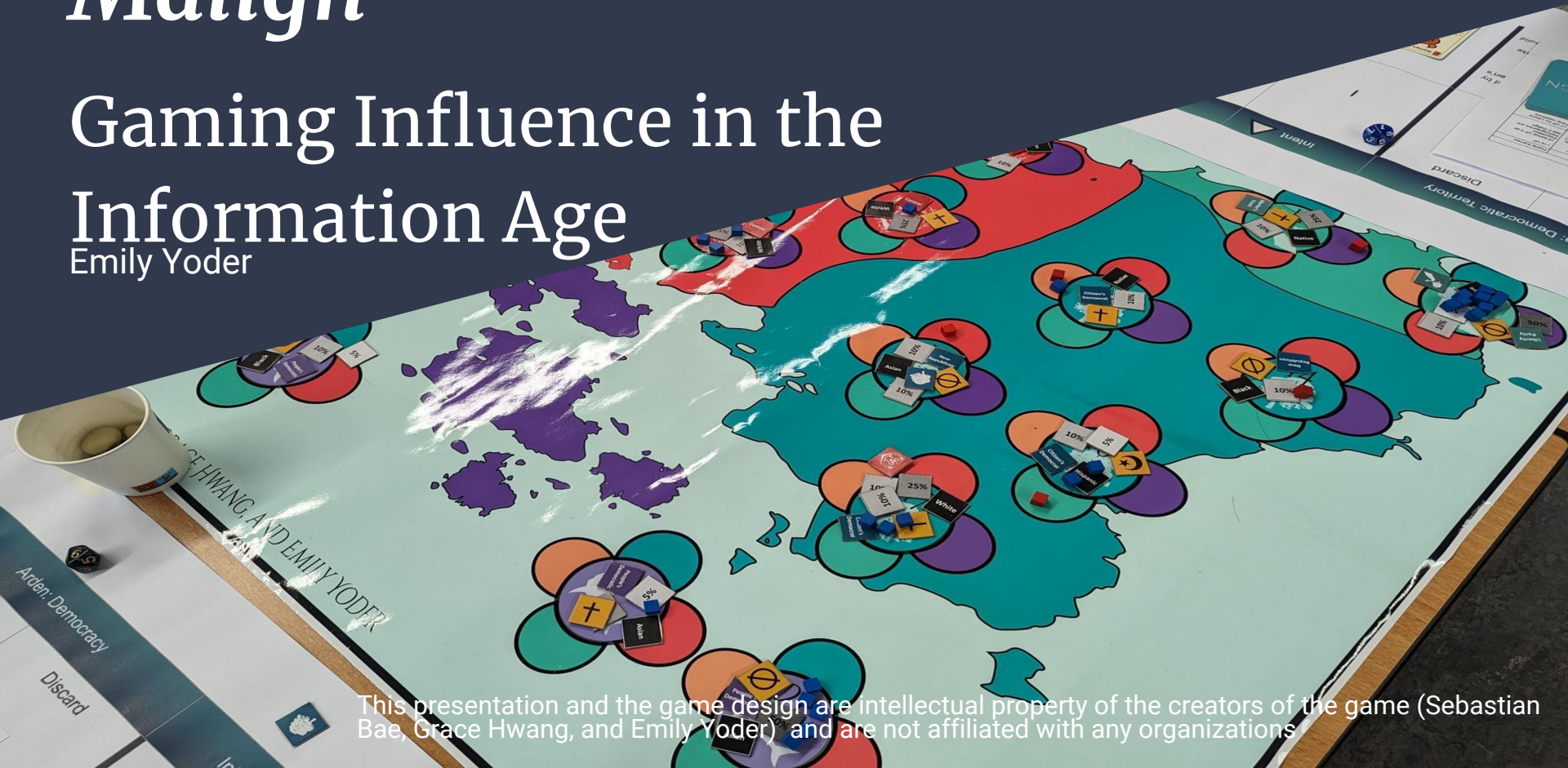


# Malign

## Gaming Influence in the

## Information Age

Emily Yoder



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# Bio

**Emily P. Yoder** is a wargamer through the Georgetown University Wargaming Society (GUWS). She led the map design and narrative design aspects of *Malign*.

