



TRIAL OF THE UNDERWORLD

Game Design Document and Development Process Report

Author: Tomas Atanasov

Tutor: Michael Thornhill



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Board Game Design Document

Game Concept

TRIAL OF THE UNDERWORLD is a competitive two-player strategy card game inspired by the fascinating world of Ancient Egyptian mythology. The game mixes deckbuilding, resource management, and tactical combat to create matches that are fast-paced, and fun, where players use mythical creatures, magical spells, and powerful artefacts in tactical card battles. The game is built to appeal to players who love mythology and strategic card games, and rules are simple (See **Appendix 3**). It combines a strong connection to the theme with mechanics that reward smart decision-making.

Right now, both players draw from a shared deck, which creates fair and balanced gameplay. But the vision for the game's future is all about personalisation and variety. Archetype-specific decks will let players tailor their experience to their favourite playstyles.

It is designed for players aged twelve and older. Whether someone is new to this kind of game or a seasoned card game fan, they will find something to enjoy. What makes the game stand out is its strong connection to mythology. Each archetype, such as **Darkness**, **Water**, **Fire**, **Nature**, and **Light**, has its own personality, both in how it looks and how it plays. For example, the **Darkness** deck, based on Anubis, is all about resurrecting creatures and disrupting your opponent's strategies. Meanwhile, the Water deck, led by Hapi, clears the board and heals your resources. These archetypes do not just feel different, they demand entirely different strategies.

Archetype	Key Theme	Strengths	Signature Card Example
Darkness	Resurrection and disruption.	Graveyard manipulation, relentless creatures.	"Reanimate" and "Desert Wraith".
Water	Regeneration and board-clearing.	Healing effects, battlefield control.	"Great Flood of Hapi".
Fire	Aggressive damage output.	High attack power, explosive abilities.	"Solar Flare".
Nature	Resilience and restoration.	Defence boosts, resource restoration.	"Verdant Shield".
Light	Vision and control.	Disrupting opponents, shaping key moments.	"Horus's Eye".

Looking ahead, the game could go in some exciting directions. Imagine Egyptian mythology reimagined with futuristic elements like mechanical Gods or advanced technologies. A Mechanical archetype might feature Anubis as a cyborg or pyramids as massive spaceships. Other expansions could explore celestial Gods, magical underworlds, or even gritty, industrialised versions of mythological Egypt. By combining traditional mythology with modern twists, the game has endless room to grow. These kinds of ideas keep the game fresh and exciting as it grows over time.

Game Design Philosophy

The philosophy behind **TRIAL OF THE UNDERWORLD** is rooted in the belief that a great game is more than just mechanics, it's an experience. Every element of the game is designed to create a balance between depth, and immersion. At its core, the game aims to challenge players intellectually while also allowing them to connect emotionally with the mythology and lore it presents.

One of the guiding principles is balance. In competitive card games, balance isn't just about fair statistics or power scaling, it's about ensuring that every decision feels meaningful. This is why the shared deck system was chosen for the initial version of the game, it puts both players on equal footing and encourages adaptability. Players must respond to the same unpredictable resource pool, creating moments of tension and clever problem-solving. As archetypes are introduced, balance will shift to ensuring that each deck is strong in its own way but leaves room for counterplay. No archetype should dominate, and every player should feel like their success stems from strategy, not overpowering cards. While balance is key, luck still inevitably plays a factor, and adds some unpredictability and fun to the game.

The second pillar is depth. A game that's too simple loses interest quickly, but one that's too complex becomes inaccessible. **TRIAL OF THE UNDERWORLD** bridges this gap by offering straightforward rules that conceal layers of strategy. For example, mechanics like summoning sickness or spell cards with immediate effects are easy to understand but introduce opportunities for advanced planning. Additionally, the synergy between archetypes, such as combining **Light** and **Darkness** cards for disruption and resurrection, adds another layer of depth for players who seek to innovate.

Finally, there's immersion. The game doesn't just want players to enjoy the mechanics, it wants them to feel like they've stepped into another world. The lore and visuals are set tightly into the gameplay so that every move feels connected to the mythology. When a player summons "Anubis," they're not just playing a card, they're invoking the God of the Underworld and altering the flow of the game in a way that resonates with the theme. Immersion also extends to the aesthetic experience, from the design of the cards to the tactile feel of the life board, every detail is crafted to transport players into the epic world of Egyptian legends.

