

How to Create Your First Board Game

By Aaron Frias

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Contents

Additional Reference Material	11
Chapter 1 Introduction	13
My Story	14
My First Game Design.....	16
Chapter 2 Your Game Idea.....	19
Journaling	19
Common Board Game Trends.....	21
Common Game Mechanics.....	23
Deck Building	24
Set Collection	25
Worker Placement	26
Social Deduction.....	27
Area Control	28
Take That.....	29
Auction/Bidding	29
Roll-and-Write.....	30
Co-Operative Play	31
Dice Rolling.....	32

Game Mechanic Resources	34
Theme	35
Player's Experience.....	39
Components.....	42
Cards	42
Game Board	43
Player Boards.....	44
Player Screens.....	45
Chits	46
Avatars	46
Meeples.....	47
Miniatures.....	48
Dice.....	49
Winks.....	49
Cubes	50
Stickers	50
The Importance of Playing Popular Games	53
Meeting with Other Game Designers	54
Local Designers.....	54
Unpubs	56
Conventions.....	57
Next Step	58
Chapter 3 The Spreadsheet.....	59

Chapter 4 The Hand-Drawn Prototype	63
Cards for your Game.....	64
Game Board and Player Mats.....	66
Game Components.....	67
Chapter 5 Solo Play-testing	69
Chapter 6 Rough Prototype	75
Graphic Design Tools.....	76
Adobe Photoshop and Illustrator	76
Paint Shop Pro.....	77
G.I.M.P.....	78
Art (Copyright and Stock Art).....	78
Flicker and the Creative Commons License	80
Adobe Stock.....	81
Graphic Design Basics.....	83
Step 1: Download a Template	83
Step 2: Create the First Layer, the background ..	85
Step 3: Create the next layer of images and	
graphics.....	86
Step 4: Create the next layer, the overlay	87
Step 5: Create the next layer, the icons and text.	89
Game Components.....	91
Prototype Printers.....	93
The Game Crafter	94

Superior POD	96
Drive-Thru Cards.....	97
Board Games Maker.....	97
Resource	97
Chapter 7 Virtual Prototyping.....	99
Table Top Simulator	99
Tabletopia	100
Additional Pointers	101
Chapter 8. Group Play-Testing	103
Where to Find Play Testers.....	104
Friends and Family	104
Local Board Game Store or Lounge	105
Local Game Nights	105
Board Game Conferences	106
Stage 1: Play Along	106
Stage 2: Setup Game then Observe	109
Stage 3: Blind Play Testing.....	110
Thank Your Play Tester	111
Final Thoughts.....	112
Chapter 9 Your Rules Guide.....	115
Make No Assumptions.....	116
Start with the Theme	117
Visual Game Setup.....	118

The Goal of the Game	119
Walking Though a Round.....	120
End of Round Rules	121
End of Game Rules and Scoring.....	122
Online Rules	122
Rules Videos	123
Chapter 10 Pitching to Publishers	125
How do I connect with a publisher to pitch my game?	126
Scheduling Time at a Convention	127
Publisher Speed Dating.....	128
Game Competitions	130
Unpubs	131
Game Publisher Submissions	131
Facebook Groups	132
Final Words of Advice	132
Chapter 11 Final Prototype	135
Chapter 12 Self-Publishing Basics	137
Kickstarter Basics.....	137
Basics	138
Rewards.....	140
Story	142
Kickstarter Video.....	143
Low Budget Cell Phone Video.....	143

Mid-range DSLR Cameras	144
High-End Cameras.....	144
Filming and Editing	145
What to film?	145
Production Companies.....	146
Kickstarter Launch	146
Successfully Funded! Now What?	148
Life Outside of Kickstarter	149
Mass Manufacturing Options	150
Shipping Basics.....	152
Drop-Shipping	152
Self-Shipping	153
Fulfillment Centers.....	153
Final Notes	155

Additional Reference Material

Be sure to visit www.CreateABoardgame.info to find supplemental material for each chapter in this book. This online resource will provide additional content, examples, images and illustrations to expand on the general and core information the book provides.

For example, chapter 6 covers the graphic design process for your prototype. The chapter walks through several steps to creating a playing card in a game. The images used in this example and links to the graphic design software can be found on the supporting website.

Chapter 1

Introduction

If you were to do a search on Amazon or Google, you would find that there are only a couple of books on board game design. Most of the books focus on game theory and game mechanics. This book is different. This book was written so that you would have a step-by-step guide that covers how to create your own modern board game. It covers everything from the initial board game design, all the way to having your game prototype professional printed. It also addresses some of the most common questions that new board game designers have about finding a publisher, manufacturing the game and running a Kickstarter campaign.

As the author of this book, I had hoped there was a similar guide that I could use when I first became interested in designing board games. I found that I had to scour the Internet to find all of the information

and it was both time intensive and tedious. Lots of individuals shared stories about their individual challenges, but I just wanted a quick guide through the main parts of the process. It took me quite a while before I made it through the whole cycle of creating a board game. Here's a quick story about my introduction into modern board gaming and a brief history of my first game.

My Story

My story on how I got into board gaming differs from some of the most common stories I hear. I did not get started on *Settlers of Catan* when it first spiked in popularity in the US. I was first introduced into modern board games when I was invited to attend a small group church meeting where they advertised that they would be playing board games.

Growing up I had played all of the classic board games like *Monopoly*, *Risk*, *Scrabble* and some other

games. In high school I had also played *Magic*, *Netrunner* and *Warhammer* with my friends who had bought all the stuff but didn't have anyone to play the games with. I even dabbled in live action roleplaying in college with the *Vampire Masquerade* game. I had a good foundation of gaming before I went to the church game night.

The first game that came out that evening was *Love Letter*. What a great little micro game to get re-introduced into modern board gaming. Then came *Ricochet Robots*, a vastly different game than *Love Letter*. Finally came *Lords of Waterdeep*. I was instantly hooked by the unique rules, the beautiful game board and all of the character cubes. Soon after I started attending a bi-weekly game night with the Dennis, the guy that hosted this church group game night.

After playing a couple of modern board games, it wasn't long before I became inspired to want to create my own board game. My background was in web development and filmmaking. I felt I had a good idea

on what it would take to get started with the creative process of developing my first game. Of course, I was wrong. The process of developing a game has a lot of complex, moving pieces that one can't really know until you experience it from beginning to end.

My First Game Design

The first game I ever developed was called *Gardenscape*. It was a tile-based game where players tried to seed, water and harvest tiles to gain points. It was a terrible game. But I was able to design, print and Kickstart the game by downloading a couple of programs and doing a lot of research on the Internet.

Then I created my next game, *En Passant*, and successfully funded it on Kickstarter, printed and shipped it to hundreds of my backers. Since then, I have created several other games both on Kickstarter and with publishers.

This book will walk you through everything I learned along the way. Hopefully it will save you time and headaches and really provide you with a shortcut to your first successful board game.

Chapter 2

Your Game Idea

All new board games start with an idea. Since you are reading this book, there is a good chance that you already have an idea for a board game. The most logical place to start is to work on expanding on your game idea.

It may seem like a trivial step, but it is important that you write down the idea. Before we get started, the first thing you are going to need to do is grab a sheet of blank paper or a journal and a pencil. This is crucial because you will see that as you go through this journey, you are going to be adding, erasing and changing your game significantly along the way.

