GAME (NOT) OVER: INSTRUCTIONS

Welcome to Game (Not) Over! If you've picked up this deck, I assume you have an interest in game design, or games generally, and specifically, in how to approach the question of failure and fail states in video games.

Game (Not) Over was born from my PhD research on (desirable) experiences of failure in video games, and synthesises my work with player experiences, industry input and reflections, and academic scholarship. It is made for game designers, and anyone interested in thinking about how we experience failure in games.

My research has primarily focused on single-player games with explicit elements of storytelling - something to be aware of, as it is reflected in these cards!

So, how do you use these cards? Simple enough (you can't fail, I promise). You can do the exercise alone, or with your co-designers.

PREPARATION (if you are using a physical deck - skip to "Activity" if you do this online!):

1. Place the Fails deck (black) and the Questions deck (white) before you, face down.

2. On a piece of paper, summarise your game idea (a couple of lines or your elevator pitch are enough), and how you currently envision its fail states (= how a player might fail, like dying by missing a platform and falling on spikes). Your game doesn't have any fail states? That's okay too! You can still use those cards to explore this!
   Ex: I'm working on an RPG where the player explores an abandoned house, finds clues and items, while being chased by a ghost. They have 30 seconds to investigate, and get out of the room they just entered - if they don't, the ghost catches up to them. Game over!

ACTIVITY:

1. **Draw a card** from the **Fails deck (black cards)** and read it out.
   Ex: I draw the Alternative Stories card, which says that in some games, failure can unlock alternative storylines.

2. **Draw a card** from the **Questions deck (white cards)** and read it out - and try to answer the question in relation to the Fail card and your game idea.Take notes to remember your thoughts if you want!
   Ex: I draw a Question card: "How does this apply to my game?". I reflect that it currently doesn't, because getting caught by the ghost means instant game over. I could maybe change the game so that instead of a game over, the player respawns but in a different room: the ghost doesn't kill them, it just transports them elsewhere. This could add some exploration and storytelling possibilities to the game, but could end up being frustrating if it happens too often.

3. **Not sure how to interpret a card?** Come back to this document and look up the extended card description for more details and examples, using the Card Details menu on the left.

4. Once you're done, you have a choice:
    - Draw a new Fail card to start thinking about another aspect of failure in your game, **OR**
    - Draw a new Question card to approach the same Fail card from a different angle. **OR**
    - Do both for a fresh start! It's up to you!

    Repeat until you have worked your way through 5 Fail cards.

NOTE: there is no 'right or wrong' way of using this toolkit, or of discussing the prompts on the cards. What matters is how you think about your game!

CARDS DETAILS

PEER SUPPORT

When players face repeated failure and/or are stuck in their progression, they can seek out support or resources from each other on dedicated platforms: forum, streams, discord servers... For some players, this support can also take the form of mentorship, or being watched by another player, who provides verbal assistance.For some participants in my research, being able to rely on someone else's expertise turned failure into a social learning experience, whereby strength lies in numbers and being able to ask for help. This in turn helped them de-dramatise failure while also not feeling powerless in the face of it - some participants cited playing with a sibling or a spouse to help alleviate the threat of failure or offer advice, while others mentioned reaching out to better players for help.

THE THEME OF FAILURE

Many players and even game designers say that failure is a normal part of what games are about. However, there aren't that many games that are explicitly about failure, or that weave their fail states into the themes and messages of the game. There is a creative opportunity there, to acknowledge the existence of failure in games (if design teams choose to have it!) and make it a part of the game's themes and metaphors.

The videogame *Hades* does that very explicitly: it embraces its roguelike roots by having the player fail hard and often, but the very existence of failure in the game is inseparable from its setting and themes. It is a game about the cyclic nature of the Underworld in Greek mythology, about death and escaping from the inescapable. The roguelike format and its associated conventions surrounding failure fit with the creative intents and message of the story.

FAILURE DEFINES LIMITATIONS

Games include sets of rules, and have things that the player, at any point, can or cannot do. As such, failure can be a tool to make the player realise the limitations of their own ability or of the game itself. Being unable to perform a certain action may signal that they don't have the skill to do it and need to improve (thus signalling something about difficulty), or that they are not going about it the right way (signalling something about intended strategy, or level design).

