

DESIGNING ILLUSTRATIONS FOR A TRADING CARD GAME BASED ON NUSANTARA CHARACTERS TO PROMOTE THE CULTURAL RICHNESS OF NUSANTARA

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Abstract

This article discusses the process of designing illustrations for a Trading Card Game (TCG) concept titled *Myth Warriors*, which features the theme of Nusantara mythology. The purpose of this work is to create an entertainment medium that simultaneously introduces the cultural richness of Indonesia through the visualization of local mythological characters. Using a qualitative descriptive method, the author conducted observations to adapt mythological characters into illustrations and visual identities that are appealing to children and teenagers. The design results demonstrate that the combination of cultural elements and modern visual styles can serve as an effective educational and entertainment tool. Through this project, it is hoped that the *Myth Warriors* card game design can become an alternative medium that combines entertainment and cultural education, and contribute to the preservation of local culture through a creative and relevant visual approach for the current generation.

Keywords: Illustration, Card Game, Nusantara Mythology, Local Culture, Trading Card Game

INTRODUCTION

Card games are one of the most widely recognized forms of games worldwide. Over time, these games have continued to evolve in terms of both visual design and gameplay concepts, one of which is the Trading Card Game (TCG) genre, which allows players to create their own strategies and decks from a set of available cards (Silva & Simplicio, 2015). TCGs often involve competitive elements, where players use their knowledge and skills to design card combinations to achieve victory.

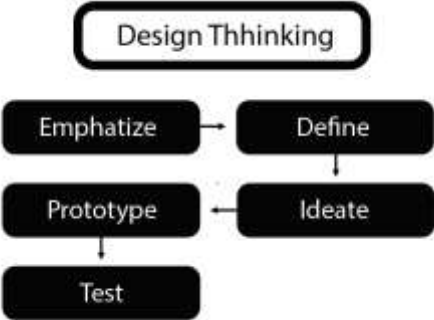
In recent years, Trading Card Games (TCGs) have gained global attention, particularly for the cultural values embedded within them. Japanese society, for example, has integrated mythological characters such as youkai, gods, and samurai into their TCG games, bringing a rich cultural flavor to their players. Such games not only serve as entertainment but also as a medium for introducing and preserving cultural values. However, amid the proliferation of TCG games from abroad, there is a lack of representation of Nusantara characters and cultural values that are rarely highlighted in this gaming world. Therefore, the author felt compelled to create a TCG titled “Myth Warriors” that focuses on the richness of Indonesian culture and mythology, aiming to introduce local culture to the younger generation, with a target audience of children

and teenagers. By linking the game to mythological characters such as Barong, Jatayu, and Dewi Sri, players can learn while having fun, demonstrating that games can be an effective medium for education and cultural preservation for children and teenagers. (Su et al., 2014).

The purpose of this study is to explore how the integration of Nusantara mythological characters into a card game can serve as a means to introduce and deepen understanding of local culture without sacrificing the element of entertainment. According to existing research, well-designed games can foster students' interest in difficult-to-understand topics and strengthen their understanding of educational content (Muthiyan et al., 2023). Thus, the results of this study are expected to provide new insights into how card games can be utilized as an effective medium for cultural preservation.

IMPLEMENTATION METHOD

The design of this work uses a qualitative descriptive method, which is an approach that aims to describe the creative process systematically based on non-numerical data (Gusliati, 2019). This approach is combined with the principles of design thinking, which emphasizes understanding user needs, exploring creative ideas, and an iterative process in finding the right design solution. This design approach enables designers to explore the social and cultural meanings of the elements being studied. The information used as the basis for the design process was obtained through qualitative direct observation, namely through the designer's personal experience as a TCG (Trading Card Game) player (Hidayat et al., 2019), as well as interviews and discussions with several students who have a deep understanding of TCG games. This approach was taken to gain relevant insights into the preferences, playing patterns, and elements that appeal to the target audience.



Picture 1. Design Development Stages
Source: Designer Documentation

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The designer created a TCG card game themed around Nusantara mythology due to the lack of similar games that highlight local culture. Most TCGs currently available focus on foreign themes, even though Nusantara mythology has great potential to be used as an engaging and educational game medium. This idea is also based on the designer's personal experience as an avid TCG player (Beskin & Koesoemadinata, 2018), as it is considered fun and exciting when played with friends. The game is designed with the aim of providing an alternative form of entertainment that still incorporates cultural elements.

The target audience for this game is children to teenagers. Therefore, the card design features simple mechanics for easy understanding, along with cool and enjoyable visuals to attract young players.

