



Design Document for:

The Watcher's Game

I Challenge You to a Duel!

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Design Overview

Game Concept Summary

The Watcher’s Game is an action rogue-like, card-based dungeon crawler. The game follows a group of unfortunate adventurers trapped in a dungeon. In order to escape the dungeon, the adventurers must fight through floors of enemies spawned by the Watcher, by using cards they draw from their deck. As they progress through the dungeon, players also grow stronger in typical rogue-like fashion, until they reach the Watcher in a final showdown.

Design Goals

Goal #1: The Card Game Feeling

The core idea of this game is, “How can I make a traditional turn-based card game in a fast-paced action setting?” Outside of turn-based card games, many games have used cards as a visual element, but when I played those games, I never really felt like I was playing with cards. So, what makes something feel like a card game? In my opinion, the most important mechanic of a card game is drawing cards. This is one of the most basic mechanics of a card game. What makes cards games so special is the fact that you are constantly pulling new opportunities, or disadvantages, from your deck, and the randomness keeps you on your toes, constantly adjusting your strategy or approach to the current obstacles.

Goal #2: A Duel

One of the most popular card game genres is the competitive collectable card game genre. I thought replicating the feeling of a duel would be a great homage to that card game genre. This idea led to the question, “How can I make the player feel like they are dueling against the computer, while still playing like a dungeon crawler?” Dungeon crawling is basically just fighting against hordes of enemies as you clear rooms. The solution I had was to have this main antagonistic enemy that the player would essentially be dueling with, and have that enemy be the one summoning all the enemies. This was where the idea of “The Watcher” came from. In order for the player to feel like they are actually dueling this Watcher, however, the player has to feel like they are meaningfully interacting with them. The Watcher playing cards just like the player and being bound to similar rules is one way to make it feel like a duel. Another option is the make player card effects directly affect the Watcher’s ability to play cards in various ways.

Goal #3: Deckbuilding and Build Experimentation

One of the beautiful things about card games is the amount of creativity, skill, and strategy that can be expressed simply through the deckbuilding. Deckbuilding allows for many different kinds of builds for many different kinds of players. I want to encourage deckbuilding as much as possible by rewarding experimentation. The rogue-like genre is a perfect fit, as it forces the player to build a new deck every single run through the game. Rogue-like deck builders are also better for a general audience. Many people may be intimidated by deckbuilding because of all the different choices of cards they can put into their deck. Rogue-like deck builders help with this challenge because rather than having to build a deck from scratch, these deck builders usually give the player a simple starting deck and simplifies deckbuilding into a question of addition or subtraction. Making the game into a rogue-like isn’t the complete answer to this goal. When players discover a build that they like, they tend to focus only on that build, completely ignoring other builds that they believe to be less powerful or effective. This is just how some people enjoy their games, but I would like to promote the exploration of new builds. Therefore, I have to both encourage players to experiment with unique builds while also not punishing players for wanting to play the same thing over and over again.

Goal #4: Development Intent

This game is intended for PC, and potentially mobile, because the main way players will play cards will be by mouse. This would be difficult to do with a controller especially in a fast-paced setting while also having to move around at the same time, but mobile has the option of touchscreen. Because this is intended to be an indie title with 3D cartoon-y graphics, the game will also be developed on Unity. I would definitely need player feedback during development especially since the emergent possibilities of all the different card and Trinket combinations would require a lot of testing, so I plan to open up a Discord server and open the game up to groups of beta testers. Maintaining a Discord server would also help with building a community and hype around the game, both very important things for any game’s release. Finally, the game’s intended audience is aimed towards a more experienced gamer who has some familiarity with collectible card games.

Design Iterations

This game concept has gone through a few changes, but it is still in development. Naturally, as more playtests are conducted and the game goes through more iterations, some aspects will be changed, added, or removed entirely to better fit the design goals as well as the overall gameplay experience. Below documents key points in the concept’s development.

Version 0.10 (Original Concept)

The original idea was heavily inspired by *Wizard of Legend* from Contingent99. The arcana, which are what the characters use to cast spells, are pretty much cards. This is what got me thinking, “What if there was a game like *Wizard of Legend*, but instead you were actually playing with cards?” So, the original concept was just *Wizard of Legend*, but you draw your spells from a deck of cards.

