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Edited by Ira Fay

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Special Issue on Analog Games

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INTRODUCTION

IRA FAY

While *Well Played* regularly focuses on video games, there are many types of games beyond the digital. Analog games provide a diversity of well played experiences worth analyzing in-depth.

In the last decade, we have seen a renaissance in the board game world, fueled at least in part by funding platforms like Kickstarter. Now that game publishers and designers can have more direct connections with their customers, we (the game-playing public) reap the rewards of games that span a wider range than just wargame or eurogame. Furthermore, game design as a field is still young, and board game designers are honing their craft, just as digital game designers are doing. It's easier now than ever for a beginning game designer to learn some basic skills, get easy access to prototyping software and components, and jump right in. Some of those beginners end up becoming great, and we are seeing the results.

This collection of well played essays spans a wide range of analog games, from one of the most well known, *Magic: the Gathering*, to some that I'd never even heard of, like the Finnish board-game-turned-drinking-game *Kimble*. I hope that readers will enjoy

taking a deeper look at some of these games, perhaps inspiring some ideas for your next class or board game night.

DISTRIBUTION, DECKBUILDING, AND DESIGN IN STAR WARS: THE CARD GAME

NICK BESTOR

Since the release of the first collectible card game (CCG) *Magic: The Gathering* in 1993, card games have played a major role in the tabletop gaming market. In these games, players amass a personal collection of cards, construct and customize decks, and play with or against other players who have done the same. Collecting, deckbuilding, playing: all are dramatically effected by the card distribution that designers utilize in their games. Building upon Carter, Gibbs and Harrop's (2012) orthogame/metagame/paragame framework, in this paper I examine the impact of card distribution on *Star Wars: The Card Game*.

The distribution of cards is central to the production and play of card games. Williams, Hendricks, and Winkler (2006) define how randomness informs both playing and collecting in these games:

> CCGs take advantage of the fact that the card decks are shuffled, thus limiting a players' ability to bring cards into play in a specific order. […] The 'collectible' aspect of the genre refers to the fact that not all cards are equally common. Players typically buy randomly assorted packs of cards and then assemble a deck of cards to play. Packs each have a mix of mostly common, a few uncommon and one rare card. […] The more cards a player buys, the greater the

> likelihood s/he has of getting a really rare (i.e., powerful) card to include in a deck. (Williams et al 2006, 5)

Williams et al. describe here the business model developed by *Magic*, one widely adopted by the many other collectible card games that have sought to replicate its success in the decades since. Cards are purchased in randomized booster packs, as pre-constructed starter decks, or as secondary-market singles. This model relies heavily on blind-buy purchases—one does not know what cards are contained within a sealed pack until they have opened it. Although card games that utilize randomized distribution foreground the variability of both gameplay proper and the collecting process, collectability—that is, a marketing paradigm defined by scarcity and luck—is not a requirement for card games. In recent years, several companies have moved toward fixed-distribution: each product contains the same cards in the same quantities, meaning players have easier access to the material components of the game.

Image 1: Booster packs for several Magic: The Gathering expansions. "Magic the Gathering Cards" by Nathan Rupert is licensed by CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

In this paper, I examine *Star Wars: The Card Game*, designed by Eric M. Lang and published by Fantasy Flight Games, to look beyond this collectible model of card game design. As one of Fantasy Flight's Living Card Games (LCGs), *Star Wars* utilizes a non-random distribution model, which directly impacts multiple facets of its design and play. In the following section, I apply Carter et al's orthogame/metagame/paragame terminology to the complex constellation of activities that comprise the card gaming hobby, focusing particular on the collection process. After this, I turn to the example of *Star Wars: The Card Game* and how its deckbuilding rules and gameplay reflect design spaces that become accessible when card games move beyond collectability.

DISTRIBUTION MODELS AND COLLECTING IN CARD GAMING:

Card gaming—like all gaming practice—involves a huge range of interconnected activities. Consumption habits are vital to active participation in collectible card game, but factors beyond consumption are necessary to understand player practices. Williams (2006) writes, "The feelings players express about gaming, how they relate to and treat other players, the ways in which players use and share game products, and their emphasis on skills all offer counter arguments to claims that subcultural selves are reducible to consumer products" (Williams 2006, 96). Card gaming is not simply shuffling the cards and playing the game; it is engaging with rules and structures, deckbuilding possibilities, and various levels of player community, both on- and offline. And it is the extended process of card collecting itself. That card gaming involves multiple layers of gaming activity is well recognized. Owens and Helmer (1996) write, "Collectible card games are two games in one: playing the cards and collecting the cards. Both games depend on the luck of the draw, as well as your skill in playing the hand you've been dealt" (Owens and Helmer 1996, 16). Though these are both important

ludic dimensions of card games, Owens and Helmer under-count here by stating that it is *only* two games in one.

More nuanced and granular terminology, like what Carter, Gibbs, and Harrop propose in "Metagames, Paragames and Orthogames: A New Vocabulary" (2012), can better elucidate the interconnected web of gaming activities. The authors build off the broadly used term "metagame," describing perspectives above or beyond (thus, the prefix "meta-") the baseline experience of a game. As they explain, the discursive use of metagame by players functions as "a tool that players use to conceptualise distinctions between game and non-game activities, as well as *more*-game and *less*-game activities" (Carter et al. 2012, 11). One definition of "metagame" that Carter et al. explore is that of "higher strategy," the use of knowledge that derives from the broader contexts of the game: "In [*Magic*], the metagame is 'what everyone else is playing,' the player's consideration of the context of their game (i.e., what cards other players might be using in their deck)" (Carter et al 2012, 12). In *Magic*, gameplay is a competitive duel, abstracted through cards and facilitated through rules; the metagame is how players understand the current state of the game, what strategies they can expect to see from opponents, and what approaches to use to meet these expectations.

Carter et al. offer two additional terms: orthogame and paragame. The orthogame is the game proper, the rules and structures to which the metagame is meta (above or beyond): "orthogame can be utilized to refer to what players collectively consider to be the 'right and correct game'" (Carter et al 2012, 14). In contrast, "paragame refers to that which is performed peripheral to, but alongside the orthogame. We argue that the 'paragame' is distinct from the metagame by being contingent on a player's desires and motivations rather than the context of play" (Carter et al 2012, 14). Unlike "metagame," neither "orthogame" nor "paragame" have been widely adopted. These terms may strike some readers as unnecessary, but I believe that the added

precision Carter et al's vocabulary provides can allow for a more robust appreciation of the range of "*more*-game and *less*-game activities" that structure and define play. These terms helps us discuss much more than just "the game," an often-ambiguous construct. There is the game within the framework of its rules, systems, and procedures (the orthogame); the game in its cultural and strategic contexts (the metagame); and the game as a venue for its players' desires and priorities (the paragame).

Collecting is a central aspect of card gaming, a driving force for a game's longevity, both as a commercial product and as a site of community formation. Within card gaming, collecting has aspects of both a metagame and a paragame. The cards a player wants may be contingent on the current state of the metagame—the cards and decks that are being played at the moment—and knowing what cards are competitively valuable allows a player to seek out specific products. But other collecting paradigms exist, dependent on player preference. Players may gravitate toward aspects of game design divorced from strategic value—a player may want every card featuring art from a specific artist, or be a completionist, wishing to own every card produced. Here, collecting transmutes from a competitive consideration into an individualistic process; though there may be *some* cards a player needs to stay competitive, there is generally little competitive benefit to owning *all* the cards of a given game.

It is important to draw a distinction between the process and mindset of collecting and the marketing paradigm of "collectability." We must remember that neither collecting nor card gaming are inextricably tied to these economic structures. Richard Garfield, creator of *Magic*, explains: "I prefer 'trading [card game]' rather than 'collectable' because I feel it emphasizes the playing aspect rather than the speculation aspect of the game. The mindset of making collectables runs against that of making games—if you succeed in the collectable department then there

is a tendency to keep new players out and to drive old ones away because of escalating prices" (Garfield 2005, 551). The blind-buy, random distribution of CCGs may be industry standard, but these are not necessary or defining traits of card gaming.

Although the collectible model remains the dominant paradigm for card game distribution, there are alternatives, such as the card games published by Fantasy Flight Games under their "Living Card Game" (LCG) brand. Fantasy Flight's roster of LCGs currently includes six games: *The Lord of the Rings: The Card Game* (2011, designed by Nate French), *Android: Netrunner* (2012, designed by Richard Garfield and Lukas Litzsinger), *Star Wars: The Card Game* (2012, designed by Eric M. Lang), *Game of Thrones: The Card Game Second Edition* (2014, designed by French and Lang), *Arkham Horror: The Card Game* (2016, designed by French and Matt Newman), and *Legend of the Five Rings: The Card Game* (2017, designed by Brad Andres, Erik Dahlman, and French).[1] Other companies have utilized similar distribution models: examples include Alderac Entertainment's *Doomtown: Reloaded* (2014-2016, designed by Dave Williams and Mark Wootton), White Wizard Games' *Epic Card Game* (2015-present, designed by Robert Dougherty and Darwin Kastle), and Plaid Hat Games' *Ashes: Rise of the Phoenixborn* (2015-present, designed by Isaac Vega).

1. There are also four discontinued LCGs: *A Game of Thrones: The Card Game* (2008-2015, designed by Nate French, Eric M. Lang, and Christian T. Petersen), *Call of Cthulhu: The Card Game* (2008-2015, designed by French and Lang), *Warhammer: Invasion* (2009-2013, designed by Lang), and *Warhammer 40,000: Conquest* (2014-2016, designed by Brad Andres, French, and Lang). Both *A Game of Thrones* and *Call of Cthulhu* were originally conventional CCGs, before Fantasy Flight launched its LCG line in 2008.

Image 2: Examples of Fantasy Flight Games' fixed-distribution Living Card Games. Copyright Fantasy Flight Games.

The key feature of these games is fixed-distribution, in contrast to the blind-buy random-distribution of the collectible model. When a player purchases an LCG product, they will receive the same set of cards as every other consumer. Overall, the consumption patterns of a player engaged in a LCG are similar to those engaged in more traditional collectible games—both are characterized by the continual, regular process of repeated acquisition of new cards—but LCGs allow players to have access to the full card pool at a much lower price-point than collectible games. Rarity as an organizing principle for card value (either economic or strategic) is at odds with LCG design. Some products, mainly the introductory Core Sets (described more below), provide only single copies of certain cards, so players may purchase multiple sets if they want a complete set, but there is none of the scarcity or luck of random-distribution. Outside

of circumstances where a product is out-of-stock or out-of-print—which happens for new games or older product lines—no card in an LCG should be any rarer than any other.

Each of Fantasy Flight's LCGs launches with a "Core Set," an introductory product that provides players with the baseline card pool of around 200 to 250 cards. Expansions for LCGs are split between two different types of product. Deluxe Expansions are larger sets of around 150 to 180 cards, usually themed around one or two of a card game's factions, that are released about two per year. Additionally, each LCG maintains a monthly release schedule of smaller packs of 60 cards. The LCG model has the effect of changing the temporal experience of collecting. Like traditional collectible card games, LCGs provide a steady stream of regularly released new cards, providing a similarly evolving and shifting game environment. But the experience of these shifts is different. *Magic* generally releases three or four large expansions a year, introducing potentially hundreds of new cards at a time; with smaller numbers of cards released more frequently, Fantasy Flight's card games allow for more incremental development and refinement of the card pool.

For the majority of Fantasy Flight's LCGs, fixed-distribution is relevant only at the point of purchase. Once a player owns the cards for *Game of Thrones* or *Legend of the Five Rings*, building a deck and playing a game are not far removed from the familiar patterns of more conventional CCGs. *Star Wars: The Card Game*, which I examine for the remainder of this essay, offers the most unconventional approach to deckbuilding of any LCG, and the ways that *Star Wars*' decks are constructed and games are played emerge from design decisions that rely on the game's non-random distribution

DISTRIBUTION, DECKBUILDING, AND GAMEPLAY IN *STAR WARS: THE CARD GAME*:

In both CCGs and LCGs, deckbuilding is not a strictly necessary

component of the orthogame. Most companies produce starter decks that are playable out of the box; a prefabricated deck is unlikely to provide a player with the greatest competitive advantage, but the game can be played. Deckbuilding is an activity that lies outside the orthogame, but can represent a significant time-investment. Deckbuilding is a curatorial process: players select cards from their collection, weighing the strengths and weaknesses of each card in order to prepare for future gameplay. In the majority of card games, players are provided many options in constructing their decks—the rules dictate a deck-size, and players choose that many cards for their deck. There may be some restrictions, either rules-based—a player cannot play both Light Side and Dark Side characters in the same deck, for instance—or strategically—some cards do not synergize well, and thus would not be used together—but generally deckbuilding is a combinatorial puzzle that provides players with significant freedom.

Star Wars still provides players with deckbuilding options, but with dramatic restrictions. A player's deck has two components: the first is a 50-card deck from which the player will be drawing, containing cards that will be used throughout the game, representing *Star Wars* storyworld features like characters, ships, and locations; the second is a 10-card deck of "objectives." Objectives provide each player with their resources, and destroying an opponent's objectives puts a player closer to victory. Outside their role in *Star Wars*' win-conditions, the objectives are also central to deckbuilding. Each objective that a player chooses to include is tied to five cards that then must be included in the draw deck; in choosing 10 objectives, you also determine the 50 cards for your draw deck. The deckbuilding rules for *Star Wars* thus significantly shift both the number of decisions players make in deckbuilding and the relative importance of each of these choices: in most card games, a player effectively makes as many decisions as the size of their deck, but

in *Star Wars*, players instead only make ten decisions, with each one of those having a much greater effect on the power, synergy, and consistency of their deck.

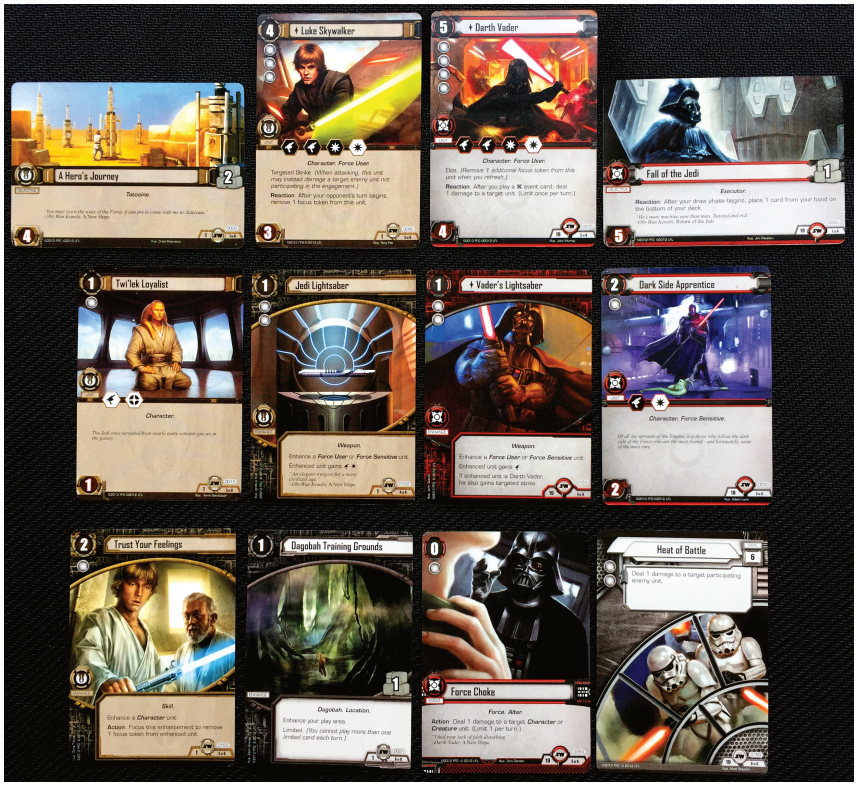

Image 3: Light Side (left) and Dark Side (right) objective sets for Star Wars: The Card Game. Photo by author.

Objective sets are important beyond just their role in deckbuilding—they also have a major impact on the distribution of cards themselves. The original card pool of the game, released in the Core Set, consisted of 36 different objective sets. Cards are split between the Light Side and Dark Side of the Force, with the Core Set primarily including cards from two affiliations on each side, Jedi and Rebel Alliance, Sith and Imperial Navy. *Star Wars*' first Deluxe Expansion introduced new objective sets for the remaining two affiliations, Smugglers and Spies (i.e. Han Solo-

types) and Scum and Villainy (i.e. Boba Fett-types). Each monthly "Force Pack" contains 60 cards, or 10 objective sets, though in practice this is not 10 unique sets. Players may use two copies of most objectives, and LCG products (with a few exceptions, including the Core Set) provide players with a full playset of cards in one purchase, so a Force Pack usually introduces 5 or 6 new objective sets a month. *Star Wars'* design would be difficult to maintain with random-distribution, but works well as a fixed-distribution product.

In the following pages, I present an example of gameplay between two players, Ben and Rey, to see the impact of distribution on multiple facets of the overall game. *Star Wars* is an asymmetrical game—every game pits a Light Side deck against a Dark Side deck, with each side having slightly different mechanics and win conditions—so players frequently compete in a best-of-two match. Ben will play Dark Side first, so he readies his Sith deck, while Rey will use her Smugglers and Spies deck.

At this point, Ben and Rey have already built their decks, reflecting both the strategic considerations and personal preferences of each player. Ben's favorite character is Darth Vader, and his deck reflects this. Every objective set in his deck is Sith-affiliated, creating a consistent theme among the cards he is playing. Ben's deck, then, springs from a paragamic desire to evoke and remediate the originary storyworld. Rey has taken a different tact: she is here to win, and her primary concern in deckbuilding has been how well her cards will synergize. Her deck's affiliation is Smugglers and Spies, but she is only using one objective set of that affiliation, two copies of "Questionable Contacts," which includes Han Solo. The rest of the deck is Jedi cards. Rey's deck, from the perspective of the *Star Wars* storyworld, is somewhat incoherent—Han Solo, an avowed Force skeptic, fighting alongside Obi Wan and Yoda is a bit of a mismatch—but her deck is strategically powerful and effective.

Image 4: The "Questionable Contacts" objective set featuring Han Solo. Photo by author.

Before the game begins, each player draws four objectives from their objective deck, and selects three as their opening objectives. Beyond their organizational role in the LCG's distribution, objectives serve several functions in the orthogame itself. First, they provide players with resources: the number to the right of the objective's name shows how many resources each objective provides, with each player's affiliation card also providing one resource. Resources are tied to affiliations; as the rules explain: "When a player plays a card from his hand, at least one of the resource-providing cards used to generate the required resources must match the affiliation of the card being played" (*Rules of Play*, 16). Ben is less constrained here, as his deck is entirely Sith or neutral cards, so any of his opening resources can pay for any of his cards. Rey must be more mindful of her resources, as 8 of her 10 objectives cannot pay for Smugglers

and Spies cards. This is why Rey's deck uses the Smugglers and Spies affiliation despite being majority Jedi cards: to always have at least one resource to pay for cards like Han.

Objectives are also central to the win conditions of *Star Wars: The Card Game*—attacking and destroying objectives is the key to victory for both sides of the Force, though there is some asymmetry in how this contributes to each side's victory. The Dark Side player uses a "Death Star Dial," a small cardboard representation of the Death Star, with numbers from 0 to 12. At the beginning of each of the Dark Side player's turn, the dial will go up by at least 1 (with several effects in the game accelerating this turn-by-turn increase), and destroying the Light Side player's objectives also contributes—the first destroyed objective advances the dial by 1, the second by 2, and so on. The Dark Side player wins if the dial reaches 12. For the Light Side, their win condition is simpler: if they destroy three Dark Side objectives, they win. For the Dark Side, this asymmetry means that in a long enough game, they will always win, giving the player the choice to play either aggressively or defensively; for the Light Side, they must play aggressively and proactively to strike at their opponent's objectives.

The objective set design of *Star Wars* demonstrates one of the key ways that deckbuilding impacts the orthogame: deck consistency, or how a deck performs turn-to-turn and game-to-game once randomized through shuffling and drawing. In a card game that allows for card-by-card deckbuilding, the player will aim to hone their decks in ways that limit, as much as possible, the negative impact of this randomization. *Star Wars* and its objective sets change how a player will approach this process. It is not a question of "Is this card right for my deck?" but "Is this set of six cards right?" Rey wants to use Han Solo, but in deckbuilding Rey could not just decide to include Han; she has to weigh the value of Han alongside the rest of his objective set. Including two copies of Han's objective set in her deck could

negatively affect her consistency: if she ever has both copies of "Questionable Contacts" as active objectives, she will have difficulty paying for the Jedi cards that make up the majority of her deck, but Rey has decided this risk is worth it. Deckbuilding in *Star Wars* asks players to make fewer but more impactful decisions, evaluating cards not on a one-by-one basis but in relation to their respective objective sets and how that assemblage of cards functions within their deck as a whole.

Returning to Ben and Rey's game, let's see how players engage in combat in *Star Wars*. Ben goes first, and in his opening turn plays two units, Dark Side Apprentice and Advisor to the Emperor. During the first turn, the Dark Side player cannot attack, so we move on to Rey's turn, in which she also plays two characters, Han Solo and Twi'lek Loyalist. Rey may now initiate the first engagement of the game. She declares which objective she is attacking, choosing "The Emperor's Web," and who will be attacking, choosing Han Solo. Ben decides that his Advisor to the Emperor will defend alone, leaving Dark Side Apprentice available to defend if Rey launches a second attack with her Twi'lek Loyalist.

Image 5: Rey's Han Solo attacks and Ben's Advisor to the Emperor defends. Photo by author.

With the participants of this engagement chosen, the game now moves to the edge battle, which the rules describe in-universe as "the combatants maneuvering for position, gathering intelligence, and engaging in sabotage, infiltration, or other heroic or insidious endeavors before the physical battle is fought" (*Rules of Play*, 18). Most cards in *Star Wars* have a number of "force icons" in their upper left corner, with the number of icons roughly corresponding to the narrative importance of the represented character or object in-universe—the non-descript Jedi in Hiding character has only one icon, while Emperor Palpatine has five. Thus, every card in your deck has some value

for its force icons. During the edge battle, each player, starting with the attacker, may place one card from their hand facedown in front of them; once both players have passed, the cards are revealed. Some cards, called fate cards, can only be used in edge battles, and will add additional effects to the combat if used. The player who has committed more force icons wins the edge battle, and gains several benefits, including attacking first. The cards used for the edge battle are put in each player's discard pile.

In the edge battle, Rey goes first, and places one card in her stack. Ben places a card in his stack, and then Rey passes; Ben decides to play one more card, and when Rey passes again, he decides to pass as well. They reveal their cards: Rey has played Yoda, giving her five force icons, while Ben has played Emperor's Royal Guard and Nightsister for only four force icons. Rey wins the edge battle.

Image 6: The results of the edge battle: Rey wins, 5 force icons to Ben's 4. Photo by author.

Rey's Han Solo will attack first now, and she places a focus token on Han, which prevents Han from being used again until the token is removed in her Refresh Phase in her next turn. Han has four combat icons, representing three different types of combat effects. Han's first three combat icons are normal icons, useable in all conflicts; his last icon, with its inverted color scheme, is edge-enabled, meaning this icon can only be used when its player has won the edge battle. "Unit Damage" (the blaster symbol) deals damage to units participating in the conflict.[2] Rey deals two damage to Advisor to the Emperor (whose damage capacity, the number in the lower left corner, is only 1) destroying Ben's unit.

2. Han has the keyword "Targeted Strike," which allows him to damage non-participating units. This is one reason Han is such a powerful card, though Rey chooses not to use his ability here.

"Tactics" (the crosshairs symbol) places a focus token on one of Ben's cards. Rey chooses Dark Apprentice. "Blast Damage" (the sunburst symbol) deals damage to the enemy objective. Rey deals one damage to the objective "The Emperor's Web;" as the Advisor to the Emperor was destroyed, Rey also deals one extra damage as an Unopposed Bonus. Had Ben won the edge battle, his Advisor to the Emperor would have attacked first, and used its Tactics icon to disable Han before Rey could attack.

The edge battle is a fundamental component of the *Star Wars* orthogame, dictating the pace and momentum of combat. This provides every card in your deck with an alternative strategic value, and in some cases, this may be the card's primary value: fate cards can only be used in edge battles, some low-value or situational cards may be best used here, and even some high-cost cards, such as Yoda, may be more valuable for their force icons. One additional feature of *Star Wars* helps further cement the importance of the edge battle and encourage players to more liberally use their cards for this purpose: the game's unusually generous Draw Phase. In many card games, players only draw one or two cards a turn, so only a small portion of a deck is seen in any game. In *Star Wars*, players instead have a hand size of six cards (by default, effects can increase or decrease this number). During the Draw Phase, players will ensure their hand contains this number of cards. If above six cards, the player discards, but more frequently, the player will be under their hand size, and draw back up to six. Additionally, players may discard one card at the start of the Draw Phase, allowing them to ditch an unnecessary card to try to draw something better. *Star Wars*' Draw Phase improves the consistency of any deck (drawing more cards will reduce random variance) and incentivizes players to be proactive in using cards for edge battles. In a game that forces players to take small constellations of cards in deckbuilding, the rules are tailored to give every card some strategic value and

allow players to see a significant portion of their deck in every game.

I have endeavored here to highlight some of the ways the design of *Star Wars: The Card Game* explores alternatives to the norms of card gaming that are made possible (or at least made more feasible) through the Living Card Game fixed-distribution model. It must be acknowledged, though, that however novel some features of *Star Wars* may be, the game does not radically redefine the scope of this type of tabletop game. It simply adds some new wrinkles and nuances to the card game formula. Other LCGs similarly venture outside the established norms of card games, albeit in sometimes limited ways. *Arkham Horror*, one of Fantasy Flight's two co-op LCGs (alongside *The Lord of the Rings*), fuses elements of card gaming and roleplaying. In the course of gameplay, players earn experience points, used to purchase and upgrade cards for their deck, and depending on how they perform in the game's Lovecraftian scenarios, cards with negative effects are added to reflect the mental and physical condition of their characters. In "Terminal Directive," a "campaign expansion" for *Android: Netrunner*, a single product offers some deviation from the norm: in addition to cards for use in competitive *Netrunner*, "Terminal Directive" provides a narrative experience as players race to solve a murder mystery within the game's cyberpunk storyworld. Fantasy Flight's LCGs may not redraw the boundaries of card gaming, but many of these games demonstrate the novel possibilities of fixed-distribution.

CONCLUSION:

Regardless of the distribution model used, cards games are driven by continual and regular expansion. These games encourage an ongoing economic relationship between producers and consumers, with players participating in the acquisition of the serially released components of the game, the cards

themselves, over timespans of years. As a game grows, so too does the scope of player choice and agency; new cards add to the curatorial and combinatorial exercise of deckbuilding. A detailed analysis of a card game's orthogame can only see so much. Engaging with the full range of what Carter et al describe as "game and non-game activities, as well as *more*-game and *less*-game activities" (Carter et al. 2012, 11) is necessary to appreciate the interconnectedness of collecting, deckbuilding, and playing. Companies like Fantasy Flight Games have taken the "collectability" out of their card games, and a game like *Star Wars: The Card Game* demonstrates, even in its modest divergences from the norms of conventional CCGs, the ways that fixed-distribution opens up the design space of card games.

