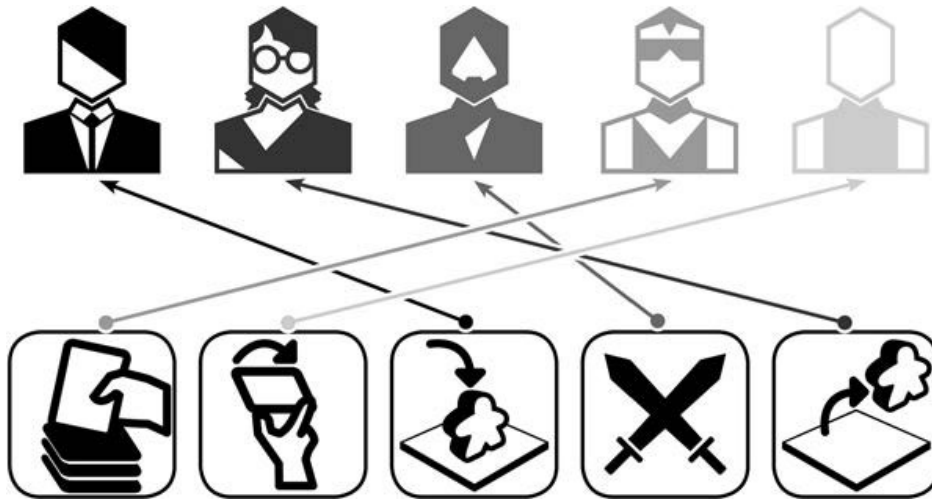


## ACT-02 Action Drafting



### *Description*

Players select from an assortment of Actions in a shared pool. The available Actions are limited in quantity, and once a player has chosen an Action it may not be chosen again.

### *Discussion*

This mechanism creates player interaction within the Action selection itself. While many games have Actions, typically if an Action is chosen by one player, that does not deny it to another. Action Drafting creates a marketplace for Actions, with players competing to select them.

Action Drafting is a very common mechanism that goes by a variety of names, such as Role Selection or Worker Placement. In a Worker Placement mechanism, players place pawns (“workers”) onto Action spaces on a board, performing that Action and denying it to their opponents. Because of the variety and importance of Worker Placement, we have dedicated Chapter 9 to exploring its considerations and variations. The issues discussed there, such as the strength of the first player advantage, apply to most of the mechanisms discussed here as well.

*Citadels* is an example of a Role Selection implementation of Action Drafting. In *Citadels*, the start player takes all the role cards (which show their associated actions), selects an Action card, and then passes the remaining cards to the player to the left. Because the card chosen is secret, this system generates information asymmetry (UNC-05). *Puerto Rico* and *Race for the Galaxy* are similar examples of Role Selection, as in a round each player selects (drafts) a role and gets to perform

associated actions. *Puerto Rico* allows players to perform a less powerful version of the action drafted by the player (see “Follow, ACT-08” in this chapter), while *Race for the Galaxy* also has Follow but allows players to select the same role.

Another frequent implementation of this system uses a Dice Pool. At the start of the Action Selection phase, a number of dice are rolled, and each number corresponds to a specific action. In *La Granja*, for example, all the 4s rolled are placed into the “Take 4 Coins” action space. Once all dice are placed in their boxes, the players take turns selecting a die, and performing the associated action. In a separate twist, there is an extra die left over after all players have selected two action dice, and every player gets to perform that final action.

An Action Drafting system based on a dice pool works against perfect plans, as players need to adapt to whatever is available. In addition, it forces players to consider not just their own plans, but also what their opponents may need. Players may consider taking a sub-optimal choice in order to deprive it from their opponents (so-called “hate drafting”).

Another variant is found in *Dungeon Lords*. In this game, players secretly select three out of six possible Action cards, placing them secretly face down in front of them in order. Each player then reveals their first card, and places tokens on the selected spaces (with ties in order being broken by a Start Player token). The players who place earlier on each Action space can perform more powerful versions of the Actions.