Version 0.11

At this point, I was just spit balling ideas of how I could implement card game mechanics into a fast-paced dungeon crawler. I carried many of these ideas over into alternate playable characters because I thought that these mechanics might be fun, but a little too complex to start with. At the time I liked the idea of cards having durability because I was still attached to *Wizard of Legend*, where the player would constantly be casting the same spells over and over. These were some of my ideas:

- How will the player to draw new cards?
 - Shuffle hand after every floor
 - Drawing after a certain amount of enemy kills
 - Cards have durability and automatically swap out once used up (this idea inspired the Tinkerer character)
 - Simply draw a new card every few seconds (this was the winner)
- How will the player generate the resource to play cards?
 - Player starts at 1 energy and once it’s used up, they gain 1 max energy and fully regenerate it, just like a lot of competitive card games (this inspired the Sage character)
 - Player gains energy by attacking enemies (this inspired the Rogue character)
 - Simply regenerate energy over time (this was also the winner)

Version 0.20

After careful consideration over all the different possibilities, I finally decided on the game’s core mechanics. These basic core mechanics are currently what I am still using.

I also had developed the idea of the Watcher a little more, which opened up the opportunity for the game to also be played as an asymmetrical multiplayer game. Along with the development of the Watcher, I also solidified more of the theme and aesthetic of the game. I was thinking about adding more meta progression and upgrades if just unlocking things wouldn’t feel impactful enough.

Version 0.30

The Adventurers can no longer summon units, at least by default. Units were just too powerful for preventing the Watcher to interact with the Adventurer. A few mechanics need to be changed as a result.

- For now, Diamond cards are just no longer playable.
 - The Watcher automatically summons units in waves. This change prevents the Watcher from stalling and gives the Adventurer a more direct goal of defeating all the enemies.
- A few Spade cards have been added for the Adventurers that directly affect the Watcher’s ability to play cards. Although cards like this were described in the Design Goals section, none were actually designed. This change intends to fix the oversight.

Game Mechanics

Initialization

The player can choose one character of the adventurers to play as. Each character changes one of the fundamental mechanics of the game (more in Characters section). Each character has their own starting deck that compliments their general playstyle.

Combat Mechanics

The game’s dungeon map is split up into floors and every floor must be completed before moving on to the next one. Depending on the character the player chooses, some mechanics may differ, but this part will describe the mechanics of the player’s first and most basic playable character:

- On combat floors, the Adventurer begins by drawing 5 cards from their deck. An additional card will be drawn every 4 seconds. Players can hold a maximum of 10 cards in hand.
- Both the Adventurer and Watcher will passively generate Energy at the rate of 1 every 2 seconds. Energy is what players use to play cards. Players can have a maximum of 10 Energy at a time.
 - When a card is used, it goes into the discard pile. The cards from the discard pile will shuffle back into the deck after the deck is depleted. At the end of every combat, both the hand and the discard pile will be shuffled back into the deck.
- Every combat floor, once the Adventurer defeats all the enemies the Watcher spawns, they move to the next floor.
- If the Adventurer dies, they have to start again from the beginning, losing resources collected on the way.
 - A new dungeon layout is procedurally generated every time the player starts a new run.

Cards:

- Cards can generally do the following: Deal damage, provide support actions, or apply negative effects and manipulate enemies.
- There will be a few seconds at the beginning of each floor where nothing happens so that players can process the cards in their hand.

The Watcher:

- The Watcher’s hand: Starts with 4 cards in hand for each combat, increasing by 1 every few floors. The Watcher does not naturally draw new cards. The Adventurer cannot see the cards in the Watcher’s hand.
 - The Watcher has 2 different decks, but every floor, the Watcher swaps their deck. One deck focuses on a faster playstyle, while the other focuses on a slower one.
- The Watcher will play cards against the player as they gain enough Energy to do so.
 - Once they play all their cards, they can continue playing using a premade Hazards deck until the next floor.
- The Watcher has their own unique set of cards. They will also add cards to their deck as the game goes on.
- The Watcher summons 1-3 waves of enemies. Every wave, the watcher draws a new hand of cards.
- Summoned enemies will have predictable movement and attack patterns.
- The Adventurer has to move around to avoid the Watcher’s cards and their summons’ attacks.
- Some floors will be boss floors. On these floors, the Watcher will gain an additional, special Boss Card in their starting hand that will make the encounter significantly more difficult.

There is also an option for a multiplayer game mode where a second player can play as the Watcher. This will be an asymmetrical, two player PvP version of the game. The Watcher’s gameplay will have some differences from their single player version.