Additionally, Emily is currently a Policy Analyst at the RAND Corporation, where she has designed and executed strategic and operational wargames, as well as educational games across a broad range of topics, including force posture and mission prioritization.

Prior to her experience at RAND, Emily participated in the U.S. Department of State Student Internship Program with the U.S. Mission to the OECD in Paris, France where she studied economic policy. Emily has a M.A. in International Affairs from George Washington University and a dual B.A. in Political Science and Economics from the University of Pittsburgh.

**Disclaimer:** My opinions and views are my alone and do not represent the policies or views of my employer or any other associated institution.



# *Malign* in a Sentence

- *Malign* is a **card-driven educational** game with rigid rules, where players must grapple with the pernicious effects of **malign influence**, while attempting to foster **social resilience**.
- In understanding gaming information, *Malign* is one way of slicing a complex and nuanced concept.



Image of players shared with their permission

# Malign Mechanics: Players and Map

- **Ursaria** – Authoritarian “Sleeping Bear” that desires a unified empire, just like the good ol’ days
- **Arden** - Democracy that faces growing bipartisanship and extensive freedom of speech
- **Republic of Fluma** - Separatist region of Arden that has a growing independence movement
- **Presque** - Cunning negotiator with a highly competitive multiparty system
- **Dinesia** - Former colony of Presque, then authoritarian regime, and now a brittle democracy that has a territorial dispute with Presque



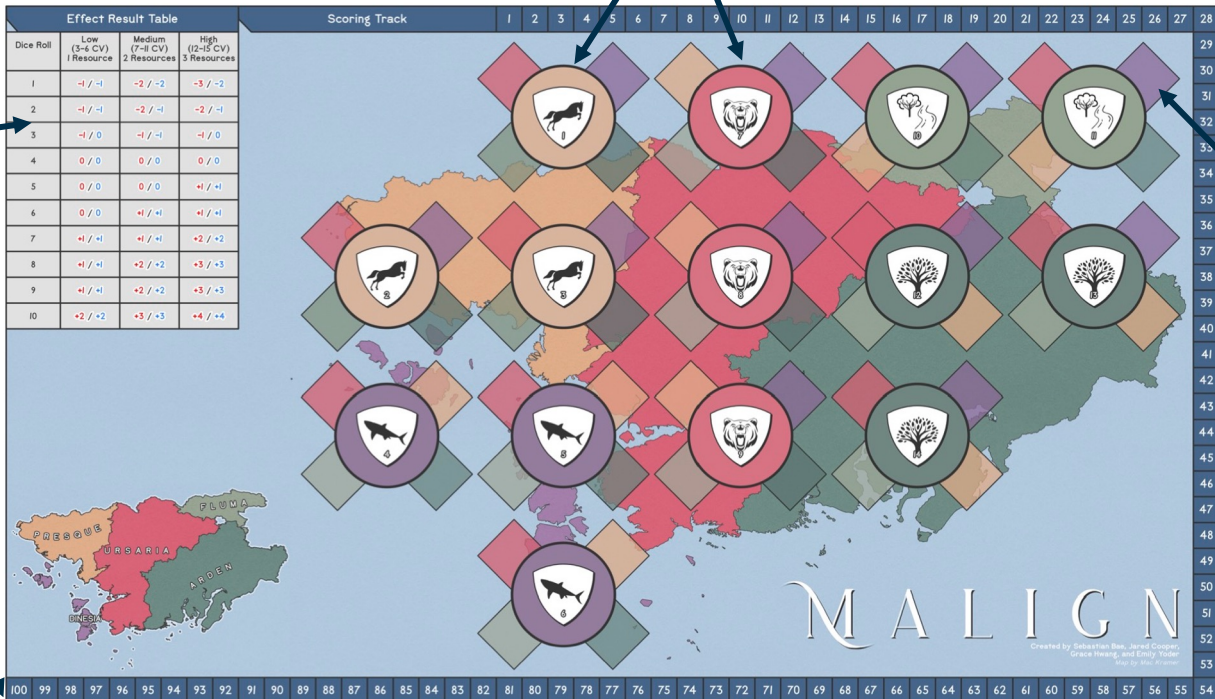
## Population Demographics (PDs)