Journaling

Journaling, whether with paper or pencil or an online journaling tool, is an important part of this

process. The next few sections of this book touch on several related topics. These topics may inspire you. There are also questions that are posed to you along the way. It is important to take notes as you read and answer the questions to help you better flush out your game idea.

You are strongly encouraged to journal to keep track of your game idea as it evolves through all the stages of game design and development. It will help you keep track of the changes. It will provide a roadmap for future game development. It will help you if you should ever need to provide your notes to a publisher. It can be a simple piece of scrap paper, a formal journal or a spreadsheet on your computer.

Be sure to keep the journal or an electronic device close to your bed at night in case an idea comes to you in your sleep you can quickly capture it before it fades away. And keep your game journal with you at work and in the car. You just never know where an idea will appear or an inspiring moment may come up.

Common Board Game Trends

The number one thing new board game creators should know is: Do not create a roll-and-move game. *Monopoly* is the number one, roll-and-move game out there. The roll-and-move game mechanic (a construct of rules that affect and interact with the game state) is where you roll dice, move your pawn and then complete an action. A lot of new designers will start with this game mechanic, because it may be the only one they know. Other classic games use this mechanic as well, including *Sorry*, *Trouble* and *Life*. The roll-and-move mechanic has been around for so long that it is now one of the least desirable game mechanics you can put in a modern game. That is unless you can put a unique twist on it. Honestly, if you try to pitch a roll-and-move game to a modern game publisher, you might just see them roll their eyes at you.

Another bit of advice for new game designers is to not start with a highly complex game. You may be a

heavy board gamer, such as a person who plays *18XX*, *Twilight Imperium* or *Terra Mystica*. While you may love these games and have your own great ideas on how to improve them, but these games are extremely complex to design. These games are also very expensive to produce and they can be a hard sell to a publisher. You can always work your way up to designing a complex game, but the recommendation is start with a simple game. It enables you to learn the basics without getting stuck in the complexities of game balance and custom components.

Another important trend you should be aware of is the popular game mechanics found in modern board games. The next section will introduce you to some of those mechanics. Learning about game mechanics is important because they are an important building block to creating your first game.

Common Game Mechanics

The best way you can develop a basic understanding of modern board games is to play as many popular modern games as you can. Modern here refers to anything after the *Settlers of Catan* (1995) boom in the US. It's amazing how many people have an idea for a game and then learn the game already exists. That's because there are so many board games that have already been published. It's not to say you can't design and publish a similar game, it is just really helpful to learn what is already out there. This will save you a ton of time making rookie mistakes by using a game mechanic that feels antiquated or out-of-date like the roll-and-move mechanic.

Here are some examples and brief explanations of some of the current popular game mechanics.

Deck Building

Deck building is one of the newer game mechanics. Many people attribute the game *Dominion* to launching this mechanic. *Deck building* traditionally means that each player starts with a set of cards. Players then draw from their individual set of cards to create a hand of cards. They play those cards and then discard them into an individual discard pile. Then as the game progresses, each player adds more and more cards to their personal deck. They continue to draw cards into their hand from their personal deck and use those cards to acquire more cards for their deck.

This mechanic is popular because it gives players the same exciting feeling of a building a deck from scratch like you would in *Magic: The Gathering*, but instead of building the deck outside of the game, each player builds their deck as they play the game. This makes it much more accessible and lowers the learning curve on these types of games. Accessible in this

context means that it is easy for new players or non-gamers to learn and get into the game.

Some popular examples of board games with *deck building* include *Trains*, *Super Motherload*, *Clank!* and *Star Realms*.

Set Collection

Set collection is a game mechanic that you will see in popular games. *Set collection* is really a classic game mechanic that has evolved with modern board games. With *set collection*, you are trying to collect matching cards or objects that you can use for actions or points in the game.

The most popular example is *Ticket is Ride*. *Ticket to Ride* is one of the most successful modern games across the world right now. In this train route building game, you draw colored cards from a common area. As you get sets of colored cards, you can turn them in

to build your train route. This basic mechanic is very effective in making the game a smash success.

Some other games where you would find *set collection* are *Settlers of Catan*, *Jaipur*, *Sushi Go!*, *Lords of Waterdeep*, *Bohnanza* and *Sherriff of Nottingham*.

Worker Placement

This game mechanic appears in popular games like *Raiders of the North Sea*, *Stone Age*, *Tyrants of the Underdark* and *“Lorenzo el Magnifico*. Players usually have worker pawns that they can use to place on different action spaces on the game board. In some games, when a player uses an action space with their worker it prevents other players from using the same action.

As more games continue to come out, this mechanic continues to evolve. You will find plenty of new and interesting variations on *worker placement* games. *Mint Works* is a great example as it is a *worker*

placement micro-card game. Another example is a game like *Harbour* that only give players one worker to use in the game. There are other games that allow you to place a worker but only if you place more workers than the previous player like in *Energy Empire*.

Social Deduction

The *social deduction* game mechanic appears in some of the top selling party games. Games like *Werewolf*, *Coup* and *The Resistance* are just a few examples. The *social deduction* mechanic usually involves players having hidden information. In many cases, players need to be able to uncover that information from other players to succeed in the game. Usually through social interaction like talking, reading body language or looking for tells.

Area Control

The *area control* mechanic is a classic game mechanic that continues to evolve. The classic game of *Risk* is a good example of this mechanic where players fight for control of different regions of the game board. Some modern, popular games that use this are *Blood Rage* and *Concordia*. Like all game mechanics, *area control* is a mechanic that can turn some players off from buying or playing a game. This is because *area control* can sometimes leave players feeling they are being ganged up on by other players. Some other players may not like the direct combat or conflict that can be present in these games as well. On the flip side, some players absolutely love this mechanic and seek it out because they like the back and forth battling that can occur with it.

Take That

Some board games allow players to do their actions and play without a lot of involvement from the other players. That is not the case with the *take that* mechanic. *Take that* usually involves playing actions negatively impacting other players. A classic example is *Uno* when you play the *Draw 4* card. If you do use this game mechanic, be sure to balance the use of it with the tone and theme of your game. Too much of this mechanic can turn players off, especially if the *take that* makes them lose a turn or not be able to perform an action on their own.

Auction/Bidding

This game mechanic can be found in a lot of classic and modern games. With *auction* and *bidding*, players are using their money or resources to compete with other players to acquire items or cards in the game. An example is the power plant auction in game *Power*

Grid. Players take turns bidding on a power plant using the money they have acquired in the game. Another example of bidding in a modern board game is *For Sale*. In the game, players bid on properties with the highest bidder gaining the most desirable property. Other bidders get the other properties they bid on at half the cost. Game designers continue to find fun and fascinating ways to evolve the auction and bidding mechanic.

Roll-and-Write

Yahtzee is the classic game that comes to mind with *roll-and-write*. With *roll-and-write*, players usually roll a dice and then write down the result on a score pad. A couple of modern board games that use this mechanic are *Harvest Dice*, *Qwixx* and *Castles of Burgundy the Dice Game*. This mechanic can really help streamline and simplify a game to make it accessible to a broader audience. As this mechanic continues to mature and

grow in popularity, it has a lot of room for continued innovation.

