

# DESIGNING INTERACTION

*What We Can Learn From Modern Board Games*

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*March 17, 2017*

# AGENDA



Why talk about board games?



What is a modern board game?



A little bit about the study of games



Board games and design



## The Settlers of Catan (Klaus Teuber, 1995)

This is the first German strategy board game to become a hit in the United States (and worldwide) and what got me into modern board gaming. It is still very popular.

[Learn more](#)



My game room in my Connecticut home and part of my board game collection. I currently own about 1,000 games and run a small weekly board game group.

# A Sampling of Modern Board Games

The slides that follow will give you an idea of the type of board games I study and play. They are good but not necessarily the best games out there.





Flash Point: Fire Rescue  
(Kevin Lanzing, 2011)  
[Learn more](#)





Concordia  
(Mac Gerdts, 2013)  
[Learn more](#)





Smash Monster Rampage!  
(Mike Swindall, 2010)  
[Learn more](#)





Battle Sheep  
(Francesco Rotta, 2010)  
[Learn more](#)



North Wind  
(Klaus Teuber, 2010)  
[Learn more](#)





Casa Grande  
(Günter Burkhardt, 2011)  
[Learn more](#)



## Scrabble

(Alfred Mosher Butts, 1948)

This slide is included only because it's my best Scrabble score ever. I pretty much quit playing the game after this because I'll never do better.



# Why talk about board games?

- *Growing popularity*
- *Cultural artifact*
- *System modeling*
- *Human interaction*
- *Visual design*



## Spiel Fair

Around 175,000 people from around the world attend this game convention, which takes place in October in Essen, Germany. Designers introduce their new games, which sell out almost instantly. [Learn more](#)