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NO TIME TO WASTE

Kairos in T.I.M.E Stories

SVEN DWULECKI

> There is a season for everything, a time for every occupation under heaven: A time for giving birth, a time for dying; a time for planting, a time for uprooting what has been planted. A time for killing, a time for healing; a time for knocking down, a time for building […]; a time for keeping silent, a time for speaking. (Eccl 3:1-8, NLT-CE)

As described in Ecclesiastes, there is a time for every kind of action. Yet, seizing the opportune moment is a delicate matter. It requires a sensitivity for the intricate interplay of various factors. Opportunities are easy to identify in hindsight, but challenging to predict. In ancient Greek mythology, Kairos represents this golden opportunity. Despite being one of the numerous children of Zeus, Kairos is quite distinct in his appearance. He is frequently depicted as a winged man only wearing a loin-cloth. Yet, his trademark sign is his hair. The back of his head is shaven bald, while his remaining hair is tied back in a ponytail on his forehead. Kairos was always in motion, so the only way to stop him was to grab his hair. This mythological tale coined the expression "to grasp an opportunity (by the forelock)." If Kairos had already passed by, there would be no chance for a second attempt, because there would be nothing to grab ahold of. This conceptualization of an opportune moment spawned an entire genre: the time travel narrative. It can be found in literary works, like H.G. Well's *Time Machine* (1895), as well as in movies, such

as *Back to the Future* (1985). Videogames presented also specific visions of manipulating timelines like EA's *Command & Conquer – Red Alert 3* (2008). They all have protagonists in common who travel back in time to make up for a missed opportunity. It comes to no surprise then that analog games would address this dream, too.

This paper will specifically take a look at *T.I.M.E Stories* (2015) for its interplay between game rhetoric and player rhetoric. *T.I.M.E Stories* is a prime example that analog games (against common misconception) are capable to unfold narratives. The *Historisches Wörterbuch der Rhetorik* deemed board games utterly unable to tell a story or deploy rhetoric (Pekar, col.1069), however this game proves such statements wrong. *T.I.M.E Stories* tells the story of time agents protecting history from alterations. Its core game mechanic is built around effective time management and essentially engages the player in a constant pursuit of golden opportunities. After a short overview on the historical and theoretical importance of kairos for rhetoric, *T.I.M.E Stories* is introduced. Taking a macro- and micro-perspective allows to gain a deeper understanding how golden oppurtunities are at the center of gameplay and based upon that how procedural as well as verbal rhetoric try to attain this goal.

DEFINING *KAIROS* AND ITS MEANING FOR RHETORIC

Kairos is a central concept in Greek thinking and especially for ancient rhetorical theory. The meaning attributed to this term changed several times and it is important to clarify which specific interpretation is the basis for the following analysis. According to Sipiora (2002, p. 4), the systematic research on *kairos* started already with the Pythagoreans. For these is was an expression of harmony in respect of mathematical questions. The term underwent a significant semantic change with Isocrates and Gorgias: Isocrates put *kairos* at the center of his entire theory (Sipiora, 2002, p. 4). Whereas, Gorgias used *kairos*

for his sophist rhetoric to formulate an absolute relativism. Operating under the assumption that every action is context-dependent, the only binding doctrine for Gorgias was awaiting the opportune moment (Sipiora, 2002, p. 5). For Aristotle, *kairos* is implicitly the time base of rhetorical action. Aristotle combined the term *kairos* with rhetoric through the idea of appropriate behavior (*aptum*) (Sipiora, 2002, p. 6).[1] Taking a neo-Aristotelean approach to rhetoric, this link between context-sensitive, appropriate actions and kairos is the primary subject of analysis in this paper.

Despite the ancient origins of the term, adequate academic definitions of the term *kairos* are rare. Neither Richard Lanham's *Handlist of Rhetorical Terms* nor the four-volume *Dictionary of the History of Ideas* cover the topic *kairos*. In the *Historisches Wörterbuch der Rhetorik* [Historical Encyclopedia of Rhetoric], James Kinneavy and Catherine Esklin (1998) suggested the short definition of *kairos* "as the correct or opportune moment to do something or also the right balance." (col. 837).[2] In context of gaming, this opportune moments shape player experience and becomes evident in every significant gaming moment. Its appearance has many faces. It is the moment in *Magic: The Gathering*, in which a player withholds one card just in case and

1. It is important to understand that *kairos* is constant theme in Aristotle's work without being explicitly addressed in his writings. For a long time, Aristotle's understanding of *kairos* remained untouched as a scholarly subject until modern research engaged itself again with this topic. André Wartelle (1982) was the first to examine in his *Lexique de la „Rhetorique" d'Aristotle* the occurrence of term and was able to identify 13 reference to *kairos* with an analog search method (p. 204 f). Yet, the term's full scope was only revealed by computer technology and the PERSEUS program. Its algorithms searched through Aristotle's *Rhetoric* in the *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae*-version and found 16 references in total (Kinneavy, 2002, p. 66). Kinneavy interpreted these results in such a way that "the concept stands out in spite of the relative absence of the term." (p.66). In his joint essay with Eskin, he demonstrated the implicit application of *kairos* in Aristotle's *Rhetoric.* Although the literal term *kairos* is absent in of all Aristotelian definitions of rhetoric, the "concept of a specific act in a concrete case" is present (Eskin & Kinneavy, 2000, p. 434). Kinneavy et al. (2000) traced its elements in all descriptions of rhetorical genres (p. 436-438) as well as the Aristotelian sources of persuasion (p. 438-441).

2. = ["der richtige oder günstige Zeitpunkt, etwas zu tun, oder auch als das richtige Maß"]

suddenly it prevents a lethal blow against one's life points. It is the sense of victory, after persuading a fellow player in *Dead of Winter* to make a move that supports one's victory conditions as a betrayer. However, it is also this missed opportunity in *Risk* to finish the game, which enables an opponent's victory. All these situations reveal the presence of *kairos*. These golden moments differentiate themselves from others due to their significance. John Smith provided a more extensive definition that picks up on this notion:

> *[K]airos* points to a *qualitative* character of time, to the special position an event or action occupies in a series, to a season when something appropriately happens that cannot happen at "any" time, but only at 'that time', to a time that marks an opportunity which may not recur. The question especially relevant to *kairos* time is "When?" "At what time?" (Smith, 2002, p. 47)

Kairos serves as the qualitative differentiator of gameplay actions. It marks moments of great triumph and downfall already by posing the implicit question of "Is it the *right* time to do this?" Rhetoric aims to overcome the paralyzing potential of this question. The game rhetoric forces the player to consider their every action and pursue strategies to grasp every favorable moment. Players will apply verbal rhetoric persuade their fellow players to engage in actions which they consider beneficial for their goals and avoid such they deem dangerous. This twofold presence of rhetoric is specifically strong in *T.I.M.E Stories.*

T.I.M.E STORIES AND ITS TIME TRAVEL NARRATIVE

The game series began 2015, published by *Space Cowboys*, distributed through *Asmodee* and contains artwork by Benjamin Carré, David Lecossu and Pascal Quidault. *T.I.M.E Stories* established itself quickly among critics and might be considered one of the most significant developments in the board games industry in recent years. It was nominated for the prestigious

Kennerspiel des Jahres 2016 [Expert game of the year] with the following words:

> The innovative and sweeping concept allows the players to immerse themselves in a wide variety of scenarios and to solve mysterious puzzles. If time runs out they use the knowledge they've previously gained in the next run. This is how T.I.M.E. Stories creates a thrilling group experience that swings between crime thriller and role-playing game, between past and future. (Spiel des Jahres, n.d.)

Fundamentally, *T.I.M.E Stories* is a narrative driven puzzle game. A group of up to four players must find a sequence of actions which allows them to solve their main objectives within a given in-game time limit. Hereby, *T.I.M.E Stories* displays a unique relationship between the core game and its expansions. Usually, additional content is integrated into already established game elements, like in *The Settlers of Catan* (1995). There, each expansion is just added to the main game and expands the players variety of choice. Core elements and add-ons merge for a larger gameplay experience. However, *T.I.M.E Stories* expansion packs offer primarily new narratives with unique mission objectives to solve within certain time frames. Sometimes new mechanics are also introduced to deal with the challenges presented to the player in these stories. The main game contains the game board, the first story deck, and a repository for saving the game progress. Each expansion contains a new story deck with a complete mission.

The basic setup of each game session establishes a doubled narrative frame. Set in the future, mankind accomplished to unlock the secret of time travel (see figure 1). In order to prevent the potential negative impact of manipulating historic events, the T.I.M.E agency was established. The group of players take over the role of special agents. These can safely travel back in time be basically possessing (historically) insignificant individuals and control them.

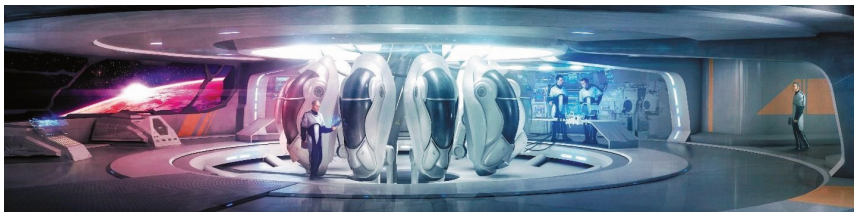

Figure 1. A panoramic scene from the futurists setting of the game.

Time and setting differ immensely between decks. The players can engage in cases spanning from conspiracy in ancient Egypt to zombie outbreaks in the 1990s. *T.I.M.E Stories* does not shy away from establishing different visual representations or borrowing from literary genres. The first story deck, *The Asylum*, displays clear influences from Lovecraftian literature, while *The Marcy Case* reminds of *The Walking Dead* (see figure 2).

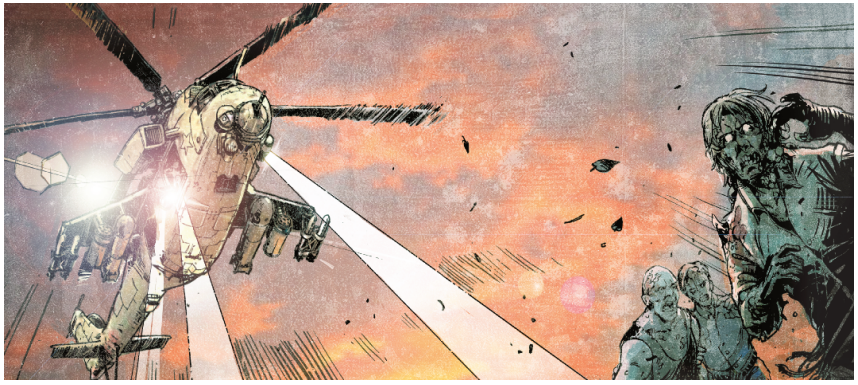

Figure 2. An example of the different art style seen in T.I.M.E Stories, here in The Marcy Case

This impression is especially reinforced by changing visual styles of each deck. The latter one uses a graphic novel style (see figure 2), while the former reminds of oil paintings (see figure 4). The player experiences here the duality of timelines. The board game, representing the future, establishes a sturdy frame for each mission. It is the player's symbolic time machine that is literally frames all adventures. It equals the constant flow of time of

the players reality. The board offers dedicated spaces for cards included in every deck. Meanwhile, these decks encapsulate the individual narratives. Every era and story differ visually and through the exploration of the individual deck is subject to the manipulation through player engagement. Therefore, this alternate timeline is in constant motion, altered by player interaction and subject to potential time loops. This unchanging basic set of rules in contrast to the player driven motion of cards on play field are two level upon which *T.I.M.E Stories* rhetoric will be dissected.

THE MACRO-LEVEL – CHASING *KAIROS*

T.I.M.E Stories requires to perform effective time-management. After an exposition scene at the T.I.M.E agency, each episode starts with the group of players laying out the map (consisting of four cards) and the landscape of their landing area (see figure 3, upper left corner). From here on out, the remaining card deck is now explored through active decisions by the group. Yet, the exploration takes place under restricted time conditions. The entire group operates on a community time counter (see figure 3, board game center).

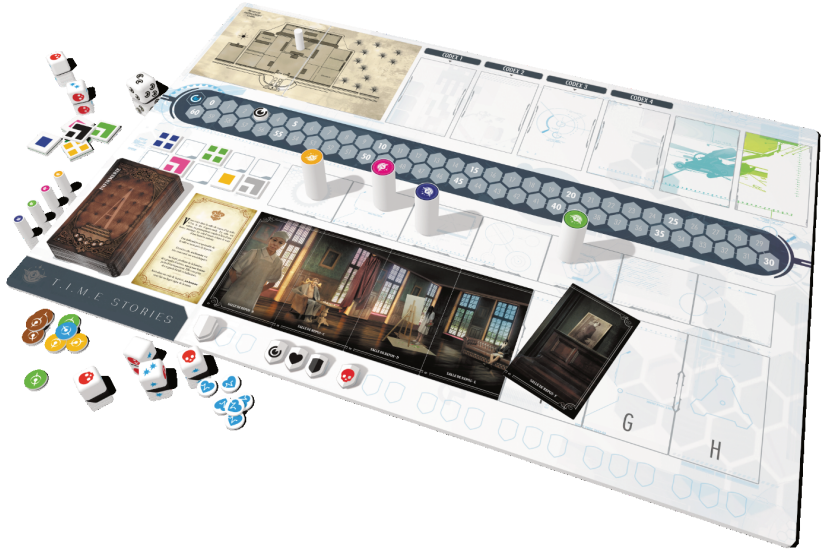

Figure 3. TIME Storie's gameboard with the time counter at its center.

Several actions will reduce the remaining time, like moving between locations, exchanging items, or continuing challenges that were not resolved in the previous round. Meanwhile, the players have no prior insights which regions in the game hold relevant items or information. Players have to be careful, otherwise they will miss the opportunity to fulfill their mission on time. Certain areas hold items that are necessary, while others are purely optional yet improve the likelihood to succeed. The former often unlock the access to previously unknown locations and further expand the possibilities to invest time in. There also those areas which only stifle the progression and serve as an obstacle. By design, the players are not meant to solve an episode within the first playthrough, but gain information, iterate their approach, and find together a more time-efficient way in the next round. This universal set of base rules deploys the game's procedural rhetoric.

(Analog) games like *T.I.M.E Stories* communicate messages to play through their rules. With the rich thematic variety of analog

games spanning from war games over pulp-fiction adventures to economic simulations, it is not surprising to see embedded rhetorical messages. A famous example for rhetorical messages encapsulated in analog games are *The Landlord's Game* and *Monopoly*. Kate Salen and Eric Zimmerman described their differences as follows:

> Despite the strong similarity between The Landlord's Game and Monopoly, there are distinct (and wonderfully incongruous) differences in the rhetorics each evokes. While the play rhetorics of progress and power apply to both games, The Landlord's Game was distinctly anti-capitalist in its conception. The game's conflict was not premised on property acquisition and the accumulation of monopolies, but instead on an unraveling of the prevailing land system. Because properties in the game could only be rented, there was no opportunity for domination by a greedy land baron or developer. (Salen & Zimmerman, 2004, p. 520)

Despite similar topics and comparable game mechanics, both games transmit opposing messages. *Monopoly* promotes a pro-capitalist notion while *The Landlord's Game* serves as social criticism. The reason for such a difference is the embedded *procedurality* within these games communicating their individual messages. For Lassard (2014) procedurality "describes an object whose actual manifestation results from the strict application of a specific set of rules (or procedures) to a particular context. Procedurality allows for the delivery of responses to changes in input and setting." (p. 407). Originally designed for the study of digital games, procedural rhetoric as a "practice of persuading through processes" (Bogost, 2007, p. 3) can also apply to analog games. Board games can invoke social criticism and even include calls to action, including the demand to be time-conscious like in *T.I.M.E Stories*.

T.I.M.E Stories' procedural rhetoric transforms players into *kairos*-seekers. Informational deprivation forces the player to search for intel, while time constraints prevent endless

exploration. The game creates among players the "need to optimize their actions" (Space Cowboys, n.d.). A simple game mechanic motivates for such behavior: The fewer playthroughs a group requires, the higher the rewards at the end of a case. Those benefits (like additional time or automatically solved challenges) apply for future cases and ease those playthroughs. This tension between insufficient information and desire to act timely makes the deployed procedural rhetoric visible. In the first playthrough, the storyworld is established and simultaneously distracts the player from optimal play-decisions. As long as the players are still constructing their mental representations of the given storyworld, it is hard to assess which information are purely aesthetical and which are truly relevant. From the second attempt forward, the group has an elementary understanding of the events and can actively seek out win-condition fulfilling combinations. However, the challenge intensives with the increased temporal gaps between rounds.

Real-life time progression between play sessions intensives the procedural challenge. Next to the obvious decrease of immanent knowledge of the storyworld,[3] locations of items, their causal relations, and ideal utilization might not be memorized sufficiently for the goal of a perfect playthrough. Hence, the global experience in every story deck communicates to the player that a cohesive gameplay behavior (in form of continuous or closely stacked sessions) is advantageous. This advocated persistence hints directly towards *kairos*. The individual group has to understand that only careful and long term orientated gameplay will allow for maximized output per in-game time unit.[4] So the game's rules actively shape player behavior and it

3. The player performance is directly linked with her memory. Albeit the developers do not ban support-media (like notes, photos etc.), they do not encourage it either; *T.I.M.E Stories* does not provide any notebook material for the players. However, the save module contained in the core game certainly indicates an awareness that players might want to interrupt a given playthrough. They allow to place revealed cards separately and even mark the specific time remaining for the returning group.

therefore clearly rhetorical and so are the players amongst each other.

THE MICRO-LEVEL – EVERY MOVE COUNTS

Taking a closer look at the smallest gameplay unit reveals frequent rhetorical interaction. Every location is a set of several cards that constitute together a panorama (see figure 4).

Figure 4. Parts setup of the Day Room panorama.

Already this simple design choice holds kaireotic meaning. Every location is literally split up into its relevant segments; every segment is represented by a card. The players have to base their decision only on two sets of information: (1) a descriptive card briefly explains what is seen on each card; (2) the individual segments offer visual cues for the player to assess which actions are most likely required. Every player can choose on which panorama tile her character shall start. No real-time restriction pressures the player to make a rash choice, however the in-game counter requires efficiency. With three/four agents in a game,

4. Digital videogames also deploy procedural rhetoric that communicate time sensitivity and long-term orientation. For more on this subject: Dwulecki, S. (2017): " I am thou… Thou art I… " —How Persona 4's Young Adult Fiction Communicates Japanese Values. In: Creatio Fantastica, 56, (97-113).

the group can split them up to maximize informational gain under the risk of activating time-consuming traps. In a purely egalitarian game, like chess, each player would hold potentially the same power. In *T.I.M.E Stories* however, the diverse set of controlled characters gives each player strengths and weaknesses (see figure 5). While some characters are focused on fighting, others are better in solving skill challenges. Therefore, not every character is equally suited to complete a challenge. This roleplaying element further perpetuates the necessity to apply the right measures at the right time.

Figure 5. Character cards from The Asylum.

The group could stick together and explore one segment after the next to minimize such risks, but this would negatively impact their time-efficiency and in the long-run likelihood to succeed. The group has to analyze the situation, make reasonable assumptions about potential challenges, and inevitably take risks. Yet this uncertainty creates a tension-field that allows for rhetorical action aimed to find *kairos*. By design, the individual elements are geared to prevent a group to finish a *T.I.M.E Stories* deck within the first attempt.[5] The developers themselves state that players have to "convincing […] sometimes even the other

[players]." (Space Cowboys, 2015). A conflict in conviction sets up the rhetorical case.

Rhetorical activity in gameplay can origin from the player as well as the game itself. The interplay between participants creates frequently rhetorical situations.

> The "rhetorical case" arises when a speaker found the zertum (his inner certainty), declared it his concern, comes forward with oratorical impetus and willing to actively enforce it with his Ego autem dico [= "but I say"].[6]

All these factors can apply in an analog game setting. No matter the nature of the game (competitive or cooperative), players will reach distinct points at which they are of opposing opinions. Such difference might raise from contrary goals as well as disagreements on tactical decisions. A player becomes a rhetorician by utilizing her "communicative agency […] to gain informational sovereignty"[7] (Knape, 2000, p. 76) and persuade her fellow players. *Kairos* with its abstract nature is implicitly already present in all these theoretical thoughts:

> Effective intervention in a rhetorical context is not simply a matter of selecting from a menu of technical strategies, but rather matching those to context and the nature of the moment. In a larger sense, kairos facilitates a discussion about the dynamic relationship between choice and constraint that is the key point at which games and writing intersect. (Mullen, 2013, p. 67)

Kairos is a decisive factor for this procedure to be successful. How open or camouflaged such activities are depends on the audience and situation. An orator is required to tune in and apply

5. A first attempt win is statistically highly unlikely, because it requires the players to have a constant streak of beneficial dice roles or almost perfect decision making despite intel-deprivation to maximize player output per time unit.

6. = ["Der „rhetorische Fall" tritt dann ein, wenn ein Sprecher das Zertum (seine innere Gewissheit) gefunden hat, es zu seinem Anliegen macht, mit oratorischem Impetus hervortritt und ihm mit seinem Ego autem dico [= „ich aber sage"] aktiv Geltung verschaffen will."]

7. = ["kommunikativer Handlungsmacht [...] informationelle Souveränität zu erlangen."]

anticipatory audience considerations (Knape & Ulrich, 2014, p. 18). Aristotle's demand to adhere to *aptum* (aptness) finds its expression here. A player must acknowledge the right timing "for keeping silent" and find the right "time for speaking." (Eccl 3:7, NLT-CE) Meanwhile, games have the ability to actively support this quest. The game successfully rises the likelihood of such an occurrence by frequently putting the players in front difficult situations.

The first scene in *The Asylum* illustrates this field of diverging intentions. The group arrives at the waiting room which consists out of five cards (see figure 3). No matter the size of the group, playing with three or four characters, at least one card cannot be uncovered within the first turn. Assuming a group of four players, the last untouched tile poses a conundrum. Unless the group dedicates an additional time unit to explore, the content remains unknown. With four players for one remaining card, the output per player per time unit is at its lowest possible value. Only its content might render a reveal reasonable. In the gameplay equivalent of *Schrödinger's cat*, this card can be considered mutually irrelevant *and* vital for the success of the mission (Schrödinger 1935). A long-term oriented player could argue that a second playthrough is quite likely. The last card can be revealed in the next playthrough and therefore time conserved. A risk averse fellow player could counter with the possibility that this card might unlock a required item. The rhetorical case is already active with just those two opposing perspectives. As long as there is just one member with a divergent opinion, the group will have to negotiate and persuade one another to reach an actionable common-sense (*sensus communis*), because the group can only move as a unit from one location to the next. Keeping the group operationable means for its member to identify every situations *kairos*.

YOU SHALL NOT WASTE TIME – PROCEDURAL RHETORIC IN *T.I.M.E STORIES*

In order to fully grasp how rhetoric shape behaviors in the game, it is worth to further differentiate the utilized *kairos*-definition "as the correct or opportune moment to do something or also the right balance." (Eskin & Kinneavy, 1998, col. 837)[8] Phillip Sipiora (2002) distinguishes between the „right time" (*eúkairos*), the moment „without opportunity" (*ákairos*) and the „wrong time" (*kakakairos*) (p. 2). A simple example, early in *The Asylum* story deck exemplifies those categories (see figure 6). In the dormitory, the players can choose between three titles.

Figure 6. Scenery from The Asylum in which each tile holds a different kind of kairos.

On the left, there is a patient bound to his bed. If the players decide to investigate his segment, he claims that someone wants to murder him and asks to be released. The players can perform a skill challenge to free him. If they are not able to solve the challenge within the first attempt, they can decide to spend more time (meaning reducing their time counter) and keep trying in the next round. The players are not informed about the result

8. = ["der richtige oder günstige Zeitpunkt, etwas zu tun, oder auch als das richtige Maß"]

of this challenge and can therefore only speculate, whether the outcome will be beneficial or not. In this specific case, the attempt to help the patient is procedurally punished. As it turns out, he was strapped to bed due to his violent nature. In the moment he is released, he starts attacking the players. Those cannot escape the fight and are stuck until they neutralized their attacker. Not only does these challenges cost most likely time, but it requires entirely different abilities. As previously stated, the players take control of different characters and thereby a character suited to release the shackles might be at an utter disadvantage in a fight. The required combination of different skills sets, the rules preventing an escape and the lack of any reward for this encounter renders the entire event a moment of *kakakairos*, a *wrong time* to show humility. All these elements are part of the game's narrative in combination with its set of rules and therefore display procedural rhetoric. Whenever the players decide to engage with this location, the players lose time and potentially health, which might become vital in future fights. The only advantage here is the knowledge to avoid a confrontation in the next gameplay cycle by not interacting with this character. The procedural rhetoric communicates clearly to not engage again with this tile.

On the right side, the players can look out of a window. With no challenge to overcome, the player is only provided with a small bit of information. Its value depends on the players previous and future decisions. The group is informed about a greenhouse and a short glimpse at a creature which looks like a giant cat with wings. This information on its own would constitute *ákairos.* Without any opportunity to act at this moment, the players hardly lose nor gain anything. Later in the game, this bit of information might enable to player to avoid a potentially disastrous fight with a manticore at the previously encountered greenhouse. Without any instant benefit or punishment, the game's procedural rhetoric leaves this space neutral. Therefore,

even a seemingly uneventful moment can enable the players to find the good time, *eúkairos,* through reducing informational deprivation. This also applies to the last segment.

The central piece of the panorama displays cabinets. The players can break these via skill challenges. Doing so will provide them with up to three objects, out of which each holds different value. One of them is essentially useless, because it is required for a sequence of actions that will force the players to spend extensive time without providing any relevant insights for the case. The second object, a ruby, is potentially useful as it unlocks a powerful artifact towards the end of the game which can be used in another story deck. The last item is an essential information to solve the case. If the players acquire this intel early, they can avoid visiting the entire room in future playthrough cycles. Hence, this tile encapsulates an *eúkairos.* Either the players gain the means to acquire a powerful artifact or the can actively save time in their next attempt. Both ways, they gain an edge for the future actions. Also the *kakakairos* is present, as the useless item might lure the players towards actions wasting their time contingent.

All three tiles hold different values. A player will naturally strive towards the establishment of an *eúkairos* and be interested to prevent any situation that would be considered a *kakakairos.* As demonstrated with the example of the dormitory, the game rules establish a procedural rhetoric. Just like the game's ruleset favors certain actions over others, so do the players. Their interactions with one another are shaped by the game to search for opportune moments and encourage interpersonal, verbal rhetoric.

EGO AUTEM DICO VOBIS – VERBAL RHETORIC IN *T.I.M.E STORIES*

Players will try to persuade their fellow players. Their individual goal might be to engage in actions which they consider beneficial for group's success or to discourage them from taking

disadvantageous alternatives. In order to exemplify how the procedural rhetoric encourages verbal rhetoric, another example from the later stages of *The Marcy Case* story deck is analyzed. The players arrive at a hotel and have three segments to choose from (see figure 7).

