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CALINFERNO

Board Game Report

CART 215 : Introduction to Game Design

PRESENTED TO:

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DESIGN INTENTIONS

Inspiration

Freund initially prototyped the game inspired by the wildfire that occurred in California caused by a gender reveal bomb in 2020. With the traditional concept of "burning down cards" and this unfortunate occurrence, Freund came up with "Wildfires: A Card Game of Gender Reveals Gone Awry."

The game's first iteration contained four cards: grass, gender reveal bomb, fire, fire department, and baby. The game's mechanics consisted of starting, expanding, and transferring stacks to "burn down" your card pile, with each card having its specs.

Intentions/Expectations

After deciding to expand on Freund's game as a team, we focused on the main criticism that arose during the first playtest: the game's speed. Due to the game being a "Single Loser Game," as players finished their deck, the gameplay significantly slowed down and lost its thrill and intensity towards the end. Therefore, as a team, we decided adding more cards with different quirks would be feasible to maintain stable and fast gameplay. Meanwhile, we put importance on sticking to the wildfires theme. We intended to allow for various gameplay routes on top of what the initial prototype offered. Consequently, we chose to add more igniters (adding the Lightning Strike and the Drunk Cigarette), grass cards(Dry Grass), fire cards(Hellfire), and utility cards(Police and Lawsuit).

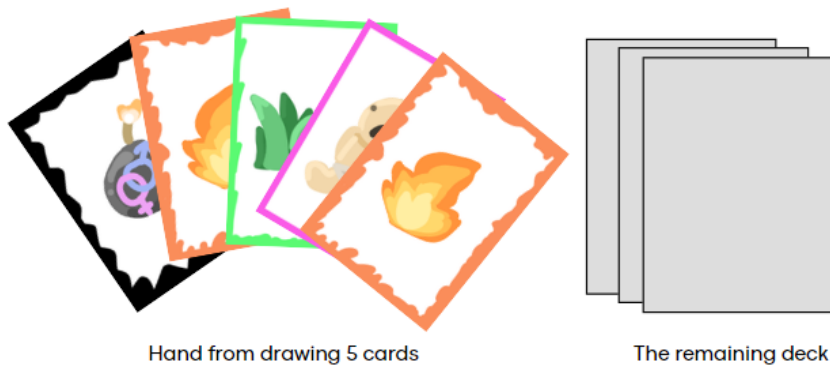
Besides utility cards, new cards follow the same functionality as the original cards but have unique behaviors that change the game loop. For example, lightning adds one more playable card per turn, and they can be played on top of each other. For drunk cigarettes, players could not extinguish the stack with the fire department, which forces players to keep playing on the stack. Playing the Hellfire card makes the player draw an extra card, and dry grass does not require an igniter card, etc.

Although we wanted to add diversions and different game loops while keeping the gameplay speed stable, we also emphasized keeping the original prototype's simplicity. However, inevitably, with the new cards and rules, simplicity suffered slightly. Therefore, we anticipated the players to ask questions and need clarification on their first test.

RULEBOOK

Set-Up

1. The 84 card deck is divided between **2-4 players**.
2. The players put down their decks face down and **draw 5 cards**.
3. All fuel type cards must be played. Refer to the **Card Guide** for details.
4. The player with the most cards **starts the game**.



Playing/Ending a Turn

Turns happen in order. Players start their turn by drawing one card from their own deck. Each player can place down up to three cards by default. The player can start a new pile by putting down a grass card or contributing to other piles. The player must play at least 1 card on their turn, unless no cards are available to play, in which their turn is passed. There are a few cards that have special rules that may affect the current turn. Therefore, please refer to the Card Guide.



Ending the Game

The goal of each player is to exhaust their deck. Therefore, the game ends when every player discards their pile. The winner is the first to empty their deck, while the player left with cards is the game's loser.

CARD GUIDE

Here are the details about how each type of card works.

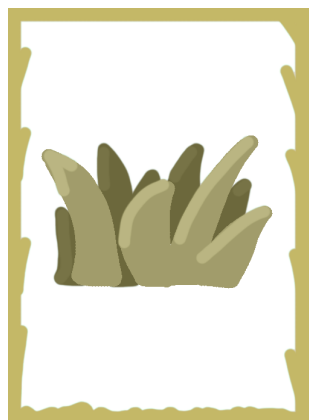
Fuel Cards

Cards that start the stack.



GRASS

Use: The grass card starts a stack and has to be ignited with an igniter card in order to stack fire cards on top.



DRY GRASS

Use: The dry grass card starts a stack; unlike the grass card, it does not need an igniter. The fire cards can be stacked directly onto dry grass cards.

