

A Post-Mortem of *The Draw*

Pronounced Dead (Prelude)

In its infancy, *The Draw* was never intended to be a card game, but obviously things have changed. The original idea was to have four completely distinct mini-games centered around four unique patrons. As members joined the team, the idea shifted from four distinct mini-games to four card games, then finally to one card game with four vastly differing mechanics. The game's identity was soon settled after that and an end-goal was now in mind. A card game drawing inspiration from pillars of the genre like [Inscription](#) and [Hand of Fate](#). With a group of three and around two months worth of time to work on the project, how bad could things possibly get?

What Went Wrong

The Natural Predator of Developers: Deadlines

Perhaps the greatest foe to any developer is not just time, but how easily they overestimate what can get done before a deadline. Thankfully though, this issue tends to dissipate with more experience. Unfortunately for us, this was our first time making a game using the Unreal Engine so we had no experience. So while our ambitions were high, our actual window of opportunity was woefully small for what we had wanted to achieve.

The idea proposed in our finalized game idea was much too complex to implement in only two months of development time. We had envisioned four separate 'spin-off' variations of the 'base-game' where using similar rules, the player could engage in the game with four distinct ways of playing. For example, one playstyle focused on playing fast, and another focused on playing only one card. So, during development there was a slow and subtle realization made by all members that the game we had thought of would not be fully realized, and that concessions needed to be made. This resulted in a somewhat more volatile project, where ideas thought to be set in stone were quickly overturned for makeshift ideas in the face of deadlines. Now instead of four unique playstyles, the player is really only given one, with the small change in gameplay revolving around what type of card is played.

A Bloated Patron: Overly Complex Code

Later on in development, somewhat subpar programming practices would come to haunt us in the final moments of development. Making substantial changes to the game became harder and harder because of one component of the game: BP_Statue. BP_Statue was the Blueprint for the enemy Patron, but soon its code came to encompass nearly every aspect of the game. What was originally meant to be the code for the enemy with HP and a handle of smaller actions soon became the central piece of code for: the turn timer, the players turn, the state of the board, winning and losing the game, and even cutscenes.

On one hand, the bloated beastly blueprint made development easier. Whenever we wanted to make a change, most of the time we'd look at BP_Statue. Though, as the project progressed, the code became harder and harder to maintain. Things that should've been separate actors were thrown into one, and code became overly complex. Had we compartmentalized even slightly more, things like enemy disruptions probably could have been more fanciful than they were, or any number of small changes could've been made **that** much easier to implement.

Just Unlucky: Balancing A Card Game

Persistent in all stages of development was a concern that the game we were designing was fundamentally fair and balanced. Time and time again though, users would indicate that the game was just a bit too unbalanced for their liking. In the first iteration of the game, the "Wildcard" was far too overpowered. It was just a stronger version of every other card. In comparison, the lower rank cards like 2s or 3s are basically useless with their poor damage output. We had tried to remedy this in the later iterations of the game by giving players the option to redraw their hand, combo cards into passive damage and slightly revised the combo system to make the lower ranked cards stronger. However, it is still the case that these cards are just weaker. Players redraw because their hand is bad, but they also redraw to gamble for those stronger cards too. Unless we were to fundamentally change the way the lower ranked cards worked, be it by giving them extra effects or by weakening other cards, the issue boils down to numbers. 2 is always less than 10, and the traditional luck-based system of a card game isn't great at making players feel like they are in complete control of their gameplay.

What Went Right

Lookin' Good: Stylization

Right out of the gate, the game seemed to have a solid identity. Maybe because we had drawn inspiration from preexisting games that it was easier to build a core game identity, but regardless, the game has its own unique feeling and style that adds to the experience more than it detracts. Unreal Engine tends to have a “default look” that most games adopt unless they make some substantial changes to the game’s artstyle or lighting engine. That’s not a bad thing, it just means the game’s appearance is less individualistic. We had tried to craft an identity for our game through use of custom music, art, and voice acting, all of which contributed wonderfully to this. Beyond that, pixelated post processing effects and an overall darker setting helped forge the unique look of the game we had sought.

Not Your Typical College Group Work: Collaborative Efforts

Group work in the college setting tends to get a bad rap, the expectation being that one person will do pretty much...everything with nothing heard from the others. This was nowhere near a problem for us. Perhaps it was the time given in class, but we also regularly communicated outside of class to keep one another updated and to collaborate on fixes and improvements that could be made. We all consistently wanted to make the game better as a collective. There was no fear of someone going rogue, nor was there a need for someone to do something completely solo. It was all hands on deck to keep the ship sailing to the final destination, and we were all very capable and present throughout the journey to make it happen successfully.

Heart of the Cards: Original “Special” Cards

While it’s true that all of the cards were specially designed for this game, there were the anticipated 2-10 numerical cards. Something we’ve had for most of our development, though, is the concept of atypical “special” cards. Rather than having Kings, Queens, Jacks, and Aces, we ended with cards that could Combo with any other card, a Patron card that could effectively refill a hand, a Wildcard that helps fill the patron meter, and a Redraw card that adds one or two redraw opportunities that can be used at any point after.

Obituary (Conclusion)

Can we then say with confidence, that our game was everything we had hoped it would be? No, of course not. But we *can* say we are proud of what we had made, and that making the game was an overall enjoyable experience. Sure, there are things we did wrong, but there are also a lot of things we did right. At the end of the day, even if this project is forgotten and seen by no one else, we will still have the experience and lessons learned from making this project.

The Morticians (Group Contribution)

Alex:

- ❖ Card Blueprints – *i.e. Holding cards in hand, drawing cards, playing cards*
- ❖ Enemy Blueprint – *i.e. Enemy actions, dealing damage*
- ❖ Game Rules – *i.e. Tutorial code, timer mechanic, end of turn calculations*

Hannah:

- ❖ Beginning Card Scene - *i.e. Randomization of position of patron cards, card selection animation*
- ❖ Music - *i.e. The music used during the game (regular and intense version)*
- ❖ Art - *i.e. All of the art done for cards, front and back, player and enemy, art done for buttons*
- ❖ Voice Acting - *i.e. Tutorial and randomized voice lines*

Ria:

- ❖ Menu Design - *i.e. Designing menu widgets and adding music and aesthetics*
- ❖ Logic Behind Starting and Ending Game - *i.e. Linked buttons to start/end*
- ❖ Font and Layout - *i.e. Added Greek-themed font throughout along with Greek color scheme*

Group Evaluation:

Done individually, on separate documents