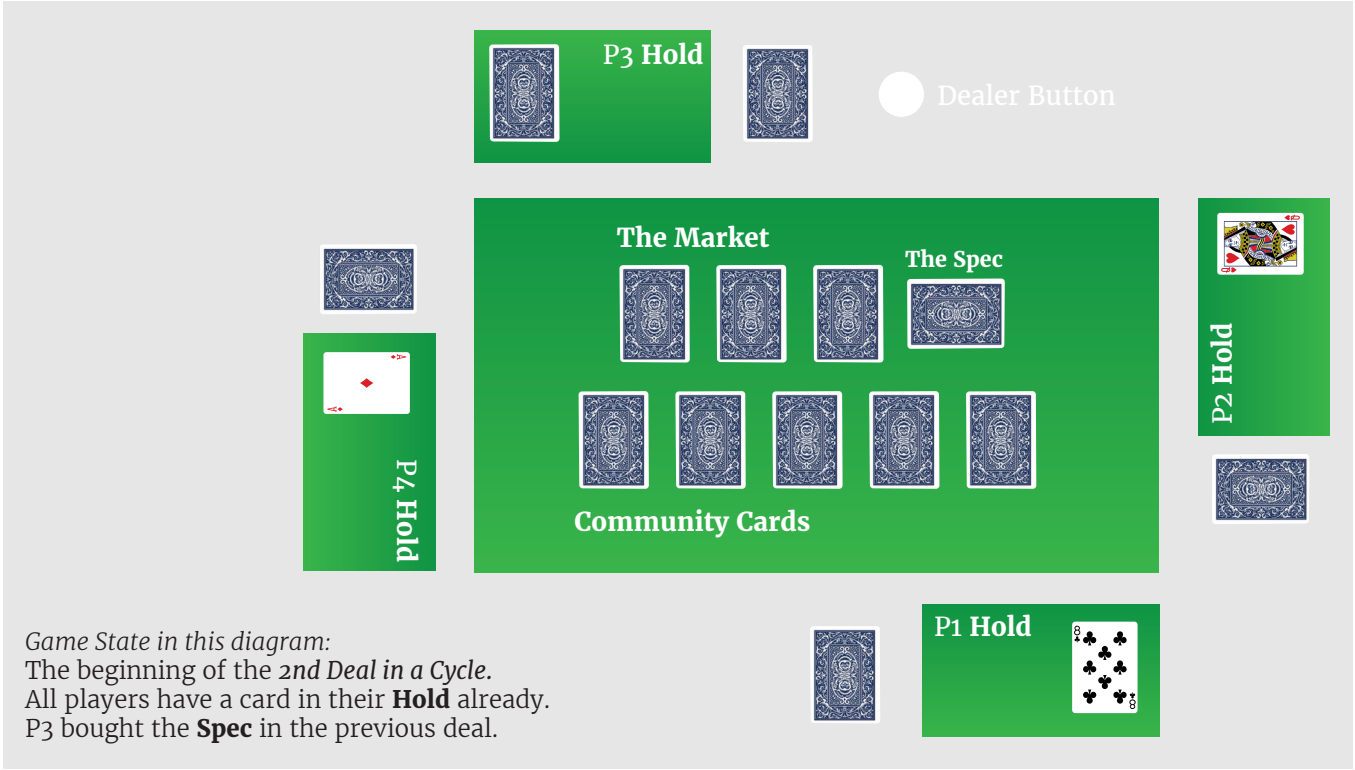
Quetta
♣♥♠♦ Poker

A Game By Vivi Yu & Hosni Auji



Game State in this diagram:
The beginning of the *2nd Deal in a Cycle.*
All players have a card in their **Hold** already.
P3 bought the **Spec** in the previous deal.

• **Overview** and **Objective** •

Quetta is a community card poker variant played with a standard 52-card deck ***(2-4 Players)***.
The objective is to end each Deal with the best hand of 5 cards from those available to you.
Quetta is played in **Cycles** of three Deals each. During each of these Deals, all players bid on a card from the **Market**. When the **Auction** is done, each player takes the card they bought and places it in their **Hold** (beside them). These cards remain in the hold until the end of the **Cycle**.
At the end of each deal, the player forms the best possible hand from: the card they were dealt at the start, the 5 community cards, and whatever cards are in their Hold.