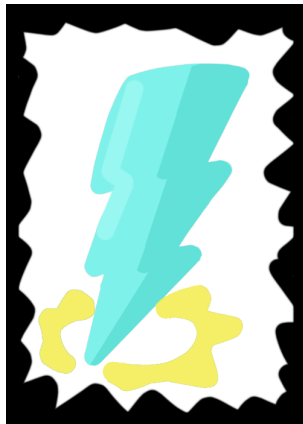
Igniter Cards

Cards that activate the stack.



GENDER REVEAL BOMB

Use: The gender reveal bomb is the default igniter that can be placed on grass to activate the stack. Players can only play this card once each pile.



LIGHTNING STRIKE

Use: The lightning strike can be placed on grass to activate the pile and stacked on the same pile multiple times. Every time players play this card, they get to play an extra card until it is extinguished.



DRUNK CIGARETTE

Use: The drunk cigarette can be placed on grass to activate the pile; however, the pile started with this card cannot be extinguished by the fire department. Players can only play this card once each pile.

Fire Cards

Cards that increase the size of a pile.



WILDFIRE

Use: Wildfire can be placed on top of an igniter and on itself.



HELLFIRE

Use: Hellfire can be placed on top of an igniter and on itself. If the player places a red fire on a pile they have to pull an extra card from their deck.

Extinguisher Cards

Cards that end the

pile.



BABY

Use: If a player plays the baby card on a pile, the pile ends. The player must pick up all the cards from the pile and add them to their hand. Then, the player should place the baby card aside on the table.



FIRE DEPARTMENT

Use: Likewise, the fire department ends the pile. However, it can only be placed on a fire card. The player can choose another player to give the finished pile. Then, the player should place the fire department card aside on the table.

Utility Cards

Cards that diversify the gameplay.



POLICE

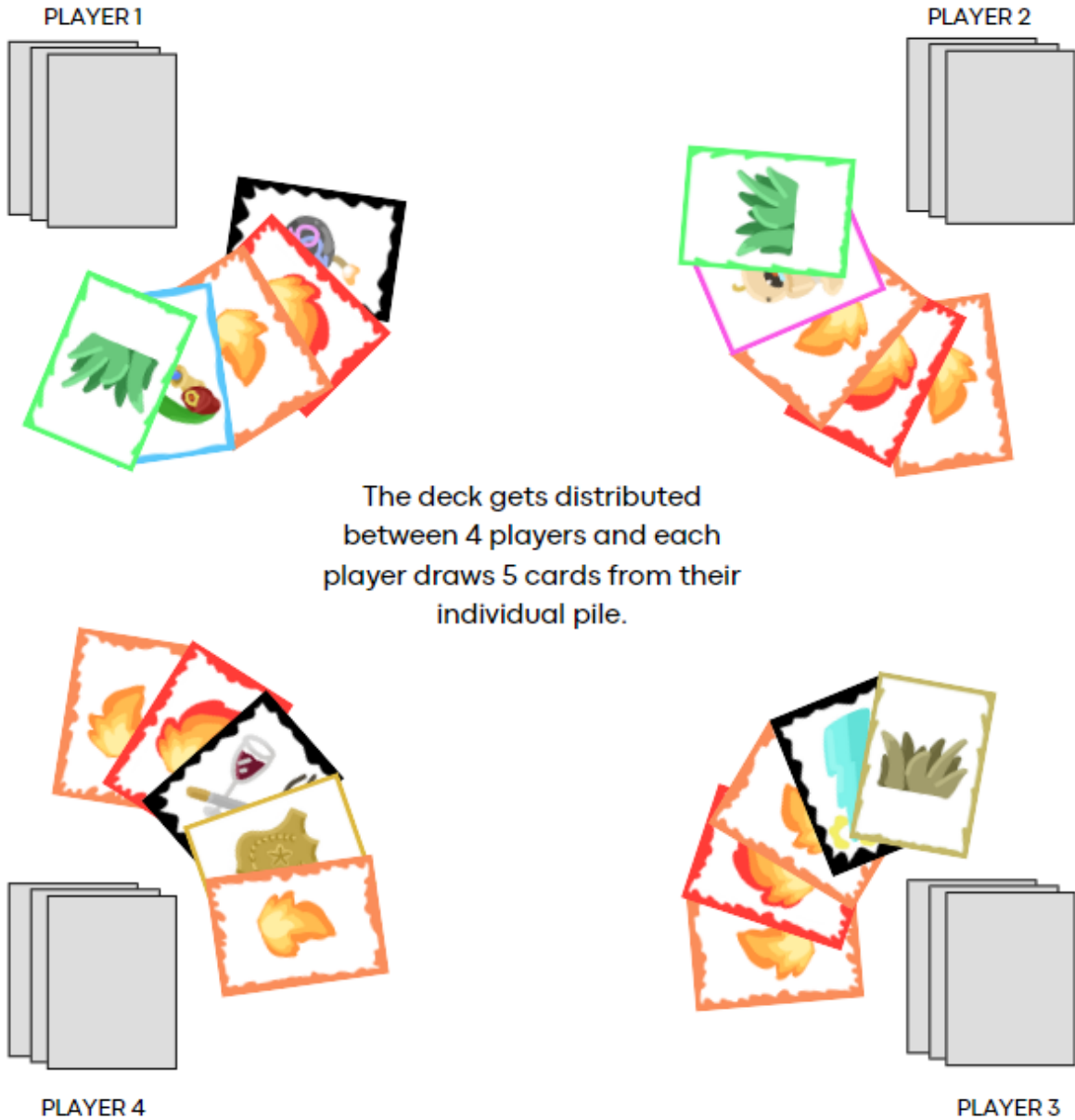
Use: The police card can be placed on any card and allows the player to block any players' turn. Then, the player should place the police card aside on the table.