Place demographic tokens (DTs) in the PDs to set up the countries

This is the effects results table (ERT). The top of each column indicates the Campaign Value (CV) range and the resource cost

Effect Result Table			
Dice Roll	Low (3-4 CV) 1 Resource	Medium (7-11 CV) 2 Resources	High (12-15 CV) 3 Resources
1	-1 / -1	-2 / -2	-3 / -2
2	-1 / -1	-2 / -1	-2 / -1
3	-1 / 0	-1 / -1	-1 / 0
4	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0
5	0 / 0	0 / 0	+1 / +1
6	0 / 0	+1 / +1	+1 / +1
7	+1 / +1	+1 / +1	+2 / +2
8	+1 / +1	+2 / +2	+3 / +3
9	+1 / +1	+2 / +2	+3 / +3
10	+2 / +2	+3 / +3	+4 / +4

Scoring Track



Each country places their influence cubes in their associated color in other countries

Scoring track keeps track of player points over the course of the game

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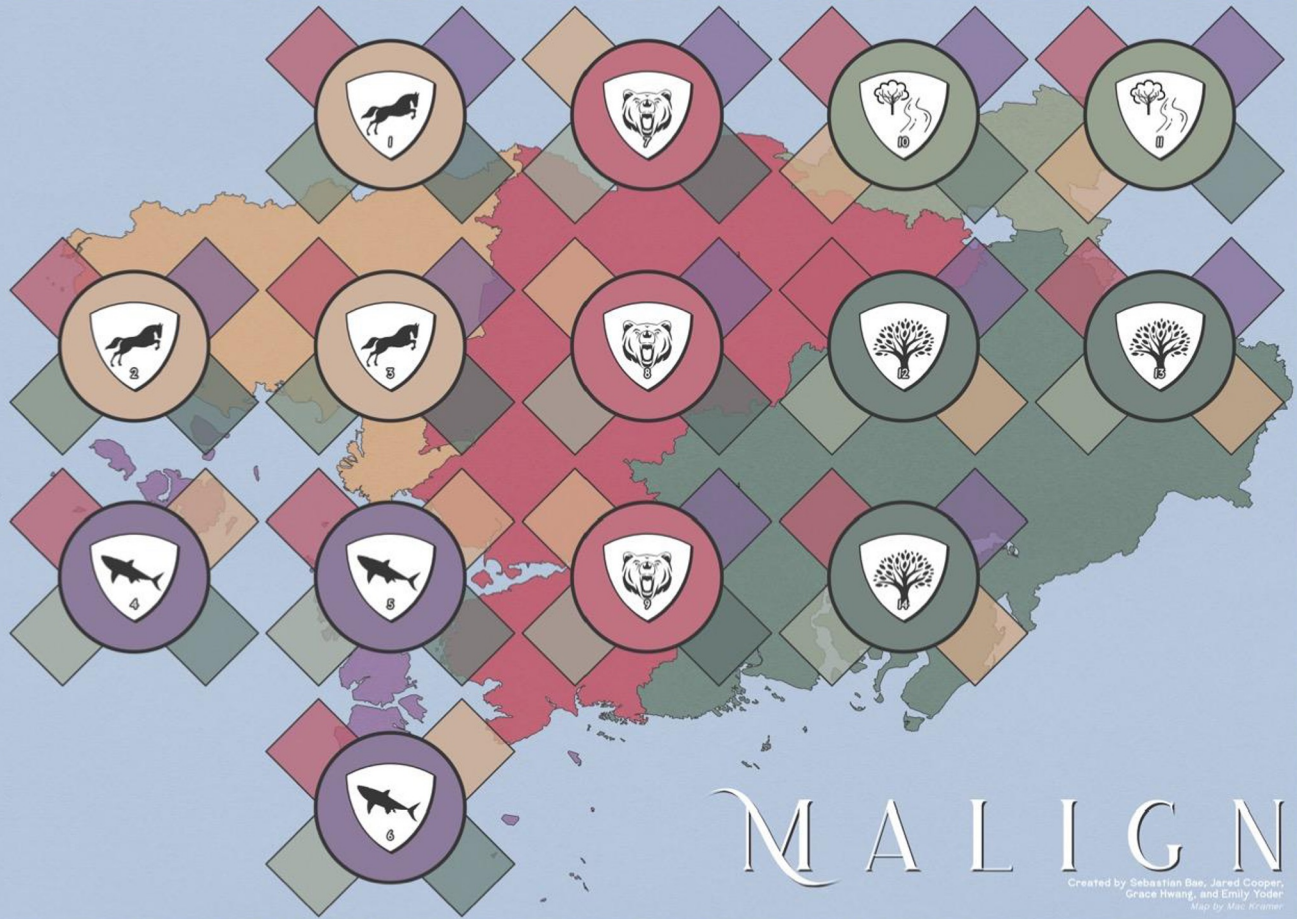
Created by Sebastian Bae, Jared Cooper, Grace Hwang, and Emily Fisher. Art by Andy Johnson.

