

Giga Grunts Playtest – Monster Design:

NOTE: ALL IDENTIFYING INFORMATION HAS BEEN REMOVED FROM THESE TESTS

Design Goals: Design an antagonist which is threatening but can ultimately be seen as sympathetic without relying too heavily on animation or dialogue.

Object(s) of Test: Concept art and models of the different iterations of our monster design. Designs were presented in a non-chronological order such that the design evolution be obfuscated, and different designs may be better contrasted.

Design 1:



Design 2:



Design 3:



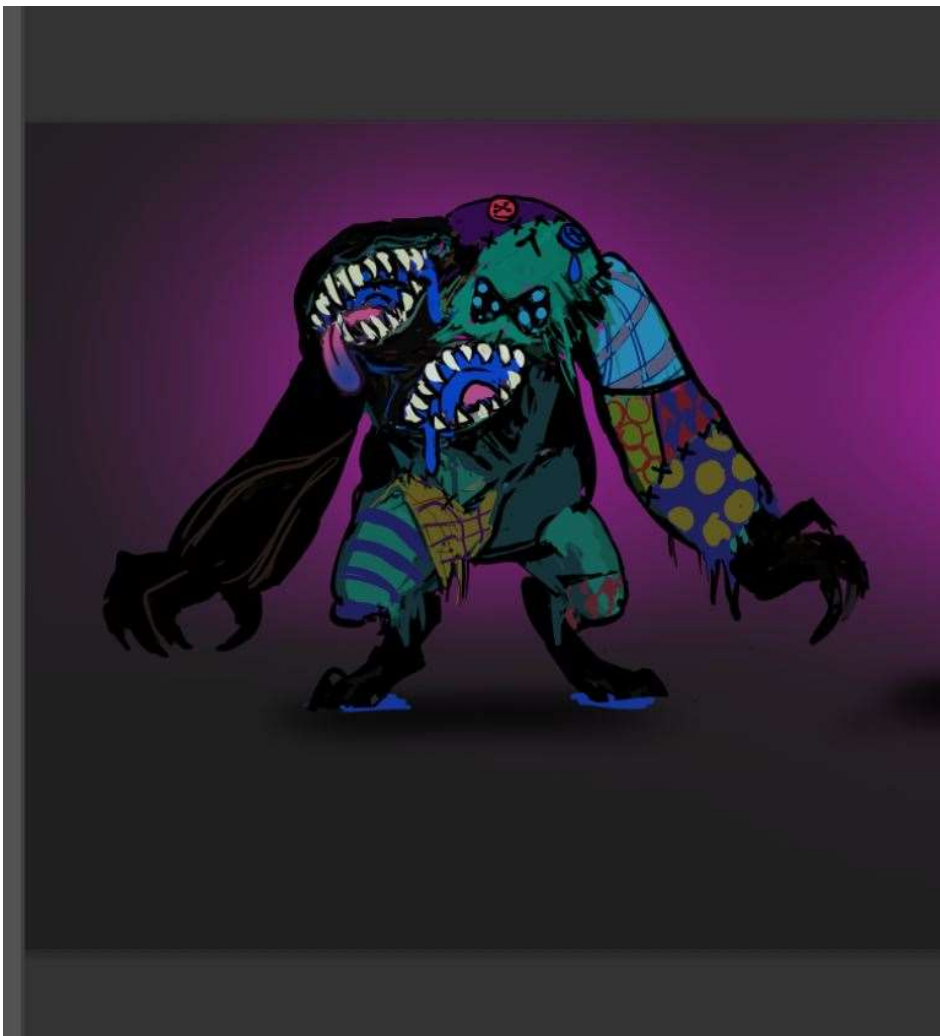
Design 4:



Design 5:



Design 6 (introduced 1/25/2022):



Method of Test:

Testers were shown each design, and asked the following questions as they observed:

What is your immediate emotional response to this creature? Why?

What do you believe this creature is thinking or feeling? What do you think motivates it? Why?

How do you think you would engage with this creature? Why?

Do you believe this creature could be sympathetic? Why or why not?

