

DESIGN DEFENSE

SAMMY SALKIND

EXCLUSIVE!

DES 397 A F20 – FINAL DEFENSE

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RULEBOOK

Exclusive! V 2.10

By Sammy Salkind

2 players, 30-45 minutes, ages 10+

Components:

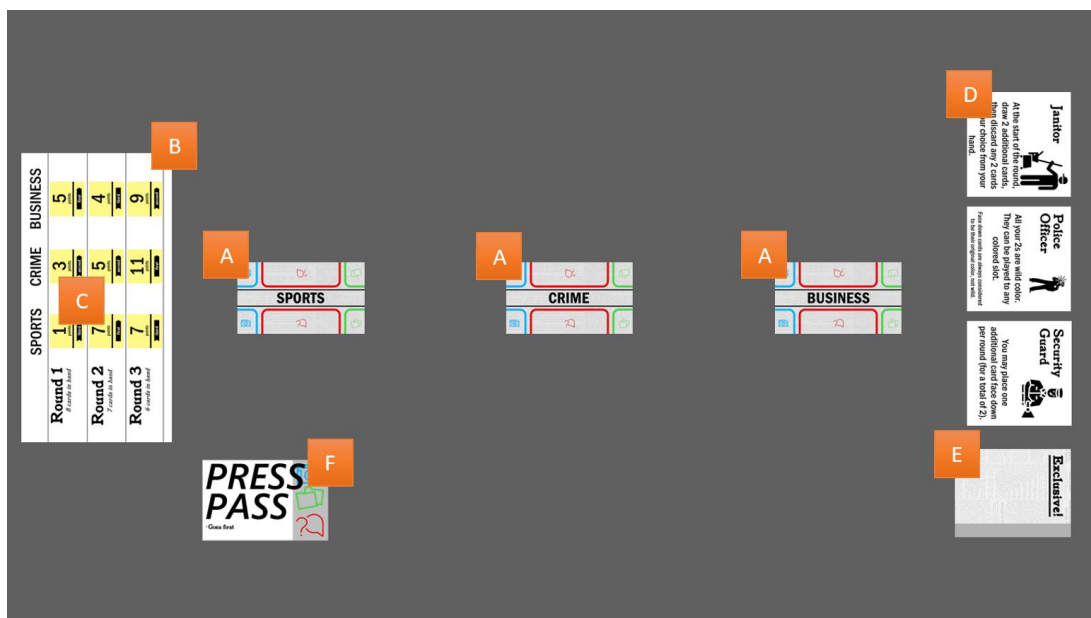
- 63 cards in three suits (rectangle)
- 3 story bases
- 1 round board
- 9 scoop tokens
- 1 press pass badge
- 3 witness cards (square)

Objective: Be the player with the most points at the end of the third round.

Setup:

- Place the three story bases (A) in a horizontal line between the players. Make sure there is a decent amount of space between each story base.
- Place the round board (B) to the side of the bases. Place each of the scoop tokens (C) on the matching spaces on the board.
- Place the three witness cards (D) to the side of the bases.
- Shuffle the deck of cards (E) and place them to the side of the bases.
- Randomly determine a first player. Give that player the press pass (F).

Three major news stories have caught the nation's attention, and as the top journalists in the country working at rival newspapers you set out to write the best news stories possible. In particular, you're seeking to get exclusive details the other newspaper won't be able to print. Maybe if you can get a hold of some of those witnesses, you'd get some help your rival can't get...



An example of a set up game, with one player sitting at the top end of the picture and the other sitting at the bottom end of the picture. The player at the bottom was given the press pass.

Game Overview

In each round, players take turns playing cards to the three stories, vying to have a higher total of card values on that base at the end of the round than their opponent. However, right before each base is scored, the suit with the highest total between both players is removed and no longer counts toward your total. *Information that is widely known to the public is of no use to a reporter like you!*

Gameplay:

Start of round

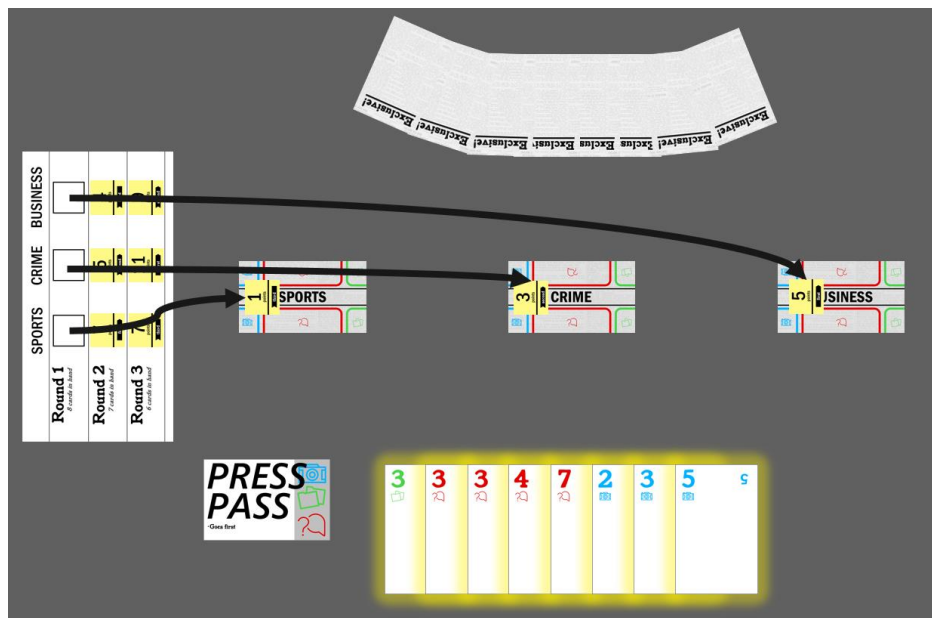
Deal each player the number of cards indicated on the current round on the round tracker.

Place the scoop token under the “Sports” column of the current round onto the Sports story base. Repeat this for the current rounds Crime and Business scoop tokens.

If your hand of cards does not contain at least one card of each of the three suits, discard your entire hand and draw a new one. Repeat this until you have a hand that contains at least one card of each suit.

If you ever run out of cards when dealing a hand, shuffle the discard pile into a new deck.

The player with the press pass will take the first turn this round.



An example of the start of Round 1. The Scoop tokens have been distributed to the three story bases listed on the round tracker. Both players have been dealt a hand of 8 cards for round 1, and the player at the bottom of the table has a hand of cards (highlighted) that includes all 3 suits so they do not need to discard and draw a new hand.

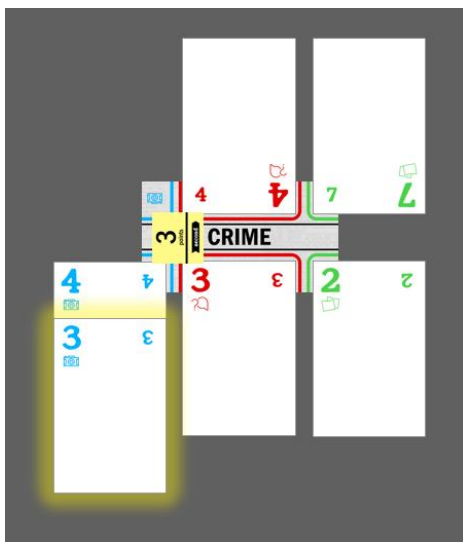
On your turn

Choose one card from your hand and play it to any one of the three story bases. Place the card face up on the matching colored slot. More than one card can be played to a single slot, so make sure to fan out placed cards so that every value is visible. You may not pass.