Effect Result Table

Dice Roll	Low (3-6 CV) 1 Resource	Medium (7-11 CV) 2 Resources	High (12-15 CV) 3 Resources
1	-1 / -1	-2 / -2	-3 / -2
2	-1 / -1	-2 / -1	-2 / -1
3	-1 / 0	-1 / -1	-1 / 0
4	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0
5	0 / 0	0 / 0	+1 / +1
6	0 / 0	+1 / +1	+1 / +1
7	+1 / +1	+1 / +1	+2 / +2
8	+1 / +1	+2 / +2	+3 / +3
9	+1 / +1	+2 / +2	+3 / +3
10	+2 / +2	+3 / +3	+4 / +4

Scoring Track

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28



MALIGN

Created by Sebastian Bae, Jared Cooper,  
Grace Hwang, and Emily Yoder  
Map by Mac Kramer

100 99 98 97 96 95 94 93 92 91 90 89 88 87 86 85 84 83 82 81 80 79 78 77 76 75 74 73 72 71 70 69 68 67 66 65 64 63 62 61 60 59 58 57 56 55 54

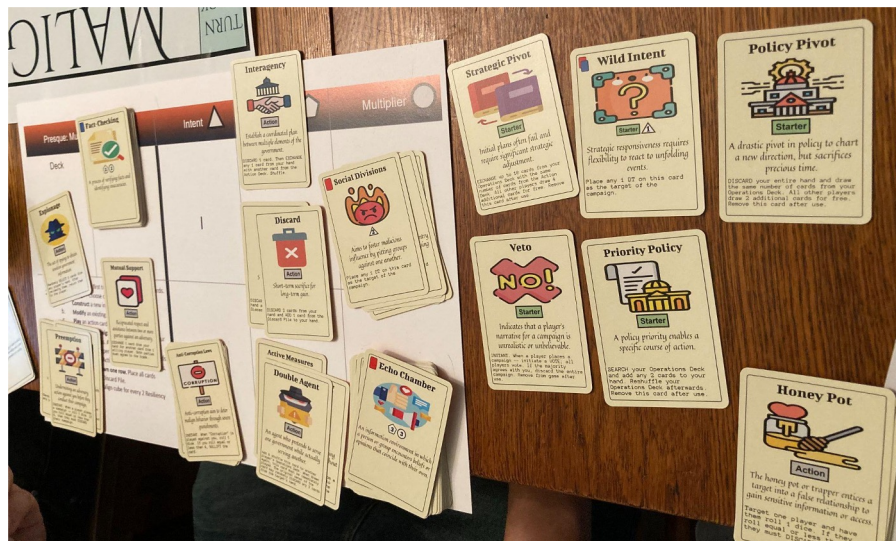
# Cards

## Action Cards:

- Played individually at specific times in the game (either specified on the player mat or the card) and trigger an immediate action (Leaks, Hack, Honey Pot, Draw) that affects other players (losing cards from hand) or the player that activates the card (drawing cards, gaining information, etc.)

