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Platform: PC

Executive Summary

A Knight at the Tavern is a casual card-based video game set in a classic high-fantasy world. The player takes on the role of an ex-knight turned tavern owner who is not only responsible for hosting patrons, but meeting the local kingdom's comically dystopian "enjoyment quota" to avoid having the tavern destroyed. In-game, the player is dealt a random hand of meals ranging from mundane to fantastical and then must match those to patrons based on their various preferences. *A Knight at the Tavern* also features simple controls and low system requirements, expanding who is able to play and access the game.

Process

Brainstorming for the project that would eventually turn into *A Knight at the Tavern* began in late November 2025, spurred by our shared interest in video games. Initially we conceived of a more methodical puzzle game, which then shifted to a more ambitious and fast-paced rogue-like, before finally settling somewhere in the middle, balancing speed and strategy based on our prototyping and playtesting feedback as well as time and resource constraints.

We took inspiration from games like *Balatro*, *Dave the Diver*, and *Tavern Talk* for the game's design, but tried to include narrative and gameplay in equal measure. For example, *Balatro* is a game with a nearly entirely mechanical appeal, whereas *Dave the Diver* and *Tavern Talk* lean more on their stories with less emphasis on gameplay depth. In comparison, we tried to create an experience that challenges players to make interesting, time-sensitive decisions while still presenting a light-hearted narrative in the background with characters that players can attach to.

Our initial prototypes for the game were created using just a deck of cards, abstractly representing potential mechanics. We playtested this physical prototype with a couple initial people before developing a digital version on the website playingcards.io. Using this digital prototype, we playtested with two more groups of people.

After playtesting, we began developing the game in the Unity engine in earnest. We chose Unity due to our past experience and familiarity with the engine, allowing us the best opportunity to achieve our goals. While many of our development responsibilities are

overlapping due to the small size of our team, we generally split up work based on our expertise, with Andrew handling the design of the game, documentation, and miscellaneous tasks, Nicholas handling technical design and programming, and Jayden handling art design and development of other assets.

Playtesting

We initially tested our physical prototype of the game by verbally explaining the rules to participants. Our procedure was rather informal, with us openly talking about our thought process to elicit feedback, as at this early stage in development, we were still figuring out exactly what we wanted the game to be and wanted to stimulate discussion.

After developing a digital version of this same prototype, our methodology became more refined. The digital prototype contained a basic description of the rules, and we had also developed a formalized set of instructions for how play proceeded, though it was still being experimented with. Much of the feedback we received at this time was positive, but there was some divergence with how testers envisioned the final product. Some imagined a faster pace for the game, with mechanics that would push players to make snap decisions, while others compared the prototype to games like klondike or mahjong solitaire, with their slow-paced, relaxed puzzle gameplay.

We ultimately decided to take elements from both of these styles, informed by our comparative research into other games and our intent to combine mechanical and narrative elements. While not impossible to manage, the addition of story to an exceptionally fast game risks interrupting the player's flow, while that same addition to an exceptionally slow game risks boring the player. Crucially, our target audience, who probably have at least a passing interest in fantasy and/or role-playing games, are likely to be receptive to the kind of game that includes both a non-zero level of mechanical engagement and narrative.

System Requirements

One of our driving motivations behind this project was to make a video game that is technologically accessible. With the increasing capability and power of personal computers and laptops, video games

are being created with high system requirements in mind as graphical fidelity remains a sought-after selling point, especially for games in the AAA space with large budgets and high development times.

However, our core audience includes young adults who may not have access to cutting edge or even last-generation hardware, particularly with the recent increase in RAM prices that only exacerbate the digital divide. The demand for computer components is so intense that even major players in the industry like Valve and Sony have had to delay product releases and reconsider pricing. By designing and optimizing our game to be playable on less powerful machines, not only do we expand who is able to play it, but we assert our belief that games should be created with sustainability, equity, and accessibility in mind.