LAWSUIT

Use: The lawsuit card can be placed on any card and allows the player to switch hands with another player. Then, the player should place the lawsuit card aside on the table.

EXAMPLE GAME CYCLE

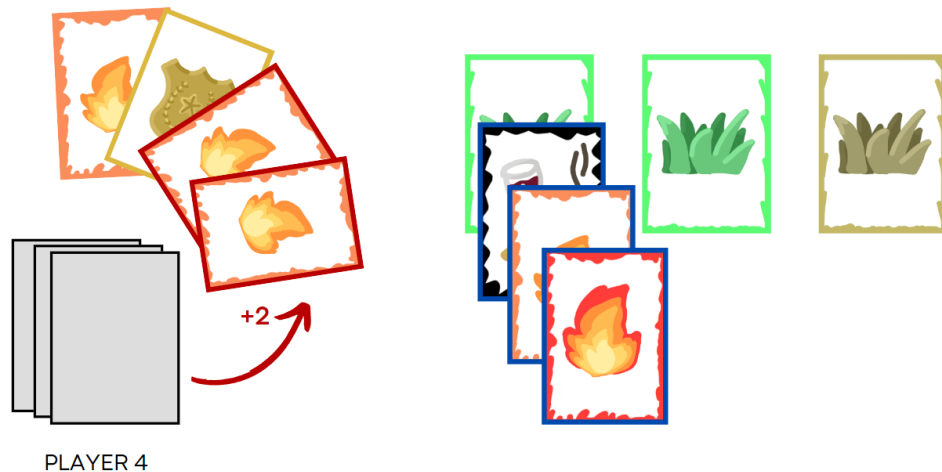


EXAMPLE GAME CYCLE

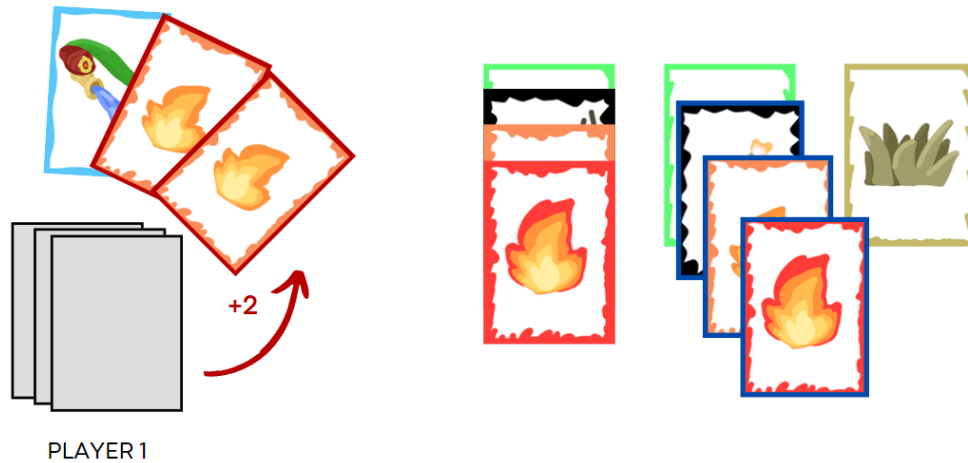
1. Players 1,2 and 3 have grass cards. Therefore, before starting the game, they place the grass cards down. Now, since player 4 has the most cards, they go first.



