

Game Developer Exercise - Enzo Ribeiro

For this activity I chose the game “**Legends of Runeterra**” (LoR), a digital collectible **card game** by Riot Games, to add a new mechanic to.

This game focuses on card mechanics and the strategies and counter-strategies to use those, exploring the digital format to its fullest by including calculations and effects difficult to apply in an analogue format, aside from an immersive visual appeal in the effects and cards. The game experience is thereby focused on real time strategy and knowledge of the game.

The mechanic chosen to be implemented is the **insanity system** from the turn-based RPG “**Darkest Dungeon**”, by Red Hook Studios.

Aside from the adventure presented, Darkest Dungeon is focused on the management of resources and party members. Following its aesthetic and narrative genre, the game brings a unique insanity system. During the adventures the characters experience disturbing scenes and situations and that has consequences. Each character has a stress bar and as it gets bigger the character is affected by debuffs and negative effects, including the possibility of inflicting stress on other party members, which can turn into a dangerous cycle. This is not the game's only innovative mechanic, but this one will be the focus of the exercise.

Application of the insanity system:

First, to be able to implement this mechanic in LoR it needs to be slightly adapted. To that end I highlight the main mechanic of the card game, which resides in cards having “keywords”. Those keywords create different effects in the game and are what allow for the creation of decks and strategies based on the matching of different keywords.

Considering that the insanity system is based on characters getting traumatized and carrying that with them, aside from the theme of gothic horror in Darkest Dungeon, this effect can be easily related to fear. LoR already has a keyword called “fearsome”. Cards with that keyword can only be blocked by cards with an attack value of at least 3. This will be used as a starting point.

With that, I came up with the keyword “frightened”. Cards with that keyword, independently from its attack value, can not block cards with the “fearsome” label. Using the existing concept that keywords can evolve with specific conditions during the match, “frightened” would evolve to “insane”. The condition would be having been struck by a specific number of “fearsome” cards. My suggestion is four times, as that number can create an intermediate challenge, but not enough to frustrate decks completely based on this. Once the card is “insane” it gains the negative status of “stun”, which impedes it to attack or block in this turn. And, similar to Darkest Dungeon’s insane characters, the stunned unit scares the card next to it, applying “frightened” to the neighboring card. If the card is already “frightened” it gets one level closer to “insane”. This also stimulates the conscient organization of the order of the cards in the board, not only to block or strike.

That would be an interesting application of the insanity system to LoR. However, this mechanic needs to be properly balanced in relation to the already existing cards. First, the acquisition of the keyword “frightened” would be a result of a special effect from cards at the center of the playability of this new mechanic, like the current new expansions do. This provides us with a set of parameters to use to balance the game. For example, I believe this mechanic should become a real threat during mid-game, which means they would have a cost of 3 to 5. However, for buildup in early turns a 2 cost card would be important and for reestablishing the mechanic in late disadvantageous turns a high cost card, like 7 with a more impactful effect would be very convenient. However, it would be important to limit the card variety, so opponents know which cards to worry about. One of the ways of doing so is splitting part of the cards in synergy with the expansion into different regions, limiting the possibilities and clarifying the possible play styles they have to offer, based on other regions keywords and mechanics. Those aspects are enough for a base game-balance, but another point would be that spells cannot concede this keyword or make that exclusive to champion spells. That puts on a focus on how to counter the deck, not by spells that deny other spells but by silencing card effects.

This can be explored in the same expansion, because it is important to consider that it's rare for a new update to include only one new effect, so including cards that complement this proposed concept should be done too. One example would be a new group of cards focused on “silencing” since those would impede the evolution of “frightened” to “insane”.

Finally, it is important to insert this mechanic in the general theme of LoR, something very emphasized in the construction and presentation of the cards and their descriptions. The cards are ordered into regions from the universe and the decks are limited to that. However, the concept of something fear already speaks to many of the existing regions. The Shadow Isles, which already presents monstrous spirits and works with the fear theme make especially good grounds for that. There is also Targon, that carries the values of being grand and imposing, that could work with the concept of fear or the presence of The Void in Shurima that inspires an alien invasion type of fear of the unknown. Other regions can also have the characteristic depending on character background and specifics, like Noxus and its intense war themes, but are less direct and would require more lore adaptation.

LoR itself already presents many possibilities for the application of the insanity system, but considering its close relation to the League of Legends universe, which many players consider and expect, it would be a great opportunity to explore existing characters not yet present in Runeterra. In the context of fear, many LoL players already associate the character “Fiddlesticks” to terror. Incorporating him into LoR could be a great opportunity to add the insanity system. If he was to be inserted in the region “Runeterra” he could generally connect the “fearsome” cards and create a terror-themed deck. Spooky.

References:

- Legends of Runeterra: [Legends of Runeterra](#)
- Darkest Dungeon: [Darkest Dungeon](#) / [Darkest Dungeon® on Steam](#)
- Fiddlesticks: [Fiddlesticks, the Ancient Fear - League of Legends](#) / [Fiddlesticks - Champions - Universe of League of Legends](#)