Game Design Document



# Title Page

## Game Name

Flash team Fighting

(very much a working title)

## Tag line

Breakneck card action!

(or smt idk, having a tagline does fit the game but I’m not sure yet what to pick)

## Elevator Pitch

Opt. A: If you’ve ever wanted to blast a stomp-rock or EDM song while dealing some action movie carnage, this is the closest you can get in board game form.

Opt. B: Flash team Fighting has all the interesting card play of typical deck builders and trading card games, but makes true on its promise of emulating action-movie fights by playing at a breakneck pace.

## Date of last update

13/12/2022

# Game Overview

## Game Concept

Flash team Fighting (FtF) is a physical real-time card game for two players. In the game, you play out an action-movie style fight scene as one of many teams, each of which has it’s own unique deck and play style. You will scramble to put together a devastating combo from cards in your hand as quickly as possible, making sure each card played flows smoothly into the next. You then both resolve the effects of your combo, dealing damage to each other’s characters. First to lose all their characters loses the game.

Flash team Fighting falls with the relatively uncommon genre of real-time card games. Games in the genre have to keep their mechanics extremely simple so they can be processed in real time, in my opinion often moving into uninteresting territory. These games are only kept fun by the having to react quickly and play fast.

FtF will lean slightly further into the interesting play and mechanics typical of many designer card games. A point of reference would be Star Realms for its relative simplicity yet interesting gameplay. FtF will also use these more complex card designs to lean into its theme much more than existing real-time card games like brawl or the traditional playing card game Spit / Slam / Speed (nl.: zenuwen).

To compensate for this complexity, the game consists of alternating real-time phases involving most of the gameplay, followed by a brief non-time-sensitive phase in which complex effects can be resolved. This effectively makes FtF a programming game, albeit of a very different type than Robo Rally for example.

## Target Audience

FtF, being played mostly in real-time, is relatively unusual for a board-or card game. This means it can target two main audiences: those who are into the board gaming hobby and always looking for something they haven’t seen before (which is fairly common for board game players), and those who don’t typically like slower, more think-y games – especially if their friends *are* into the hobby, this game offers a way for them to still play together.

## Genre(s)

Flash team Fighting is a 1V1, real-time card game. More specifically, the real-time systems alternate with a non-timed phase as in a programming game (as defined for board games, “programming game” has a somewhat different meaning in video games).

For its theme and aesthetic the game borrows from sci-fi action, a major inspiration being the various Ghost in the Shell anime (Stand Alone Complex in particular).

## Game Flow Summary – How does the player move through the game? Include both the interface and the game itself.

Before the start of the game, both players pick from a number of pre-set teams. Each team has it’s own deck, containing cards from the different characters in that team, as well as some refence material to track character health and special abilities.

Once both players have set up their team, the game is played out in “combos” (read: rounds). Each combo is first built in real-time, then resolved when both players have finished building it.

During combo building, you play cards from your hand into a face-up row in for each player, from left to right. Players must make sure these cards flow into each other and accomplish maximum effect, but can’t stop to think for too long as rewards are given to the fastest combo builder. Once a player finishes their combo, their opponent only has limited time left to finish theirs.

After this follows a quick combo resolution phase, resolving both player’s combos without time constraints. The primary thing to check is which characters take damage and how much.

If a character’s health hits zero, that character dies. If a player has no more living characters, that player loses.

## Look and Feel – What is the basic look and feel of the game? What is the visual style?

This game has a cyberpunk or near-future, sci-fi aesthetic. It skews toward science-fantasy rather than hard sci-fi. Being an intense action game it borrows more from the flashy action movie side of things than it does from the moodier entries in the genre. FtF specifically seeks to reproduce the feel of an acrobatic choreographed action scenes rather than an entire movie.

One essential element of the visual style is that it must be immediately readable to enable the fast-paced play the game is built for. This means most key information will be represented with bright colour coding or clear iconography.

Non-functional illustrations such as card art may have to be simplified to match this aesthetic. They cannot be outright scrapped though, since card art, card names etc are what sell the action-scene fantasy of the game.

# Gameplay

## Objectives – What are the objectives of the game?

Full game scale: Both players’ explicit objective is to defeat the opponent by killing their entire team. Of course that makes it an equally important goal to protect your own team, as this is effectively a zero-sum game.

Multiple rounds scale: This main goal is broken down into killing & protecting individual characters. This is also an explicit goal since every time an individual character falls already has a consequence on gameplay.

Once per round scale: Defeating and protecting characters is of course accomplished by dealing damage & gaining block, as well as managing which characters are getting hit.

