

Royal Menagerie - Process Statement

The constraints we were provided with for this project were:

- **Hidden Roles**
- **Betrayal/Mistrust**

To understand these constraints as they related to games better, our team started off by playing published games that also dealt with these issues. We played **Bang!**, and **Lifeboat** and discussed **Werewolf**, and **Mafia**. Doing so enabled us to identify several strengths unique to this specific sub-genre while also understanding a couple of shortcomings we wished to avoid having in our own game.

Foremost among these shortcomings was the player elimination dilemma. To accentuate the feeling of tension and raise player risk, many of the games we scrutinized employed a system whereby players could be eliminated. Our team unanimously came to the conclusion that this system made play much less entertaining for players who got eliminated.

When coming up with the initial prototypes we came up with several widely differing ideas about the direction to take the game. One of our more fleshed out ideas revolved around gift-giving, the theme being a High School love-dodecahedron. That game, inspired by the love system from **Lifeboat**, involved passing gifts to one's "secret crush." One couldn't directly pass on gifts to their crush, and so had to rely on adjacent players to pass on the gifts. However, since scoring was based on the number and type of gifts in your secret crush's field at the end of the game, players had an incentive to either intercept the gifts or switch them out when passing them along.

One of our issues with this game was that the player who started a gift passing had little to no control over where the card ended up in case they were passing it along. Also, having them pass the gift directly to their secret crush kind of took away the whole "secret" aspect. What card ended up in which player's board ultimately ended up being more random than we would have liked. The method of allocation of secret crushes also presented a unique challenge, since it was possible to end up with yourself as your secret crush - an objectively worse situation to be in at the start of the game since there was no way to ensure that you

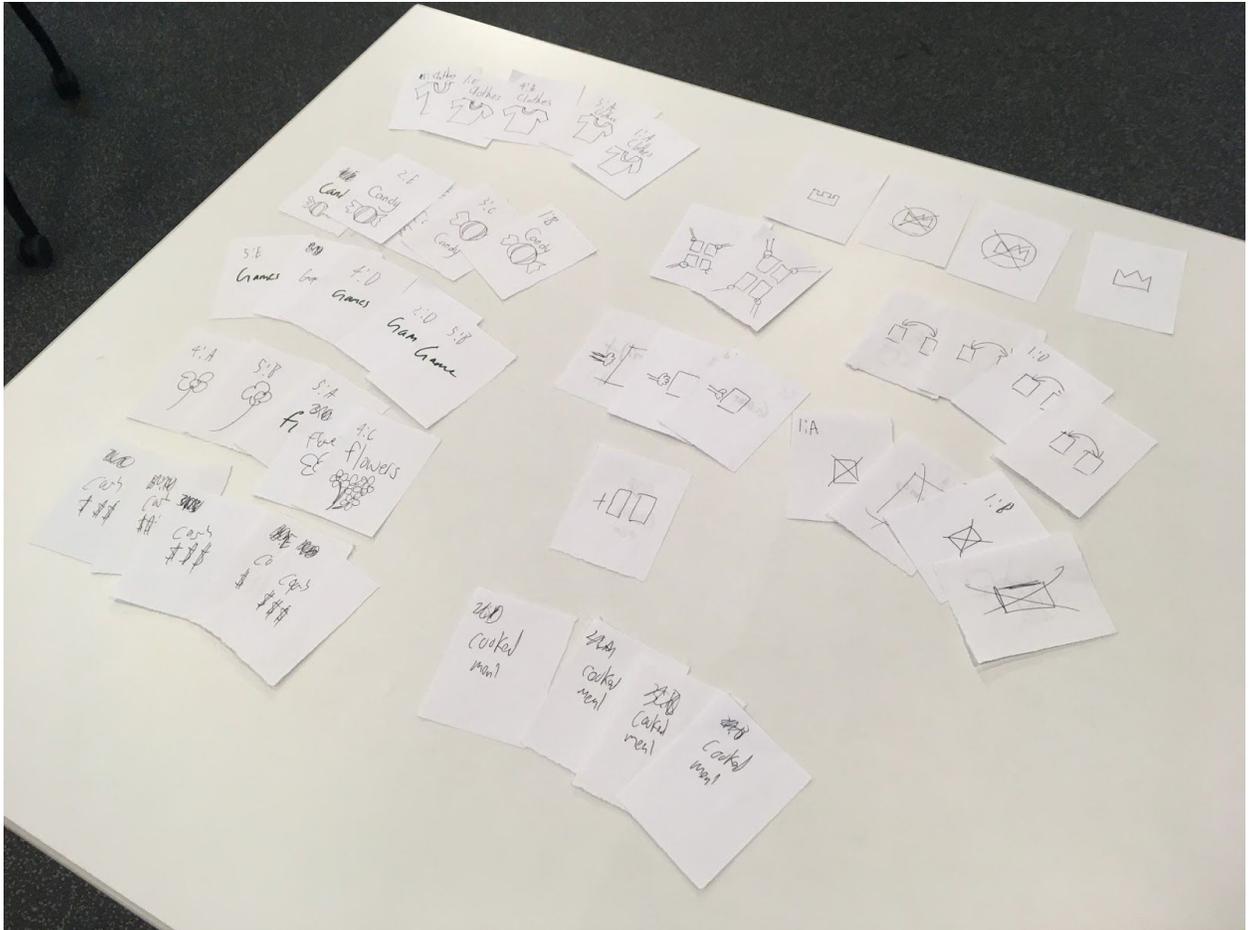
would receive any of the cards you passed on, and no one else would have incentive to pass cards on to you.

