**Popular TCG Mechanics.**

**Hearthstone**

Hearthstone is a multi-platform extremely popular digital TCG. It was created by blizzard and has regular card expansions released. It has a large e-sports following.

The two types of major cards within hearthstone are minions and spell cards. Each type can be further categorised into sub-types which leads to a complex collection of cards and deck builds.

Hearthstone allows for players to create a deck consisting of 30 cards. No more than 2 copies of one card in each deck. When creating a deck, the player has to choose which class they’d like to play as. Each class has its own special sets of cards and mechanics leading to card synergies. The classes also come with a hero power that the player can activate once per round for the cost of two mana. This is an interesting mechanic as it allows players to still take a turn even if they can’t play a card that round.

Once a player enters the game with their deck, the aim is to get the enemy players health down to 0. Each player starts with 1 mana and 30 health. Each round the mana increases by one. The general power curve of the game starts low and quickly grows throughout the rounds. If either player fails to destroy the other before they run out of cards, every round the player that has ran out of cards starts taking damage. This mechanic is important as it allows games to actually end rather than enter a stalemate.

**Minion Cards**

Minion cards can come with a plethora of different abilities. Here are some basic card abilities:

* Battlecry: When this card is played do *x*.
* Charge: Once played, the minion can attack straight away.
* Deathrattle: Once this minion is destroyed, do *x.*
* Discover: Once this triggers chose one card from a selection of three. It then gets added to your hand.
* Inspire: Once you use your hero ability, do *x.*
* Poisonous: Any minion damaged by the Poisonous minion is destroyed.
* Stealth: This minion can’t be targeted until it attacks.
* Taunt: A minion that shields your player, other enemy minions have to target the taunting minion.

There are many more, but these 7 are the basic abilities that form a foundation for the gameplay loop.

**Spell Cards**

Spell cards often include powering your minions, damaging enemy minions or empowering your hero. There are secret cards which are played like traps, the enemy can’t see what secret card you’ve played until it’s been activated. Minions can have abilities that trigger once spells have been played which allows for some powerful combinations.

**The Elder Scrolls: Legends**

This was created by Bethesda Studios and is a popular multi-platform TCG. TESL was released 3 years after Hearthstone and brought some interesting mechanics and gameplay design elements with it.

Gameplay can be seen as vaguely similar to Hearthstone. Players start each game with minimum Magicka which limits the power curve early on. Each round players are awarded with one extra magicka. However the cap is 12, as opposed to Hearthstones cap of 10.

The biggest difference between TESL and Hearthstone is that TESL introduced multiple lanes. Rather than having one playing field players have two. Lanes can have different attributes such as ‘Shadow’ which stealth’s all the minions within the lane. Some spells and minions allow for the player to move minions into the other lane. There is a maximum of 4 minions in each lane.

Rather than using classes, TESL allows for characters to align themselves to different card types. Each card has an attribute assigned to it. Agility, Endurance, Intelligence, Strength and Willpower. Making a deck with more than two different attributes isn’t advised. However, creating a deck with one or two different attributes can create some powerful synergies and is seen as the proper way of building a deck.

This allows for players to customise their decks even more so than Hearthstones. There are 10 combinations within the attributes, and then pure decks which consist of solely one attribute. This allows for 15 different types of decks to be created.

However, for newer players this can be seen as daunting and a bit complicated compared to hearthstone’s class system. They both bring a good amount of customisation and personalisation to the TCG gameplay loop, however they both have some limitations.

Every time the player loses 5 health they are given a card even if it’s not on their turn. Some cards can be played at this moment, however most just get added to the players hand. This is a great way of bridging a gap between skilled players and new players.

**Gameplay Mechanics I’d Like To Implement**

**Deck Mechanics**

Whilst both Hearthstone and TESL deck mechanics are great, they both have limitations. Every class in Hearthstone features a unique hero power which often works well with certain cards, and doesn’t with others. Rather than forcing the player to choose a class, they should be able to use cards from every type to create what they feel, a perfect deck. TESL tried to combat this, however with the huge amount of different deck types it can become rather daunting. This could be combated by allowing the players to align themselves towards something within an actual game. The player would still have to create a deck that they feel would benefit this, but with fewer options the player wouldn’t feel as restricted.