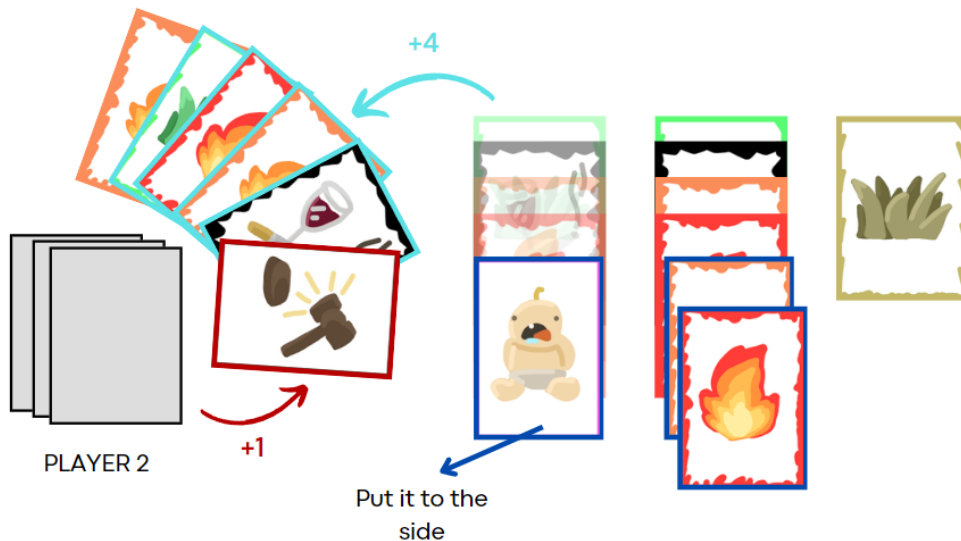
2. Player 4 starts by drawing a card from their deck. They place the Drunk Cigarette card to “ignite” a pile. Players cannot put out the corresponding pile since the player played the Drunk Cigarette card. They place a Wildfire card and a Hellfire card. They drew another card from their deck because they played a Hellfire card.



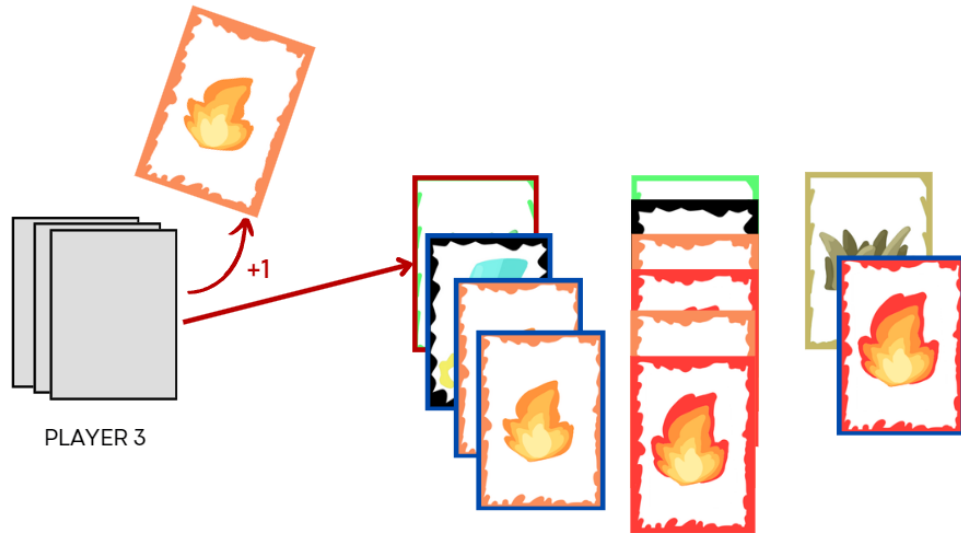
3. Player 1 draws a card and places the Gender Reveal Bomb on another pile. After, they place a Wildfire card and a Hellfire card. They drew another card from their deck because they played a Hellfire card.