## Campaign Cards:

- Played in the formulation of a malign or resiliency campaign and shape the narrative that players discuss. Designated as Intent, Method, or Multiplier.

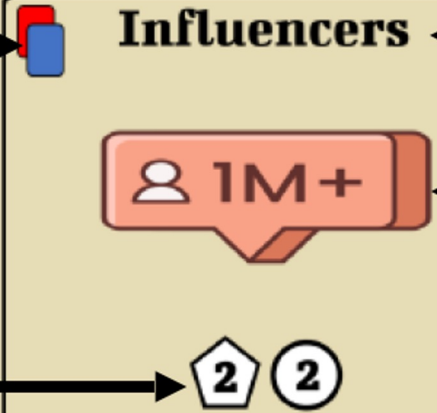


# Card Taxonomy

Red is for Malign influence. Blue is for Resiliency.

Triangle is Intent. Pentagon is Method. Circle is Multiplier. The number inside the shape is the Influence Value (IV)

**Influencers**



Using influential figures to enhance the reach of your message.

Card Title


Card Image

Indicates Action Card

Card Description

Card Effects

**Active Measures**



**Action**

*Covert and deniable operations intended to achieve political influence.*

Randomly **DISCARD** 2 cards from any player's hand.

Card Title

Card Image

Action

*Covert and deniable operations intended to achieve political influence.*

Randomly **DISCARD** 2 cards from any player's hand.



## Honey Pot



Action

The honey pot or trapper entices a target into a false relationship to gain sensitive information or access.

Target one player and have them roll 1 dice. If they roll equal or less than 6, they must DISCARD 4 cards.



## Social Divisions



2

Aims to foster malicious influence by pitting groups against one another.

Place any 1 DT on this card as the target of the campaign.











## Influencers



2 2

An individual or group attempting to influence and inspire others, usually on social media.

# Malign Mechanics: Placemats

Arden: Bipartisan Democracy			Action Card
Operations Deck	Intent I	Method I	Amplifier I
			
Arden's strong democratic values face the push and pull of domestic politics while international threats loom on its borders.	Intent II	Method II	Amplifier II
Starting income: 			
Turn income: 			Discard

Action Card

OR

**National Unity** : If you roll a 4 or less, remove one malign cube from any of your PDs

Discard

Regime Ability

Action Card

OR

**National Unity** : If you roll a 4 or less, remove one malign cube from any of your PDs

Discard

# Arden: Bipartisan Democracy

Operations Deck

Arden's strong democratic values face the push and pull of domestic politics while international threats loom on its borders.

Starting income:



Turn income:



**Malign Influence**



A hostile effort by a foreign country to influence a target country using overt or covert means.

Ursaria People's

**Online Radicalization**



The process of introducing and indoctrinating an individual or group to an extreme ideological message or belief system.

When used with "Conspiracy Theory," add 2 to the CV.

**Conspiracy Theory**



A belief that an event or set of circumstances are the result of a secret plot.

**Resiliency**



to withstand, adapt, or recover rapidly from

< High School

**Electoral Security**



The protection of elections and voting infrastructure, usually from a cyber threat.

When used with "National Effects," add 2 to the CV.

**Deplatforming**



Removing access to a platform, such as social media, to reduce their ability to get their message into the public.

A row, comprised of intent, method, and amplifier. The CV is determined by adding all of the Influence Values (IVs) together. This CV is 11, so it would cost 2 resources


Each player has starting resources (indicated by number of yellow cubes) as well as income every turn.