As I would like my game to include at least three different types of mythology I feel the deck building wouldn’t be as complicated for new users. Rather than forcing the player to chose one mythology and build a deck using only those card types, I feel free reign over card types would benefit the player and gameplay loop. Mythology itself is essentially the battle of good vs evil. This could be incorporated within my game by using an alignment system that allows the player to align between good and evil to then use that alignment to play powerful cards.

This would need to be tested, but it would work like so:

* Three alignments; Good, Neutral and Evil.
* Three overarching card types; Greek, Norse and Egyptian.
* Players build a deck with the alignment they would want to lean towards in mind. However they wouldn’t worry about which type of overarching card type they will pick.
* During the game the player plays cards and depending on that card, their alignment would change. Each card within the game will have it’s own alignment value.
* Once the player reaches mid/end power level they can then use their alignment and mana (mana may be reworked as it’s not original) to play that card.

After testing this mechanic it could either be expanded, by introducing more cards for each mythology and then having an alignment within each mythology. This could allow for the player to be aligned to Evil within the Greek mythology, yet be aligned with Good with Norse. This would allow for further customisation of the deck. However, this could lead to customisation overload and discern the player from wanting to play.

**Health Mechanic**

Hearthstone and TESL both feature a very similar health system. However, TESL has a feature which allows for players to bounce back from a losing streak. The player itself is seen as the heart of the game. Once they have been destroyed the game is over. Cards are ways of deterring attacks from their ‘heart’. If a player places a card down on the play field the opposition is much more likely to attack that card than the opponents ‘heart’. This is because board control is so important, and intuitive.

I feel TESL’s health mechanic to be interesting and a bit more forgiving. However, it allows for less strategy and more randomness. It also breaks the flow of the game slightly, whilst a player is attacking another it should be seamless and completely in their control. Hearthstones secrets also break the flow slightly, but not as much as the health system within TESL. Secrets are few and far between, and only belong to a few classes.

Within my game I feel it best to implement a standard health system in which the player starts off with a certain amount of health. Throughout the game the player should be allowed a few choices with the cards. They can increase their ‘hearts’ health or their minion’s health. This allows for a bit more strategy and situational decisions.

**Power Mechanic**

TCG need power mechanics. Players shouldn’t be able to play their most powerful cards at the start of the game. This would lead to complete randomness. Players chances of winning would all depend on the cards they draw first. Whilst TCGs in nature are slightly random, introducing a power curve lessens the random nature and opens room for strategy. It also allows for longer games, it’d be rather boring if games were other within 2 rounds.

Combining a power mechanic with my suggested alignment mechanic could create some interesting gameplay. In Hearthstone and TESL once you reach the higher power levels you can essentially play any card you want. Understandably the more powerful the card the less you can do with the rest of your turn. However, I feel that powerful cards that require alignment **and** power should also slightly negatively affect the player.

One way of doing this would be to essentially destroy the alignment gathered by the player throughout the game. This way they wouldn’t be able to play two extremely powerful cards within two turns. The player would still have a higher power level and be able to play high power cards, however they’d have to focus on pushing their alignment to whichever way they please. I feel this would add another layer to the game that would lead to some fun gameplay.

**Card abilities**

Throughout the mythology research and documentation document I have highlighted features of each myth/creature. This makes it a lot easier to implement some card abilities. TESL and Hearthstone both feature similar basic card abilities that form the foundation of the gameplay loop. However, my game would need to feature abilities that are relevant towards the mythology included. Here are some basic ideas that would form a foundation, subject to change.

* **Patience:** Every round this minion doesn’t attack when it could have, do *x*.
* **Protector:** Force enemy minions and spells to target this minion.
* **Repent:** Every time you gain Evil alignment, do *x.*
* **Preach:** Remove *x* amount of alignment from the opposition.
* **Venom:** When this minion attacks, poison the defender for *x per turn.*
* **Stonecast:** When this minion gets attacked and survives, turn the attacker to stone.
* **Sleep:** When this minion attacks and doesn’t eliminate the defender, put them to sleep.
* **Hidden:** This minion can’t be attacked by other minions until it attacks.
* **Deflect:** Deflect *x* spell(s) to the minion to your left/right.
* **Birth:** When played, do *x.*
* **Death:** When destroyed, do *x*.

These abilities could be combined to create some interesting cards such as: **Patience: Preach(**5 for every round).

Throughout development these card abilities will be altered to allow for fun and fair gameplay. Some may be added and some may be removed, however it is important to have a range of different abilities to allow each card to really feel unique.