

A vibrant festival scene at sunset. The sky is a mix of orange, yellow, and blue. In the foreground, the silhouettes of a crowd are visible against the bright light. A stage with large speakers and lights is in the middle ground. String lights with colorful spherical ornaments hang across the scene.

Festival Favourites

Who will host the next festival of the year?

Kai Ahern

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Introduction

Festival Favourites is an abstracted experience of building a music festival. Taking the form of a card game, pitting lineups against each other, to host the best music festival.

Ideation

I wanted to make a card game with similar mechanics from Exploding Kittens, and to not make a game nearly as complicated as Back to the Future: Dice Through Time. Then it clicked, why didn't I already think of music festivals? The ideas started flowing through my mind of different concepts I could try, ultimately landing on the game I present here, Festival Favourites.

Festival Favourites became my project through the love of my special interest of live music and Australian music. I wanted to explore making the industry an experience that can be enjoyed by players, that might not be the fanatic I tend to be.

Theme & Setting

The theme of *FF* involves creating a festival lineup featuring both international and well-known Australian acts to maximise ticket sales, whilst navigating challenges and competing against rivalling festivals.

Using current popular Australian and international artists, the game's setting rests in the present, where the Australian music festival industry is currently struggling. Catalysed by rising costs of living, climate change, and increasing operational costs (Creative Australia 2024). I wanted to create something that removes the logistical nightmare of putting on a festival, allowing players to connect with artists and fostering a sense of anticipatory nostalgia, granting a reimaging of the future rather than the past (Bergs et al. 2020). The abstraction of complexities, as seen in actuality of music festivals, grants access to the fantasy of curating a desired music festival (Moore 2020).

Genre & Audience

The genre of *FF* slots into the family game genre, targeted towards young Australian adults. This audience has been selected due to it being the highest attending demographic of music festivals in Australia (Creative Australia 2024), (Appendix 1). Being a simple structured card game, allows for autonomy in how the experience and strategy is approached. It also draws from the licensed games category using real world music artists to build a foundation of familiarity with the players.

Comparable Products

The major differentiators against comparable products and against the rest of the market, is that there are limited Australian themed tabletop games currently available on the market (BoardGameGeek 2018), with very few holding contemporary relevance.

Core Game Loop

Festival Favourites is a card game where players use actions and strategy to collect the highest scoring artist cards to hold the biggest music festival.

World-Building

For the built world of *FF*, I've assigned the following alethic values to the listed world options, using Marie-Laure Ryan's method 'Ontological Rules' (2018).

World Options	Alethic Value
Inventory of individuals	Same – using real world artists that players may be already familiar with.
Property of common individuals	Same (Verified) – the characters used are real world individuals/groups.
Natural species	Same – although doesn't necessarily apply due to the absence of creatures besides humans.
Kinds of natural (physical) laws	Same – the fundamental laws of reality are still in place, stripped of complexity.
Technology	Same – realistic approach.
Cosmology	One world.
Time	Historical – or more so altering the players present e.g. using present examples of artists in unique groupings perhaps not seen before in existing festivals.
Space/Geography	Augmented – Players may choose to communicate the details of their festival but there is no set space as to where it must be. There is influence on the notion that it's an Australian locale with most artist cards being Australian.
Logic	Occasionally violated – vastly different artists can be on one player's lineup. Compared to the realistic economics of building a music festival, Festival Favourites is an abstracted practice of doing so.

I was suspicious that the assigned alethic values would be too similar to real world conditions, however, my playtesting found that to be the opposite. Participants would be eagerly fighting for their liked artists to be on their lineups. This approach to world-building allowed me to create an accessible experience to players within and beyond the Australian music festival space (Moore 2020).

Game Mechanics

The game mechanics used in *FF* define how the players interact and progress during play, and akin to many games, maintain a relationship to theme and setting of the game (Moore 2020).

Key Mechanics:

- Cards: 2 separate decks; 'artists' and 'actions' - cards are used to maintain as well as disrupt flow of play.
- Turns - a key role in maintaining flow of play. Players may proceed in a clockwise or anti-clockwise fashion.
- Actions - action cards determine how a player's turn is conducted (see appendix 2 for examples)

Further Mechanics:

- Point scoring - points are gained as allocated on artist cards and particular action cards.
- Indirect asymmetry - all players start with a different set of cards, providing unpredictability in play (Moore 2020).
- Capture - players may have the opportunity to swap or steal artist cards they desire, from other players.
- Drafting - all players have a base maximum of 5 artist cards they can hold. However, opportunity to increase that amount is possible with a certain action card.