Gameplay Mechanics

The game is easy to pick up, but it has enough depth to keep players hooked as they develop more advanced strategies. Each player starts with 30 life points, tracked with a sliding token life board, and draws six cards from a shared deck of 84 cards, then flip a coin to begin the match (See **Appendix 1**).

Here is how the game flows through its four phases:

1. *Draw Phase*: At the start of each turn, players draw two cards. If the deck runs out, players take two damage instead of drawing. This puts real pressure on how players manage their resources as the match goes on.
2. *Summon Phase*: This is where you bring monsters into play. You can summon up to two monsters per turn, and they act as shields to protect your life points. Monsters cannot attack straight away because of "summoning sickness" unless their abilities say otherwise.
3. *Action Phase*: This phase is where the fun happens. You can attack, cast spells, and trigger abilities. It is all about playing smart, using combos, and making the most of the cards you have. For instance, a monster like "Scarabaeus" gets stronger when there are other scarabs in play, so synergy between your cards can make a big difference (See **Appendix 1**, *Figures 1d and 1e*).
4. *End Phase*: This is the tidy-up phase, where you clean up lingering effects, get your hand in order, and get ready for the next turn.

The goal is simple, reduce your opponent's life points to zero. However, the choices you make along the way, like when to attack or hold back, are what make each match feel unique and engaging.

Deck Evolution and Player Customisation

One of the most exciting things about **TRIAL OF THE UNDERWORLD** is how it's designed to grow with time. Archetypes will play a huge role in this. Each archetype has a theme that matches its mechanics, and as players learn how to use them, they'll find all sorts of creative ways to win.

The Darkness archetype, for example, is all about bringing creatures back from the dead and messing with your opponent's plans. It lets you fill your board with powerful creatures from the grave. Then there's the Water archetype, which focuses on clearing the field and healing with cards. Fire decks, with their explosive attacks and high damage, are perfect for aggressive players, while Nature decks help you build a solid defence and restore life points over time. Light decks, led by Horus, give you control over the game with effects like peeking at your opponent's hand or disabling their key cards.

But that's just the start. The game plans to keep evolving, with new archetypes offering all kinds of cool options. Imagine a futuristic Mechanical deck where Anubis is a cyber-God or Ra commands solar-powered spaceships. There could be cosmic archetypes inspired by the stars or gritty, industrialised takes on Ancient Egypt. No matter what direction it goes, the game will keep players excited for the next big thing.

Customisation is one of the key elements that makes the game unique. It gives players the freedom to shape their gameplay experience in ways that reflect their personalities and strategic preferences. While the current shared deck system encourages adaptability and quick thinking, future versions of the game will fully embrace deck customisation by introducing archetype-specific decks. Players will be able to mix cards from different archetypes to create hybrid strategies, such as combining the disruption effects of **Light** cards with the graveyard manipulation of **Darkness** cards.

In digital formats, customisation could go even deeper. Players could unlock alternate artwork for their favourite cards, transforming their decks into personalised masterpieces. Imagine a cosmic version of Horus or an industrial take on Geb, these variations would not only add visual appeal but also help players feel more connected to their decks. Other digital features could include avatars, in-game titles, and badges earned by mastering specific archetypes or completing challenges.

Customisation isn't just about gameplay, it's about identity. Whether you're experimenting with different archetypes or designing a deck that looks as unique as it plays, **TRIAL OF THE UNDERWORLD** ensures that every player feels like their choices matter.

Aesthetics

The look and feel of **TRIAL OF THE UNDERWORLD** play a big role in immersing players in its world. Every card features detailed illustrations inspired by Egyptian mythology, from Gods to mythical creatures and artefacts. The designs are bold and eye-catching yet clear enough to make them easy to read during intense matches. Artefact cards, for example, showcase sacred items such as crowns and urns. These items not only tie back to the game's theme but also make the mechanics feel grounded in mythology (See **Appendix 1**, *Figures 1c and 1g*).

The sliding token life board is another highlight, combining elegance with practicality. Its geometric patterns are based on Egyptian architectural designs (See **Appendix 1**, *Figure 1h*). It is designed to feel sturdy and satisfying to use. The tokens and cards are all made with high-quality materials, so they last a long time and feel great to play with.