- The Watcher plays similar to the Adventurers, but now a second player will be controlling the Watcher with a goal of trying to defeat the Adventurers and prevent them from escaping the dungeon.
 - The Adventurers will still be played by the first player, and will still have the goal of trying to escape
- At the start of each run, the Watcher chooses 2 decks to start with from a few different starter decks, and each floor the Watcher will rotate between decks.
- While the Watcher has no summoned units on the field, if they spend more than 8 seconds without playing a card, the Adventurer can proceed to the next floor.
- These runs will not earn players meta currency.

Cards

Competitive card games generally have 4 main deck archetypes:

Aggro, which focuses on getting all their cards out as fast as possible to rush down the opponent.

Control, which focuses on slowing down or denying the opponent’s gameplan while stalling for their own high-value late game cards.

Midrange or Tempo, a sort of in between of Aggro and Control that can adapt well against those archetypes and generally works to slowly build momentum.

Combo, these decks can vary in speed, but they are mainly waiting for a specific combination of cards that when played together will quickly result in a victory.

Building around these archetypes and making sure that the game’s design allows for these types of decks will naturally help the game feel more like a turn-based card game.

One thing to note is that because the game is fast paced, card effects have to be simple so that the player knows what a card does right after they draw it. The designs of the cards should tell the player as much information as possible through visual indicators. The cards will borrow elements of poker cards. Different parts of the card will provide key information to the player about what it will do.

- As stated in the Gameplay Mechanics section, there are 4 different kinds of cards: Damage, summon, support, and debuff. These 4 card types correspond to the 4 suits of poker cards.
 - Damage corresponds to Clubs.
 - Summoning corresponds to Diamonds.
 - Support corresponds to Hearts.
 - Debuffs correspond to Spades.
- The numbers of the cards are the Energy cost and in the center of the card is a graphic that represents the card’s action. For example, a fireball card has a fireball on it, and a poison card has a vial of poison on it.
- Next to the graphic will be a range indicator so the player can tell at a glance where they can play the card
 - This is the main thing missing from the cards in Reference 1.
- There will also be descriptions of the card’s effects when the player inspects it. The player can also inspect cards in the middle of combat, which will slow down time for them to read it.



Reference 1 - [Poker Cards with Graphics](#)

Player Progression

Floors are connected by a branching map, similar to other dungeon crawling rogue-likes. After the event of the current floor is complete, the adventurers can move on to the next floor. There will be an option of 1-3 paths they can take. There are a few different types of floors that can appear:

- Combat floors, where Adventurers go up against the Watcher.
 - After combat, the Adventurer and the Watcher get to choose 1 of 3 cards to add to their deck. They can also skip the new card in exchange for some currency, Tokens.
- Shops, where Adventurers use Tokens to buy cards or Trinkets.
 - Trinkets provide unique buffs to the player and can encourage certain gameplay patterns and synergies.
 - The Watcher has a separate shop where they can only buy cards.
- Bars, where adventurers can heal or upgrade cards, appear less common than other floors, but always appears before the Boss floor.
- Event floors, where the Watcher sets up a random event, from special challenges to free gifts.
- Boss floors, where the Watcher temporarily gains a powerful Boss card to attempt to defeat the Adventurer. Boss floors will reward players with special Boss Trinkets that are more powerful than regular ones.
 - When defeated, The Watcher gets to choose 1 of 3 random Curses to apply to the Adventurer for the rest of the run.
- Figure 1, on the next page, is a flow chart of what one of the procedurally generated layouts may look like.
- Combat, shop, and event floors all appear at the same rate.
- As adventurers progress through the dungeon, they get stronger through the combination of new cards and Trinkets, but the Watcher also becomes stronger to match them.
 - The difficulty of a battle will become easier through mastery of game mechanics, game knowledge, and proper card plus Trinket synergies, while becoming harder as enemy strength and game complexity increases.

The dungeon will be split into 3 layers, with each layer having around 10-12 floors, including Boss floors.

Meta Progression

Players can unlock new content, like cards, trinkets, characters, and character skins by completing achievements. These achievements push players to try out specific playstyles and the resulting unlock will also complement that playstyle. The achievement unlocking system will also give players more of a reason to come back to the game, especially for the cosmetic character skins.