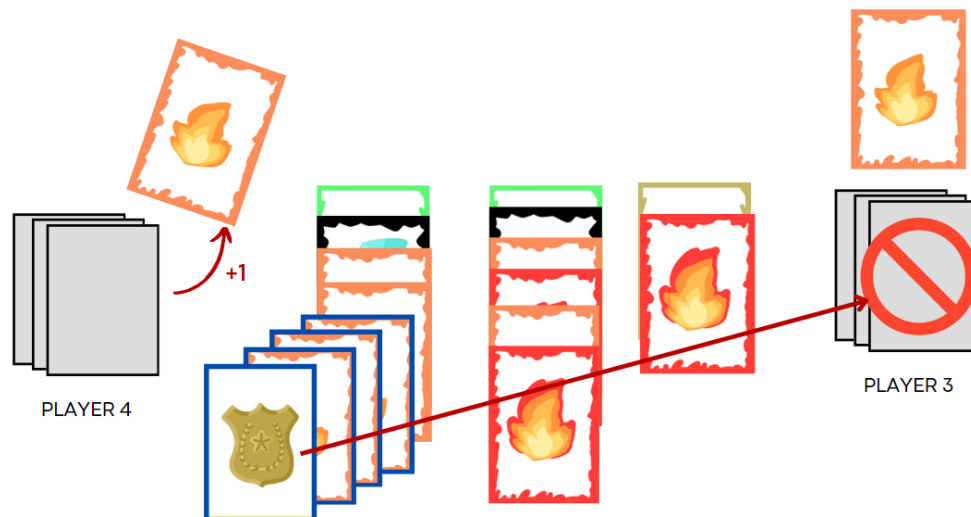
4. Player 2 draws a card, then places the Baby card on the first pile, resulting in them taking that pile. The baby card gets put to the side. Afterwards, they place a Wildfire card and a Hellfire card. They drew another card from their deck because they played a Hellfire card.



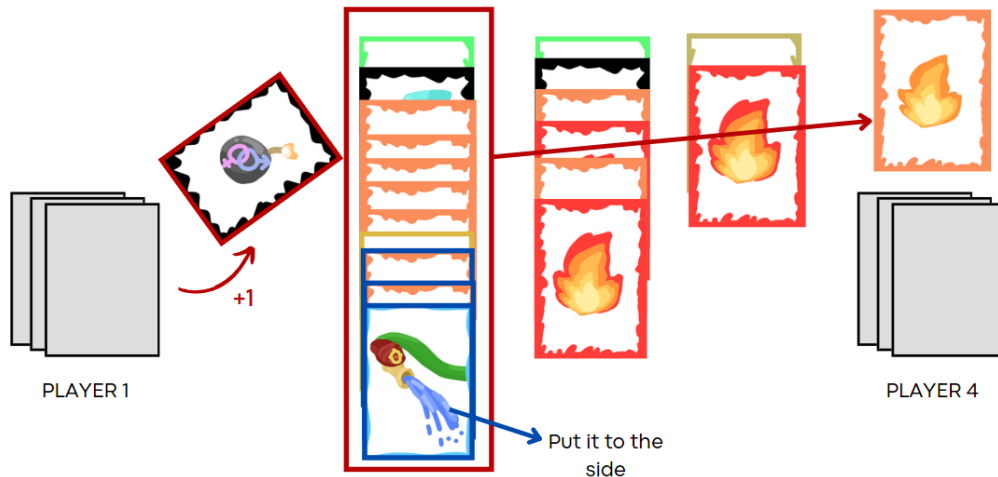
5. Player 3 draws a card. They draw a grass card and play it immediately. Then, they place a Lightning Strike card. Players are allowed to play 4 cards instead of 3. Afterward, they place 2 Wildfire cards and a Hellfire directly onto the dry grass card since dry grass does not require an igniter. They drew another card from their deck because they played a Hellfire card.



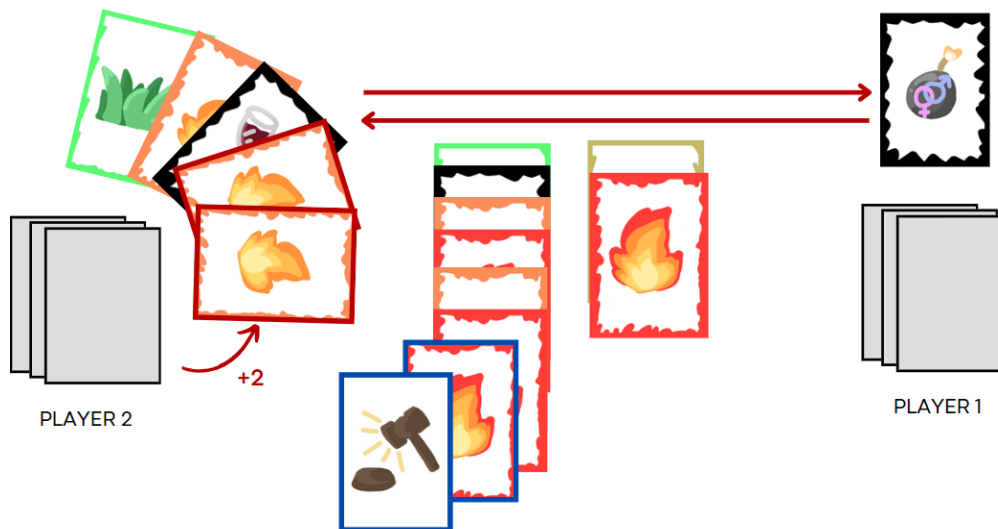
6. Player 4 draws a card. They place 3 Wildfire cards on a pile and then a Police card. They pick player 3 to block for the next round.