Future expansions could take the aesthetics in exciting new directions. A mechanical theme might add glowing circuitry designs. Similarly, a celestial archetype could feature starry patterns that bring the heavens into the game. Whatever the theme, the goal is always to keep the game visually engaging and tied to its core identity.

Physical & Digital Expansion

The physical version of the game is designed to be an immersive experience, with premium-quality cards, tokens, and boards that make gameplay as satisfying as possible. Every detail, from the sliding token life board to the intricate card designs, reflects a commitment to creating a tactile game that's both functional and beautiful.

The digital version, on the other hand, might open exciting new possibilities. Animated effects could bring cards to life, imagine the fiery brilliance of Ra's attacks or the shadowy presence of Anubis filling the screen. Interactive features like deck-building tools and co-op modes would keep players engaged, while global matchmaking ensures there's always an opponent to challenge. Expanding into digital formats also allows for regular updates and special event cards, keeping the game fresh and evolving with player feedback.

Both versions would complement each other, offering different ways to enjoy **TRIAL OF THE UNDERWORLD**. Whether you prefer the physical joy of holding the cards in your hands or the dynamic excitement of online play, the game's versatility ensures there's something for everyone.

Lore and Storytelling

The lore behind **TRIAL OF THE UNDERWORLD** plays a vital role in making the game feel alive. Every archetype represents a facet of Egyptian mythology, weaving themes of creation, destruction, rebirth, and divine power into the gameplay.

The game's narrative positions players as divine challengers vying for dominance in the mystical realm of Egypt. This rivalry sets the stage for epic battles, where the clash of opposing Gods shapes the fate of the battlefield. While the current version of the game focuses on gameplay mechanics, future expansions could deepen this lore by introducing story-driven cards and events that let players piece together larger mythological narratives. For example, collecting specific cards across different archetypes could unlock insights into the histories of their Gods and followers, creating a rewarding experience for lore enthusiasts.

This storytelling potential extends to companion materials, such as art books or digital lore compendiums. Imagine an interactive digital timeline showing the evolution of Egyptian mythology within the game. Such additions would enrich the overall experience and further immerse players in its vast thematic tapestry.

Social Experience

TRIAL OF THE UNDERWORLD is as much about bringing people together as it is about strategy. The physical version encourages face-to-face interaction, creating moments of suspense, triumph, and shared enjoyment. Whether it's casual matches with friends or competitive battles at local events, the game fosters connections between players through its engaging mechanics and immersive theme.

In digital formats, the social aspect expands even further. Online matchmaking and ranked play allow players to challenge opponents from around the world, while cooperative modes could introduce opportunities for teamwork. Deck-sharing systems, where players can recommend or trade strategies, would encourage collaboration and discussion. Chat features and community hubs could keep players engaged outside of matches, helping them form friendships and rivalries that last beyond the game.

Social experiences are also key to community-building. Regular events, tournaments, and developer-led updates could create a thriving player base invested in the game's evolution. By emphasising connection as much as competition, **TRIAL OF THE UNDERWORLD** ensures it's not just a game, it's a shared passion.

Competitive Scene

The competitive side of the game offers players a chance to test their skills and strategies in exciting matchups. Balance between archetypes and straightforward mechanics makes it ideal for tournaments, where success is determined by creativity and adaptability rather than brute force. In physical formats, events like draft challenges or archetype-specific showdowns could add variety to the competitive landscape, letting players experiment while showcasing their mastery.

The digital version takes this even further. Ranked play and leaderboards would give players tangible goals to strive for, while seasonal tournaments could introduce exclusive rewards, such as alternate artwork or new cards that represent the best strategies of the season. Spectator modes and replays of top matches would also make the competitive scene more accessible, allowing aspiring players to learn from the best.

The competitive scene isn't just about winning, it's about community. As players form teams, compete in events, and share strategies, they'll create an environment where skill and passion drive the game forward.

Process Evaluation Report

Methodology

The Game Design Document for **TRIAL OF THE UNDERWORLD** was built around two key ideas, Core Mechanics and Player Experience, as well as the Iterative Design Process. These two approaches worked together to make sure the game was fun, exciting, and flexible enough to grow and improve over time.