FF takes advantage of a multitude of game mechanics in a balanced compromise for a positive experience (Forbeck 2011), whilst accounting for different strategy types, but not to leading the player to confusion.

Three-Act Structure

Using Tidball's three-act structure, we can observe a simplified structure of how *FF* is played (Tidball 2017).

First Act

- Players read the rules.
- Cards are shuffled and separated into their respective decks.
- Each player is dealt 4 action cards.
- The player who last attended a music festival will start play.

Second Act

- Play proceeds in a round-table motion.
- A player's turn will consist of picking up an action card, then choosing either to play an action card or pass.
- Competition arises, artist cards being traded and stolen, actions cancelled, valuable cards being surrendered, players fighting to have favourable artists in their lineups.
- Players may also surrender what looks like a winning position (Tidball 2017), hiding valuable cards, or passing turns when in the lead.
- Players must solve the puzzle of forming the highest scoring lineup, with only the cards they've been dealt, and risking stealing from other players.

Third Act

- Once all players have reached at least 5 artist cards in their lineup, points are tallied, and the winner is declared.

Prototyping

The initial idea when proceeding with prototyping was to create cards to represent artists (see figure 1) and actions (see figure 2), and tokens to act as the 'tickets sold'. However, after an initial solo playtest, acting as two players, I thought that the token mechanic would overwhelm the game and would provide any tangible value outside of keeping track of a score, ultimately, I decided to not pursue this idea. Through the method of philosophical carpentry (Moore 2020), I used pen on cardstock and paper, to gain a tactile understanding of how the game would play.

Figure 1 - Artist cards.

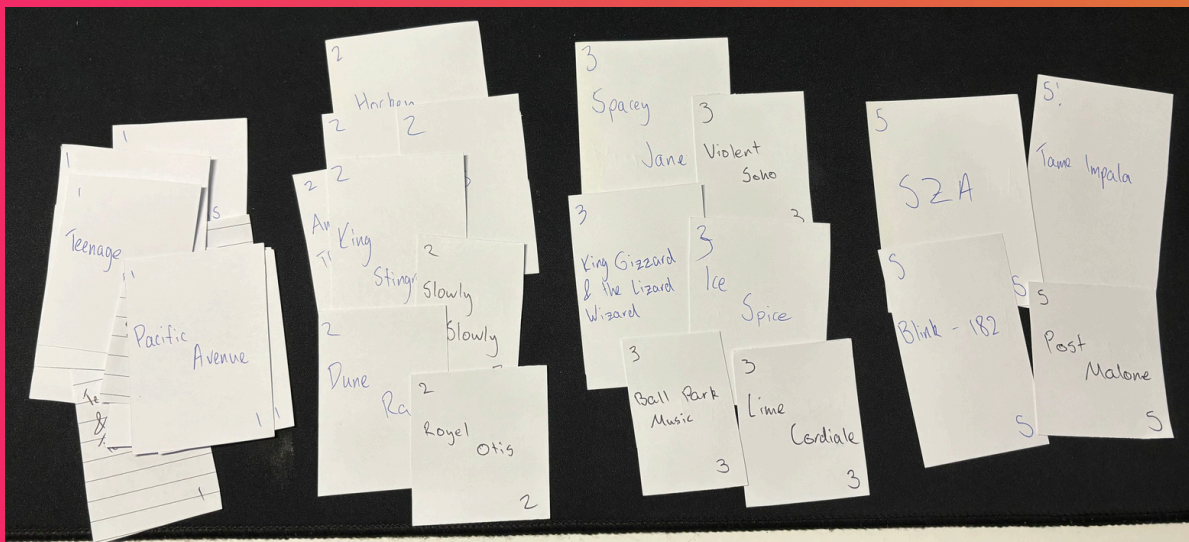
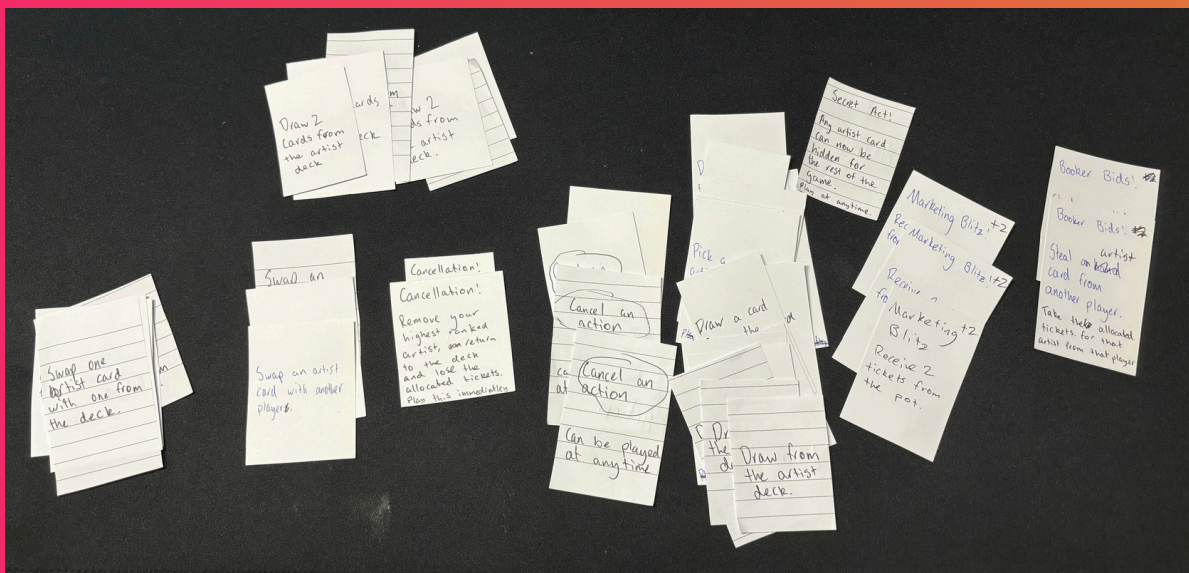