Co-Operative Play

One of the top-selling co-operative games that is *Pandemic*. In a co-operative game, all of the players are working together to beat the game itself. In *Pandemic*, players are scientists fighting against the growing virus on the board. The virus spreads after each player's turn, ensuring that the players must work together to beat the game. This is a great game mechanic but may require some deep planning in the design phase. Not only are you creating the rules for the players, but you are also designing the artificial intelligence built into the game the players are trying to beat.

Dice Rolling

Several modern board games that have made dice their core mechanic. One thing to remember is that using dice in a roll-and-move fashion is a mechanic that may feel antiquated and outdated. Modern dice rolling board games use the dice in more innovative ways.

King of Tokyo is a good example. In the game, players roll a handful of custom dice that have unique symbols of them. Players can keep the *heart symbol* die to heal their monster or keep the *claw symbol* die to hurt other players' monsters. Or they can try to collect sets of numbers to get points in the game. The last player standing or the first player to 20 points wins the game.

One thing to remember about using custom dice in your game is that they can be pricey.



Journal Assignment

In your journal, be sure to answer the following questions about your game idea.

- What are my favorite game mechanics?
- What game mechanics do I see my friends enjoying the most?
- What game mechanics are the best fit for my game?

Game Mechanic Resources

Here is a quick summary of this chapter and some resources you can use to learn more about game mechanics and how they fit into your game:

- Tip number one is to go out and play as many games as you can to learn about all these different game mechanics.
- Tip number two is use these resources on the Internet to learn more about each one:

Board Game Geek

<https://boardgamegeek.com/browse/boardgamemechanic>

Wikipedia

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Game_mechanics

Theme

The theme is the overall feeling, subject matter or world you build around your game. For example, the theme of your game might be zombies. Or you may choose a historical period like the French Revolution for the theme of your game. Another theme you may utilize is a location like the Galapagos Islands. Or you may use a scientific theory as your theme like Thermal Dynamics. Another potential theme is your game could be abstract like checkers.

No matter what your theme is, the most important thing starting out, is to eventually pick a theme. A theme can be an important element in your game design. You can use the theme to build a story arc across your game to help people understand the world they are about to step into when they play your game. This also helps bring a sense of cohesiveness to your game, its story, characters, game mechanics, rules and winning conditions.

You don't have to use a real theme. You can also create your own original theme. *Tera Mystica* is a great example of a unique world and theme built to support the mechanics of the game. And really, that's where theme can really help your game. If you are able to integrate your theme and game mechanics, you can really create an engaging experience for your players.

A good example of a game whose theme integrates with its mechanics is *Fresco*. At its core, *Fresco* is a worker placement and set collection game. But the theme really elevates it to the next level. In the game *Fresco*, each player is an artist who has been commissioned to paint the ceiling of a cathedral. You use your workers, in this game –apprentices– to go out and buy paint, mix paint and use the paint to complete a tile on the ceiling. Having the theme integrated with the game mechanics makes teaching the game considerably easier, as it really immerses the players into the world of the game.

You may hear the expression that the “theme has been pasted onto the game”. This expression is used by players who feel that a theme was just loosely placed onto the game mechanics. There is nothing wrong with this approach and it can help slightly elevate an abstract game. But as much as you can integrate an engaging theme, it may help separate your game from the rest of the busy field of games that are coming out.



Journal Assignment

In your journal, be sure to answer the following questions about your game idea.

- What are my favorite themes in board games?
- What are my friends' favorite themes in games they always want to play?
- What is a great theme for my board game idea?

Player's Experience

While considering your game idea, it is important to think about your player's actual experience while playing your game. It may not seem like it at first, but there are several different experiences that a game can invoke.

For example, some games involved several players but may play like a solo experience. *Castles of Burgundy* may be an example of a game where you are able to play the game within your own game board without a lot of interaction from other players. Other games exist on the other side of spectrum and have extremely high levels of player interaction.

Another aspect of player experience that you should consider when flushing out your game idea is quiet vs. rowdy. There are several games where players are very quiet as they play, usually because the game is competitive and has a high level of decision-

making for each move. Heavy Euro-style games may fall into this category.

On the flip side, party games are usually extremely loud and boisterous. Some examples of popular party games are *Codenames*, *One Night Ultimate Werewolf* and *Monikers*. These are games that are difficult to play in libraries, game shops and conventions because the loud players can bother other patrons.

Try to determine the player experience you are trying to promote. This can help you refine your idea and will eventually make it easier for you to market or pitch your game when the times comes to decide your method of game publication.



Journal Assignment

In your journal, be sure to answer the following questions about your game idea.

- What is your most memorable experience playing board games?
- What are some of your friends' most memorable experiences playing board games?
- What experience are you hoping to evoke from your players?

Components

When building on your game idea it is important to consider the components that will be a part of the game. Game components are the physical pieces of the game.

Here is a brief summary of some of the most common components found in board games:

Cards

A large majority of board games have cards in them. They are to manufacture, can convey game information on them and can be very versatile as an element in the game. Cards may be the primary component in a game like *Sushi Go!*, *No Thanks* and *Hanabi*.

One game mechanic you might see with cards that hasn't been described yet is *drafting*. *Drafting* is when a player chooses a card from a common set of cards or

chooses a card from their hand of cards and then passes the rest of the cards to the next player.

Cards come in several common shapes: poker-size cards (the most common), tarot-sized cards (which are large cards), mini-sized cards (like in *Ticket to Ride*) and square cards.

A unique type of card that is beginning to be used are transparent cards. Games like *Gloom*, *Mystic Vale* and *Custom Heroes* have begun using these cards because they allow a player to layer multiple cards together to form a single card.

Game Board

Many traditional and classic games have game boards. It is a very common game component. Game boards are useful because they create a shared space amongst all players where much of the game's action takes place.

Some unique twists on game boards that have begun rising in popularity are modular and mat game boards.

Modular game boards are boards that can be constructed from several, interchangeable pieces. This makes the game board layout unique for each play. A recent example of this is *Clank! In! Space!* and *Kingdom Builder*.

Mat game boards are also going in popularity. They sometimes feel like a large mouse pad that has a custom graphic applied to the top of it to represent the game board. Games like *Splendor*, *Elysium* and *Legendary* games have options for mat game boards. A couple of deterrents to these types of game boards is they can be pricey and can be difficult to fit in the game box due to their size when rolled up.

Player Boards

Player boards are similar to game boards except that each player receives their own smaller player

board. Some examples include *Castles of Burgundy* and *Terraforming Mars*.

These personal play boards are becoming more and more popular because they help maintain the player's game state and usually provide some guidance as an instructional game aide.

Player Screens

Another popular game component appearing in modern board games are player screens. These are small cardboard cutouts that stand up and shield a small area in front of each player so that other players cannot see what is going on behind it. Some games use these screens to hide a player's money or resources from being seen by other players.

A couple of examples include the games *Isle of Skye* and *Diamonds*.

Chits

Chits are small cardboard tokens that can be used to represent money or resources in a game. They can come in several shapes and sizes. An example would be small circles with numbers printed on them to be used as coins in a game.

Another example of these cardboard tokens' use it to denote experience points, wound markers or player conditions such as *befuddled* and *stunned* like in the game *Gloomhaven*.