In *War of the Ring*, each player has their own dice pool, and players alternate selecting one of their dice. These systems are not really drafting, in that players are not denying their opponent an Action. However, it does restrict the range of possible Actions, gives players flexibility, and an understanding of the possible Actions available to their opponent.

### *Sample Games*

*7 Wonders* (Bauza, 2010)

*Agricola* (Rosenberg, 2007)

*Citadels* (Faidutti, 2000)

*Coimbra* (Brasini and Gigli, 2018)

*Dungeon Lords* (Chvátíl, 2008)

*La Granja* (Keller and Odendahl, 2014)

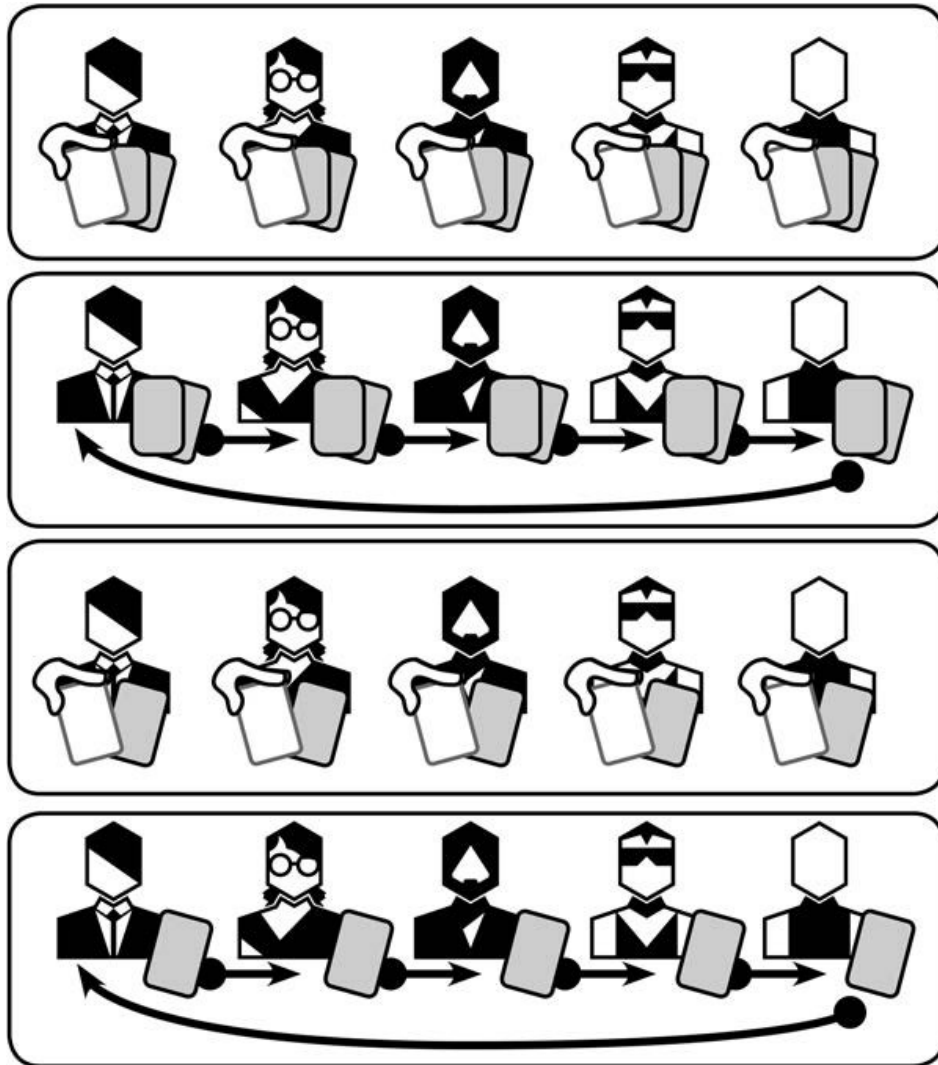
*Puerto Rico* (Seyfarth, 2002)

*Race for the Galaxy* (Lehmann, 2007)

*War of the Ring* (Di Meglio, Maggi, and Nepitello, 2004)

*Yspahan* (Pauchon, 2006)

## CAR-06 Drafting



### *Description*

Drafting is a means of distributing cards or other game elements to players through an ordered selection process.

