



# The making of *La Mancha*

## Games as Literary Criticism

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### ABSTRACT

This paper considers the ways in which game making may be a means for deeply analyzing literary and artistic works. This work is done through a game design postmortem of *La Mancha*, a storytelling card game based on Miguel de Cervantes' 1605 novel *Don Quixote*. The game allows players to interact with and reshape moments from the novel through guided storytelling using quotes from books that influenced Cervantes. This postmortem describes two approaches to design: design precedents and the "collected work theory" of game analysis; that were integral to *La Mancha*'s creation. To accomplish this, this postmortem describes previous efforts to translate literary works into tabletop design and the different ways those efforts allow players to interact with their source material's content and themes. It also describes how individual moments from *Don Quixote*, its themes, and critical analysis were used to design not only the overall game, but individual interactions, cards, and even pieces of artwork for the game. Finally, the role of these concepts in *La Mancha*'s Kickstarter funding campaign and commercial release will be described, including ways which the lessons learned will be incorporated into future works.

### CCS CONCEPTS

• Applied computing; • Arts and Humanities; • Fine Arts;; • Media Arts;; • Education; • Interactive Learning Environments;; • Interaction design; • interaction design theory, concepts and paradigms;

### KEYWORDS

Game Design, literature, Don Quixote, educational games, literary criticism, design thinking

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

Writers and theorists of "serious games" – which will be understood as games made to both entertain and address non-entertainment

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or real-world impacting goals [1] – regularly extoll the virtues of games as tools for exploring real-world concepts through play. [2][3][4] As many game designers will say though, games – regardless of their intent – are not magic wands for fixing the world's problems. Rather, games are complex systems whose parts must be tuned and balanced before any "serious" content can be understood by players. Early work that suggests this includes Kurt Squire and Henry Jenkins' analyses of popular commercial games used in classrooms: the reasons that students chose to engage the games in the classroom were more complex than "fun", but included a variety of personal and social factors.[5] Game design scholars Andrew James Stott and Carman Neustaedter warn against shallow implementations of games in classroom environments based on reward systems, often referred to as "gamification." [6] Instead, they offer four dynamics as elements of successful classroom games: freedom to fail, rapid feedback, progression, and storytelling. Schell Games designer Sabrina Culyba, in her book *The Transformational Framework* [7], offers what may be one of the most comprehensive explorations of what makes "transformational" games successful. It does so through exercises designed to have creators define the ways their games will address their audience.

This more comprehensive approach to educational games was central to the design of *La Mancha*, a storytelling card game based on Miguel de Cervantes' 1605 novel *Don Quixote*. *Don Quixote* is the story of a country gentleman who reads books of chivalry until "his brains dried up, causing him to lose his mind." [8] In his madness, he decides to become a knight such as the ones he read about in his books of chivalry: riding around the countryside with his squire Sancho Panza in search of great feats to accomplish. *Don Quixote* is a significant literary work: considered the first "modern novel" [9] and among the greatest ever written. In the over four-hundred years since its publication, its interpretation has evolved with time: at points being seen as a comic novel, social commentary, and meditation on identity and the realities of life, among others. [10]

*La Mancha* puts players in the role of Don Quixote-esque knights seeking to become the most renowned in Spain. Players take turns drawing from the Journey Deck, where they find Encounters (story prompts that reward the best storyteller with strength-granting Treasure Cards), Loves (boon-granting characters that they can impress with poems composed from their Chivalry cards), and Feat Cards. Players build their stories and poems around Chivalry Cards, with quotes from chivalric books that inspired Cervantes (figure 1) When a Feat Card is drawn, players enter a battle phase where they attack the card by adding the total strength bonuses from their Treasure and Love cards, then take turns rolling a six-sided die. If the total of their attack (strength plus die result) is equal or greater than the Feat's difficulty, then they hit it. The first player to make two successful attacks wins. The player who wins the most Feat



**Figure 1: Promotional image for *La Mancha*, showing the different card types, including Feat Cards (far left), story-telling prompts (second card from left), Love Cards (middle two cards with character portraits), Treasure Cards (second and third cards to the right) and the Chivalry cards that players use to tell their stories (far right.)**

Cards after a pre-determined number of them have been drawn (usually 3 to 5) is the winner.