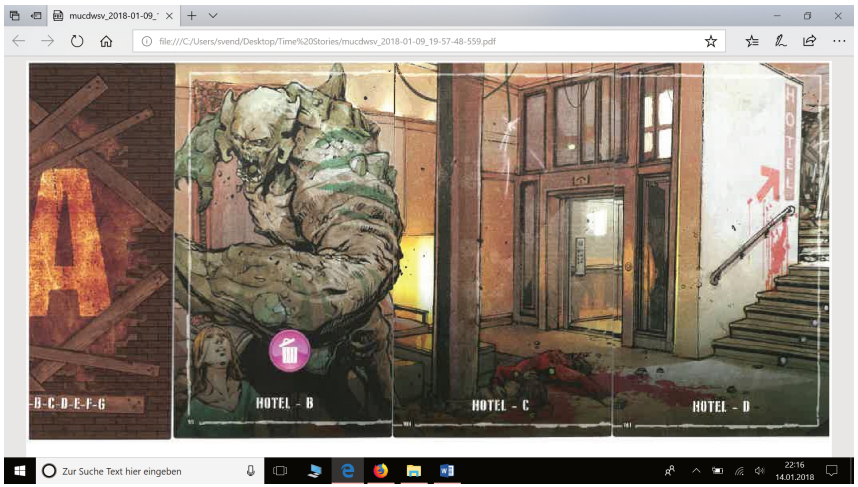

Figure 7. A scenery consisting out of three segments from The Marcy Case.

On the left, a monster attacks a young woman. As part of the story deck, the group of players have the task to find a young girl called Marcy. The attacked woman might be a person of interest. Depending on previously acquired information, the group may or may not know that this individual is not their target, nor do they gain any significant advantage by rescuing her. They can only assess that a fight would result most likely by interacting with this segment. Depending on their informational situation, the players may come to different conclusions how to proceed. As mentioned in the introduction, kairos is only revealed with certainty in hindsight. Hence, the potential for this card to hold eukairotic or kakakairotic potential is equally given as explained through the Schrödinger's cat simile. Rhetoric occurs when at least two players favor different options and try to make their judgment count. "Rhetoric is communicative contingency-

management"[9] (Knape, 2006, p.12) and attempts to dissuade from alternatives that are subjectively considered harmful or disadvantages. One player might argue that rescuing the women, no matter if she is the target or not, might be rewarded. Another position could be that a fight for a character non-crucial to the win-condition is a waste of time. Not knowing that this is clearly the wrong time (*kakakairos*) to help, the players have to commit to a certain plan of action. Rhetoric as contigency-management helps them by reducing the options to one actionable option the group can agree upon.

The same necessity arises from the other two tiles. It is unknown to the players whether the elevator is still functional or the staircase intact, but the illustrations on the cards provide hints. Despite its unlikeliness, the delipidated hotel has a functional elevator. An indication for this is the functional light in the cage. Meanwhile the staircase is visibly blocked by debris. Choosing the latter option results either in a loss of time or health. Here, the game provides the players with arguments that hint them towards the better of two options. The elevator has no disadvantage linked to it and thereby eukairotic in nature. Meanwhile, the staircase holds a penalty for the non-observant player and it therefore kakakairotic. Already the smallest decision and a difference in opinion opens the potential for rhetorical activity. Whenever the game lures the players towards a certain choice, the players have to negotiate amongst each other if they want totake the risk or press onward.

TIME AND TIME AGAIN

> It is not enough to be in the right place at the right time.
> You should also have an open mind at the right time.
> (Erdős, 1998, p. 99)

Paul Erdős emphasizes in the statement that placement, timing,

9. = ["Rhetorik ist kommunikatives Kontingenz-Management."]

and mindset only unfold their full power if they come together. The combination of these factors renders Kairos so difficult to catch. Just being at the right place at the right time means nothing, if a mind is set and unwilling to seize the moment; the same applies to other possible configurations. All the possible variations of these factors can create the setting of a time travel narrative. If one factor out of place, the seed for tragedy is laid and the motivation to alter past events born.

As demonstrated above, these very same factors are demanded from the players of *T.I.M.E Stories*. This game (series) sets itself apart with is unique gameplay mechanism. Its time-management demands force the players to construct a long-term plan to maximize output. Its setup naturally creates a field of tension (through procedural rhetoric) that the players have to overcome by successfully negotiating a plan of action (via verbal rhetoric). All these expressions of *kairos* exemplify this otherwise highly theoretical concept. It was shown that unraveling its presence can be the heart of gameplay and demand rhetoric as a means of persuasion to steer a group towards it. Therefore, this paper helped to give some insights into the already quite underdefined and under researched field of kairos and which influence it *plays*.

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SEEING BUT NOT OBSERVING WITH SHERLOCK HOLMES THE CONSULTING DETECTIVE

TAPANI N. JOELSSON

INTRODUCTION

It's quite exciting, said Sherlock Holmes, with a yawn. (A. Conan Doyle, A Study in Scarlet)

In this article we try to convey some of our experiences of playing the narrative crime fiction tabletop game *Sherlock Holmes – Consulting Detective* (SHCD). This game was originally published in 1981, but our experiences are based on the playing of the first six cases of the 2012 re-release of the game by Ystari Games (2017). There are also other new editions and releases for this game, and there are some differences between them, so the experience of playing them might differ from ours.

It was not chance that our path crossed with *Sherlock Holmes – Consulting Detective*. It was the game that met our criteria of being playable alone or with small group, that has an interesting theme for our taste, and it should be challenging. Selection process was carried at boardgamegeeks.com (2017) from where the potential games were selected and scrutinized based on their theme and

what other players had to say about them. Through this process we came by a game that contained no dice or other means of chance, but instead relied only on textual materials in the form of casebook and related narrative materials, emphasizing decisions made by the players. A closer look at the game brought up a review by Shut Up & Sit Down (2016) which confirmed to us that this game also has the challenge that we were looking for. In example, in this particular review, reviewers can be seen lying down at the floor and comparing their notes when they are trying to solve their case, and in some points urging other players to play against their abysmal score instead of the reference score provided by the game.

Findings during the selection process intrigued our curiosity and raised our expectations on playing this game. This background information also affected the playing sessions, as we had the knowledge to be prepared. As proper detectives, we play the game with notebooks for our notes and we track our progress in the accompanying city map with stickers.

As we are not native speakers of English, we translate the narrative to our native language during the gameplay. In games narrative we form the Baker Street Irregulars led by Mr. Wiggins, who also represents the players in the games narratives. Other characters in the narrative come from Sherlock Holmes lore, including the titular consulting detective Sherlock Holmes, Dr. Watson, inspector Lestrade, and case specific characters.

Chronological order of play of the cases is not mandatory, but the rulebook suggest that the cases should be played in chronological order as the newspapers for later cases might spoil the previous cases. The in-game world is set in late-Victorian London and in the world of Sherlock Holmes. For those that are familiar with either or both of these themes, game has a familiar feel on it. Players that are unfamiliar with the era in question might have small handicap but it should not pose a threat to the

gaming experience. Knowledge about Sherlock Holmes might be helpful, but mostly specific knowledge or familiarity with him are not necessary as general knowledge about crime-fiction should be enough.

The rest of this article will include an analysis loosely based on the MDA framework (Hunicke et al, 2004), following the example of Duncan (2014). In MDA games are split in three parts (Rules, System and Fun), and these are link to their design counterparts (Mechanics, Dynamics, and Aesthetics) from which the framework gets its acronym. Our analysis mostly deals with the aesthetics of the SHCD. In MDA aesthetics describe the desirable emotions the designer wants to evoke in the player while they are playing the game. For us the sessions playing the SHCD have been rollercoasters of emotion, ranging from desperation to immense delight and joy, and for this reason we see MDA as a fitting analysis tool for it.

The following text contains spoilers that might make some of the available cases easier or unplayable for interested readers.

MECHANICS AND DYNAMICS

There is nothing more deceptive than an obvious fact. (A. Conan Doyle, The Boscombe Valley Mystery)

Base components of SHCD are simple; the game provides us with the rulebook (12 A4 sized pages from cover to cover), a map of Victorian London, a directory of people and locations in London (20 A5 sized pages), newspaper issues (1 double-sided A3 per case), and a casebook containing the story for each case. There are 10 cases which all have accompanying chronological issues of The Times newspaper and as the later cases might employ clues from the previous issue, this part of the material accumulates with progress through the cases. Figure 1 showcases the base components, and Figure 2 a spread from the London Directory.

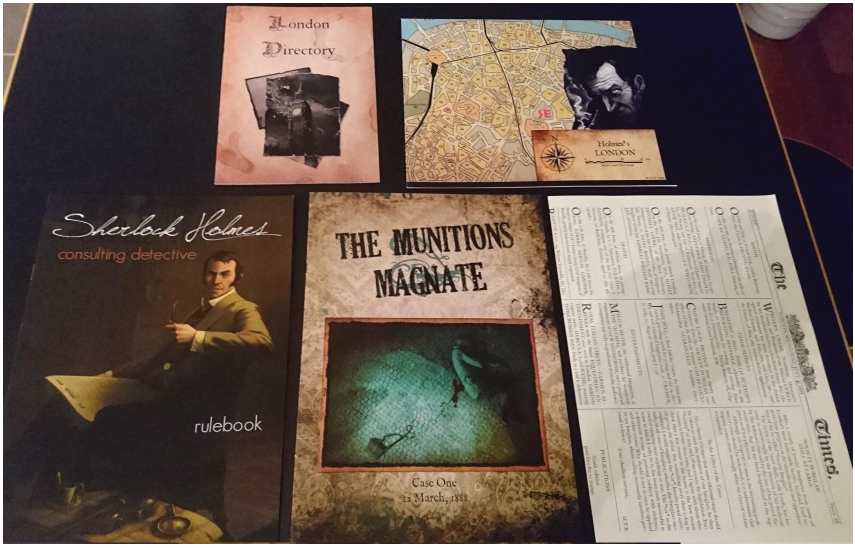

Figure 1. Base components for playing a Sherlock Holmes – Consulting Detective.

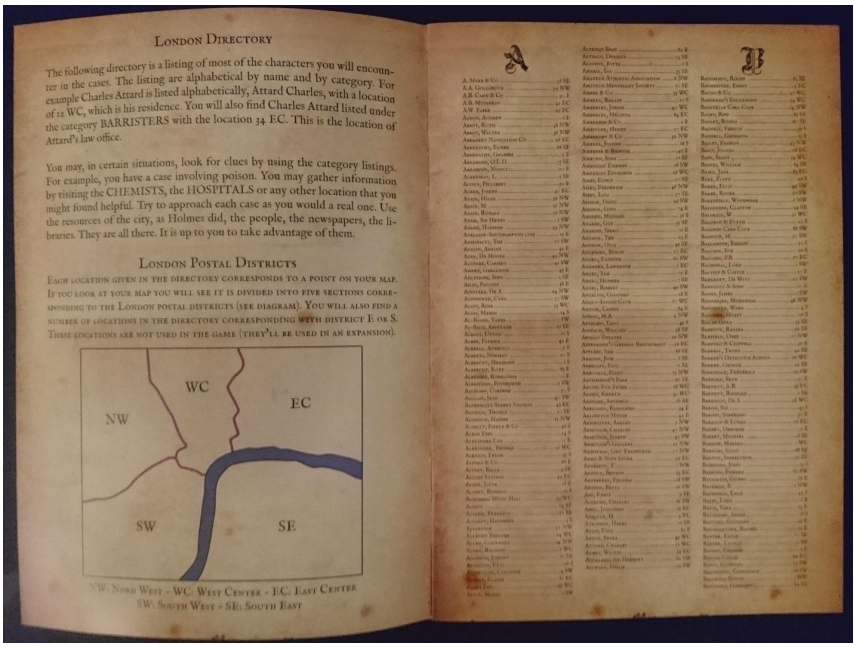

Figure 2. London Directory, demonstrating the section containing name/location pairs starting with letter A and beginning of the B section.

Every case starts with a prolog about how Sherlock gets involved with the case and which also provides the initials clues for the case. At the end of a prolog, Sherlock dispatches the players to solve the case. Thematically this in many cases involves half careless quip on how Sherlock is busy with something and how this might be good practice for the group in detective work. From this point onwards, players can at any time decide that they know enough to solve the case, in which point they go back to Sherlock and answer a series of case-related questions. Otherwise they must decide who to meet or where to go in London to get additional information in the form of documents, observations made by their characters, and short interviews with suspect and witnesses.

The choice of next location to investigate is, preferably, made based on the clues provided by the prolog, newspaper(s), and

descriptions from locations that the group has visited. In case that players get stuck, nothing prevents them from choosing any possible location or person in the directory. Each available location do not have a description in every case, so visiting some of them is not actually possible. But, for locations that are available there is a description for the players. These descriptions vary on their length and content, ranging from simple *"Jasper Meeks doesn't have any extra information to give us. You'll have to make do what you have, my friends"* to page-long stories about the location and conversations Irregulars have there with various characters. From these visits players gather the most of their clues from which they construct the case, who did what, how, when, and why. In this the game follows the familiar traditions of crime fiction, with all the familiarity of Sherlock Holmes stories.

By combining these decisions to the mental work players are doing while finding clues, eliminating suspects and solving the case, SHCD creates a strong mental engagement with itself and players. Salen and Zimmerman (2004) call this mental engagement as cognitive interactivity (or interpretive interactivity) which refers to "the psychological, emotional, and intellectual participation between a person and a system" (p. 59). In SHCD, there are at least three manifestations of cognitive interactivity in this network. First is with the game's initial prolog and following location investigations, second is then between players who discuss and interpret the pieces of narrative presented at these locations, and third when players decide that they have to consult the in-game newspapers for additional information or refresh their memory with rereading the previous clues.

If players decide that it's time to solve the case, they go to meet Sherlock and answer a series of questions. These questions are scored and compared to a baseline of 100 points, which is the default score Sherlock gets on each case. The players' score is reduced by 5 points for EACH location/person they have visited

that Sherlock did not visit. For example, if players knew how to answer to the "who, how, and why" questions correctly they would acquire a baseline score of 100 points, but if they visited 10 places that Sherlock did not visit during his investigation they get 50 points redacted from their score bringing them to total score of 50.

In short, the whole game revolves around these two main decisions: 1) can we solve the case, if not 2) then to which location in London we shall go next? All players have to go on, are the reading material the game provides and their own cognitive interaction to make this selection and to base their answers.

AESTHETICS

You know my methods. Apply them. (A. Conan Doyle, The Sign of Four)

In MDA, aesthetics are the emotional responses evoked in the player, and they are broken down into eight types. According to Hunicke, LeBlanc and Zuber (2004) these are:

1. Sensation: Game as sense-pleasure
2. Fantasy: Game as make-believe
3. Narrative: Game as drama
4. Challenge: Game as obstacle course
5. Fellowship: Game as social framework
6. Discovery: Game as uncharted territory
7. Expression: Game as self-discovery
8. Submission: Game as pastime

In the case of SHCD, the most fitting aesthetics to discuss are the Fantasy, Narrative, Challenge, and Discovery. Fantasy and Narrative aspects of SHCD relate to its theme of Victorian/Edwardian London and the Sherlockian lore. It is possible to play the game without prior knowledge of either of these, but

that in our opinion probably causes some problems. If players do have prior knowledge of how Holmes works with cases, be the knowledge from books or movies, they can deduce much easier what information is important in the clues and what is "just a thematic filler". Off-hand notes about muddy shoes or the size of someone's hat has many times more value than prolonged discussions about a manservant's schedule during the murder day.

Knowledge on these themes also increases the immersion, feeling of achievement when you overcome the challenges presented by the game and even fellowship. In our case, our familiarity with Sherlock influences greatly the way we have interpreted his quips and remarks, especially those directed to us as the Irregulars. For those that know the way he speaks to people, remarking how something "is quite obvious" when it has required great deal of work from it can be quite infuriating especially as you have just blown the case or at least the given score. This has fostered our determination as a group to up our effort in next case to beat Sherlock, making us more focused team. For some reason, the feeling of achievement is also probably greater for the fans of the Sherlockian theme as you are solving crimes assigned to you by Sherlock Holmes as a member of the Irregulars.

In SHCD, the narrative is presented in textual format, and only rarely are there any images accompanying it. This stresses the importance of words, their meanings and how they interconnect with each other and details, and also presents challenges that might not be so evident in other formats. This might also cause additional challenges in cases where players are not native speakers of the game's language or if the game uses the old meanings of some words that players are not aware of. For example, in one of the cases ("Case Four: The Lionized Lions") our investigation had led us to a hotel room used by our suspect who had been described as young man with athletic abilities. So

we suspected that he had climbed down from his room, using the vines on the wall as aid, thus avoiding the detection of other guests or hotel staff. But then the narrative for this location told us that the leaves of the vines looked *'dusty'*, and to us dusty meant that nobody had been climbing on those vines as they still had *dust* on them. This derailed our investigation as this suspect was cleared by this one word and the meaning we gave to it. After the game had ended with less favorable results, we used the Google Translate to check this word, and we found out that one of the less used meaning for the word dusty is … *'greyish'*. After this fiasco our attention to every word and its potential meaning in Sherlock's time has increased considerably, but still we have found out that we have fallen to similar traps again. And again. But, despite these frustrations and defeats, the game manages to evoke sense of achievement and gratification even when we fail, and we keep on playing the remaining cases.

Discovery in MDA refers to the game as uncharted territory which player are exploring. In SHCD this aspect is somewhat problematic from the viewpoint of scoring mechanism which effectively restrains player's curiosity and prevents them on acting like real detectives. As explained previously, players get minus points if they explore too many locations that Sherlock did not visit during his investigation. Typically Sherlock has only visited four locations, so this pushes players to minimize the locations they visit in order to avoid penalties and try to draw conclusions from what they were able to gather based on these few locations. Effectively this scoring mechanism denies the access to the wider narrative from the players by punishing them if they try to uncover details and visit new locations which provide them more pieces to the overall narrative of the case. This problem is most visible in cases where players early on recognize that there are two separate cases to solve. In solving both cases, the players' location count could raise so high that

additional points scored by solving the secondary case get nullified.

There are several ways to circumvent this problem if players are more interested in seeing the narrative side of the case than on scoring high at the end. First is simply to ignore the original scoring mechanism, and just see if players are able to find out the correct solution without counting the visited locations. A second circumvention, as suggested in some boardgamegeek.com discussions, is to utilize an outsider who scores the game, thus not revealing them Sherlock's solution. This is a bit problematic as the outsider should be present during the whole playtime, so that they know which questions they can ask without revealing to the players that they missed something (e.g. secondary case). In our case, typical playing time has been between 2-8 hours depending on how many places we have visited and how much we have discusses the case among our group (and also how many times during these discussions we had to walk our dogs). Yet another circumvention is to treat the case books as Choose Your Own Adventure books after the play session. The original scoring mechanism spoils the story anyway as in the scoring phase the questions presented to the players sometimes reveal things that they didn't find out during their gameplay and Sherlock's explanation of how he solved the cases reveals everything. Because of this, there is no replayability value on the cases, so after the session players can just read the case story and find out the rest of the narrative on their own.

CONCLUSION

My name is Sherlock Holmes. It is my business to know what other people do not know. (A. Conan Doyle, The Adventure of the Blue Carbuncle)

Members of our group do play lot of tabletop and computer games, and some of us also have experience with tabletop roleplaying games. In most of the games we play, there is a strong

element of chance, usually in the form of dice or other source of random number generation. To us, Sherlock Holmes Consulting Detective gives a different kind of a tabletop experience. In SHCD there is no chance, hence our failure or success relies only on our own abilities to spot the right clues and make the correct deductions to solve the cases. When we are solving the cases we can use our personal strengths and apply our background information to help the group reach the right solution.

SHCD achieves this by giving us a rich narrative, enabling collaboration, and by producing a sense of fun and achievements, even thru failure. Usually our cases are failures in some sense, even when we solve the case, as Holmes beats us by a large margin in the scoring phase. Other times, the game just bests us as we are trying to be too clever and end up going too deep in the clues. Refer to Figure 3, which showcases the typical setup during our sessions and also acts as an example of our glorious failure to understand what the game has been telling us.

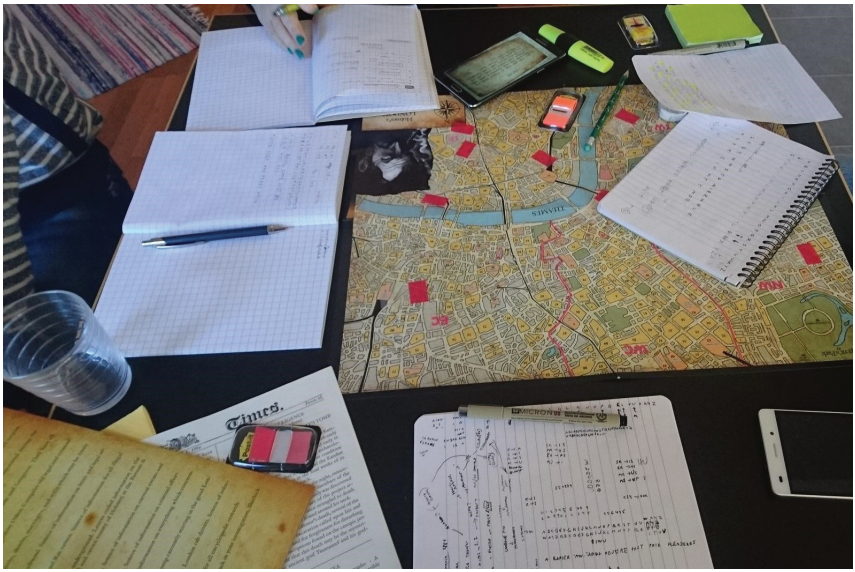

Figure 3. Gaming table during a case, presenting the map, in-game newspaper, and notes of four players trying to figure the meaning of a coded message.

The situation in Figure 3 is from Case Five – The Cryptic Corpse where murdered man has been found from theatre after the play had ended. At the beginning of the game, the first set of clues contains an encrypted message, which we of course tried to solve furiously. And we did it, but that did not lead us any closer to the solution. While we were being busy thinking on how to crack the code, we had ignored several hints, direct and indirect ones, on how to really solve the meaning of the message when we went on from location to location following the other clues. This dawned on us after we read how Holmes solved the case. The comment from shopkeeper in one of the locations that said "*You must read what's front of your eyes, that way you will save everyone time and trouble*" was suddenly very clear. What a moment before had been an impossible case, was suddenly a very simple case that we failed by being overly complicated and by misreading the clue. In this case, the intend was not to take the original ciphered message and find out how to decipher its contents. Instead, you had to look for something that was on plain sight, on the ciphered message itself. The ciphered message contained a date (5 May, 1889) and string of letters which some were lower- and others in uppercase, e.g. "*E ormji ErkiP geQi...*(and continuing)". Date and month were both 5, something that we also had used in our attempts to decipher the message, and it was the key to reading the message. Our idea was that with the number 5 you know how to substitute the letters and then you can read the message. Instead, you simply had to count every fifth letter in columns from the message, and take the next capital letter after each of the word that were formed. This way you found out that the message in front of your eyes read: "Moriarty", the archenemy of Sherlock Holmes. This is similar to how Pyrhönen (2010, p. 46) describes how in crime fiction readers are often given clues needed for solving the presented case, but the narrative simultaneously confuses the real meaning of these clues that only become clear in hindsight. In this case we again

went from frustration to amazement and laughter when we discovered the simple solution.

As noted in the beginning, there are other versions of this game available. Based on what we know about them, which is not much as we can't really search for information about them in fear of spoiling the cases we haven't played yet, they have the same structure, but the playing experience might differ somewhat because there are subtle differences. These changes include modified narratives to "fix" clues that have been deemed as illogical by the publisher and differences between how some clues are presented in different language editions. Interestingly there are also digital versions of this game, including the re-release of the PC version which is available on Steam. We haven't played the digital versions, but it would be interesting to see how this kind of game has been transferred to a digital medium and how well it works. Based on a short look on a series of YouTube videos about this digital version, it seems that the narrative is presented in a form of full-motion videos where actors play out the scenes from the casebook. Sherlock and Watson also have much more presence in the narrative as players seem to be guiding them around, instead of the player acting as the Baker Street Irregulars.

SHCD does frustrate us when we fail, and it frustrates us when we excel. But in either case, we are having fun at the end, be it bitter failure or sweet victory. And for that reason every game ends on a discussion on when we can meetup again and try to solve the next case.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The game is afoot. Not a word! Into your clothes and come! (A. Conan Doyle, The Adventure of the Abbey Grange)

I would like to thank my fellow Irregulars Lotta-Liisa Joelsson, Mikko Arvola, Veera Arvola, and Petteri Joelsson.

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It is a capital mistake to theorize before one has data. Insensibly one begins to twist facts to suit theories, instead of theories to suit facts. (A. Conan Doyle, A Scandal in Bohemia)

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WHY SHOULD I PLAY TO WIN IF I CAN PAY TO WIN?

Economic inequality and its influence on the experience of non-digital games

PATRICK MAISENHÖLDER

INTRODUCTION

While pay-to-win models are very common in digital games, they are rarely connected to non-digital games. But especially trading card games – like *Magic: The Gathering* (*MTG*) – show that economic capital can have a huge impact on one's ability to participate successfully in non-digital games. At least, if the game allows you to buy extra content besides the basic game content. It is of course, in games like these, possible to buy the basic game only. But when it comes to competitive gaming in certain game modes, you quickly reach your limits with the content of basic game packs or the content of some booster packs only – even if you are not playing on a professional level but are rather a casual player. Therefore, one is forced to buy cards to stay competitive or has to find other ways in order to make the game enjoyable. For example, by participating in (more) casual playing styles.

In this text, non-digital games that allow you to buy contents that improve your chances to be successful in them, will be analysed from the perspective of Roger Callois' (2001) game concept. The focus will be on the non-digital trading card game *MTG*. Additionally, Bourdieus (1997) forms of capital are used and extended to show how economic capital can be transformed into

different forms of ingame capital but also how ingame capitals can be transformed into each other. Both concepts are used to explain how and why paying to win can influence the game experience negatively.

Besides asking what the players can do against this problematic phenomenon, questions on the consequences for producers of non-digital games regarding their responsibility will be raised – always keeping in mind that "moral heroism" (moralischer Heroismus) (Kersting, 2008, 19) can not be the solution but rather an approach that tries to arbitrate between economic demands, (media) ethical values and a good gaming experience for ideally every player.

WHAT ARE GAMES AND WHY ARE THEY FUN TO PLAY?

According to classic definitions, play is a free action that takes place in a "magic circle" (Huzinga, 1980, 10), i.e. that is distinct from the real world. Play follows rules and it is not connected with material interest. That means, it has its end in itself. You play for the sake of playing. A game is the "place" where play can happen. For example, if you play chess, the game provides the space in which play takes place.

Roger Caillois' (2001) concept builds up on Huizinga's (1980) definition but extends it when it comes to the reasons why games and playing are fun and enjoyable. While Huizinga (1980) mostly focuses on competition, Callois says that also other mechanism can be the sources of fun and enjoyment. Besides competition (agon), he lists chance (alea), mimesis (mimicry) and the alteration of perception (ilinx) (cf. Caillois, 2001, 12).