Dark Souls is known for its ruthless difficulty. Players have reported conceptualising failure as a way of gauging their current skill, and sometimes as an encouragement to explore elsewhere, in order to find a solution to a problem they currently cannot overcome. *Hollow Knight* works in a similar way: its non-linear structure allows players to run into a difficult

boss or section or the game, and decide for themselves if they want to or can push through ridiculous levels of difficulty, or if there is maybe something (an upgrade or easier stages) that they have missed and is worth looking into before coming back.

FAILURE AND REAL LIFE

While the notion that games are a magic circle wherein what happens within the magic circle has no bearing outside of it is a compelling one, we, as players, do bring our own lived experiences into our practice of playing games - likewise, we can learn from games and apply these learnings to real life. Some participants in my research have stated that they conceptualise failure in games as ‘training’ for handling failure in real-life: an opportunity ti learn to be patient and persistent, and to practise resilience in the context of a game. Conversely, some players have talked about bringing their real-life problem-solving skills into their gaming practice, and finding parallels between real-world scenarios and games scenarios.

NO RE-TRY

Consequences are a significant part of what players include as the positive sides of having failure in story-driven games - even the players who have no qualms about re-loading to replay a section if they didn’t like the outcome! While attitudes to consequences may diverge, they remain an expressive narrative possibility related to fail states, and may be a way of giving players a sense of responsibility, and of ‘seriousness’ - what they do matters.

Deconstructeam experimented with this idea with their game *The Red Strings Club*. While this game has no ‘hard fail state’ in that the player cannot die, and there is no ‘game over’ possibility, there are smaller failures that can occur throughout the game that end up restricting the player’s options in dialogues, for instance - and there is no save point for the player to reload, meaning that whatever mistake is made, cannot be corrected in the same playthrough.

PAINFUL STORY EVENT

Failure may lead to a negative event or outcome, such as a beloved character’s death, treason, deteriorating relationships, disastrous consequences on the game’s world, etc. This can create rich story content, evoking powerful emotions despite the negativity of the outcome. It is similar to the paradox of tragedy we observe in other media (ex: why do we watch sad films?), but games have the added peculiarity of granting players a sense of agency, and of consequences of their own actions over the game’s outcomes. Negative events and outcomes are associated with powerful emotional experiences, creating ‘positive negative experiences’.

So-called ‘bad endings’ are an excellent illustration of this phenomenon. Bad endings usually result from the player’s accumulated failures throughout the game, steering the game’s

narrative towards a disastrous or catastrophic outcome for the player character. Games like Beholder, that feature different endings based on the player's choices and performance throughout the game, include 'bad endings' where the player character does not triumph at the end - providing players with additional story content and a possible incentive to replay and try to get a better outcome on second try.

THE SPECTACLE OF FAILURE

Some games go out of their way to make failure spectacular and entertaining in and of itself, by way of adding cinematics, dedicated narrative branches, or programming their physics system so that even failing becomes an event, rather than a mere interruption in the game. Some players report that the spectacularity of failure is something that can help alleviate the sting of it, and even make it a valuable experience in and of itself, for the sake of it.

Surgeon Simulator and *Until Dawn* stand on seemingly opposite ends of the spectrum, but take on a similar approach. Surgeon Simulator embraces the comedy of taking a serious setting and topic (life-threatening surgery), and integrating it into a game with infuriatingly clumsy physics that lead the player to losing various vital body parts in places body parts certainly do not belong. Until Dawn, on the other hand, punishes player failure by killing off playable characters - with each death being accompanied by a particularly graphic and spectacular death cinematic, that becomes additional content for the player to discover (by accident or intentionally).

THE THREAT OF FAILURE

Be it long-term consequences on the story, or the immediate disappointment and frustration of losing and having to re-play a section, as well as confronting one's own shortcoming, the threat of failure is something players say weigh upon them as they play. When they are aware of the consequences of their shortcomings, this threat becomes a point of pressure that incentivises them to pay more attention, approach situations more carefully, and raises the stakes - some players phrase it by saying they 'take the game more seriously' when they know that failing has a price. Not everyone reacts to failure or pressure in the same way, but knowing that failure is possible, and that it comes at a cost, rarely leaves players indifferent.

ALTERNATIVE STORIES

Failure can be somewhat of a relative notion. Some players have a hard line definition of failure, and argue that as long as the game continues, then they haven't really failed - whereas other players, or even game designers, talk about big and small failure, mechanic or narrative failure, etc. In games that are heavily story-driven, a failure on the player's part may branch the player onto an alternative storyline, that they would not have been able to access otherwise. Players can access different branches or beats by making choices, but in some games, they can do so by succeeding or failing various challenges.

