

Project Post-Analysis and Afterthoughts

Project: So You Think You Can't Cook...

Date: Spring 2010

Genre: Card Game

What is it...

So You Think You Can't Cook, which will be abbreviated to SYTYCC hereafter, is my second non-digital project and first card game. Its unofficial tag line is, "The card game for those who can't cook—and don't want to." This game takes a little bit of mechanics from a variety of games. There are action cards, ingredient cards, and recipe cards. Everyone is dealt an action card and three ingredient cards to begin with. Then, three recipe cards are taken out and flipped over so everyone can see. Each recipe has ingredients and actions associated with it. The idea is to pull cards out of the action and ingredient decks in order to get what's on the recipe card. Once a player has this, he or she can take the recipe card. The winner is the one with the most recipe cards. Players, instead of taking cards from the deck, can choose to take cards from each other, so that adds a certain element of direct player interaction to the game.



Like my dice game, I created this entirely by hand. I learned exactly how many cards are required to actually make a card game. That sounds like an incredibly inane statement, but when you have to cut all of the cards by hand, you really notice, "Holy crap, these games need a lot of cards." Each of these cards had to have a back and a front, too. They needed backs for two reasons. One, I had different kinds of cards, so they had to be labeled; two, they needed to not be seen through.

I also created a small folding rule booklet for the game, which proved to be surprisingly confusing upon my first few attempts. However, I got it by the end. The box was also custom made, but it wasn't anything nearly as ornate as my previous box.

The thing I remember most about this project was that the day I was presenting the final product was the day the professor just randomly (or perhaps not so randomly) happened to have Richard Garfield come into class that day. Since we had such a large class, we were broken into small groups for presenting, so some people were presenting to TA's and some were presenting to the other professor for the class, while the main professor and Richard Garfield walked around. Naturally, they walked up right when it was my turn to present, so I was presenting my very amateur, handmade little card game about cooking to a professional designer. He actually seemed to genuinely like the idea and pointed out that it was definitely unique from the other projects. (Being one of two females in the entire class, that wasn't hard to do.) Anyway, it was a great experience though, and I was very happy to have the opportunity to meet such a well-respected designer.

What went right...

The game received attention for being unique from the other card games, whose themes were centered around more traditional themes, like zombies, pirates, war, etc. The art on the cards was also well liked, and everything was very clean and well put together. The mechanics were fairly well liked. They weren't as solid and basic as my dice game, but they were definitely much simpler and more solid than other games in the class. Because it was about cooking, the guys in the room were a little reluctant to want to play or get into it much. However, once they started, they actually had fun trying to figure out if the other had the card he wanted and liked stealing cards from each other.

What could have gone better...

The one major thing I wish I had done better was using a much stronger material to create my box with. I used two layers of cardstock to make it, and I made the horribly wrong assumption that it would hold up because I figured people would naturally be a little gentler with student-made projects. That was definitely a stupid assumption. When I got my project back, the box was completely trashed, and it's now totally unusable. The cards, however, are actually still totally fine, as is the rule book.

Another thing is that for some reason I just never really quite felt like my mechanics were that solid. I did well on the project, and it was well received. However, I personally am not sure about exactly how fun it is. If I saw the game somewhere or was watching people play, I'm not sure how I'd feel about wanting to play it myself or not. I think the reason is because I only ever saw two people play it, so it wasn't as exciting. As with most card games, the ideal would be three to five players. However, I think it made it specifically for three people at most because of the number of cards.

What I learned...

I learned a lot of things from this actually. I learned that two layers of cardstock do not hold up well against the might of the average card player. Another big thing I learned was exactly how many cards were necessary for a card game. I'd never really thought about how much a whole stack of cards is. Along those lines, I learned to appreciate the mechanical advances in this world that allow for machines to do the production and cutting of cards. This game also gave me insight into the significant difference in the feeling of two people playing a card game versus three people playing a card game; it almost completely changes the dynamic. This idea, I think, is something that can be related to just about any other kind of game, digital or not.

If I were doing this project again...

I would playtest the game specifically with three people as well as two in order to see the full potential of the game. Also, I'd use two layers of cardboard instead of two layers of cardstock for the box. Meeting Richard Garfield again would also be really cool. (Hah.)