company joining) That doesn't seem compelling enough to me. For a game I play on the side it's all impulse for me and my impulse is go to businesses for salary reasons, not tactics

- If you can't spend into the negative it seems broken that you can steal into the negative or go negative at all - stealing should be a risk as well that it might not have payoff otherwise you can just get everyone picking on one player

Eric

- Not as fun as the third playtest.

- No backstabbing again this time. Factions formed immediately but were never broken ever. When it devolves into 2 v. 2 what happens? If backstabbing were even more rewarding, maybe it would be worth it? But would it ever be worth it? If you betray your partner then you'll get the crap embezzled out of you.

- Backstabbing in the late game: he didn't want to do that, since at that point his partner's victory was his victory. If backstab was 100k maybe it'd be worth it – a partnership is worth 100k for three rounds.

- Diplomacy manages to have backstabbing because maybe of 7 players, and the asymmetry of the starting positions. In Rex Furum everyone basically starts on the same foot.

- Felt companies took backseat – didn't mean anything anymore. The third playtest were like "Musical chairs" - this time it's like "gotta be in a company, oookay." Very mechanical.

- Not enough outings this game. Wanted to see all the hilarious things going on with people betraying each other... definitely not enough visibility of that. Wanted to engage in schadenfreude. Couldn't get a bead on anything happening.

- Part of it was that 3rd playtest was that they were still exploring, figuring out strategies, and alliances only formed after a while.

- CEO extort "nerfed", wasn't worth going for it when you could just embezzle.

- Embezzlement should have some risk because it is constantly being used, then protect is constantly needed, then deadlock. If there were more of a triangle of actions (rock paper scissors), maybe it'd be better. Now it's protect and turtle vs. be all out offensive. Protect kind of sucks. Suggestion: Certain actions garner certain protections.

Anton

- More fun to be in alliance and screw others over than backstab. Depends on the type of player, though.

- Likes to figure out what happened between rounds, but if there is a large money change then he can't figure anything out.

- Also felt like it wasn't as fun as 3rd playtest.

- Everyone played it like a team game, which didn't really bring out many of the mechanics meant to be fun.

- Figures a lot of responsibility is on players to bring out the best in the game.

- Would like more visibility of what happens.

- If 5-6 players, if 1 or 2 were outed on average every turn it would be better.

Analysis

On the whole this playtest blew the doors wide open on the game. Crashing was rare, again there was no backstabbing, protect was used almost every round (Zeina, Jake, and Pei, who were not working completely together and whose protection was patchwork, were incredibly disadvantaged), and overall it was agreed among the playtesters that a certain "magic" had been lost between playtest 3 and this one.

I'm inclined to agree with Eric's assessment, that the instant formation of ally networks made for gameplay that devolved into a constant protect-and-embezzle cycle where luck was more likely to steal you money than anything else. Again there was no real incentive for backstabbing if you had a good ally – players were more inclined to act like a team than as individuals, since teams are always at an advantage with the ability to protect one another. Reframing the game as a individualistic endeavor should also be a priority.

No point in bribing to join a company if everyone hears about it.

Changes between versions 5 and 6

Backstab has been made far more vicious and worthwhile – now 20k*(number of companies both involved parties are working for). However, the penalty for failure is 30k paid to the targetplayer. If both targetplayers fail they are fined 30k, which simply vanishes.

Protect now only protects against embezzlement, and cover up can be applied to any targetplayer, and prevents only outing. A player can't be protected and covered up for at the same time.

Outing done the same way if targetplayer is covered up.

Solo protection allowed, but with the caveat you can stil lget 20k embezzled from you at most, split among the embezzlers.

Embezzlement is further penalized by having an embezzlement failure announced everywhere. Doesn't apply to when a person is protecting themselves.

Crash also made highly charged, now 30k per head.

Bribes have been changed to be anonymous, and is only announced internally throughout applied company.

CEO extortion has been increased to 60k for a success, but a 30k slander fee.

Delta company brought back for greater potential reward with embezzlement to balance out some of the reward increases in other offensive actions.

This new revision is designed to create and harbor more independent movement among players as opposed to solid factions, once again providing more incentive to backstab, and is also designed to increase the risk/reward across the board for almost all offensive actions. With this, my concerns are that it might return to the problems of the first ruleset, where people acted without one another and were very timid towards doing offensive moves for risk of failure. Hopefully this is not the case with this set of actions.

If possible, though this is one of the game's attractions, I'd like to see if it would work just as well without a time limit, or maybe even better. Where the next round starts as soon as every player has submitted... I don't know how that would go, but it'd be a nice test to see how well it would work.