Figure 2 - Action cards.



Playtesting & Iteration

Including a solo playtest, I conducted a total 4 playtesting sessions, having taken notes on each one.

- Playtest 1 - Solo, 27th April (Appendix 3)
- Playtest 2 - Joel, Winston & Jacob, 3rd May (Appendix 4)
- Playtest 3 - Joel, Jacob & James, 17th May (Appendix 5)
- Playtest 4 - Lachlan & Myself, 27th May (Appendix 6)

Phase 1

I decided to make a few alterations before presenting the game to participants. This included removing 'play immediately' rule on artist pick up cards to allow for more autonomy in play, and adding in actions to pick-up 2 artist cards, to allow for further strategy required to win.

See appendix 3 for session notes.

Phase 2

My first official playtest provided me with a lot of valuable feedback. From this session I was able to make some helpful changes, to make the game more enjoyable.

Most of the feedback was a consensus from the group, including:

- Looking at the maximum 5 artist cards and what can be changed or added to allow players with full lineups to continue playing.
- Remove a few pick-up artist cards.
- Lowering the score of the 'Marketing Blitz' card.
- Add more 'Secret Act' cards.
- Changing the starting amount of action cards.
- Add in 4-point scoring artists.

See appendix 4 for session notes and full playtest.

Playtesting & Iteration cont.

Phase 3

Returning to my next playtest during class, I could gauge the improvements, thanks to Joel and Jacob's participation in the previous session. Additionally, I observed how the revised version performed with James, as a new player joining the test.

Emotions were running high throughout this playtest, this was aided by Joel's and Jacob's previous participation, and their pursuit for victory.

This playtest lasted about 50 minutes, when I've intended to have the game be a lot faster paced. To accommodate for this in line with the feedback from this, I noted to add in back in more pick-up artist cards, but I still wanted to see how it would fare with less players involved.

See appendix 5 for session notes and full playtest.

Playtesting & Iteration cont.

Phase 4

I wanted to get some feedback from someone who wasn't involved in the subject, in the same degree for that matter, so I turned to my housemate Lachlan for a few rounds of playtesting. This was also the first time I had played the game with someone else.

We played 2 rounds, making changes to the game in the second, the changes made the game feel a lot more fast paced, and a race to get the higher score. The main piece of feedback from Lachlan, was to add in more types of cards to challenge your opponents. With his feedback and ideas, I added in cards to minus points from opponents' final totals and artists points, giving the game more of a competitive edge trying to impact oppositional force, whilst focusing on your own lineup (figure 5).

See appendix 6 for session notes, recount of changes.

Visual Design

It wasn't until phase 3 of iteration that I began designing the appearance of *FF*. Considering philosophical carpentry, I wanted to have certainty that my prototype was heading in a positive direction before getting involved with design, as to not double handle the process (Moore 2020). Designs were created using a combination of Midjourney and Canva.