A second game idea that received a decent amount of focus during our discussions was an idea involving asymmetrical hidden roles and indirect attacks on fellow players, inspired by the **Warcraft 3** custom map, **Dark Deeds**. The ideation behind the indirect attack was that it kept the hidden roles from being too obvious too early on in the game. However, it was still possible to infer what the roles were based on which players were affected most by an attack. Ultimately, we theorized that a game of this type would cause the players to ignore most of the intricacies of the rules and simply gang up on the player who was closest to winning.

Hang Ruan came up with a prototype the next day which drew inspiration and mechanics from the different game ideas we discussed, along with a few from some of the games we played, most prominently **Bang!** This game also revolved around giving gifts to other players. In this version, unlike our previous prototype, one could give to their target directly. Instead of having secret crushes that players wanted to end up with more gifts, this version introduced hidden roles, analogous to the roles in **Bang!** Each of these roles had different victory conditions and incentivized different player behaviours.

The **King** was revealed at the start of the game, and could draw and play more cards than any of the other roles - a call back to the idea of asymmetry we played around with in our earlier discussions. The **Prince** was a hidden character who wanted to individually have the highest score in the game, while the two **King Slayers** wanted to have a combined score greater than the sum of the Prince and the King's scores. For the King to win, the Prince had to not have the highest score in the game, but the combined total of the King and the Prince's points had to be greater than the combined score of the two King Slayers. The scoring system allotted 1 point for having 1 of a single type, 3 points for 2, and 0 for 3. If a player ever had all 6 types, they would lose one of each. This allowed for a gift to have multiple intents possible behind it - it might help immediately, but it could set up for a 6 type combo, or lock up points by completing a set of 3.

The gifts were still themed based on our previous High School crush version (clothes, cash, candy, cooked meals, flowers, and games), and you could give yourself a gift. We also had action cards inspired by the cards in **Bang!**