7. Player 1 draws a card. They place 2 Wildfires on a pile, then place the fire department card. They give the stack to Player 4 and put the Fire department card aside.



8. Player 2 draws a card. They place 1 Hellfire card. They draw another card from their deck because they played a Hellfire card. Then, they play the Lawsuit card and swap hands with Player 1.



9. Player 3 is blocked.
10. Turns continue until everyone burns down their individual piles. The first one to do so is the winner, and the last one the loser.

PLAYTEST ANALYSIS

Data Collected

The general consensus was that the game was fun but initially confusing. Almost all players noted the need for a practice round before they understood all of the game's mechanics, to which every mechanic needed to be explained. Once players understood the gameplay, they enjoyed the systems provided, such as the stacks of card functionality and the use of utility cards. Despite the learning curve, players noted the game as "simple" and "intuitive" and quickly picked up the mechanics.

Finally, the game was universally described as balanced, with every card having its niche and all feeling necessary to the gameplay. Any strong card was uncommon enough not to overturn the state of the game completely, such as the red fire or fire department cards.

Future Iterations

Based on the players' feedback, the game's mechanics and rulesets are well-catered and balanced and should not be changed. Our design intentions were well-received by the players regarding all the game's mechanics as balanced. All of the core experiences the players shared were ones we expected and hoped for, as the players' favorite moments came directly from intended mechanics, such as turning around a losing game with red fire or inviting friendly competition with the police and fire department cards.

The primary concern to address would be how to communicate the rules to new players faster and more efficiently. One way to address this issue would be to create a rulebook sheet, as seen in games such as Monopoly, that clearly defines all rules for the players to read at any time. This way, players needing clarification about the functionality of a card could consult the ruleset in between turns. To better convey the functions of the cards, they could be illustrated in their artwork. For instance, the red fire card can communicate that you must draw an additional card from your deck by having a +1 with a card icon.

Overall, while the game was well-received by players and met our design expectations, the need for a smoother introduction to the game was evident. Therefore, further iterations will benefit from keeping these rules akin. However, the cards and the rules need to be clarified with concise rulebook sheets and clear illustrations that visually aid comprehension.