Avatars

Probably more commonly known as pawns, these are usually colored markers each player uses to represent themselves on the game board. In a classic game, your avatar in *Monopoly* was a dog, car, iron or ship. In classic games like *Life*, it was a car with pegs in it representing your family.

For some of the modern board games it can be a cardboard standee that fits in a small plastic base with a picture of your character on it like in the game *Dead of Winter*.

Many choices for different shapes and options for avatars exist.

Meeples

One of the popular options for avatars in games are meeples. Meeples are little wooden people usually represented in different colors used by each player. *Carcassonne* is one of the most popular and original games that uses meeples as a game component.

Several games that use meeples have also begun personalizing the meeples with meeple stickers. Meeple *stickers* match the size and shape of the wooden avatars to give the meeples more personality.

A new innovation in meeples is the “item meeple”. This meeple has holes on its head and hands to allow

various plastic pieces to be attached to the meeple like helmets, swords and shields.

Miniatures

Another popular option for avatars is miniatures. These are resin, pewter or plastic three-dimensional, detailed figures. Previously, many miniatures were cast in pewter, but the invention of the 3-D printer and evolutions in plastic materials allows for very detailed figures. A couple of popular games that use them are *Blood Rage* and *Kingdom Death Monster*. Minis add a lot of personality and depth to a game and give it that classic tabletop *Dungeons & Dragons* or *Warhammer* experience in a board game format.

Minis are becoming extremely popular in games and when used can really raise the cost of the game for the designer and customer. As the modeling and creation of minis continues to become cheaper, more and more games will continue to use them.

Dice

Dice are one of the most common game components found in both classic and modern board games.

In modern board games, customized dice continue to grow in popularity. These are dice that have the traditional pips removed and replaced with custom symbols. A great example of custom dice is the game *King of Tokyo*. The dice in the game have the number 1, 2 and 3 on the dice, along with a symbol of a claw (for attack), a heart (for healing) and energy (used like money to buy power up cards). Although popular, custom dice can be very expensive.

Winks

Winks are small, flat, circular plastic discs. They are usually used as currency or to track something in a game. The new game *Felicity: Cat in the Sack* uses winks for the money in the game.

Cubes

You will find a lot of modern games use wooden or plastic colored cubes. Many Euro-style games use these to track resources. Some of the wooden cubes may be cut into custom shapes to represent resources like wheat, wood, steel and clay. Examples of games employing these components include *Agricola*, *Concordia* and *Lords of Waterdeep*.

Stickers

A new type of modern board game is a Legacy game. Games like *Pandemic Legacy*, *SeaFall* and *Charterstone* are legacy games where you permanently change the game as you go by destroying cards and placing stickers on the game board.

This is a very novel way to create a unique game experience for your players. A word of caution when using stickers to permanently alter the board or cards in the game, a lot of thought and testing need to be in

place to make sure they work like you expect it to work. If players place stickers in the wrong place or at the wrong time, it can make for a terrible playing experience.



Journal Assignment

In your journal, be sure to answer the following questions about your game idea.

- Think about your favorite game. What physical game components are in that game?
- Think about the games your friends enjoy. What game components are found in those games?
- Think of your game idea. What game components do you think will work best for your game?

The Importance of Playing Popular Games

Hopefully this chapter provided some food for thought when it comes to building up your game idea. This chapter referenced several examples.

One of the best ways to try out these board games is to get connected with your board game groups or your local board game stores.

Most of these board game groups have scheduled events where you can show up and try out new board games. Their schedules can usually be found on MeetUp.com or Facebook Groups. Nearly all of these groups are easy to get connected with and have several individuals that will help you get integrated into the group and introduce you to several new games.

On the flip side, several medium and large cities have local game stores that have a game library that you can usually use for a small daily fee (like \$5). You can check out games from their library and get a chance to get exposed to a lot of the popular games.

You may also be able to find modern games in your local library as well.

Meeting with Other Game Designers

You may be surprised how easy it is to meet with other game designers. Here are three ways you can network and meet game designers to learn the lessons from those that have been through the whole experience.

Local Designers

Even in smaller cities and towns, there are usually at least a couple of great game designers. I had the opportunity to meet Don Eskridge, the designer of *The Resistance*. He is originally from Edmond, Oklahoma, and stopped by a public board game group while he was in town. I had the chance to ask him some general questions about how he got started and about the evolution of the popularity of *The Resistance*. I also got

to see him run a playtest of his new game *Abandon Planet*. I learned a lot from simple interaction from one of the biggest names in board game design.

I also Googled “board game designers in Oklahoma City” and found Shane Willis’ name. Shane created the amazing game *Garbage Day*. It’s a card dexterity game where players have to balance trash cards on top of a physical plastic trashcan. He met me for lunch and answered all of the random questions I had prepared for him. I will never forget when I asked him about the differences in card quality and he literally ripped one of his game cards from his prototype in half to show me the guts of the card.

I also had the opportunity to meet the guys from Proud Games who made *Chicken Run*. They are local game designers in the Oklahoma City area. I met them at a local board game store where they were demoing their game. They were a wealth of information and a great example how a team approach works to game design. In their team, each member had

specific strengths that they brought to the process such as graphic design, marketing and game innovation.

It's really amazing how accessible and open some game designers are to share everything they know. Take the opportunity to seek out and find these local designers and learn as much as you can from them. And in some cases, partner with them.

Unpubs

There are several regional unpub events where unpublished games are play tested. These events are a great opportunity to meet with both aspiring and respected game designers. It is also a great opportunity to learn more about the play testing experience which you will be doing further along in your game development.

Conventions

Another great place to meet designers is at board game conventions. One thing to keep in mind is that there are some smaller conventions where the game designers may be more accessible than larger conventions. For example, it may be very difficult to talk to successful game designers at GenCon. This is because they are using the opportunities at large conferences to network with the big game publishers.

But at conferences like BGG Con, I found it surprising easy to get a couple of questions in with epic Eric Lang, who could be found wondering all over the convention. I also had the chance to meet Sean and Alan, the designers of *Two Rooms and a Boom* from Tuesday Knight Games.

The moral of the story is that if you go to where game designers are, there is a good chance you can talk to a game designer. In my experience, most game designers I've met are extremely friendly and willing to share their story and advice.

Next Step

Now that you've journaled and expanded on your game idea, it's time to move to the next step: the spreadsheet. Remember that game design is an iterative process and that you may need to come back to your game idea and journal several times to change your game design or in some cases, to start over completely.

Chapter 3

The Spreadsheet

Journaling is a great way to capture the ideas for your game but you may also need to expand into using a spreadsheet. Spreadsheets are a great tool to help you list all of the possible cards and actions in your game. This will help you gain a better understanding of the details and dynamics of your game.

There are two primary spreadsheet tools: Microsoft Excel and Google Sheets.

Microsoft Excel has been an industry standard for spreadsheets for years. The downside of Excel is that it is not free.

Google Sheets is a popular, online spreadsheet tool that is free. A great benefit that comes with Google Sheets is that you can share it and work with others at the same time on the spreadsheet. This makes collaborating with co-designers very convenient. If you are used to using Excel, getting used to Google

Sheets may take a little bit of practice and time to get used to the differences between the two programs.