According to Kim (2023), focusing on core mechanics is essential for creating systems that feel rewarding and easy to understand. Using this principle, **TRIAL OF THE UNDERWORLD** prioritised giving players meaningful decisions in every phase of the game. For instance, the Summon Phase encourages strategic thinking about which monsters to play, and the Action Phase rewards players who combine cards creatively. This focus helped ensure the game appeals to a wide range of players, from those just starting out to those who love deep, strategic play.

The Iterative Design Process played a huge role in refining the game, making it better with each step. Bay (2025) explains that iteration, which involves testing and improving ideas in cycles, is perfect for balancing gameplay and finding what works (See **Appendix 2**). Playtesting highlighted areas that needed adjustment, such as tweaking the "Reanimate" ability in the Darkness deck to make it powerful but not unbeatable. This feedback made it possible to balance the game across archetypes and ensure it stayed fair and consistent for all players.

By using both of these approaches, the GDD became more than just a plan for the game. It became a flexible resource that made room for creativity and improvement, while still sticking to the core vision for **TRIAL OF THE UNDERWORLD**.

Challenges and Solutions

As with any creative process, there were some bumps along the way. One of the biggest challenges was making sure different cards were balanced. For example, the ability to bring back fallen creatures through "Reanimate" had to feel strong without overshadowing other strategies. To solve this, limits were added to how often some abilities could be used, keeping things fair while still letting each archetype shine.

Another challenge was nailing the visuals. It was not just about making the cards and components look nice, they had to fit the Egyptian mythology theme while staying practical for gameplay. For this, examples of key components, like artefacts and tokens, were added to the GDD to show how the design supported the game's overall feel. It helped tie everything together and made the vision clear.

With each round of feedback and playtesting, these challenges were tackled one step at a time, leaving the game stronger after every step.

Feedback Incorporation

Player feedback was invaluable throughout the development of the game. Early playtests revealed several areas for improvement, as well as some fantastic ideas for enhancing both gameplay and player experience.

One major point was the way life points were tracked. Instead of managing individual tokens, players suggested creating a life board for easier tracking. This led to the sliding token life board design, which is now one of the core physical components of the game.

Another challenge was distinguishing God cards from regular monsters. Players found it difficult to tell which cards represented Gods, prompting the addition of visual markers and distinct layouts to make them stand out.

Hand size also came up during feedback, with concerns about whether players could keep unlimited cards. A limit was introduced to balance strategy and resource management, preventing players from stockpiling cards for overpowering moves. The mechanics around summoning Gods were also refined. Initially, summoning a God counted as a monster summon. However, following feedback, Gods can now be summoned as normal monsters but require a deity card to activate their abilities. Additionally, a one-God limit per field was introduced to maintain balance and avoid overpowering gameplay.

Several suggestions focused on speeding up the game's flow. For example, players felt the current draw mechanics were slow, recommending either drawing up to six cards or increasing the draw count per turn. After testing, the draw mechanics were adjusted to ensure faster gameplay without overwhelming players. Overpowered cards like "Ankh of Fate" were also addressed, with tweaks made to balance their effects.

Finally, feedback around gameplay clarity led to the decision to use a shared deck instead of mixed decks, which reduced post-game confusion. Player input was instrumental in shaping these changes, ensuring that the final design offered a smoother, more enjoyable experience.

Listening to feedback did more than fix issues, it helped inspire new ideas for the future. Suggestions for unique themes and mechanics led to plans for new archetypes.

Reflections and Recommendations

Looking back, the whole process of creating the GDD was a massive learning experience. It showed just how important it is to balance details with readability, making the document clear and thorough but not overwhelming. Playtesting and gathering feedback early on made a big difference too, as it gave direction for what needed adjusting and what worked well.

For future projects, a few things could make the process smoother. Adding more visual aids, like card mock-ups or diagrams, could make mechanics easier to explain without lots of text. Streamlining the GDD to avoid repeating information would also help keep things concise. Staying open to new ideas, especially from players, will always be the best way to keep the game fresh and exciting as it continues to evolve.

Appendices

Appendix 1

Figure 1a – Physical printed copy of the deck & health tokens.



Figure 1b - First segment of the card deck (includes cards 1–18).



Figure 1c - Second segment of the card deck (includes cards 18–30).



Figure 1d - Third segment of the card deck (includes cards 30–48).

