

# **Five Card Draw War: The “Poker?! I Hardly Know Her” Approach to War**

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Sep 6, 2021

## **Abstract:**

This paper analyzes the traditional card game War to highlight flaws and weaknesses from a game design perspective then proposes a modification to improve the gameplay. The proposed solution takes inspiration from a classic poker game, Five Card Draw.

## **Proposed Modification:**

### **The Goal:**

The goal is to be the first player to win all 52 cards.

### **The Setup:**

Divided the deck evenly between both players.

### **The Gameplay:**

Each player draws 5 cards from their own deck.

Each player discards their desired number of cards (0-5) face down into their discard pile, then draws cards equal to the number of cards they discarded from their deck.

Once each player has discarded and drawn, the hands are revealed whichever hand has the higher poker ranking wins all of the cards from both hands and places these cards facedown in their discard pile.

In the event of a tie (both hands have the same poker ranking), players draw and make hands again, the winner takes cards from both rounds.

Repeat until all cards are owned by a single player.

If there are no cards left in your deck, shuffle your discard pile, this is now your deck.

If, when drawing your initial hand, you have less than 5 cards, finish drawing your hand from your opponents' deck.

If you have no cards to draw during the discard phase, discard your desired cards into your opponents discard pile and redraw that many from your opponents deck.

2's are wild cards: 2's can count as any card of any suit you would like.

# Poker Hand Rankings



Royal Flush



Straight Flush



Four Of A Kind



Full House



Flush



Straight



Three Of A Kind



Two Pair



One Pair



High Card



## Design Processes:

My Initial thought in my design process was to work with the game Tic Tac Toe. I was recently hanging out with my cousins' kids and one day they played a lot of it. We were camping so we didn't have a piece of paper to play on so we were playing on the end of an upturned log with pieces of bark or stone, I liked how the tactile aspect of the board lived up to the "Tac" in its name. I was thinking of different surfaces one could play on and if they even had to be on a relatively flat face, what if it could be played on a sphere? For a few days I prototyped different layouts with a sharpie and a pingpong ball, but I eventually came to the conclusion that the modifications wouldn't necessarily improve on the faults of tic tac toe. It was still fun to play, however I think most of that enjoyment could be contributed to it being a new game and a different way of thinking. So I decided to pivot to War, because I used to play it a lot when I was younger and the aspects of the game that could be improved upon are more apparent.

The card game War at its core is an extensively simple game. Players flip the top card of their decks, whoever flips the higher face valued card wins both cards. It is hard to imagine how an elementary game has become such a staple in many people's lives. War is an easy game to learn, by virtue of its simplicity, allowing the game to be accessible to a younger audience.

For more advanced gamers however, War falls a bit short in enjoyment. The primary reason for this is a lack of choice for each player. There is only a single action a player can take, completely absent of choice, strategy or thought. The gameplay can be long, feel extraneous, and after the conclusion of the game, as a player I don't feel like I have bested my opponent, I simply feel I got lucky. This is not the only emotion I like to have when I win a game.

War teaches one concept that is fundamental in many games, cards have different values, and some are valued higher than others. In this same vein I wanted the modification to also include a fundamental feature of other card games. I thought it would be interesting to include the poker hand ranking system within the modification.

With this in mind the first iteration in complexity would be to have each player flip over the top 5 cards and whoever had the better poker hand would get the pile. Compared to original War, there is a lot more variation in play, the power doesn't just rest with the aces and face cards, but each card can win provided the right combination of cards. This version of war however still does not allow the player any choice, and by extension thought.

To address this issue, I looked at how different versions of poker manipulate hands. My family every once and a while would have a poker night, my favorite version that we would play is 5 Card Draw, where after everyone has drawn their hand they can discard and redraw cards to improve upon their hand. This small rule change means that each round a player's decisions actually matter and have effect on the outcome of the duel. Each player already has a deck in War so the second iteration had players draw five cards, then discard any number of cards into their own discard pile, and redraw the same number of discarded cards. After this phase both players would reveal their hands, just as before, and the player with the better poker hand would win the cards from both hands and place them into their discard pile.

This version played fairly well, certainly was more engaging than the original War. There was a bit of awkwardness when a player got close to losing the game, they may not have enough cards in their deck or discard pile, to make a full 5 card hand, or they might not have enough to discard and redraw. To combat this and add a little bit of spice, I thought well maybe

you discard and redraw to and from your opponents cards, kind of like your opponent is the dealer in a poker game. This way it normalizes drawing cards from your opponents deck, so on edge cases such as you don't have enough cards to fill your hand, you can just fill it up with your opponents cards. Discarding your opponents discard pile also allows for a little bit more strategy when choosing your hand, maybe you choose to hold onto a prized ace even though discarding it has a better probability of you winning the hand. I was really leaning strongly toward this alteration for at least a whole day, until I noticed some things that I didn't really like. For one this lengthens the game, if a player was just drawing from their own deck once they got down to 5 cards that was there hand, they were not allowed to discard, a little bit anticlimactic, but the game should end at some point. I also didn't like that both players were drawing from both decks each round, It meant that it actually didn't add that much spice to the game, in regards to holding a card to keep in your deck, because both decks were being drawn from by both players.

To compromise these two options, in the final version, players discard and draw from their own decks, unless they can not. If players can not draw from their own deck, they draw from their opponents deck. This allows for an exciting end while not punishing the leader too much, as well as creating a separation for the most of the two decks.

The feedback received was fairly universal. Play testers enjoyed the game and thought it was a vast improvement on the game war. Some players indicated that it is almost too simple and needed a little bit more spice. One tester brought up that they had played games with wild cards, and this might be a good addition. On the spot 2's were made to be a wild card, and the excitement and enjoyment visibly increased. It allows players to make strong hands more consistently, which feels good as a player and makes each hand more contentious and exciting.