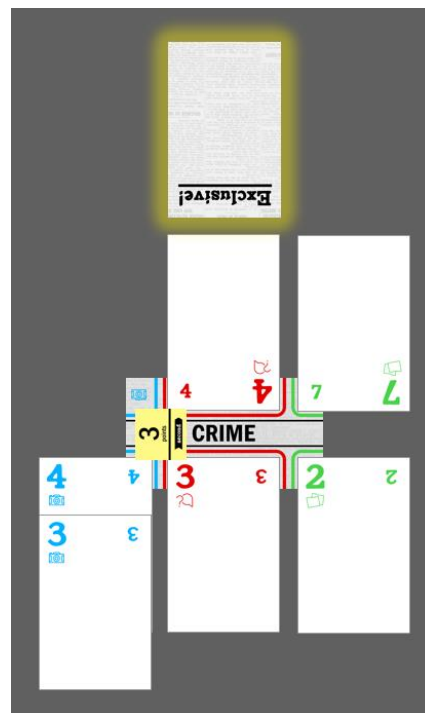
Playing face down: Alternatively, you may play your card face down instead of face up. To do this, place the card face down near one of the bases but do not put it in a slot. **Each player may only do this once per round.** Face down cards will be revealed at the end of the round. *Keeping exclusive knowledge under wraps until publication, when done right, can be hugely profitable.*

Once you have placed your card, the turn passes to the next player.

Once both players have no cards left in their hands, the round ends.



The bottom player wants to add a blue 3 from their hand to the Crime story base. They place the blue 3 (highlighted) onto the corresponding slot on the story base, stacking it on top of the blue card already there such that both values are visible.



The top player wants to play a card face down at the crime base in order to bluff their opponent. They place the card (highlighted) face down near the base but not at any particular color slot.

End of round

If you have any witness cards from previous rounds, return them to the center of the table, laid out face up so all of them are visible (you will have no witness cards in the first round).

Then, score each story base one at a time, starting with the base with the token labelled “first”:

Scoring a story base:

Flip all facedown cards faceup and place them in the matching colored slots at this base.

Check which suit has the highest total on the base between both you and your opponent. Take each card of that suit and discard them. In case multiple suits are tied, all tied suits are removed.

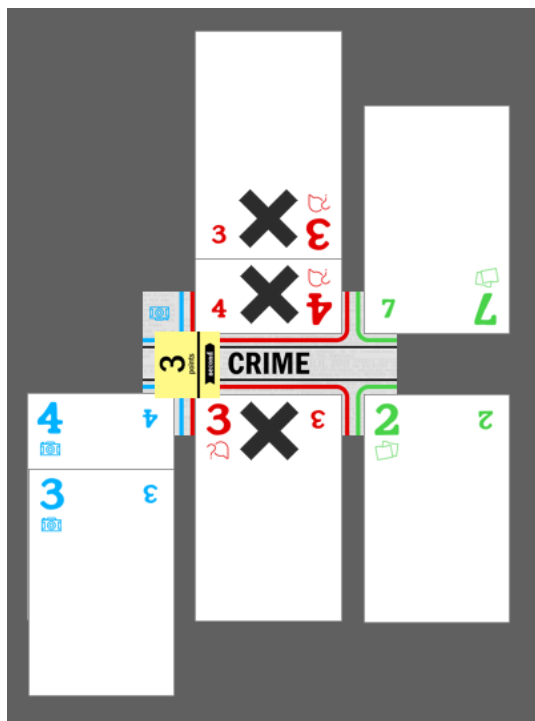
Information that is widely known to the public is of no use to a reporter like you!

Then, each player totals up the values of all their remaining cards. Whoever has the higher total takes the scoop token on the base. Whoever had the smaller total takes a witness card from the middle of the table and places it in front of themselves (skip this step in the third round). If there is a tie, return the Scoop token to the box; do not earn points or take a witness.

Leave any remaining cards on the base. They will start on the base in the next round. *Some details take time to enter the public discourse.*

Repeat these steps for the story bases with the token labelled “second”, then “third”.

If this is the end of the third round, the game ends! Otherwise, give the press pass to the other player and start a new round.



At the end of the round, all 3 story bases are scored. Here, the Crime base is scored. The color here with the highest total between both players is red – red has a total of 10 compared to blue’s 7 and green’s 9. Therefore, the red cards are discarded.

Of the remaining cards, the top player’s total is 7 and the bottom player’s total is 9. The bottom player’s total is higher, so they win the base! They place the scoop token on the base in front of themselves, giving them points. The top player chooses a witness card from the ones available and places it in front of themselves.

Witness cards

There are three key witnesses that can help you during your investigating – but you have to win them over!

Witnesses give you a passive special ability you can use during a round. When you have a witness in front of you, simply follow the instructions written on the witness. If you have multiple witnesses in front of you, all of their powers are available to you at all times.

End of game:

Total up the points that you have won on your scoop tokens. Whoever has more points wins the game! In case of a tie, whoever had the Press Pass at the end of round 3 wins the game.

Credits:

Game design: Sammy Salkind.

Instructors: Craig Stockwell.

Special thanks to Jeremy Holcomb for instructing the class in which this project was started.

Tabletop Simulator Workshop URL:

<https://steamcommunity.com/sharedfiles/filedetails/?id=2312192443>

Image Credits:

Suit icons from The Noun Project (<https://thenounproject.com/>).

Newspaper texture: <https://abundantgenealogy.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/20180215-newspaper-clipping-reverse-search-03.jpg>

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RESEARCH

TARGET AUDIENCE

I am aiming for an E (Everyone) demographic - anyone over the age of 10 should be able to easily grasp the rules and start playing quickly, and not feel overwhelmed during the game.

PERSONA 1: THE YOUNG COUPLE

Abby and Charlie are 29 and 27 years old respectively and have been dating for a few years. They have a small collection of 7 gateway board games, most of which are reserved for social events. They enjoy Exclusive as a quick activity that they can do together during their busy days - they enjoy playing a round after a long day of work, or sometimes playing multiple times in a row on Saturday mornings over coffee. Neither of the them are big gamers and don't play aggressively - but they appreciate the mental puzzles the game creates. Abby enjoys using her knowledge of Charlie's personality to predict his moves, while Charlie enjoys getting the occasional win against Abby.

PERSONA 2: FATHER AND DAUGHTER

Evie is a 15 year old in high school that really enjoys board games - she enjoys everything from No Thanks to Lords of Vegas to Warhammer 40,000, and is always excited to play any kind of game, and has a collection of about 60 different games. She really wants to play games with her father, Oliver, but there aren't many games he enjoys playing. Despite this, he really enjoys games as a way to directly interact and spend time with his daughter, and Exclusive's simple rules and straightforward turns means he can keep up with Evie and enjoy the game turn by turn. As a more strategic gamer, Evie is still engaged as she is able to dig deeper into the long term strategies of the game that Oliver chooses to ignore.

COMPARABLE PRODUCTS

LOST CITIES

One of the more often cited comparisons to Exclusive is Lost Cities, another elegant two player card game where players play their cards to slots. In terms of player heuristics, both games also have a strong emphasis on hand management and timing of card plays. The main difference between the two is that Lost Cities is about building up a tableau where Exclusive is about area control. One advantage Exclusive has over Lost Cities is a stronger emphasis on long-term planning - seeing upcoming scoop tokens on the round board allows players to plan ahead for future rounds and collect abilities that suit their playstyle, whereas Lost Cities has nothing connecting the three rounds of the game. One advantage Lost Cities has over Exclusive is that it is impossible for players to be dealt a hugely good or bad hand - every starting hand feels equally difficult to play with.

AIR, LAND AND SEA

Air, Land and Sea is the closest comparison I could find (but no one other than me has mentioned it). Both games are two player area control card games where players compete to have the highest total of cards on three different bases with a strong emphasis on counterplay, even if there isn't very much direct interaction. One advantage Air, Land and Sea has over Exclusive is that players can forfeit a round to give their opponent fewer points, providing a motivation for players to bluff how good their hand is and is a way for players to simply end the round as soon as they feel screwed over by luck. One advantage Exclusive has over Air, Land and Sea is that it is more open-ended despite having fewer rules: where Air, Land and Sea has many rules to create the core tension in the game, Exclusive only needs the highest-value-color-removal scoring rule to create a lot of really good tension.

While Lost Cities and Air, Land and Sea were the top two comparables for this project, others include Battle Line, Star Realms, and 13 Days.

PUBLISHERS

KOSMOS/THAMES & KOSMOS

Kosmos is a board game publisher based in Germany, with Thames & Kosmos functioning as the North American branch of the publisher. Kosmos has a popular line of two player Eurostyle games aimed at an E or FM demographic, which include Lost Cities, Kahuna and Targi, among others. Exclusive would fit in well with that line, given that it is also a two player Eurostyle game with an E demographic.

