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OMELAS

A game of social intrigue placed within the city council of Omelas,
between those who are trying to build the city and those trying to leave.

> You are the council members in the city of Omelas, working together to continue to build this city towards perpetual prosperity. And you all know that somewhere underneath the city there is a child whose misery upholds the happiness of the people of Omelas. Beware, there are rebels among you that may decide to leave the city and head out into the darkness to retrieve the child and bring it into the light. If they do, Omelas' perfect structure will cease to exist.

OVERVIEW.

On the board there are two sides, the "*Omelas*" (red) for those wanting to stay in the city and "*The Darkness*" (black) for those trying to leave the city. At the beginning of the game, 1 player (or 2 depending on the number of players) is assigned the secret role of *Rebel*, and others play regular *Council Members* In each rounda tile is pulled out, followed by a dice roll. The council members aim to match the 'Yes' votes exactly to the dice roll - which will allow them to keep the tile on the Omelas. The Rebel, secretly tries to sabotage the vote and take the tile to *The Darkness*

OBJECTIVE.

The game ends when all squares on either side are filled.
The side who fills all the spaces on their side first, wins.

PARTS LIST.

A

B

C

D

E

A. 1 ------ Game Board (Omelas - Red side / The Darkness - Black side)
B. 12 ------ Vote Cards (6 Yes, 6 No Cards)
C. 6 ------ Role Cards (2 Rebel, 4 Council Member Cards)
D. 18 ------ Letter Tiles (3 of O, M, E, L, A, S Tiles)
E. 1 ------ 4-Sided Die

SETUP.

Card Distribution

Each player should have a set of Vote Cards (1 Yes, 1 No), and a Role Card. For the Role Card distribution, refer to the following:

- 4 Players: 1 Rebel, 3 Council Members
- 5 Players: 1 Rebel, 4 Council Members
- 6 Players: 2 Rebels, 4 Council Members

First, hand out the set of Vote Cards to all players. Then, shuffle the Role cards, making sure that all Role Cards are placed with the 'Council Member' side facing up. Each player takes a Role card. Once all the cards have been dealt, all players check their role card secretly, without flipping them.

Tile Placement

Pick out the 'O' tile from the tile bag, and place it on the 'O' square.

HOW TO PLAY.

1. The youngest player starts. Draw a random letter from the letter bag and place it on the corresponding 'OMELAS' square. If the letter is already on the board, it is discarded, and the turn moves on to the next person, going clockwise.
2. The same person rolls the die. The number determines the ***exact*** number of 'Yes' cards needed to keep the letter card on the square. *(ex. If the dice rollis a 3, you need exactly 3 'Yes' cards, no more and no less, to keep the tile. If there are 4 or more/2 or less cards, the vote fails.)*
3. Everyone discusses the way they should be voting.
4. After the discussion, everyone votes. The voting is done by players putting their chosen Vote Cards in the center, face-down.
5. The Vote Cards are shuffled, and then revealed one by one.
6. If the number of 'Yes' cards exactly matches the dice roll, the tile stays on the square. If not, the tile is moved to The Darkness, ***face-down***.
7. Everyone hands in their remaining Vote Card, and all Vote Cards (voted and remaining) are shuffled to be redistributed. Each player should have a set of 1 'Yes' and 1 'No' card again.
8. Play continues from Step 1, with the next person drawing a letter. The game ends when either side is completed.

VICTORY.

- The Council Members win if all the tiles are placed on the Omelas, completing the word 'OMELAS'.
- The Rebel wins when tiles are placed on all 3 spaces of The Darkness.

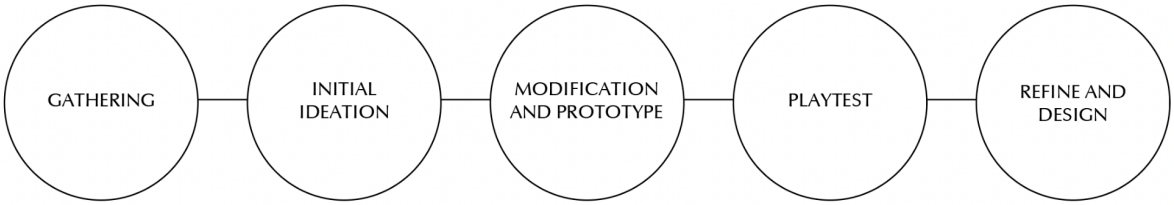
*EXTREME TENSION VARIANT.