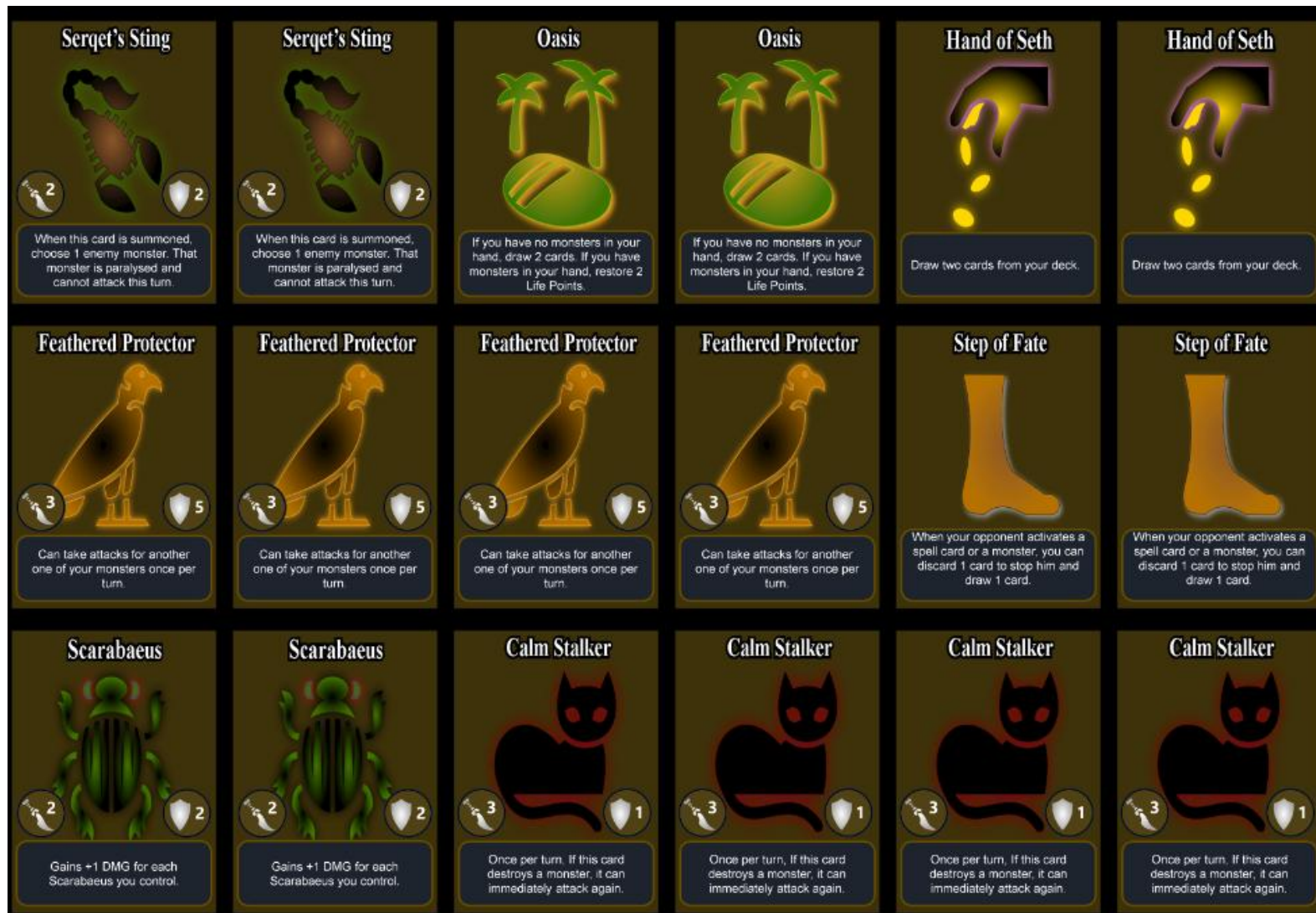


Figure 1e - Fourth segment of the card deck (includes cards 48–60).



Figure 1f - Fifth segment of the card deck (includes cards 60–68 + Card Back).