OINK GAMES

Oink Games is a small box game publisher based in Japan who publish games that are easy to learn but have one unique twist that make the games really stand out (for example, A Fake Artist Goes to New York is a drawing game with a hidden traitor - that one twist brings the game to life). In Exclusive, that twist is the highest-value-color-removal scoring rule. Oink Games has never published a game for specifically two players before - which either means Exclusive may be attractive to them as a way to fill a gap in their portfolio, or they are actively avoiding two player only games.

DESIGN DEFENSE

DESIGN PILLARS

SUPER ELEGANT GAMEPLAY

Exclusive should have incredibly simple rules, quick to teach, and easily understood by players. At the same time, players should feel that the game has lots of depth and room to explore.

AGONIZING DECISIONS

Tension is a higher focus than excitement in this game - turns should provide just one decision, but that decision should be full of tension and create a really interesting problem for the player to figure out.

READING YOUR OPPONENT

Counterplay is a strong focus in this game, and it takes on the form of bluffing. Players should be considering what secret information their opponent knows, and correctly guessing what their opponent is hiding should be a huge engagement spike.

A HISTORY OF CHANGES WITH REASONING

This section details the changes made to the game in each iteration. Major changes are bolded for clarity, changes that remain in the final version are highlighted in yellow.

VERSION 2.0

Version 2.0 is the result of about 2 months' worth of playtesting and iterating as a when I was a freshman and is the starting point of this project. Back when this was created, I was extremely focused on making a hyper-elegant game – something that had no hard edges and was super easy to learn.

The highest-value-suit removal has been in the game since day 1 and has proven over many tests to be an extremely solid, reliable and intriguing core mechanic that was created because it adds so much tension with just one rule – every time a player plays a card to increase their total on a base, they are simultaneously increasing their opponent's ability to cancel out that card – this results in every move feeling like a delicate balancing act, where players need to figure out how to improve their standing without letting their opponent destroy their work. These short-term heuristics have been successful since the project began and form the core of the player agency in the game.

An additional source of agency and excitement was created by the scoring system, where winners of a base earn points equal to the total value of the cards that were removed. This created further options with their single card play – they could build up their own personal value

to try and win the base, attempt to cancel out the value of their opponent's cards by swinging which color would be removed, or increase the victory point payout for the winner.

In terms of counterplay, there was some but not much in Version 2.0. There has always been an element of playstyle counterplay surrounding the hands of cards, where understanding how your opponent plays and being able to predict what they have in their hand based on that can give players a leg up, which is both an engaging problem to think about and can be a great exciting moment if a prediction pans out well – and also encourages some subtle bluffing as to what players have in their hand. This further contributed to the player agency in the game – playing good cards early is a suboptimal move as it gives your opponent more time to respond and undo the effects of the card, so players have to make sure they're playing their cards not just at the right locations, but also at the right time.

Since the player taking the last turn of a round would be at a huge advantage, the player going first would be given a bluffing opportunity in the form of being able to play a card face down in order to offset the second player advantage. This face down card added even more to the counterplay possibilities of the game by giving players a direct way of creating mystery and intrigue that isn't just assumed in hidden hands.

Finally, a "scoop token" worth extra points gets placed at the base with the fewest cards each round, in order to encourage players to play at bases that have fewer cards at the start of the round.

VERSION 2.1

The biggest change made was that the bluffing mechanic was expanded to be more than just a balancing mechanic for the player with the press pass. **Now, both players can play a card face down each turn, with the player with the press pass getting to play an additional face down card.** This was done because many playtesters – both recent and from a year ago – stated that playing cards face down was their favorite mechanic, so expanding that should make the game more engaging. I hoped that lack of certainty would make tension ramp up throughout each round and allow for more engagement spikes when the cards are revealed. I also hoped it would provide even more opportunities for counterplay and for players to get into their opponent's heads to figure out what they played. Another smaller change was made to add further uncertainty to the game: **the range of values in the deck was expanded from 2-4s with a few 6s to 2-5s with a few 7s**, which I hoped would result in players having more ability to swing the results of bases and overall make the game feel more dynamic – players found that some game states felt solved when all the 6s were out of play, and the 4 wasn't enough to swing bases in their favor.

I also changed the Scoop token's behavior: **instead of moving to the base with the fewest cards at the start of each round, it now appears on bases in a predictable pattern as listed on the day tracker.** This was done to increase player's capacity to form long-term heuristics, as there really wasn't much players could plan on in the long term. I hoped players

would look ahead and try to build up cards on bases they knew the scoop was going to appear at (and have to balance that with actually trying to win on other bases, resulting in interesting decisions) – and they did, but I think there’s even more room to expand players’ abilities to form long-term heuristics.

There has always been a big issue ever since the project began where players consistently express at some point during the game that they have zero chance of winning. I attempted to fix this by **adding public score tracking instead of hiding the points each player has in a face down stack of cards** so players would stop assuming they were behind.

VERSION 2.2

I experimented with dividing the deck into four parts, one for each day, with each deck having just enough cards for each player to get a full hand while still having a few extras so there is still uncertainty as to what your opponent has. I hoped this would result in hands still having a good amount of variation while reducing the chance of players feeling “screwed” by the deck, which is a common piece of feedback I have gotten from playtesters since the project began. This worked somewhat, but players still reported feeling screwed over by RNG, albeit less strongly than players before them. Dividing the deck into per-round sections also allowed me to make the cards increase in value as the game went on, further increasing both tension and excitement as the game went on.

Additionally, “Move” cards were added to decks for later rounds that let players move previously played cards between bases, as previous playtesters desired more uncertainty/swinginess in the game.

VERSION 2.3

Because players still felt like they were getting screwed over by random draws, I decided to see what would happen if I removed most random elements and turned up the amount of bluffing – I wondered how players would respond if the main source of uncertainty was in bluffing and hidden information rather than random draws. **Each player is dealt the same hand of cards, plus one random card that is more powerful than the other cards.** I had always felt that the core challenge of the game was hand management based on the random draw, this version was created to test if the game still works without that random element – I figured it wouldn’t work, and I was right. Player agency and counterplay relies on your opponent not knowing what you have in your hand – players ended up feeling like their choices and bluffing didn’t matter when they only had bluffing and not any hidden information.

I also introduced wild cards in addition to the “move” cards to create an additional source of swinginess and excitement. Players were still constantly expressing that they felt like they had no chance of winning at some point during the game, and I realized this was because there was a very small amount of excitement in the game in comparison to the tension – it added up to feeling like a lot of stress and “feelbad”, and resulted in players not having a satisfying game experience which they tended to express in terms of feelings of not being able to catch up.

VERSION 2.4

One major problem I wanted to fix was the confusion in the scoring system. Players seem to grok that the highest value suit at each story is discarded, but the addition that the cards removed are the points that the winning player earns was one too many interconnected systems for players to easily understand – and while that twist added some interesting decisions, the relatively small amount of agency and engagement it created wasn't worth the hassle and confusion for players when learning the rule, so I removed it (I was really proud of this rule as well – I'm sad to see it go).

Additionally, players have been consistently ranking the Scoop tokens as one of their favorite mechanics, so I decided to expand that mechanic so players can interact with it more. **I created new types of Scoop tokens – some worth points like the old one, but also some that give players special abilities throughout the game.** This should help add some intrigue and variation to the scoring system that the old scoring method provided, where now players have to balance collecting points for immediate gain and collecting special abilities for long-term gain. **Additionally, all Scoop tokens are laid out on a side board at the start of the game which tells players exactly what each Scoop token is and where it will appear later in the game,** theoretically allowing players to plan ahead for future rounds – if they see a Scoop token they really want is coming up on the Sports story, they may play their cards so they have more cards going into the sports story next round, further increasing the need to balance short-term heuristics with long-term heuristics. The addition of more special abilities adds another layer of excitement that the game was missing and should make players feel less melancholy during the game.

One smaller thing is that **I combined the various card decks back into one.** I hope that the addition of Scoop tokens that have increasing value plus the addition of special abilities as the game moves on provides the same increase in tension and excitement that using multiple decks created.