Is there anything you would change to make this creature more sympathetic (or more threatening)? Why?

After viewing all five designs, testers were asked the following question while being able to reference the images:

Which design do you think does the best job of conveying being outwardly threatening but ultimately sympathetic?

In some cases, answers prompted further discussion, clarification, etc.

Test #1:

Test took place at 6:27pm, January 20, 2022, in their apartment.

Notes:

Design 1:

Pre-questioning notes – they stated that they liked the colors of this design, as well as the design of the back.

Immediate response – Their immediate impression was of a swamp or sewer monster, discussing its coloration, but noted the “neon vibes” from the background and certain color details, stating that they would expect it to be accompanied by a synth sound cue and that it reminded them of retro horror.

Motivation – They didn’t believe that this creature was particularly intelligent, and that it was motivated by hunger or wanted to “bite some people,” pointing out the two sets of teeth. At one point they wondered if part of the design showed the creature wearing pants or a loincloth, which would suggest intelligence, but doubted this based on the rest of the design. While they did bring up the possibility of it being a “friend”, they found the prospect dubious. They also pointed out what could possibly be a bloodstain on the creature’s back, though noted it may be something else, suggesting a shell.

Action response – Given the intimidating nature of the creature their immediate response would be to run, unless it was specifically portrayed as nonthreatening, with them mentioning speaking or gestures as ways of indicating safety.

Sympathy – The creature being sympathetic to them would rely on actions. They mentioned attempts at communication would make the creature more approachable, but when told that wasn't possible, was far vaguer on how to indirectly convey that this creature could be understood.

Changes – For visual design, while they liked the base idea, they suggested possibly going down to one mouth and giving it “accessories” or visual tweaks to indicate its nature. In terms of action, they noted that specifically seeing it in pain or fear would help them sympathize with the creature.

Designer Comments – This design seems good for conveying the intimidation of the character, but any sympathy would rely on specific animations or narrative support.

Design 2:

Pre-questioning notes – They recognized this as a “different version of the same boy,” saying that they particularly liked this design, stating that it fulfilled many of their criticisms of the first design. This design gave them more of a sense of the creature being in pain, with the plushie face creating interest and sympathy. Overall, it is scary and if it attacked they would try to defend themselves, but they also felt bad for it, and if they saw it in pain or trying to help itself (they threw out trying to use a bandage as a possibility), they would want to help.

Immediate response – They particularly enjoyed the spookiness of this design, stating that it had a bit less of a synth aesthetic and reminded them more of a cryptid. They noted the tattered fabric texture as a point of focus (though noted it might get lost in motion), with that and the plushie face making them want to know more about the creature and its story.

Motivation – while the previous creature gave them a sense of hunger, this one was more enigmatic (or perhaps “no thoughts head empty”). The tearing and stitches gave them a sense of it being in pain, while the tilted head gave them a sense of it being almost doglike, conveying confusion, curiosity, concern, and drive. Overall, this one conveyed a strong presence with a more simple, animalistic mentality – as they put it, “I don't think he could do math.”

Action response – they felt that if they saw this thing “shambling” around near them they'd likely run, but at a safer distance they'd want a closer look, as its appearance makes them curious about its nature and what it might be doing.

Sympathy – They stated that this design had a lot of what would have made the first design more sympathetic to them. They specifically noted the tattered textures as making it feel like this was a creature that was struggling. They reiterated that the plushie elements made them curious about the creature's backstory, wondering if it was maybe once a person, or if it picked it up because it found it nice or comforting. They compared his perception of the creature to a dog with rabies – something that they felt sympathy for, but still found scary and couldn't do much for.

Changes – They didn't see any changes they would make to the visual design, stating that the rest would depend on its movements.

Designer Comments – This design seems to strike the balance of threat and sympathy, with a good bit of animalism as well – I find the “rabid dog” comparison particularly apt for our story.

Design 3:

Pre-questioning notes – Not much discussion, but they did give an interested “Ohhhh”.