Data Analysis and Needs

The designer has experience playing various TCGs such as Yu-Gi-Oh!, Pokémon TCG, and other two-player turn-based games. Some of these, particularly Yu-Gi-Oh!, are complex with numerous card types and effects, often confusing new players. Additionally, the pay-to-win system requiring players to collect powerful cards makes the game feel unfair for beginners. This inspired the idea to design a TCG that is more beginner-friendly, with balanced decks and simple mechanics, so that all players can enjoy the game without relying on expensive cards or high levels of experience.

Feedback from fellow TCG players also reinforced the view that the entertainment aspect should be prioritised over an overly educational focus, as this can diminish the game's enjoyment (Wulansari, 2017). According to them, simply featuring characters from Nusantara mythology is already a form of cultural preservation that is enjoyable. To reach children and teenagers as the primary target audience, the designers chose a modern and cartoonish illustration style, with bright colours and a simple layout to make the game appealing, easy to access, and still fun.

Design Process Based on Design Thinking

1. Empathise

The Empathise stage serves to explore users' needs and desires through observation and direct interaction, which forms the foundation of a human-centred design approach (Yamagata, 2016). Based on the designer's experience playing TCG and feedback from several experienced friends, it was found that TCG games appealing to children and teenagers ideally have simple yet competitive mechanics (AMELIA et al., 2023). The selection of the Nusantara mythology theme is considered appropriate because Indonesia has numerous mythical stories and unique characters that are highly potential to be featured as characters in card games, such as heroes, monsters, or supernatural beings that align with the general format of TCG cards (Yamagata, 2016). The uniqueness of these mythological characters offers a distinct appeal to young players. Additionally, a game that is not overly complex yet still challenging is more accessible to new players and more enjoyable if it does not rely on a 'pay to win' system. Balance among players is key to fostering healthy competition within the game. Based on observations and

feedback from two individuals with different experiences, the designer concluded that a card game with simple and balanced mechanics is what the target audience desires.

2. Define

Define is a crucial phase in the design process that helps the team understand user needs and behaviour, and create a clear and actionable problem statement (Yamagata, 2016). The main problem the designer aims to solve is how to create a TCG card game that can introduce Nusantara mythology in a light-hearted and enjoyable way, without compromising the game's essence as entertainment. Many educational-themed games often lose their fun factor because they are too focused on cultural messages. Therefore, Myth Warriors is designed as an alternative that still functions as an entertainment medium, but with local cultural elements naturally woven into the characters, stories, and visuals. Additionally, the issue identified is the complex TCG game system, which tends to confuse new players.

3. Ideate

Ideate refers to the brainstorming process in which those involved try to generate as many ideas as possible without judging or criticising. In the idea development stage, designers create concepts and game mechanics that are simple and easy for the target audience to understand. These mechanics are largely inspired by the Pokémon TCG game system, particularly the use of energy cards as a requirement to activate attacks or actions. However, the designers added a new mechanic with limited energy cards, making this game different from Pokémon TCG. Additionally, the diverse mythological characters of the Nusantara region inspired the designers to divide character cards into four main factions: Heroic, Beast, Spirit, and Divine. Each faction has unique skill and passive characteristics that synergise to enable various strategies. These character cards are supported by Item Cards, which function as buffs to provide additional effects during combat, creating varied strategic combinations that remain accessible to new players.

4. Prototype

A prototype can be considered the initial representation of a designed product, whether in physical or digital form. According to Schork and Kirchner (Yamagata, 2016), at the prototype stage, designers create an initial set of the game consisting of one deck containing 30 cards. This deck includes the three main card types used in the Myth Warriors game: Warrior Cards, Item Cards, and Energy Cards.

The deck is designed to be played immediately by a single player, with the number and composition of cards adjusted to remain balanced, engaging, and easy to test.

Warrior Cards number 12 cards, serving as the main characters in the game. Each card has ATK (attack) attributes, HP (health), and active or passive skills adapted from the mythology of the Nusantara region. Warrior Cards require Energy Cards to perform actions, and each card's energy requirement is tailored to the character's strength. To enhance collectibility and visual appeal, two Warrior Cards will be printed in foil laminated format. Warrior Cards are also divided into four main factions, each containing three characters and offering synergistic effects when played together:

- 1) Heroic: The hero faction in mythology, comprising Gatotkaca, Srikandi, and Hanoman.
- 2) Beast: The faction of wild beasts or half-animal creatures, including Barong, Resi Jatayu, and Ahool.
- 3) Spirit: The faction of ethereal beings known in folk beliefs, representing entities such as local spirits and jinn.
- 4) Divine: A faction consisting of mythological creatures equivalent to powerful humans or demigods, such as Nyi Roro Kidul, Dewi Sri, and Batara Indra.