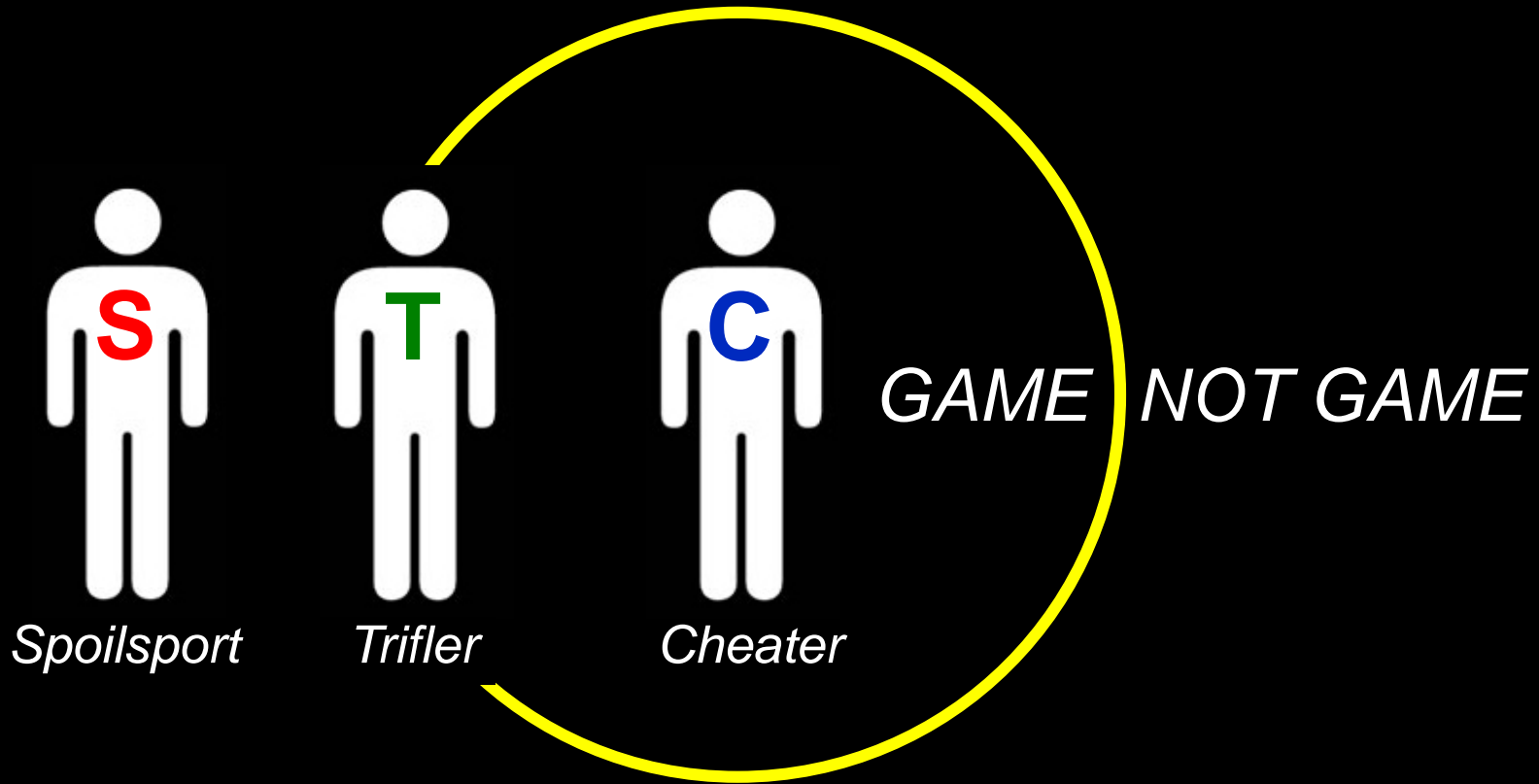




## BoardgameGeek.com

This annual board game convention in Dallas draws more than 3,000 people every November. The convention features a library of thousands of old and new games, and a vendor hall showcasing new releases. The event sells out hours after registration opens. [Learn more](#) (Note: The link points to someone else's account of BGG.con 2016, not mine.)

# THE MAGIC CIRCLE



The magic circle is a term coined by Dutch historian Johan Huizinga (1938) that describes the virtual area of play. Within the circle, players' behavior is shaped by agreed upon rules. The spoilsport, trifler, and cheater are states of being in relation to the magic circle. [Learn more](#)

# DEFINING A GAME

A **game** is a rule-based formal system with

- a variable and quantifiable **outcome**
- where different outcomes are assigned different **values**
- the player **exerts effort** in order to influence the outcome
- the player **feels attached** to the outcome
- the consequences of the activity are **optional** and negotiable

*Jesper Juul, game theorist*

*From “Half-Real: Video Games Between Real Rules and Fictional Worlds”*

*(MIT Press, 2005)*

[Learn more](#)



# What is a modern board game?

- *Geared toward older players*
- *Beautiful visual designs*
- *More complex game play*
- *Balanced, strategy driven*
- *Often thematic*

# Also known as ...

- *Strategy board games*
- *Eurogames*
- *Tabletop games*

# A few board game genres

## *Area control*

Players battle over control of territory on the board; dominance usually wins



**Blood Rage**  
(Eric M. Lang, 2015)  
[Learn more](#)



# A few board game genres

## *Route planning*

Plan and optimize routes  
to connect points  
on a map, sometimes  
to transport goods



Ticket to Ride  
(Alan R. Moon, 2004)  
[Learn more](#)

# A few board game genres

## *Worker Placement*

Send your workers (usually people-shaped pieces) to places on the board to accomplish tasks to fulfill game goals



### Village

(Inka & Marcus Brand, 2011)

[Learn more](#)

# A few board game genres

## *Dexterity*

Use physical skill to  
manipulate game  
components



Flick 'em Up!

(Gaetan Beaujannot & Jean Yves Monpertius, 2011)

[Learn more](#)