Once you have landed on which spreadsheet tool you are going to use, the next step is to set up your spreadsheet. One way you can organize your spreadsheet is to create separate tabs for different things or actions in your game. For example, you can have a tab for character cards, building cards, item cards, actions, resources, etc. On each tab, use the rows to identify each unique item and use the columns to describe the attributes of the item.

Here is an example:

En Passant - The Card Game

Card Name	Number of Cards in Deck	Card Action
The Rook	3	Discard this card. Take a random card from a player.
The Knight	3	Discard this card. All players take one card from the player on their left.
The Bishop	3	Discard this card. All players pass all of their cards to the left or right, your choice.
The Pawn	4	Discard this card. Nothing else happens.
The Queen	1	Discard this card. Trade all of your cards with another player of your choice.
The Princess	1	Discard this card. Look at another player's cards. Take one of your choice.
The King	1	Cannot discard. You win if you have this card when the game ends.
Total Cards	16	

This is a very simple Excel spreadsheet. The more complex your game is, the more tabs, rows and columns you will have.

This is a vital step when you begin to playtest your game. You will want to make changes to the interaction and balance of the elements in your game and your spreadsheet will help you achieve that balance.

When you make significant changes to your spreadsheet, it is a best practice to save a new copy of the spreadsheet. You can use version number or dates to help keep your multiple spreadsheets organized. This is important because you may find that you made a terrible change and you may want to revert back to an older spreadsheet. This is very easy to do if you keep your spreadsheets organized.

Chapter 4

The Hand-Drawn Prototype

At this point in the book, you should have recorded your game ideas in your journal or spreadsheet. Your notes should include some basic ideas around your game's theme, mechanics and the experience you hope to elicit from your players. It is normal if you are still trying to figure out some of these elements. While we walk through the exercise of creating a hand-drawn prototype of your game, you will naturally refine and expand out your idea along the way.

Creating your initial prototype involves a few simple steps. Here is a breakdown of each of those steps.

Cards for your Game

A lot of modern board game involves cards. If you are looking to start with a simple game idea, it is recommended to try creating a micro card game. A micro card game is a game that only consists of 18 cards and a rule sheet.

When creating your initial prototype, it is strongly recommended that you start with blank pieces of paper and a marker. It is not recommended to create detailed cards on your computer that you send to a professional printer. The reason will hopefully become obvious as you begin creating and playing your initial prototype.

When you first take the idea of the game out of your head and put it onto a tangible object like pen and paper, you will notice that, how the game plays in real-life, is not the same as how it plays in your mind.

There are a couple of quick ways to create your paper and marker cards. One way is to use scissors or a paper cutter to cut out rectangle playing cards from

card stock paper. If uniformity is important to you, you can also buy business card stock paper that is perforated and easy to tear into rectangle playing cards.

There is another technique you can use if you have double-sided cards in your game where the back and fronts of the cards are important. That technique is to buy clear card sleeves that you can use to mix-and-match the fronts and backs of cards more easily than continually trying to create new fronts and backs for combinations of cards.

This technique can save you several hours of printing out the fronts and backs of cards on your ink jet printer. In one of my prototypes, I needed card backs to reflect different regions of a map. The front of those cards had different events and items specific to the region. In my playtesting, I constantly needed to change the regions for the different events and items. I would just take two pieces of card stock, write the front

of the card on one piece and the back of the card on the other piece and put them together in the card sleeve.

Game Board and Player Mats

You can also use paper and a marker to create your game board and player mats too. This may seem rudimentary but until you are able to work out the basic mechanics and flow of your game, having this throw away game board may save you a lot of frustration of being locked into a nicely printed game board that is not as easy to make changes to.

Another great trick is to draw your basic game board and to use Post-It Notes for the important spots on the board. This will allow you to add, remove or move things around on the game board with very little effort.

Game Components

You may need dice, pawns and other basic game components for your prototype. A great trick is to go to your local Salvation Army or Goodwill thrift shop to scavenge for games. You can usually find classic games for a couple of bucks that have the game pieces you need for your prototype. You may also be able to find bundles of classic board games on Facebook Marketplace you can use as well to meet your prototype's component needs.

Chapter 5

Solo Play-testing

So now that you have your hand-drawn prototype completed, it's time to test out your game and see how it plays. An effective way to do that is with solo play-testing. Solo play-testing is where you, the game designer, pretend that you are two to four players and play through your game.

It hasn't been addressed yet but at this point you will need to begin developing the rules for your game. A game without rules is just a bunch of cardboard and plastic. It's the game rules that bring the game to life and define the parameters of the world you create within your game.

You may have made notes on your rules in your journal as you thought about the theme and game mechanics. If so, you have a jump start on solo testing your prototype. If not, it is perfectly okay to make it up as you go. Be sure to dedicate some space in your

journal to capture your initial rules and how they change over time.

With your hand-written game board, cards and borrowed game components, try out your game. There are two things to watch for while you are testing.

The first thing to watch for is the flow of the game. Is it smooth or finicky? Is it clear what to do on your turn or is it confusing? Does the game stall between rounds because of all of the round-to-round scoring or setup? How your games flows is very important to ensuring your players will have a good gaming experience when you open it up to play-test with them.

The other important thing to watch for is the elements that make the game fun. Sometimes as game designers we add a lot of unnecessary elements to the game. But unless these elements add to the enjoyment of the player's experience, you may want to consider removing them. When considering this, it is important to understand what type of player you are appealing to. If you are appealing to a casual gamer who likes

light and fast games, you need to make sure there is not a lot of setup and rules. On the flipside, you may be developing a game that is heavy and complex. In that case, you want to make sure that your game's key elements appeal to that type of player.

Addressing this now will make it a lot easier on you than trying to make these types of tonal shifts in your game in the future. This is because the more design and testing you put into the game, the more you will begin to find yourself resisting to deconstructing and making major changes to your game.

It is also important to be as open and flexible as possible during this phase of the development. You may have created the perfect game in your mind and then find out that the game doesn't work in real-life. If it doesn't work, you may not want to try to force it to work to fit what was in your mind. It is amazing what innovation you may need to implement into your design to create a compromise between the vision and

the reality of the game you are designing. As game designers, we spend a lot of time finding unique ways to troubleshooting terrible aspects of our game to make them better. This is especially true when we are trying to make the game better for the people that will be playing the game.

While play testing your game yourself, another important thing to try is make sure that you take on different player personalities when you pretend to be each player playing the game. For example, if you are acting as four players for your game, try playing the game like a player who doesn't have a lot of experience with games. Have them make suboptimal moves that aren't necessarily the best move in the game. Make another player play the game like they are a hardcore gamer who always tries to make the most optimal move. Make the third player someone who is very cutthroat who will do anything to undermine another player. And make the fourth player someone who

likes helping other players, even if they lose the game themselves.

As you solo play test your game, the single most important thing to remember is to take notes in your journal. Write down what works, what doesn't work, what changes you've made or what you've added to the game. This will be very helpful as you continue to refine and improve your game through all the phases of creating your first board game.

Chapter 6

Rough Prototype

At this point in the design process, you've tried out your hand-drawn prototype several times and have a playable game that you are ready to try out with others.