Games that are mostly competitive are fun to play because one can compare one's game-related abilities to those of others (Caillois, 2001). Examples are football, chess or a game of the Call of Duty series. In football, for example, players compare

their rapidity and stamina, in chess, they compare their ability to anticipate and in a game of the Call of Duty series, they compare their quick-aiming abilities. Every competitive game has certain spheres in which the players compete. Thereby, an uncertain outcome is a key factor for the enjoyment of the game. If the result of a match is clear beforehand, it is not perceived as a competition and may therefore lack fun and enjoyment.

Another source of fun in games is chance or alea. This category includes "all games that are based on a decision independent of the player" (Callois, 2001, 17). That means, games that have "an outcome over which he has no control, and in which winning is the result of fate rather than triumphing over an adversary. More properly, destiny is the sole artisan of victory, and where there is rivalry, what is meant is that the winner has been more favored by fortune than the loser" (Caillois, 2001, 17). In this type of games, the enjoyment is also caused by the uncertain outcome in combination with the possibility to win. In contrast to agon, players have less possibilities to influence the outcome. They can calculate the possibilities, for example in *Blackjack*, but they can not force the needed card(s) to appear by using your strength or other abilities. The role of fortune is bigger in these games.

The other two types – mimicry and ilinx – are games which are not as restricted by rules as the other types are. Mimicry can shortly be described as playing a role. "One can […] escape himself and become another. This is mimicry" (Caillois, 2001, 19). The other type – ilinx – also has to do with an altered perception of reality. But in contrast to mimicry it is not about being another person or taking another role. Games of this type are rather such activities which lead to an altered perception of reality by manipulating the body or the sense organs. This can be achieved by activities leading to "dizziness and disorder" (Caillois, 2001, 12). But also through other activities that change the constitution of the body, i.e. by causing adrenaline rushes, and by that the perception of the world. Callois' (2001) examples

are "high speed on skis, motor cycles, or in driving sports cars" (p. 25).

What is *Magic: The Gathering* and why is it fun to play?

MTG was chosen as an example because with its release in 1993 it is the oldest trading card game and can therefore be seen as a prototype of and for other trading card games. And with its approximately 20 million players around the world, it is also well-known and well played (Duffy, 2015). So its existence on the market, the influence on other trading card games and its popularity were reasons for choosing *MTG* as an example for the possibility to use real economic resources to improve one's chances to participate successfully in non-digital games.

Since its release *MTG* underwent different alterations but the core principles stayed the same. One of these principles is that there are two or more players that play against each other. The aim of the game is to beat the opponent(s). Therefore, all players are equipped with an own deck that he or she can build himself or herself before the game. Theoretically players can use every card out of every edition (i.e. every card since 1993) to build their deck. So the pool from which players build their decks that have (normally) at least 60 cards in them is theoretically every card ever created for *MTG*. The only limit is that you can have only four identical cards in a deck (except for basic lands). But the pool form which players can choose cards can differ. It depends on the gaming situation which cards are allowed. Everything is possible from cards that are only from the new(er) edition(s) to every card that has ever been produced for *MTG*.

Figure 1, 2, 3. Cards from 1993, 2005, and 2017 different editions. One can see that the style of the cards changed over the years.

The cards have different colors. The core colours are red, blue, white, black and green. Each color has to offer specific abilities and offers a different playing style. While red cards often offer players the ability to damage creatures or players, white cards often have abilities that prevent damage or give back life points. Besides different colors the cards are of different types. There are creatures, sorceries, instants, enchantments, artifacts, lands and even other types. The different card types offer different possibilities but have also different restrictions. If a player wants to cast his or her cards in the game, he or she has to "pay" them with mana that is produced by lands.

Another aspect in which the cards differ is their commonness. There are four types of commonness: common, uncommon, rare or mythic rare (There are even more differentiations possible. But these specifications are not important for the purpose of this text.). In general, the abilities or the effects of the cards or the possibilities and combinations offered by them get better with the degree of their rareness.

Figure 4. Colours indicating the rarity of a card: Common, Uncommon, Rare, Mythic rare.

At the beginning of a match, each player draws seven cards from the deck. Each turn a player has to draw one card. The aim is then to play lands to generate mana to cast the different cards in one's hand and ultimately to defeat the opponent(s) with the cards one has at hand. This is either done by reducing the life points of the opponent(s) to zero or less or by reducing the deck of the other person(s) to zero cards because if a player can not draw a card anymore, he or she also loses the game.

The cards can be bought in boosters which contain 15 cards each. They (generally) contain one rare card while the other cards are common and uncommons. One can also buy deck packs which contain playable decks with 60 cards. Single cards can also be bought. There are different possibilities starting with *www.ebay.com* to trading card specific websites like *www.magiccardmarket.eu*. The prices differ according to their release date, their edition, their abilities and also according to their commonness.

Figure 5. How to play Magic: The Gathering.

Since *MTG* is played freely by most if not all players, since it has rules, since it takes place in a "magic circle" (Huizinga, 1980, 10) due to the fact that killing creatures or the opponent does not cause real harm and since it is (mostly) played for enjoyment and not for economic resources, it can assumed to be a game. The sources of enjoyment can thereby be found in three of Caillois' four categories. Namely agon, alea and to a certain degree mimicry. But while it may be the case that being a mighty wizard or *Planeswalker* is an enjoyable imagination for some people, it seems more likely that besides mimicry the factors competition and chance are the main sources of enjoyment in *MTG* (and also other trading card games like *Yu-Gi-Oh!* and the like).

The competitive part of *MTG* is given in the setting that two or more players try to defeat each other by using their game-related skills, abilities and resources. The ability to think of good combinations of cards, to know when to play which card or

to anticipate the opponents actions can be mentioned here. Therefore you need better cards and/or a better strategy than the other player(s). You also have to be able to react to the actions of your opponent properly, so that his or her play will not be effective or at least not be as effective as he or she would like it to be. So *MTG* has competitive elements on several levels. Since both players can choose from the same card pool, i.e. all *MTG* cards or the editions the players determined as the card pool, the initial position for deck construction are theoretically even and skills and abilities – besides chance – seem to be the only crucial factors for winning.

The other factor which makes *MTG* enjoyable is that it contains some elements of chance. Drawing the first seven cards is always exciting because it can be very crucial for your success in the game. The card that you can draw each turn can be equally important. Knowing that your opponent will defeat you next turn unless you draw that one card that you need for your last-minute victory is a thrilling experience that can occur in some game situations and is clearly a factor of great enjoyment. It can, of course, also be a factor of disappointment but the thrill you feel bevor drawing the card is and end in itself and this could only exist if it is possible to fail.

Figure 6. The Pro Tour Ixalan Finals 2017 as an example of competitive gameplay of MTG. Forms of capital and their ingame forms

When one has to describe games in which one can achieve better results if real capital is used to gain ingame advantages, one can use and transform Pierre Bourdieus (1997) forms of capital. Bourdieu states in his original concept that besides economic capital, it is also possible to accumulate social and cultural capital, whereby cultural capital can be differentiated into institutionalized cultural capital, objectified cultural capital and embodied cultural capital. Bourdieu also states that these forms of capital can be (more or less directly) converted into each other or support each other.

When it comes to games – digital and non-digital – one can use this concept to explain how forms of ingame capital can be converted into each other or support other. Ingame capital will here be described as everything that directly or indirectly improves your chances to win or be successful in a game. Like

the classic forms of cultural capital, cultural ingame capital can either be objectified cultural ingame capital, embodied cultural ingame capital or institutionalized cultural ingame capital. The first form of cultural ingame capital – the objectified cultural ingame capital – can be described as every ingame object that improves your avatar or your chances to win, like weapons, armor, equipment in general, character-bound skills, improved stamina or mana, certain units in strategy games or, when it comes to non-digital games, (specific) cards, certain combos or miniatures. Embodied cultural ingame capital can be described as your abilities and skills as a player. Skills and abilities that one needs for playing directly against other players but also skills that you need for choosing the best equipment and creating your deck, army list or combos and so on belong to this category. Institutionalized cultural ingame capital is everything that shows or is at least an hint for a player's rank and/or experience in the game. Examples are a high level or other qualities, attributes and items bound to your avatar that do not improve your chances to win but are only an an aesthetic feature and an alteration of appearance. An example would be a golden weapon in *Call of Duty*. It shows that a player has a high rank but it does not improve the strength of his or her weapon.

Another form of capital that mostly occurs in digital games is economic ingame capital. This is the case because it is mostly only in digital games possible to buy ingame money with real money. This ingame money then allows you also to buy the cultural ingame capitals mentioned above – at least every cultural ingame capital except embodied cultural ingame capital. It can only support the latter. Fo example, by enabling players to buy helpful objects that improve their playing.

Lastly, there is social ingame capital which is the reputation that players have in a game or a gaming community. It allows them to activate people for the realization of your own goals, i.e. a raiding

another persons or teams base or becoming the member of a clan or gaming group.

Like in Bourdieu's concept, it is assumed here that these forms can also be (more or less directly) converted into each other and support each other. If you play well, i.e. use your skills, abilities but also equipment, you can earn objectified cultural ingame capital as well as institutionalized cultural ingame capital. In return, objectified cultural ingame capital can increase your embodied cultural ingame capital because it can have a positive effect on your playing which may increase your skills and abilities. The conversion of embodied cultural ingame capital into institutionalized cultural ingame capital is possible because if you play well, you can level up faster and/or unlock aesthetic features that do not improve your character but show your rank. Having certain equipment, rank or level then gives you respect in the gaming community because it is a symbol of skill and ability or endurance. That can give you advantages when it comes to finding partners for a raid or something similar that enables or at least helps you to get the other forms of ingame capital. Due to the shortness of this essay, every other possible conversions and transformations will not be explicated. It should only be pointed out that they can directly or indirectly be converted into each other.

Here, it needs to be said that one has to limit the model of forms of ingame capital and the possible transformations. Not every of these forms of ingame capital can be used for every digital or non-digital game. It depends on the mechanisms of the game which form of ingame capital you can use and to what extent. If one analyzes a game, one has to bear that in mind.

One also has to say that the phenomenon of conversing ingame capitals into each other is not problematic in itself. The problem is rather given when game-external capital allows players to increase their forms of ingame capital. For example, if a game

allows you to buy objectified cultural ingame capital with real economic resources. In this case, a game-external capital is used to influence game-internal capitals that give the players in question advantages on different levels as it is mentioned above.

PAY TO WIN IN DIGITAL AND NON-DIGITAL GAMES

By using Callois' (2001) categories, it can be shown why the usage of game-external capital to increase game-internal or ingame capital(s) can be a problem from the perspective of the players. As it was mentioned above, games are a "magic circle" (Huzinga, 1980, 10) in which play happens. Two great sources of fun and enjoyment in digital or non-digital games are competition or chance. The idea is that you have theoretically equal starting points and only your game-related skills and abilities or in general your game-internal capitals or your luck are or should be crucial for winning or losing. This is corrupted when players are able to increase their game-internal capitals by using game-external capital and thereby increase their chances to win or be successful tremendously.

Of course, the ideally equal starting points can also be shifted by other factors, like training, experience with and in the game and unlocking weapons and gear and the like. But these forms of improvement are included in the logic of the game and are internal to it – for example, if weapons and gear (objectified cultural ingame capital) are unlocked by using game-related skills and abilities (embodied cultural ingame capital). In other words: If the competition is based on the comparison of game-internal capitals that were increased or are supported by other game-internal capitals or training, there is no problem because this is how the game works. This is what is written down in its rules. How well players of games perform depends on how much time and effort they put in it. In this case, better gear and equipment, a higher level and other advantages are the fruit of one's own game-related labour. The inequality is therefore

dependent on game-internal factors which are part of the logic of the game. The circle is not left or perforated and the transformation of capitals only happens in one sphere of capitals, here: the sphere of ingame capitals.

When players are able to use real economic capital, i.e. game-external capital to influence the game-internal capitals, the magic circle becomes perforated which unbalances the relation between the ressources players have at hand and game-related labour. And if this has a tremendous effect on the balance of the competition, a new sphere in which players have to compete comes into play: The sphere of game-external capital. Besides comparing their game-internal capitals, as it is the idea of the game, players now also have to compete in regard to their real economic capital. A subversion of the logic of the game is the consequence which creates a ludic unbalance or asymmetry in favor of the economically strong(er) players which is in the disfavor of economically weak(er) players.[1]

The same works for non-digital games, especially trading card games like the example used in this text: *MTG*. Here players are also able to buy objectified cultural ingame capital, i.e. cards. As it is mentioned above, cards differ in their price according to their abilities and/or commonness. Players with more economic capital are able to use it to buy powerful single cards. They are also able to buy more boosters or deck packs which increases their chances to get rare and/or powerful cards. This enables

1. It should be mentioned here that the ability to use real economic capital to increase one's ingame capitals does not make embodied cultural ingame capital, i.e. game-related skills and abilities useless. They are still important and can not be directly increased by real economic capital. What is meant here is what is said: Real economic capital can shift the chances of winning in favor of the economically strong(er) players because – taking MTG as an example – they are not only able to combine magic cards and construct decks but to own and build them in real life and not just theoretically. Skills and abilities still need to be given and can not fully be replaced by the usage of real economic capital that is used for game-internal capitals. But the influence of real economic capital on one's chances to be successful in MTG and therefore for a possible good game experience is not marginal which is what this text wants to make plausible.

them to build decks that are really strong and that are almost impossible to defeat when buying basic packs or some boosters only. This influences the competition in favor of the players with more real economic capital by subverting the sources of fun and enjoyment – competition on the basis of game-internal capitals and even chance by making it more possible to draw a card if it is more than one time in a deck – through factors that are external to the game.

Figure 7; 8. Price comparison of a common ($0.01) and a mythic rare ($14.40) card. Prices according to https://shop.tcgplayer.com (11/11/2017).

Like in other games, buying the basic game is a necessary investment if one wants to play *MTG*. And what is also quite normal to trading card games is that there are many developer-given possibilities to boost your deck(s), i.e. by buying extra decks or booster packs. So, one could argue that using real economic resources to increase one's objectified cultural ingame capital is part of the game and its rules and therefore no problem at all. A possible argument could be: If players who are not able or willing to spend real economic resources on MTG complain

about this, they do not seem to have understood the game. The negative game experience is a result of the player's wrong understanding of the game and not owed the game itself and its mechanisms.

And prima facie this argument seems to be right. MTG is a trading card game and therefore it is part of the logic of the game to buy, collect and trade cards. In other words: Using game-external capital to own and increase objectified cultural ingame capital is part of the game. But looking at it more closely, one can detect some problematic phenomenons that come along with it. And they have to do with how the developers of *MTG – Wizards of the Coast* (*WotC*) – deal with this.

When one looks at the game-related media products in which *MTG* is presented or explained by *WotC*, a flaw can be detected. This is the case because they explicitly tell (potential) players – i.e. in advertisements – or especially implicitly give (potential) players the impression – i.e. through the rule texts, other game-related texts or videos that explain how to build decks or play *MTG* – that the main sources of fun and enjoyment of MTG are competition on the basis of ingame capitals and/or chance, in other words: that winning or losing are (mostly) dependent on game-specific skills and abilities and luck and that you only need a relatively small amount of cards (objectified cultural ingame capital) to play *MTG*.

On their website for example, *WotC* has a 16-page *Quick Start Guide* for *MTG* (http://media.wizards.com/2014/docs/EN_M15_QckStrtBklt_LR_Crop.pdf). In it, the impression is given that only game-related skills and abilities are crucial for winning or losing since *MTG* is depicted as a game in which you only need "deep strategy" (p. 2) for winning while you just need "some Magic cards" (p. 2) because they are "the tools you use to defeat your opponents" (p. 2). Of course, you need to buy the game, i.e. have to use real economic capital to buy objectified

cultural ingame capital, but the expression is given that you do not have to spend much of real economic capital since booster packs and additional cards are not explicitly called a way to make your decks stronger or – if you use a certain amount of real economic resources – almost invincible. They are just a way "to make your deck your own" (p. 2). Similar to this, in videos like *How to Build your First Magic Deck* from the *MTG* YouTube channel (new) players of *MTG* get explained that for deck building you only have to "open up some booster packs" or that you just have to get some of your cards together and combine them to get a playable deck.

Figure 9. How to Build Your First Magic Deck.

Principally, all of these statements are correct. But since the *MTG* game experience can strongly be influenced by real economic capital, one could argue that the media ethical value *truthfulness* that can be described as the disposition to tell the truth or not to conceal important information (Rath, 2014) is violated in these

media products. At least, if the possible influence of real economic resources on the game is theoretically justified and also empirically detectable – which should not be a problem to show in *MTG* or other trading card games. And if this influence is plausible, producers and promoters who do not provide information about the potentially problematic influence of real economic capital on the game experience violate the value truthfulness. This is the case because, as it is mentioned above, they implicitly or explicitly raise wrong expectations with their promotion and explanation of the game and its mechanisms and rules. The expectation is raised that players only need some objectified cultural ingame capital and mainly their game-related skills and abilities to participate successfully in the game. By this, the huge possible influence of game-external capitals – in this case: real economic capital – is unnamed and *truthfulness* therefore violated. In other words: While *WotC* gives the impression that players mostly compete on basis of their skills and abilities (which can be the main reason for buying the game in the first place), they conceal that the game can also include an unofficial sphere of comparison: The real economic capital. (New) Players therefore buy the game in a state of partial knowledge.

Creature (25)
4 Glint-Sleeve Siphoner
3 Hostage Taker
4 Longtusk Cub
2 Rishkar, Peema Renegade
4 Rogue Refiner
1 The Scarab God
3 Walking Ballista
4 Winding Constrictor

Sorcery (4)
4 Attune with Aether

Instant (10)
4 Blossoming Defense
4 Fatal Push
2 Vraska's Contempt

Land (21)
4 Aether Hub
4 Blooming Marsh
4 Botanical Sanctum
2 Fetid Pools
2 Swamp
1 Island
4 Forest

60 Cards

Figure 10; 11: Comparison of prices for the Planeswalker deck (Ca. 15 $ | More than 300 $ without sideboard) from the video How to Build Your First Magic Deck and Seth Manfield's Sultai Energy Pro Tour Ixalan deck that is listed in the category Winning decks on https://magic.wizards.com/en/articles/winning-decks. Prices according to https://shop.tcgplayer.com (11/11/2017).

PLAYERS POSSIBILITIES AND PRODUCERS RESPONSIBILITIES

If a game enables players to highly influence their chances to win

by using real economic capital and if this is generally done in a manner that forces players to also engage in such actions because otherwise it would influence their game experience negatively in a very extreme way as it is described above, it seems that players have three options: either pay the price, i.e. buy cards or play with reduced fun and enjoyment or quit playing. But, as experience shows, that does not have to be case.

Over the years, some forms of casual game modes have developed. In them, factors that make the game enjoyable can not be corrupted by real economic capital fueled objectified cultural ingame capital. In game modes like these, skills, abilities and luck are the crucial factors for winning or losing the game – like ideally in agon and alea. Examples are *pauper*, *peasant*, *booster draft* or *cube draft*. On their website, *WotC* have a list of these limited formats in which game-related skills and abilities and luck are more crucial for winning than real economic capital (http://magic.wizards.com/en/game-info/gameplay/rules-and-formats/formats). In *pauper* for example, you are only allowed to use common cards. Besides this limitation, there is also another limit represented by banned cards. *WotC* have lists on their website where you can see banned cards for pauper (http://magic.wizards.com/en/game-info/gameplay/formats/pauper). These modes are also included in their weekly event *Friday Night Magic* (http://magic.wizards.com/en/events/event-types/friday-night-magic) where players gather to play the game. Formats like these limit the influence of economic resources on the chances to win and make game-related or game-specific skills and abilities and also luck again more crucial for winning or losing. In these formats, economic capital can not have a tremendous negative effect on the gaming experience. They seem to provide a good gaming experience for ideally every and not only economically strong players.

So, besides their flaws in regard to truthfulness, *WotC* has to be mentioned as a positive example for promoting such game

modes. The only flaw that can be found is that the game modes that are not as costly as the *Standard* game mode are not promoted and supported in the same manner. *Pauper*, for example, or even *Modern* have no big tournaments like the Pro Tour (anymore) (https://magic.wizards.com/en/events/coverage/ptsoi/where-modern-goes-from-here-2016-04-24). This gives the impression that these modes are not the *real* or *actual* ones and do not provide the full *MTG* experience. The latter only seems to be provided by the game mode in which players have to buy new cards every three months (https://magic.wizards.com/en/content/standard-formats-magic-gathering). And also at *Friday Night Magic*, this last game mode – *Standard* – seems to be present the most. So, if the promotion of the – from the perspective of the players – (more) economical game modes and events would be combined with a truthful depiction of the game and the possible influence of real economic capital on the game and the game experience, *WotC* could serve as a good example for other producers of trading card games and also other non-digital games that allow you to improve your chances to win by using real economic resources, like *Warhammer 40.000*.

What does all of this mean for non-digital games that allow the usage of real economic resources to increase game-internal or ingame capitals? From a(n) (media) ethical perspective, one can not say that is it morally wrong to produce games which enable pay to win. It is not a problem in itself that in some games the influence of economic resources is tremendously. That means that it is not a problem if the main sources of enjoyment – competition and chance – are subverted by game-external factors to an extent that makes it almost or fully impossible to be successful in the game for non- or less-paying players. At least it is not a problem if this is transparent for the (potential) players because then it becomes an explicit part of the game's logic. If a game is promoted as a game that gives an advantage to

players who are able and willing to use real economic resources for ingame ressources, it is not problematic at all if the game is played and the agents involved in production, distribution etc. gain profit from it. But it can become problematic if a game is intransparent with regard to this.

From the producers view, being truthful thereby does not have to be negative. Being transparent may be rewarded with a better relation to the community and customer loyalty. In other words: *Ethics pay off* (cf. Rath 2006, 126)! And it may also lead the producers to develop (new) game modes or promote those which are less corruptible by real economic capital which may then attract new players. It may also bring back players that quitted playing MTG (or other trading card games) for the same reason.

This, of course, raises the question what truthfulness implicates: What do producers of a game have to make transparent? Another question could be on the outreach of the responsibility of the producers of games: If there is a market for single cards that is not run by the producers, to which extent are the producers responsible for the influence of transactions on these markets on the game? And to what extent do producers have to explicate this in their depiction and description of the game? Questions like these can not be answered here. But the text can be seen as a starting point for reflecting on these topics and questions. Further research has to be done and could eventually – by implementing other and promoting the existing (more) economical game modes – be a factor for reducing the influence of game-external capitals on the game experience.

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STACKING MAGIC

The Flexible Simplicity of Analog Rules

ERIC MURNANE & KENTON HOWARD

INTRODUCTION

Two rival sorcerers meet on a contested field. Their purpose: to destroy one another with fantastic creatures and powerful spells. At the same moment, two friends sit at a table for a card game. Each of them has brought their arsenal: a sixty-card deck with identical brown backs. Any who have played *Magic: The Gathering* (*Magic* hereafter) will recognize that these groups are one and the same. Nearing its twenty-fifth year in production, this trading card game has been a staple of hobby shops and comic stores across the United States and internationally for a generation. From its relatively humble beginnings in 1993, *Magic* has accumulated a devoted base of players while drawing new players into the fold. At its core, *Magic* is a social game. There is no single player option in the analog version. The makers of *Magic* certainly recognized this. One edition of the rules warns players, beginning with all capital letters: "IMPORTANT! Don't try to read through this rulebook until you've played a few games" (Wizards of the Coast, 2003). In discussing the game, both authors of this paper recounted how they learned the game from friends.

A substantial reason *Magic* attracts so many players is that it is an intensely social enterprise. *Magic* is relatively easy to learn

but nearly impossible to master. Much of this comes from the social dimension of the rules. Our discussion here centers on one of the key mechanics of *Magic*: the stack. This aspect of the game governs the way that players interact with each other on the level of play. As a mechanic, the stack is elegant due to what we call "flexible simplicity." Most of the time, players implement the mechanic in an ad hoc fashion, interrupting one another only when the need arises; however, when the need arises, players have the ability to deal with complex game dynamics and intricacies in a manner that we will argue is altogether rhetorical. It is these intense moments of gameplay that are of particular interest. The way that players resolve situations with such keen detail while readily breezing through more mundane interactions largely accounts for *Magic's* continued popularity.

In discussing *Magic*, we will here argue that the flexible simplicity of the stack greatly contributes to the game being well played. Our initial thoughts on the stack come from years of experience playing the game both casually and at the tournament level. In that time, we both observed players, who were quite aware of the rules of the game, only slow down gameplay when the interactions required careful thought. Our initial thinking was that players with a sufficient mastery of the rules did so because they recognized that strict application of the rules is only required when a situation is sufficiently complex. It is with this idea in mind that we played two games of *Magic,* transcribing the games as we went. In the first game, we played casually, only really slowing down when the need arose: essentially, we used flexible simplicity. In the second, we adhered stringently to the order of events as advised in the rules regardless of the need presented by the situation, ignoring the concept of flexible simplicity entirely. To say that the second game was tedious would be an understatement. Using these test games as a subject, we will demonstrate the usefulness in applying flexible simplicity

to the stack, drawing on theories in game studies as well as rhetoric.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The scholarly conversation surrounding *Magic* is decidedly scant. Galotti, Drebus, and Reimer (2001) used *Magic* to measure learning by participants. Trammell (2013) discussed the Wizards of the Coast's response to fan art modification. In considering the gameplay of *Magic*, Carter, Gibbs, and Harrop (2012) described the means through which players experience games on multiple levels. Paraphrasing *Magic's* creator, they note that "the time a player spends planning his/her deck is also part of the metagame." This moves the relationship between player and cards to one which is necessarily social. They went on to describe selection as "a process of exploring the thousands of combinations a player's deck can have. Garfield's concept of the metagame encompasses the entire context of play." Essentially, when a player has mastery of a given game, they consider cards as individual units as well as the relationship that individual cards have with other cards in one's own deck as well as potential decks a player might encounter from opponents. Of significance to Carter, Gibbs, and Harrop's argument is the social rhetorical nature through which players view individual cards and their combinations.

Because of the lack of scholarly conversation surrounding *Magic* and analog games in general, it is useful to shift our attention to the larger conversation within the study of games. The concept of flexible simplicity that we propose is based on the work of Jesper Juul (2010), who discussed the flexibility of design in video games. While discussing the differences in difficulty levels among various video games, he pointed out that *Guitar Hero* and *Rock Band* have "difficulty levels that scale from very easy to near impossible, providing depth as discussed in chapter 2. *Guitar Hero* and *Rock Band*…represent a kind of flexible design that

lets players decide what type of game to play" (p. 129). In this case, Juul was discussing video games, in which the application of game rules is handled by code that has been programmed in advance. In the games described above, players might choose from various difficulty levels or other options that might influence gameplay, but the way game rules are applied is generally out of a player's direct control because those rules are mostly governed by the game's code. With those differences in mind, these games do function as a useful point of comparison to *Magic* because they are social games that usually involve multiple players, and Juul (2010) argued that "social game design isn't about creating a game that is strategically deep as much as it is about making sure that the game, in turn, creates interesting interaction between players" (p. 121). It would be inaccurate to describe *Magic* as not being strategically deep, but the rules of the game are specifically designed for interaction between players as well as for keeping the game interesting for them.