### *Discussion*

Many games can be described as a process of acquiring, manipulating, and spending resources. One of the main distinctions between modern and classic card games is the move away from random deals and draws and towards more agential means of acquiring cards. Auctions are one popular method (Chapter

8), but they can be cumbersome, mathy, and intimidating to many players. Drafting represents a quicker alternative. One way to think of a draft is that instead of precisely valuing each lot and bidding accordingly in an auction, players can instead ask: What do I want most right now? Do I have to take it now, or will it be here for me next turn too?

Drafting cards is closely related to Action. Drafting (ACT-02) and Worker Placement (Chapter 9). The core concept is the same in all of these: players select, in turn order, something for their exclusive use. What makes card Drafting different is the variety of design options afforded by the physicality of the card.

The draft variant most similar to worker placement is the Rochester draft, as exemplified in *The Networks*. All available cards are laid on the table, and players each take one card on their turns. Play continues until all the cards have been taken, or all players pass their turn. Like a worker placement game, Rochester drafts make all options visible and available at the same time. This can be overwhelming for players and can lead to analysis paralysis, just like in a worker placement game. By physically removing cards from the display, Rochester drafts simplify visually as the draft continues. Consequently, each card is also exclusive to the player who selects it, though designers can include multiple copies of a card if they wish for an action to be available to multiple players. In addition, for games in which cards are taken in hand and played in a later phase, Rochester drafts test players' ability to recall what cards their opponents took. In a worker placement game, the players' pawns encode that information visually, and everyone can see where each pawn was played.

Another simple draft mechanism is pick-and-pass. In *Lords of Waterdeep*, a game effect calls for the active player to draw a hand of cards equal to the number of players at the table, select one to keep, and pass the rest. Each player does this in turn, until the last player is left with the last card. Some games call for drawing one more card than the number of players, so the last player also has a choice. This mechanism is tightly coupled to turn order. *Lords of Waterdeep* leverages this coupling to provide the greatest return to the player who triggered the effect, but designers should take care not to overly advantage players based on turn order when using this mechanism.

To mitigate turn-order imbalances, designers can implement a snake draft, in which the order of Drafting in round 1 is inverted in round 2, so that the last player in the first round becomes the first player in the last round. Snake Drafting mitigates, but does not resolve, turn-order imbalance. Assuming a level drop-off in the values of cards, the value of the first choice in round 1 and last choice in round 2 is greater than the value of the last choice in round

1 and first choice in round 2. In cases where values don't drop off in a level fashion, the problem remains: some positions are superior to others. Games where the difference in value is negligible, or in which different selections have different values for each player, may be the best place to implement snake drafts. Most games will use a snake draft as part of some larger system, or in setup, as in *Catan's* placement of initial settlements.

One game to cleverly address this issue is *Kingdomino*, in which players draft dominoes with two terrain squares on them, and add them to their kingdom. Some squares feature crowns, which make all connected squares of the same terrain worth one point per crown in the combined region. The tiles are numbered, with the lowest-numbered tiles being the least valuable. To draft the tiles, they are laid out in numbered order in a vertical display. The player who chooses the most valuable tiles, the bottom tile in the display, will claim that tile, but will go last in the following turn. Conversely, the player selecting the least-valuable top tile will go first in the next round. While the tiles have some absolute value, they will differ in relative value to each player based on the exact terrains featured on them, and what is in each player's tableau already. In some cases, a player will gladly take a weaker tile, and its better place in turn order, because of how well the tile fits in his or her own board.