Immediate response – Their first focus was on the claws, which they described as feeling much meatier than the previous designs' more shadowy feel. They described this creature as a victim of circumstance, comparing it to Lisa Trevor from *Resident Evil*.

Motivation – This design, while similarly “no thoughts head empty” to the previous (which they attributed largely to the pose), gave a greater impression of violence and intent. They mentioned that they imagined this one living in a shack and storing food, indicating an impression of self-awareness and isolation.

Action response – Their first instinct would be to run, particularly if it chased them, but if it remained stationary, they would back away slowly and observe from a distance. Again they noted that the plushie texture intrigued them, specifically pointing out that in a puzzle game they would be primed to be curious about the creature.

Sympathy – They stated that they believed the creature could be sympathetic, noting the fabric texture and the rounded head shape, and stating that this monster felt less immediately aggressive and interesting in a “weird dumb dog kind of way” – while the first felt actively predatory, they could possibly feed this one a squirrel.

Changes – They had some interesting mixed feelings about this design. They found the second mouth offputting, particularly in its location over the heart, finding that and the asymmetry to be threatening and give the impression of “constant gnawing.” They felt that animation and body language would give clearer impressions of intent.

Designer's Comments – While we want the monster to be sympathetic, we don't want it to be friendly or nonthreatening. This design seems to be a bit of a blank slate – it has potential depending on how it is framed.

Design 4:

Pre-questioning notes – They immediately noted the muscularity of this design, calling it a “buff boy”

Immediate response – Their immediate description of the creature was “jock”, stating that they believed this creature “runs.” Whereas they could “get past” the previous designs, this design was “significantly more intimidating”, with two large mouths and “big buff arms”, their only hope being the possibility of hiding from the blind creature. As they stated later, even though this creature didn’t give them the same sense of height and size as previous designs, its bearing and physicality gave it a more threatening impression. Per their own terms, this design is “significantly less sympathetic” – they have no inclination to approach or study this creature, believing it would simply kill them.

Motivation – Whereas previous designs seemed to be in pain due to hunches, proportions, etc., this creature seemed far more motivated by hunting, consumption, and active malice – if this creature is nice deep down, it would require a serious moment of weakness to convey that through its intimidating exterior.

Action response – They would immediately run and hide, hoping it wouldn’t find them. It being so physically imposing, they wouldn’t want to risk being anywhere near it if it got angry.

Sympathy – They didn’t think this monster harbored any complexity, stating that it was “too perfect” compared to the tattered, hunched, hobbling designs seen previously. This creature is “the Chad monster” that knows exactly what it’s doing when it crushes you.

Changes – While they appreciated the more humanoid hands compared to the previous designs’ claws, this design gave them severe “murder vibes.” Perhaps a hobble or backstory details would convey more about its character, but to them it seemed “just overall a powerhouse.”

Designer Comments – This design is effectively terrifying, but doesn’t fit the archetype of our monster as something pained and sympathetic.

Design 5:

Pre-questioning notes – this design gave them a definite impression of being hurt and needing to be patched up. This one gave them a similar “cryptid” impression to the second design, with them referring to this as “Chad’s [Design 4] flawed little brother”. They found this design intimidating but not as much of an immediate threat, without massive claws and the blue blood of the mouth giving him less of a sense of biting or attacking.

Immediate response – This design was less of an immediate threat, being clearly dangerous but with time to observe or escape. This one gave them a strong sense of it being animalistic and doglike, particularly noting the flopping tongue, referring to it as a dog with a thorn in its paw, in pain but still moving.

Motivation – This one gave an impression of being a hunter, but with an undercurrent of pain and sickness. This design felt “the most animal like,” like it would want to eat them but could also be possibly befriended. They noted the fabric “jumpsuit” as something intriguing and pitiable, wondering if it was okay and “does he like bunnies,” getting them invested in the character.

Action response – Their initial response would be to run, but if given the chance to approach it safely they might attempt to befriend it, give it food and medical attention. They noted how its attack positions seemed unsteady and hobbling, and how it seemed easily confused in its alert pose based on its heads looking different directions, as evidence for it being less threatening and intelligent.