As mentioned above, a key difference between a video game and an analog game such as *Magic* is that the application of game rules is handled directly players instead of by code. In *Magic,* players actively interpret the rules that have been created by Wizards of the Coast as they play the game. This distinction might seem obvious, but it introduces a crucial difference between the rules of *Magic* and the video games that Juul describes. In *Magic,* the influence of player interpretation on those rules means that they are rhetorically and socially constructed by players in response to various in-game interactions, rather than being unilaterally applied by a computer. Since "contemporary perspectives on rhetoric often hold that 'everything, or virtually everything, can be described as rhetorical'" (Schiappa qtd. in Paul, 2011), this social element of analog gameplay suggests an interesting site of analysis, especially since it is one of the major differences between them and electronic games. Paul (2011) argued that "if rhetorical analysis is a critical perspective, focusing beyond

mere persuasion, all elements surrounding games are influential symbols worthy of study, as all games function persuasively." This claim suggests that persuasive elements might be found within many aspects of game design, including a game's rule system. In analog games like *Magic,* these persuasive elements are foregrounded in the way players discuss, or in some occasions argue about, interpretations of the game's rules in order to settle disputes during play. When players disagree, the rules become one of the main rhetorical elements used to persuade the opposing player that one's interpretation of the rules is correct. With this in mind, players can:

> [T]hink of a game as a language: a language contains a lexicon (the words) and a syntax (that controls the arrangement of the words). Scrabble is not an expressive game because the range of things we can do (the lexicon) is very small, and because the game forces us into playing for the goal (a very rigid syntax). Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas and Sims 2 feature a wide range of things we can do (a large lexicon), while accommodating a wide range of playing styles (a flexible syntax). (Juul, 2010, p. 139).

From this perspective, *Magic* would certainly have a large lexicon and a flexible syntax, as the game features over thirty thousand cards (i.e. things to do) and an incredible variety of playing styles in terms of how those ards can be combined into various decks. If the rules of *Magic* can also be seen as part of this language system, they accordingly must be able to accommodate the very broad "language" of the game itself. As such, the game's 224 page "Comprehensive Rule Book" can be very complex, lengthy, and technical, leading to rhetorical situations between players in which those rules must be interpreted, analyzed, and discussed in order to resolve gameplay situations.

While there are many flexible elements of *Magic* that could be examined, we argue that "flexible simplicity" is the best way to describe the ways the game's rule system is actually applied by players during play. In most cases, this effect can be seen in

players deciding upon how strictly to apply the rules of *Magic* in a particular game; by doing so, players introduce a social element to the game's rules that might only be possible in analog games. In fact, this flexible simplicity can even be observed on a case-by-case basis in *Magic,* as players usually rely on a strict interpretation of the games rules only when a particular gameplay situation requires it. The game's more detailed comprehensive rule book highlights this, claiming that those rules are "intended to be the ultimate authority for the game, and you won't usually need to refer to them except in specific cases or during competitive games" (Wizards, 2017c). They also note that "for casual play and most ordinary situations, you'll find what you need in the Magic: The Gathering basic rules" (Wizards, 2017c), a much shorter document that is intended for beginners. While these statements represent suggestions by the game's creators on how to use the rules, they also suggest that flexible simplicity is built in into *Magic's* rules intentionally.

When discussing social elements of gameplay in video games, Juul (2010) cited *Magic's* designer: "Game designer Richard Garfield notes that 'a particular game, played with the exact same rules will mean different things to different people,' and he uses the term metagame to describe these differences" (p. 121). What is interesting about both Juul's and Garfield's claims is that the video games Juul describes more often use the "exact same rules" from game session to game session than an analog game like *Magic* because those rules are applied by code. By contrast, analog games are not always played with the exact same rules each time because those rules are socially constructed. Players might follow the rules more strictly in one game than in another because they have the flexibility to simplify or modify gameplay rules on the fly for various reasons. In *Magic,* the most common example of flexible simplicity might be when players do not strictly obey the rules of the game in order to speed up play, an occurrence that happens frequently, and is demonstrated in

the first game that we played. As noted above, this concept is built into the game's rules system, and it is best exemplified by the stack, a specific subset of the game's rules that govern many of the interactions between cards. We will provide gameplay examples from *Magic* to support this claim more fully later in this paper, but it is worth providing a brief overview of the game's rule system, since our analysis of the game will rely on such very specific elements of the game's rules.

THE RULES OF *MAGIC*

Before any thorough discussion of our own test games can take place, it would be prudent to outline the basics of the game. The current comprehensive rules of the game are just over two hundred pages, so we will strive to faithfully present them here in a condensed format. However, it should be clear that this explanation is at best a paraphrase. Gee (2003) notes in his Active, Critical Learning Principle that ideally "[a]ll aspects of the learning environment…are set up to encourage active and critical, not passive, learning" (p. 49). In a social game like *Magic*, this learning would take the form of an experienced player showing decks to a novice and walking him/her through a few practice games, but we will do our best here.

The Basics

Perhaps the most succinct description of how *Magic* is played lies on their own website. According to the Wizards Strategy site (2017b), players are "powerful mages each armed with a deck of *Magic* cards representing lands, creatures and spells. Each player summons creatures and casts spells, trying to knock the other down from 20 to 0 life and win the game." This is certainly a good start. In a standard game of *Magic*, players each have a deck of sixty cards. They draw seven and decide who goes first. Over the course of a turn, a player draws one card, plays up to one land (the principle resource cards in *Magic*) as well

any cards in their hand which he/she she wishes, provided they have sufficient mana (as determined by lands they have in play). Figure 1 demonstrates some of the cards a player might use in a deck. In *Magic*, players construct a deck from the cards which he/she owns. This deck can be any combination of the game's five colors: black, blue, green, red, and white. Those represented in Figure 1 are all green (for the sake of simplicity). From left to right the cards below are a land, an instant, and a creature.

Figure 1. Sample Cards. Images from Gatherer (Wizards 2017a)

Lands represent the primary way that a player would produce mana (represented by the symbol on the "Forest") which is in turn used to pay the costs represented in the top right of both the "Giant Growth" and "Elvish Archers." It is with these cards that a player attempts to either reduce an opponent's life to zero or empty the cards from an opponent's deck. If either of these occur, the player wins.

Turn Order, Priority, and the Stack

With the absolute basic structure of the game established, we can turn our attention to the more nuanced aspects of the game. Each player's turn is divided into numerous phases with a specific focus and set of actions that each player can take. The untap phase is first. All the player does here is reset the cards

on his/her side of the table. Next is upkeep phase; the player can use spells and abilities that are instant speed (can be used instantaneously) during this phase, and pays any required "upkeep costs" of his or her cards as necessary. Then there is the draw phase, in which the player simply draws a card. Nothing can be played during this phase. After that, the player has his/her first main phase. During this time, the player can play one land, as well as any cards he/she can afford. The main phase is the only time that one can play most creatures. Then, there is the attack phase in which, unsurprisingly, the player can attack the opponent with any creatures that have been in play at least one turn. This is followed by a second main phase and finally a discard phase in which a player reduces his/her hand to seven cards if he/she has more than that. It is worth noting that most turns, especially early in the game, are quite short. Players rarely call out the transition between these phases unless they have a specific reason to do so – in fact, it is common to see players reset their cards, draw a card, play a land, and use a nonverbal cue (such as tapping the table) to indicate the end of a turn, all of which might happen in a matter of seconds.

This rigid turn structure is not to say that the opposing player cannot do anything during the active player's turn; the game's rules allow the opposing player to play certain types of cards (instants) during the active player's turn, which allows for interactions between the players. With the exception of playing a land, any time a player uses a card in his/her hand, that card goes on the stack. According to the comprehensive rules (Wizards, 2017c), "A spell is a card on the stack. As the first step of being cast (see rule 601, 'Casting Spells'), the card becomes a spell and is moved to the top of the stack from the zone it was in, which is usually its owner's hand." Essentially, the act of playing a card causes it to form a physical stack on the table. The "active" player gets the first chance to play a card during each phase of a turn, after which the opposing player gets the opportunity to

play one of his/her own. This exchange is passing priority. If the opponent plays a card, priority returns to the first player. This process of responses between players continues until both players do not wish to play a card. The stack is then resolved starting with the card which is on top. This led to the expression in *Magic* "last effects happen first." The last spell played is the first one to take effect. This back and forth between priority using the stack is ultimately where the most interesting interactions between players occurs.

THE STACK AND RHETORIC

With the basic framework of *Magic* established, we can begin our discussion of the test games played by the authors of this paper. As previously discussed, the games in question consisted of one game in which both players adhered to a more casual structure while the other game utilized strict adherence to the turn structure as described in the previous section. As a control, two sixty card decks were constructed and used for each game. In the casual game, Howard used the green and blue deck while Murnane used the white and red. The first few turns took just a few seconds each. Murnane played a Mountain on turn one. Howard played a Forest and a Sedge Scorpion on turn two.

Things did not really become interesting until turn twelve. It was Howard's turn and he controlled a Nephalia Seakite as well as a Frog Lizard token creature. Murnane controlled a Geist-Honored and two token creatures. Howard attacked with both the Seakite and the Frog Lizard. As demonstrated in Figure 2, an interesting stack emerged from the attack phase on this turn. After attacking, priority passed to Murnane who declared Geist-Honored Monk as a blocker for the Frog Lizard. Both creatures had a power and toughness of 3. Normally, this would result in both creatures dying. However, Murnane played the spell Gods Willing targeting Geist-Honored Monk. This would give the

creature protection from green, saving it from dying. Moments such as

Figure 2. Stack from Game One

these are especially interesting if examined as competing rhetorical situations. Grant-Daive (1997) explains that such situations revolve around the concept of exigence or "what the discourse is about, why it is needed, and what it should accomplish" (p. 266). In this case, both players represent rhetors (speakers), but the exigence that each player seeks is in direct competition. Their goals are mutually exclusive.

Howard seeks for the combat to resolve in his favor: both creatures die in combat. Ultimately, the moves of each player are rhetorical in that they see a potential outcome for the interaction which is favorable to them. Bazerman (2004) notes a "successful text creates for its readers a social fact. The social facts consist of meaningful social actions being accomplished through language, or speech acts" (p. 311). A social fact then is a proposition rendered through successful action. In the course of a game of *Magic*, a player achieves exigence in a given moment through the

execution of successful speech acts. These namely are achieved through playing cards and using abilities. In such a situation, players are constrained (Grant-Davie, 1997, p. 273) by the cards which they have in their hand and the available resources to use them. The stack demonstrates a historical record of players competing for their social fact to be true. By playing Gods Willing, Murnane was essentially rendering Howard's social fact false.

However, the rhetorical situation at hand is always as complex as a player has the capability to make it. Had Howard not responded to Gods Willing being placed on the stack, Murnane would have achieved his exigence. In response, Howard played Griptide, also targeting Geist-Honored Monk. Because the stack operates from the last card played down to the first, Griptide removed Geist-Honored Monk from combat. This meant that when the stack moved on to Gods Willing, the spell no longer had a legal target. It "fizzled" or was rendered useless. This ultimately demonstrates the flexible simplicity of the stack as a game mechanic. When players both agree that the social fact of a creature or spell being played is true, nothing happens, and gameplay quickly moves on. Contested rhetorical situations such as those described above only emerge when the need arises, and the game rules that govern how the stack resolves therefore only become complex when they need to be.

In fact, strict adherence to the procedures of the game without the need present can lead to a frustrating gameplay experience, as we learned in game two. In playing the game, each player declared each phase: Untap, Upkeep, Draw, First Main, Attack, Second Main, Discard. Additionally, each time a player cast a spell, he declared the casting, placed the card on the stack and gave priority to the opponent; each player also announced these "priority passes" even when he had no spells or creatures to play, since technically the game rules dictate that this happens. Despite game one having 31 turns and game two only having

14, the second game took over twice as much time to play. Additionally, Murnane (who was notating the game) forgot to attack on turn 9 and nearly forgot again on turn 11 due to the tediousness of the situation. There were no particularly interesting situations during the game itself, but both players were not exercising flexible simplicity during this game. The game could have been resolved much more quickly and without such tedium had we done so.

Our play experience during these games suggests that if the stack represents a rhetorical situation in which exigence is contested, then it simply does not make sense for players to delve into the rhetorical steps of the stack when they both agree on the social facts which are at stake. This is how *Magic* is played most of the time. To put it another way, players who have mastered the rules know when a situation calls for slowing down and carefully examining what rules are at play. Chen (2007) explains how games regulate pacing, saying, "In order to maintain a user's Flow experience, the activity must balance the inherent challenge of the activity and the player's ability to address and overcome it" (p. 32). In a digital game, the feedback mechanisms programmed in regulate flow. However, when two players sit down to play *Magic*, they rely on each other to slow down when the need arises. Just as importantly, they know when to maintain a steady pace. Players without this mastery will ultimately have a hard time finding partners. Thus, the social dynamics of *Magic* encourage approaching the stack as flexibly simple.

The flexible simplicity of *Magic's* rules is a social and rhetorical phenomenon that can be observed more broadly in analog games as a whole. In one sense, it could be argued the rules of all analog games exhibit flexible simplicity: since players always interpret the rules of an analog game as they play, they always have the option of modifying or simplifying them if they wish. In fact, the second game we played, in which we followed the rules as strictly as possible, does not represent how *Magic* would be played in

"real life:" even in competitive tournaments that feature rules referees and high-level gameplay, players rarely call out the transitions between turn phases or adhere strictly to the stack unless it is necessary. There are some obvious reasons for the application of flexible simplicity: it makes gameplay move more quickly, and it makes games more fun. That being said, the complexity of game rules obviously varies from game to game, and *Magic* provides an example of a game where the rules are particularly complex, as evidenced by its lengthy comprehensive rulebook. However, the interesting aspect of *Magic's* rules is that they are only as complex as they need to be in any given instance, and while there are examples of cards and decks that produce incredibly complicated game states, the rules accommodate those states while also allowing for a quick, simple, and fun game between friends.

One conclusion that can be drawn from *Magic's* implementation of the stack to handle these situations is that analog games can be developed with this flexible simplicity in mind. The stack is an elegant rules construction that is specifically designed to make *Magic* as simple or as complicated as it needs to be in a given instance, allowing players to engage in a wide variety of interactions without slowing the game down or making it tedious to play. From a game design standpoint, it represents a good example of how the rules of analog games should be designed: while there might obviously be reasons for a game to have very complex or difficult to learn rules, the stack shows that game rules can easily accommodate a wide range of play styles and interesting interactions without being particularly complicated themselves. Flexibility could therefore become a guiding principle for analog game rules, and considering its long-standing popularity, *Magic* serves as a good example to other games of how to implement the concept.

Finally, we argue that flexible simplicity is a unique affordance of analog games; while other types of games can exhibit flexible

design in other ways, the concept we propose here requires human interpretation of game rules, which is a feature that is usually exclusive to analog games. While Game Studies has paid less attention to analog games than their electronic counterparts, flexible simplicity is an example of a rhetorical concept that is only exhibited by analog games, and is therefore an interesting site of analysis going forward. Social games exhibit a wide variety of rhetorical concepts because of their very nature, as they require social interactions and communication with other players; however, analog games require an additional interpretative element because players must apply the rules of the game themselves. If the rhetorical elements of *Magic* and other analog games are going to be analyzed more thoroughly in the future, flexible simplicity offers a concept for discussing the rule systems of such games.

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SKETCHVENTOR

Evolving Ideations by Design

ANTHONY PELLICONE, KATHRYN KACZMAREK FREW, ELIZABETH BONSIGNORE, DEREK HANSEN, SKYLAR HOFFMAN, & KARI KRAUS

INTRODUCTION:

> "In an abandoned pub a group of new Tessera recruits sit around a table engrossed in a game of cards. Throughout its centuries of existence, the Tessera has honed the creativity and innovative thinking of its members through this rite of passage. Over a few rounds of gameplay, you start to pick up a pattern: one machine, one verb. What would the Internet look like in the Stone Age? How could one expand the Telegraph? Could Wi-Fi be modified for an evil purpose? You set to work, remixing technology past and present with nothing more than a pencil, some paper, a deck of cards, and your imagination."

In this paper, we detail the design evolution of *Sketchventor*, an original card game whose goal is to scaffold and promote players' ideation and innovation skills. The card game is featured as part of *The Tessera*, an Alternate Reality Game funded by the National Science Foundation (NSF Awards 132378 & 1323306) that launched in January 2017. A gothic ghost story, *The Tessera* engages players with the history of computing by having them interact with famous persona–including Ada Lovelace and Charles Babbage–who influenced the development of information technologies. As a transmedia experience, *The Tessera* has an online component at http://thetessera.org; a real

world component at The Computer History Museum in Mountain View, California; and an artifactual component in the form of *The Tessera* card deck (see Figure 1). In this paper, we focus on the analog version of *Sketchventor*, one of two games that can be played with the card deck (shown in Figure 1). Sketchventor's print-and-play version can be found at https://goo.gl/riQjWJ, which contains instructions for the game, and a link to printable card files.

Within the storyworld of *The Tessera*, teen players acquire and practice the skills and dispositions related to computational and design thinking. Importantly, *The Tessera* encourages youth who may not initially think of themselves as scientists, inventors, or designers to begin to imagine themselves as such. By introducing them to innovative thinking techniques drawn from the research literature on the psychology of creativity, *Sketchventor* helps players gain confidence in their own creativity and explore the process of creative ideation (Eberle, 1972; Rouke, 1988). In this paper, we report on the design evolution of the mechanics used in *Sketchventor*. We consider the game's development by closely examining two play sessions:

- An early play-testing session with an intergenerational group of players, and
- a later play session with teens in a design-based research study (Sandoval & Bell, 2004) structured to evaluate the learning potential of the game.

An examination of *Sketchventor's* evolution—including its participatory design processes–provides new insights into the design of ideation games more generally.

Figure 1. Sketchventor "invention" cards arrayed around the "verb" cards.

GAMEPLAY AND MECHANICS:

Sketchventor is a game of creative ideation, where 3-6 players sketch and pitch ideas for new inventions inspired by rethinking famous inventions. A round begins when a judge selects an "invention" card and a "verb" card (see Figure 2), which together create the round's "theme." Players have about 4 minutes to sketch their invention and then 30 seconds to verbally describe (i.e. pitch) their invention. Sketches can include drawings, arrows, and explanatory text. The judge then gives awards in the form of "superlatives" by identifying the sketch they believe was "most innovative", "most useful", and "funniest." Players determine the number of rounds, but typically each player gets to serve as judge at least once. An example is provided in Figure 3.

Alternative rules are provided for a less competitive game, wherein the role of judge is eliminated and each player provides

a superlative to another player. Additionally, a "wildcard" superlative can be used, which can be any adjective that describes a certain aspect of another player's invention (e.g., "most dystopian").

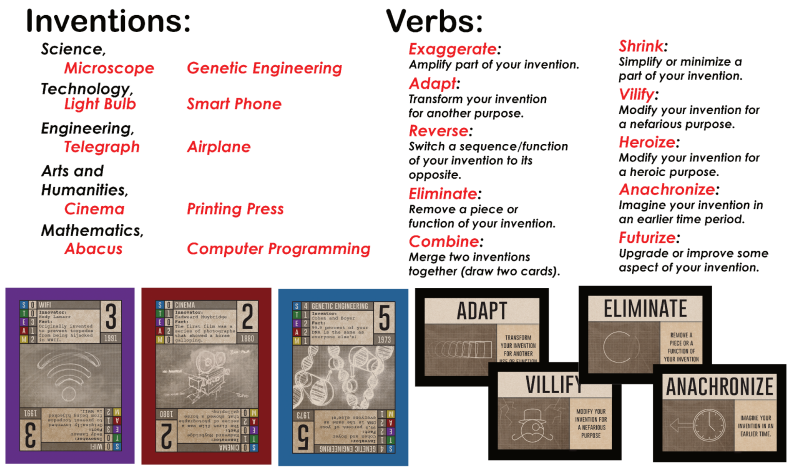


Figure 2. Some invention cards, and all verb cards, with graphic examples.

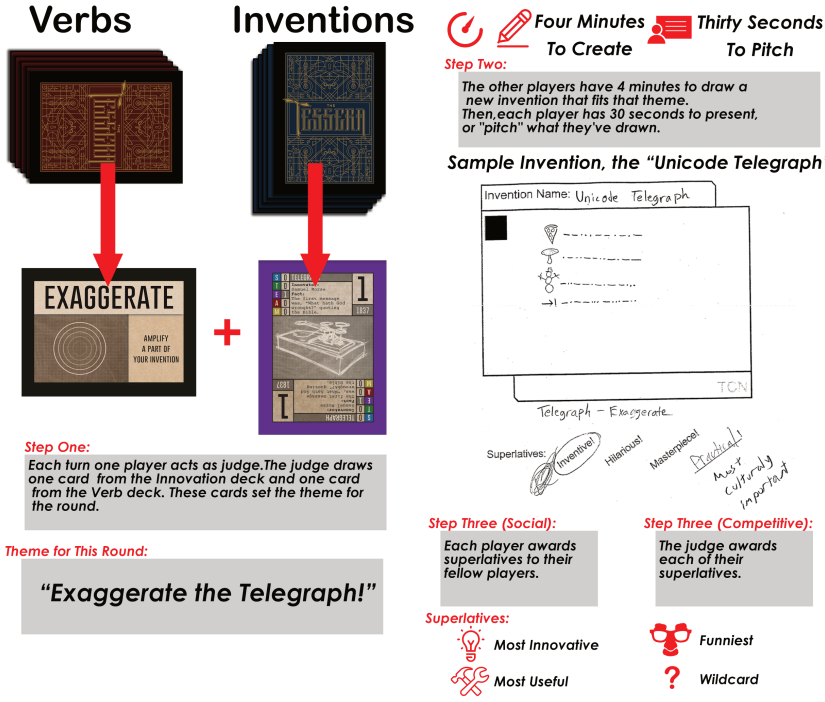


Figure 3. Rules of Sketchventor using "Exaggerate the Telegraph" as an example theme.

LEARNING CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND:

Our design philosophy is centered on the notion of activating interests in the fields of computing, engineering, and design. We use *activation* in the sense of aligning our players with a set of dispositions (i.e., attitudes, beliefs, values), practices, and content knowledge that empower them to approach future science and engineering experiences with confidence and enthusiasm (Dorph, Cannady & Schunn, 2016). We were also motivated by recent evidence that creative thinking skills have been on the decline in the United States since 1990 (Kim, 2011), even while educators, policy makers, and government leaders worldwide have acknowledged a need to facilitate creativity in education (Shaheen, 2010). *Sketchventor*'s design process was specifically

situated within a larger research effort to promote computational and creative design thinking.

The germ of the idea of *Sketchventor* emerged in a preliminary form from a suggestion of Author 1, who combined two existing genres of tabletop game: social games, such as *Apples to Apples* and *Cards Against Humanity*, as well as drawing games, such as *Pictionary*. Originally, a player drew three invention cards and incorporated at least one element from each into a sketched invention. In terms of generative mechanics, that initial approach drew on the idea of combinatory card games from *Apples to Apples* (e.g. the act of having to think on one's feet in order to respond to a prompt given a limited set of options in one's hand), alongside the limited creative constraints imposed by drawing within a time limit (e.g. representing an abstract concept through drawing within the span of a minute timer).

In a follow-on design team meeting, we brainstormed ways that we might scaffold the innovation process beyond the 2-3 invention cards that players could draw in a round. There was concern that our initial open-ended prompt might be daunting to our target teen audience. We settled on the idea of using a set of verbs that "players could use as design trigger mechanisms to create their new innovations", such as "Combine, Subtract, Superimpose, Repeat, Animate, Contradict, etc." (team email, Sept 2015). We were inspired by ideation techniques from the psychology of innovative thinking known as Synectics and SCAMPER (Gordon, 1961; Roukes, 1988, Eberle, 1972). In Synectics, designers apply "trigger mechanisms" (e.g., verbs such as *distort* and *change scale*) to an existing idea or problem so that "ordinary perceptions are turned into extraordinary ones" (Roukes, 1988:13). Similarly, SCAMPER asks innovators to combine existing ideas with verbs (**S**ubstitute, **C**ombine, **A**djust, **M**odify, **P**ut to other uses, **E**liminate, **R**everse) to create something new (Eberle, 1972), and has been shown to increase the quality of children's inventions (Rule et al., 2009). We aimed

to embed these ideation prompts into Sketchventor's play to spark design thinking and creative dispositions in teen players.

We also drew upon several previous games for inspiration which helped us to differentiate and expand on the rules of our own game. As mentioned previously, the initial idea for the game came out of both social (sometimes called 'party') games, such as *Apples to Apples*. In terms of mechanics, we reviewed other drawing games such as the classic *Pictionary* to help us think through player interaction with game materials.

As we worked through the design process we discovered the game *Disruptus*, an award winning game by Funnybone Toys (2010), which also has players draw new inventions inspired by combining a verb (create; improve; transform; disrupt) and a specific item (e.g., stoplight, football, vending machine, street). Verbs are selected with a dice, and items are everyday objects. Though similar, our focus on historical inventions and ideas, incorporation of different verbs, and integration of different award structures collectively serve to differentiate the game. Still, we believe our findings are relevant to *Disruptus* and similar games.

Jesse Schell's (2014) *Deck of Lenses* uses the card/deck form factor to inspire game developers to consider important elements of the design process. Each card in the deck presents a different 'lens' for considering game design – for example, the lens of "Physical Interface" provides the instruction that "the player has a physical Interaction with your game … Use this lens to be sure that your physical interface is well suited to your game by asking . . . questions [such as] How does this map the actions in the game world? Can the mapping be more direct?" (ibid). The random nature of the deck is presented as being a means to consider unexpected or particularly difficult aspects of game design.

Sketchventor's design reinforces four major dispositions (from

ITSE, 2011) important to our work: the verb and innovation combination presents an open-ended problem ("tolerance for ambiguity" and "open-ended problems"). Players must also draw on scientific and technical knowledge of inventions alongside creative skills such as drawing; and they must deploy convincing argumentation in order to devise and then present a solution to that problem ("confidence in dealing with complexity" and "ability to communicate and work with others").

DESIGNING *SKETCHVENTOR* THROUGH PLAY:

Many design decisions that define *Sketchventor* emerged and were confirmed from an iterative design process with players, and thus were derived largely through play. We integrated traditional methods such as beta-testing (Fullerton, 2004; Hammer et al., n.d.), with participatory design and co-design techniques (Druin, 1999; Muller, 2008; Schuler & Namioka, 1993).

Two play sessions comprise our close reading of *Sketchventor* gameplay: (1) an intergenerational playtest conducted during the design phase of *Sketchventor*, and (2) a data collection session with teen participants from the research phase of the game.

There were several major design 'moves' over the course of our initial development process, which drew on three major sources:

- **The Design Team:** included the authors of this paper. We brought our own personal experience as players and designers of games, as well as theoretical perspectives on learning and identity development. We often participated as players of the game in the playtesting and cooperative design sessions.
- **Intergenerational Playtesters:** were drawn from diverse settings and perspectives (e.g. players at a board game cafe, students in an undergraduate class on Digital Literature). Our intergenerational playtesters engaged in gameplay sessions

that reflected more traditional beta testing environments (Fullerton, 2004; Hammer et al., n.d.).

- **Teen Design Partners:** from our target demographics helped develop several core components of Sketchventor by sharing their unique perspectives as players (e.g. teen design partners were the original inspiration for the later idea of 'superlatives').