• **Betting / Bidding Values** •

Ante: $1 (Fixed)
Market card (open): Starts at $1
Spec card: Starts at $2

• **Poker Hand Ranking** •

Royal Flush This hand contains five cards in sequence, all of the same suit.	A♥ K♥ Q♥ J♥ 10♥
Straight Flush This hand contains five cards in sequence, all of the same suit.	8♣ 7♣ 6♣ 5♣ 4♣
4 of a Kind This hand contains all four cards of one rank and any other unmatched card.	5♦ 5♠ 5♥ 5♣ 3♥
Full House This hand contains three matching cards of one rank and two matching cards of another rank	K♥ K♦ K♠ 5♥ 5♣
Flush This hand contains all five cards are of the same suit, but not in sequence.	K♠ J♠ 9♠ 7♠ 3♠
Straight This hand contains five cards of sequential rank in at least two different suits	Q♠ J♦ 10♣ 9♠ 8♥
3 of a Kind This hand contains three cards of the same rank, with two cards not of this rank nor the same as each other.	Q♠ Q♥ Q♦ 5♠ 9♣
2 Pair This hand contains two cards of the same rank, plus two cards of another rank.	K♥ K♠ J♣ J♦ 9♦
1 Pair This hand contains two cards of one rank, plus three cards which are not of this rank nor the same.	A♣ A♦ 9♥ 6♠ 4♦
High Card made of any five cards not meeting any of the above requirements.	A♦ 7♥ 5♣ 3♦ 2♠

Playing Quetta Poker

Quetta is played by **2-4 Players** in **Cycles of three Deals** each.
It uses a standard 52-Card deck.

How a single Deal (hand) of Quetta Poker plays

•1• Dealing •1•

Each player is dealt **one card**.
They are free to see this card but should keep it hidden.
The dealer then places **5 community cards**, face down, in the middle of the table. Finally, the dealer places as many cards in the **market** as there are players *(eg. 4 players = 4 cards in market)*. One of these cards is always placed rotated (as shown in the diagram). This is called the **Speculative (Spec)**.
Play starts from the person to the left of the **Dealer** *(player w/the 'Dealer button')* and moves clockwise. On their turn, players can, choose to fold, or pay the ante (into the pot) to continue...

•2• The Flop and Opening the Market •2•

...After each player pays the ante,
the dealer **flips opens the first 3 community cards**.
On their turn, players can again choose to fold before the Market opens.
There is no round of betting before the Market opens but once it does, each player **must** purchase a card unless they folded beforehand.
To open the market, the dealer flips **open all cards in the Market with the exception of the Spec**. It remains closed.
On their turn, players can bid on cards in the Market...

Note 1: *If a player folds before the market opens, the dealer must remove one card at random from the market (without seeing it). The card is shuffled back into the deck.* ***The Spec cannot be removed.***
Note 2: *At least two players must still be in the game for the market to open. If all but one player have folded before the market opens, that player takes the pot and the deal is over.*

•3• Bidding and The Auction •3•

...The first player to **begin bidding** *(The player to the left of the Dealer)*, decides what card to bid on and does so by **placing its value in chips** on the card itself. If this bid is unrivaled, the player **takes the card** from the market and **places it in their Hold**. The chips they bid to purchase the card are added to the pot. It is now the next player's turn to bid (in play order).

If a player chooses to **rival a bid**, they must bid a higher amount by placing that value in chips on the card as well. Each player involved in this card auction **can take turns raising the bid** amount until the card is sold. The player with the highest bid at the end takes the card from the market and puts it in their Hold. The chips they bid are placed into the pot. However the losing bidders reclaim their chips. Play order continues until all participating players have purchased a card (no cards left in the market)...