Sympathy – They felt that there was probably more to the creature than being a spooky monster, noting the plushy aspects, but that it was still very much a monster that would need to be observed to be understood.

Changes – They didn’t have any particular notes on anything needing change.

Designer Comments – This one could work well for us, leaning into the animalism and rawness of its drive.

Final Rankings: They preferred Design 5 for its “dumb dog” vibes, with Design 2 being a runner up. The first and third designs they gave a “maybe” while the fourth was a resounding no.

Test concluded at 6:56pm.

Test #2:

Test took place at 6:59pm, January 20, 2022, in their apartment.

Notes:

Design 1:

Pre-questioning notes – As a passionate horror fan with a penchant for monstrous creatures, they immediately liked this design, noting the multiple mouths, “fins”, and asymmetry of the character.

Immediate response – They took a strong liking to the character, noting their preference for dangerous, bizarre creatures.

Motivation – They read this creature as “feral and hunting,” noting the forward posture and large snarling mouths, comparing it to the Demogorgon from *Stranger Things*.

Action response – Their inclination in terms of gameplay would be to avoid the creature, noting that its build made it look like it could move quite fast, likely on all fours.

Sympathy – They noted the stitches and different body tones, giving them a sense of this creature being a creation or experiment, with feelings of pain and hatred.

Changes – They stated that sympathetic elements and signifiers of its past would need to be played up more, as currently their assumptions about the creature were based largely on a single patch of back skin.

Designer Comments – This one captures the terror and wrongness of the creature, with avenues to making it more sympathetic.

Design 2:

Pre-questioning notes – Per their own telling, “this one I vibe with a lot more” – while the previous was more sharp and predatory, this one was less ferocious. They noted their appreciation of the color scheme and the “sad split cat face”, though wished it was a bit more horrific and hunched.

Immediate response – This one felt “softer” than the previous design, less immediately scary.

Motivation – They read this creature as “curious,” noting the angles of the mouths. They would still be inclined to avoid the creature, but less out of inherent terror than an understanding of the gameplay and situation. They possibly wouldn’t run immediately, taking a moment to understand the situation.

Action response – If given the opportunity, they would take some time to study the creature. They read it as less aggressive, expecting it to give chase if the player caught its attention but not to actively hunt, and possibly able to be snuck around. This design was less “oh god I need to get out,” and more something that was spooky but could be dealt with.

Sympathy – Especially compared to the first design, this design carried a lot of sympathy, particularly in the plushy elements.

Changes – They discussed how they would combine elements of both previous designs, keeping the storytelling elements of this design (the plushy face, angled mouths, color palette) while applying the silhouette and ferociousness of the first.

Designer Comments – This design captures much of the sympathy we’re going for, but could perhaps use some beefing up in the scare department – possibly through redesigns, but also possibly through animation.

Design 3:

Pre-questioning notes – Their reaction was apprehensive and critical, feeling that the model was bulging and uneven, and not in a stylized way – it felt inorganic to them, like the mouths were just stuck on and there was little asymmetry to it.

Immediate response – They found this design “funny looking”, comparing it to Belial from *Basket Case* – something they can tell is meant to be frightening, but that just comes across as amusing.

Motivation – This creature seemed unintelligent to them, particularly with the mouths hanging open (like a bad Audrey II).

Action response – They would “just blitz past it” – unless there was a serious implication of danger in gameplay, it wouldn’t feel threatening to them.

Sympathy – They believed that it could be sympathetic by virtue of it being “big and stupid” and not knowing what it’s doing.

Changes – They felt the creature’s silhouette didn’t feel organic, specifically pointing out the claws. They felt the plushy elements of this design were lacking, wanting to see it more tattered and “ripped through.”

Designer Comments – Based on this response, this design lacks the intimidation factor and complexity we’re going for with this creature.

Design 4:

Pre-questioning notes – This design was “a bit better” than the previous, but had some unusual aspects. They specifically noted that the lips of this creature felt too defined and organic, without the shadowy aspect of previous versions, and had the weakest head. While they found it better than Design 3, they preferred the earlier design’s proportions. Overall, they felt this design didn’t match the tone of the others, having a very different feel.