See figure 4 for design examples

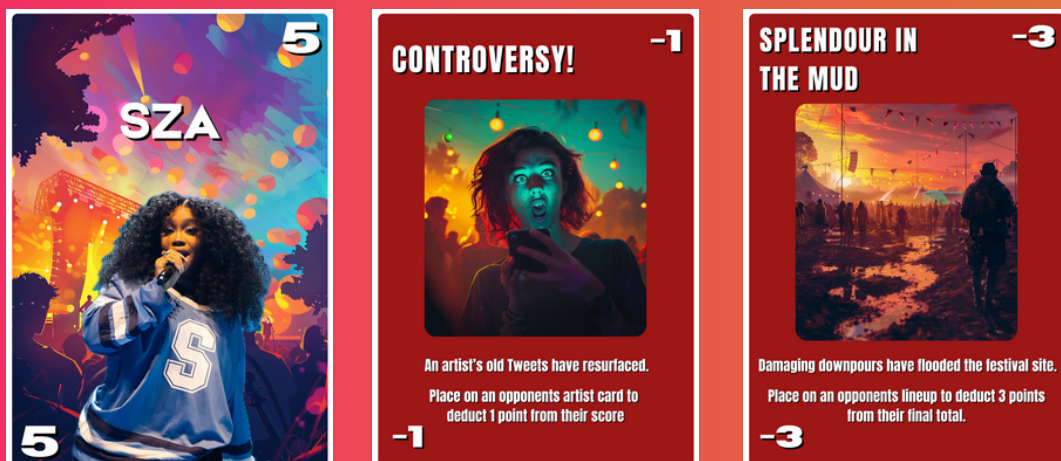
See appendix 7 for further artist designs.

See appendix 8 for action card designs.

Figure 4 - artist cards designs.



Figure 5 - added action cards.



Looking Forward

Regarding the future of *FF*, I prefer to take it towards a crowdfunding avenue of development. This route would allow me to pursue a thorough development process, gathering feedback grounded in community and experience over commodity (Moore 2020). Although there are challenges of uncertainty, with high dependency on marketing and capturing interest, artists that feature in-game can further promote the game, saving on marketing costs.

The most difficult costs that would be faced are licensing costs for use of artist imagery. Smaller artists may be easier to onboard, due to prospective exposure garnered from their appearance, larger-scaled artists however would be the biggest challenge. In this case, I would attempt to source other relevant artists providing economical options of licensing or create parodies of artists to maintain relation amongst players and is exempt from copyright repercussions (Copyright Agency n.d.).

Granted the success of the game, this opens opportunities of creating 'artist' expansion packs to cater to different niches of countries and genres.