Note 1*: The* ***Spec*** *has a higher starting value (2:1) and is bid on blind. When sold, the purchasing player can see the card but must keep it face-down in the hold.*
Note 2: *Open market cards must remain face-up when in the hold at all times.*

•4• Betting Rounds and Awarding the Pot •4•

...When all players have purchased a card, the auction is over and the dealer immediately **flips open another community card** *(the fourth)*.
In play order, players can **place their bets** (or fold if they do not want to match a bet or raise).
When all players have either placed their bet or folded,
the dealer **flips open the final community card** *(the fifth)*.
There is a **final round of betting** before players show their hand.
The player forms the best possible hand from:
the card they were dealt at the start, the 5 community cards and whatever cards are in their hold. The player with the best hand is **awarded the pot**.

Note 1: *Purchased cards remain in the player's* ***Hold*** *for the entire* ***Cycle*** *regardless of whether or not they are used to form a hand.*
Note 2: *If the* ***Spec*** *is used in a player's hand, it is revealed and must remain face-up in the player's* ***Hold*** *for the remainder of the* ***Cycle****.*
Note 3: *In the case of one or more players being "All In", standard poker Side-pot rules apply.*

•5• Ending a Deal and Ending a Cycle •5•

Quetta is played in Cycles of 3 Deals each.
Players **keep their purchased cards in their hold** for the duration of a Cycle.

At the end of each Deal, all **other cards are given back to the Dealer** and shuffled into the main deck.
At the end of a Cycle, all cards are given back to the dealer and a new cycle begins.

Quetta Poker • Design Process •

• Information gathering to get inspired •
Our original idea for the game was to make a poker game with deck building features. We both appreciated the deck building mechanic in Dominion, however it's not a widely-used mechanic in traditional card games. With the keywords "traditional card game" and "deck building" in mind, we did some internet research, while also reaching out to faculty members.

Among the game we saw,, we thought Jesse Fuchs' Arcade Cribbage was a good example for us as it had both deck-building and, at least partially, used poker scoring. We played this game for several rounds to get an idea of how it was incorporating other traditional card game mechanics. It's a great two-player competitive card game with deck building, market and scoring systems. We liked the market system which enabled both deck-building and an interesting bidding system. The game also had different phases which we enjoyed as well. However we found the scoring system a bit too complicated and playtime to be too long. We wanted a system that was concise and allowed for quick rounds in the same vein as other poker variants.

• Prototyping and finding the right direction •
Since our goal was to try implementing a deck-building mechanic into a traditional poker-like card game, we thought it would be best to retain key elements for existing and popular poker games. We did not want to design another ranking/scoring system that might confuse players and slow things down, so we opted to stick with the Poker hand ranking that was widely familiar. We felt this would also help get the 'quick rounds' we wanted to achieve.
In our earliest prototype, each player was dealt an open card and 5 cards were placed in the center. Players could choose to buy cards from the deck to build their hand. From here we developed our first 'market' idea which was a set of open cards that players could choose from. For the two-player game we were testing, 5 market cards were opened. After each player chose their card, the remaining exposed cards were removed from the table. Players would pay a fee to acquire this card. The community cards were then opened with intermittent betting. After testing this for a few rounds, we realized that all open and hidden information was shared by both players so there was no competitive edge. It felt a bit like a game of blackjack only scored with poker hands. We liked the idea of having a market to help build a hand but we wanted to push it further.

In the next prototype, we made the dealt card closed and added a three-tier market system.
After each community card was opened, instead of having players bet, we had them bid on cards in the market. Each market tier had a different value. Early playtests proved encouraging but we were unsure how to deal with the purchasing process. After bouncing several ideas, we decided to try the "open market" system that allowed players to outbid each other on cards but that would drive up the price of cards in general. We also add the option of buying a hidden card and reduced the amount of cards available to bid on per market round.
We weren't completely happy with this prototype but figured our best bet was to test it until we can clearly identify what wasn't working.
We also had discussions about how whether betting and bidding would both contribute to the pot or if they were distinct actions.

It is at this time that we also began to realize that our game relied heavily on poker itself. We were apprehensive about this because we felt it was delicate territory. It was a variant but not quite a mod. How much of poker is it ok to keep recognizable? How much do we change? How much needs to change for us to consider this our game? We were treading this weird line that was a bit uncomfortable. However it was during this process of questioning that the idea of having cards stay with the player between rounds emerged. We felt it was a simple change but it had not been done before (at least with the various Poker variants we researched). It was not quite deck-building but we felt it captured a little bit of that spirit.