Figure 4, below, gives a chronological summary of how each of these sources contributed to the eventual rules and form factor of *Sketchventor*.

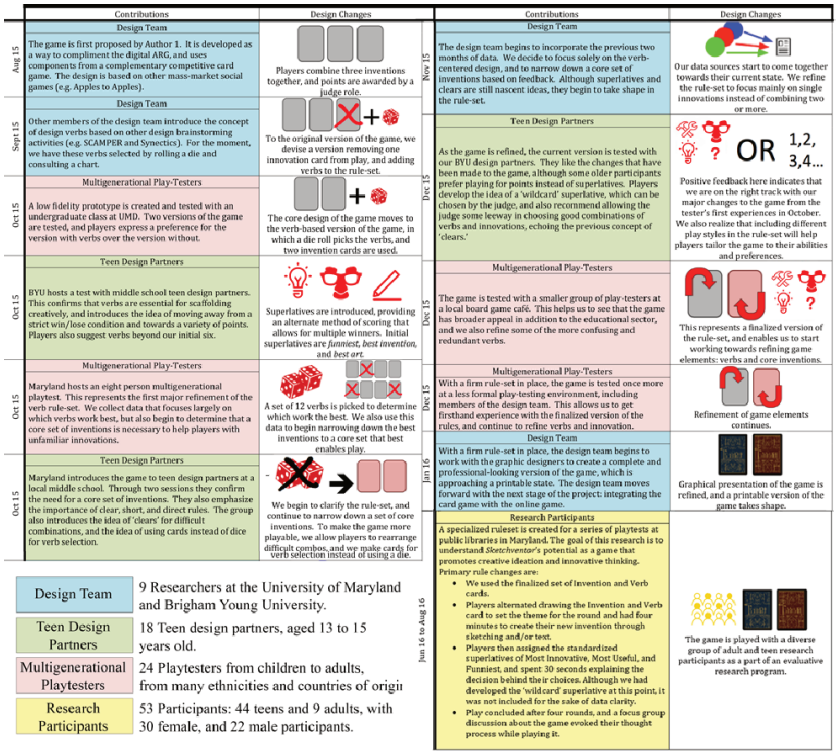


Figure 4. The design process of Sketchventor. Blue represents the design team, red represents multigenerational playtesters, green represents teen design partners, and the yellow represents Sketchventor played as part of a research study conducted in summer of 2016.

CLOSE READING ONE: MULTIGENERATIONAL PLAYTEST, OCTOBER 2015

Throughout our design process we conducted 11 total playtesting sessions that contributed to *Sketchventor*'s current rendition. Our first close reading focuses on the third design session, held in October, 2015, which drew an intergenerational group of eight players who ranged in age from 12 to 43 including one middle school aged participant, one undergraduate, four graduate students, and two working adults. The rules of the game for this session had several differences from the final product described above:

- We had not yet picked our core set of inventions.
- A six-sided die was used instead of verb cards, with a reference list of available verbs.
- We used both the point and the superlative variants for this playtest.
- We used two verb lists with one representing ideas taken from Synectics and SCAMPER (Eberle, 1972; Gordon, 1961; Rouke, 1988), and the other containing additional verbs derived from suggestions during previous playtesting.

After a brief introduction, players were divided randomly into groups for play-testing. There were two sessions per group, with each session having two distinct themes unique to that group.

Refining the Card Decks

From field notes recorded by the design team during the session, it became clear that some inventions caused problems for players along two dimensions of gameplay: first, understanding the design and function of the invention, and second, being able to manipulate that invention in a way suitable for the verb card. In one group, the judge for the round set a theme involving the ENIAC computer (Electronic General-purpose Computer – the

first mainframe computer system). Instead of proceeding directly into the sketching portion of the round, players had to discuss what the ENIAC was, its component parts, and how it fit with the verb. We noted that this disrupted the flow of play, and took players out of the experience of creating a new invention. We explored this idea in the large-group discussion, described in Figure 5.

***Author 1**: So you guys ... pulled out [meaning removed from play]... the ENIAC ...*

***Playtester 2**: Yeah, it was too obscure. I mean ...*

***Author 1**: So... it's also an actual invention, so was it hard because it's like an actual historical--*

***Playtester 2**: Yeah, you either know what it is or you don't.*

[There is general agreement -- one playtester asks if "*ENIAC was a tube-based computer, right?*"]

***Author 1**: You also pulled out space travel -- space voyages...*

***Playtester 1**: Which could have worked with others things but not with what we had.*

***Playtester 3**: Yeah, the verb we had was combine... and to combine an object with space travel... I mean, it's just not doable ...[laughter]...*

***Author 1**: So because they weren't in the same class ... it was hard?*

***Playtester 5**: What did you try to combine with space travel again?*

***Playtester 4**: I think it was originally the abacus.*

***Playtester 3**: And so it would be like some guy walking around with an abacus going ... I'm going to Jupiter ... [laughter].*

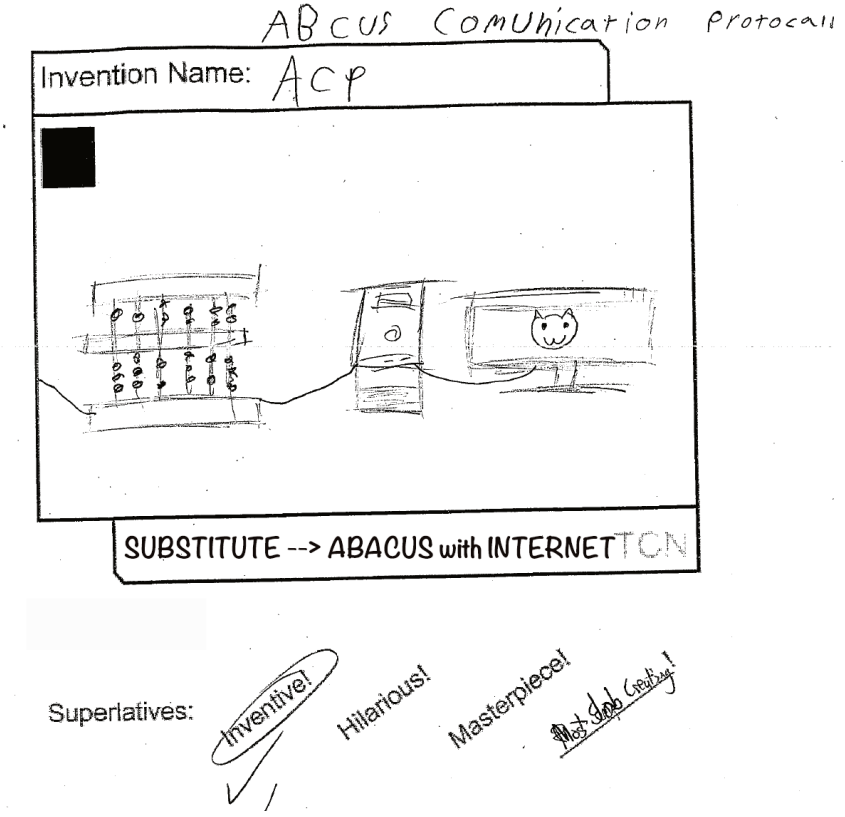


Figure 5. Playtesters discuss difficulty with "Space Travel" and "Combine", along with one player's combination of The Abacus and The Internet.

What we learned through play, in the case above and other playtests, was that some inventions have certain properties that make them easier to elaborate upon. Inventions needed to have a certain degree of currency in contemporary culture, even if they are archaic or obsolete (e.g. the Abacus is a defunct technology, but nonetheless continues to circulate with some familiarity in the larger cultural discourse).. Generic items tend to work better than specific historical artifacts (e.g. The Computer instead of ENIAC). Items work best when they are a complete invention, not a component piece of another invention (e.g. the transistor). Finally, abstract concepts are difficult to work with in the game's

format (e.g. rethinking ideas such as Space Travel, or Science Fiction), but can work for advanced players.

Furthermore, throughout our playtest discussion, we found that while some existing inventions are difficult, they still generate interesting and fun circumstances for gameplay. An example can be seen in the above transcription: although the ENIAC was perceived as a tricky invention to work with, players still engaged in a generative conversation as they discuss what the ENIAC was, its functions, and its history. Since the invention cards are also used in a second game (*The Tessera Inventors* Card Game) we flagged certain inventions that fit with the criteria described above as a set of core inventions. The core set is used by players new to *Sketchventor*, with a prompt in the instructions to mix in more challenging inventions as they gain experience with its signature ideation game mechanic.

Similarly, our playtesters for this session helped to confirm an idea that had cropped up previously: a need to both refine and scaffold the verbs in our game. For this playtest session, we offered two verb lists, one that was more formal and inspired by codified innovation exercises such as Synectics (Roukes, 1988; Gordon, 1961), and SCAMPER (Eberle, 1972), as well as a more informal list, cultivated from ideas provided through previous playtest sessions. In this playtest, we observed that verbs needed to:

- suggest a concrete action that the player can take,
- be discrete from one another (e.g. an original verb of *modify* was deemed as too similar to other verbs, such as *adapt*.)
- include short annotations (which lead to the eventual design of our verb cards with short, text descriptions, as well as illustrative iconography).

During this session, we also noticed that the use of a die for verb

generation (cross referenced against a list), was cumbersome and took players out of the game. Middle school players confirmed this idea in a later playtest when they asked for verb cards as a replacement.

Refining Rewards and Win Conditions

Through our participants' play, we began to understand the importance of offering multiple end-game conditions for rounds: more formalized points, and less formalized superlatives. Importantly, our playtesters pointed out a popular feature from our design inspirations, especially *Apples to Apples*: the idea of play itself being pleasurable, and not necessarily needing a firm end-game condition encoded by the ruleset.

This playtest was our first formal trial of an idea developed earlier in the month, with eight teen design partners. They formed one group of 4 girls and one group with 2 girls and 2 boys. After each round, we let each player "vote" on the most innovative design, best drawn design, and most useful design. After several rounds of play, the all-girls team always assured that each person received exactly one award. With some prompting, they explained that they liked to do this as a way of being "fair" and they didn't feel like there should be a "winner". In contrast, the mixed-gender group did have a winner (i.e., someone who received the most superlative "votes"), as well as "losers" who did not receive any superlative for the session. One of the girls in that group, confidentially after gameplay, explained that playing was fun, but she disliked the game because her inventions hadn't "won" and didn't receive any superlatives over several rounds.

Consequently, for this test of *Sketchventor*, we had each group play one round with typical point assignments, and another round using our superlatives: *most inventive*, *most hilarious*, and *masterpiece*. There wasn't a consensus about which end-game was

necessarily better, but players agreed that having a choice was optimal, as in Figure 6.

***Author 3**: So [after] 5 or 6 rounds, what would be the endgame, I mean, who would be the winner? Would you prefer superlatives, or points, or...*

[There is cross-talk, with some players saying points, and others saying superlatives.]

***Author 3**: So, we just got both answers... [laughter].*

***Playtester 2**: I would, almost consider having it be an optional thing* [general agreement from whole table]. *'Cuz some people just wanna screw around, and some people just wanna be like, "I have the most points, I win."*

***Playtester3**: … you know, declaring a winner... I mean, that was cool .... Like, "I won one round, that's awesome..." But, at the same point, there wasn't -- there wasn't really an end goal... I think we all had fun doing -- **playing** -- this game -- as opposed to -- y'know, "I won."*

***Playtester 6**: Right. You think of points...with like, skills-based games...or something, Right…? I was just saying, like maybe you could do like an Apples-to-Apples thing. Like you can get points for humor, too. I mean, somebody can choose it **not** because it makes the most sense...*

***Playtester 3**: So multiple categories for point-assignment. So like, best idea points, but also like, weirdest, or...*

[There is general agreement from the whole table.]

Figure 6. Playtesters discuss scoring.

From this conversation, and from the experience of watching our players engage with our game, we derived the idea that our win conditions worked best as modifiable elements of the rules. Instead of presenting one or the other, we instead moved towards both superlatives and points being options for play, that are customizable for each individual instantiation of the game.

CLOSE READING TWO: TEEN PLAYTEST, AUGUST 2016

This second close reading was drawn from a research session with 3 teens and a teen librarian held in August 2016. The teens, two girls and one boy, were all entering 11th grade and were lead members of the teen library program. Player 1 in particular represented herself as being "really into engineering."

Playing With Decomposition And Recombination

In the first round, players drew the "Eliminate" and "Airplane"

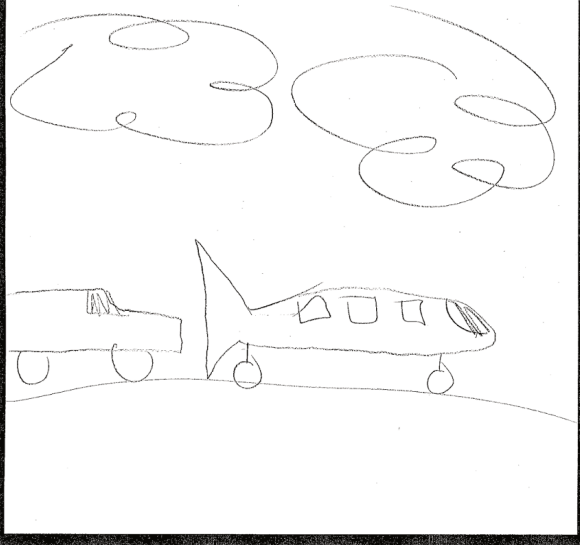
cards. Player 3 made a list on the bottom of his sheet, one column labeled "Functions" and the other labeled "Parts", which he used to break down the airplane into its various components to consider which he wanted to eliminate. This process of decomposition, a distinct computational thinking skill, allowed him to generate a new invention he christened the "Airplane Car," which eliminated wings and the function of flight. Player 3's design stood out as the only player to take away the core function of flight, and his fellow players recognized that element of his drawing through superlatives.

The focus group discussion revealed that all players considered decomposition one of the vital skills for playing *Sketchventor* successfully, as shown in Figure 7:

1

Invention Card: Airplane
Verb Card: Eliminate

Innovation Name: Airplane Car



PLAYER 3

Airplane

Functions
~~Flight~~
transportation

Parts
wheels
~~wings~~
engine

Player 2: *I think you need to think very abstractly, because you have a lot of, um, inhibitions when considering things such as the airplane. You know it has one single function which is to fly people around, and so you have to think more beyond its...primary function and like, consider the solutions to each of the...eliminating the parts.*

Author 3: *What other thinking skills do you think you need to be good at this game?*

Player 4: *Analytical skills and being able to take apart the verb and the innovation that you got, the card, and being able to twist it around and do different things, so that analysis skills are important.*

Figure 7. Player 3's Innovation Sheet for the Airplane + Eliminate round, featuring a brainstorming list of functions and parts of an airplane in the bottom left-hand corner. Players 2 and 4 discuss decomposing inventions and verbs.

The emphasis on decomposition reinforced our design decision to focus on inventions with the optimal balance between specificity and genericity so that players could easily identify the component parts and functions. Even though Player 2 said she had difficulty looking beyond the primary function of an airplane, she could still identify it and think about other ways that function could be accomplished. Both she and Player 1 approached the design task from the lens of what problems might arise with the existing invention. Player 2 disliked the way that plane engines can be hazardous to birds in flight, and so chose to eliminate them, but did not specify how else the plane might be powered. Player 1 replaced the wings with solar panels as an alternative energy source, and took the additional step to replace the seating with luxury massage chairs to address the discomfort of flying, "a personal problem I have with planes."

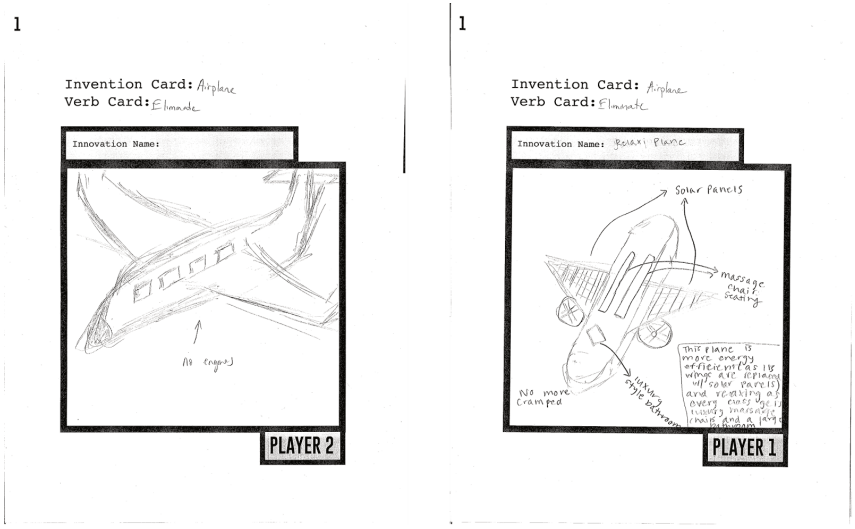


Figure 8. The Innovation Sheets for Players 2 & 3 for the Airplane + Eliminate round.

"Something besides what it normally does": Ideating from the Everyday to the Novel

Framing *Sketchventor* as a problem-solution design task allowed these players to identify ways into creativity that stemmed from the familiar and made the task relevant to their personal needs and desires. While at first glance finding solutions to problems in existing inventions seems to privilege functionality, the verb card does not insist on replacement of the eliminated part, leading to inventions such as Player 2's airplane that flies without engines, much like a glider.

While invention familiarity could aide players, it sometimes posed a level of challenge. The second round asked players to "Adapt" "Wi-Fi", causing Player 3 to remark during the drawing round, "This is hard!" In the focus group discussion, the players elaborated on why they found this task so difficult, show in Figure 9:

***Player 4**: I enjoyed the Wi-Fi one because that was a little bit... you're taking something kind of standard and thinking, how in the world can I rework this? So taking… an invention that you really don't think you can rework again, um, pushes your limits a little bit.*

***Player 3:** Yeah, I agree with that. Like, it was something that you don't really think about it because, oh, you think wi-fi is just an Internet connection, but now it's like, okay, now change wi-fi to make it do something else besides just be Internet, and so I thought that was pretty neat you had to make it into something else.*

***Author 3:** And that made you feel creative?*

***Player 3:** Yeah, because you had to think of something else besides what it normally does.*

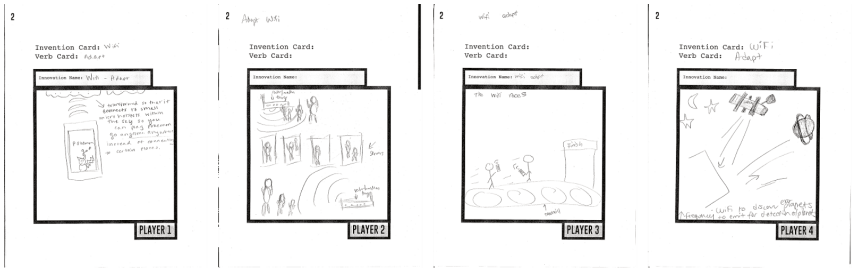


Figure 9. Players discuss "Adapt Wi-Fi", and their Innovation Sheets for that round.

Player 1 took the same problem-solution approach as she had in the first round to create what she called a "Wifi-Adapt", a sort of universal Wi-Fi that "connects to micro-hotspots in the sky so you can play Pokémon Go anytime anywhere instead of connecting in certain places." Thinking purposefully, Player 4 imagined using an amplified Wi-Fi emitted by satellites to help discover exoplanets in the far reaches of the solar system. Player 2 took what she described as a "metaphorical approach", where people can be "sucked into Wi-Fi and meet up in the servers", which is how they can access websites and get immersed into virtual reality worlds. Player 3 again took a humorous approach in creating "Wi-fi Races" in which people have individual treadmills whose speeds correlate with the speed of their Wi-Fi connection: "the worst connection will always lose."

Similar to the airplane example, Wi-Fi has one salient function for these teen players: connecting them to the Internet. However, the inventions that resulted from their Adapt + Wi-fi

combination were significantly more varied than that for Eliminate + Airplane, even though they found the task harder. One of the reasons is that *adapt* is a broader verb than *eliminate* (indeed, it's a superordinate verb that might be said to encompass several of the other verbs). Another reason is that Wi-Fi is intangible in comparison to the materiality of the airplane, and our teen players likely have a looser understanding of the mechanics of how Wi-Fi works than they do the physical forces at work for a plane. This means that while the purpose of Wi-Fi is well understood, the technical details exist mostly in the players' imagination, giving them license to contemplate radical alternatives.

Ideating on the Superlatives

As in the previous design sessions, the superlatives became a point of contention for our teen players. Player 2, who is female, specifically asked during the first round of play, "Can we give all of them away, one to each person?", reflecting the same concern for fairness that the younger playtesters showed. Players were directed that the superlatives did not have to be distributed equally, but all of them did have to be awarded. They chose to award one of their superlatives to each player, meaning that each received an equal amount, but not having a clear-cut winner through the person with the most superlatives wasn't their concern. Instead, they focused on how constraining the three chosen superlatives (Most Innovative, Most Useful, and Funniest), as shown in Figure 10:

Player 4: *I would add more of those superlative cards, like different ones, because I thought it was somewhat limited what you could describe the inventions as with having only having three to choose from.*

Player 1: *Yeah, I agree with that.... I know like a lot of [innovations] were funny in a specific way, like one was funny and just ridiculous, putting an umbrella on a drone, but the others were funny in a… I don't know, a different way… it's more like different categories of things….*

Author 3: *So to improve the game you would get more superlatives that could show the nuance, maybe, or the gradations between funny, or the distinctions between the funniest?"*

Figure 10. Players discuss granularity in superlatives.

As sophisticated players, these teens could observe and (almost) articulate the differences between the kinds of amusement they were getting from funny innovations. Had we been free from the constraints of the research study, we believe that these teens would have generated their own superlatives that were just as amusing and creative as the innovations themselves. This observation solidified the decision to allow players to add their own superlatives in the online *Sketchventor* game.

CONCLUSION:

The two play sessions above describe *Sketchventor* both during its design process, and later, with a version of the game approaching its current form. Both reveal several key themes that directly impacted the evolution of the game, which were validated over an iterative process that spans around two years of design and research. Our iterative approach allowed us to validate the new designs that emerged, understanding what worked, and what

did not, alongside the detailed feedback from our diverse group of players (many of whom have asked for card decks to play independently at home).

To conclude, we offer a pedagogical reflection on our research that may be of use in designing other games focused on creative self-efficacy and design thinking skills.

Striking A Balance Between Free Play And Creative Constraints

A major gameplay mechanic inherent in *Sketchventor*'s genre of creative ideation games (e.g. *Disruptus* and *The Deck of Lenses*) is that the creativity of players is scaffolded and guided by the constraints of the game system. A way that the tension between free play and creative constraints came to the fore was in the selection, design, and presentation of both our game elements: inventions and verbs. For example, in the first close reading, the ENIAC as a technology constrained players too much, given its very specific and fixed nature. Alternately, certain verbs gave too much freedom. For example, the verb "modify" provided so much freedom of interpretation that there was no useful guide for player action (its close cousin, *adapt*, was eventually incorporated in its stead, overcoming some of the same problems through a carefully considered definition that was printed on the card) . The above tension was again apparent in our second close reading session: Wi-Fi was at first figured by our players as something conceptually fixed by virtue of being so familiar and ubiquitous; however, the scaffolded constraint of the verb card coupled with a mental model of the invention that was clear on its purpose but vague on its workings provided them with an opportunity to rethink something that was generally taken for granted in their day-to-day lives.

As a team of researchers well versed in the history of computation, and who approach design challenges as a matter of

fact in our work, we adapted our game elements to reflect the feedback we received, working towards a set of inventions and verbs that allow for a pleasurable range of freedom, while also providing a scaffold of familiarity and creative guidance.

Beyond Points: Meaningful, Playful Feedback Systems

Based on our early experiences with teen design partners, and then reaffirmed in the multigenerational playtest described above, the game mechanic of superlatives gives players a way to provide feedback to their fellow players in a way that is qualitatively meaningful rather than strictly numerical. That desire for personally meaningful feedback was codified in the ruleset by the design team. Continued playtesting revealed that the ability to customize the superlative served to further augment that meaningfulness, resulting in the introduction of the Wildcard superlative.

Due to our dispositional approach to learning, we strove to introduce learners (and players) to concepts in a way that allows them to gain confidence in their abilities. The early point-based system with an appointed judge was a poor fit for that goal, due to its often exclusionary nature. Through our iterative design process we began to understand that rethinking the feedback system—in part by shifting more agency to players–could help them better recognize, value, and put into practice the many different types of skills that go into gameplay.

Modifiable Rules To Meet Player Needs

With nearly every aspect of *Sketchventor*'s final ruleset, we found ourselves incorporating more options for play. In the first close reading, the player gravitation away from a point system is consistent with the social game genre tradition in which we were working (e.g. the fact most players approach *Apples to Apples* without any points whatsoever). Our core ruleset provides a scaffolded suggestion for how to initially play *Sketchventor*, but

also offers options to change those rules to accommodate player tastes, as well as (in the case of the expanded invention deck) skill levels. In our second close reading, it becomes obvious how important this is: although we can anticipate general player actions with our game elements and our rules, in a game focused on creativity, the desire to expand on those core rules is both natural and fruitful.

WELL PLAYED THROUGH PLAYTESTERS AND DESIGN PARTNERS

A common thread runs through the interactions documented in our close readings (indeed, in all our *Sketchventor* play sessions): the interplay between designers and players. As designers we have a number of pre-existing ideas about learning, creativity, and play derived in part from the existing research literature (Gordon, 1961; Roukes, 1988, Eberle, 1972). We created a game based on those ideas and instantiated them in a format reminiscent of other games (e.g., *Apples to Apples* and *Pictionary*), with the goal of disposing players favorably towards engineering and design (Dorph, Cannady & Schunn, 2016; ITSE, 2011). Once we had a working prototype of *Sketchventor*, we opened up the design process to other players, effectively asking them to **engage in a close reading of their own gameplay**. These close readings were then fed back into the game design process, resulting in substantive changes to *Sketchventor*.

There's an old adage in the literature on composition and rhetoric that says good readers make good writers. As we hope our account of a multiyear collaboration with players has demonstrated, there's a corollary to that: good readers–close readers—also make good *designers*.

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FROM A BOARD GAME TO A DRINKING GAME

One Biography of the Finnish Board Game Kimble

LILLI SIHVONEN

INTRODUCTION

> "Kimble is an old and unbelievably boring game but if you use it as a drinking game and modify the rules a little bit, playing turns into serious business." (man 1991)

The board game *Kimble* was introduced in Finland in 1967. It is based on the American game called *Trouble* which Aarne Heljakka's family received as a gift from their American relatives in the summer 1967. While watching his children play Heljakka realized that the game might have potential markets in Finland as well. After carefully studying the game he then began the manufacture. He named the game Kimble, a name that was popular in Finland at that time. Heljakka picked it from the American TV-series called *The Fugitive* where the main character Dr. Richard Kimble, accused of his wife's murder, runs from the police and tracks down the real murderer. The name is said to represent the game's core idea; to run a away from others. Since then Kimble has established its place, and it's one of the most popular games in the Finnish board game markets. It became a hit already in the 1960s since it was one of the few board games made out of plastic back then. It was and still is argued to be durable and almost impossible to break in normal use. It is

often referred to as a classic. Even still Kimble is intrigued by the players and media because of its simplicity and the Pop-o-matic die container in the middle of the game board (see Image 1). Kimble is produced by the Finnish board game company Tactic Games Ltd (former Nelostuote Ltd, founded by Aarne Heljakka). Their most popular, internationally known and played game is Alias. Tactic Games is a family company lead by the founder's son, Markku Heljakka.