There will also be a separate progression system using a meta resource, Watcher’s Favor. Various actions throughout a run that please the Watcher will earn the player Watcher’s Favor. In multiplayer mode, players will not earn Watcher’s Favor to prevent them from farming free Favor. These actions include the following:

- Defeating a boss.
 - Clearing a combat or boss floor quickly.
 - Adding the player’s underused cards into the deck.
 - Completing achievements.
 - Completing certain event floors.
- Each character has extra abilities that can be unlocked by spending enough Watcher’s Favor.

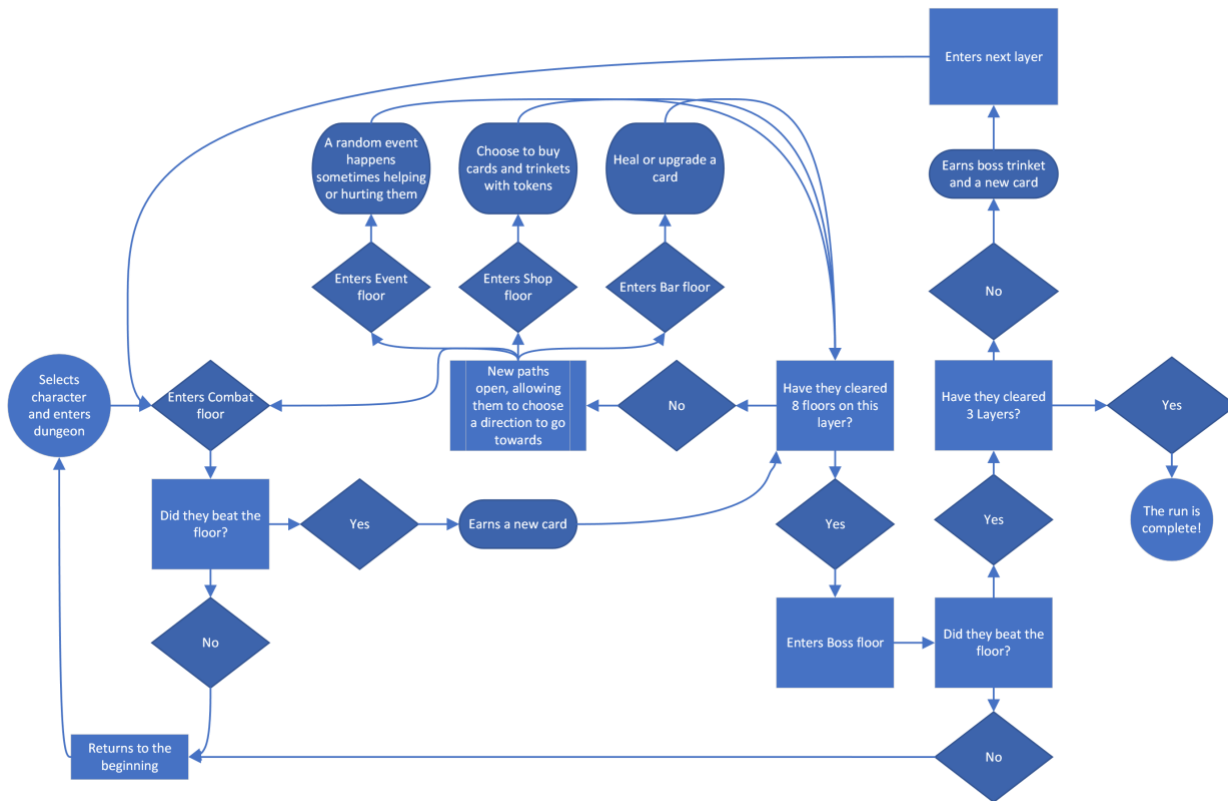


Figure 1 - Player Progression Flowchart

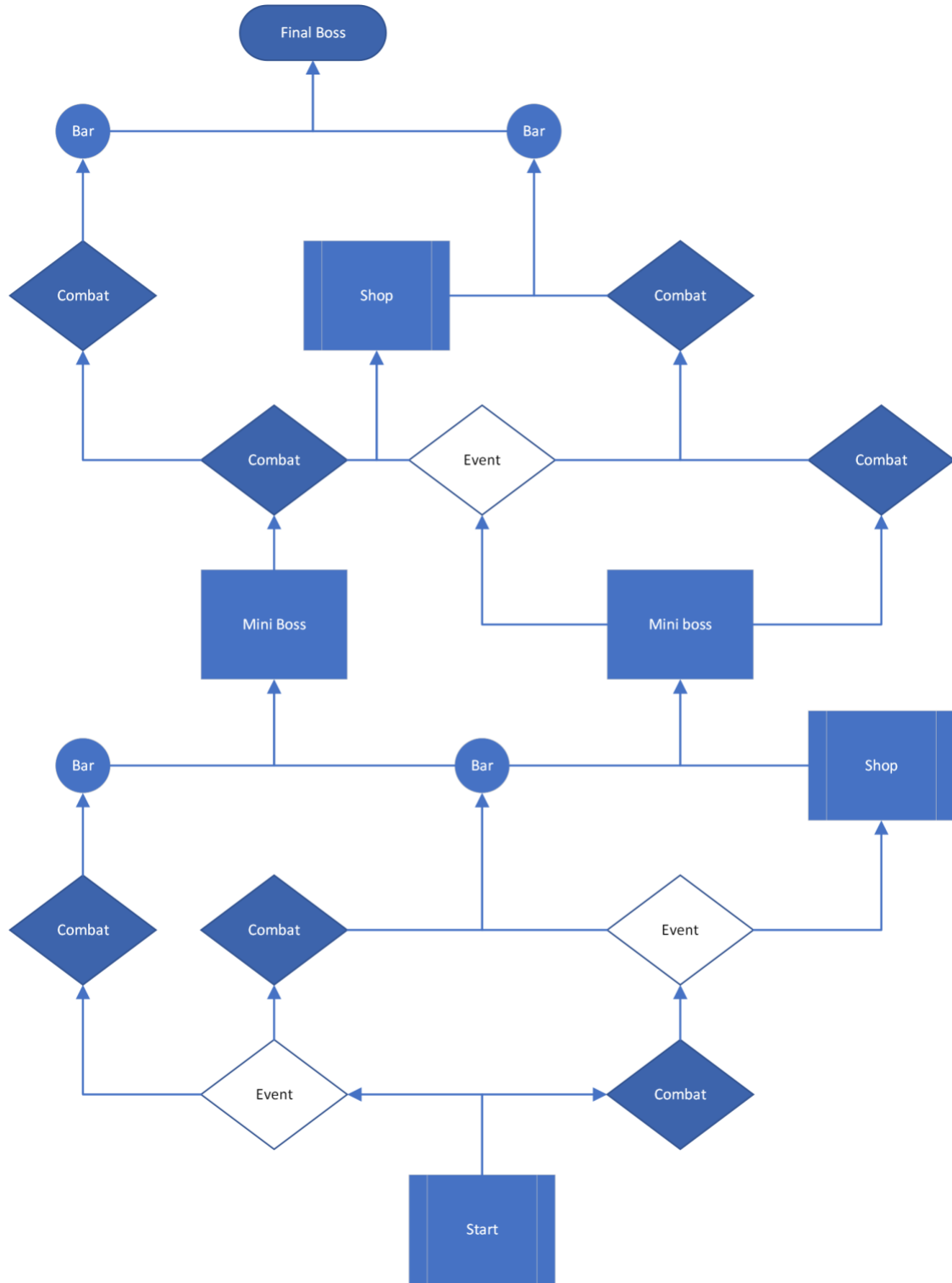


Figure 2 - Example flowchart of a procedurally generated map

The World

Art Style

The game will be in a 3D isometric perspective, and it will have a lighthearted cartoon-y art style. The images I chose for the reference photos all fit the style I am going for. A somewhat minimalist, clean, cartoon-y look with some casino themes like poker chips and low LED lighting. The theme is inspired by the game *Dandy Ace*, but this game is more focused on a casino or game show theme rather than a magic show one.

Every run, the Watcher gives the adventurer a custom map that guides them through the newly generated layout. This map takes the form of a crumpled-up brochure map that would look similar to Reference 2.



Reference 2 - [Minimalist Brochure Map](#)

Dungeon Layers

There are 3 different layers of the dungeon, in order to move on to each layer, adventurers must beat the final boss of the layer. The Watcher resides at the bottom of the dungeon, and since the only way for the adventurers to escape is to confront the Watcher, the adventurers have to descend down into the dungeon.

