The Game of War:

Reimagined

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Abstract:

The card game known as War has historically been more of a card drawing simulation based solely on chance rather than an actual game. In this "simulation" the two players of the game have no actual input on the outcome, instead only being helpless to watch as the "game" unfolds before them. Little changes the actual outcome of the game beyond the moments of shuffling that each player undertakes at the start of and throughout the process of the game and all other moments of gameplay amount to nothing much more than false senses of tension brought on by the "Battles" that occasionally occur. In this short reimagining of the Game of War, I have opted to increase the players' agency and interactivity within the scope of the game by giving them a set list of choices that they can make at certain intersections throughout the course of play. This is intentionally designed to introduce the potential for strategic risk taking and to hopefully increase the pace of a game so that no longer may the players end up trapped in a 40 minute game of passing cards back and forth hopelessly even though the fate of the game was essentially sealed the moment the shuffler finished shuffling. In this sense, I hope to reintroduce the concept of actual **strategy** to the Game of War.

Complete Rule Set:

Original game: 2 players

- Shuffle the deck
- Divide the deck evenly, dealing cards one at a time until each player receives 26 cards dealt face down.
- Place your cards face down before you and the game begins.
- Each player draws and shows their top card simultaneously. The card with the higher value (known as "rank" in War) on a scale of 2 to Ace wins and that player takes both cards from that round. These cards are then placed face down at the bottom of the winner's deck.
- In the event that the cards are of the same rank, the players enter a game state known as "war" or "battle" wherein both players turn one card face down and a second card face up. Once again, the player with the higher rank wins the lot and gets all of the cards in that war. In the case that another draw occurs, you continue "war chaining" until a winner is reached.
- Repeat these two previous steps until one of the players has all 52 cards.

The Game of War: Reimagined: 2 players

**note: new rules are denoted with red text

- Shuffle the deck
- Divide the deck evenly, dealing cards one at a time until each player receives 26 cards dealt face down.
- At this point, the player is given the option of looking at their deck and either reshuffling once or changing the order of a maximum of half of their remaining number of cards. The player may not choose both actions. This will continue to be true for each instance of a shuffle from this point forward and is meant to encourage the players to seek patterns in the placement of their cards and of their opponents, as well as how their opponents tend to shift their own cards.
- Place your cards face down before you and the game begins.
- Each player draws and shows their top card simultaneously. The card with the higher value (known as "rank" in War) on a scale of 2 to Ace wins and that player takes both cards from that round. These cards are then placed into a discard pile which will be reshuffled once the player has run out of cards, following the same rules as the third bullet point.
- In the event that the cards are of the same rank, the players enter a game state known as "war" or "battle" wherein both players turn one card face down and a second card face up. Once again, the player with the higher rank wins the lot and gets all of the cards in that war. In the case that another draw occurs, you continue "war chaining" until a winner is reached. At any point during the war chain, if the loser loses by half or more of the points (2 to 4, 5 to 10, 6 to queen) the Loser may request "double or nothing reinforcements", wherein the loser draws twice the number of cards that they have out on the field and if the added combination of **one** of those face down card and the face down cards already on the field from the initial draw chain is higher but not equal to the combination of both of the opposing players cards (the initial face up and face down cards in the draw chain) then the loser takes the draw of that turn. Else, the original winner gets all of the cards in that war. In the case of a draw caused by the reinforcements all cards go back to their original players and are shuffled back into the deck, following the same shuffle rules of bullet point 3.
- Repeat these two previous steps until one of the players has all 52 cards.

Picture:

This image depicts a game state in which the players have entered a "War State" and the losing player initiated a "Reinforcements call". The piles at the top and bottom of the image are the respective player's discard piles, followed by their play decks, and finally the central line is an instance of a "War State." The player on the bottom attempted to use the "reinforcements call" which failed after their facedown and additional placed card did not match up to the opposing player's King and 10. As such, the Player on the top now gets to keep all three of their cards and keep the 5 cards from the opponent's field (the card that initially caused the war is not counted into the calculations for double or nothing).

Design Process Statement:

   War, a simple card game both on its surface and in actuality. What is defined in its most base form as a game where two players split a deck evenly in half and draw cards simultaneously, comparing their values and claiming them based on who has the higher draw until one player has all 52 cards, can be boiled down to what is affectively aimless luck of the draw. With nothing more exciting happening than the occasional points draw wherein both players must place one card down and one card up, again having the player with the highest card take the whole lot and repeating the processes for as many draws as appear, it doesn't seem that the player actually has much input in this game at all beyond the action of pulling the card and placing it face up or down on the table.

   By following Greg Costikyan's critical vocabulary from his essay "I Have No Words and I Must Design" and using his fundamental definition of a game as "an <u>interactive</u> <u>structure</u> of <u>endogenous meaning</u> that requires players to <u>struggle</u> towards a <u>goal</u>," it appears that a number of these important factors are glossed over in the play of this game, most fundamentally, the idea of interactivity itself. By the very definition of interactivity, a game's outcome must be changed by player input. However, in the case of War, the player has no chance to creating meaningful input at all, as everything from the shuffling of the cards, to the drawing phase, to the often sparse instances of an actual "war" event occurring is left entirely up to chance. In effect, this means that a "game" of war is nothing more than the act of drawing and comparing cards over and over again until one player has all the cards. Beyond this, this act can take a highly variable amount of time which is only influenced by the order of the shuffle with no user input at all, and as the only goal of the game is "get all 52 cards" with no decision making, strategizing, or otherwise input from the player, this can get boring fast.

   It is worth noting that most of the other terms which define a game are covered for in War. The **structure** of the game is that the higher valued card wins regardless of suit with Ace being the highest ranking card and if a draw takes place a certain action must be taken until the draw or chain of draws is resolved again by the higher card. The **endogenous meaning** of the game, though arguably thinly veiled as just another card game, is higher cards win with 2 at the bottom and Ace at the top. The actions which place in a draw also have the added endogenous meaning of being known as a "war!" or "battle" in game. The **struggle** of the game is the chance of losing your cards to your opponent at any given time. And Finally, the **goal** of the game is to gather all 52 cards.

   So, the clear first step into reworking this activity into more of a complete game is to increase the players direct input, and therefor interactivity, with the game. In order to do this, I gave the players more agency and interactivity throughout the course of the game, giving them the opportunities to strategize, memorize, and observe the actions and patterns of both themselves and of the opposing players. Beyond that, I decided to add a high element of risk, with a potential for high risk but high reward. This will potentially increase the struggle of the game and thus the players' engagement with it. All of this increase is done by allowing the players to 1) shuffle their own decks multiple times throughout the course of play 2) change the order of their decks strategically instead of shuffling and 3) challenging the opponent to a high

risk, high reward style of war in order to either maximize their gains or prevent loses. By adding these elements onto the base game of War and then altering the structure into which cards are reintroduced into the deck, I aim to change the iterative nature of the game and allow the players to add more strategy and control into the Game of War.