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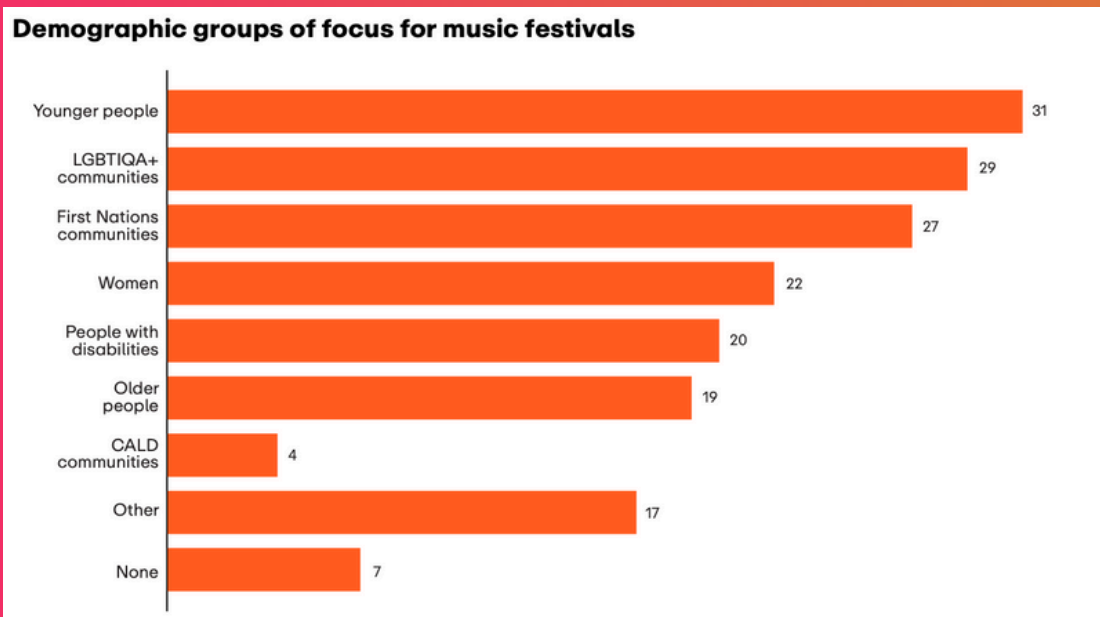
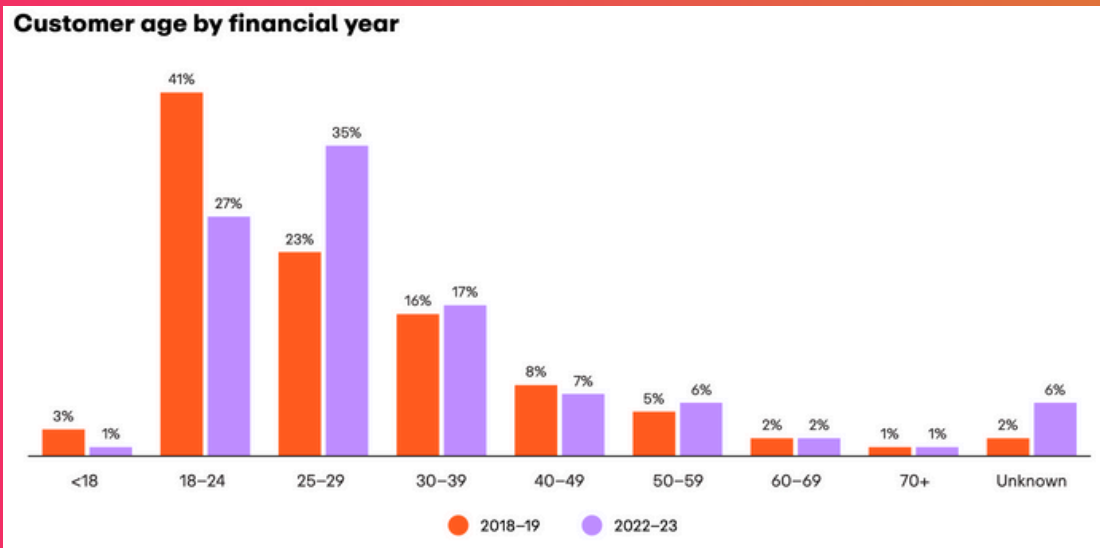
User: Mr. Grace, 2018, Australian Themes, BoardGameGeek, viewed 28th May 2024, <<https://boardgamegeek.com/geeklist/16229/australian-themes>>.

This dossier was written with use of ChatGPT:

<https://chatgpt.com/share/b01530e1-db2f-4301-af0b-9be820554e70>

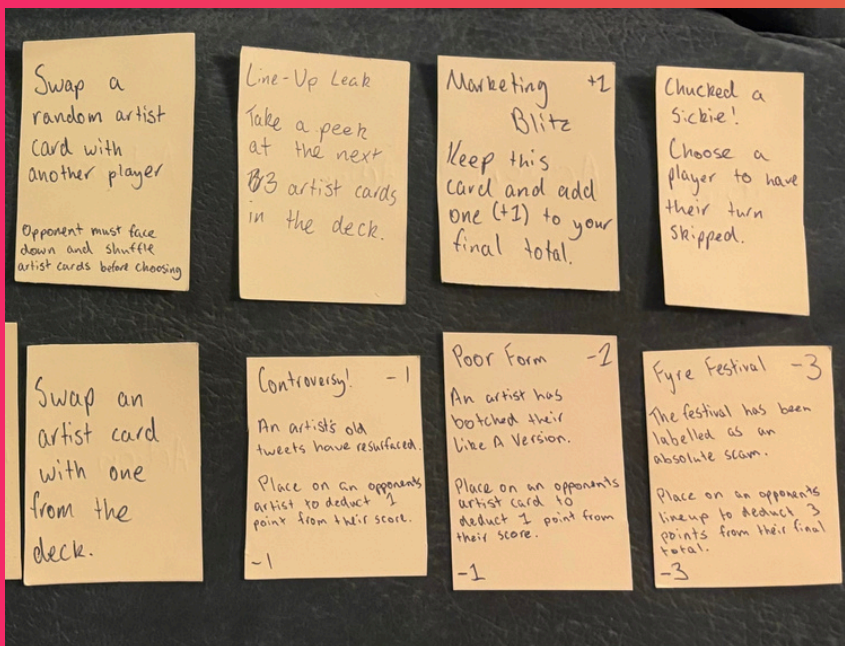
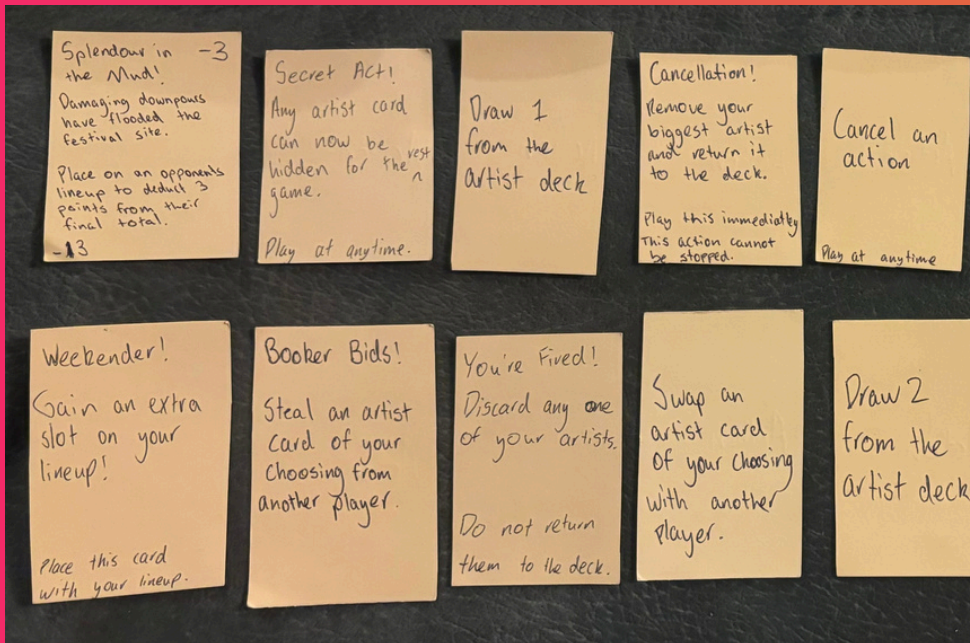
Appendix

Appendix 1



Appendix cont.

Appendix 2



Appendix cont.

Appendix 3

27/4

First Solo play test (as two players)

- Add in a 'pick up 2 artists' card
To prevent imbalance of ^{artist} cards being stolen
- Thinking of removing token aspect, cards w/ numbers can be added up at end of game instead.
- Remove 'play immediately' aspect of artist pick-up card, in order to increase strategy required to win.
- Clarified rules to stipulate a maximum of 5 artist cards.
- Lessened amount of 5 point artist cards, increase rarity and competitiveness.

More emotionally satisfying drawing that card

Appendix 4

Playtest video

Playtest 1 3/5

Jacob, Joel, Winston. Final

Feedback

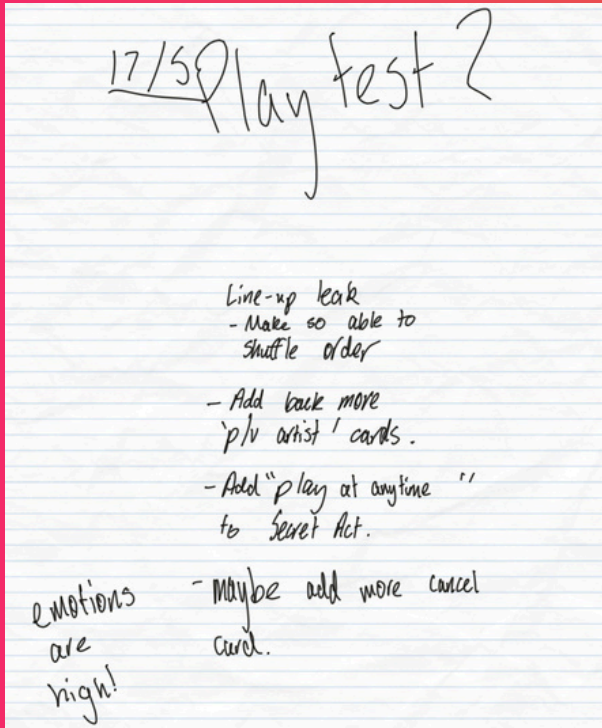
- Look at max 5 and what players can do
- Too many pick 1 artists ✓
- Maybe increase artist amount.
- "Pick random of other players artists." ✓

- find a new way to end the game. ?
- lower marketing blitz ✓
- more secret act cards ✓
- more types of actions
 - ruined out
- Rules were easy to learn
- Start w/ 4 cards, all turns the same