Kimble, like Trouble, is a cross-and-circle race game, and its origin is claimed to lie in the Indian *Pachisi* game. Each player has four pieces in one color. The goal is to be the first to move the pieces once around the game board from the home base to the finish. The game starts when the player rolls "6" by pushing the Pop-o-matic, and is then allowed to move one piece to the starting point. Each "6" allows another try with the Pop-o-matic. The piece is moved according to the die. During the game the player must also prevent others from winning the game. This happens only if one of the pieces lands on another player's piece. That piece is then sent back to the home base. In Finland this is referred to as "eating" which is similarly used in chess.

Kimble is a fundamental part of Finnish culture since almost every Finn has played it at least once in their life, usually in early childhood. It is passed on from parents to children generation after generation. There has also been some tabloid news about Kimble which have caused stir in Finland. Kimble is also used as a drinking game especially among students. It has been described easy and simple enough for that purpose. In this paper, my goal is to study how the use of a non-game element such as alcohol affects the game's playability and meaning. Usually, drinking games are considered harmful to players but does drinking actually harm the game itself? Does the game become more or less a game?

The first part of my research material consists of online inquiry responses (247 respondents) I received when conducting a Kimble themed online inquiry in November 2015. Six out 247 respondents mentioned the use of a Kimble drinking game version. The inquiry led to a contact from students of the Guild of Automation and Systems Technology at the Aalto University in Finland, and to the second part of my research material. In this group Kimble is described as a "Thing", and it has a certain prestige among them. The students invited me to their Kimble happening in the spring 2017, and allowed me to document their Kimble culture. I also interviewed one of the students. In this paper I will be referring to them as students of AS.

The need to study Kimble drinking game rises from the research material but also from Olli Sotamaa and Jaakko Stenros' article "Through a Shot Glass, Darkly: The Study of Games in the Light of Drinking Games" published in *Games and Culture* in 2016. In their article they address a question whether drinking games are just one way to instrumentalize games or the gamification of drinking. Gamification has been defined as "the use of game design elements in non-game context" (Deterding, Dixon, Khaled, & Nacke, 2011). Katriina Heljakka (2015), on the other hand, has argued that the concept of gamification has been

expanding, and that it can involve different kinds of products, apps, services, and even the uses of toys.

I will use Sotamaa and Stenros' article as a guideline throughout the paper. I attempt to concentrate on the positive sides of Kimble drinking game versions and describe some distinctive features of these versions. The paper proceeds from a short overview of Sotamaa and Stenros' article to the use of Kimble as a drinking game. I will make some remarks on how Kimble actually verifies Sotamaa and Stenros' results. Lastly, I will attempt to move further by suggesting that we might need to look drinking games (and other uses of board games) as one biography (Kopytoff 1986) of board games, and as something that increases the game's replayability.

NOTES FROM SOTAMAA AND STENROS' ARTICLE

Olli Sotamaa and Jaakko Stenros (2016) have studied drinking games in their article "Through a Shot Glass, Darkly: The Study of Games in the Light of Drinking Games" where they focus on the relations between play and drinking. They note that scholars have hardly touched the drinking and games as part of games studies and, if drinking games have been studied, the aspects of the studies have usually been negative revolving around the theme of bad play (dangerous and in no way nice play). They also remark the fact that the study of drinking games has focused on student groups, and that the players themselves are usually male. Sotamaa and Stenros ponder around the question what the study of drinking games can give to the game studies in general. They argue, for instance, that drinking games can help theorizing game experience, skill, and game design.

Drinking games have different social functions such as breaking the ice among people who are new to each other. One can also practice drinking and search one's limits. The effects of drinking are both physical and social. In drinking games the player becomes worse at the play, not better. Adults also have "the

permission" to do silly and inappropriate things. Sotamaa and Stenros note that most games become drinking games just by adding drinking to them. The consumption of alcohol can be goal oriented and integrated into the rules, and that drinks can serve either as a punishment or a prize. Players are also free to modify the games, and drinking games can be manipulated and modified. Furthermore, it is not only the game that changes but the player as well. (Sotamaa & Stenros 2016.)

Sotamaa and Stenros (2016) argue that drinking can often be considered as a superstructure which is Elias, Garfield and Gutschera's (2012) definition of something that happens "outside of or alongside the gameplay proper". This can be, for instance, preparation before the game, stories told, and modifications made to the game. This means that drinking happens outside of the play. One can play the game without drinking (alcohol), and the consumption of alcohol is external to the game itself. They also refer to the term *metagame,* again a term from Elias and others (2012). Metagame means all actions that aren't part of the play of the game itself but are relating to the game somehow (Elias, Garfield & Gutchera 2012). Drinking alcohol can be part of the metagame, the game outside the game, meaning that it has an important role in socializing and being the theme of the game. Sotamaa and Stenros ask whether drinking games are just an excuse to drink or a way to turn drinking into a game. (Sotamaa & Stenros 2016.)

Next, I will focus on some points they have made about drinking games and will compare them to my own findings from Kimble. The focus lies mostly on student groups but the players are both men and women. As a reference to their article, I will first ask how deeply drinking is integrated into the Kimble drinking game versions. In other words, can you still play the game if alcohol and drinking are excluded? Secondly, what is the purpose of Kimble drinking game versions? Is it intoxication, socializing, or

playing? And thirdly, what else it at stake or should be regarded here?

THE MANY VERSIONS OF THE KIMBLE DRINKING GAME

The online inquiry respondents

I collected Finnish people's memories of Kimble for my dissertation in the autumn 2015. The idea was to attain information regarding how the playing had changed over the years, which Kimble versions (original or themed) people recognized and owned, and what kind of game experiences they had. In two weeks I received 247 responses. 184 out of 247 of the respondents were women and 51 men. 12 respondents answered "other" or didn't want to specify their gender. Most of the respondents were students or workers due to the channels I used when spreading the online link for the inquiry (university email lists, social media, etc.). 151 respondents were born in the 1980s and 1990s, and 83 of them in the 1960s and 1970s. The oldest respondent was born in 1924, and the youngest in 2000. Most of the respondents played board games "sometimes" or "seldom", and only a few (9 out 247) considered themselves as active players. Even though I knew about the possibility of using Kimble as a drinking game, I didn't inquire about it nor did I expect to receive such detailed responses regarding it. Half of the respondents used here can be considered as highly experienced Kimble (drinking game) players since they've had an active phase of playing Kimble at some point.

Among the respondents there were only six who mentioned that they had played Kimble as a drinking game, and only three of them gave detailed descriptions of the game such as which rules they had followed. Most of the respondents who mentioned Kimble as a drinking game in any way were students or had played the drinking game version as a student, and at least one of them was a member of AS at the time of the online inquiry. Only

one of the respondents said that she had played the drinking game version at her friend's birthday party, and that they had followed the rules they had found on the Internet but she didn't mention the website. The respondents were both men and women, however, men's descriptions of the game were much more detailed and longer than women's.

What was common for some of the respondents was that they chose to play Kimble as a drinking game mainly because it was simple and easy enough to turn into a drinking game. However, it was interesting that the rules were made much harder for the drinking game version. This was also done to give Kimble some extra kick when played without alcohol. Kimble drinking game versions actually seem to move away from the general idea of modifying the game only by alcohol. Being "too" simple Kimble has to be first made more difficult in order to play it with alcohol. It is not necessarily about playing worse but integrating the drinking to the play, and regulating the drinking in the play. For instance, if played so that the player takes as many sips as the die shows, the game quickly becomes unpleasant when the player rolls several sixes in a row.

Drinking was seen either as a punishment or a reward depending on the rules. When the player's game piece is pumped, the player gets a penalty of half a 0,33 liter beer can. All the penalty drinks have to be drunk before the game ends. In other cases when pumped, the player's drink is drunk by the opponent meaning that it is both a punishment but also a reward for the other player for playing well. Sotamaa and Stenros (2016) state that winning means that one doesn't have to drink. In games winning also means that one plays well. Being good at Kimble means that you are lucky but also know which piece to move and when to eat.

One distinctive feature was the group activity around the drinking game versions. For instance, one male respondent reminisced that during his university studies they had founded

a Kimble club for their students' union. Although the club was founded with irony, it became a part of their tradition. One of the annual key happenings was the *Kimbledon* tournament which he described the following way:

> "The game was played on a big game board using beer bottles as game pieces. When the opponent's game piece was eaten, their beer bottle was drunk by the opposite team. The tournament was designed so that every team would have a reasonable amount of games so that everyone would be in good spirits and would not turn into drunkards before the final. The finals were quite Fellini-like happenings where four oddly and suitably dressed for the theme teams of four people were playing against each other wobbling and screaming basically all the time during the game. And so was the audience as well." (man 1969)

The respondent doesn't give a full description how they modified the game rules but more about how the playing felt like, and how they prepared for the game. The dresses of the teams, watching the games, and the preparation of the tournament are definitely part of the metagame of this Kimble drinking game version. The playing had started as casual; hanging out with friends and sipping beer, and then, with an ironic twist it turned into playful competition where alcohol was involved. Another respondent reminisced her playing of the Kimble drinking game the following way:

> "We pimped Kimble suitable for the purpose: to replace the lost game pieces we used corks from the beer bottles, and we would write the extra game rules onto the cover of the game box: the green ones were elves, yellow ones Chinese, red ones communists, and blue ones.. I've forgotten! Every team would have a leader game piece which was to be taken first back to the finish before others, ergo gunmen, who had to eat someone before they could be returned to the finish, so sometimes the gunman had to go round the game board several times." (woman 1983)

She describes how they modified Kimble but doesn't explain how alcohol was integrated into the game, only that alcohol was

involved. She also mentions that they used to have different kinds of sayings or catchphrases such as "Don't pop on someone else's turn". This was also characteristics for the Kimble culture of the students of AS which I will discuss next.

Students of AS at the Aalto University

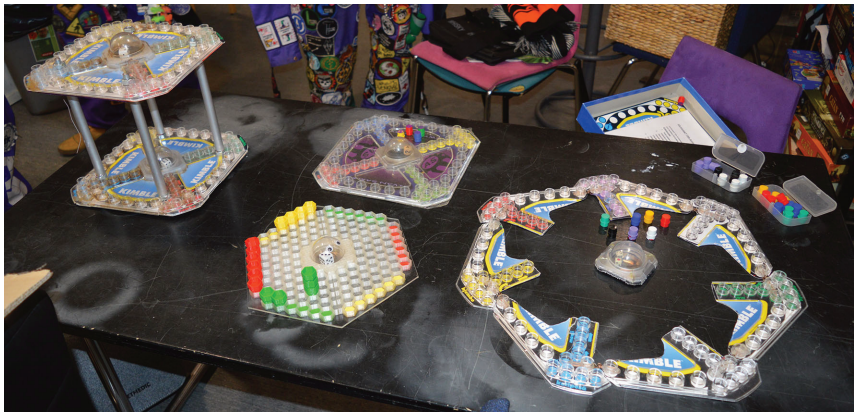
In the spring 2017 I interviewed one of the students of AS at the Aalto University in Espoo in Finland. The main point was to get an idea how the tradition of using Kimble as "the game" and the playing of human Kimble had begun and developed over the years and how it was maintained. I documented several Kimble versions they had designed and built themselves using parts of old original Kimble versions, IKEA furniture, 3D printed parts etc. I also documented the playing of the human Kimble. The human Kimble version was one of the most interesting ways to create a drinking game version of the game. The huge game board was made from sofas as the home bases and small round carpets from IKEA as the game track. In the middle of the game board, where Pop-o-matic is normally located, there was a table-like self-made game board and the original Pop-o-matic in the middle of it. One member of each team plays around the table, while others move as actual human game pieces "eating" each other (see Image 2).

The Kimble tradition is linked to the opening of the *Konttauskausi*, a season that begins long before May Day and means happenings, partying and different tasks especially for the freshmen to accomplish. The name comes from a Finnish word "kontti" which means a shipping container that was in the guild's use during the first years of the tradition, but the name also carries a wordplay in Finnish since "konttaus" actually means crawling. So, another translation for Konttauskausi would be "The Crawling Season". The guild would open the season with festivities and play the human Kimble. After they gave up the shipping container, the playing of Kimble remained. The student I interviewed, Matti Ojala, couldn't say for sure why Kimble was chosen as "the game" but it became a way to get to know people and get the evening going. He says that to them Kimble is a game of gentlemen and a matter of heart, and that they have long been playing it. They have a certain person, Jäykkäranne (accurate translation would be The Stiff Wrist), who takes care of the guild's Kimble tradition, and usually referees the first game. The stiff wrist also refers to the way how Pop-o-matic should be pushed.

Over the years the students of AS have developed their own versions of Kimble such as *3D Kimble*, *Hex Kimble*, *Modular Kimble*, and the guild's *15th Anniversary Kimble* (see Image 3). All these versions contain some of the basic elements of Kimble: the Pop-o-matic die container is always located in the middle of the game board, the game pieces have the same appearance, and the rule of eating another player's or team's game piece is never left out. The versions are played as drinking games, and the consumption of alcohol can be huge, of course, but the game is made a little bit easier for the freshmen, and there's always the possibility to drink non-alcoholic drinks instead. They even claim to have tried the "euro's cheese burger Kimble" which, according to them, stopped being funny after the second burger.

They have also tried to replace the alcohol drinks by physical exercises.

The 3D Kimble is built from two game boards. The game begins from the lower game board and proceeds to the upper one. This version takes time since if the game piece is eaten on the upper game board, it has to be returned to the lower one and start again. In the 15th Anniversary Kimble each team has one extra game piece. The Hex Kimble looks a little like a honeycomb, and the players are able to pile the pieces. The goal is to get to the other end of game board. For the Modular Kimble the students have painted old pieces with new colors thus adding more teams to the game. The game board is in pieces and is built a bit by bit when sixes are rolled.



As mentioned earlier, the students of AS have developed numerous sayings and their own versions of Finnish songs by replacing the word Kimble in some of the words. They were also aware of the relation between the numbers of the die which means that the number on the opposite side is more probable to be pushed next than any other number, especially the relation between six and one. They describe the "6-1" as a classic way to start the game. There is clearly a belief in the tactics, even though Kimble is considered as a more luck than tactic based game. When following their playing of human Kimble, I noticed that

some of them had trained themselves to push the die container in a certain way, thus hoping to get the right number. The students have also constructed the idea of Kimble Gods that are present in every game. Indeed, it is possible that the drinking games heighten Kimble's mysterious nature.

The Kimble culture of AS is definitely well maintained and cared for. Although alcohol is involved, it seems that it has been Kimble, and not alcohol, that has been connecting both new and old students for several years. For instance, Matti Ojala states that they enjoy building new versions and modifying the rules since it makes the playing more enjoyable. "It's in our blood", Ojala says.

CONCLUSION

In the beginning of this paper I presented some questions regarding the playing of Kimble drinking game. I asked how deeply drinking is integrated into the drinking game versions, what was the purpose of the games, and what else is at stake here. First of all, it seems that drinking is not a necessity in the game but the games are rarely played without alcohol since replacing alcohol or drinking is difficult. The purposes of these games are both intoxication, socializing, and playing but the relation between these alters. The intoxication was hardly mentioned by the online inquiry respondents or the students of AS although it was there in the background in the form of beer cans and other drinks. Only one online inquiry respondent alluded that her memories of the drinking game times were blurry. Socializing, on the other hand, was the key reason for playing and drinking. Kimble drinking games served as a way to get to know new people and to pass time in a pleasant way. What is more, both the respondents and the students mentioned that these games were modified, and it was fun and part of the game. Especially the students of AS had went pretty far with the modifications and designed new Kimble versions with more

difficult rules and interesting game situations. This also made the non-alcoholic play more fun.

Mary Flanagan (2009) states that one of her prior interests in her work *Critical Play* lies in the board games and how they reflect the given culture, its hopes and values. Drinking games are old, as Sotamaa and Stenros (2016) note, and they tell a lot about culture and the occasionally rising need to become intoxicated. So, it's not uncommon that some player groups modify games suitable for drinking. Drinking games belong to everyday life although they're not played every day. There has long been debates about alcohol consumption in Finland, but none of the respondents or students seemed concerned about their drinking games. Instead, they were excited to tell me about their memories and traditions. They had, however, discussed about the possibility for easier and non-alcoholic games, which indicates that they had found a mutual understanding regarding these subjects.

What is surprising here, is that how one game can inspire different groups around one country to drink. The online inquiry respondents and students of AS hint of a subculture of Kimble where drinking and building of new Kimble versions are part of the superstructure. Indeed, even Kimble's mysterious nature seems to escalate, and this is probably because the players can't control the game that much when drinking.

Kimble is re-gamified by non-game elements, yet at the same time it is also about gamifying drinking. Kimble seems to be better suited for this purpose than any other game. For instance, Matti Ojala says that they have tried playing Beer Pong and other games which are designed to be drinking games but Kimble allows more players to take part in the game because it can be modified so well. When turned into a drinking game Kimble is not only played but experienced as an object which generates fellowship. Memories are special and shared by a small group. The feeling of togetherness increases when Kimble is played as

a team. However, the possibility for individual play does exist. One male respondent (from AS) did state that they usually play the team version first, and then move on to find out who is the champion of the winning team.

What else is at stake here? Sotamaa and Stenros (2016) argue that drinking games have not been studied as games or play. Yet, the same theories can, at least partly, be applied to them. The drinking game studies have been player and drinking oriented, but it might be worthwhile to turn the gaze into the game itself, what happens to it, and how the game is modified. This follows in a slightly reversed way the idea from Samuel Tobin (2015) who has studied cocktail cabinets and suggested that it is not just the game that matters in the cocktail cabinets even though game is the basis for everything. If we study the cabinets from the perspective of the player's body, the cabinets become something more. If we study drinking games from different perspectives, we discover that these non-game elements, not only alcohol but candy, money etc., can play a crucial role in creating a strong attachment to the game (the object), mechanics that might extend the game's life so that it is not that prone to planned obsolescence, and new spatial contexts for the play when games are brought outside and built from furniture.

Tobin (2015) also argues that we re-define and re-name our objects all the time. Tobin criticizes the digital essentialism, the focus on digital which causes us to ignore the genealogy that, for instance, the cocktail cabinets have. He points to the alternate cultural histories of the cabinets or games for that matter. This idea links to Igor Kopytoff's (1986) theories of object biographies. Each object can have several biographies such as social, political, and physical which can change with its age and convey different meanings. Such as the hangers (Tobin 2016) do to the video arcade. The hangers give the arcade a different meaning since they are not playing any games. For instance, the use of Kimble as a drinking game was defined by some of

the online inquiry respondents as "another way to use Kimble". Drinking game was not considered as the primary use of Kimble, not even among the students, but it was seen as a part of everyday Kimble. The same individual Kimble can be both a board game and a drinking game, yet not every Kimble turns into a drinking version in its users' hands. Still, the drinking game is one biography of the whole Kimble concept. Users can extend the object's life by the way they use them, and thus enhance the game's replayability. Kimble is given other purposes, but it also gives the players a different purpose. It's about a different biography of the object that follows its user's life. In the future, the focus could lie more on the "life cycle thinking", and the idea that games are objects and have lives they aren't designed or supposed to have.

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THE LORD OF THE RINGS: THE CARD GAME

A Machine That Generates Possible Worlds

MICHAŁ ŻMUDA

> Welcome to Middle-earth, a land of Hobbits, Elves, Dwarves, Wizards, and Men. From the bright towns and fields of the Shire, to the wilds of Mirkwood Forest and Rhovanion, and to the powerful kingdoms of Gondor and Rohan, the various peoples of this land struggle against the foul minions and the ancient, evil threat of the Dark Lord, Sauron. (French, 2011, p. 2)

These words open the instructions to *Lord of the Rings: The Card Game* (Fantasy Flight Games, 2011). It is interesting that the rulebook begins not with the definition of the game but with the description of the storyworld based on J. R. R. Tolkien's work. This correlation is further emphasized in the text, which presents the product as "a game of heroes, perilous journeys, and adventure set in the lands described in the epic fantasy masterpiece created by J.R.R. Tolkien, The Lord of the Rings (sic)" (French, 2011, p. 2). The manual reveals that the game was specifically designed to recreate the world from Tolkien's books. But how does one adapt a literary work into a card game medium?

The Lord of The Rings: The Card Game was published by Fantasy Flight Games in 2011. The core package holds 226 cards, but the game can be expanded with add-ons. The rules are written for cooperative play that can be enjoyed by up to 4 players. The game

can be played in a single-player mode as well. In both cases, the users compete against the procedures of the game.

Figure 1. One of the scenarios in progress.

All sessions transpire in accordance with the chosen scenario (see Figure 1), which is directed by the rules that are set down by the game's system. The core set comes with three scenarios: *Passage Through Mirkwood*, *Journey Down the Anduin, Escape from Dol Guldur*. Each scenario consists of the card pool that is randomly revealed during the gameplay. Those cards contain instructions, illustrations, literary descriptions, names and attributes. The players have decks at their disposal with which they try to overcome scenario cards that establish specific challenges, enemies and encounters. During the gameplay, the cards controlled by the players and the game interact with each other and create a progression of the plot. The main goal for the players is to take part in a so-called "quest," successfully completing a scenario inspired by Tolkien's works.

The literary inspiration governs the whole system of the game. Even the basic design choices are deeply influenced by the ideas presented in *The Lord of the Rings* books. The concept of two opposite card pools corresponds with the black and white reality of Middle-earth. The player's deck represents the forces of good, while the cards in the encounter deck represent the forces of Sauron. The decision to deny the players the ability to control the dark army stays true to the ethical vision in *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy. Forcing one player to identify with the evil side would go against that vision. The fact that each player controls not one but three adventurers is also consistent with the books. The game transports such values as companionship, group effort and cooperation from the literary work onto the gameplay system.

The same can be said about the questing mechanism, in which the players amass supplies, gather allies, explore locations, fight enemies, and deal with adversities. The gameplay framework is shaped after the fantasy tropes formulated in Tolkien's work. The adventuring in *The Lord of the Rings: The Card Game* is not only intellectual, but also a tactile experience. During the gameplay the players gather small, cardboard tokens that symbolize resources and then spend them to bring ally, item or event cards into play. Another category of tokens represents the journey of the group. These discs are decorated with an illustration of hobbit footprints in the ground. Successfully committing the characters to the quest allows the players to put the progress tokens on the current scenario card. It's not easy though, since each scenario requires different amount of tokens to be collected and creates different, scenario specific obstacles. This solution prevents quests from being too similar, and it also supports a representation of diverse themes inspired by the books. In one scenario, the progress tokens stand for information gathered during a search for Gollum, in another they embody a military assault on a city of Osgiliath.

The questing system is connected with a player's threat level. To

resolve the quest, the player chooses which characters are going to attempt it, compares their willpower with a threat strength of all the unengaged encounter cards in play, and depending on the result, either advances the quest or raises the threat level. The lower the level, the better. A higher value can cause foes and obstacles to become more difficult. What is more, the level raises slowly each turn, putting more and more pressure on the players. When the level reaches fifty, the player is eliminated. Every turn the players have to choose: do they commit their heroes to a quest or engage them with certain encounter cards in play? Ignoring enemies and other obstacles often ends with a defeat. Neglecting the quest prolongs the play, allowing the system to reveal more encounter cards with each turn. The threat mechanism not only creates most of the tactical decisions during the gameplay, it also echoes the description of Eye of Sauron in the books. This literary influence seeps to the analog dimension of the game. The core box comes with a special device assembled from two numeric dials attached to a cardboard faceplate. The accessory is operated by the player during the session and is used to track the threat level of the adventuring party. The act of manipulating the tracker not only stimulates the feeling of danger, but also recreates Sauron's surveillance over the forces of good in Middle-Earth. The red eye pictured on the faceplate stares at the player during the whole session.

The card game demonstrates a far-reaching transformation of the source material, while still remaining dependent on it. The literary source is evoked through the textuality of the game (illustrations and verbal description), through the gameplay systems, and even through the design of material components. This strong relation that develops between the game's and literary work's storyworlds is the paper's main focus. I examine how the design of the game evokes its literary source: what kind of alterations were involved in transforming literary material into a game and how does the card game evoke its predecessor?

Is *The Lord of the Rings: The Card Game* a "well played" adaptation? To answer these questions, I use tools from literary studies to survey different modes of narration and world building in the game.

A METHODOLOGICAL STARTING POINT

Gérard Genette's category of hypertextuality provides a methodological starting point for the analysis. His concepts allow me to define the relation between the game and the literary work as a special kind of evocation – an act in which one text refers to and transforms another text. Genette refers with this category to every relation that connects a text B (hypertext) with a preceding text A (hypotext). He notices that a text B could not exist without a text A: a text B is a derivative of a text A and expresses it by transformation (Genette, 1997).

Genette's terminology explains the process of change that took place between two distinct texts. Moreover, it strictly defines this transformation as a means of reference, where the change itself is a way in which one text recalls another. This in turn, makes understanding the relation between the card game and the literary work much easier. Genette's theory helps us realize that certain design choices are dictated by the source material. The transfer from a book to a different medium shapes the gameplay. This change is based on two form of intermedia relations: a medial transposition or/and intermedial references.

Irina O. Rajewsky (2005) distinguishes these two concepts as subcategories of intermediality. They both expose different manifestations of media configurations and hybridizations. The medial transposition applies to a transformation of one media product (e.g. a literary text, a movie) into another medium. This transposition has "genetic" quality in which the original product "is the <<source>> of the newly formed media product, whose transformation is based on a media-specific and obligatory intermedial transformation process" (Rajewsky, p. 51). The

intermedial references imitate or allude to certain techniques that are not obtainable by a referencing medium. The given medium uses its own characteristics and poetics to reference structures or components of another, dissimilar medium. This referenced medium is not materially present, but only evoked. The medial differences constitute meanings and poetics of the referencing medium in relation to the referenced product (Rajewsky, p. 52-53, 59). Rajewsky's perspective on intermediality provides additional tools to understand the scope of hypertextuality in *The Lord of the Rings: The Card Game*. I am going to probe the game with intermediality in mind, looking for instances of medial transposition and intermedial references, especially those that are used in a worldbuilding process. The intermedial relation between a hypo- and a hypertext constitutes the relation between *The Lord of the Rings'* and the card game's worlds. Nevertheless, as we are going to see, distinguishing those worlds as completely separate may be difficult.

A TRANSFORMATION

The card game's hypotext incorporates the literary works that constitute the universe of Middle-earth. This corpus of texts includes*: The Hobbit*, the novel cycle *The Lord of the Rings*, the poetry anthology *The Adventures of Tom Bombadil*, and (published after the author's death) *The Silmarillion*. The correspondence between the literary source and the card game is complicated. The hypotext was changed by far-reaching transformations that took place not during the transposition from one literary text to another, but between two dissimilar media. A close study of one of the cards reveals methods of intermedial transposition and reference that appear in the game.