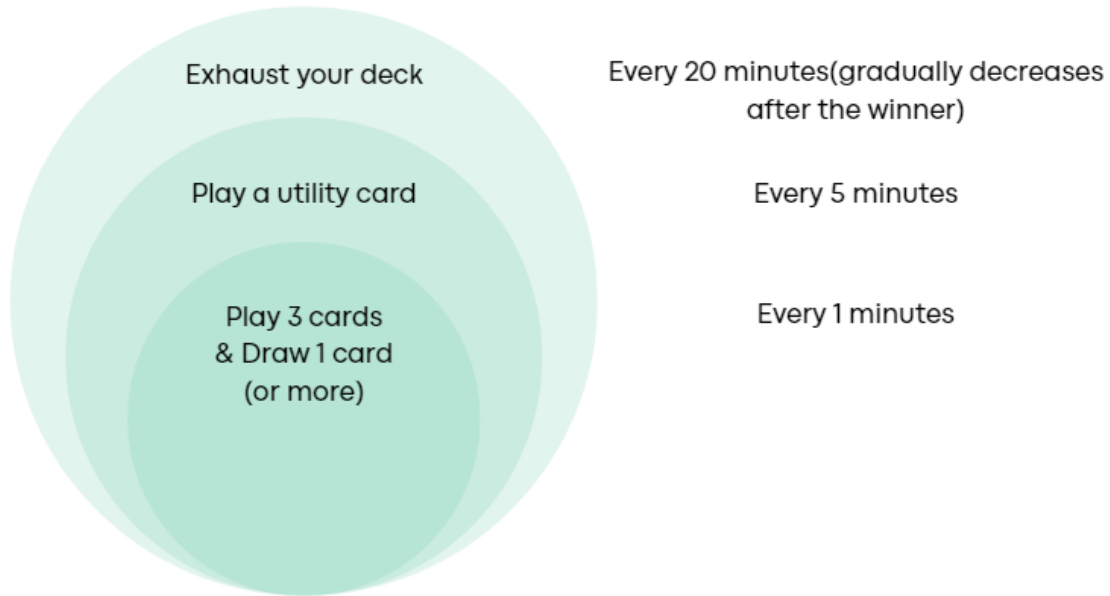
THEORY

QUESTIONNAIRE

1. We saw in class four general modes of player engagement: challenge, narrative, social, sensory. Considering how your game engages players, rank the four modes by importance, and for each describe its main “hooks” (it’s ok if there are none for some modes).
 - Social - The game provokes fun and friendly competition. Therefore, players find the most engagement in the social aspects of the game.
 - Challenge - The game encourages players to challenge each other by strategizing and scheming with the cards they have in their hand, as addressed in the social hook.
 - Narrative - The only narrative bits connect to the theme, such as using a baby card or gender reveal bomb. The theme might draw players to check out the game, but won’t hook the player in terms of gameplay.
 - Sensory - There are no sensory elements in the game, thus no hooks.
2. Identify and describe two key skills demanded by your game to its players.
 - All skills required are mental, as there is no physical strain and minimal social deception/cooperation needed. Players only need to exercise basic tactics, memorization of rules, and basic planning before taking their turns.
3. Identify and describe the two reward types you find the most motivating in your game.
 - The two most powerful rewards the game offers (other than the feeling of winning) are rewards of chance. The first is the feeling of being lucky and drawing/having the “right card for the job” to give you an advantage or turn your game around. The second is Schadenfreude, where players will feel satisfaction when seeing/placing their opposing players in dire situations, such as using the police card or the fire department card.
4. What do you think are the main costs of your game?
 - The game has minimal costs: it only takes around 1 minute to set up, 10 minutes per round, and requires little to no skill or experience from a player. Players aren’t required to be tactical with their turns and can still have fun without overthinking what cards to play.

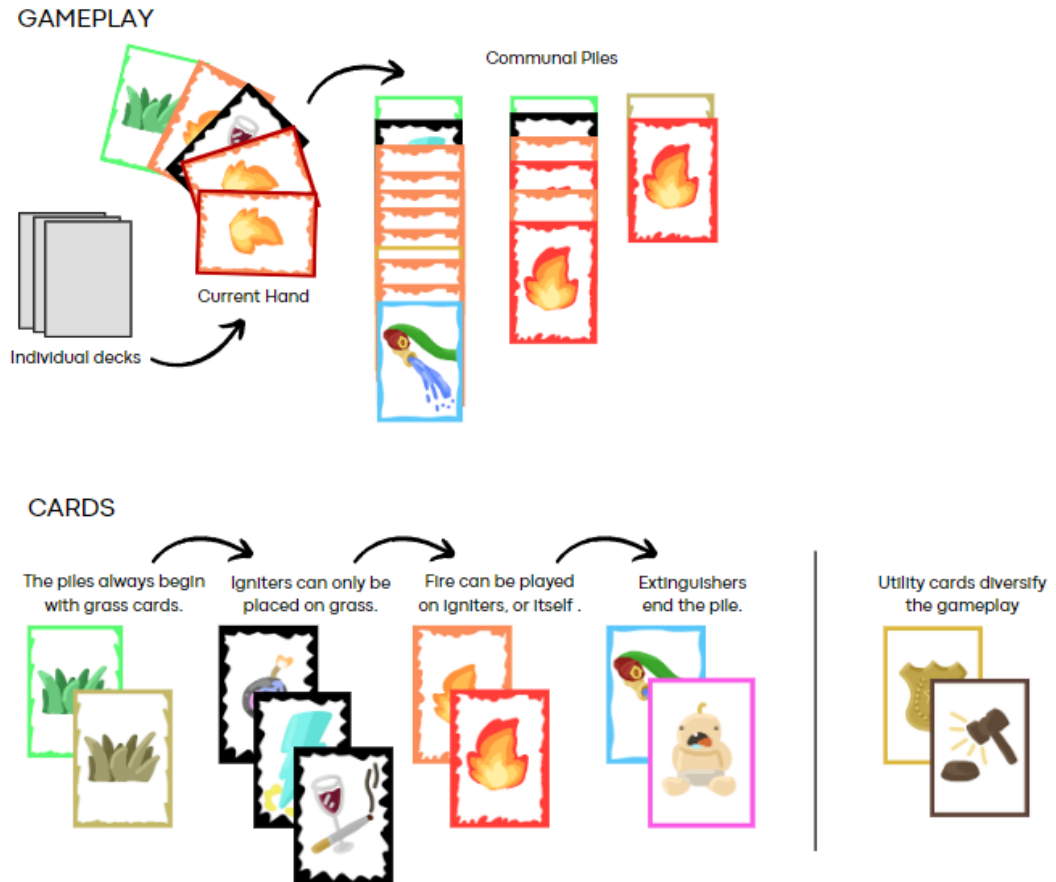
5. **Imagine a scale of 0-5 measuring the role of chance in games (chess being 0, roulette being 5), where would you situate your game? Why?**
 - On the scale of role of chances, Calinferno is positioned at 2.5. Even though the game relies on the card shuffle and the distribution of the cards, injecting unpredictability into the play, the players are still encouraged to strategize with the cards they have in their hand. Even when they are at a disadvantage, they still have the opportunity to exhaust their stacks by using the cards effectively and strategically.
6. **Describe the means through which your game creates a fictional world. What kind of stories does it tell and how? Use the terms “embedded” and “emergent” story.**
 - We define embedded narratives as "A story that can be encountered while playing the game" and emergent narratives as "events that dynamically occur and emerge from the game." Calinferno falls under the "embedded narrative" category since the cards themselves tell a straightforward story about interesting and absurd ways wildfires begin. Players can start fires with gender reveal bombs, lightning strikes, and cigarettes, as well as put out the fires, sue each other, call the police on each other, and throw a baby in the fire. The narrative is embedded in the cards, although not at the forefront of the game.
7. **Describe two important dynamics that emerge from playing your game, explain how they are afforded by your mechanics.**
 - Firstly, Calinferno prompts players to engage between individual agency and communal card piles. Every turn, the player is driven to assess the current gameplay and decide whether to augment their position or disrupt their opponent's plans. For instance, the player can either take risks and contribute to an existing stack or play it safe by starting a new one. This relationship between individual and communal piles creates different dynamics between players, emerging alliances and rivalries each turn and contributing to the social elements of the gameplay.
 - Secondly, Calinferno provides inconsistent and unstable gameplay, meaning special cards add moments of unpredictability and force players to adapt. The cards, as outlined in the Card Guide, introduce new twists and fun surprises at every turn, changing the demonstrated flow of the game and promoting an environment where adaptability and foresight are greatly rewarded.