The following system requirements are based on our research into games with a similar graphical style and their requirements, as well as our estimate into what the game could most realistically run off of.

OS: Windows 10 (64-bit)

Processor: Intel Core i3 (or equivalent)

Memory: 2 GB RAM

Graphics card: Integrated graphics (OpenGL 3.0 compatible)

The World

Characters

Below are the major recurring characters that appear during play.

The Knight: A brave and successful knight who once sought glory by taking on all manner of quests. Having tired of the adventuring life (and the very inconvenient accumulating pile of powerful artifacts), they've found yet another trial to challenge them: running a tavern in one of the most dystopic kingdoms around.



The King: The comically malevolent ruler over the kingdom in which the Knight resides. He has a penchant for siccing his pet dragon onto local

businesses that fail to meet the arbitrary enjoyment quota (measured by monetary profits, of course).

The Omnomicon: A cursed sentient tome the knight collected at some point during their past adventures. While it mostly spouts nonsense in an attempt to corrupt the knight to do its bidding (ineffectively), it also occasionally gives effective cooking advice and contains a number of rather delicious recipes. The knight keeps it cooperative by feeding it prepared meals every once and while.



The Chef(f), Jeff: The former owner of the tavern who unfortunately perished the last time the tavern failed to meet the King's enjoyment quota. Cursed to remain in the land of the corporeal and haunt the tavern, he coaches the knight as a mentor and also serves as his cook.



Worldbuilding

Apart from an introductory cutscene and short tutorial, the world surrounding the Knight's tavern is revealed primarily in bits and pieces from the food you serve, the patrons that visit, and environmental details.

Artstyle

The art of *A Knight at the Tavern* takes inspiration from early internet Adobe Flash games and animation, characterized by bright, flat colors, simple shapes, and a general laid-back aesthetic. First and foremost, the simplified 2D nature of this style makes it very computationally cheap compared to 3D or more shader-intensive 2D games. It also pays homage to the games of the Newgrounds era, a popular website for hosting a variety of media. These browser-based games were, in many ways, pioneers of technological accessibility in their design and gained popularity among younger audiences as a result.

Gameplay

Game Experience

A Knight at the Tavern is a casual game that we intend to be engaging but not overly demanding for the player. Based on the feedback we received, we leaned towards creating something formulaic, like *Minesweeper* or solitaire-style games, but with an element of strategy like those found in *Balatro* or *Dave the Diver*. The more intense background elements of the game, like the threat of having the tavern destroyed or the pressure of serving customers, are presented as comedic, over-the-top, and not particularly hostile.

Game Controls

The game is primarily controlled through the mouse, used in menus to click on buttons and in-game to select and drag cards. By keeping the controls relatively simple, players will have little trouble interfacing with the game, which may otherwise lead to frustration or annoyance.

Game Mechanics

Upon starting the game, the player is presented with the main menu where they can start or continue a run, view options and credits, or quit the game.

When starting a new run, the player is given a skippable short tutorial by the ghostly Jeff, explaining how the game is played. The player is tasked with serving patrons food based on their preferences in order to make money, needing to make a certain amount each day to avoid having the tavern destroyed by the King. Play generally proceeds as follows.

1. The player is dealt a 'hand' of five randomized meals (represented as stylized cards).
2. Three patrons stand at the tavern's counter in a row and ask for a specific kind of meal or combination of meals based on their pre-defined preferences.
3. The player can then drag the appropriate meal(s) if they have them or discard them to the Omnomicon to draw new ones.

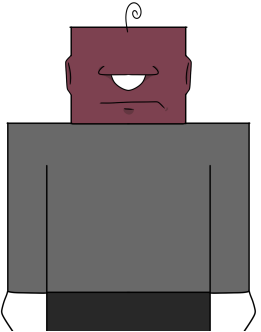
4. After giving a patron their requested meal(s), a new patron will take their place, and the player is dealt new meals to refill their hand.
5. This continues until the end of the day, at which time if the player has met the quota they move to the shop to purchase tavern upgrades from Jeff.
6. The player moves on to the next day with increasing difficulty. If they fail to meet the quota, their run is over.