You may have a hard time trying out your game with other people when it is created on torn sheets of paper with your handwriting on them. Now it's time to create a prototype that is a little more appealing and creates a better experience for your players.

A rough prototype is a prototype that is not a finished product but still conveys a theme and mechanics of your game that is clear to your players. A rough prototype will not contain any final art. It will not be a fully finished, polished product. But it will be professional enough that you could use it to pitch to a publisher. More on that later.

The following section will walk you through how to create a rough version prototype of your game.

Graphic Design Tools

Your rough prototype is going to contain some generic art and some computer generated graphics, text and numbers. To do this, you are going to need a graphic design program. Here are some options from most expensive and complex, to cheap and simple.

Adobe Photoshop and Illustrator

Adobe Photoshop is a premier graphic design tool. It is used by professional photographers and graphic artists for commercial and professional projects. You can access Adobe Photoshop for \$10/month or the entire Adobe suite of products for \$60/month (or cheaper if you are a student).

The learning curve on Adobe Photoshop and other Adobe products is high. There are many helpful

YouTube and tutorial videos available to help you get started. If you do not have a lot of experience in graphic design, this is probably not the right tool for you.

Paint Shop Pro

There are several moderately priced graphic design tools on the market. I personally use Paint Shop Pro to design my cards, tiles and boxes. It costs about \$64 for a full license. It has a relatively low learning curve and is pretty easy to use with the card, tile and box templates you get from other web sites.

One challenge with this software is that there are not a lot of online resources or tutorials to help you get started. If you are interested in trying it out to see if this is the right tool for you, a free trial version of the software is available at PaintShopPro.com.

G.I.M.P

GIMP is short for GNU Image Manipulation Program. It is a free tool that is easy to learn but doesn't have a lot of the advanced features that Adobe and Paint Shop Pro provide. There are a lot of great online resources on how to use the tool. This is a great place to start especially since it is a free tool.

Art (Copyright and Stock Art)

Now that you have a tool to use to make the designs of your cards, tiles, game boards and boxes, you are going to need some art to go with it. Based on all of the suggestions from the industry experts, it is highly discouraged for you to pay for art at this stage in the process.

Hiring an artist to create the art for your box, board and cards can be extremely time-intensive and costly. This is a step you may have to do later in the process if you are going to self-publish your game. But

if you are going to try to pitch and sale your game idea to a publisher, there is no need to hire an artist because most publishers will scrap your art and use their artists to develop the game.

With all of that being said, it is still important for your rough prototype to have art on it though. Art helps elevate your game design to the next level and communicates the theme and feeling you want your players to experience when they are playing your game.

That is why the recommended step at this stage in the process is to use copyright or stock art.

Copyrighted art means that you do not have permission to use the art. This is a temporary solution to give your game a very professional feel but understand that this is only for your rough prototype and should not be distributed or sold to other individuals. That is because you do not have permission to use the art.

A better alternative is to use stock art. Stock art is generic art that is affordable and that you have permission to use. A lot of stock art web sites gives you full license to use the art even for commercial purposes. This means that if you find really good stock art, you can use for the final version of your game and sell copies of your game using that art. Here are a few ways to find stock art.

Flicker and the Creative Commons License

Flicker is a web site of art that individuals have put online. In the Flicker advanced search, you can select the copyright type on the images. Look for an option for Creative Commons License. This is a license that may grant you permission to use that person's art and photos for free. This method is very hit-and-miss as the quality and selection of art and photos is very limited. But it's free.

There are also other web sites other than Flickr that have the ability to search for Creative Common License art. Just do a search on Google to get started.

Adobe Stock

Adobe Stock is one of the many mainstream stock art photo websites that is available. Shutterstock, iStock and Getty are some of the others.

Each of these websites allow you to search for art or photos and then pay a fee for permission to use the image. A great tip that you may not know about are icons. You can do a search for a specific set of icons and then pay for one image that may contain hundreds of icons on it.

For example, if you have a game where the theme involves energy, try out a search for the term “energy icons” on Adobe Stock’s website. One of the first results returned is a single image that contains 200 energy-related icons. These are professional, high-

quality icons that you have the right to use in your game, even if you're going to sell copies of the game.

This tip is not just restricted to icons. There are several images on Adobe Stock that contain more than one picture on them. For example, if you do a search on the term "knights", one of the results is a collection of 7 different cartoon knights that look very professional. Seven images for the price of one are a great deal. The cost for that one image is \$3. That comes out to \$0.43 per image. If you use an artist to create custom art for you, it could be anywhere from \$25-\$125 per character.

The key to remember is that if you plan to get your game developed by a publisher, a lot of the art used in your game may be discarded and thrown away. If that is the case, don't spend a lot of money on the art if you can avoid it at this stage.

And even if you do plan to self-publish the game yourself, there may be some appropriate art you can get using this method as opposed to hiring an artist to

do the art for you.

Graphic Design Basics

Now you have some graphic design software and some images and icons. The next step is to put them together to create your cards, tiles and game board.

Step 1: Download a Template

One of the best tips to getting started is to make sure you use a template provided by some of the prototype and print-on-demand board game web sites. I recommend using TheGameCrafter.com to print your rough prototype, but there are several options I will lay out in the next section. If you go to TheGameCrafter.com, you will see a list of different cards, mats and board dimensions. Find the best match for your game and then click on it to get a template from the web site. The template is available in various common image formats. PNG is a good

generic template. Save the file and then open it in your graphic design program.

Each template gives some important information about it listed on the template itself. Usually the template will display an area where the card will be cut. Cards usually have rounded corners so you may notice this on the template's pattern. You may also see a region on the template that shows an area that you should keep text within. This is because the card cutting process is sloppy and any text or graphics near the edges of the cards could get cut off.

You may see terms like borders and bleeding. A border is pretty straight forward in that it usually consists of a solid color that wraps around the card. Bleeding refers to cards that do not have borders where the images or graphics stretch all the way out to the edges of the card. If you are going to bleed an image, be sure to use the entire template and not stop at the safe zone or the outer zone depicted on the template. If you stop your image at those areas, it is possible the

card could be cut to the left or right a little bit and a white edge may appear unexpectedly on the card.

Step 2: Create the First Layer, the background

When you create a card, tile or board, you usually start with the background. The background can be a solid color, a gradient color or an image that covers the entirety of the card.

In all of the graphic design software options that were presented in the previous section, they all contain a feature called layers. Layers allow you to stack graphics on top of each other. To begin, open the template image you received and then find the option to add a new layer.

As you copy-and-paste an image onto the new layer or if you fill up that new layer with a solid color, you will notice it will completely hide the template layer below it. You can usually adjust the opacity of the top layer. For instance, if you change the opacity to 75%, you will begin to see the template layer appear

under your background layer. This can help you make sure you can see the guides and safe zone that are laid out on the template. This will help you later, so you know where you safely place text and icons. This way they won't risk getting cut off when the card is cut by the manufacture.

Once you have the background layer completed, you are ready to move on to the next layer: images and graphics.

Step 3: Create the next layer of images and graphics

In your graphic design program, click the option to add another new layer. Assume your background layer from the previous step is a solid white background.

At this stage, you may want to add an artistic image to your card or board. Use the example of a board game card with an image of a warrior in the middle of the card. Copy and paste your warrior onto

the card. You may need to resize the warrior image to make it look right on the card. Some graphic programs let you simply click-and-drag the edges of the image to resize it. Other graphics' programs have a resize option on the toolbar.