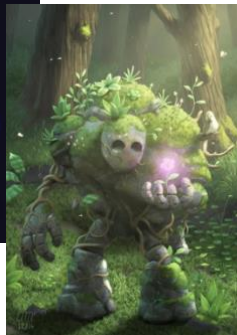
Layer 1

The first layer takes place in a traditional dungeon setting.

- The walls and floors of the rooms are made of stone and some vegetation or overgrowth scattered around
- Along the corners of the dungeon, there are neon light strips, and the doorways that lead to the bosses use a neon sign, hinting at the theme of the coming floor.
 - These decorations will also be out of place because, the game takes place in a traditional medieval fantasy setting. Adventurers may also comment on these strange decorations as they discover them.
- There is no sunlight, and the only light sources are from torches and the neon lights.
- Enemies that the Watcher spawns in this layer include:
 - Wisps
 - Golems
 - Goblins
 - Man-eating plants



Reference 4 - [Wisp](#)



Reference 5 - [Golem](#)



Reference 3 - [Dungeon](#)

Layer 2

The second layer takes place in a casino themed setting.

- The floors are covered with red carpet with walls covered in wallpaper.
- There main light source now are the neon lights giving the casino an unnatural blue atmosphere.
- Reference 6 shows what a bar would look like down in this layer, regular combat floors would still have the tables and slot machines, but mostly towards the sides of the room rather than in the middle.
- In this layer, the Watcher adds a few new enemies to their deck.
- Enemies that spawned in the previous layer are stronger and get a new look fitting the casino theme.

Reference 6 - [Casino Bar](#)



Reference 7 – Paper Mario TTYD, [Battling for an Audience](#)



Reference 8 - [The Stage](#)

Layer 3

The third and final layer takes place in a game show setting.

- Combat floors take place on a stage in front of a large audience filled with random enemy units.
 - Similar to the Paper Mario series, these enemies are just there for the atmosphere, they do not really attack adventurers.
- Spotlights now shine down on the stage, following the adventurer as well as any cards played by the Watcher.
- Compared to Reference 8, the combat stage will be much larger, and the stage would be mostly clear of props.

UI



Figure 3 - [Mockup of combat UI for version 0.20](#)

Above in Figure 3 is a general idea of what the game could look like. The mockup uses *Hades* by Supergiant Games as a reference for gameplay. In terms of art style, *Hades*’ is a bit darker and gloomier than what the game is going for and the rest of the UI elements are placeholder art, but they don’t exactly fit the art style mentioned in the previous section.

The mockup UI focuses on showing the main resources of the game: Cards, Energy, Health, Tokens, and Trinkets.

The player’s cards and Energy are the most important resources for the player to know about, because all of the player’s actions are based off of their current cards and Energy, so these two resources are right in the middle of the screen, big and clear for the player to see. The mockup also shows what it would look like while the player is selecting one of their cards. The selected card lifted so it can be seen more clearly, and the energy bar highlights the amount of energy needed to play the card, three, in this case. Additionally, there is a targeting indicator on the ground for the card. The player can also see the Watcher’s cards and Energy, but those are not as important as the player can just react to what’s being played. One of the Watcher’s hands will be there to physically play the cards.

The health, Token, Trinket indicators are simpler. These resources tell the player generally how they are doing. Health is there to let the player know how many more hits they can take until they lose the run. It’s a simple number right next to the cards so that everything the player needs to know for combat is in one place. The Tokens and Trinkets tell the player how strong their character is. These resources aren’t as dynamic as the other resources, and they also aren’t as important in combat. So, they are further away from the center so that there isn’t too much information cluttered in one area.

Characters

The characters the player can play as are unwitting Adventurers who stumble into the Watcher’s domain. Trapped in the Watcher’s dungeon, each adventurer must make the most of their unique abilities in order to escape. Following are the current playable characters.

The Apprentice: *A young eager scholar who is always ready to learn.*

They follow the standard game mechanics, but the bonuses they gain from the Watcher’s Favor that make the game more comfortable to play.

- Performs best with a midrange style deck.
- Watcher’s Favor: Makes various small improvements to their stats, such as faster card draw and increased HP.



Reference 9 - [Apprentice](#)



Reference 10 - [Tinkerer](#)

The Tinkerer: *A grouch old inventor who doesn’t like to give up on broken equipment.*

They can play a card multiple times (each card has a specific limit), but they will draw new cards much slower.

- Fits well decks that slowly accumulate value through multiple card usages.
- Watcher’s Favor: Can improve the effectiveness of cards already played.