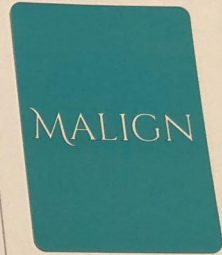
DTs to indicate target country and demographic

Fluma: Democratic Territory

Intent 

Method 

Multiplier 



1. **Draw** 5 cards. On the first turn, draw 10 plus Starter Cards.
2. **Campaign Stage** – Choose one of the following:
  - a. **Construct** a new influence campaign
  - b. **Modify** an existing campaign
  - c. **Play** an action card
3. **May activate ONE campaign and its effects.** Explain your narrative. Roll for success. Apply the effects of any successful campaign. Depending on the CV, discard cards.
4. **Action Stage:** Play ONE Action Card and apply its effects.
5. **Move all campaigns down one row.** Place all cards without a row into the Discard Pile.
6. **Clean Up:** Remove 1 Malign cube for every 2 Resiliency cubes.
7. **Begin a new turn**

**Resiliency**








The ability to withstand, adapt, and recover rapidly from disinformation.

**Liberty Party** by 1 DT on this card  
target of the


**Attribution**





Proactively attributing clandestine actions to an actor.

**Grassroots Mobilization**



Movement at the local level intended to affect political or economic change.

**Malign Influence**



1

A hostile effort by a foreign country to influence a target country using overt or covert means.

Place any 1 DT on this card as the target of the campaign.

**Online Radicalization**



6 6

The process of introducing and indoctrinating an individual or group to an extreme ideological message or belief system.

When used with "Conspiracy Theory," add 2 to the CV.

**Conspiracy Theory**



4

A belief that an event or set of circumstances are the result of a secret plot.

## Malign Influence



1

A hostile effort by a foreign country to influence a target country using overt or covert means.

Place any 1 DT on this card as the target of the campaign.

## Online Radicalization



6

The process of introducing and indoctrinating an individual or group to an extreme ideological message or belief system.

When used with "Conspiracy Theory," add 2 to the CV.

## Conspiracy Theory



4

A belief that an event or set of circumstances are the result of a secret plot.