Failbetter Games embraces the narrative possibilities of failure to great extent throughout their games. In *Sunless Sea* and *Sunless Skies*, both text-based narrative and resource management games, the more the player spirals towards failure and disaster, the more the events they encounter reflect this impending doom and escalating madness, giving them the opportunity to encounter catastrophic, but compelling narrative moments despite their impending demise. The studio ensured that the fail states received the same quality of writing and attention as any other section of the game. *Disco Elysium* followed the same philosophy, where failing a die throw leads to a failed action, which will be described in great detail by the game's writers.

MAKING FAILURE MAKE SENSE

Failure can be frustrating when it is perceived as a necessary evil, that gets in the way of the player more than it serves the game experience. While some players fall back on the assumption that failure is just a part of what games are, some games and their designers try to address this dissonance by making sure that the existence of failure is justified within the game. This helps make failure feel less unfair and arbitrary, and less separate from the rest of the game experience.

Bioshock, for instance, tries to explain its die-and-retry model of failure by having the player-character revive through a technology called the Vita-Chambers, wherein the character, after death, respawns in a convenient location. The Vita Chambers narratively explain why the character can die and be resurrected at will. Similarly, *Gods Will Be Watching* uses a timeloop narrative to explain the player's multiple attempts at beating the game.

SPENDING TIME WITH NPCs

In games where failure does not result in death, or where it is more sparse, players get to spend more time with the characters they meet on their journey. They may perform more activities with them, and develop a deeper bond and appreciation for them. Player may also develop a sense of attachment and responsibility towards the others characters in the game, which ends up influencing the decisions they make so as to make sure they save the characters they have grown attached to. Failing to help those characters, or the threat of it, can make for a powerful experience.

Pyre is a game where the player meets various NPCs over their journey, gathers a group around them, and consistently interacts with them through dialogues and shared trials. Even in the event of a loss, the characters don't die: instead, the player unlocks new interactions with them that reflect on their failure, and gets to spend more time with them as they survive and reprise their journey together. When the time comes to part ways with a character, the emotional weight of the decision the player must make is made more impactful by virtue of having been able to spend time with that character, and to grow to care for them.

PLAYER EXPECTATIONS

Video games are an extremely diverse form of entertainment that, over time, has developed its own sets of genres and conventions. Some of these genres are associated with certain forms or experiences of failure: one seldom expects any challenge in a walking simulator, instead expecting to be given the time and space to appreciate an atmosphere and story, but would expect frequent death in any Souls-like game that is designed to test their skills.

These expectations can be communicated through marketing, by targeting specific demographics and expected audiences, and shape what players may come to expect of a game. Being aware of the expectations associated with certain types of games because of the reputation some titles have garnered, may help create experiences that will cater to or subvert players' expectations of the level and type of failure they may encounter, and its function in the game. Supergiant Games, for instance, was very aware of the type of audience a roguelike like *Hades* would attract, but also deter: by offering a deep narrative experience and very rich in-game lore, as well as dynamic character interactions and permanent upgrades, they sought to take the sting out of failure and difficulty, and to cater to audiences who may be interested in the game's themes and story, but who might otherwise be deterred by the expected level of a difficulty of a roguelike game.

STORY OR MASTERY?

Some game designers have found that sometimes, players worry so much about avoiding failure, that it prevents them from absorbing the story or its themes. High difficulty and challenge, or the frustration of repeated failure, can shift the focus of the player from the game as a whole, and make them zero in on beating the mechanics of the game, thus overlooking the other elements of gameplay at their disposal. This instance is an opportunity for game designers to reflect on the place of failure in their game: is the point of this sequence to focus on the numbers or the button combo, or is there a story moment they would rather the player focuses on? There is no right or wrong answer - only a reflection on where the focus of the player should be at a given moment.

UNNECESSARY SUCCESS?

Many games are conflict-driven, with the end of the game culminating in the player successfully overcoming the story's main conflict. This Hero's journey approach posits games as power fantasies where progression happens through series of successes, and satisfaction is attained when all obstacles have been overcome.

Some games, both in their narrative and structure, turn away from this conflict-driven, success-based positioning, and offer different types of experiences by removing notions of success and failure - or blurring their definitions by offering much more grey and ambiguous experiences. *Before I Forget* is a walking simulator about a scientist suffering from dementia, in which the player accompanies her on her emotional journey as she lives through her symptoms. The game does not rely on success or failure to convey its intended experience;

arguably, notions of success or failure would feel irrelevant for the story of Sunita's struggles with her deteriorating condition.