8. Provide a game loop onion diagram to represent three layers of player actions. For each propose a frequency approximation (how many minutes)



9. Amongst the game loops described, in #7, which would you consider to be the “core loop” and why? unpack this loop in terms of player motivation.
- The fundamental loop of the game is "Play 3 Cards & Draw 1 Card", which serves as the foundation for all other processes. Since the game heavily relies on which cards each player holds and the timing of when they draw or play specific cards.

10. Provide a diagram of your game as a system, indicating main objects and their relationships. provide two main observations.



- Until someone uses an extinguisher card, only fires can be played after igniter cards. This allows players to 'burn' through their deck until someone extinguishes it.
- Players cannot contribute to the pile once an extinguisher card is played. Depending on the extinguisher card, the player has to take all the cards, or they can be given to someone else to put them at a disadvantage.

11. What do you think your game has to say about your theme? How does it do it?

- As mentioned, Calinferno is initially based on real-life events and gender reveal parties causing wildfires in California. As we iterated the game, we added two more causes contributing to wildfires: lightning strikes and cigarettes. Calinferno conveys this theme and story through the gameplay and visuals of the cards—for example, the “drunk cigarette” card. While there are no words on the card, the visuals clearly show that one simple mistake of flicking a lit cigarette on a night out can lead to irreversible consequences. Furthermore, players being able to stack the fire cards on top of each other directly represents wildfires in real life; it starts small but quickly becomes a significant hazard to the environment. Cards like the fire department, police, and lawsuit cards also directly embody their real-world counterparts. Additionally, cards such as Baby and Hellfire add humor and absurdity into the theme. Calinferno aims to tell a subtle, whimsical, engaging but thought-provoking experience with its gameplay.

12. Describe an imagined target player of this game: what games do they like? Why would they like this one? Why would they play it rather than similar competing games (name at least one actual game)?

- The target player of the game could be a person who casually enjoys or is not experienced with board games and is looking for a quick game to play with friends at a party or with relatives. It is simple and easy to pick up while telling subtle stories about wildfires. "Calinferno" has similar processes and flow compared to Uno and Exploding Kittens. It is akin to Uno with its main processes, such as exhausting your hand, utility cards like blocking, swapping hands, and taking and giving extra cards. Likewise, it is similar to Exploding Kittens regarding the size of the party playing the game and humor.

ANNEX

Playtest Questionnaire

1. Game Overview

- a. Can you describe your understanding of the game mechanics and objectives?

2. Initial Impressions

- a. What aspects of the game caught your attention immediately?

3. Gameplay Experience

- a. Did you find the rules easy to understand? If not, which rules were unclear and confusing?
- b. Did the game feel balanced? Were there any aspects of the game that felt overpowered or underpowered?
- c. Were there any specific cards or mechanics that stood out to you in a positive or negative way?

4. Fun Factor

- a. What elements of the game contributed most to your enjoyment?

5. Replayability

- a. Would you be interested in playing this game again? Why or why not?

6. Suggestions

- a. Were there any components or elements of the game that felt unnecessary or confusing?
- b. Are there any additional features or mechanics you would like to see added to enhance the gameplay?