Item Cards consist of 4 different types of cards, each duplicated so that there are a total of 8 cards in one deck. Item Cards function as buffs or additional assistance for Warriors, providing strategic effects for players. The cards include:

- 5) Offering: Draw the top 2 cards from the deck.
- 6) Sacred Kalpataru Leaf: Add 5 HP to one Warrior.
- 7) Spiritual Jar: Draw 2 Energy cards from the Energy deck.
- 8) Dayak Tribe Shield: Grant a shield effect (defend against one attack) to one Warrior.

Energy Cards consist of 10 cards, used as a resource to allow Warrior Cards to attack or retreat. Each Warrior requires a different amount of energy, depending on the card's strength and effects. The stronger the Warrior card, the more energy is needed. Energy Cards also serve as one of the indicators of victory in the game, as running out of energy can lead to defeat, unless the game is set in a special mode like energy recycling.

After completing the playtest and card adjustments, the designer began developing the visual design that will be produced physically. Moving forward, this product is planned to be marketed through an e-commerce platform with a pre-order system. The visual design process begins with creating illustrations,

When designing illustrations for Myth Warriors, the designer started by creating a moodboard containing visual references from Pinterest and specific illustrator styles. The illustrations are created using the Procreate application on an iPad because it is considered flexible and supports professional bitmap image processing. The designer follows the general flow of digital illustration: sketching, outlining, and colouring (Rahmawati et al., 2023).

1. Sketches

Sketches help formulate ideas and concepts that form the basis of logos and other design elements at the beginning of the design process (Yuda et al., 2022). At the sketching stage, designers determine the pose, perspective, and composition of characters as the basis for illustrations. This process uses textured brushes such as pencils and no stabilisers, so that it is faster and freer in exploring shapes.



Picture 2. Sketch

Source: Designer Documentation

2. Outlining

The next step is outlining, which involves emphasising the sketch lines using a monoline brush with consistent thickness. To keep the lines neat and stable, the designer uses a 40% stabiliser. However, the use of this stabiliser has the disadvantage of causing a slight delay when drawing. This stage is quite challenging as it requires high focus to achieve a precise final result.



Picture 3. Outlining

Source: Designer Documentation

3. Colouring

The final process is colouring. The designer utilises bright colours in the TCG cards to create positive associations with characters from Nusantara mythology, thereby strengthening cultural ties while providing visual appeal (Rahmawati et al. (2023)). The colouring technique begins with a base colour, followed by shading using a multiply layer with 80% opacity, then lighting on an overlay layer with similar settings. Both shading and lighting are done with a hard brush without gradation to speed up the process and align with the established art style.



Picture 4. Colouring

Source: Designer Documentation

5. Testing (Testing and Evaluation)

Testing is a technique used to evaluate products by involving users in testing (Yamagata, 2016). Designers create dummy cards for playtesting and balancing purposes, then conduct game trials with two people with different levels of experience in TCG. The aim is to measure how well the prototype is accepted by both experienced and novice players, as well as to identify aspects that need improvement (Putra & Anissa, 2023). The first tester is an experienced TCG player. They provided feedback on card balance, particularly regarding the ratio between energy requirements, ATK, HP, and passive effects, which were felt to be not fully balanced. Nevertheless, they found the game enjoyable and considered it has potential for further development. The second tester had never played a TCG before. Initially, they were not particularly interested in the genre, but after trying the game directly with the designer, they found it quite fun and challenging. They enjoyed the strategic aspects that needed to be considered in each turn and admitted to becoming more interested in learning more about TCGs. From these two different responses, the designer gained new perspectives to refine the prototype. Some cards deemed unbalanced were adjusted, and additional mechanics like energy requirements for the Warrior's retreat action were added to make the game system fairer and more strategic.



Picture 5. Playtesting

Source: Designer Documentation

As part of the refinement process, the designer also created a rule sheet containing brief game information, basic rules, and how to play. The back of the rule sheet was designed as a game board, making it both functional and practical. This sheet will be included in every Myth Warriors deck as both a guide and a play medium.

Final Design

a. Logo

The designer chose a logotype shape that is easy to read and recognise, using the Glimmer of Light font, which was deemed appropriate for the nuances of Nusantara mythology due to its elegant and distinctive character. Inside the letter ‘O’ in the logotype, a secondary logo in the form of a monogram is inserted, modified into a symmetrical octahedron-style geometric crystal symbol, representing clarity and strength. The symbol also incorporates the initials ‘M’ and ‘W’ to reinforce the Myth Warriors identity. The logo is designed in a flat and minimalist style to create a modern yet professional impression.



Picture 6. Logo

Source: Designer Documentation

b. Colour Palette

The Myth Warriors colour palette was developed based on cultural themes and the visual needs of the target audience. The main colours include brown, orange, golden yellow, dark green, and white for neutral areas. Additionally, each Warrior faction is assigned an identity colour: Orange for Heroic, Purple for Spirit, Green for Beast, and Turquoise for Divine. The colour palette forms the visual foundation of an illustration, helping to maintain design consistency and create an aesthetically pleasing experience for users (Hidayat (2023)). This palette will be consistently applied across all visual elements such as cards, packaging, promotional materials, and rule sheets to reinforce brand consistency.