FROM ZERO TO HERO

After an experience of failure, games can give players an opportunity to bounce back, either by replaying the section they failed at, or offering chances for redemption later in the game. For some players, this is where the appeal of (difficult) games lies: for those more mastery-oriented players, failure is a chance to learn from their mistakes, and apply the lessons learnt upon re-try. Whale the frustration built up from repeated failure can be an intense experience, the relief and pride of finally succeeding makes for a powerfully satisfying experience that reframes failure as something worth enduring for that one moment of unbridled joy.

An extreme example of this particular kind of satisfaction is embodied in *Getting Over It With Bennett Foddy*, which, by Foddy's own admission, was created with a certain type of player in mind. This notoriously difficult and infuriating game mercilessly beats players down (with Foddy's voiceover commentating throughout), but the satisfaction of finally overcoming a difficult section, or the entire game, is immense.

UNCERTAINTY

In story-driven games with permanent in-game, narrative consequences, failure can lead to uncertainty. The player fails at a task, and knows there will be consequences, but what will they be? What happens next? Failure can dramatically escalate a situation and place the player in a feeling of uncertainty, confusion and doubt, that in some cases can align with the character's development in the game, or with the suspenseful atmosphere of a scene.

In *Disco Elysium*, players determine whether their actions are successful or not by a roll of die. A successful die results in a desired outcome, but in many cases, the players cannot anticipate in advance what will happen if they fail the throw, and have to take that risk in order to discover what happens to the detective. Arguably, this uncertainty and anticipation of the worst suits the themes and atmosphere of the game, wherein players play as a down-on-his-luck detective and where wondering "oh no, what now?" would certainly feel like an appropriate reaction and experience.

BREAKING THE HERO'S JOURNEY

Video games famously tend to follow the narrative structure of the Hero's journey, wherein the hero goes on an adventure, overcomes a decisive conflict, and returns transformed from their journey. This sets up certain expectations about the kind of heroes, characters, conflicts, and actions we might expect to meet and undertake in a game. The hero is also expected to come out victorious at the end of their adventure, no matter the hurdles to get there.

In this configuration, failure rhetorically becomes a learning step, a temporary setback from which the hero learns and evolves, before overcoming the next obstacle. Failure is fleeting and rarely final. Some games include ‘bad endings’ as possible outcomes as the result of player failures. Other games, such as *Spec Ops: The Line*, take the Hero’s journey and spin it around, by highlighting the horrifying nature of what can count as success in video games, and how it affects the player character; making players question if failure may not, sometimes, be preferable, or whether there is space for games that challenge this narrative model.

BUTTERFLY EFFECT

Some games allow the player to re-try a challenge after failing - others make the player continue with the story and live with the (sometimes catastrophic) consequences of their failure. For some players, having no choice but to live with those consequences, and seeing their failure reflected in the game world and the story, adds a layer of depth and tension to the game, as it raises the stakes and turns each playthrough into a unique experience that is reliant on their choices and skills, rather than solely on the design team’s decisions.

In *Frostpunk*, players run a human colony in a post-apocalyptic, ice-age world, and manage their resources to ensure the survival of its inhabitants. Here, players can make a wrong management choice - this failure will quickly spiral out and into a snowball effect of consequences. What may initially have been a small choice that is difficult to pin down upon reviewing one’s actions, becomes a catastrophic failure and a driving force of the narrative, and grants players the possibility to use The Book of Law, a tool that allows them to gain buffs and limit the consequences of their failure, at an often morally questionable cost.

ACCEPTANCE OF FAILURE

Many players assert that failure is part of playing video games - that it is an inevitable occurrence, a mandatory feature of games. While not all games include failure, many of them do - and long-time players may have built up a tolerance of acceptance to failure that players with a different games literacy or experience may not have. ‘Learning by failing’ is a common mindset in games, but for some people, who are not familiar with games or a lower tolerance for failure and frustration, a different approach or framing to failure might help in making the experience more accessible.

UNAMBIGUOUS FEEDBACK

Learning by failing works insofar as players get some form of feedback from the game. The game may explicitly state why the player failed, provide tips for progression, or the gameplay may be engineered so that it is very clear to the player how the failure occurred in the first

place (chance, a missed platform, a poorly timed jump or hit, a bad choice, etc). Lifting all possible ambiguity about the reason of the failure allows players to more swiftly go back into the game and attempt to correct course, and lets them know what to look out for next time.