Once you have the warrior at a size you like, be sure to position it on the card where you want. Now you have a card with three layers. The bottom layer is the template with your guides. This layer is completely hidden by the layer above it that has your background, which in this case is a solid white background. Your third layer up is your image of a warrior in the middle of the card.

Step 4: Create the next layer, the overlay

Now that you have a card with a white background and an image of warrior in the middle, it is time to add some borders.

You will find in a lot of board games where the cards have a distinct border around them. This isn't the case in all games. Some games have large images that cover the entire card. But it is common to see a card with a black border on a white background or vice versa.

For this example, you will put a black border around the card. To begin, add another new layer. Most graphic programs have shapes that you can pick from to accomplish this. For example, you will want to use a rounded rectangle which should closely match the guidelines on the template that show where the card will be cut to have rounded corners on the edges.

You usually select the properties of the shape, like the rounded rectangle, on the toolbar. Some of the properties are the outer and inner colors of the shape and the thickness of the border line on the shape. For this example, you want the inside of the rounded rectangle to be completely transparent. That way the images of the warrior can be seen. For the outer edge

of the rounded rectangle, you want it to be a thick, black border. Thick so that it covers the full edge of the card and provide a good border around the outskirts of the card.

If done correctly, you should have card that has a thick black border, a white background with an image of a warrior in the middle of the card.

Step 5: Create the next layer, the icons and text

The last layer on the card will be your icons, number and text. To begin, add another new layer. This will be the last layer.

On the new layer, add some text below the image of the warrior that says “WARRIOR”. You should have several options for the text like color, size and font. One important thing to note is that some fonts are copyright protected. You can Google them to find out if you have permission to use them if you sell your game commercially. You can use any font for your

prototype if you plan to pitch the game to a publisher. The publisher usually handles the font choice when they develop and refine your game. Another important note about fonts is you want to make sure that your font can be read easily. This is especially true if players need to see the card from across the table. Be sure your font contrasts against the background so that it is easy to read and not hidden in the business of a graphic. One trick is to create a solid rounded rectangle on the layer under the text so that the text is easy to read.

Now that you have the word “WARRIOR” on your card below the image of the warrior, you can add an icon to the top-left of the card. As mentioned earlier, you can find large collections of icons as a single image. If you do, use the selection tool in the graphic design program to only select the icon you want for your card. Then resize it and copy-and-paste it to the top-left corner of the card. In this example,

assume you have a sword icon to represent the warrior's class.

On the top-right of the card, you may want to add a number to represent the strength of the warrior. Use the text tool to add the number "9" to the top-right of the card.

You should now have a complete warrior card after completing this tutorial.

Game Components

You are probably going to need some game components for your rough prototype. This may include dice, pawns, cubes, minis, winks, etc. At this point, it may be easier to order some game components instead of trying to piece them together by destroying old, classic games.

Here are a couple of resources where you can buy some common game components.

Amazon.com

Amazon has a great collection of different game components. You can order multi-colored plastic cubes and winks in bulk for a very low price. You can also order different colors and types of dice as well. It is not a good website to find custom shaped wooden bits or miniatures.

The Game Crafter

The Game Crafter is one of the best board game prototyping sites currently available. They have a wide range of meeples, dice, winks, miniatures, resource tokens and standees.

Alibaba

Alibaba is another great source to find bulk game components. You may also be able to find the most affordable prices on this site. Keep in mind the

shipping price and the shipping time, as some of the components will be shipped from China.

Prototype Printers

Once you have complete the graphic design of your cards, tile and/or boards, it's time to find a good, quality printer for them. Here are a couple of recommendations for the easiest place to get started for new designers.

One item of note. If you are looking to save costs on your prototype, you may want to go with a generic box without any box art. Boxes can be the most expensive component of a prototype. However, if you plan to pitch the prototype to a publisher, it may be worth the expense to print a box, because it may improve the overall aesthetic or convey the theme of your game to a publisher.

The Game Crafter

One of the easiest print-on-demand game manufacturers out there for a small run of prototypes is The Game Crafter. Signing up for an account is free. Once signed up, you can click the button on the website to create a new game.

From there you can scroll through the different items you can have printed or included for your game. You can start with the non-print components like dice, pawns, timers, etc. Simply search by material type and color to find the piece you are looking for. Then click on the number of game pieces you need. The site will automatically add them to your game and begin to give you a running total on the complete cost.

From there, scroll through the options for board, boxes, cards, tiles and chits. Select the one you need and choose a size. There are usually dimensions and examples included so you can get a better idea on the size of each item. You will also find the templates for each of the items on this page. It is highly

recommended that you use the templates so that when you are ready to upload the images, they will already be the right size and resolution.

Once you chose an object like a card, you will be asked to upload an image for the card back. This will save you a considerable amount of time if all of your cards have the same back design.

From there, you can upload the image for each individual card and set the quantity of that card that you want. For example, if we needed 6 copies of our Warrior card we created earlier, we could upload the warrior file and change the quantity to 6. You also have the option with each card to override the default card back and include a specific card back for this particular card.

One thing to remember when using cards, tiles and chits is to look for how many are included on one sheet. Most printers charge you by the sheet. For example, 18 standard poker size cards fit on one sheet. If you can create your game so that the number of

cards is divisible by 18, it may save you significant costs on your game.

Once you have uploaded the image and set the quantity, the last step is to proof the card. When you click the button to proof it, it will show you an image of your card with the card edges and safety zone highlighted. Be sure the borders look good on the card edges and be sure there are no important icons or text outside of the safe zone.

Once you have uploaded all of your cards, chits and tiles, you can add a copy of the game to your cart, pay and it will be shipped to you a couple of weeks later. The shipping time may vary, but it gives you an estimated date and you are able to see how many orders are being printed in front of your order.

Superior POD

Although not a great option for printing a lot of copies of your game, Superior POD has some of the most competitive pricing for small runs of games.

The process is similar to the process laid out for The Game Crafter.

Drive-Thru Cards

Another great option, especially if your game has a lot of cards. The process is significantly different, because you need to put all of your cards on a single image and save it as a PDF. This can be challenging, but there are a lot of good tutorials online that will walk you through the process.

Board Games Maker

This option can be pricey but the production value is very high.

Resource

There is a great, comprehensive list created by James Mathe's website under the title "The Hitchhiker's Guide to Game Manufactures".

Chapter 7

Virtual Prototyping

Although physical prototypes are the norm, some game designers are using virtual board games tools to demo and playtest their games. There are two great options for this form of virtual prototyping: *Table Top Simulator* and *Tabletopia*.

This book will provide a high-level overview of each online tool. There are a lot of great tutorials and videos on how to create, upload and play your games using these tools.

Table Top Simulator

Table Top Simulator will run about \$20. If you want others to help you play test, they will each need to pay \$20 for the software as well.

The process to create a game on Table Top Simulator is pretty straight forward and the learning

curve isn't too bad. There are also a ton of videos by other designers on how to get started.

This is a highly recommended tool for virtual prototypes.

Tabletopia

Tabletopia is also a great choice for designers. The primary advantage is that your first game is free. It's free for you and free for others to play your game.