For players who want a more tense, mind-game situation, go for the following Role Card distribution:

- 4 Players: 2 Rebels, 2 Council Members
- 5 Players: 2 Rebels, 3 Council Members

OMELAS

Process of Making and Design Statement



The basic process of making follows this diagram. Our team first selected things to communicate from the story, set our creative goals for the game, and took lessons to take away from the reference game. All things gathered, we delved into initial ideation, and after discussion decided to merge a few of the developed ideas into one. The prototype was playtested and refined for completion.

GATHERING.

From the Story

Two things were taken from the story, the ***conflict element*** and the ***illusion of choice***. The 'Ones who Walk Away' - some citizens deciding not to be a part of the cruelty of the seemingly-utopian city is the explicit conflict element that we wanted to directly show through the game. The illusion of choice is that neither the people staying in the city nor those who walk away actually saves the child, signifying the inevitability of the child's suffering.

Creative Goals

We settled on three creative goals that we should aim to achieve, based on the emotional responses and narrative connotations from the story.

- structural Should be a game that involves a poker face - as to not give oneself away.
- structural Every player should be given the choice on their actions.
- narrative Individuality over society (or alternatively, individual morals over societal morals and customs).

From the Reference Game

After playing 'Mascarade' and watching the video of 'Love Letter', we felt that it was not quite intriguing without players knowing who themselves were - so we aimed for role assignment instead.

INITIAL IDEATION.

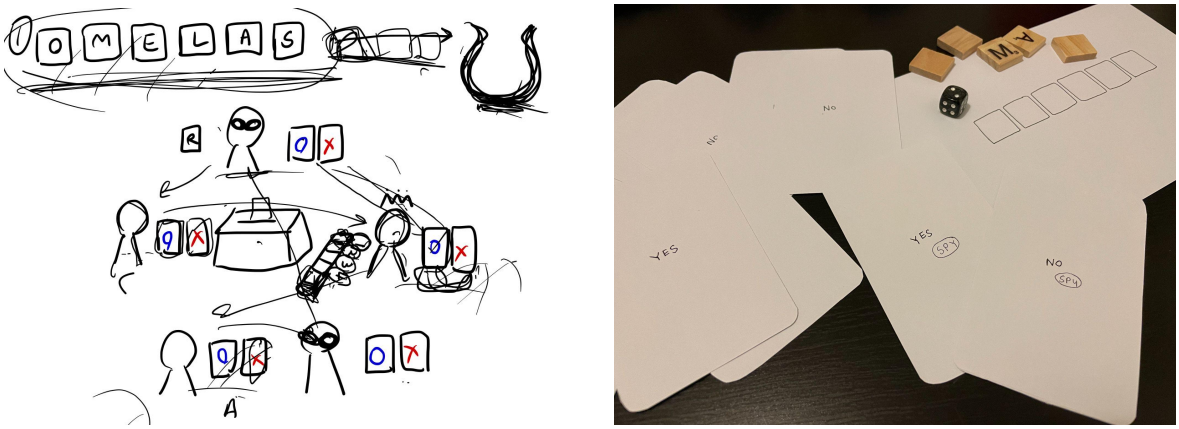
<u>Ideas</u>

- Personality card game with individual win conditions
- Ratting-out the hypocrite game as parts of the existing story unfold each round
- Rapid card-discarding game with actions according to the rank of the cards
- Random personalities and random wins
- Guillotine vote game, where we convicting a player each round as the murderer
- Deceit word game where all players except for one is dealt a card with a common word, and players try to convince the person with a different word that they are not the outlier
- Deceit word game with two words and two sides, trying to settle for the same word without saying which.

These were the games we came up with during the ideation phase. For these ideas however, it was quite difficult to combine the narrative with complex mechanics, such as games with multiple individual goals. Thus we took some ideas from the idea pile to build a new game.

MODIFICATION AND PROTOTYPE.

The concept of ratting out the ***hypocrite***, the mechanics of ***voting***, and the structure of the ***word*** game were combined to design the new, modified game. For the word part, we decided to dissect the word to letter tiles so that each letter could serve as a goal for the rounds in the game. After sketching out the intended gameplay, the prototype was roughly developed for playtesting.



Sketch of the gameplay and the playable prototype

PLAYTEST.