Our next prototype, we reverted to a one-tier market. Players still need to enter the market to buy cards. However the cards they buy will stay with them for up to 4 rounds. Since players need to keep the card they buy from earlier rounds, the market now works more like a place where the 'deck-building' happens – or let's say 'deck-building lite'.

With these two prototypes in hand, we playtested for several rounds First ourselves, then with different members of the faculty and our fellow students. The feedback showed the second prototype is a better choice - the market (and values) were easier to track, and at the same time playtesters were finding the carrying cards across different rounds part interesting . We decided to stay with the second prototype. We also got a lot of useful advice and instructions on how to design the bidding system in the market, how to set cards in the market etc.

• Endless playtesting and adjusting •
In this phase, our targets were to: 1. Make sure the basic game flow works well. 2. Balance the values of the cards in the market. 3. Find the right balance between our rules and poker rules.

We firstly focused on target 1. To solve the problem that how many cards we should put in the market, we playtested several rounds with different player numbers. Finally we found we should have as many cards in the market as there were players with only one of these cards being the hidden card. We wanted to keep the door open for people prioritizing hidden information over having a predominantly exposed hand. (Something that came up several times during playtesting). We also gave thought to when betting and folding should be permitted to enhance the flow of the game whilst staying true to the 'logic' of poker so to speak.

Next we started to balance the values of the card in the market. At the very beginning, we priced the hidden card at 3x the value of an open card, perhaps overestimating its appeal. However, in our playtests, we found the price difference exacerbated the snowball effect - some players would become 'very rich' after 2 rounds, at that time the price for the hidden card would be too expensive for the 'poorer' players, and they could hardly get cards much less the cards they wanted.. So we adjusted the hidden card and open card price ratio from 3:1 to 2:1. The playtest results showed the adjustment was successful. It did not eliminate the problem of the rich getting richer by being able to always get the card they wanted. And as the card they wanted increased their chances of winning, they could overbid with confidence. It was not a foolproof plan as we saw it backfire numerous times in our playtests, but players were perceiving it as a problem, which annoyed them.

Another thing we saw quite frequently in our playtests was that the possibility for a player to get a flush was extremely high - almost 80% of games were ending up with a flush hand winning. Since the chances were the same for all players, it was not necessarily a problem of balance, but since we were using standard poker hand ranking and similar formats of betting, players were valuing their hands on that basis. So for a player to get a three-of-a-kind 3 times in a row and then lose to a flush on each of those, or to get a flush but then lose to a higher ranking flush on more than one occasion, skewed confidence in the balance. By using poker conventions as a means of familiarity, having hand values appear 'distorted' was having an adverse effect on players.
We toyed with the idea of reshuffling hand values but then decided on the simple solution of decreasing the sub-rounds from 4 to 3. This served two purposes, it halved the amount of games ending in a flush and it reduced the earlier problem of the rich as always getting richer because it shrunk the hand they could 'buy' by one card and one round. By the time a player achieves what is perceived as an unassailable advantage, the cycle of sub-rounds would be up.

• Wrapping up and final thoughts •
By this stage it was clear that our game, while having a distinct flavor and direction, was still poker at heart. We thought that our best bet was to embrace it. Countless times we discussed changing things just for the sake of changing them but this seemed motivated not by wanting to fix something we perceived as broken but by wanting to break something as a means of extending ownership over the parts of the game that were still distinctly poker. Nevertheless, we reasoned that our best bet was to try to fine-tune and embrace the Poker connection.
During our research phase early in the project, we stumbled across various poker variants and we realized that they often had names of places or cities in the name: Texas hold'em, Omaha, Manila, Chicago, Tahoe. So we decided to draw a straight line on the world map between our home cities/regions: Beirut (Lebanon) and Yunnan (China). The center point of the line was close to a city called Quetta (in Pakistan) and thus, Quetta Poker.