To be a satisfying game experience, *La Mancha* could not be a gamification system augmenting a student’s reading homework or as a set of trivia cards, but had to be a self-contained work that complemented the novel and allowed players to deeply explore its themes [11]. Doing so required a comprehensive view of how and why serious and educational games engage players such as those described by Squire, Jenkins, Stott, Neustaedter, and Culyba. This effort would also involve design methods adapted from other design disciplines. These processes – *precedent study* and a *collected work theory* of game analysis – are of particular interest to game designers, as they allow them to synthesize influences from a wide landscape of art, literature, and media into new works in both macro and micro-scaled ways. These methods would help create gameplay mechanics that best represented the action within *Don Quixote* while elements of the game, down to the design of individual cards, could represent modern literary criticism of the novel.

This paper provides a postmortem of the creation of *La Mancha*, akin to those found in game industry publications such as *Gamasutra* [12], for the purpose of exploring how practical game design processes become tools for literary criticism. Rather than tilt at the windmills of speculative theory, this work begins by defining the design processes used to approach the challenge of turning *Don Quixote* into a tabletop game and describing game precedents which helped broadly define the game’s mechanics. The paper then shows how individual game components were designed to address modern literary criticism of the novel, allowing players to explore this criticism as they play. Lastly, it describes how this relationship between *La Mancha* and *Don Quixote* was expressed during the Kickstarter campaign that funded the game’s production as well as its subsequent release and promotion to find an audience.

## 2 LA MANCHA’S MACRO DESIGN – PRECEDENT STUDY AS A DESIGN METHODOLOGY

*La Mancha* did not begin life with lofty serious or educational game goals, but as a response to a design challenge sent to a monthly tabletop group. Rather than play purchased games at an upcoming session, the member that issued the challenge wrote in their e-mail, we should create our own prototype games. I was reading *Don Quixote* and had been wanting to make a game based on it in some way. Creating a digital game was a non-starter. Given the production realities of digital games, initial ideas were either expansive such that they would require large teams and many resources or limited in scope such that they would fail to properly explore the novel.

A tabletop game though, could allow players to explore *Don Quixote*’s eight hundred sixty-three pages and four-hundred-plus years of literary relevance in a form made from simple components: cards, dice, and so forth. Rather than painstakingly model *Don Quixote*’s world and characters in 3D or with a modern game engine, players’ imaginations could do a lot of that production. Roleplaying game designer Jason Morningstar calls this idea the *fruitful void*, the social space between players and the game itself that players fill with meaningful content [13]. This meaningful content can take the form of simple social interactions, shared strategizing, playful distrust, or in the case of roleplaying games, actual narrative. *Don Quixote* is a novel rich in memorable interactions between Don Quixote, Sancho Panza, and the various characters they encounter. This made it an ideal base for a game for in which social interaction was a core element.

### 2.1 Precedent study in non-game contexts

Key to the design of *La Mancha* are methods from architectural design. While architecture offers spatial concepts useful to specialized areas of game development, such as level design, it also offers approaches that can ease game designers’ relationships with factors external to the project itself. Chief among these is the practice of *precedent study*: analyzing previous works in an area and applying the lessons of their successes and failures to your current projects. Architect and game design writer Sarah Bonser cites “the precedent method” as a key element of architecture school curricula [14]. She likewise describes groupings of works with common elements in a short period of time as a *style* or within the *zeitgeist*. A cynical reading of precedent design is that it concerns itself only with *trends* as a means of selling more games. While it has an important role in marketing or reaching audiences, it can also be a powerful creative force when used deliberately. Game developers Chris Lowthorpe and Sean Taylor identify the precedent method as a key element of postmodern design and compare its use to the musical practice of *sampling*, where clips from other works are recorded and remixed into new works [15]. This practice, they argue, helps break up what they describe as the “dangerously monocultural” aspects of gaming culture that emphasizes “gameplay mechanics over artistic or creative content.” [16]



Figure 2: Chivalry Cards, which have quotes from books of chivalry mentioned in *Don Quixote* and other sources, were a key part of *La Mancha* from the earliest design phases.

## 2.2 Story action and genre

Since *La Mancha* had a key challenge exploring a work of literature meaningfully through gameplay, precedent played an important role in its design. The first step in this design was deeply analyzing *Don Quixote* for useful activities or *verbs* that could form core mechanics of the game. To many readers the scene of Don Quixote charging his steed Rocinante towards a row of windmills is the defining image, but in reality, much of the book revolves around characters telling one another stories. This was a fruitful place to start finding precedents: storytelling is a key mechanism of several game genres such as roleplaying and party games.