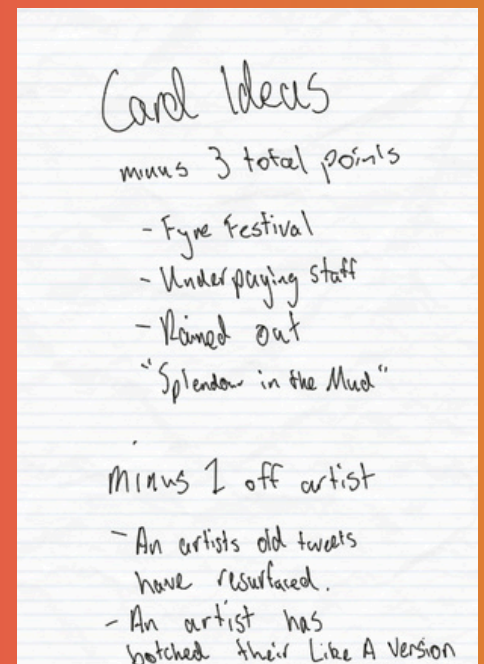
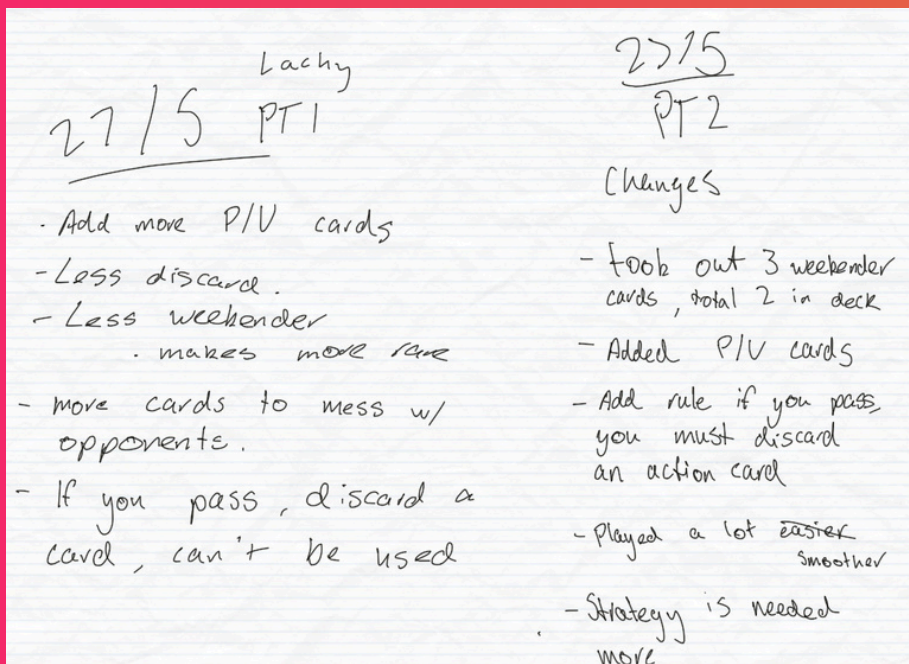
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Appendix 5

Playtest video



Appendix 6



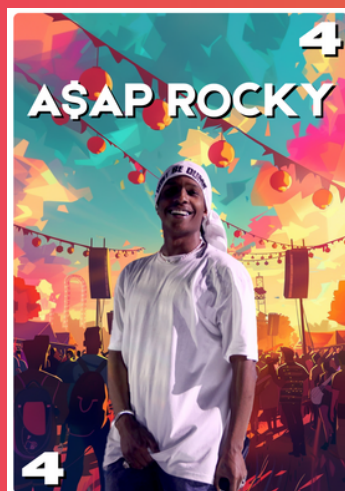
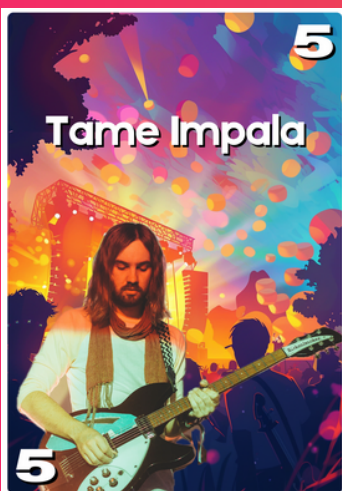
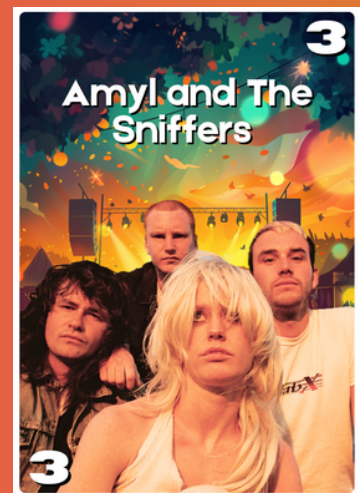
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Appendix 6 cont.