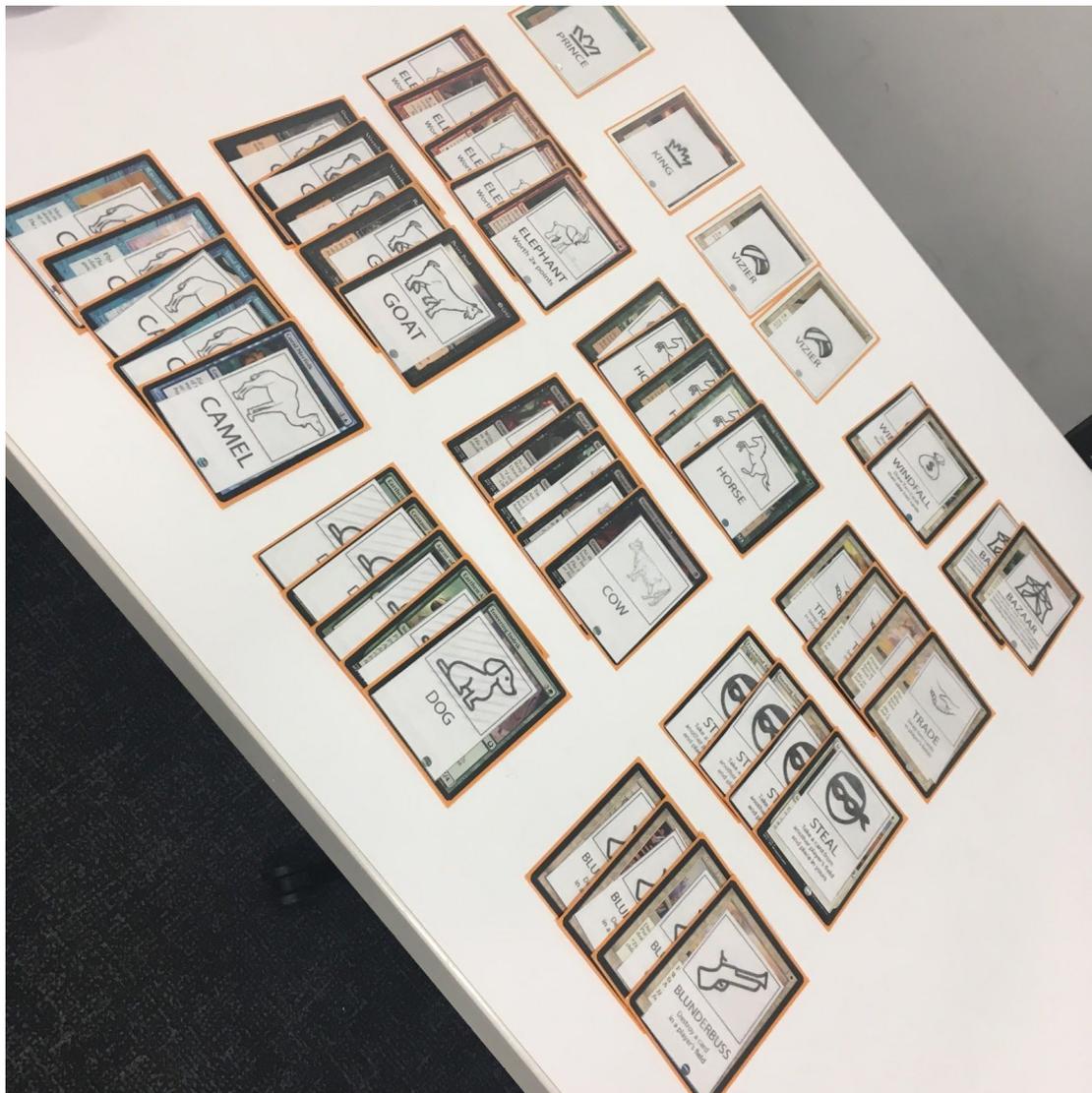
We fiddled around with the objectives in order to make the players' incentives line up with our desired behavior. We wanted obvious play to not necessarily be optimal so that the players made some effort to conceal their roles. When the Prince wanted to have the most points, their decisions were never very interesting - they just wanted to help themselves. The King would have to help the Prince to some extent, but everyone mostly just had incentive to help themselves and hurt whoever was winning. We swapped the Prince's objective with the King's, and added a shared victory condition for the King with the Prince character. The Prince thus wanted to help the King to some extent, but not enough so that the King would have the most points, and the King would mostly be trying to help themselves, but would still want to know who their Prince was in case they needed to go for a shared victory. The Prince would also want both the King and the King Slayers thinking that he was one of them so that he would be out of their crosshairs.

We also decided that the ability to give gifts to yourself was both against theme and made the players' decisions too easy - it was always a safe play to give a gift to yourself. If you

were forced to give to another player, then you really needed to think about who was who and what your actions said about your role.

An interesting notion that emerged from our mechanics was that ‘gifts’ weren’t always beneficial. This calls to mind the phrase ‘White elephant’ - “possession which its owner cannot dispose of and whose cost, particularly that of maintenance, is out of proportion to its usefulness” (Wikipedia). The origin of this term was derived from South Asian monarchs, and so we decided to set the game’s theme to be one inspired by the Mughal Empire.

Extending the idea of gifting “White Elephants”, we decided to frame the gifts as animals. Our initial roster of animals included more mundane animals common to Mughal India which included dogs, camels, horses, goats, cows and the eponymous White Elephant - an animal which we decided would be worth twice as many points!



From this point, we mostly made minor rule tweaks. After a playtest session with Naomi and Zach, we decided to go with their inclination to alter the start of the game. Each player would start with 2 animal cards dealt to them in order to give the players more to work with at the start, sort of creating a landscape for players to base their decisions off of, and allow action cards to be used right away. We also changed the starting player from the King to the player to the left of the King, giving players a chance to court the most powerful player's favor before the King made their first move.

With our mechanics in a pretty good place, we spent our last few sessions working on the visual design and theme. We tweaked the White Elephant theme to be set in a more vague setting and with more exotic animals - it was pointed out that the White Elephant thematically suggested that it was a particularly bad gift, rather than something that would be worth more points. And so we changed the White Elephant into its older, decidedly more extinct cousin, the Woolly Mammoth. With the eponymous White Elephant no longer in the game, we decided to change the title to **Royal Menagerie**.