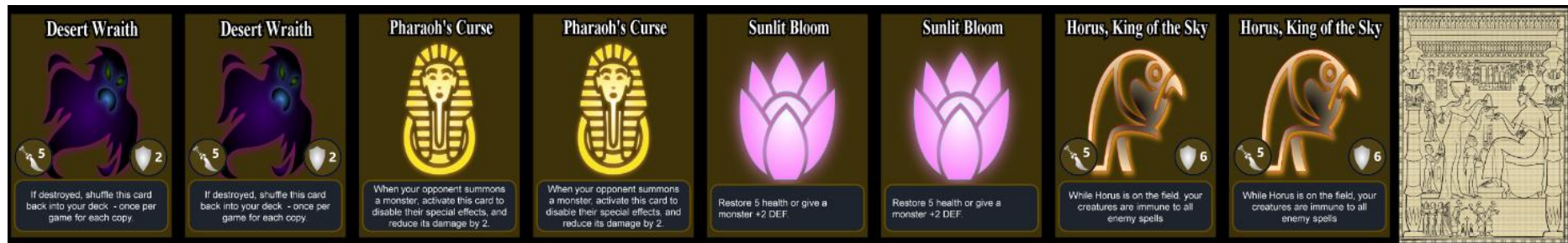


Figure 1g – Sixth (last) segment of the card deck (includes cards 68–84 + Card Back).



Figure 1h - Health tracking board designed by the author, using [Inkarnate](#).

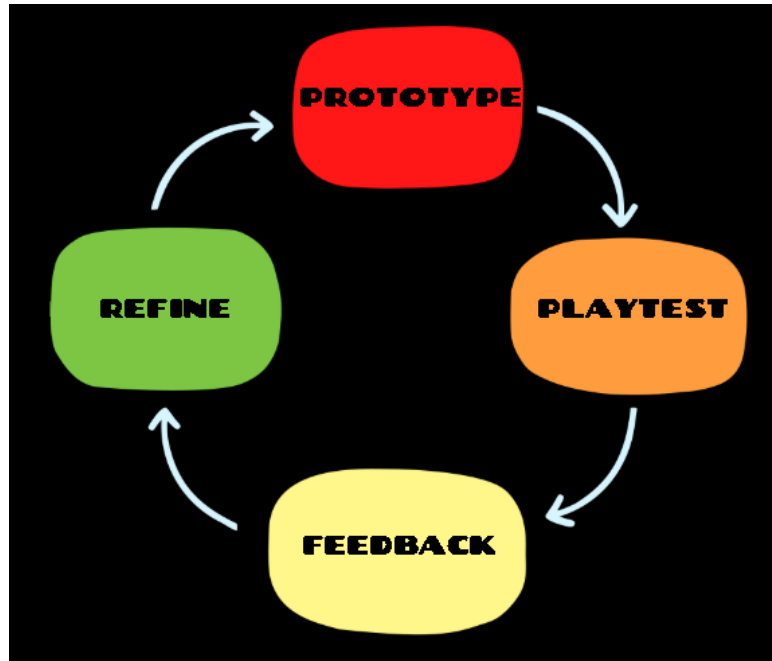


Figure 1i - Coin for the game, purchased from [here](#).