VERSION 2.5

The only change made here was adding a mechanic that I hoped would mitigate the negative feeling created by drawing a hand of cards without a lot of variation – that's been a consistent problem since the project began, messing with ranges didn't help so I needed to try something mechanical. **I added a “domination” mechanic, where if a player has 2 more cards of a suit at a story than their opponent, any additional cards of that suit played to that story by the dominating player are considered to be wild.** Players who are dealt a majority of one or two colors should be able to use this to their advantage to build up a color on a base, then once that color is built up they will be able to start playing their cards of that color as wilds. Only players who have enough of one color should be able to take advantage of this bonus and this should add a lot to the value of what was previously “weaker” hands, because after a couple turns of building up a color the player suddenly has a more dynamic hand than a player with a hand with lots of variation. Being dealt a bad hand of cards is such a big hit to engagement that it needed

some sort of mitigation to keep players engaged, and I hoped this would be an elegant way to do it.

VERSION 2.6

Players have been really digging the Round Tracker/Scoop Token system as it provides a method of long-term strategy and a method of building up the game as it goes along. This week, I attempted to improve that system further in a few ways. First, players last week indicated that they were much more excited and engaged when they won a special ability instead of just points. Additionally, players usually felt the choice between points *or* a power felt obvious depending on the token. Both of these resulted in a few changes to the scoop tokens: **Scoop tokens are always worth an ability *and* points, and there are no more tokens in the first two rounds that only give points**, so players can always experience the joy of getting an ability when they win a base (except in the critical final round). Another factor that added to this change was the failure of the previous random-card-draw-mitigation mechanism: I hoped that adding lots more opportunities to get luck-mitigation abilities in the first round would help players feel less helpless with a bad draw in later rounds.

A lot of these changes were also made in the name of making the game more elegant: a super-elegant game is one of my design goals with this project, and I have added a lot of features to the game over the past few iterations which has significantly decreased the elegance of the game. Removing the luck-mitigation mechanic and creating that same mitigation within an already existing system made the game much more elegant. Additionally, **keeping track of the points on the Scoop tokens takes away the need for an additional component to keep track of points.**

VERSION 2.7

First, **I have added a simple forced-mulligan rule, where players must draw a new hand of cards at the start of the round if they draw a hand that is missing at least one of the three suits.** While this is a very inelegant solution to the problem of bad card draws, it's a simple way of fixing the problem *enough to ship* – the amount of agency taken away from a bad hand is so large that I do not feel comfortable shipping the game without some sort of mitigation, even if it's tacked on. The reason the mulligan is forced is because of my demographic – for E (everyone) players, I think it would be intimidating for their first interacting with the game to be being dealt a hand of cards and then asking whether or not they think the hand is valuable enough to keep... that's a lot of foresight and familiar gamer thinking needed that I don't expect my audience to know or want them to have to use.

Additionally, **I reverted back to having some Scoop tokens that are worth only points** – the excitement of winning a special ability is diminished when every Scoop token has a special ability, and having some tokens being worth a lot of points but no special ability means there is some tension in players needing to balance collecting special abilities for potential long-term power and collecting points to actually get closer to winning the game. Additionally, having too many special abilities in play allowed the player in the lead to start snowballing by midgame.

VERSION 2.8

In previous versions of the game, special abilities were distributed via Scoop tokens, as I was hoping to create some tension surrounding which bases players go for and balancing going for powers versus going for points. The big problem with this is that it created a snowballing effect: the more skilled (or luckier) player would win more bases, giving them points and a special ability, giving them even more power in the next round, resulting in some extremely one-sided games that players found fun but lacked investment over who won the game by the end. To fix this, I wanted a method of giving the player losing the game more abilities instead of the winner – hopefully balancing out the game as it moves forward. **To accomplish this, I added the Witness system, where players can win over “Witnesses” throughout the game that give them special abilities.** During the game, players will earn Clout tokens which are spent in a blind bid to win over one of three Witnesses. Clout tokens are earned when bases score, where usually a smaller number of clout tokens goes to the winner of the base and a larger number of clout tokens goes to the loser of the base, giving the player further behind in the game a chance to catch up by having more spending power on Witnesses. This should hopefully keep both players more invested as the end of the game approaches and making them both feel like they have an equal chance no matter what. This also adds a new avenue to increase replayability, as it would be rather easy to make many different Witnesses and only use a few of them per game – **additionally, this provides an opportunity to make expansions for the game** – future expansions could introduce new Witness cards, refreshing the game for players who have played with all the Witnesses multiple times.

VERSION 2.9

The Witness system was overall successful but could use some work. One issue is that, for this game, the blind bidding phase for the Witnesses was rather inelegant, requiring another page of rules and nearly doubling the number of components needed in the game. Another issue is that it was designed to help the player who lost the bases have more power in acquiring the Witnesses – but sometimes, if the player in the lead spent their Clout tokens at just the right time, they could get more Witnesses than the player who was behind, resulting in the same snowball feeling that this system was trying to fix. In order to fix both these problems, the blind bidding for Witnesses was replaced with a more simple draft. **Each round, whoever loses the most valuable base gets to pick a Witness, whoever loses the second most valuable base gets to pick a Witness out of the ones remaining, etc.** While this removed the engaging counterplay of blind bidding for Witnesses, it still provides the same excitement of winning a special ability in a much more elegant manner (one page of rules and three different components were able to be removed). It also guarantees that the player who wins more points will get less Witnesses, as now you *only* get Witnesses for losing bases.

VERSION 2.10

This version is mostly cleanup for final submission, particularly in the rulebook. Diagrams were updated to include more labels, making it clearer what a diagram was expressing without the need for the reader to read the caption to get meaning from the diagram. More flavor was added

to help assist players in understanding the game. Confusing sentences were reworded and ambiguous rules were rephrased.

VERSION 3.0

This version represented a “reset” for myself after 8 months of not working on the game, so the changes are rather small, based on my “next steps” I had written previously. I had hoped the round board with the scoop tokens in previous versions would make players want to plan ahead, but over many iterations I realized that it wasn’t very often that players would deliberately play to set themselves up for a future turn. Additionally, increasing the number of points on scoop tokens over the course of the game rarely resulted in changing player heuristics. In an attempt to make the game more elegant, **I removed the round tracker board and scoop tokens in favor of “Bestseller tokens” – winning a base gets you a bestseller token, and the first player to 5 tokens wins the game.** This should reduce the setup and math in the game without having a big effect on engagement or player heuristics.

Secondly, as a minor improvement to the Witness system, I set each witness to correspond with a particular base, and whoever loses that base will receive the corresponding Witness token in the next round. I hope that this will add a little bit of dimension to the core gameplay, as players should hopefully aim to set themselves up to gain witnesses they desire at specific bases, rather than just hoping that their opponent doesn’t happen to draft the witness they wanted first.

BALANCE: WHY NO EV CALCULATIONS?

Most aspects of this game were designed to be self-balancing, forgoing the need for in-depth EV calculations. Examples include:

- Every card play builds up your own value on a base, but the highest-color-is-removed rule means higher value cards are more likely to be removed. In short, more powerful cards are also easier to lose, so a 5 isn’t always better than a 2!
- Witnesses give players special abilities. Those abilities are balanced by the players, by allowing the player who is behind to get first pick of the Witnesses and therefore letting the players determine how much they value the various Witnesses for themselves.
- Players are dealt random hands of cards but are forced to draw a new hand if there isn’t enough variation, which so far in testing has completely removed the feeling of being screwed over by luck.

That doesn’t mean that there isn’t balancing work to be done here, but for a game of this style that amount of detail in balance isn’t needed. In the future I think a monte carlo simulation would be more useful than EV calculations for determining the effect of lucky card draws and balancing the various Witness powers.