Since the game was being designed for a more casual gathering, precedents from the social party card game genre, such as *The Metagame* [17] or *Apples to Apples* [18]), became the focus. These games have players respond to a prompt card, usually a question, with cards from their hand that have quotes or phrases printed on them. Some, like *Cards Against Humanity* [19], involve no player action beyond playing the cards while others, such as *Superfight* [20] give players the opportunity to argue for their chosen cards. In *Don Quixote*, even fight scenes feature heavy storytelling aspects: Don Quixote himself, his living as a knight a kind of pseudo-roleplaying game in itself, is prone to quoting from books of chivalry as he is about to take action. From the very first design phases, it was decided then that *La Mancha* would have a deck of “Chivalry Cards”, which have quotes from books of chivalry mentioned in *Don Quixote* on them – especially *Amadis of Gaul*, *Tirant lo Blanc*, and *Don Quixote* itself (figure 2) These cards could be played as in *Superfight* or *The Metagame*, but would form the basis for stories rather than arguments or jokes. Eventually, this mechanism was shown to create an “introduction to roleplaying games” experience: players would role play their own Don Quixote, but did not have to conceive of the whole story themselves.

Recreating other parts of the novel, such as the famous windmill scene, required precedents from other genres. To find these precedents, games were evaluated based on how they addressed narrative, explored literary themes, and whether they rendered systems like combat in easily-understood ways. Once a palette of suitable precedents and mechanics was identified, they could be sampled to form the composition of *La Mancha*.



Figure 3: The author’s copy of the *Moby Dick* card game showing the game’s decks, oil tokens, and standard setup.

## 2.3 Game mechanics as expression of narrative

Games that directly reference or recreate literary works formed an easy “one to one” precedent for *La Mancha*, as they accomplished already what *La Mancha* was trying to do. Two tabletop games, *Moby Dick* by King Post [21] and *Dune* by Avalon Hill [21], were vital examples in this area as they embodied the settings of their source material while allowing players to tell their own stories within the setting.

*Moby Dick* (figure 3) is based on the 1851 Herman Melville novel of the same name and has players take on the role of crewperson leading one of the *Pequod*’s many whaling boats. Players pay for crew members with oil, which adds to the power of their boat. The game proceeds as players draw cards from a deck marked “The Sea”, which features objects, locations, events from the novel, and notably, whales. When a player draws a whale, the game enters a battle phase where each player must first suffer an attack from the whale, then may run or attempt to spear the whale by adding the battle strength of one of their crew members to the result of rolling two six-sided die. If this total is higher than the whale’s strength, then the whale is speared. The game proceeds in this way, alternating between travel and whaling until a pre-determined number of white “Moby Dick” cards are drawn from The Sea deck, which initiates a final battle with the unkillable titular whale. The last player alive takes the Ishmael card and is the winner.

*Dune* (figure 4) recreates Frank Herbert’s 1965 novel of the same name by having players, each controlling one of six factions, compete to control territory on the planet Arrakis, home of a powerful resource called Spice. The game is a complex strategy game that plays out in fifteen turns with nine phases each, representing various actions from the novel: setting traps, moving troops on and off planet, battle, and gathering Spice. Beyond these turn rules, the game is made even more complex through each faction’s various powers and weaknesses, closely mirroring the role of characters and factions in the novel itself. The factions’ powers let them manipulate the game in various ways representing their roles in the novel. The game ends if a faction controls three stronghold spaces on the board at the end of a turn or if their faction’s special win condition has been met.



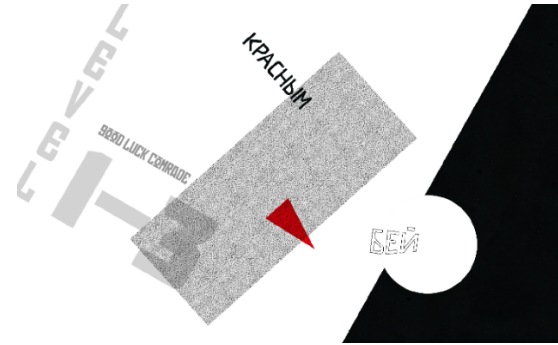
**Figure 4: The author’s copy of the 2019 Gale Force Nine reprinting of *Dune*, showing the board, components, and player faction screens in a standard setup.**