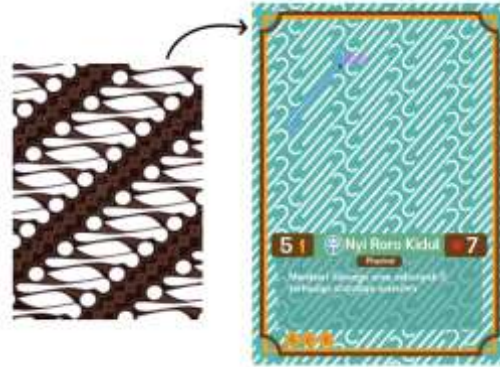


Picture 7. Colour Palette

Source: Designer Documentation

C. Layout

The card size is designed to be 63mm x 88mm, following international TCG standards. The card design combines local cultural elements with modern aesthetics. On the back of the card, the Myth Warriors monogram logo is used as the primary identity marker, giving a contemporary feel. The front of the card is designed with a symmetrical layout to maintain visual balance and make it easier for players to read the information.



Picture 8. Card Layout and Pattern Inspiration

Source: Designer Documentation

The visual design of the cards features different structures depending on the card type, but maintains a clear hierarchical system: card name, illustration, attributes (ATK, HP), effects, and faction icon. Indonesian-inspired elements such as the parang batik pattern are subtly incorporated into the design as background ornaments, simplified to harmonise with the minimalist style. The cards will be printed using 260gsm Art Paper without lamination, following recommendations from the printing company with experience in producing local TCG cards such as Kartu X Kartu.



Picture 9. Front and back layout

Source: Designer Documentation

d. Typography

For the typography system, the designer uses Glimmer of Light as the main font for the logo. For other text such as card names, descriptions, and rule sheet content, the DX Grafik font is used because of its clean and easy-to-read design, suitable for various text sizes in the context of games for children to teenagers.



Picture 10. Font

Source: Designer Documentation

The visual identity design of Myth Warriors was created with the target audience's preferences and the findings from the previous stage in mind. The hope is that all design elements will meet players' expectations and create a strong, attractive, and easily recognisable visual experience (Prasetyaningtyas, 2020).

Game Mechanics (Rule Sheet)

1. Card Types

There are three main types of cards: Warrior Cards (base colours: Orange, Purple, Green, Blue) as the main characters in battles, Item Cards (base colour: White) as support cards that provide special effects, and Energy Cards (base colour: Brown) as resources for performing actions such as attacking or retreating. These three types of cards complement each other in forming an effective game strategy.



Picture 12. Final Card Display

Source: Designer Documentation

2. Game Preparation

The game begins by determining turns using rock-paper-scissors. Each player then draws 4 cards from the deck and selects up to 3 Warrior Cards: 1 for Battle Mode and 2 as reserves. At the start of each turn, the player draws one card from the deck and one Energy card. Players may use a maximum of 2 Item Cards per turn, either before or after attacking.

3. Player Turn (Turn Phase)

A Warrior may only attack once per turn, provided it has sufficient energy. Attacks are performed by reducing the opponent's HP by the Warrior's ATK value. If a Warrior wishes to retreat from the arena, they must pay 1 Energy card. When a Warrior's HP reaches 0, the card is sent to the Graveyard. Each Warrior has active or passive skills that influence the course of the game, both when entering the arena and during combat.

4. Determining Victory/Defeat

The game ends when a player runs out of Energy Cards, as without energy, the player cannot perform further actions. With its simple yet competitive mechanics and strong local theme, Myth Warriors offers a strategic, enjoyable gaming experience while indirectly introducing the culture of the Nusantara region.

CONCLUSION

The Myth Warriors TCG design project aims to create a card game themed around Nusantara mythology that is suitable for children and teenagers, featuring an engaging visual approach and simple yet competitive gameplay mechanics. Using qualitative descriptive methods and design thinking principles, the designer underwent a step-by-step process, starting from observation, data collection, ideation, concept development, illustration, gameplay mechanics design, to playtesting. During this process, the designers faced various challenges such as art block, inconsistencies in illustration styles, as well as technical and conceptual obstacles that temporarily hindered progress, but these were successfully overcome through continuous evaluation and adjustment. The decision to combine mythological characters as factions, an energy system as the driving force behind actions, and modern illustrations with local cultural touches reflects a serious effort to blend traditional values with modern entertainment. The final outcome of this project is expected to serve not only as an entertainment medium but also as an educational tool that is both relevant and enjoyable for introducing Nusantara culture to the younger generation.

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