PLAYTESTING

SURVEY SUMMARY TABLE

From a total of 11 players – players responded on a scale from -2 (strongly disagree) to +2 (strongly agree).

| Statement | Average | Std. Dev. | M.S.P. |
|---|-----------------|-----------|--------|
| The rules booklet is helpful. | 1.166667 | 0.687184 | 136% |
| Resolving turn order is confusing. | -1.70588 | 0.455645 | 291% |
| Winning points was satisfying. | 1.1875 | 0.881671 | 141% |
| The game length felt too long. | -1.29412 | 0.955769 | 167% |
| There are interesting choices most turns. | 1.588235 | 0.771463 | 252% |
| Gameplay builds from start to finish. | 1.352941 | 0.836039 | 183% |
| The overall game feels balanced. | 0.882353 | 0.962983 | 78% |
| The theme feels important to gameplay. | -0.11765 | 1.078253 | 1% |
| The game pieces do not look good. | -1.05882 | 0.725225 | 112% |
| Overall, I enjoy playing this game. | 1.352941 | 0.836039 | 183% |
| I want to play this game again. | 1.352941 | 0.76244 | 183% |

COMMONALITIES

The most popular response to “favorite mechanic” is the bluffing elements and mind games that the system allows for. Players really enjoy how much uncertainty they can create simply by placing a card face down and makes them feel like they have a lot of agency. However, a small number of players completely forget that they are able to place cards face down – which is fine.

Players also generally felt that the game was elegant and easy to learn – the strongest opinion among all the surveys was that resolving turn order is NOT confusing. I’m very happy to hear this, as elegant gameplay is a design pillar for this project.

The most common issue brought up is the feeling of the game being unbalanced, although this has gotten *much* better in recent iterations. While players are no longer expressing feelings of a snowball effect for the winning player or generally getting screwed over by luck, there’s still this slight feeling of unfairness in the game. Some players feel that some Witnesses are far more valuable than others (although I have had all three abilities currently in the game

described as far stronger than all others by playtesters at some point – there is no consistent opinion on which is strongest), and some feel as though the 7 cards are too strong.

Another common issue brought up that players feel the theme barely feels important to gameplay at best. This isn't a huge concern for this particular design, as elegance and interesting decisions are being held up above all else, but there certainly are more opportunities to sell the theme within the game.

NEXT STEPS

The core gameplay feels mostly good to great – of course, I'm not done iterating further on those mechanics, but given that the game am pretty consistently getting 2's from testers on how much they enjoy the game and how much they want to play again I feel like there's room to start exploring extra features. One additional feature would be to include a larger deck of Witnesses with the game, and 3 could be randomly selected to use in each game, which should greatly increase the replayability for the game as players will have to use new long-term heuristics every game. Another would be exploring possible 3 and 4 player variants to the game if two copies of the game are combined – a feature I think publishers would be excited about!

The main change I would want to make to the core gameplay is an elegant solution to the problem of bad card draws – something that makes a monochrome hand just as valuable as one with lots of variety, forgoing the need for a clunky mulligan rule. I think changing the rules by which cards are removed from the bases before scoring could help here, but I'm still not sure what that would look like – the removal of the highest value color is so core to the gameplay, but perhaps there's away to create the same engagement and heuristics without players feeling like they got screwed over by cards so often.

The core gameplay feature that needs the most testing is the Witness system, as it was the most recently added. It has worked enough for me to know it is a good path to be going down, but there's still lots of room to explore to find the most engaging implementation of this idea. The bidding system in 2.8 was the most engaging to playtesters but was horribly inelegant, nearly doubled the number of components in the game and had lots of opportunities for snowballing. The drafting system currently in the game is much more elegant but less engaging to playtesters than the bidding system. Doing further testing to find a happy medium could result in something that really shines.

The final core mechanic I want to experiment with is the scoring system – I started to notice over the course of many tests that having bases be worth different amounts of points tended to either have little effect on players' heuristics, or act as such an overwhelming motivator that players would entirely ignore lower value bases. Entirely removing the scoring system in favor of a "first to X bases" victory condition could make the game more elegant, bit it also is one less "knob" I would have to balance the game with, so that will need some experimentation as well.

GAME TIMES

This table contains the time (in minutes) for every playtest in which time was tracked. The times for round 1 include teaching time, which either consists of me teaching rules directly to the players or players learning from the rulebook. Some times were lost due to poor note-taking, which are marked with n/a. Some tests were ended before the third round, these are marked with an X.

| Test | 3+4 | 5+6 | 7+8 | 9+10 | 11+12 | 13+14 | 15+16 | 17+18 | Average |
|-----------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------------|
| Round 1 + teach | 25 | 26 | 18 | 15 | 34 | n/a | 30 | 17 | 23.57143 |
| Round 2 | 10 | 10 | 7 | 13 | 11 | n/a | 23 | 9 | 11.85714 |
| Round 3 | 9 | 14 | 5 | 15 | n/a | n/a | X | X | 10.75 |
| Total | 44 | 50 | 30 | 43 | 45 | 28 | 53 | 26 | 46.17857 |

The average FTUX is about 46 minutes. Future tests will need to be done to determine game times for repeat players.

DETAILED SURVEY SUMMARY

| | Q1 | Q2 | Q3 | Q4 | Q5 | Q6 | Q7 | Q8 | Q9 | Q10 | Q11 |
|-----------------|--------------|---------------|--------------|---------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|---------------|---------------|--------------|--------------|
| Test 1 | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Test 2 | | -1 | 2 | -2 | 2 | -1 | 1 | -1 | -1 | 1 | -1 |
| Test 3 | | -2 | 1 | -1 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 0 | -1 | 2 | 1 |
| Test 4 | | -2 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 1 | -1 | 1 | 1 |
| Test 5 | | -2 | | -1 | 1 | 2 | -1 | 0 | -1 | 0 | 1 |
| Test 6 | | -1 | -1 | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | -1 | -1 | -1 | 1 |
| Test 7 | | -2 | 1 | -2 | 1 | 1 | 0 | -1 | -2 | 1 | 2 |
| Test 8 | | -2 | 2 | -2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 1 | -2 | 2 | 2 |
| Test 9 | | -2 | 2 | -1 | 2 | 2 | 1 | -2 | -1 | 2 | 2 |
| Test 10 | | -1 | 2 | -2 | 2 | 2 | 1 | -2 | 1 | 2 | 2 |
| Test 11 | | -2 | 2 | -1 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 0 | -1 | 2 | 2 |
| Test 12 | | -2 | 1 | -2 | 2 | 1 | -1 | 0 | -1 | 1 | 1 |
| Test 13 | 1 | -2 | 0 | -2 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| Test 14 | 2 | -2 | 1 | -1 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 1 | -1 | 2 | 1 |
| Test 15 | 2 | -2 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 2 | -2 | 2 | 2 |
| Test 16 | 1 | -2 | 2 | -1 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 1 | -1 | 2 | 2 |
| Test 17 | 0 | -1 | 0 | -2 | 2 | 2 | 1 | -1 | -2 | 1 | 1 |
| Test 18 | 1 | -1 | 2 | -2 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 0 | -1 | 2 | 2 |
| Avg | 1.166 | -1.705 | 1.187 | -1.294 | 1.588 | 1.352 | 0.882 | -0.117 | -1.058 | 1.352 | 1.352 |
| Std. Dev | 0.687 | 0.455 | 0.881 | 0.955 | 0.771 | 0.836 | 0.962 | 1.078 | 0.725 | 0.836 | 0.762 |
| MSP | 136% | 291% | 141% | 167% | 252% | 183% | 78% | 1% | 112% | 183% | 183% |

SURVEYS AND NOTES

PLAYTEST 1: NATE BORGER AND MYSELF, 9/7/20 3:42PM–4:30PM, TABLETOP SIM, RULES V2.0

Unfortunately, I do not have a survey for this playtest, but here's a short write-up on my findings. The goal of this playtest was simply a check-in on what I had done a year ago. What still worked, what did I miss when I was a lesser designer? Because of this, I playtested with Nate Borger so we could have a very designer-y discussion on the game.

During the game

The only hiccup when teaching the game was some confusion on what cards were removed vs total value for each player's side.

Nate tended to place his face-down card early when he had the press pass, in order to increase my uncertainty as soon as possible. He also enjoyed making the bases tie in the first couple rounds – he said that he really enjoyed that he was able to “make his opponent squirm”.

All three 6 cards were revealed in the first round. As a result, Nate felt that many positions were solved in each subsequent round. He really wanted more uncertainty in the game. He suggested adding wild cards as a way to increase his ability to swing bases.

He noted that he felt like he was attacking on some bases and defending on others – but sometimes he would be forced to give up on a base outright, and he really disliked having to do that.