These games show different approaches to how a novel’s setting or story might be expressed through mechanics. *Moby Dick* broadly recreates the systems of whaling in the novel: players recruit crew to their individual boat and go out on whaling missions; but individual rules cards recall specific parts of the book or must be played in very exact ways. The Sea deck, for example, has Chapter cards, which recount an event from the book and add some condition to the overall game such as making specific cards more or less powerful. Every game of *Moby Dick* ends with all but one player dead, who then receives the Ishmael card. This adherence to the source material is a mixed bag: some interactions create the feeling of being in the novel while some add arbitrary complexity to the game (Ahab seems to have his own set of rules entirely.) The game also lacks a strong social component: players are really enacting the rules in parallel to one another with no mechanics that let them affect one another’s game. *Dune* contains very few specific events from the book, but rather focuses its efforts on recreating the characters and settings in extensive detail so players can create their own narratives. Since players can directly attack and use powers on one another, the game fills the “fruitful void” with exciting social dynamics. The result here is a smooth and exciting gameplay experience that creates a genuine sense of being in the novel, when the players understand what they are supposed to do. Learning the game can be difficult given the many phases and intricately realized factions. Seeing the successes and failures of these precedents was important in realizing *La Mancha’s* approach to *Don Quixote* and how the game might best put players in its setting.

## 2.4 Games as a way to explore artistic and literary works

During this precedent study, some games were also found that let players interact with text or visual components of a work as to interpret their meanings entirely. While not recreating the literary or artistic works they are based on literally, they represent a meaningful way for players to engage with works.

Two card games, *Dick* [23] and *Bards Dispense Profanity* [24] by Why So Ever, directly include text from their respective sources,



**Figure 5: A level from *Lissitzky’s Revenge* showing the game’s visual recreation of Lissitzky’s original poster.**

*Moby Dick* and various works by William Shakespeare, as playing pieces. Both games have *Cards Against Humanity*-style gameplay where a prompt card is drawn and each player must play a response card from their hand. In these games, the responses are quotes from the source texts on them. These games stand out because the scenarios depicted on the prompt cards are modern, rather than belonging to the era of their source material. This allows for reinterpretation or recontextualizing of the original text.

Letting players play, explore, and juxtapose elements of a work via gameplay is a powerful way to expose the concepts or themes of that work. Two digital games which play at this concept are *Lissitzky’s Revenge* [25] by Pie for Breakfast Studios and *Mediterranean Voidland* [26] by Federico Fasce. *Lissitzky’s Revenge* (figure 5) is a video game recreation of the 1920 poster *Beat the Whites with the Red Wedge* by Russian Constructivist artist El Lissitzky. A goal of the game’s designers was that any screenshot taken of the game should look like a new piece of art from the Suprematist or Constructivist movements, which emphasized basic geometric forms and architectural compositions [27]. Players take on the role of the red wedge from Lissitzky’s poster and each level is a puzzle to expose and defeat a white circle. Playing the game involves moving the geometric forms in each screen around to steer the wedge and expose the circle, creating different juxtapositions and relationships between shapes. In this way, playing is editing and interpreting.

*Mediterranean Voidland* (figure 6) is a virtual diorama recreating the vernacular architecture of designer Federico Fasce’s hometown on the coast of northwest Italy. After reading a description of the Acropolis in Athens and how it walked visitors through a series of specifically arranged views, Fasce created a similar experience in his game [28]. As *Lissitzky’s Revenge* players can rearrange the pieces of Suprematist artworks, *Mediterranean Voidland* players have agency over their experience of the environment: wandering lets them both explore the way views are arranged for them and how they can choose their own views. This tension is present in nearly all games and some critics have struggled with the idea that players can subvert authorial intent through their interventions. Fasce embraces player agency and exploration with rewarding vistas.

These works all give players agency over some core aspect of the work itself: the text, the graphics, or the perspective; as a means of



**Figure 6: *Mediterranean Voidland* plays like a conversation between the player and designer.**

giving players agency over the work. In viewing these works during the precedent analysis for *La Mancha*, they suggested promising things for the Chivalry Cards with quotes directly from *Don Quixote* and the chivalric novels that inspired it.