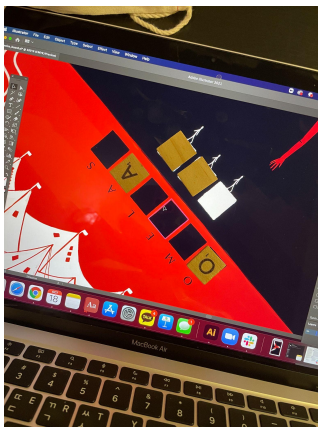
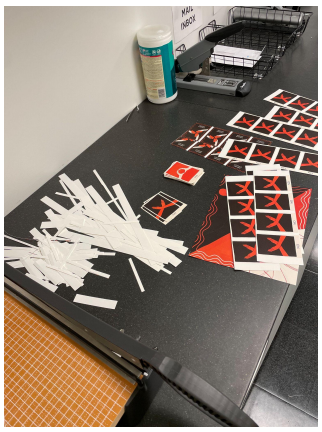
Taking note of what happened in the gameplay, we made revisions to the design.

Key Changes

- The largest issue was that the game was strongly sided to the spy (the name later changed to Rebel). So we replaced the 6-die to a 4-die, to prevent situations where everyone has to vote 'Yes' - making it too easy for the spy to sabotage the vote.
- The 'spy' indication on the Vote Card brought the need for a mediator, since it was impossible to return the Vote Cards to the player without revealing their identity. So we decided to make the Vote Cards look identical, and to collect the remaining cards / shuffle them together.
- The discarded tiles were going nowhere, so we decided to make space for them by creating The Darkness side - where the discarded tiles go after the vote fails. This also created an explicit goal for the Rebel.

REFINE AND DESIGN.

The last step was to focus on the visual storytelling of our game and the fabrication. Choices on the visual design will be further iterated in the design statement section.


Designing, Sizing the design, Cutting the Print, and Polishing

DESIGN STATEMENT.

Our fundamental aim for "OMELAS" was to balance both embedded and emergent narrative- though, we wanted to allow for more emergent narrative through social intrigue and interactions. In order to achieve this goal, we first used game mechanics to express embedded narrative. We wanted to communicate the core conflict element of the story- in order to preserve Omelas' utopian status, there lies an abhorrent cost, a secret so morally awful (the suffering child) that prompts some people to ultimately walk away from the city. To convey this conflict, we made the primary objective of the players to fill all their respective side's tiles, which corresponds to the city's fate. Filling the OMELAS side reflects expanding the city and elongating its prosperity, while willingly acknowledging and ignoring the child at the same time. Filling the Dark Side mirrors walking away with a moral compass still intact and simultaneously hurting if not delaying the city's progress. Council Members must work together as a group- like a society- and coordinate their YES votes to match the number rolled through a die if they are to add a letter to their side (aka build their city). The Rebel must sabotage this collaboration as much as they can and walk away once their damage has been done to the city. A few extra things to further note is that we decided to purposely make this game rebel-sided to establish the concept in which the city of Omelas is destined to be deserted. We also wanted to keep consistent the illusion of choice present in the original story- even if people left or stayed in the city, the child was still neglected. Whether you win or lose a game of "OMELAS", the child remains abandoned.

Next, we combined game mechanics with visual aesthetics to further demonstrate embedded narrative. We designed the game board to illustrate and contextualize the two sides and the child (while also staying simple and concise enough to allow for gameplay, of course). As for the cards, we were inspired by tarot, which symbolizes 'playing with fate'. We chose not to include faces or characters on the role cards so that anyone can identify/ immerse themselves with the roles and stay hidden; especially in the case of the rebels, in which anonymity is crucial. For the game as a whole, we decided on using a red, black, and white color palette: in nature, red and black are warning colors; red is used to represent danger, black is used to represent darkness and mystery. We just used white to balance out the heavy reds and blacks and make the visuals more satisfying to look at altogether. Overall, we didn't want to spoon-feed our players the whole story, but rather give just enough information to allow for interpretations, as well as for the players to expand on the world of Omelas however they want to.

Whereas we used visuals and mechanics to allow for embedded narrative, we relied on the dynamics of our game to enable emergent narrative. How the players interact with the game and with each other determines the crucial resolution of the story that will unfold. There are many possibilities, and in conjunction with how generally vague "OMELAS" is with its storytelling, it is up to the social intrigue of the players to lead and close off the narrative.