Moment to moment scale: Players try to string together cards from a randomly drawn hand into a combo, with the competing goals of solving this puzzle as fast yet as well as possible. This then generates damage, which kills characters, which eventually defeats the opponent (or equivalent for defensive gameplay).

## Game Progression

Despite being a fast-paced and hopefully relatively short game, there is a bit of an arc to it as the game goes on. This mostly comes in the form of characters dying, as all of that character’s cards are removed from their owner’s deck when this happens, altering their playstyle permanently. On a side note, each team needs to be designed to accommodate this – the deck still needs to functions with any subset of characters left alive. To compensate for the loss of cards, the losing player gets a temporary but significant power up.

Because of the consequence to losing characters, simply weakening characters also becomes more significant as you can no longer rely on them to survive.

## Play Flow – How does the game flow for the game player

As described before, the game takes place over multiple rounds, each round being broken down into a combo building phase (real-time) and a phase for resolving those combo’s effects (not timed).

If the game’s design works out, players should mostly be doing the real-time part with the resolution phase going by as quickly as possible. Players can of course go as slow as they wish through the resolution phase if they need a breather.

The progress of combo building should feel intense, although simply going as fast as possible isn’t quite the goal – players will also need to think about what they are doing to optimise the effect of their combo. The core idea is high pressure more than high pace.

An extra note: since some rules have changed after the first playtest, interaction between players is now completely isolated to the resolution phase. There is not much of a reason to watch your opponent during combo building. If possible without overwhelming the player, I’d like to put that back into the game.

## Mission / Challenge Structure / Puzzle Structure

The core of the game is a 1V1 card battle – no missions, scenarios etc. However, by changing which teams you and your opponent are playing you can experience different playstyles and matchups.

The main puzzle in this game is in drawing a random hand of cards from your deck each turn and trying to mould whatever you got into a combo. This puzzle will change with every turn with a new hand, every few rounds when a character dies and you lose their cards, and every game that you get to try a new team.

Additionally, I would like to include a quick start guide that provides a beginner “test game” with which to learn the mechanics by playing against a friend in a low-pressure environment, and potentially some puzzles (akin to chess puzzles) in case players want to practice their combo building skills.

# Mechanics

## Rules – What are the rules to the game, both implicit and explicit.

This is only a quick overview of rules, the full game rules will eventually be compiled into a separate rule book once they have reached a somewhat stabile form through early playtests.

The goals of the game: kill your opponent’s characters. The flow: rounds consisting of combo building (real time), then combo resolution (not timed). These high-level concepts have been explained further in other sections.

A brief overview of combo building:

You draw eight cards. You must place eight cards in your personal combo, one at a time, from left to right in a row in front of you. You may switch the last card played for another if you change your mind on something, the rest are locked in.

Every card played must “chain” with the card before it: requirements are listed on the left edge of each card, “links” that can satisfy the next card’s requirements are listed on the right. Cards can chain only if both requirements are met, those being a character requirement and a momentum requirement. Character can be any of the characters in your team, momentum can be any number.

Final rules will feature a more clear explanation and some examples.

There is some way of getting new cards when you get stuck not being able to continue a combo with your current hand. Current mechanic: discard your entire hand & draw same amount of cards at no cost as often as you want (until your draw pile is empty).

Once you have both built a combo consisting of eight correctly chained cards, you resolve the effects listed on them – primarily dealing & blocking damage. Damage is always dealt to a specific character. Current mechanic: whichever character you ended the combo with takes all unblocked damage from your opponent’s combo that round.

The game still needs a way to deal with incomplete combos (<8 cards) and illegal combos (not all of a card’s requirements are met). Specifically the game needs to just move on when someone makes a mistake, but still punish players enough that they won’t do this on purpose.

## Model of the game universe. Think of it as a simulation of a world, how do all the pieces interact?

The larger world only explicitly exists in flavour texts, faction descriptions etc. The world is a less essential part of the game, as FtF focusses more on small-scale conflict. The game does involve any mechanical means of affecting the world it is set in, only your and your opponent’s teams being mechanically represented.

Of course if the flavour texts are well written enough and the world somewhat interesting, you may well pick up an interest in this world that you are only seeing filtered through snapshots of factions fighting over it. I would highly welcome If this leads players to imagine how their latest fights might affect the city, or to get excited about how every new faction fits into the world.

If this game would ever get published and it just so happens to also be very successful, it would definitely be interesting to look into a way to involve the world more, possibly even on a larger scale like a campaign or living card game. On a small scale an expansion with mechanics for scenarios or environmental attacks would also work.