Immediate response – They found this design the weakest of the bunch, and stated that the quality of designs had been decreasing throughout the test. They found the creature’s expression somewhat comical, particularly that of the chest mouth, and felt the limbs didn’t have enough bulk, commenting that it “looks like it skipped leg day”.

Motivation – The mouths and their expressions gave them conflicting senses of this creature’s nature – while the head mouth felt scheming and predatory, the chest mouth felt unintelligent.

Action response – Similar to the second design, they would try to observe and understand it before acting.

Sympathy – They didn’t feel this creature had anything sympathetic to it, with no implied backstory or complexity, just being a beast.

Changes – They stated that this design felt very “mid” while pulling out their phone, which doesn’t bode well for the intrigue of the design – this to them was the most boring design, “just a dude with a weird mouth.” They suggested making it bulkier and modifying the mouths, and noted that if it was meant to be sympathetic it would need something similar to the plush aesthetic of the previous designs. They felt that this design was disconnected from the others, the only similarity being its number of mouths.

Designer Comments – Once again, this design somewhat captures the intimidation factor but fails to garner any sympathy or complexity.

Design 5:

Pre-questioning notes – They found that this design “kind of does what I wanted” from the first two designs, fulfilling some of what they found lacking. They enjoyed the more bestial feel of this design, albeit taking some issue with its froglike posture.

Immediate response – They found this one more scary, which he greatly appreciated.

Motivation – This one they identified as a hunter going after the player, noting the open mouth and hanging tongue.

Action response – They would flee, but pay attention to its actions. They noted that the creature had no eyes so would perhaps be sensitive to sound, though admitted that they may not have caught onto that had they not been looking at several similar designs in a row.

Sympathy – They appreciated the return of the plushy elements and what they brought to the character, noting how the creature looked torn out from the fabric, though posited that this version may be too animalistic and driven to be sympathized with.

Changes – They recommended giving it a more human posture and more distinct head(s) – having the creature hunch worked, but this one’s hump made it feel more like a frog. Otherwise they felt this design balanced sympathy and threat.

Designer Comments – While this design may be somewhat more predatory and active than we’re going for in story, the elements of personality seem sound.

Final Rankings: They named Design 5 as the most effective design, with Designs 2 and 1 following it up. Designs 3 and 4 they found the weakest.

Test concluded at 7:26pm.

Test #3:

Test took place at 7:28pm, January 20, 2022, in her apartment.

Notes:

Design 1:

Pre-questioning notes – They found this design “really cool,” with an air of mutation and classic horror, noting the multiple mouths and sense of limping.

Immediate response – Their response was uncertain and uneasy, not knowing what to make of it with its mutated figure, but feeling that it was effective.

Motivation – They believed that there wasn’t much to this creature beyond capturing or killing anything it saw. Noting the lack of eyes, they believed it would have a low perception of its surroundings, perhaps having enhanced hearing.

Action response – Their immediate response would be to get away, possibly trying to limit movement or noise to prevent it taking notice.

Sympathy – They felt there was a chance to find this creature sympathetic, possibly being able to find a way to befriend or control it.

Changes – They felt this design did a good job riding the balance of scary and sympathetic. They felt that if she were to change something it would be major, though couldn't put their finger on what might be adjusted, while noting the mouths and the color scheme.

Designer Comments – Again, this design captures the monstrousness and mutation (or in our case sickness) of the creature, while sympathy is perhaps a bit shaky in the face of its predatory impression.

Design 2:

Pre-questioning notes – They noted how this design leaned into the mutated aspect of the character with the protruding mouths, oversized extended claws, and hunched posture, giving the creature greater character and impression of wrongness.

Immediate response – Their instinct was not to engage with it, to a greater extent than the first, as they found this design more immediately frightening.

Motivation – They read this creature like the first, being driven to pursue what it saw.

Action response – They would try to avoid this creature, distancing and taking cover to avoid being seen, as they felt it would give chase if it saw them.