Appendix 2

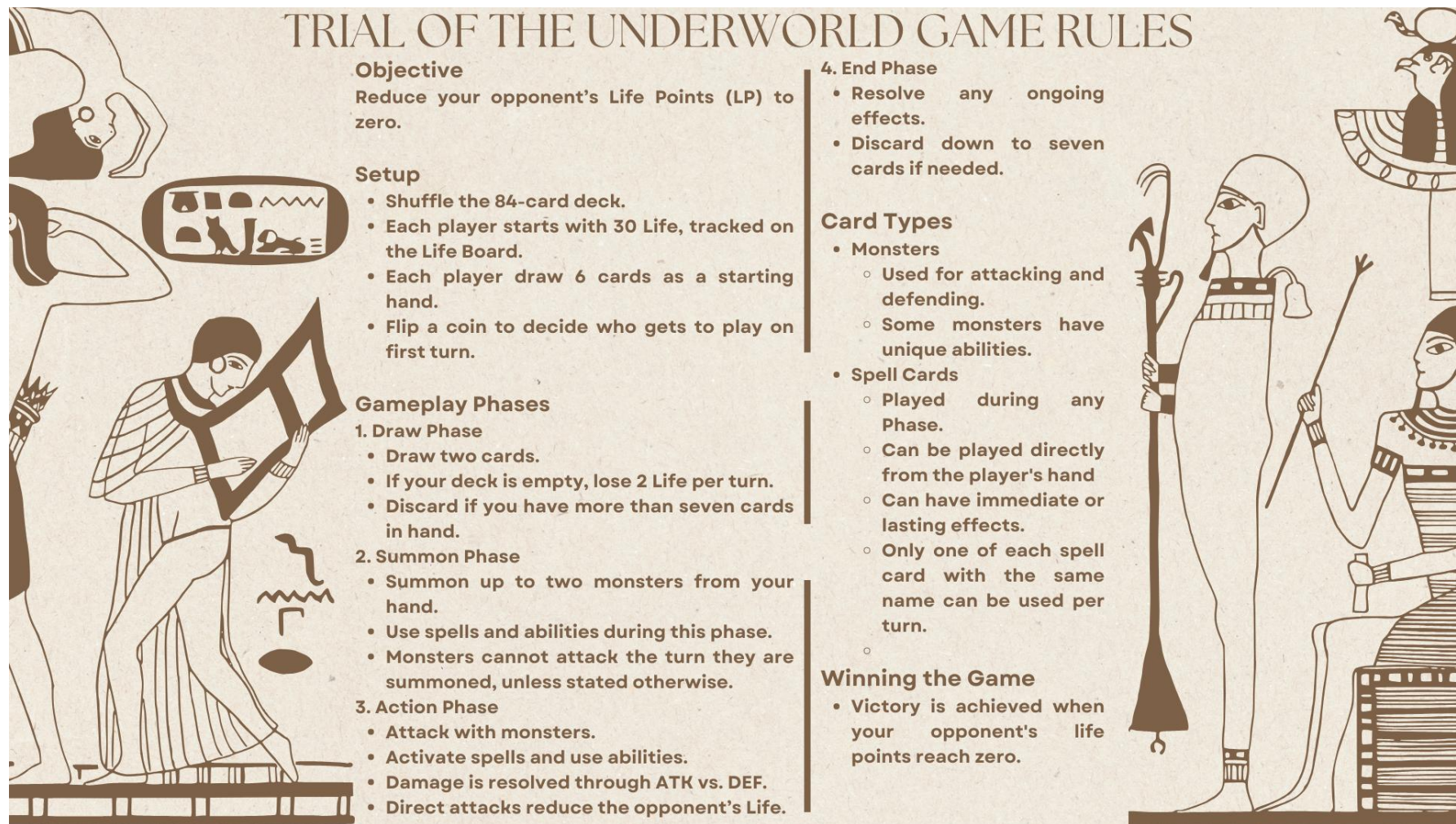
Figure 2a - Iterative Design Process for the game.



Source: This diagram was created by the author of this document using [Canva](#).

Appendix 3

Figure 3a – Official Rules for the game.



TRIAL OF THE UNDERWORLD GAME RULES

Objective
Reduce your opponent's Life Points (LP) to zero.

Setup

- Shuffle the 84-card deck.
- Each player starts with 30 Life, tracked on the Life Board.
- Each player draw 6 cards as a starting hand.
- Flip a coin to decide who gets to play on first turn.

Gameplay Phases

- 1. Draw Phase**
 - Draw two cards.
 - If your deck is empty, lose 2 Life per turn.
 - Discard if you have more than seven cards in hand.
- 2. Summon Phase**
 - Summon up to two monsters from your hand.
 - Use spells and abilities during this phase.
 - Monsters cannot attack the turn they are summoned, unless stated otherwise.
- 3. Action Phase**
 - Attack with monsters.
 - Activate spells and use abilities.
 - Damage is resolved through ATK vs. DEF.
 - Direct attacks reduce the opponent's Life.

4. End Phase

- Resolve any ongoing effects.
- Discard down to seven cards if needed.

Card Types

- **Monsters**
 - Used for attacking and defending.
 - Some monsters have unique abilities.
- **Spell Cards**
 - Played during any Phase.
 - Can be played directly from the player's hand
 - Can have immediate or lasting effects.
 - Only one of each spell card with the same name can be used per turn.

Winning the Game

- Victory is achieved when your opponent's life points reach zero.

References

Kim, A.J.Y., (2023). *Game Design Principles Tutorial*. Available at: <https://gamedevacademy.org/game-design-principles-tutorial> (Accessed 19th of April 2025).

Bay, J.W., (2025). *How to Write a Game Design Document*. Available at: <https://www.gameindustrycareerguide.com/how-to-write-a-game-design-document/> (Accessed 20th of April 2025).