Using “days” as the term for rounds resulted in Nate thinking that there would be either 5 or 7 rounds, as he expected the game to take place over a week.

In terms of counterplay, Nate was really focused on and said that he thought a lot about his opponent's motivations. He said that the face down cards were the most fun mechanic in the game.

After the game

At final scoring, he ended up winning the game but felt like he should have lost. This feeling was so strong that he questioned if he had done his math correctly.

Nate said that rounds 3 and 4 were the most interesting rounds, while round 1 was dull, but he also said that he would play round 1 different next time (not aiming to tie the game for the heck of it).

Nate wanted the Scoop to behave differently – he said it felt counterintuitive for the scoop to sometimes stay on the same story. He suggested a completely random movement for the scoop. He also said that he wanted more long-term planning in the game, as well as a more narrative-based reason to get invested in the game.

PLAYTEST 2: MASON MATUSZAK AND MYSELF, 9/21/20 10:42PM–11:50PM, TABLETOP SIM, RULES V2.1

Tester's Name: Mason Matuszak

| Statement | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree | Not Applicable |
|--|---|------------------------------------|---------|-------|----------------|----------------|
| The rules booklet is helpful. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| Resolving turn order is confusing. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| Winning points was satisfying. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| The game length felt too long. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| There are interesting choices most turns. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| Gameplay builds from start to finish. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| The overall game feels balanced. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| The theme feels important to gameplay. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| The game pieces do not look good. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| Overall, I enjoy playing this game. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| I want to play this game again. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| Please list your two favorite game mechanics from this playtest: | First | Facedown Cards | | | | |
| | Second | Press Pass | | | | |
| Please list two game mechanics that need the most development: | First | Card RNG | | | | |
| | Second | Scoops (could be more interesting) | | | | |
| What was your favorite moment during this game? | Pressuring my opponent to not capture the Crime Story on Friday, in accordance with my beginning strategy. | | | | | |
| Please provide any additional information about the playtest. (Optional) | <p>Game builds in an interesting way, except poor card draws limited my ability to build presence on stories in hopes of gaining captured points.</p> <p>Face-down card mind-games are very enjoyable, and the Press Pass allows formulation of strategies based on turn in a concrete fashion.</p> | | | | | |

PLAYTESTS 3 AND 4: JADEN CORRADO AND LAUREL DARLING, 9/26/2020 3:04 – 3:49 PM, V 2.2,
TABLETOP SIM

Neither of the players are fans of strategy games, which is an audience I hope to reach with this game.

Tester's Name: Jaden Corrado

| Statement | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree | Not Applicable |
|--|---|--|---------|-------|----------------|----------------|
| The rules booklet is helpful. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| Resolving turn order is confusing. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| Winning points was satisfying. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| The game length felt too long. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| There are interesting choices most turns. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| Gameplay builds from start to finish. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| The overall game feels balanced. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| The theme feels important to gameplay. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| The game pieces do not look good. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| Overall, I enjoy playing this game. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| I want to play this game again. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| Please list your two favorite game mechanics from this playtest: | First | The Face-Down cards. | | | | |
| | Second | Move cards (seem cool at least). | | | | |
| Please list two game mechanics that need the most development: | First | Scoop – Its neat, wish it were worth more or gave some other minor advantage. | | | | |
| | Second | Maybe something to signify the cards being stackable? That may just be me being stupid though. | | | | |
| What was your favorite moment during this game? | Flipping over my first hidden card in the 3 rd round and winning the crime (story?) off of it. | | | | | |
| Please provide any additional information about the playtest. (Optional) | | | | | | |

Tester's Name: Laurel Darling

| Statement | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree | Not Applicable |
|--|---|---|---------|-------|----------------|----------------|
| The rules booklet is helpful. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| Resolving turn order is confusing. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| Winning points was satisfying. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| The game length felt too long. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| There are interesting choices most turns. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| Gameplay builds from start to finish. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| The overall game feels balanced. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| The theme feels important to gameplay. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| The game pieces do not look good. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| Overall, I enjoy playing this game. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| I want to play this game again. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| Please list your two favorite game mechanics from this playtest: | First | Moving cards because I very much like direct interaction | | | | |
| | Second | Trying to raise the size of stacks just enough to win them without over-committing was interesting. | | | | |
| Please list two game mechanics that need the most development: | First | Counting points felt a bit tedious | | | | |
| | Second | Randomness felt like it restricted my ability to strategize | | | | |
| What was your favorite moment during this game? | Probably the end of round 2. I'd been stacking Sports knowing I'd already won the other two stacks but Jaden pulled a fast one and won one of the other stacks last second. | | | | | |
| Please provide any additional information about the playtest. (Optional) | It's probably relevant that I'm very much not a strategy player normally, so the fact that this was very light on strategy is good, but I didn't really understand how I lost or how I'd play better if I played again. | | | | | |

PLAYTESTS 5 AND 6: RONI WAALK AND MASON MATUSZAK, 9/27/2020 9:16 – 10:06 PM, V 2.3, TABLETOP SIM

Mason has played the game once before while Roni has not. Mason was outspoken last time he played about the random elements so I was curious what he thought of the lack of randomness in this version.

Tester's Name: Roni Waalk

| Statement | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree | Not Applicable |
|--|---|---|---------|-------|----------------|----------------|
| The rules booklet is helpful. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| Resolving turn order is confusing. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| Winning points was satisfying. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| The game length felt too long. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| There are interesting choices most turns. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| Gameplay builds from start to finish. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| The overall game feels balanced. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| The theme feels important to gameplay. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| The game pieces do not look good. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| Overall, I enjoy playing this game. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| I want to play this game again. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| Please list your two favorite game mechanics from this playtest: | First | Wild Cards | | | | |
| | Second | The ability to place cards face-down. I like pretending that my face-down cards are actually the exclusive stories unable to be achieved by the other journalist. | | | | |
| Please list two game mechanics that need the most development: | First | The scoop bonuses. | | | | |
| | Second | I don't know, if I had to pick a second "mechanic" I would stretch and say the points system. That is off the cuff and without extensive thought to outcome. | | | | |
| What was your favorite moment during this game? | Honestly, though not related to gameplay; saying "fuck Business". | | | | | |
| Please provide any additional information about the playtest. (Optional) | The visuals are simple for my monkey brain, but I want the wild cards to stand out more. Those are like the tips you get from a stranger in an alleyway telling you to go to a specific address. The wild-cards/high value cards are desirable. | | | | | |

Tester's Name: Mason Matuszak

| Statement | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree | Not Applicable |
|--|---|---|---------|-------|----------------|----------------|
| The rules booklet is helpful. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| Resolving turn order is confusing. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| Winning points was satisfying. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| The game length felt too long. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| There are interesting choices most turns. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| Gameplay builds from start to finish. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| The overall game feels balanced. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| The theme feels important to gameplay. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| The game pieces do not look good. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| Overall, I enjoy playing this game. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| I want to play this game again. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| Please list your two favorite game mechanics from this playtest: | First | Extra Cards (made facedown cards interesting) | | | | |
| | Second | Facedown Cards | | | | |
| Please list two game mechanics that need the most development: | First | Card Draws | | | | |
| | Second | Scoop Distribution | | | | |
| What was your favorite moment during this game? | Being right about how my opponent was developing Sports on the final round. | | | | | |
| Please provide any additional information about the playtest. (Optional) | <p>Because my opponent didn't see Business as worth building towards (because it was the only story without a scoop), any attempts to build on Business were light and destroyed by the next turn, so the game effectively played with only two stories.</p> <p>Since both players had the same pool of cards to work with, playing facedown cards, to me, felt pointless if I needed to build against a fortified story. The game wound up being more shot-for-shot pattern recognition than interesting mind-games because of it.</p> | | | | | |