Figure 2. Bilbo Baggins.

Bilbo Baggins (see Figure 2) is one of the numerous cards available in the core set. In the game terminology it is branded as a "hero" card; therefore it openly associates itself with its precursor. After all, Mr. Baggins is the main protagonist of *The Hobbit*, and also

the main element of *The Lord of the Rings'* plot. But the ways he is represented in the card game and in the books differ. What in the literary original was accomplished by the use of narration and descriptions, in the game is reduced to the numerical characteristics: willpower strength, attack strength, defense strength. These numbers are far from being random statistics. They establish Bilbo as a mechanical component. Willpower is referenced when the card is committed to a quest or an unexplored location in play. Strength and defense matter during battle encounters. The first one denotes potential damage done to an enemy, the second one acts as a buffer, reducing the attacker's strength by a certain number of points. This mechanical aspect of the card also evokes Bilbo's characterization in Tolkien's work. The low numbers in attack and willpower (both start at 1) correspond to his physical weakness and cowardice, his defense is a little bit higher (it starts at 2), probably thanks to his nimbleness. What is more, Bilbo Baggins is described by the game with one "trait": he is "the hobbit." This classification acts in two ways: it places the card in the Middle-earth diegesis, while at the same time it conforms to game rules. Certain cards can have instructions that affect other cards with a specific keyword printed on them. For instance, *Boots from Erebor* can be only used on "hobbit" or "dwarf" characters. This ruling is hypertextual: a quote on the card in question explains that the boots fit only the small humanoid races of Middle-earth.

Bilbo Baggins also contains the excerpt that links the game mechanism with the books. A quote from *The Fellowship of the Ring* is placed at the bottom of the card: "'Well, my dear fellow,' said Bilbo, 'now you've heard the news, can't you spare me a moment? I want your help in something urgent'." When taken out of its original context, the excerpt appears to be coincidental. It creates a link between the hypotext and the hypertext and suggests that some kind of propping up on the literary ancestor

is taking place here. The indicated statement is continued in the source text: "Elrond says this song of mine is to be finished before the ends of the evening, and I am stuck. Let's go off into the corner and polish it up!" (Tolkien, 1982, p. 281). This passage is a part of the scene in which Bilbo proposes to Strider a collaboration on the writing of songs for the celebration party. Thus, the act of text creation represented in the book is mirrored by the game. According to the rules, in each turn the player can draw one card from her deck. Thanks to *Bilbo Baggins*, this limit is raised by one more card. Thereby, the scene from the book is represented by the game mechanics. The additional draw made possible by *Bilbo Baggins* corresponds with the narration about the protagonists writing a song. The act of drawing cards is associated with the discovery and generation of new texts. A similar case can be found in another card: *Campfire Tales* (see Figure 3). The card allows the users one additional draw. This rule is accompanied by an extract from *The Fellowship of the Ring*: "It is a fair tale, though it is sad, as are all the tales of Middle-earth, and yet it may lift your hearts." The image depicted on the card presents the group of characters sharing stories by the fire. Once again the motion of drawing cards from the deck is tied to a storytelling practice.

Figure 3. Campfire Tales.

Figure 4. Flies and Spiders (both sides of the scenario card).

The Lord of the Rings: The Card Game is a system designed to smoothly generate content. On the level of the game's mechanics this content emerges thanks to the interactions and the rules that develop among the cards. Such phenomena can be examined in the example of the *Passage through Mirkwood* scenario that even in its name builds on Tolkien's world's geography. The *Passage* is composed of four quest cards: *Flies and Spiders* (see Figure 4), *A Fork in the Road, A Chosen Path: "Don't Leave the Path!"* and *A Chosen Path: Beorn's Path*. They are revealed sequentially during the play, forming the structure of the scenario. The first one sets a beginning stage of the adventure, the second is made active if the players complete the first one, and the last two create alternative ending conditions. The name *Flies and Spiders* copies the chapter title from *The Hobbit*. It is also *The Hobbit* from which the excerpt that is placed on one side of this card is taken:

> The nastiest things they saw were the cobwebs; dark dense cobwebs with threads extraordinarily thick, often stretched from tree to tree, or tangled in the lower branches on either side of them. There were none stretched across the path, but whether because some magic kept it clear, or for what other reason they could not guess.

The referenced text creates the correspondence between the game world and the storyworld in the books. However, it is not a simple transposition that takes place here. The indicated quote

evokes a vast story arc about the journey through Mirkwood, which in the original version occupies many book pages. Therefore the goal of the quote is to invoke a reminiscence, a reproduction that takes place in the users' memories and initiates a recollection of a specific storyline, as well as its themes, images and protagonists.

The process in question can be defined as a particular kind of deliberate dissemination. The quote expresses something that physically could not be contained on a tiny card. Seeing that only a bare minimum can be transcribed on the surface of the card, the original text was reduced to a short excerpt. Paradoxically this miniaturization initiates the opening and expansion of the text that is being referenced. The source can manifest itself in its completeness, but this time only thanks to the evocation in the players' minds.

Another thing found on the card is the narration that was written only for the purpose of the game. It reads as follows: "You are traveling through Mirkwood Forest, carrying an urgent message from King Thranduil to the Lady Galadriel of Lorien. As you move along the dark trial, the spiders gather around you…" While this short account is not a quote in itself, it is still filled with keywords derived from the hypotext, such as "Mirkwood Forest," "King Thranduil," and "Lady Galadriel." The passage is focalized from the perspective of participants. Its goal is to immerse the players in the gameworld. Still, the game itself does not explain who Thranduil and Galadriel are. Only the source text (and the users' acquaintance with it) can clarify those things. Without the proper knowledge of the storyworld from the books, the players' understanding of the descriptions on the card can be limited. The textual coherence depends on the users' familiarity with the source material, for without it the text loses its context and becomes riddled with unexplained information.

Flies and Spiders is also an assembly of instructions. It sets

directives that must be followed if one wants to prepare the cards to play this part of the scenario. The card reads: "Setup: Search the encounter deck for 1 copy of the Forest Spider and 1 copy of the Old Forest Road, and add them to the staging area. Then Shuffle the encounter deck." These instructions are obligatory for the proper performance of the scenario. Under their guidelines the players must mechanically – directed by the procedures – lay down specific cards in the game space. Among them is the *Old Forest Road*. This card's presence connotes motifs from Tolkien's works: "the journey," "the adventure," that what is "unknown" and "mysterious." On one hand, the *Old Forest Road* is a location "excised" from the literary foundation and transported onto the language of the game; on the other, it animates the play. It introduces rules to be followed by the players and influences the way the gameplay will proceed.

The cards from the player's deck act in a similar fashion. A green icon in the left corner of *Bilbo Baggins* indicates that the hero belongs to the sphere of lore, one of the four spheres of influence distinguished in the game system. Each sphere represents certain traits and ideas. The domain of lore denotes intellectual prowess and wisdom; it is no surprise that Bilbo was placed in this category. The resources generated by *Bilbo Baggins* can only be used to play cards that correspond with his sphere or cards that are neutral. Because of that design, the initial composition of the party dictates the deck building options. Choosing one sphere over another impacts the strategies and the themes that will predominate the player's deck. The sphere of lore focuses on cunningness and planning, that is why most of the lore cards emphasize such actions as drawing new cards, manipulating the player and the encounter decks, healing, and recovering discarded cards. The motives that comprise the lore deck reflect its mechanical side. *Forest Snare* is an attachment card that allows the player to trap an enemy, stopping it from attacking the party. *Daughter of the Nimrodel*, an ally card, is not a great asset in a

physical confrontation, but the player can choose her special ability to heal one heroe. This trait is connected with the healing powers of the Nimrodel stream mentioned in *The Fellowship of the Ring*. The quote on the card very clearly reminds the player of this moment from the novel. *Erebor Hammersmith* alludes to high skills possessed by Dwarven smiths in Middle-earth. When he enters the play he returns the topmost attachment card from the discard pile to the player's hand. The juxtaposition of these cards can create a strong sense of narrative in the game. The player can use *Forest Snare* to catch a spider enemy encountered during the *Flies and Spiders* scenario, heal sustained damage with the help from *Daughter of the Nimrodel*, and, after defeating the foe, call for *Erebor Hammersmith* so he immediately "repairs" the broken snare. Thanks to the logical rules, illustrations and contextual quotes on the cards, all of these actions make sense not only from a mechanical standpoint, but also from a narrative perspective.

These examples show that in *The Lord of the Rings: The Card Game*, each card works in linkage with others. They are interlocked. They respond to other cards, start specific procedures, activate chosen elements and eventually force the players to act. The users' performance also drives the game to generate additional activities. During the play, more and more cards will appear in the game space, additional elements taken from Tolkien's books will be evoked, and a sequence of operations and rules to consider will be formed. All of that must occur for the game to constantly generate new texts, till the criteria of the scenario are fulfilled.

Because of that, it is possible to categorize the analyzed product as an example of a cybertext. Espen Aarseth explains that the "cyber" prefix indicates that "the text is seen as a machine – (…) a mechanical device for the production and consumption of verbal-signs" (Aarseth, 1997, p. 21). Of course, in the case of the card game, the signs are not limited to being only verbal. What is important though is the fact that this machine is activated during

the interaction among the operator of the text (the player), the material medium (the cards themselves), and signs produced by the interaction. The game has a performative aspect. It is a device that manipulates itself and the player. A system that develops and processes signs and codes. In the case of *The Lord of the Rings: The Card Game,* the process in question includes rules and references that imply motifs and details from the world represented in Tolkien's writings.

The game works on the basis of defined processes that activate certain actions. It is a logical and predictable device, since the users must be able to understand it. But one more principle appears among the other factors: the primacy of randomness. The game was designed in such a way that it can be replayed many times, each time taking (even if only slightly) a different course and leading to different results. That is why an act of card shuffling was placed at the heart of the play. Even before the game begins, every deck must be carefully mixed, so any intentional setup is eliminated. As a consequence, the randomness plays a tremendous role in the experience.

The distribution model of *The Lord of the Rings: The Card Game* takes advantage of this trait. The game is marketed as a "living card game" that grows with regular publication of add-ons. While such a distribution model may sound similar to that of *Magic the Gathering* (Wizards of the Coast, 1993), the game in question is actually quite different. It does not rely on the purchase of random sets of cards. When buying the expansion package, the players know what assortment of cards they are getting. Cards are not sold randomly in booster packs, but constitute a full set. The game is constantly bolstered by expansion of the available card pool, and introduction of new scenarios and game mechanics. This makes the game highly replayable. Each pack contains at least one new scenario that is usually part of a bigger story cycle. For example, the expansion *Khazad-dum* comes with three adventures. The themes from this

set are later continued in a cycle of smaller packs. Most of the expansions add a new pool of player cards that can be used to play recent and old scenario. This distribution model opens new ways to re-experience the old content. What is more, Fantasy Flight Games has introduced a concept of game difficulty into the mix. The company releases special add-ons with cards that make existing scenarios even harder. These "nightmare decks" feature stronger challenges for the player to tackle. Some of the cards replace older ones, some develop harder game mechanics. As of 2017, Fantasy Flight Games has published 16 big box expansions, 42 small expansions that form 8 narrative cycles, 7 standalone scenario packs, and 47 nightmare decks. Such growth of the product establishes a highly variable structure, in which no gameplay session repeats itself. An optional scoring point system was inserted into the rules to induce even more replay value, to allow the players to evaluate their skills, and to motivate them to experiment with the deck building options.

Another transformation of the source material is created as a result of this quality. Tolkien's works were written in prose and published as novels (with the exception of poetry found in *The Adventures of Tom Bombadil*). The narration of *The Lord of the Rings* follows a linear path determined by the order of the chapters. The readers are not advised to play with this order, nor are they allowed to choose what kind of elements from the storyworld are going to be written into the narrative. We can imagine different readings of Tolkien's storyworld, different interpretations of it in the readers' minds, yet the narration that is written on the pages of the books remains the same. On the contrary, with each playing of the card game, a different chain of cards is going to appear, and a different progression of events is going to take place. As such it is impossible for the game to keep a total coherence with the narrative in Tolkien's books. Those stories cannot be faithfully replicated in the contingent medium; contingent in both senses: being suspect to change and occurring

based on certain circumstances. Instead, the card game generates a modified version of familiar events, actions, and protagonists. The game allows the users to experience the familiar world in a new configuration.

The phenomenon in question is especially visible in scenarios that not only evoke the Middle-earth diegesis, but also recreate narrative threads from the books. One such scenario is included in the expansion *The Battle of Lake-Town* that adapts the climax of *The Hobbit* – Smaug's attack on Lake-Town. The scenario establishes many mechanics that bring the event to life. Firstly, Lake-Town itself is represented by a special card revealed at the beginning of each session. Whenever the dragon successfully burns some parts of the city, the players put tokens on the card to indicate the damage. When there is fifty or more tokens on the card, the Lake-Town is completely ruined and the battle is lost. Secondly, by introducing a new keyword *burn* and rules related to it, the game creates a simulation of a burning city. The encounter deck is full of location cards that contain this keyword (with a certain value attached to it). The cards show specific areas of the city (a port, a district, a manor) and their presence in play indicates which places are currently under Smaug's attack. Whenever the encounter card instructs the players to resolve all burn damage from locations, they are obliged to assign a specific amount of tokens to the Lake-Town card. Every unexplored location in play raises the speed in which the fire spreads through the streets. Thirdly, Smaug the dragon is represented not by a singular card, but by a separate deck created at the start of the session. This small deck includes three copies of three unique cards – each one depicting different behavior of the creature. *Smaug the Mighty* initiates the dragon's immediate attack on the party of heroes, while *Smaug the Terrible* presents the creature's aerial assault on the city. The first card forces the players to fight the dragon in the moment he is revealed from the deck, the second one asks them to apply the burn damage to the Lake-

Town card. The players draw one card from the Smaug deck each turn, making the dragon more unpredictable than most enemies in the game.

The mechanical backbone of *The Battle of Lake-Town* not only creates a challenge for the players, it strongly evokes a very important part of *The Hobbit*. The event that was verbally narrated in the book is transformed into a set of procedures. While illustrations and quotes on the cards represent certain elements of that event (the places and protagonists described by the narrator), the rules put the event in motion. The procedures of the game imitate a fire spreading through the town, a flight of the dragon and the party's attempts at minimizing the damage. It is no surprise then, that this simulation creates different outcomes. The dragon can burn the whole town, but he can also be defeated. The high variability of the player's deck composition contributes to this narrative irregularity. The game rules do not restrict the thematic contents of the players' decks in any way. The decks can be composed of any combination of heroes, allies, items and events, even if some of those elements were not part of the story that the scenario is based on.

This design creates an experience that closely follows the books and diverges from them at the same time. The phenomenon in question is taken even further in the saga expansions. In 2012 Fantasy Flight Games started to release products that were meant to "give players the opportunity to directly participate in, or even recreate, the narrative events described in the classic novels written by J.R.R. Tolkien" (Grace, 2013, p. 1). Each novel was adapted into six scenarios. *The Fellowship of the Ring* for example was transformed into sets *The Black Riders* and *The Road Darkens*. The saga expansions add new cards inspired by the protagonists (e.g. the enemy cards representing the black riders) and events (e.g. a new *hide* test that simulates the party's effort to avoid the riders) depicted in *The lord of the Rings* trilogy. The most important addition though comes in the form of a campaign play.

A new and optional set of rules allows the players to tackle all quests based on the trilogy as one big narrative. Each session in the campaign mode can have far-reaching consequences. Defeated heroes cannot be recovered between the scenarios, but those who survive the adventure can gain permanent abilities, allies or defects that will stay with them after the scenario is over. New *boon* and *burden* cards represent the consequences (both good and bad) that the players have to accept as part of the long journey. Burdens earned by the party are usually shuffled into the encounter deck at the beginning of play. They can appear during the scenario, causing unpleasant effects. One of such cards, *Panicked*, raises the threat level. Boons on the other hand, can be usually included in the player's deck before each scenario or are permanently attached to a hero, creating new strategies of play. One of the heroes can learn healing skills by obtaining the card *Skilled Healer,* or can gain *Mithril Shirt,* which gives + 1 to defense. The designers provided the players with sheets that help them track the changing state of the campaign. They can record information about fallen heroes and cards earned during completed scenarios. This mode of play strengthens attachment to the characters that take part in the adventures. Moreover, many tactical decisions become even more meaningful, because their outcome can be felt many sessions later.

The saga expansions are designed to be as close to the books as possible, and yet the campaign mode introduced in them highlights the fact that storyworlds created during the gameplay differ from those represented in the novels. The building blocks seem to be the same, but the way they fit together changes with each gameplay. The concept of boons and burdens only builds on the already high variability of the game, adding another layer of hypertextual transformation to the experience.

A POSSIBLE WORLD

The Lord of the Rings: The Card Game was not designed as a

retelling of Tolkien's books. It is a bold attempt at rewriting his work. This idea is brought to life by the most unique aspect of the game – it's counterfactuality. The game regularly creates situations that were not narrated in Tolkien's works. The hypertext transforms the hypotext so radically that it either goes beyond or contradicts the original. The card *Beravor* (see Figure 5) exemplifies such counterfactuality. It represents a protagonist who did not exist in any previous narration about Middle-earth. Is it a supplementation of the hypotext; an addition that extends the world described in *The Lord of the Rings*? Or is it a fabrication that was quietly smuggled among other (faithful to the hypotext) components? I would like to argue that it is both.

Figure 5. Beravor.

Beravor is accompanied by the quote from *The Fellowship of the Ring*: "But in the wild lands beyond Bree there were mysterious wanderers, The Bree-folk called them Rangers, and know

nothing of their origin." The citation does not allude to any specific character from the books but grounds Beravor in the diegesis of Middle-earth. Moreover, the card is indicated with keywords that recall the hypotext (Dúnedain, Ranger). They provide reasons for Beravor's presence in the game. The game text suggests that she could exist in this world, she could be a part of *The Lord of the Rings* cycle. Her absence from the pages of the books does not mean that their narrative precludes the possibility of her existence within them. She, at the same time, both "belongs" and "does not belong" to the source texts. In regard to them, she can only be described as a potential being, one that is not fulfilled in the hypotext, but can be actualized in the hypertext.

This elaboration seems surprising, but makes a lot of sense from a storyworld perspective. The game design problem (a need for additional hero) could be solved not only with an adaptation of a certain character from the books, but also with an invention of a new protagonist who adheres to the worldbuilding rules set by Tolkien. The game is based upon an intermedial transformation that produces an expansion and addendum of the source material. The card in question emphasizes these qualities.

To describe this matter, a term "possible world" from logic and philosophy seems ideal. A possible world is counterfactual in regard to a certain primary world. It is a probable state or a situation contrary to facts from that primary world, and can be described with such sentences as "it is possible that…" or "it could be that…" Philosopher Saul Kripke (1980) presumes that possible worlds are abstract beings. They are established in an act of hypothesis creation, during which phenomena that are alternative to a given state of things are described. As he reports, possible worlds are based on descriptive conditions that we bestow upon them. They do not create new, analogous worlds, but introduce some kind of modality to the way we describe certain things. Thus they are discursive in nature.

Ruth Ronen makes a clear distinction between possible worlds and the ontology of fictional worlds. She argues:

> Possible worlds are based on a logic of ramification determining the range of possibilities that emerge from an actual state of affairs; fictional worlds are based on a logic of parallelism that guarantees their autonomy in relation to the actual world. (Ronen, 1994, p. 8)

There is a big difference between ramification and parallelism. Greek "para allelon" means "alongside one another," while Medieval "ramificare" indicates "to form branches" (Hoad, 2003, parallel, ramify). The first one implies an independent being, the former conveys a connection to something.

The idea of ramification applies to *The Lord of the Rings: The Card Game* as well. The game does not operate as an autonomous creation. It is not a parallel representation of the Middle-earth, but a derivation achieved thanks to the intermedial references. No self-contained world is created during the game session. The scope of information about the diegesis represented by the cards is quite limited. The rest of the necessary data must be presupposed from the books.

The possible world theory can be used for the description of transtextual occurrences that happen in the game. A possible world can be interpreted as a hypertext that is built upon a hypotext. A possible world's counterfactual property means that without a point of departure it will lack its essence. In the same way, a hypertext without a hypotext loses its transtextual character. Genette's theory assumes that a new text is always a consequence of a previous one. Viewed from this perspective, this new text is never autonomous. When talking about counterfactual states, we must remember that possible worlds are not some slightly modified duplicates of another world. These possible worlds are limited only to certain attributes that are being considered in terms of their "possibility." Kripke even explains a "counterfactual state" as a mini-world or a mini-state

which is reduced to currently considered traits (Kripke, 1980, p. 18). A possible world is always examined in the context of an actual world. In our case, the card game is played in the context of other texts that describe the fictional world of Middle-earth.

Marie-Laure Ryan uses the notion of possible world to describe a textual universe as a narrative creation that consists of plural worlds: an actual one (called by her a factual domain) and all the possible states that surround it. This view means that a fictional world encompasses both an actual state and that which "could be" but is not actualized (Ryan, 1992, p. 22-23, 112-113). Following this idea one can understand the distinct link that connects Beravor to *The Lord of the Rings*. It is as if she was not created by the designers of the game, but rather was hidden (as a potential being) in the hypotext itself. Her being in the game is a simple ramification of the possibilities produced by the hypotext.

Another aspect of the game is becoming noticeable here. In some way the game tests the boundaries of Tolkien's world. Each game session could be regarded as an experiment in which the limit of the potential hidden in the source text is inspected. One last example – the *Gandalf* cards – should justify this hypothesis.

There are actually three cards in the game which represent the Istari wizard (one is available in the base set (see Figure 6), the two others are included in the expansions *The Hobbit: Over Hill and Under Hill* and *The Road Darkens*). Two are classified as "allies", and one is a "hero." All of them are among some of the most helpful and powerful cards in the game. They also represent different characteristics of Gandalf. The first card is based on his tendency to aid the group in dangerous situations and then disappear without a word. This *Gandalf* must be discarded at the end of the round. The second one explores how the wizard's power is a threat to the group, because his actions and presence bring the attention of the dark forces. Each turn the players have to decide if they want to discard this *Gandalf* or let him stay in

the party, because at the end of the turn he increases the threat level. The third card – Gandalf as a "hero" – focuses on his vast knowledge and immense magical abilities. He has an ability to act as a character who belongs to all spheres of influence.

Figure 6. Gandalf from the core set of the game.

The cards explore different aspects of this protagonist, but it is impossible to tell, which one shows the "true" Gandalf. What is more, during the gameplay he can take part in events that were never recounted in the books. After all, the story in the game is created procedurally without following a prescribed narrative from the books. For example, in one session he can slay Smaug the dragon, while in another this opportunity can be ignored altogether. If we can have both Gandalf the slayer of Smaug, and Gandalf who did not kill the beast (and maybe even perished under its flames), then it can be acknowledged that his properties in the game are just possibilities explaining how Gandalf could be, if the books narrated other events.

Despite the differences among the cards, the name printed on them seems to still refer to the same person. One of the cards reads, "I am Gandalf, and Gandalf means me!", indicating that Gandalf is identified based on a discursive practice. How is it that certain properties tied to the wizard change with each game session, but we can still recognize the protagonist? Gandalf from the card game possesses a transworld identity. He is not a completely different character, but a variant created by a means of ramification. He is the same protagonist, but also one whose properties or circumstances have changed. Despite this change, he can still be recognized as *himself*.

In his considerations of possible world logic, Kripke has deduced that properties of any object are not essential to its identity, since "an object could have had properties very different from its most striking actual properties, or from the properties we use to identify it" (1980, p. 77). Rather, it is the name that remains the designator of a given identity. How do names become designators then? Kripke argues that it happens by a process of reference – similarly to the hypertextual process. Counterfactual situations are represented with signs (verbal or not) that carry certain meanings and references. These two remain the same, even if used in the context of different possible worlds (Kripke,

1980, p. 77-78). Kripke's thesis explains how one can recognize Gandalf in all of the counterfactual situations possible within the game. The sentence "I am Gandalf, and Gandalf means me!" does not refer to Gandalf as a character from the game but points to Gandalf from *The Lord of the Rings* books. Thus Gandalf in the game does not have separate ontological properties; all of them are connected to the source material.

A MACHINE THAT GENERATES POSSIBLE WORLDS

Using Aarseth's definition of cybertext, the game can be classified as a machine, which aims to generate possible worlds that draw upon *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy and its accompanying texts. The diegesis is constantly shuffled. As a result of the game procedures each gameplay generates a new string of sequentially organized texts. Something that in the literary version was a part of a stable structure, here is transformed and placed in a new sequence. A story (a succession of events) that is created during the game session is always random, never planned. The shuffled deck determines a set of potential elements, and the game session is a space in which possible worlds are shaped from those elements. Given this contingency, *The Lord of the Rings'* characters take part in the events that did not happen in the books. Certain events proceed and end differently, characters from the background are put in the spotlight, and other characters do not appear at all. The users of the game can check "what would happen if…": Frodo did not take part in Bilbo's journey, Gollum did not lose his ring, Gandalf had never arrived.

The variability of the game influences the way the players interpret the gameplay as well. The introduction from the booklet encourages a very specific mode of reading: it invites the players to "embark upon new adventures and share new experiences with the beloved The Lord of the Rings characters and settings…" (French, 2011, p. 2). The game urges the players to constantly recentralize their focus. Recentralization (a term

taken from the possible world theory) is a cognitive operation in which the readers move from one textual actuality to another, constantly refocusing their view on what should be regarded as actual, and what as just a possibility (Ryan, 1992, p. 21-22). The game asks the users to alternate between the events depicted in the books, the events created during the gameplay session, and all the other possible outcomes. In consequence, the game challenges the Tolkien's works, the players' vision of what those works are, and, above all else, the very idea of what a faithful adaptation is supposed to be. To truly enjoy *The Lord of the Rings. The Card Game* the players must allow the gameplay to carry them through Tolkien's world anew. The game relays on the players' interpretative skills, their familiarity with the original work and their tolerance for change. A dogmatic vision of Middle-Earth is only going to hold the users back. The players are going to see the game as a (de)generation in which the structure of the first work is deformed. Yet the game does everything it can to prevent such reception. Each layer of the experience reminds the players about the special relation between the game and its predecessor. The textual side of the experience asks the players to reminiscence about certain elements from the books, while the gameplay systems create simulations inspired by these elements and invite the players to play with them. Both of these aspects work in tandem. The game's textuality establishes a close connection with the hypotext, the procedures build on that connection, reshaping the content with new ideas.

This exploratory aspect makes *The Lord of the Rings. The Card Game* a brave adaptation of the source material. The game does not traverse the same ground, but rather constructs a machine that (re)generates the texts that it is based upon. It brings a new life into them, transports them into the new medium, reinterprets them and causes the diegesis to be reborn in new configurations. The randomness of the game removes the

original elements that were initially constituted by the hypotext, and creates new ones in their place. The game constantly oscillates between different possibilities of its progression. It is full of potentials, from which only some (depending on the factors of randomness, rules and the players' involvement) get to manifest themselves. Despite the fact that the game creates counterfactual states of Middle-earth, every element of the design proves the creators' admiration of the setting. Even the contradictions are deeply embedded in the storyworld rules laid down by Tolkien.

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