## 2.5 Blending game mechanics

When borrowing mechanics directly from precedents, solutions that worked for designers of the precedent game may prove unsuitable for a new work: two works with similar ideas might have different historical contexts, subject matters, or audiences. Precedent studies revealed a variety of promising approaches to translating literary works into social tabletop games, but this sampling had to be followed by an iterative sequence of prototypes and user tests.

One of the core game loops would be a *Metagame*-style “prompt and response” interaction with prompt cards and the Chivalry Cards with chivalric quotes on them as responses. While Chivalry Cards were a component of the game from very early on, the story prompts that these Chivalry Cards went through several versions before the right design was found. The first version of these prompt cards was much like those *Dick*, in that they depicted modern scenarios that players would respond to with quixotic ramblings, but playtesters found this confusing. Subsequent versions of these cards featured scenarios direct from *Don Quixote*, becoming the “Journey Deck”, similar to *Moby Dick*’s Sea Deck.

The Journey Deck was diversified with the inclusion of the Love and Feat Cards. Feats would be battles much like those in *Moby Dick*, but built to encourage player interaction through the use of special Chivalry Cards with progress-cancelling effects. *La Mancha*’s battles are also much more forgiving than *Moby Dick*’s in that players rarely lose their treasures and ties between die rolls and card numbers are ruled in the player’s favor rather than the card’s. This was done so that the system would better match *Don Quixote*’s lighthearted tone in contrast to the oppressive tone of *Moby Dick*.

These broad strokes worked well and after several playtests, the game flow was well-received by playtesters. Precedents helped shape not only the mechanics but also *La Mancha*’s approach to its source material: it featured story events and characters as in *Moby Dick* and *Dune*, but had an open-ended approach with the storytelling and Chivalry Cards that let players create their own versions of the story. Playtesting finally helped distance the game from its influences, finding places where borrowed mechanics had

to be adapted to their new setting and eventually, into more unique solutions.

## 3 LA MANCHA’S MICRO DESIGN: GAME COMPONENTS AS INDIVIDUAL WORKS

With the overall mechanics set, attention was turned to the design of individual cards. As we saw at the beginning of this paper, effective serious and educational games are those made with a rich set of dynamics rather than a few systems.

### 3.1 Theories of game analysis

As Lowthorpe and Taylor suggest, focusing only on broad mechanics risks making games too similar to one another. From a marketing standpoint it lowers your market value if audiences feel that your game is derivative; from a creative perspective it lowers the cultural value of your work. To combat this, a shift in perspective on how games are structured is helpful. Lowthorpe and Taylor suggest that games are not just mechanics, which most game designers and fans will confirm is true: making a game is an effort of professionals from multiple fields such as art, music, sound design, programming, and so forth. Most academic views of games focus on their mechanics as a means of highlighting games’ unique interactivity, but risk under-analyzing the contributions of art, music, sound, and other aesthetic elements of games.

These two mindsets can be called the *single work theory* of games, which sees games as self-contained media objects [29], and *collected work theory*, which understands games as networks of artworks that combine to form interactive experiences [30]. Single work theory is apparent in social science-based game studies and works by figures such as Huizinga [31] or Caillois [32]. This model is useful when describing the transformational potential of games, especially to audiences not deeply familiar with the medium, or exhibiting them in art museum settings. Collected work theory is apparent at game industry events where one would find discipline specific speaker tracks—such as those focused on art or programming—or at conventions that include fan-made artworks and game music cover bands. For *La Mancha*, seeing the game as a collection of components that make an overall experience rather than a set of broad mechanics helped the game stand out among its precedents and explore the novel more deeply.

### 3.2 *La Mancha* and the application of game mechanics as literary criticism

To make *La Mancha* a complementary work to *Don Quixote*, the game needed to invite analytical conversations about the novel. Two resources in particular were useful in this effort: study guides for *Don Quixote* [33] based on the Common Core standards for Language Arts [34], and the work of literary critics such as Harold Bloom and Roberto González Echevarría (who also evaluated the game and made suggestions for the rulebook.) Much of this material was found thanks to Dr. González Echevarría’s open access Yale University course, SPAN 300 – Cervantes’ *Don Quixote* [35].