Sympathy – While perhaps not evident at first glance, they felt this design leaned more into the sympathetic elements of the previous, with a sense that this wasn't its original form. From this they wondered if this creature wasn't always hostile and that, if it were attacking out of fear, it could potentially be controlled.

Changes – Rather than any specific changes, they suggested perhaps tweaking its design based on the game state (e.g. quadrupedal and claws out for hostile, standing and claws down for moments of greater sympathy).

Designer Comments – Their perceptions of the monster and its mutations hit its reactive behaviors and story progression right on the head.

Design 3:

Pre-questioning notes – They appreciated the 3D model, particularly how it conveyed the loose, rippling skin and lumpy mouths for a good first impression of mutation. They see the frightening aspects but also the potential for sympathy, particularly in its current upright posture. They later stated that this felt like a good translation of the 2D concepts into 3D.

Immediate response – They stated that they would find this more fearful in the game's setting, particularly with enhanced detail and in a low-light situation.

Motivation – This one gave a sense of primal hunt and capture instinct, but again perhaps motivated by fear and mutation.

Action response – Again the first response is to run for cover, not wanting it to catch up.

Sympathy – As before, the design gives the initial impression of a dangerous mutant, but with potential in behavior (posing, movement) to be more complex.

Changes – As stated, the impression of this one would depend on animation, posing, and expression, possibly emphasizing the claws and hunch during times of hostility.

Designer Comments – This appraisal was more favorable, with many of the same notes as Design 2.

Design 4:

Pre-questioning notes – To them, this design was an interesting contrast to the previous designs, feeling more humanoid than monstrous, though it still had some sense of mutation with the chest mouth.

Immediate response – While this design would have them “freaked out,” it wasn’t to the same degree as the previous, with this design feeling more grounded and human. They pointed out the humanoid hands and less exaggerated silhouette, making it less immediately scary.

Motivation – This one felt like “someone” experimented on, with them thinking that it would perhaps be trapped in its own thoughts.

Action response – Their first response would be avoidance, but they felt that if they were more equipped or had certain abilities that it could be evaded, distracted, or stunned. This difference came down to it feeling more humanoid and therefore susceptible to human methods of being stopped.

Sympathy – The humanity of this design made it more immediately sympathetic to them, particularly with the current neutrality and possible high expressiveness of the mouths. This creature felt more intelligent and aware, and therefore more controllable.

Changes – Their major complaint was that the hands clashed with the bulky body, suggesting making them larger and spiked to complete the intimidation.

Designer Comments – While this design is sympathetic, it’s too much too quickly, too human without the monstrousness or inscrutability the story needs.

Design 5:

Pre-questioning notes – They immediately “like[d] this one”, enjoying the contrast of the dark colors and saturated blues for a low light environment.

Immediate response – This one felt more threatening, particularly with the dripping blue blood and “mossy” color and texture, making it feel more natural but still mutated. The detail of the mouth and contrast with the darker tones draws attention to the fangs and their immediate danger.

Motivation – This creature is motivated by a killing instinct, more inherently chaotic and violent than confused. The forward-leaning posture gave them an impression of hunting and attacking more than roaming and reacting, while the color contrasts of black, green, and blue drew the eye to the claws and teeth.

Action response – They didn't feel they could hide from this one, opting to run and hope it didn't catch up. They felt that only outside forces or objects could hinder it, and that early players likely would have no defense against it.

Sympathy – While this design was more threatening, they felt there was still potential for sympathy, but had less of a grasp on how exactly making it so would be done, particularly while it engaged with the player.

Changes – They were less immediately certain of how to render this design more sympathetic, again suggesting animation, posing, and expression but sounding more dubious. When the possibility of expressing fear was suggested, they felt it could work given signs of mutation and experimentation they noticed on a later look, but they were unsure based on their first impression of whether it could be scared.

Designer Comments – This design is perhaps a bit too monstrous, too active a threat, but there are certainly effective elements here that could be used.

Final Rankings: They named Design 5 as their preferred iteration, followed by Design 2. Designs 4, 3, and 1 followed those in the ranking.

