

Struggle for life?

Wolf Pack is a short and easy-to-learn board game by Jorge Diaz, where 2 to 4 players can take on the role of Alpha Wolves to manage their packs to survival.

Each player starts the game with an Alpha Pair whose objective is to hunt and survive by increasing their packs. The game lasts two years, divided into turns interpreted as seasons. A wolf pack has to hunt at least once every season to avoid losing members. Herds follow a certain path and they move one slot every season, except the cattle, who stays in the ranch, but whose killing increases the threat bar of the Hunter. Each herd has a number representing the minimum number of wolves in the pack required to kill it. The number of movements and actions of Wolf Packs is determined by a dice roll at the beginning of the turn. Depending on the season, players can take other actions as well than hunting: they can call for a new member, raise pups, attack each other or join together.

Playing the game with only two players resulted in a little bit boring experience, but my overall impression is that the game in its current state can serve as a basis for a really fun and great game. The short setup and the simple mechanics make it a good family game, understandable by children as well, and it has elements appealing for all player types: achievers can focus on increasing their pack number, griefers have the means to ruin other peoples packs by attacking them or making it hard for them to get food, socializers can focus on diplomatic aspects when there are more than two players and explorers can find it exciting to work out the best tactics.

The mechanics, the board and other components along with the element of pups and the hunter reach their goal in the sense that they easily immerse players at beginning, but at the current state of the game, the mechanics lack some elements that could lead to a dynamic where players could really get the feeling of this struggle for life.

For example, in the case of two players an exploit-like element appears thanks to the liberty of using up movement points or the computability of movements of herds: both players can just move one, to the place where the chosen herd arrives in the next turn. As a solution I would suggest forcing players to use up all of their movement points or, even better, making the moves of herds more random (e.g. the first player of a turn should have to roll a D6 to determine how many tiles the herds advance on their path during the given turn). This could even help to reach the design goal of transferring the experience of the struggle for life.

To implement more opportunities for using tactics and strategies, and to increase immersion, the design could also profit from exploiting the concept of seasons and the different kinds of territories more deeply than they are at their current state. At the moment, seasons are used only to determine when pups can be raised, but all seasons could have its speciality (for example you could call a new member only in fall or in winter, because you don't have to be cautious for you pups during these periods, etc.). This is the case with territories as well: all of them could have a special "ability" without making the

game too complicated, as this could simply be written on the board itself. As an example, water could give bonus to raise pups.

It wasn't a problem for us that only having a larger pack can lead to victory, but I can imagine that implementation of some new elements could improve game balance and work against the positive feedback loop: for example, Wolf Packs with more than six members should have to hunt for at least 4 points in fall, and they would lose two members if they don't succeed. This could also apply to packs raising 3 or 4 pups in the summer. This also means that I would leave the number of pups to raise as it is now, because I think it is a great opportunity to increase their pack for those who have lost too many members.

Another balance issue can be the order of players: in some situations it can cause a positive feedback loop for the first (and the second?) player, because they can hunt cheaper many times. A good solution may be to redefine the order every season.

Some additional notes:

I think in the case of two players, the playtime is a bit too short, players can avoid every kind of interaction too easily, I would increase it to 3 years.

As for the components and the rules: I would clarify in the ruleset, where exactly should we place food and the wolves at the beginning, also, I would make it explicit that these are only the Alpha Pairs that players should move in practice.

It wasn't totally clear for us whether the Cattle should also be two-sided or not.