We’re working on a game tentatively titled cube war. It’s based on the gamewright game cube quest. Looking at the game through the Lens of Essential Experience, the original physical game was much more focused on a very physical feeling. Given an age rating for eight year olds, the game was definitely intended to give a feeling of action. With the small board, it was all about flicking the cubes to send them flying off of the board with every move. If you missed, your cube was going to fly off the board. If you hit the other player’s cube, they’d both probably go off the board.

We’re going change some of the rules to instead aim for an essential experience that makes the player feel like a tactician. The most important thing for this experience is providing the player with the necessary information and meaningful decisions necessary to make their moves. The first things we have in mind to capture this experience center around taking the elements that contributed to a physical game, and changing them to support a more mental game. Most prominently, the board size.

Looking through the Lens of Endogenous Value: The game has a number of valuable things. Firstly, the players’ units are all valuable, giving them the primary resources they need to win. Out of those units, their ‘king’ unit is by far the most valuable, because like chess, if they they lose the piece, the lose the game. While less visible, positions on the board are also valuable. Positions that give the unit in that spot as more of a threat, because they have a good angle on the resources of the other player. Managing how valuable these resources are to the players will come down to a balance problem. Deciding how much power to give the units and how useful the different board positions are, will determine how much the players value them.

The Lens of Problem Solving asks what problems the game asks your players to solve. In ours, the problem is, “how do you knock out the enemy king?” It is a simple problem, it is all of the hidden problems that the player must solve the actually accomplish that, which will take up the majority of the game. In order to solve the problem to knock out the enemy king, they first need to figure out how to knock out the units defending the king. At the same time, they need to figure out how to avoid their own units being knocked out. The problems combine and change with every unit type and combination of units within an area of the board. These combination of factors generating the different problems to solve are created anew with every new match between players, which could keep them coming back, since it will be a unique game every time.

The Lens of Risk Mitigation says to look at how things could go wrong. The technology aspect is already covered, and worrying about something as binary as the turn system doesn’t make sense (it works or it doesn’t) will all shake out in making the game actually run, if not, we have much larger issues to worry about. The main issues I see with the game have to do with playability and fun. It’s not making the systems function that concerns me, but making them function *well*. For instance, one of my main worries is about the way the player flicks the cubes. Currently it’s done with click and hold on the mouse, but this brings up issues with how the camera placement affects the drag location, they may not line up correctly, rendering the player’s experience aiming into a hit-or-miss guessing game. It also doesn’t account for changes in terrain, is there any way to flick the cube upward? Should there be? It’s going to take a lot more work and iteration to get it to feel good than it will to simply make it work.

Besides that, there are risks relating to the player’s available information and control of the play field. I already designed two different camera systems to mitigate the some risk for the latter, but the former is still an unknown. If we don’t display the necessary information about the units to the player, they will not be able to make informed decisions while playing. Because the units are cubes, they do not inherently provide a whole lot of information, so it will require designing UI elements to display the info.

Lastly, will it actually be fun? The reason this is a concern to me has to do with the original game and changes we’re making to its rules. I haven’t played the original game yet, so while I have an idea of the experience it provides based on its ruleset and video of people playing, I can’t be completely sure. Even so, the changes we have in mind aim to move the game away from the essential experience of the board game, so it’s unknown whether a game about tactically flicking digital cubes is actually fun. To mitigate that risk, we’ll need to do a lot of playtest loops to hone in on what parts of the design work well and emphasise them.

The Lens of Pleasure: our game mainly gives the pleasures of fantasy, anticipation, and possibility. Not having played and experienced it yet, I’m not sure, but believe it may provide some humor, surprise, and triumph over adversity as well. Though they are a little further out, we may be able to add a bit of expression as well, by allowing the players to customize their cubes. For the ones missing, I feel like narrative would be an interesting pleasure to experiment with, like starting the cubes in specific locations to suggest the lead up to the battle, or interesting visual or audio effects to let the players form a narrative in their minds of the game. I think it’s likely that the game will appeal most to killer type players, and somewhat to socializers. Perhaps some sort of leveling system for the units would be of interest to achievers.

The Lens of Flow asks about goals. The goal is our game is very clear: knock out the enemy king. Normally the player’s goal would be the same, though I could see some players just stacking up the blocks into different formations sometimes. Currently, there is nothing to distract the player from the game goal. However, being a PvP game, it doesn’t have a challange curve that we can set directly. That will depend depend on the other player. As for the player’s skill progression, we do not yet know how quickly or slowly they will learn and grow better at the game, since we don’t have a working prototype yet.

The Lens of Fairness: should the game be symmetrical or asymmetrical? For ours, it will be asymmetrical, though there will be one simple way to tell that both players are provided with the same chance at winning. All of the units are worth a point value, and both players units’ add up to the same value, so they can be certain that they are evenly matched at the beginning. At least in terms of units anyway. Advantages based on field types and unit placement may come into the mix and will need to be balanced later. For enabling players of different skill levels to play together, an easy balancing mechanic would be to increase the units available to the less skilled player.