Test concluded at 8:01pm.

Test #4:

Test took place at 3:11pm, January 25, 2022, over Discord call.

Note: This tester had just previously played the Week 3 prototype build of the game. They also indicated a strong aversion to horror media.

Notes:

Design 1:

Pre-questioning notes – Their first response was of disgust and fear, taking a moment to figure out the mouths (which they at first thought were eyes). They later noted that the gash in the shoulder “kind of looks like a face,” which made it scarier.

Immediate response – They read this creature as “definitely mean,” something they didn't want to interact with or be near. They found its pose quite large and threatening, comparing it to a standing bear, noting the muscles, teeth, and arms at player-grabbing level.

Motivation – They believed that this creature was motivated by little else than hunger and eating, noting the two mouths.

Action response – They were inclined to run away and not engage.

Sympathy – Their initial response was no, but they did make note of the details such as the fabric “clothing.” While they believed that at one point it might have been a sympathetic “buddy,” in its current state it seems too monstrous and single-minded – they’re more sympathetic to what it used to be than what it is. If it showed serious weakness, such as a display of sadness, then perhaps they would be able to see past the fear.

Changes – They wondered if, based on the cloth and patterns, if it was once a person. If so, they recommended adding to the elements of its past, giving it more detail or an object to carry to give it a sense of personality and past.

Designer Comments – This design seems to turn up the intimidation factor, but there is room to develop sympathy in the plush elements and behaviors.

Design 2:

Pre-questioning notes – This elicited a similar fear reaction to the first, with them noting the more pronounced plush face on the shoulder, which they found “gross.”

Immediate response – They found this design “weirdly more feminine,” noting the tattered, shadowy texture in the back which reminded them of hair, and its less muscular, more bottom-heavy design. They found the elongated arms and multiple faces creepy, though found this design less immediately threatening than the first.

Motivation – They found this creature “interesting”, less driven and more enigmatic – they imagined it running up and grabbing them, but perhaps it would do so just wanting a hug. Regarding the possibility of sympathy, they pointed out the lowered arms making it seem more passive, though still considered it eating them with the two mouths.

Action response – Still to run, not wanting to get near this creature. They believed this monster would move quickly on all fours, indicating the canine feet, but that it might stand to attack.

Sympathy – The fabric here made them think less of clothing and more of the creature once being a doll, particularly with the more intact plush face. This to them made it feel less sympathetic, as that meant there wasn’t any sort of humanity to it.

Changes – They recommended a similar course to the previous design, enhancing the elements of its past and origin.

Designer Comments – The story here seems to come through clearly, with the transformed doll reading and more complex response. Admittedly this made the creature less sympathetic to this tester instead of more, but this concern is somewhat tempered by their inclination against from horror. The “feminine” reading interests me, possibly to draw parallels between the creature and our protagonist.

Design 3:

Pre-questioning notes – They sarcastically celebrated the translation of the design into 3D, indicating that this made it more unpleasant to them (though they did appreciate the cloth texture).

Immediate response – They repeatedly stated that they found this design “gross”, noting the lump on the shoulder, strange proportions of the mouths (finding the lower one almost like a “baby”), large wingspan, and disproportionately skinny legs and ankles.

Motivation – They wondered if this one wanted to put things in its mouths, noting the pouch to the belly and wondering if it stored things it consumed.

Action response – Still very solidly running away.

Sympathy – This one’s “clothing” gave them the impression that it was once something intelligent, though of what nature was unclear. They also pointed out the plush shoulder lump, though their reaction to said detail was somewhat unclear.

Changes – They didn’t have any specific suggestions, feeling that this design was “very much what it’s trying to be.”

Designer Comments – There seems to be potential here on both monster and sympathy sides, though the emphasis on said sympathy coming from the monster being humanoid/intelligent is perhaps concerning as it doesn’t align with our story.

Design 4:

Pre-questioning notes – They quickly noted its “shark horn thing”, comparing it to the first design and finding the asymmetry off-putting. They found the more humanoid hands and reversed leg joints (and distinct, splayed toes) disturbing. They noted how, between each design, the monster seemed to be “changing.”