## Physics – How does the physical universe work?

Obviously a card game like this does not have a mechanical physics system, so I will take the opportunity to discuss the realism of this world. In short, I don’t care about it. I will gladly break the laws of physics in card art etc if it leads to a cooler action scene being evoked. Similarly some factions may seem fairly reasonable while others would be ridiculous in the real world, but still the two can go toe-to-toe in a fight in the name of fun & the rule of cool.

## Economy – What is the economy of the game? How does it work?

There is no literal economy, but in some ways the combo links act as resources. Momentum especially can be gained and lost, and used to accomplish your goals of playing powerful cards into your combo. However, these links do not act as typical resources in an economy. Some teams may simply want to build up momentum and spend it on big moves, sure, but others might be more well suited to playing at low momentum, and others yet will simply manipulate it up and down all over the place as long as it means they can play their next card. In short, momentum is sort of a resource but definitely not a currency.

Traditional card draw economy or mana economy is also less of a thing, since playing a card is free, you always play exactly eight cards on a turn and always have exactly enough cards to do this. However, there is an “action economy” to getting the most out of those eight cards played by picking the right ones, looking for the combo that is the most effective.

I’m still torn on whether to add an explicit resource to the game that can be gained by playing some otherwise weak cards and spent at any time later to empower some other cards or get some other benefit. I do think it opens a lot of fun design options, but I fear it may overcomplicate a game that is already overwhelming to play in real-time.

## Character / Game Piece movement in the game

Movement & positioning is not a real part of the game mechanics, but it can be implied or evoked by the card designs. A card may depict a sprint forward, or a wall run to outmanoeuvre the enemy, or a backwards leap out of range…

## Actions, including whatever switches and buttons are used, interacting with objects, and what means of communication are used

## Conflict: if present, how is this modeled?

The entire game is a model of conflict, see rules section.

## Screen Flow -- How each screen is related to every other and a description of the purpose of each screen

## Game Options - What are the options and how do they affect game play?

## Replaying and saving

## Cheats and Easter Eggs

# Story and Narrative

## Back story

*In the near future, most of humanity has adjusted to living in enormous metropoles concentrating nearly all economic and political power. The streets of are rife with violence as various factions fight for control in these megacities – whether that’s powerful corporations, shady underworld organisations, lone mercenaries looking out only for themselves, or police forces violently keeping everyone in check.*

A note on this lore: it is very functional, but nothing here makes for a particularly unique setting. If this needs to be a strong IP, it will need more of an identity. However, the current backstory does everything necessary to support the gameplay and the core fantasy without getting in the way. Plus, keeping things this vague keeps a lot of possibilities open to design uniquely themed faction teams.

## Plot elements

*Life for normal civilians is tough in this sci-fi metropole, but you are not ordinary – you belong to one of the thrashing factions fighting over the city, and to you, doing their dirty work is one hell of a thrill.*

*Lead your team of mercenaries, thugs, half-assed heroes into battle and prove just how much of a well-oiled machine of destruction your squad really is!*

Each team in the game belongs to a faction. In the story, these factions are often much larger than just that team. Each faction has its own motivations in the backstory. The factions identity should be reflected in the team’s playstyle and aesthetic as much as possible. Each team of course consists of multiple characters, which can further specialise their playstyle and story identity.

## Story progression

There is not much of a plot playing out throughout the game since it is just a physical card game about fighting. However, it is a major design goal to actually evoke imagery of an action movie fight scene unfolding as you are playing the game. FtF may not have a plot, but it does have a much smaller scale story of how the fight plays out and even a bit of an arc as characters fall, gradually weakening both teams.

## Cut scenes -- descriptions include the actors, the setting, and the storyboard or script.

## Accompanying game pieces – story booklets, art work

The backstory of the game as a whole is expressed explicitly in the core rule book. Each individual team can then expand on this, coming with some info about the team members and the faction they are a part of. In this way, the unique teams get to steal the show both in gameplay and in the story.

Throughout the game, the theme is communicated in the form of illustrative art on the cards, player boards etc as well as naming conventions, all supported by some thematically evocative mechanics.

Effectively every game piece is a small part of the “story”, so playing the game strongly evokes playing out an action scene in this world.

# Game World

## General look and feel of world

See back story: the world is a near(ish)-future cyberpunk world. It is dystopian and violent as a world to live in, but the perfect scenery for a good action scene.

It is neon, full of crashing windows and acrobatic action moves, shady back alleys and massive high rises, and greatly stylised. Realism and subtlety are lowest priority, exciting and unique factions and action are paramount.