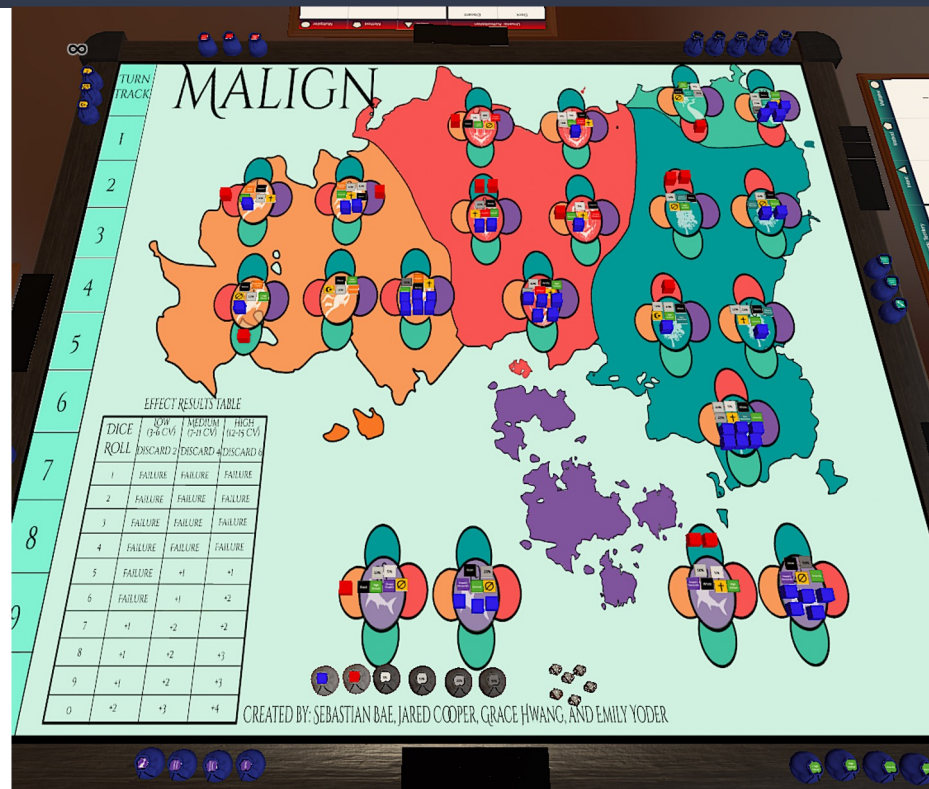
# The Value of the Narrative

- The most important aspect of the game is the **narrative** that players construct in their campaigns
  - All of the game pieces (map, demographics, victory conditions) are intended to help players create unique narratives that take common tools of malign influence and resiliency and piece them together.
  - Players can **veto** narratives that they do not believe make sense—creates a conversation!
  - Avoids players from just “gaming” the game
- The game’s pieces are designed to be **flexible** to test out different scenarios
  - Currently designed for a “Russia-Ukraine” scenario, but victory conditions and demographics can be changed easily to entertain other case studies.



# Design Insights

- **Fictional World < – > Realistic Scenarios**
- **Number of assets vs. Flexibility**
- **Exploratory game vs. Time**
  - Complexity of the game and facilitation (no one reads the “read aheads”)
- **Cutting down mechanics:** Alliances and social “sliding scales”
- **Victory Conditions:** How do we incentivize the best interactions between players?
  - Currently a “rack and stack points” but moving towards “achievement unlocked” mechanisms





# How does *Malign* fit in the research space?

- *Malign* is only **one** proposed way of slicing the research problem of finding effective ways to counter misinformation, disinformation, and malinformation
- Developing into a training tool to help players contextualize the different ways that information has influenced their daily lives



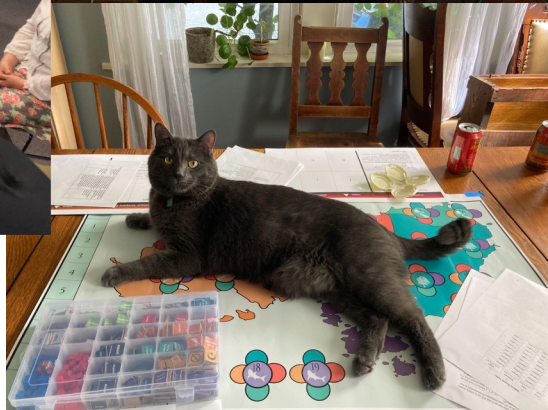
# Other Information Gaming Opportunities

- Player behavior in gaming can highlight avenues for further research
  - Different groups/cultures/identities may be more or less receptive to different information campaigns
- Psychology of a successful vs. unsuccessful campaigns
  - What makes people believe something?
- Specific country dynamics
  - Will a social media campaign work the same in different countries?
- How information and influence fit into the larger battlespace/international environment?



# The Journey So Far (thank you!)

- European Center of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats (Helsinki, FI)
  - Aalto University & Laurea University Students
- Steam TableTop Simulator (TTS)
  - 3-5 playtests
- Pittsburgh board gaming community
- Disinformation Event: Riga, Latvia
- Connections NL
- The Hague University
- Friends of Europe: Brussels
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Poland



# The Journey Ahead

- Boxed version of the game in the works



# Backups

# Game Design

## Tools:

- Gimp: Map creation
- Inkscape: Map editing/design
- Google Slides/Drive: Placemats, running document of design ideas, edits, etc.

## Inspirations:

- *Pandemic*: measuring influence through cubes
- *Root*: battling factions going head-to-head
- *The Quiet Year*: the role of the narrative
- *Dungeons & Dragons*: map designs