Immediate response – This design was again gross, but also very strong, with them pointing out the muscle definition and stating that “he could snap me.”

Motivation – They read this design as angry and actively seeking to harm people. They noted that unless they unhinged somehow, the mouths seemed like they wouldn’t open far and would make it difficult to eat. Thus, they wondered if it tore things up before it consumed them.

Action response – Again they stated they would run away, but this response seemed more intense than some of the others, referencing how our young protagonist would have no defense against this creature.

Sympathy – This one felt more open to them, as its more humanoid features made it more relatable and understandable despite its mutations.

Changes – They had no suggestions.

Designer Comments – While this design seems to deliver both scares and sympathy, both stem from a sense of active malice and intelligence that doesn't align with the tone of our game.

Design 5:

Pre-questioning notes – This one surprised them, feeling to them more like the earlier designs. Again they pointed out the plushy shoulder lump as a point of interest.

Immediate response – This monster to them felt more aware of its surroundings, with its alert pose having heard something, and hands going for a grab or swipe having a distinct target.

Motivation – They thought this monster had minimal thoughts, driven by instinct – “What do monsters feel when they're hunting?”

Action response – “Not trying to be a broken record but I am running away.”

Sympathy – They noted the “doll face” on this one as well, mentally categorizing it with those that were similar, thinking they would have similar backstories of possibly once being human.

Changes – None made.

Designer Comments – Similar to previous designs, but with a greater impression of hunting and awareness – perhaps not entirely what we're going for, but something to consider.

Design 6:

Pre-questioning notes – The prominence of the doll features and bow stood out to them, noting the sense of patchwork which they found disturbing, as they did with the creature's tongues and muscular arm.

Immediate response – They pointed out the plush face crying, which gave them a strange impression. It was unclear to them how this creature was created, between the doll parts and patchwork, and the veins and shadows. Again, while it maybe was once “chill,” its current half-monster half-doll state is frightening and unapproachable.

Motivation – While this one again seemed motivated by hunger and consumption, the mouths and tongues gave them the sense of it “panting,” something that was powerful but could become winded.

Action response – “I am still running.”

Sympathy – Considering all the designs, they wondered if the doll features connected to the child protagonist (“Maybe they were her dolls”). Their notes on this design were similar to past ones, though they noted the humanoid musculature of this design, and the doll face's tear which was a bit sympathetic, but also a bit creepy.

Changes – No changes suggested.

Designer Comments – The elements of this design feel perhaps a bit disconnected, with a large contrast between the monster and plushy elements, with not enough blending or tattering. In particular, the noting of the bow makes me wonder if the doll parts are too intact. On a more general note, them connecting the doll elements with the child protagonist is a good sign for the story's clarity.

Final Rankings: This ranking was less clear cut, with some discussion of the intent of the game and story. They personally preferred Design 4 for its identifiable humanity but noted that if the monster once being human was not the intent, then 4 would be the worst choice. Design 5 to them had identifiable desire with its reaching posture. Design 6 was "just creepy", with the most doll-like elements but not in a pitiable way. Designs 1, 2, and 3 all rated similarly to them, though they noted that 1 had a good balance of hurt and humanity.

Test concluded at 3:46pm.

Conclusion:

Design 5 seems to be a favorite for our purposes, balancing animalism, threat, and hurt with an interesting visual design, while Design 2 is a close second. Designs 3 and 1 seem to come next, with similar elements but lacking the same amount of emotional punch in either fear or sympathy factors. Design 4, while effectively scary, seems to fulfill our needs the least, without the enigmatic, sympathetic, pained properties of the others. Design 6 is something of an outlier being introduced to testing later, but it seems to land somewhere in the middle, incorporating successful elements of previous designs but not quite blending them together. Balancing the readability vs. destruction of the plush elements seems to be key to garnering player interest, as the former tells players there's more to this creature than monstrousness, while the latter helps sell the unnatural, transformative, destructive sense of the creature's existence.