# A few board game genres

## *Party*

A game for larger groups, often humorous and focused on social interaction

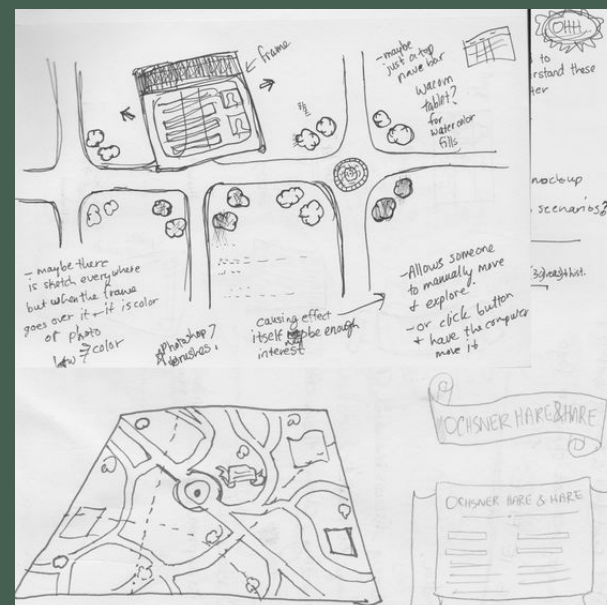
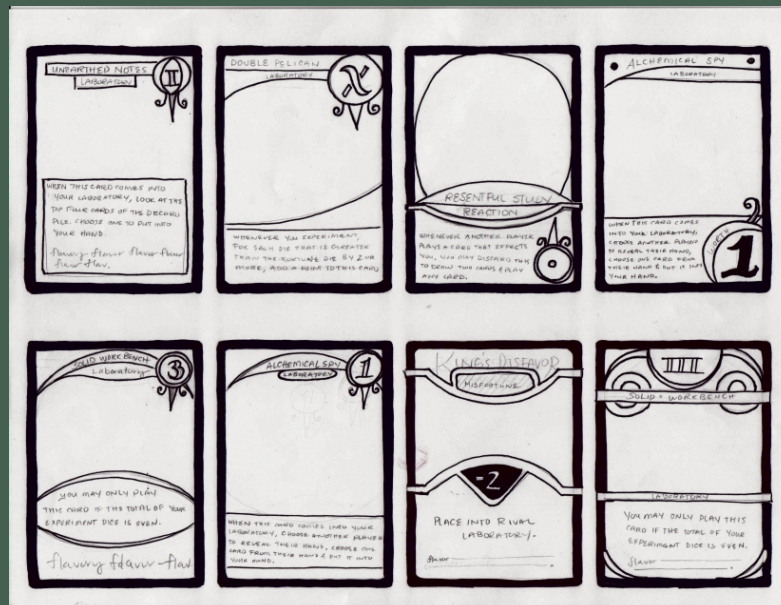
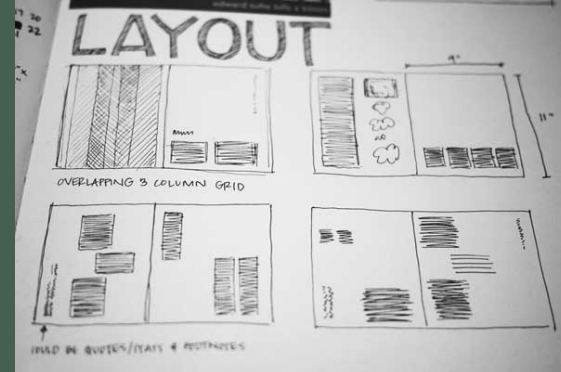


Codenames  
(Vlaada Chvátil, 2015)  
[Learn more](#)

# How is a board game designed?

Board games can take years of design development. It usually starts with concept sketches.

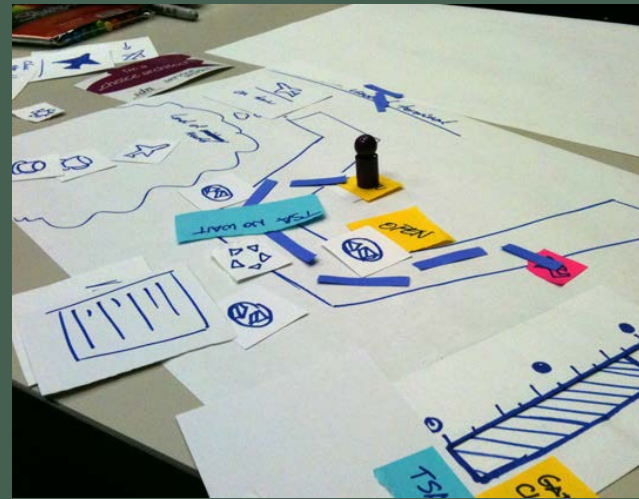
[Learn more](#)





# Game prototypes

Prototypes may or may not have a theme applied. They allow the game to be play tested.



# Play testing

Games must be extensively play tested to ensure the game is not “broken” (locks up or is too easily defeated). Designers enlist friends and family, and take prototypes to game conventions.





# Visual design

The game publisher or independent designer hires an artist to illustrate the game board, cards, and other components. See some beautiful board game art [here](#). Read about one young game artist, Shaz Yong, [here](#).





# Publishing and distribution

Very few people get rich creating board games. Even best-selling strategy board games have a niche audience. Smaller publishers and independent designers will be lucky to sell more than 1,000 copies. At the other end of the spectrum, the game that wins the [Spiel des Jahres](#) (German game of the year) could 500,000 copies or more.

Read tips about board game publishing from an insider [here](#).



# A closer look at design

Many board games use symbols and icons to remind players of the properties of game components or what actions are available. These symbols only work if they have inherent visual meaning and they “speak” a language understood by the player.

Below are examples of symbolic systems that are not particularly useful without memorizing what the symbols mean.



# A closer look at design

On the other hand, using illustrations of recognizable objects can quickly convey an idea. This isn't always practical when you have very limited space (such as on a playing card).





# A closer look at design

Because many games are published for a worldwide audience, many publishers try to eliminate text on game components to create language-independent editions.