All this colourful yet grimy, stylised, intense action is rendered in hand-drawn anime-inspired illustrations – notably these almost always have to coexist with gameplay elements, which should visually get priority to enable fast-paced play.

# Areas

## General description and physical characteristics

Functionally the entire world is constrained to a single megacity, the world outside is usually irrelevant.

Within the megacity there are of course different districts, neighbourhoods and landmarks, but the gameplay is agnostic to them. Furthermore, the actual setting of the world as a whole is not the focus of this game.

The closest analogy to “areas” in the world that actually matter would be the factions: they are a story part of the world that you don’t directly control (teams are only a small part of a larger faction), each with their own identity. For a more detailed, in-progress list of factions, see my notes.

## How to relate to the rest of the world

Each faction relates to the world as a whole in what part of it they control, what role they fill in the world and what they are fighting for. Private military working for a major corporation relates to the world very differently then a crime syndicate or a government funded special operations team. This information will be provided on the story primer that comes with each team. Once again, factions are still being worked out and currently only exist partially in my notes, and partially in my mind.

Factions may also physically control some areas of the world – it would be fun to place them on a fictional map of the city, to make them all feel like a part of a single, consistent world.

As mentioned, the larger world outside those factions is not very relevant to the play nor the appeal of this game. While there could be districts defined, each with their own function to the city, and even extra locations outside the main city could be established, it does not seem necessary at the moment.

## What levels use it

The only things that are relevant are your team and your opponent’s, and the fight playing out between the two of you. Environment is simply occasionally implied by the cards – a sniper taking a shot from a rooftop, a SWAT team member breaking in through a window etc.

Like before, the factions you both decide to play are what really matters. Every time you play the game, both players will pick a team and each team has it’s own identity in the story and in playstyle, so using the analogy of factions as areas, players get to choose which area to play in each game.

A fun future expansion might be to include environment into the fights more explicitly. At the start of the game, both players would agree on an area to play in on top of picking their team. Areas then add some unique rules, cards or objectives as a twist on gameplay. This system would add more novelty and could evoke certain kinds of action scenes that cleverly use the environment to create a more unique choreography. However, to reiterate, this mechanic is not currently planned to be implemented.

## Connections to other areas

# Characters.

## For each character

## Back story

## Personality

## Appearance

## Abilities

## Relevance to the story

## Relationship to other characters

## Artificial Intelligence Use in Opponent and Enemy

## Non-combat and Friendly Characters

# Levels

## Training Level

## For each level

## Synopsis

## Required introductory material and how it is provided

## Objectives

## Details of what happens in the level

### Map

### Critical path that the player needs to take

### Important and incidental encounters

# Interface

## Visual System

## HUD

## Menus

## Camera model

## Control System – How does the game player control the game? What are the specific commands?

## Audio, music, sound effects

## Game Art – intended style

## Help System / Manual

A clear manual will be provided that is as concise as possible without sacrificing this clarity.

It will be added as a separate document as soon as the exact rules start to settle into their definitive form. For now some of my notes are provided instead, which by no means are meant as a resource to learn the game from.

# Design Guidelines

## Design guidelines

## Accessibility & customisability

## Difficulty selection

## Lean design

## Player feedback

## Monetisation VS game play

## Tutorials

## Character balance

## Quick setup

## Every game unique

## Skill ceiling

## A game for yourself

## New & experienced players together

## Fun comes first

## Broad audience

## Player choice

## Consistent theme / aesthetic

## Balance & fairness

## Introduction of mechanics

## Distinctions between phases

## Prevent waiting

## Design principles

## Working memory

## Zero sum games

## Attention VS perception

## Balancing

## Ability synergy

## Theme

## Define the problem

## Environmental storytelling

## Sense of accomplishment

## Time dilation

## Fairness

## Feedback loops

## Pacing

## (A)symmetry & synchronicity

## Errors without punishment

## Hick’s law (decision fatigue)

## Koster’s theory of fun

## Lazzaro’s four keys to fun

## Payoffs

## Puzzle development

## Fast / cheap / good

## Play testing

## Problem-solving obstacles

## Information

## Ooh, shiny!

## Paper prototyping

## Punishment

## Rock, paper, scissors

## 80/20 rule

## Affordance cues

## Game tropes

## Gestalt

## Genres

## Pillars

## Doubling & halving

## Player errors

## Experience design

## Flow

## Core gameplay loop

## Learning curve

## Loss aversion

## Making moves

## Memory VS skill

## Social ties

## Transparency