Introduction

In this section, I will explain the philosophy behind this game and the process through which I designed it. If you opened this document just to examine the game’s mathematics and are not interested in such topics, feel free to skip this part. However, I strongly recommend that those outside this category give it a read.

This game is a synthesis of the popular games Blackjack and Poker.  
I’ve had the opportunity to play this game with hundreds of people since middle school. I designed its rules by observing countless strategies and tactics—often paying the price by losing. All the strategies and tactics I took precautions against had at least one of the following flaws:

1. They forced other players to adopt the same strategy or tactic, making the game monotonous.
2. They ended the game too quickly, reducing it to a coin toss rather than a game of skill.
3. They diminished or eliminated the psychological factor that is strongly present in the game and perhaps forms its foundation.

Creating the most sophisticated game with the simplest possible rules should be the sole aim of any designer working on strategy games.  
If complexity arises from artificial and meaningless rules or features, then the game becomes more about experience and luck than IQ and EQ (I’m well aware that the existence of EQ is highly debated, but there’s no better word to describe the skill set I’m referring to here).

After all, the game table isn’t a courtroom, and the players aren’t lawyers. If we wanted a contest to see who memorized the most rules, we could have studied law.  
Of course, we can never eliminate the advantage experience brings; arguing that this factor should be zero is absurd. However, minimizing it would benefit everyone.

Another factor we need to discuss here is luck. Like nearly all card games, this game also involves a certain degree of luck.  
What matters is keeping the element of luck low enough that skilled players (here, “skill” refers to lying convincingly, detecting lies, card counting, forming alliances to their advantage, etc.) can almost certainly beat unskilled players in the long run.

Otherwise, our game wouldn't be much different from something like Snakes & Ladders (a purely luck-based board game designed for children). In that case, there’d be no reason for players to engage in such a mentally demanding process.

Borrowing from the Greats

Let’s consider Chess and Go (Baduk). One is the most popular strategy game in the Western world, and the other in the Eastern world (excluding video games).  
What makes these games so successful and “well-structured” (apart from their historical development)?

One of the most important answers to that question was mentioned at the start of this text: complexity should emerge naturally through players' actions, not through artificial rules.  
Let’s analyze these games in three phases: opening, midgame (action), and endgame. In the opening phase, experienced players usually don’t waste much time because compared to the midgame and endgame, the complexity is at its lowest.

At this point, I would love to continue the explanation using Go, because any sensible and objective game designer knows that from a rules and structure perspective, Go is vastly superior to chess.  
There are no different pieces with unique rules or characteristics. Memorizing openings is nearly impossible.

*"If there are sentient beings on other planets, then they play Go."*  
– Emanuel Lasker

Oddly enough, this quote is from a chess grandmaster. Lasker’s reasoning was that the rules and movement patterns in chess are somewhat arbitrary.  
So, if our alien friends have designed a game similar to chess (which is likely if intelligent life exists), we can safely assume its rules differ significantly.  
This doesn’t apply to Go. The rules are incredibly simple, and there is only one type of stone. Apart from the board size, there are no arbitrary or made-up rules.

That’s why I would have preferred to use Go as the basis for my examples.  
However, most people reading this probably aren’t familiar with Go, so I’ll surrender to fate and proceed using chess.

In chess, the opening phase is relatively less complex. The number of playable pieces and the squares they can move to are quite limited.  
Threats, counter-threats, passed pawns, etc., are far fewer than in the midgame (the phase I call “action”).  
Of course, there are infamous checkmate traps and tricks during openings, but learning them isn’t hard.  
Also, experienced players can often have nearly identical experiences during the first 5 moves of a game.

After that, both players inevitably drift from familiar board setups, and the real game begins.  
According to research, the highest heart rate and sweat levels occur in the midgame because that’s when complexity peaks.

In the endgame, due to the nature of having fewer pieces on the board, there are fewer variables to calculate, and at a certain point, continuing to calculate becomes meaningless.  
(For example, once a passed pawn is promoted to a queen without being sacrificed, unless a blatant blunder is made, the game is essentially won.)

But in the midgame, there’s a constant clash between long-term strategies and short-term tactics.  
Ideas like gaining an advantageous position through sacrifices, threats and counter-threats, deceptive traps disguised as mistakes—these all abound.  
A skilled player often “toys with” a player trying to simplify the board due to their inability to calculate the chaos.

And that’s exactly what makes chess beautiful. The complexity is created intentionally by the players.  
What makes a game strategic is the ability to see what the opponent cannot amid this chaos and turn it into an advantage.

Taking all the above into account, the core of the game I designed is complexity born out of simple rules.

Game Objective and Core Mechanics

Before the game begins, every player is given an equal amount of money (10 to 20 units is sufficient—more or less is allowed but could cause the game to end too quickly or drag on too long).  
The objective for each player is simple: Take all the other players’ money. In other words, there’s only one winner.

The in-game currency can be anything—marbles, mints, coins, Q-tips, pinecones, etc.

The rules (or "mechanics" if we want to sound fancy) of the game can be roughly split into two categories:

1. **Card Mechanics** – determine the value of players' hands
2. **Betting Mechanics** – govern how players win or lose money

**Note:**

When written out, these rules may seem quite complex. If you have trouble understanding them, don’t give up—the examples at the end of the document should make everything clear.

Card Mechanics

This section explains how the cards in a player's hand correspond to numerical values.  
This part is almost entirely inspired by the game of Blackjack.