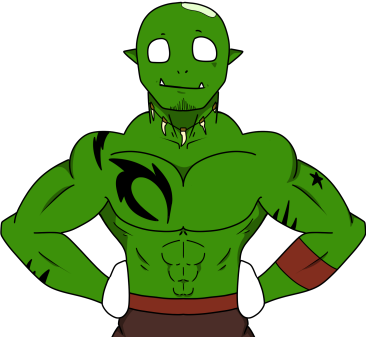
Strategy emerges largely from patron preferences. Some patrons may reward more gold for clearing them but want a higher quantity of more specific meals before they're satisfied, which is time consuming and puts extra cognitive pressure on the player. The player may want to discard meals now in order to 'clear' a more difficult patron right now, or may serve other patrons in the hopes of drawing the exact meal they're looking for.

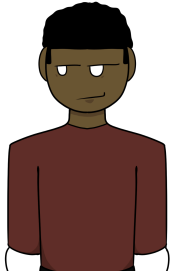
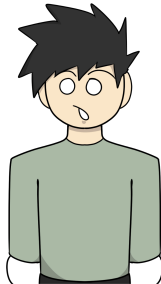
Game Elements

The Patrons

<u>Name</u>	<u>Description</u>	<u>Sprite</u>
Gabriel the Seraphim	A minor god that watches over the people of the kingdom and neighboring territories. Came down to the land of the corporeal to enjoy human delicacies.	

Orkul the Cyclops	A grumpy cyclops that has traveled for days to reach the tavern. In search of an ale strong enough to surpass his high tolerance.	
Lindsay the Elf	A catty undercover elven princess who occasionally leaves her kingdom to visit friends in the neighboring kingdom.	
Catherine the Mage	No one really knows how she attained Great Mage status, and the respect she commands stems from fear of what she may accidentally cast rather than her rank. A bit of a fashionista.	
Sirxus the Lesser Demon	Escaped from the Underworld to live above ground. He has a surprisingly disarming charm despite his battle-hardened appearance.	

Fred the Orc	The jovial Orc chieftain from a neighboring village. Rumors of his mythical strength have spread even beyond Orcish encampments, though most seem embellished.	
Atria the Royal Knight	Once colleagues with the Knight, Atria has recently grown distant in light of her promotion to Royal Knight. Whenever she's not protecting the King's cabinet, she comes to the Knight's tavern mostly to heckle them.	
Unngggh the Zombie	Once a normal human, who was resurrected by a cunning necromancer. He has a hard time dying, so he just roams the world, looking for brains... or a nice steak.	

Other humans	Normal visitors of the tavern that come from within the kingdom or neighboring territories.	   
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Monetization and Audience

The target audience for our game is for casual computer gamers, generally around age 18-24. People within this demographic are most likely to be constrained in what they can play by the technology they have access to, and may be interested in its high-fantasy theming. While younger players may enjoy the gameplay and style, some elements of

the game, like the depiction of alcohol and implied cartoon violence, could be problematic. The game is planned to be priced at \$2.99 USD based on this audience's budget, the price point of similar games, and our desire to make the game as accessible as possible.

Future Updates

In the future, we are interested in adding more content and features to the game. During development, there were many ideas that we wanted to implement but ultimately fell outside the scope of our project, mainly due to time constraints. Some of these ideas include:

- Special tavern events that impact gameplay
- More unique dialogue for patrons
- Additional sets of foods and patrons to serve
- Tavern appearance customization
- Card appearance customization
- Meta-progression unlocks (additional modes, cosmetics, or permanent progression)
- Extra accessibility options (especially for controls, like changing mouse-click behavior or binding actions to the keyboard)