Another approach to balancing the turn-order issue of Drafting is to have parallel pick-and-pass drafts happening simultaneously. This method, featured in *7 Wonders*, *Sushi Go!*, and *Among the Stars*, is executed by dealing each player a hand with a number of cards equal to or greater than the number of players playing. Each player picks a card from his or her hand to keep, then passes the hand to the left, and receives a hand from the player to the right. Play continues until all cards are selected. This kind of draft accelerates gameplay because all players are choosing at the same time. However, unlike a Rochester draft, where all choices are visible at all times, and where players have nearly equal access to every card, in a parallel draft, each player will only see some fraction of the cards—as few as half in a 7-player game of *7 Wonders*—and will simply not ever have the option of taking those cards. Another consideration is if one player is particularly slow, he or she can create a bottleneck, which often leads to confusion about which player is up to which round of Drafting.

As mentioned earlier, Drafting, in nearly all its formats, presents two questions. The first is what does the player value most. Many players will stop their analysis here and select the card they like best. But, more skilled players will ask whether they need to take that card right away, or whether,

when turn order wheels back around to them, that card will still be there. This technique, called “wheeling,” adds tension and skill to Drafting.

Wheeling is particularly important to booster drafts of *Magic: The Gathering* and other Collectible Card Games (CCG). What’s unique about these styles of draft is that the pool of cards in the draft is unknown to any player, since they come out of sealed booster packs. Moreover, in many CCGs, card synergies are tightly coupled, such that once you begin drafting towards some strategy or deck type, other cards drop to little or even negative value. The extremes in valuation for cards between players make wheeling much more likely to succeed, since the card that one player values the most may have little use to the other players. When that disparity is large enough, it might make sense to take a card that’s useless to you, simply to deny it to other players, a move called hate-drafting.

Wheeling and hate-drafting are not mechanisms, they are behaviors that emerges from the Drafting mechanism, and the underlying card distributions and overall game system. They are part of what makes the Drafting mechanism so engaging, and designers should evaluate their prototypes with these behaviors in mind.

A few other variants on the parallel Drafting structure include whether cards are played immediately after Drafting, as in *Best Treehouse Ever*, or in turn order during a play phase, like in *Medieval Academy*. Sometimes, not all cards drafted are played, as in *Fairy Tale* where only three of the five cards drafted each round are played, and the other two are discarded. Another variant is to allow players to mix their hand with the hand of cards being passed. In this kind of setup, players may take as many cards as they wish from the new hand, as long as they pass the correct number of cards to the next player. Having players play a card immediately after drafting can also help keep the draft on schedule, and avoids bottlenecks and confusion by forcing all players to play at roughly the same cadence.

Drafting games can sometimes be played at 2 players, like in *Seasons*, but they tend to be a little flat. *Tides of Madness* is a drafting game limited to 2 players only, and among its innovations is that players can be forced to collect cards with madness symbols on them, and can even lose the game if they collect too many.

*7 Wonders Duel* is a 2-player drafting game with quite a few mechanical twists to ratchet up tension. Players can only draft cards on the bottom-most revealed level of a structure, but by taking a card, they can reveal face-down cards higher in the structure that become available for drafting. Cards can be used for multiple purposes, including selling off for money, which incentivizes

hate-drafting. In addition, there are three possible win conditions, including two in-game sudden-death wins. One win condition is tied to a tug-of-war contest that requires both players to take enough military cards to prevent being overrun by the other player. Another instant-win condition is subject to a set-collection contest in which players must draft wisely to at least prevent their opponents from assembling the winning set. These during-game concerns, and the possibility of forcing certain lines of play because of them, add richness to the Drafting choices.

### *Sample Games*

*7 Wonders* (Bauza, 2010)

*7 Wonders Duel* (Bauza and Cathala, 2015)

*Among the Stars* (Bagiartakis, 2012)

*Best Treehouse Ever* (Almes, 2015)

*Catan* (Teuber, 1995)

*Fairy Tale* (Nakamura, 2004)

*Kingdomino* (Cathala, 2016)

*Lords of Waterdeep* (Lee and Thompson, 2012)

*Magic: The Gathering* (Garfield, 1993)

*Medieval Academy* (Poncin, 2014)

*The Networks* (Hova, 2016)

*Seasons* (Bonnessée, 2012)

*Sushi Go!* (Walker-Harding, 2013)

*Tides of Madness* (Čurla, 2016)