Papers Please does this printing out a document in-game that fines the player if they erroneously let a character through the border when they should have been detained. While the immediacy of the mechanic does not fit the narrative (realistically, the player should only find out that they let someone through that they shouldn't have hours, or days after it happened, not instantly), in this case, Lucas Pope chose to prioritise clarity over a narrative consideration, to ensure a smooth gameplay loop and give players the necessary feedback to continue enjoying the game.

PLAYER RESPONSIBILITY

In games where failure is accounted for in the narrative, the story and mechanics work together to tie player failure to character failure. If the character fails, it is because of the actions of the player, fostering a sense of agency (when there is success) and responsibility (when there is failure). It is made clear that the failure isn't due to an element of luck, or to an impossibly difficult design. REWORK

COMMUNITIES

Playing with an audience, for example family members, friends, streaming viewers, etc, can create new perceptions and dynamics within fail states. With an audience, failure becomes a spectacle, a shared experience: watching somebody else fail at a game can be very funny, or provide a sense of *schadenfreude*, or spur the spectator to come to the rescue and provide some assistance. Playing with a friend can dedramatise failure and make it much easier to overcome - and bring people together when working to find a solution.

IT NEVER HAPPENED

In many games that include a die-and-retry system of failure, the player character dies and is brought back to life without the character's death or failure being acknowledged within the game's narrative. Effectively, from a story point of view, it is as though the events leading up to the failure and the failure itself are erased, and re-written; similar to shooting another take in cinema and only keeping the best one. This is a very common model of failure in video games (in AAA games such as *Uncharted* as well as indies such as *Celeste*) - one can support learning loops, but that can also be detrimental to the narrative experience. Finding a balance between both can be a creative challenge in and of itself.

NO FAILURE

Some games do not include any experience of failure, both mechanically and thematically. Such games are often disputed as ‘not being real games’, due to certain assumptions that all games must include some kind of challenge and/or win states and fail states. Despite this, these games include a wide range of expressive possibilities, from walking simulators to hypercasual games, and offer new storytelling possibilities that present different kinds of ‘conflict’ - or none at all.

In *Gone Home*, the player plays as a young woman returning home after a long absence. The game ends once the player has investigated the home and pieced together the puzzle of the family’s history. There is no progression check based on skill: rather, the character progresses from point A to point B until reaching the story’s conclusion. The point of the game is exploration and environmental storytelling, rather than testing the player’s skills, wits, or dexterity.

WHAT IS FAILURE?

For some people, games constitute a safe space wherein to try things they would otherwise not be able to do outside of games. This includes experiencing and experimenting with certain topics or emotions, in a way that has no perceived consequences outside of the game. Failing in a video game has much less drastic and dramatic consequences than failing at something where the stakes are much higher (ex: a job, a test, etc). For some people, this is a chance to evaluate and reflect on their own tolerance and attitude to failure, and to explore what failure means to them.

SAFE (?) EMOTIONAL REFLECTION

Because games are, for the most part, a low-stakes environment wherein failure has less bearing on real life (if the character dies in the game, nobody dies in real life!), games can constitute a good environment for players to explore and reflect upon a range of emotions. Just like we may be horrified by a character’s death in our favourite TV show, failing in games can trigger powerful emotions (sadness, anger, frustration, grief, helplessness…), while also offering players the chance to scrutinise those emotions. This re-appraisal process (‘why did I feel the way that I felt?’) can be a very valuable experience in and of itself.

DIFFICULT THEMES

Failure can be a tool to explore difficult themes weaved into the story. Failure can exist in games exploring themes such as war, loss, relationships, mental health, etc. Games differ from film or television in that game mechanics are part of the storytelling tools at the game designer’s disposal: the actions the player must undertake, how they can win and fail, can communicate part of the story to the player. As such, when dealing with difficult themes, it is important to consider how fail states may interfere with the communication of that theme,

either interfering with that communication, or even communicating the opposite of the intended experience.