**3.2.1 *Don Quixote*: relevant themes.** One of the key themes of González Echevarría’s reading of the novel is how characters up-end expectations of class and identity throughout the novel. Before

declaring himself a knight, Don Quixote was a low-level noble named Alonso Quixano and his squire Sancho Panza a peasant farmer. In the social context of the novel, these characters would have little upward mobility into the aristocracy, so adopting a title such as “Don” and declaring oneself a knight would have been outlandish [36]. This is another element of Don Quixote’s blurring of fantasy with reality, which also plays out in his illusions that windmills are giants, inns are castles, and that his lady love, Dulcinea del Toboso, even exists. Don Quixote and Sancho are not the only characters who play with their identities. Another example is Dorothea, who first appears in the novel disguised as a man so that she could pursue the Duke’s son who spurned her. Such agency would have been against societal feminine norms of the time, but Dorothea upends them in both her actions and dress [37].

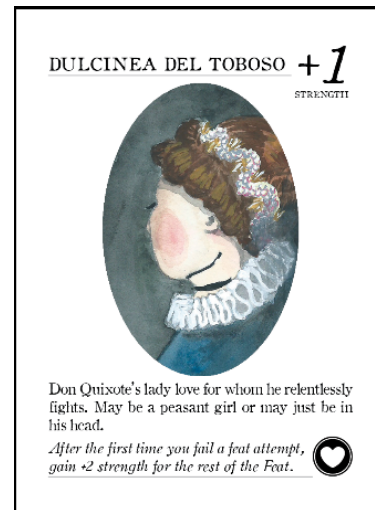
Another theme is the form of the chivalric novel and even fiction itself. The narrator of *Don Quixote* is specifically not Cervantes the author, but the fictional historian Cide Hamete Benengeli who is said to be translating manuscripts he has found of Don Quixote’s adventures. This is a parody of chivalric romances where authors rarely presented their work as their own invention. This gave novels credibility at a time when fiction was dismissed [38]. Cervantes uses this device to great comedic effect with narrative tricks such as cutting away from fight scenes before the first blow because Benengeli claims to have received an incomplete manuscript. Benengeli even appears in interstitial chapters in the book’s second volume to complain about the real reviews of the first volume [39].

**3.2.2 Themes as mechanics in *La Mancha*.** To fit into casual “game night” settings, *La Mancha*’s core game loop had to remain simple, so the detail from literary criticism of *Don Quixote* had to be expressed through the mechanic and visual design of individual cards. The Love Card depicting Dulcinea del Toboso, for example, was illustrated with the optical illusion of a figure who could be interpreted as either an old woman or a young woman (figure 7). Dorothea’s card likewise expresses her prominent role in moving the action of the novel forward by letting players hold extra Chivalry Cards.

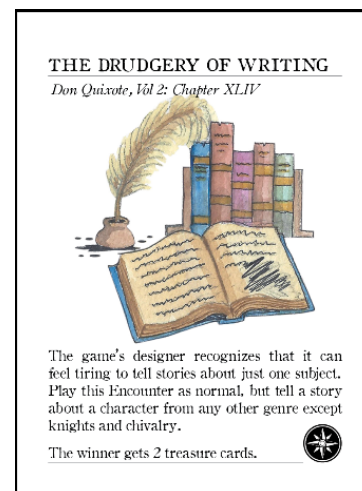
Another card playing with themes of the novel was an Encounter card titled “The Drudgery of Writing”, written during one of the designer’s late-night design crunch sessions (figure 8). This card mirrors a chapter where Cervantes, speaking through Benengeli, addresses negative reactions to the side-stories in volume one, complaining that trying to write about only Don Quixote and Sancho was boring.

This modularity also helped address *Don Quixote*’s place in the cultural canon and how interpretations of it have evolved over time. Two cards demonstrate this, “The Impossible Dream” and “The Dragon Speech.” (figure 9) The first recognizes the famous musical adaptation of the novel, *Man of La Mancha* by forcing players to sing their stories for a round of play. The second was a promotional card created for the yearly Game Developers Conference (GDC). At this conference in 1992, prominent game designer Chris Crawford invoked Don Quixote’s rejection of the bleak world around him in favor of a chivalric ideal in a speech where he quit the game industry.