PLAYTESTS 7 AND 8: GRANT GAROUTTE AND DEVIN SPANE, 10/11/20 6:13 PM – 6:43 PM,
TABLETOP SIM/DISCORD, V2.4

Tester's Name: Devin Spane

| Statement | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree | Not Applicable |
|--|---|---|---------|-------|----------------|----------------|
| The rules booklet is helpful. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| Resolving turn order is confusing. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| Winning points was satisfying. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| The game length felt too long. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| There are interesting choices most turns. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| Gameplay builds from start to finish. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| The overall game feels balanced. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| The theme feels important to gameplay. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| The game pieces do not look good. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| Overall, I enjoy playing this game. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| I want to play this game again. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| Please list your two favorite game mechanics from this playtest: | First | Highest color for both players combined being omitted | | | | |
| | Second | Being able to place a face-down card | | | | |
| Please list two game mechanics that need the most development: | First | Cards being left behind after each round? Unsure, though, because it also allows for set-up for later plays | | | | |
| | Second | Chips that add potential abilities | | | | |
| What was your favorite moment during this game? | Being able to tip the scale of color balance and wipe out a large score potential for your opponent | | | | | |
| Please provide any additional information about the playtest. (Optional) | | | | | | |

Tester's Name: Grant Garoutte

| Statement | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree | Not Applicable |
|--|---|---|---------|-------|----------------|----------------|
| The rules booklet is helpful. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| Resolving turn order is confusing. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| Winning points was satisfying. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| The game length felt too long. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| There are interesting choices most turns. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| Gameplay builds from start to finish. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| The overall game feels balanced. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| The theme feels important to gameplay. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| The game pieces do not look good. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| Overall, I enjoy playing this game. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| I want to play this game again. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| Please list your two favorite game mechanics from this playtest: | First | Card slots suiting in the three categories, three suits per | | | | |
| | Second | 2's are wild suit | | | | |
| Please list two game mechanics that need the most development: | First | Example for removing highest group for scoring a category | | | | |
| | Second | n/a | | | | |
| What was your favorite moment during this game? | When I made it to the last round I felt I had a pretty good hand. I felt I had an edge but lost a lot of ground over the second round. I felt I made the perfect choice for each card, saving my two's to the end. I almost snatched all three categories; but I lost the highest bidding one. But alas I still pulled off a major win. I felt that luck was on my side, but it took the choices to ensure victory. | | | | | |
| Please provide any additional information about the playtest. (Optional) | Favorite head to head DigiPen card game. It's fast paced, and easy to pick up. I sincerely want to play this again. I think this game is elegant enough for kids and adults to enjoy it. | | | | | |

PLAYTESTS 9 AND 10: MARK ESPARAGOZA AND CASEY ROGERS, 10/18/20 8:15PM – 9:08PM,
TABLETOP SIM + DISCORD, V2.5

Tester's Name: Mark Esparagoza

| Statement | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree | Not Applicable |
|--|---|-----------------|---------|-------|----------------|----------------|
| The rules booklet is helpful. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| Resolving turn order is confusing. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| Winning points was satisfying. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| The game length felt too long. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| There are interesting choices most turns. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| Gameplay builds from start to finish. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| The overall game feels balanced. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| The theme feels important to gameplay. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| The game pieces do not look good. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| Overall, I enjoy playing this game. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| I want to play this game again. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| Please list your two favorite game mechanics from this playtest: | First | Face down cards | | | | |
| | Second | Win condition | | | | |
| Please list two game mechanics that need the most development: | First | Wild cards | | | | |
| | Second | | | | | |
| What was your favorite moment during this game? | Last round, thinking I was about to lose but when all the cards were face up, I won. | | | | | |
| Please provide any additional information about the playtest. (Optional) | <p>You did talk about ending the game but kept going so that influenced my answer along with I need to do an assignment. Winning the trophies were satisfying the points, not as much. Winning trophies gave me more choices while points were just point.</p> <p>Gameplay drastically builds from start to finish but, in the way that players are counter playing each other and understanding each other instead of the system showing buildup. Wild cards are not engaging, you already know this. I completely forgot about wild cards except when they were for trophy's a bit.</p> | | | | | |

Tester's Name: Casey Rogers

| Statement | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree | Not Applicable |
|--|---|------------------|---------|-------|----------------|----------------|
| The rules booklet is helpful. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| Resolving turn order is confusing. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| Winning points was satisfying. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| The game length felt too long. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| There are interesting choices most turns. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| Gameplay builds from start to finish. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| The overall game feels balanced. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| The theme feels important to gameplay. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| The game pieces do not look good. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| Overall, I enjoy playing this game. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| I want to play this game again. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| Please list your two favorite game mechanics from this playtest: | First | Face Down cards. | | | | |
| | Second | * | | | | |
| Please list two game mechanics that need the most development: | First | Wild Cards. | | | | |
| | Second | * | | | | |
| What was your favorite moment during this game? | The last flip of the column where we flipped our two facedown cards. | | | | | |
| Please provide any additional information about the playtest. (Optional) | <p>I don't think I really looked at the player reference card much. In part cause I felt like I understood the game, but also cause it seemed cumbersome to read at a glance.</p> <p>I kinda wish there were fun journalist flavor text.</p> <p>Not sure how I feel about there only being the set win tokens. I almost kinda wish they weren't the same ones every time.</p> | | | | | |

PLAYTESTS 11 AND 12: NATE BORGER AND RYAN MASSEY, 10/25/20 9:05PM – 9:39PM, TABLETOP SIM + DISCORD, V2.6

Tester's Name: Nate Borger

| Statement | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree | Not Applicable |
|--|---|-------------------------|----------|----------|----------------|----------------|
| The rules booklet is helpful. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| Resolving turn order is confusing. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| Winning points was satisfying. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| The game length felt too long. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| There are interesting choices most turns. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| Gameplay builds from start to finish. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| The overall game feels balanced. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| The theme feels important to gameplay. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| The game pieces do not look good. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| Overall, I enjoy playing this game. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| I want to play this game again. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| Please list your two favorite game mechanics from this playtest: | First | Placing cards | | | | |
| | Second | Wilds | | | | |
| Please list two game mechanics that need the most development: | First | Upgrades (+3 to sports) | | | | |
| | Second | Turned cards | | | | |
| What was your favorite moment during this game? | The multiple "oh.. oh crap" moments throughout the game | | | | | |
| Please provide any additional information about the playtest. (Optional) | <p>Game builds from start to finish, but also can be steamrolled. Build, yes.</p> <p>This does not feel balanced, but I'm not against that. I want to play again and again, so I don't care about balance at that point.</p> <p>Needs more on-board signifiers! I forgot what some things did at times.</p> <p>Would play again</p> | | | | | |

Tester's Name: Ryan Massey

| Statement | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree | Not Applicable |
|--|--|--|---------|-------|----------------|----------------|
| The rules booklet is helpful. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| Resolving turn order is confusing. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| Winning points was satisfying. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| The game length felt too long. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| There are interesting choices most turns. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| Gameplay builds from start to finish. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| The overall game feels balanced. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| The theme feels important to gameplay. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| The game pieces do not look good. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| Overall, I enjoy playing this game. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| I want to play this game again. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| Please list your two favorite game mechanics from this playtest: | First | Mind Games | | | | |
| | Second | Bluffing | | | | |
| Please list two game mechanics that need the most development: | First | The player who starts winning, starts to steam roll | | | | |
| | Second | Ensuring all victory cards are balanced and have strategic affordances | | | | |
| What was your favorite moment during this game? | Trying to be smart and mind game my way to victory | | | | | |
| Please provide any additional information about the playtest. (Optional) | | | | | | |

PLAYTEST 13 AND 14: MIA MATUSZAK AND RONI WAALK, 11/8/20 5:30 – 5:58 PM, TABLETOP SIM
+ DISCORD, V2.7

Tester's Name: Roni Waalk

| Statement | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree | Not Applicable |
|--|---|---|---------|-------|----------------|----------------|
| The rules booklet is helpful. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| Resolving turn order is confusing. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| Winning points was satisfying. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| The game length felt too long. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| There are interesting choices most turns. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| Gameplay builds from start to finish. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| The overall game feels balanced. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| The theme feels important to gameplay. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| The game pieces do not look good. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| Overall, I enjoy playing this game. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| I want to play this game again. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| Please list your two favorite game mechanics from this playtest: | First | I like that the cards remain after the max column is removed. | | | | |
| | Second | Assuring that each player has one of each color card. | | | | |
| Please list two game mechanics that need the most development: | First | *Possibly* the "power-up" features of the scoop tokens, maybe they can only be used once. | | | | |
| | Second | This really messes with stuff but maybe the length of the game? I felt most comfortable end of round two and by then my opponent had a strong lead and advantage. | | | | |
| What was your favorite moment during this game? | Unsure if this is relevant, but I enjoy the moment when cards remain after a round. It gives me a more solid foundation to plan my moves. | | | | | |
| Please provide any additional information about the playtest. (Optional) | The most unsatisfying part of our gameplay was running into ties that not only removed a large foundation of cards (which makes sense), but also put a scoop out of the game. | | | | | |