Our first playtest lasted around 15 minutes, and we both agreed it felt as if it was dragging along and could have felt a bit more fast paced. Lachlan felt as if there were too many cards to expand his lineup (Weekender cards) and to discard artist cards, but not enough opportunities to pick up more artist cards.

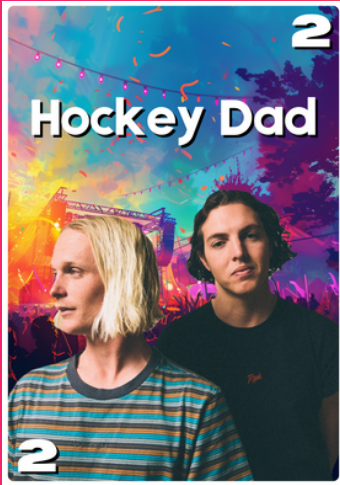
For our second playtest, I added more 'pick-up artist' cards, in variations of 1 and 2, and removed 3 'Weekender' cards, leaving 2 remaining in the deck. However, they accidentally got shuffled back in, so we just removed them as we played. We also added a rule where if you pass your turn, you're required to discard an action card, to maintain a consistent flow of play, and requires further strategy to win.

Appendix 7

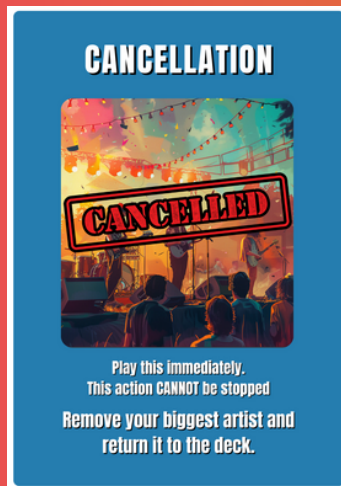
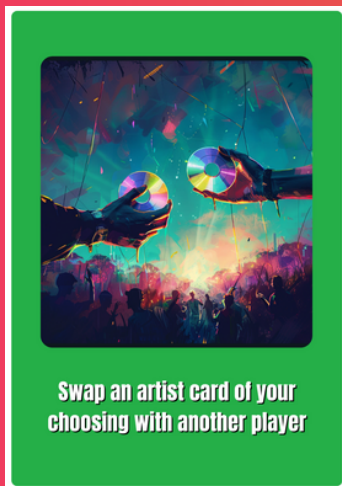
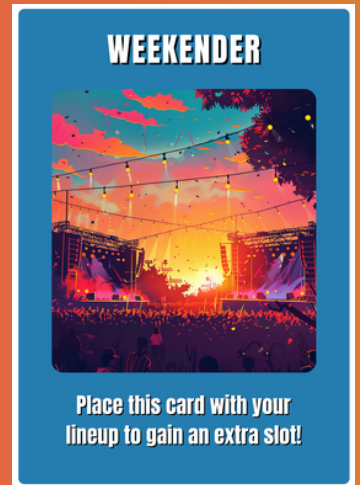


Appendix cont.

Appendix 7 cont.



Appendix 8



Appendix cont.

Appendix 9 - Game Rules

- 1) Shuffle the **artist** cards and place the deck face down on the table.
- 2) Remove all 'play immediately' cards from the **action** deck and shuffle.
- 3) All players are dealt 4 **action** cards each.
- 4) Re-shuffle **action** cards with 'play immediately' cards returned to the deck, place face down next to the **artist** deck.
- 5) The player who most recently attended a music festival will go first.
- 6) Players on their turn will pick-up an **action** card, with the choice of playing an **action** card or passing. If a player chooses to pass, they must forfeit one of their **action** cards.
- 7) Players collect **artist** cards to build their lineups with a maximum of 5 artists (this maximum can be increased with a played Weekender card).
- 8) Players will proceed in a round table motion, following the instructions written on the action cards.
- 9) Once all players have reached at least 5 **artist** cards in their lineup, the game is over, and scores are tallied according to the points of their **artist** cards.

The player with the highest score is the Festival Favourite!

Appendix cont.

Appendix 10 - Game Design Journal

View my full game design journal [here](#).