They have created their own visual language system that is fairly consistent across publishers. Dedicated hobby gamers will know what the player aids on the right and below are telling them.



## Fresco

(Wolfgang Panning, Marco Ruskowski, Marcel Süßelbeck, 2016)

[Learn more](#)



## The Oracle of Delphi

(Stefan Feld, 2016)

[Learn more](#)

# A closer look at design

This example, from the game Helvetia, shows “helpers” a player can enlist along the bottom of the board. Above each helper are icons that show the action the helper enables.

In the center of the board is a diagram that shows dependencies for the game’s resources. For example, to create a steak, you need straw to feed a cow first.



Helvetia

(Matthias Cramer, 2011)

[Learn more](#)

# A closer look at design

Some board game conventions are costs (in resource cubes) in an upper corner, and point values displayed in a gold shapes (often coins).

However, sometimes icons and symbols are not enough to convey the complexity of the action, as seen here in a series of cards from Grand Austria Hotel. The rulebook contains an extensive explanation of the icons.



Grand Austria Hotel  
(Matthias Cramer, 2015)  
[Learn more](#)

| Overview of Symbols |  |
|---------------------|--|
|                     | Advance the depicted number of spaces on the Emperor track.  |
|                     | Take a dish or drink of the depicted color. Place it on a guest's order or in your kitchen.  |
|                     | Take a dish or drink of your choice. Place it on a guest's order or in your kitchen.   |
|                     | You receive 2 Victory Points.  |
|                     | Prepare a room of your choice, according to the placement rules. You must pay the cost.  |
|                     | Prepare a room of your choice, according to the placement rules. You must pay the cost minus 1 krone.  |
|                     | Prepare a room of your choice at no cost, according to the placement rules.  |
|                     | You receive 1 krone.   |
|                     | You can play a Staff card at no cost.  |
|                     | You can play a Staff card, paying 3 kronen less than printed on the card.  |
|                     | Take a Staff card from the draw pile and put it into your hand.  |
|                     | Take 3 Staff cards from the draw pile and play one of them immediately, paying 3 kronen less than printed on the card. Return the other 2 cards to the bottom of the draw pile.  |
|                     | You can turn a room of the depicted color to the other side, marking it occupied. Gray color means you can turn any room, regardless of color.   |
|                     | Complete the order on a Guest card of the depicted color. Take the required dishes and drinks from the general supply, placing them on the Guest card. Gray color means you can complete any guest's order, regardless of color. |
|                     | Prepare a room of the depicted color at no cost.   |
|                     | Take a face-up Guest card from the game board and place it in your Café at no cost, unless you have no space in your Café.   |
|                     | one-time   |
|                     | once per round   |
|                     | permanent  |
|                     | game end   |



# A closer look at design

Two cards from the Greek mythology-themed game Elysium. Notice the many symbols representing the card family, power, and various attributes.

A coin icon is used to represent money, and the laurel wreath represents victory points (the points collected to win the game).

In this case, the designers felt the icons and symbols were insufficient in themselves, so text was added at the bottom of each card.



## Elysium

(Matthew Dunstan & Brett J. Gilbert, 2015)

[Learn more](#)

# What makes good functional design in a board game?

- *Consistent system*
- *Use of conventions*
- *Recognizable symbols/icons*
- *Frequent appearance and placement*
- *Attractive and memorable graphics*
- *References, if needed (legends, quick guides)*