Tester's Name: Mia Matuszak

| Statement | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree | Not Applicable |
|--|---|--------------------|---------|-------|----------------|----------------|
| The rules booklet is helpful. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| Resolving turn order is confusing. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| Winning points was satisfying. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| The game length felt too long. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| There are interesting choices most turns. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| Gameplay builds from start to finish. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| The overall game feels balanced. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| The theme feels important to gameplay. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| The game pieces do not look good. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| Overall, I enjoy playing this game. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| I want to play this game again. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| Please list your two favorite game mechanics from this playtest: | First | Scoop Tokens | | | | |
| | Second | Face Down Cards | | | | |
| Please list two game mechanics that need the most development: | First | Comeback Mechanics | | | | |
| | Second | Initial Draw Phase | | | | |
| What was your favorite moment during this game? | Sending a fleet of facedown cards. Otherwise, correctly guessing my opponent's facedown cards. | | | | | |
| Please provide any additional information about the playtest. (Optional) | I like the idea of scoop tokens for score & powerups, but put something in so if somebody doesn't get a powerup they can still stay competitive. Whether this be a headwind/tailwind or alternate win condition, I leave this to you. | | | | | |

PLAYTEST 15 AND 16: GRANT GAROUTTE AND CASEY ROGERS, 11/20/20 7:51 – 8:43 PM, TABLETOP SIM + DISCORD, V2.8

Tester's Name: Grant Garoutte

| Statement | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree | Not Applicable |
|--|--|----------|---------|-------|----------------|----------------|
| The rules booklet is helpful. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| Resolving turn order is confusing. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| Winning points was satisfying. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| The game length felt too long. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| There are interesting choices most turns. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| Gameplay builds from start to finish. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| The overall game feels balanced. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| The theme feels important to gameplay. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| The game pieces do not look good. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| Overall, I enjoy playing this game. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| I want to play this game again. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| Please list your two favorite game mechanics from this playtest: | I like the highest stack gets removed. Clout bidding. | | | | | |
| Please list two game mechanics that need the most development: | I liked the mechanics! Sorry nothing I would change | | | | | |
| What was your favorite moment during this game? | When there was a tie on the Crime category. 5-2 on green, 2-5 on blue | | | | | |
| Please provide any additional information about the playtest. (Optional) | I want cups to hid my tokens in meat space. Let me know if you publish this and I'd buy a copy | | | | | |

Tester's Name: Casey Rogers

| Statement | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree | Not Applicable |
|--|--|----------|---------|-------|----------------|----------------|
| The rules booklet is helpful. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| Resolving turn order is confusing. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| Winning points was satisfying. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| The game length felt too long. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| There are interesting choices most turns. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| Gameplay builds from start to finish. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| The overall game feels balanced. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| The theme feels important to gameplay. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| The game pieces do not look good. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| Overall, I enjoy playing this game. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| I want to play this game again. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| Please list your two favorite game mechanics from this playtest: | Face Down, Bidding | | | | | |
| Please list two game mechanics that need the most development: | How cards are removed | | | | | |
| What was your favorite moment during this game? | Round 2. Super long decision standoff. | | | | | |
| Please provide any additional information about the playtest. (Optional) | Super awesome! | | | | | |

PLAYTEST 17 AND 18: PJ RIVAS AND COLIN CROMWELL, 12/3/20 12:57 – 1:40 PM, TABLETOP SIM + MICROSOFT TEAMS, V2.9

Tester's Name: PJ Rivas

| Statement | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree | Not Applicable |
|--|---|----------|---------|-------|----------------|----------------|
| The rules booklet is helpful. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| Resolving turn order is confusing. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| Winning points was satisfying. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| The game length felt too long. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| There are interesting choices most turns. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| Gameplay builds from start to finish. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| The overall game feels balanced. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| The theme feels important to gameplay. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| The game pieces do not look good. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| Overall, I enjoy playing this game. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| I want to play this game again. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| Please list your two favorite game mechanics from this playtest: | Building gameplay and the card placement itself | | | | | |
| Please list two game mechanics that need the most development: | Witness cards and rulebook | | | | | |
| What was your favorite moment during this game? | Flipping over my hidden cards to win tiles | | | | | |
| Please provide any additional information about the playtest. (Optional) | Dope game! | | | | | |

Tester's Name: Colin Cromwell

Because we had a 30-40 minute discussion after the game was over, Colin and PJ were told that the short answer questions were optional.

| Statement | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree | Not Applicable |
|--|-------------------|----------|---------|-------|----------------|----------------|
| The rules booklet is helpful. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| Resolving turn order is confusing. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| Winning points was satisfying. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| The game length felt too long. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| There are interesting choices most turns. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| Gameplay builds from start to finish. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| The overall game feels balanced. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| The theme feels important to gameplay. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| The game pieces do not look good. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| Overall, I enjoy playing this game. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| I want to play this game again. | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | n/a |
| Please list your two favorite game mechanics from this playtest: | | | | | | |
| Please list two game mechanics that need the most development: | | | | | | |
| What was your favorite moment during this game? | | | | | | |
| Please provide any additional information about the playtest. (Optional) | | | | | | |

Major notes from gameplay:

- Both players were confused as to what Witness cards were, they were not sufficiently explained in the rulebook, but figured it out eventually. Additionally, the rules should note that the players will have no Witness cards in the first round of the game.
- Having two numbers on each Scoop token clashes visually – makes it harder to read at a glance.
- Both players opened with a face-down card for their first turn, they later mentioned this was due to them not really feeling like they knew how to begin.
- Both players completely missed that cards stay on the board between rounds, but enjoyed the game nonetheless.

Major notes from after gameplay:

- Both players felt the diagrams would have been more useful with labels and arrows on the diagrams themselves, rather than a long explanation in the caption.
- The rulebook doesn't cover what happens to the scoop token in a tie.
- The rules text uses too much in-game jargon, which could be intimidating for new players.
- Colin felt more flavor in the rules would help him understand the game better.
- The Janitor felt like by far the strongest card to PJ.
- During the post game discussion, both players analyzed the different possibilities for long term strategies: throwing the first round for better Witnesses? Go heavy on lower point bases if the next round has a higher point value?
- Overall, the game felt "well built" and "interwoven".

PLAYTEST 19: NATE BORGER AND MYSELF, 7/23/21 5:30 – 6:15 PM, IN PERSON AT OUR APARTMENT, V3.0

This playtest was more conversational than formal because this was meant more as a playtest to catch myself up and reset my brain than to really test anything. As such, there is no survey or round times for this playtest.

After teaching the game, Nate said that the rules made sense. He noted that the word “base” was confusing, making me realize that the only reason I called that component a “base” is because other games such as Smash Up use it – unfamiliar gamers will not understand the term.

In his first turn, Nate was dealt a hand of just low numbers, which he said felt bad and that he felt predisposition to randomly lose. Nate noted that he consistently forgot that he could play cards face down, and often ended up playing only 1 of his 2 per turn. He also wished that there was something for the winners of the bases other than points.

At the end of the first round, I had won all 3 tokens and Nate said that he already felt like he lost the game. At the end of the second round, a tie between all colors resulted in all colors being removed – Nate enjoyed this because it was exciting, but also felt like it shouldn’t have happened and that his progress was being erased. Nate continued to bring up that he felt like he was getting a lot of small numbers from the deck.

The Witness system did affect Nate’s choices during the game – it incentivized him to win bases of Witnesses he DIDN’T want, so that in the event that he lost a base he would get a Witness that he liked. Of the new scoring system, Nate did not like it, saying that it caused him to feel like he lost the game off the bat. He said that he wanted a second step to scoring points, as if the current gameplay was actually half of a larger game.