The Assassin: *A quiet shadow who calculates every move.*

The Assassin has the unique ability to directly attack nearby enemies, regenerating Energy for themselves, however their passive energy regeneration is much lower than other adventurers. They must weave through enemies’ attacks to find the best moment to strike.

- Focuses on chaining cards together.
- Watcher’s Favor: Adds complexity to their deadly combos, such as increasing the effectiveness of cards played right after landing their attack.



Reference 11 - [Assassin](#)



Reference 12 - [Sage](#)

The Sage: *A patient master of time and Energy.*

This character is supposed to emulate a turn-based card game more closely. Instead of regenerating Energy over time, the Sage begins with 2 maximum Energy, forcing the same conditions on the Watcher. The Sage and the Watcher act in turns. The Sage can either use up all of their Energy, or “pass,” giving their turn to the Watcher where they do the same. Once the Watcher’s turn is over, the Sage and the Watcher both gain 1 maximum Energy and fully regenerate their Energy, up to a max of 10 Energy. Basic Enemies will still act normally.

- The Sage is versatile and can support decks of many archetypes.
- Watcher’s Favor: Gains more ways to manipulate her cards and Energy, for example, storing extra Energy or drawing extra cards when passing with extra Energy left.



Reference 13 - [Gambler](#)

The Gambler: *An overexcitable thrill seeker who always lives in the moment.*

Instead of drawing a card every few seconds, the Gambler throws away their whole hand after 6 seconds and draws 4 new cards.

- They specialize in heavily aggressive decks that want to get as many cards out as fast as possible.
- Watcher’s Favor: Adds additional goals for the Gambler to hit in every hand, such as using every card in hand for more card draw.

The Trickster: *An unpredictable mischievous prankster.*

The Trickster likes to swap around the positions of cards in their hand, applying various effects to them depending on their position, for example, drawing an additional card in return for discarding the first card in hand.

- The Trickster constantly generates value through random cards while also enjoying disrupting the Watcher’s actions.
- Watcher’s Favor: Add more effects to cards in hand based on their position, for example, swapping the last card in hand for one of the Watcher’s.



Reference 14 - [Trickster](#)



Figure 4 - [The Watcher's Neutral Form](#)

The Watcher, the titular antagonist

of the game, is a sort of multi-versal trickster spirit who enjoys playing with people for their own entertainment. To them, the Adventurers are like toys. Inspired by this common villain splash art pose, the main design element of this character is their giant hands. The Watcher uses these hands to physically play their cards. The Watcher is also almost always smiling, enjoying the misfortune of the Adventurers. However, the Watcher is a somewhat honorable character. They will always play by the rules, and if an Adventurer defeats them, they will let them free.



Figure 5 - [The Watcher's Casino Form](#)

When players reach the second layer of the dungeon, the Watcher puts on a costume reminiscent of a magician’s outfit (Figure 7) matching with the layer’s theme.

Image Sources

In order of appearance

Reference 1, Poker Card with Graphics from [Pinterest](#)

Reference 2, Minimalist Brochure Map by [Rowena Leanne](#)

Reference 3, Dungeon by [Roman Klčo](#)

Reference 4, Wisp by [Zestydoesthings](#)

Reference 5, Golem by [AndrewMcIntoshArt](#)

Reference 6, Casino Bar from [freepik](#)

Reference 7, Battling for an Audience from [Super Mario Wiki](#)

Reference 8, The Stage by [KhtulhuLot](#)

Figure 3, Mockup of combat UI

A screenshot of gameplay from [Hades](#)

Backpack Icon from [PinClipart](#)

Master Hand from [SmashWiki!](#)

Energy Bar from [Slynryd](#)

Heart from [Wallpapers Quality](#)

Playing Card Back from [Free Stock Photos](#)

Poker Chip from [PinClipart](#)

Reference 9, Apprentice by [Mingjue H. Chen](#)

Reference 10, Tinkerer by [Jason Nguyen](#)

Reference 11, Assassin from [Tabletop Gaming Resources](#)

Reference 12, Sage from [Pinterest](#)

Reference 13, Gambler by [Nuare Studios](#)

Reference 14, Trickster by [Nika Kuznetsova](#)

Figure 4 and 5, The Watcher

Mad Cat from [Pinterest](#)

Top Hat from [Clipart Library](#)

Bow Tie from [Clipart Best](#)