Through the Darkest of Times is a resource-management, strategy game based in WW2 Berlin, wherein the player runs a resistance group from Hitler's ascension to power through to the end of the war. During the early days of development, the win and fail conditions were very different from the final product: the player progressed from one chapter to the next by fulfilling certain numerical objectives (ex: gaining 100 supporters before a certain date). Failing to complete this objective meant restarting the chapter. During playtesting, the developers at Paintbucket Games realised that these win and fail conditions meant that the players were incentivised to play the game by the numbers, instead of exploring the various resistance actions at their disposal, and the associated stories the game was trying to tell. The developers then changed the win and fail conditions for progressing by adding a morale meter: as long as the morale remains above zero, the game can continue. This more flexible approach allows for a more flexible experience, where the player can focus on exploring the various possibilities for leading resistance actions, and decide what kind of resistant they want to be in the game, without the game dictating a 'right' or 'wrong' way to resist fascism - thus being much more open to the game's messages and themes.

FOSTERING POSITIVE VALUES

Experiencing failure in games is a lower-stake opportunity to do so than in some real-life situations. As such, for some people, it's an opportunity to exercise some values they would like to sustain outside of games as well. According to some players, being confronted to failure in games is a chance for them to exercise patience and sportsmanship, 'learning how to lose and accept failure', in a way that they can then apply to real-life scenarios.

MONETISATION

For game studio models that rely on in-game monetisation, failure can be engineered to fit within the monetisation process: for instance by having a limited number of actions the player can perform for free. If the player fails to complete their objective before running out of actions, they may feel incentivised to spend money on new actions, and be able to continue playing.

Fallen London, a web-based text-based game that is free to play, partly relies on such transactions. It's a very story-rich game, where success and failure relies on a throw of die and player statistics, where the player unlocks further content by performing actions, the number of which within a day is limited. If the player so chooses, once they have run out of daily action, they can spend real money to purchase more actions and continue playing - which can be a way for them to finish a storyline despite failing at a task.

THE PLAYER AND THE GAME

Failure can constitute a form of disruption in the play experience. Some players report that failure can take them by surprise, or make them question how the game works and what is required of them to beat the game or overcome an obstacle. A seemingly easy game becomes a test, a linear gameplay becomes more nuanced, a quest that seemed to be about character strength may be more dexterity or stealth-based, a player character's success turns out to have terrible consequences, etc. Failure can be a trigger for re-negotiation and re-appraisal of the game as a whole, and of the player's relationship to it, and of their position and role within it.

PERSONAL SIGNIFICANCE OF FAILURE

Failure can be interpreted and experienced very differently, depending on the player's culture, background, life experiences, experiences with different media, etc. For some players, games are all about winning and failing is a tough pill to swallow; for others, failure is just a stepping stone towards success. For some players, failing in a narrative game is not really 'failure', because the story continues regardless, while other players may attribute varying levels of importance of scale to individual failures.

WHAT ARE GAMES?

Games are always evolving, as do players' understanding of what games are, and what to expect of them. For some people, the possibility of failure is a core component of games: you overcome obstacles, and complete an objective, or a series of them. Upheaving these expectations can leads to ground-breaking re-definitions of what constitutes a game (for instance the discussions surrounding walking simulators and whether or not they count as 'games'), or a specific genre in which failure plays a crucial role.

AN INTROSPECTIVE JOURNEY

Some players report that confronting failure in games has been an opportunity for them not only to learn how to cope with failure, or how to handle themselves better in the face of it, but also a chance to reflect upon themselves and what their attitude to failure may say about them. Failure can lead to valuable introspective journeys, where the player is given the chance to consider their attitudes, preferences, and personality in specific scenarios designed to challenge them.

WILDCARD (AFFIRMATION AND QUESTION)

Thought of something that is on none of the cards, but that you feel really should be? Add your own ideas! Our perceptions and understanding of games and failure changes all the time: this tool is meant as a guide for reflection, not a prescription, unchanging rulebook.

Note: The rules outlined above are only an **indication** of how you can use this deck to get you started. If you realise you would rather time yourself, or go through the entire deck, or use the cards in any other way, feel free to do so! Ultimately, you should do what feels best for your design practice and intent. This is a guiding exercise to open up discussion and ideas, not a checklist.

When using this deck, you should already have a concept for your game, some ideas for your mechanics, including or not including fail states, but not have gone as far as your ideas being set in stone and immutable. This exercise may prove less productive if you're close to releasing your game. But it may be useful if you're in the early stages of design, and are trying to explore ideas out of curiosity, proof-testing your concepts, or looking for a fresh perspective. If you are close to releasing your game, or have already released, this may still be useful as a post-mortem exercise. Use it as you will!