# A word about printed game rules

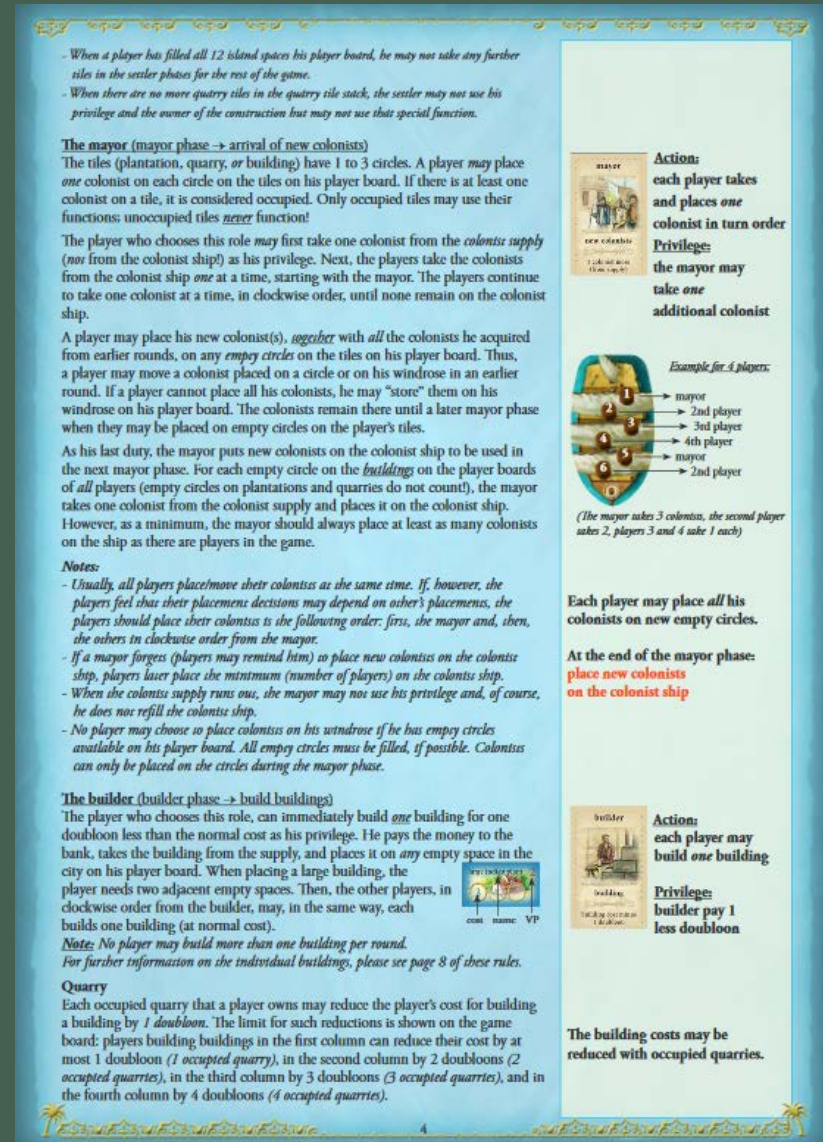
Game publishers are experts at making complex rules understandable in a minimal number of pages.

They use a variety of techniques to summarize, gradually introduce, and visually organize rules.

One of the best practices is to briefly summarize sections in the margins to re-familiarize players who have a read the rules in the past.

Other publishers color code sections, use tables and charts, and follow conventions such as always italicizing examples of play.

Puerto Rico  
(Andreas Seyfarth, 2002)  
[Learn more](#)





# A word about printed game rules

This page from the rulebook for the game Alhambra shows how publisher Queen Games uses color-coding to organize their rulebooks.

Queen Games produces some of the most visually beautiful games on the market and excellent best rulebooks.

Alhambra  
(Dirk Henn, 2003)  
[Learn more](#)

## How to play

Play proceeds in a clockwise direction, beginning with the starting player.

The player whose turn it is must do one of three things:

- Take some money
- Buy and position a building tile
- Redesign their own Alhambra

After a player's turn is over any money cards and building tiles which have been removed are replaced with new ones so that there are always 4 of each.

### Taking money

A player can take any one of the money cards from those lying face-up, or several money cards if they do not add up to more than 5 (the currency does not matter).



Example: you could take both the cards on the left or one of the other two.

### Buying and positioning building tiles

#### Buying the tiles

A player can buy a building tile from the building market. He must pay at least the price shown on the tile and use the currency displayed next to the tile in the building market. But take care – no change is given!

The money used to pay for the tile is placed on a discard pile next to the building market.

If you can pay the exact amount it is still your turn and you can decide once more which of the three options you would like to take.

While it is your turn no new tiles are placed on the building market. It is only at the end of your turn that the empty squares are refilled with new tiles.

It is therefore possible to carry out a maximum of 5 actions during your turn (paying the exact amount four times and then either taking money or redesigning your Alhambra).

#### Positioning the tiles

You can either: add your new building tile to your Alhambra or place it on your reserve board. You can have as many building tiles on your reserve board as you want.



#### Example:

You want a garden for your Alhambra.

The garden on offer costs 10. You have two money cards of this currency in your hand and decide to buy the garden. However, as you cannot pay exactly 10 of the blue currency (but only 11), your go is then over; you do not receive any change.



# A few resources

- [Boardgamegeek.com](http://Boardgamegeek.com) – online database with a wealth of information; free to use and create an account
- [Board Game Gift Guide](#) – A shopping guide from the 2016 holiday season; good place to start for newbies
- Where to buy (trusted online stores):

[Miniature Market](#)  
[Cool Stuff Inc.](#)  
[Cardhaus Games](#)  
[Amazon](#)

Online prices are usually better, but you can also find many modern strategy board games at Barnes & Noble, Target, Toys R Us, and local game stores.

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