* All numbered cards have their face value.
* Face cards (J, Q, K) are worth 10.
* Aces are worth either 1 or 11, depending on the player’s choice.
* If the total value exceeds 21, the hand is considered worth 0.
* During a round, a player can draw as many cards as they like, all face-down.
* The “5-card Charlie” rule—often disliked by casinos—is valid here.  
  If a player has five cards totaling 21 or less, their hand is considered 21.  
  (In Blackjack, this usually results in an automatic win, which isn't possible here.)

At the end of the round, all hands are discarded into a "trash deck."  
If the main deck runs low, the trash deck is shuffled back in.

**Examples**:

* 8 + 8 + 5 = 21
* J + 9 = 19
* 5 + Q + 8 = 0
* 4 + 3 + 4 + 6 + A = 21 (because of 5-card rule)

Betting Mechanics

At the start of each round—before cards are dealt—each player places a **blind bet** into the center (also called the pot).  
This blind bet equals 1/5 of their starting money.

Then each player is dealt two cards: one face-up, one face-down.

From this point on, each player may raise the pot **as long as**:

1. The maximum bet increase hasn’t been reached.
2. The raise is affordable by the poorest player still in the game.

Every player who wants to continue the round must match the raised bet (i.e., place the same amount of money as the raise into the pot). Otherwise, they are considered folded and lose all the money they had placed for that round.

The maximum bet raise represents the highest amount a single player can contribute to the pot during that round. This amount is half of the starting money.

I understand that these rules can be confusing and difficult to follow in written form, which is why I think it’s best to explain them with examples.

In the examples, the starting money is 10.

Other Rules

Let’s assume there is no unseen bet in the pot. If all players continuing in the round neither want to draw cards nor raise the bet (this can be simply shown with a thumbs-up gesture), the round ends and everyone reveals their cards. We’ll call this gesture a green light. In simple terms, it means “I’m ready and willing to reveal my cards.”

The player with the highest hand value takes the pot. If multiple players have the same highest hand value, the pot is evenly split between them. If the pot can't be split evenly, the remainder stays in the pot for the next round.

A player cannot draw more than 3 cards in a single round.

If a player decides to draw a card, they must take the card once they see it. They cannot look and put it back.

A player who folds may place their cards face down in the discard pile. If all players but one have folded, the remaining player also has the right to keep their hand hidden.

If the game is taking too long, the blind bet rate may be increased with the unanimous decision of the remaining players.

The one open card dealt to each player must remain visible to all as long as the player has not folded.

Players may reveal any of their cards before the round ends, provided at least one card remains hidden. (The aim here is psychological manipulation. For players with good memory, this tactic often backfires by giving the opponent more information about the deck.)

Example 1:

Round 1

Players A and B are starting a new game. Both put 2 as blind bets.

A -> 8 B -> 8 Pot -> 4

A's cards are 10 and 9. B's cards are J and 8.

A -> 10, 9 B -> J, 8

Player B gives a green light. Player A raises the bet by 2. Player B matches the raise.

A -> 6 B -> 6 Pot -> 8

Player A gives a green light. Player B also gives a green light, and cards are revealed. Player A wins the pot.

A -> 14 B -> 6 Pot -> 0

Round 2

Both players place their blind bets.

A -> 12 B -> 4 Pot -> 4

Cards are dealt. A gets K and 7, B gets 9 and 6.

Player A draws a card and gets 8.

A -> K, 7, 8 B -> 9, 6

A gives green light. B also gives green light. Cards are revealed, and B wins.

A -> 12 B -> 8 Pot -> 0

Round 3 (Bluff Example)

A and B place blind bets and cards are dealt.

A -> 10 B -> 6 Pot -> 4

A -> 10, 8 B -> 8, 9

B draws a card and gets 6. Since 8+9+6 = 23 (exceeds 21), B’s hand value is 0.

However, A doesn’t know this. Only B’s first card, 8, is visible. B tries to bluff by placing the maximum raise of 5 (10/2) into the pot.

A -> 10 B -> 1 Pot -> 9 (5 unseen by A)

A thinks B must have a strong hand and folds to avoid losing more.

But if A had called the bet, he would have won the round.

A -> 10 B -> 10 Pot -> 0

Round 4 (Failed Bluff Example)

A and B place blind bets and cards are dealt.

A -> 8 B -> 8 Pot -> 4

A -> 9, J B -> 10, 3

B draws a 9.

A -> 9, J B -> 10, 3, 9

B tries to bluff again and raises by 4.

A -> 8 B -> 4 Pot -> 8 (4 unseen by B)

Only a 21 can beat A’s hand, so he matches the bet.

A -> 4 B -> 4 Pot -> 12

Then B gives a green light. A senses the bluff from B’s body language and raises by 1 (can't raise more than 5).

A -> 3 B -> 4 Pot -> 13 (1 unseen by B)

B’s plan fails and folds to avoid further loss.

A -> 16 B -> 4 Pot -> 0

Round 5 (5-Card Game)

A and B place blind bets and cards are dealt.

A -> 14 B -> 2 Pot -> 4

A -> 4, 4 B -> 5, 2

A draws a 10 and seeing this, raises the bet by 2.

A -> 4, 4, 10 B -> 5, 2

A -> 12 B -> 2 Pot -> 6 (2 unseen by B)

Before deciding to match the bet, B draws a card:

A -> 4, 4, 10 B -> 5, 2, A

B draws again:

A -> 4, 4, 10 B -> 5, 2, A, 3

B draws again:

A -> 4, 4, 10 B -> 5, 2, A, 3, 5

Even though B’s numerical value is 16, they have 5 cards without exceeding 21, so the hand value is 21. B calls the 2 raise.

A -> 12 B -> 0 Pot -> 8

A wants to raise but B has no money left. Both give green lights, and B wins when cards are revealed.

A -> 12 B -> 8 Pot -> 0