As with the macro-level design elements of the game, playtesting was an important part of testing the efficacy of the game in

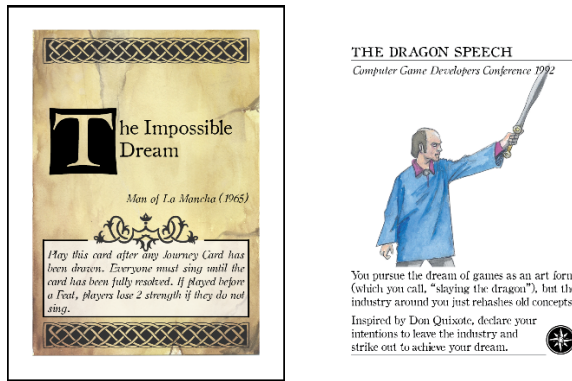


**Figure 7: The Dulcinea del Toboso card features an optical illusion to express the duality how this unseen character is depicted through the novel: as a non-existent noblewoman and as a peasant neighbor of Alonso Quixano.**



**Figure 8: The “Drudgery of Writing” card was an opportunity for the game designer to speak directly to the player and momentarily break the theme of the game.**

allowing players to interact with the novel’s themes. While a full educational study was outside of the scope of the project during these development phases—the focus being on the commercial funding, manufacture, and release of the game—playtesters were nonetheless questioned by designers to find whether the game had affected their knowledge of the novel. Many players who had not read the novel reported that they enjoyed the scenarios taken from the novel and that the game had shown them that *Don Quixote* was more than “that book with windmills.” Other trends from these tests included several instances of testers purchasing copies of the novel after playing the game and players who had read the novel identifying,



**Figure 9: “The Impossible Dream” and “The Dragon Speech” are two cards that recognize the influence of Don Quixote in the cultural lexicon.**

with great amusement, relevant themes or pointing out thematic design elements of the cards (the optical illusion on the Dulcinea card was a hit among these players.)

#### 4 FUNDING AND RELEASING *LA MANCHA*

These approaches to designing *La Mancha* helped shape the promotional materials and pitch documents for its Kickstarter funding campaign. The campaign video consisted of a sixty second trailer for the game, followed by a video describing the gameplay in depth. Since the video was for a tabletop fan audience and not Quixote scholars, the pitch only alluded to how the novel’s themes were represented in the game. The language identifying some of these themes, though, was enough to signal fans of the novel, who helped fund *La Mancha* for one hundred nine-percent of its \$12,000 goal.

Balancing these audiences helped the game find relevance outside of typical tabletop enthusiast circles. Once the game was manufactured (via Panda Game Manufacturing) and made available for sale, it was promoted in tabletop design media such as the *Board Game Design Lab* podcast and the *Overdue* literature podcast (who also positively reviewed the game [40].) The game was also made available via the National Library Association’s International Tabletop Week. At the time of this writing, the game sees modest but consistent sales through its online marketplace and with brick-and-mortar tabletop game stores.

#### 5 CONCLUSION AND FUTURE WORK

While precedent study is not wholly new to game design, it is not as studied in that field as it is in fields like architecture or music. Lowthorpe and Taylor warn that precedents may create a “creative cul-de-sac”[41] if artists sample from too-small a canon, but extol the virtues of sampling from diverse and even irregular canons [42]. *La Mancha* is an effort to do this very thing: it is a game that samples other games, but also samples media outside of games, an uncommon practice in the game industry unless a studio is specifically working with licensed intellectual property. This gives *La Mancha* a novel theme but also lets it add to the cultural

conversation about *Don Quixote* in a way not usually expected of games.

While precedent helped create mechanics in broad macro-scaled strokes, the architectural concept of design thinking helped enrich the game’s details. Seeing the game as not just a singular object, but as a collection of smaller works that create a larger experience helped compartmentalize the design such that individual cards and illustrations could be packed with meaning, resulting in a game appealing to both tabletop fans and scholars.

Ongoing work in this area, especially with collected work theory, may be found in a video game project called *Little Nemo and the Nightmare Fiends* [43], based on the 1905 comic strip *Little Nemo in Slumberland* by Winsor McCay. This game will explore the use of game art as a means of artistic criticism by interpreting and experimenting with McCay’s visual style. Hand-drawn game assets and levels will reflect the comic’s visual innovations and make the work accessible to twenty-first century audiences. Through the case studies of games like *La Mancha*, *Little Nemo*, and retroactively through Lissitzky’s *Revenge*, it is hoped that precedent study, design thinking, and collected work theory may be more refined game design practices.

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