The interface to setup up your game is a little more intuitive than Table Top Simulator. But neither tools require any technical expertise. You just have to be willing to watch the tutorial and videos available and work through the process of setting up your game.

Additional Pointers

It is important to note that both of these simulators create a table and organize your game's components in a 3D setting. Like in real life, players still have to know the rules and click on each object in the game to interact with it appropriately. This type of environment is called a sandbox.

But one of the great advantages of these virtual prototypes is you can show and play through your game with others no matter where they are in the world. This opens up opportunities for playtesting and pitching to companies scattered around the nation.

Chapter 8. Group Play-Testing

Let's quickly recap. You have a game idea. You expanded on that idea in your journal to determine the theme and game mechanics. Then you created a spreadsheet to keep track of the different cards, icons, numbers, building, resources and other elements of your game. You created a hand-drawn prototype to work out the basics of the game by playing through it by yourself or with a couple of close friends. Then you put in the work to create a rough prototype that has some basic images, numbers and icons printed on them. Now you've received your physical copy of your prototype in the mail. Finally, it's time for some intense play testing.

Group play testing is the most important part of the entire process of developing a game. You won't know if your game works or more importantly, if your game is any fun, unless someone other than you plays the game.

This stage of play testing is different than the solo play testing, because in most cases, you won't be playing your own game.

Where to Find Play Testers

Finding people to help you play test your game is not as hard as you might think. Here are a couple of places you can find a group to help play test your game.

Friends and Family

If all else fails you can host a play testing session at your home and invite your friends and family to help you out. Sometimes it can be difficult to get honest and critical feedback about your game from those that are close to you, but it is still a good option for play testing.

Local Board Game Store or Lounge

You can go to your local board game store or lounge and ask around to see if anyone is interested in helping you play test. You can talk to the owner and see if he or she can help you find some potential regulars who would be willing to help you play test your game. Many of the board game stores and lounges also have game nights where you may be able to find a group who is willing to give your game a try.

Local Game Nights

Most cities now have weekly or monthly community board game events. This is another great place to find an opportunity to play test your game. You can usually contact the individuals who host these events and ask if these events are appropriate to ask others to help play test your game.

Board Game Conferences

There are now several small and large board game conferences you can find at various times of the year across the United States. Some of these conferences have a general play area where you can ask around to see if anyone would be interested in your game. Other conferences have areas dedicated to play testing prototypes.

If you have an opportunity to find a play testing area at a conference, this is by far the best place to find a diverse group of play testers who are usually willing to you very honest and critical feedback about your game.

There are three stages of group play testing:

Stage 1: Play Along

With the first stage of play testing, you will be playing the game alongside some other individuals you have found to help you play test.

It is common for you to initially explain the rules of your prototype game and assist players through the experience as they have questions. Players will look to you to explain and clarify rules as you play. Be sure that your first response is to ask them what they think the rule is or what the right action is to take in the game. Do not offer the answer directly to them right out of the gate. This will help you understand how other players process the rules and information of your game as they play it.

Be sure to take notes as you play the game. It is important to capture any rules you had to clarify or explain during the game. Also make notes if players needed clarification on the rules. Be sure to capture notes on the overall experience like which parts players enjoyed or didn't like while they played. Note things like time between turns, player interaction and player satisfaction when the game ended. It may be helpful to have someone help you take notes during the game play.

Additional feedback is usually gathered by asking the play testers a set of general or prepared questions. You should focus on questions like:

Did you enjoy the game? Why or why not?

What did you think about the length of the game?

What was your favorite part of the game?

What was your least favorite part of the game?

How would you explain this game to your friend?

These are just a few sample questions. Remember that the purpose of these questions is to create a safe environment where players can share their true thoughts and opinions about your game. Do not get defensive. Just take down the notes objectively as you can.

You will experience a lot of different emotions during playtesting. Some players will tell you that your game is awesome and that they can't wait to buy it. Others may tell you that your game is terrible. More often than not, players will tell you what they

think you should change about the game. Take each response with a grain of salt. If one person makes a suggestion, take it or leave it. If you begin to hear the same response from different people, you really need to take note. If three or four individuals share the same feedback, you can usually assume that many others will have the same experience when they play the game.

Stage 2: Setup Game then Observe

After you make it through the initial play testing that you sit in on, it is very important that you move to play testing where you are not playing the game.

For this round of play testing, get a group together. Make sure they are non-game designers. Set up the game and explain the rules. Then hand over the official game rules to a player. Now let the players know that you will not be playing or assisting them with the game and that you will be taking notes you will use to continue to improve the game.

Once they have completed the game, be sure to ask similar questions as before about their experience. But this time, have them fill out a paper or online form instead of asking them the questions directly. This will help you begin to gather more anonymous and open feedback.

Stage 3: Blind Play Testing

By now you should have gotten a lot of great feedback about your game and made some changes to the game or rules based on the feedback. The key at this stage is that the rules for your game should be complete and easy to understand. There will be some additional tips on the most effective way to structure your rules sheet in the next chapter. With all of that complete, you are ready for blind play testing.

There are two methods you can use for blind playtesting. Method one is to send the game to a person who is willing to play the game with their friends in your absence. You will provide a short note

asking them to read the game rules, play the game with their friends and then fill out the included questionnaire.

Another method is to bring a group together and record them playing the game. This is the preferred method if you can have the ability to put this together, because it allows you to see the entire experience from beginning to end without any of your interactions with the players. With this method you will be able to see how they set up the game, read through the rules, play the game and best of all, hear their thoughts and comments after the game ends. Some individuals may be unwilling to share open feedback because they know a camera is recording them but overall, the feedback should come freely and naturally.

Thank Your Play Tester

The most important thing you can do after a play test is to thank the participant. You have to remember that the play tester took the time and energy to sit

through your potentially broken game. Tell them you appreciate them and you appreciate the feedback that they provided to you.

Final Thoughts

A lot of designers I know do not do well with this step in the design process. A lot of designers are very close their games and have a difficult time hearing critical feedback about their “baby.” The key is how you use their feedback.

Someone may tell you that your game sucks and you should think about abandoning the game and starting over. That information is not helpful to you. Have them explain which elements of the game they did not enjoy and what would have made the experience more enjoyable. And then take that information back and see if any others made similar comments. The key is to validate the feedback from multiple sources, find any patterns and then determine how or if you are going to address it in your game.

Also be very careful how you make changes to your game as you receive feedback. Changing one small rule or number in your game can cause different or larger issues. Always be sure to find a way to keep the different versions of your game and rules. You may want to revert back to a prior rule set after you find a change you made to the rules makes the game even worse.

The final recommendation with play testing is that you don't have to pursue perfection to finalize your game. I have seen several game designers never publish their game due to trying to make it perfect. There is no such thing as a perfect game. And there are a lot of games that have severe imperfections that are still very popular. Look at the low player board quality in Terraforming Mars. Or look at the sometimes confusing rules to Betrayal at House on the Hill. These imperfections did not stop these games from being some of the most well-known and popular games out there.

Chapter 9

Your Rules Guide

One of the most important elements of your game is your rules guide. It is always interesting to watch a group of new players open up a game they have never played before and try to walk through the rules straight out of the box. It doesn't matter if the game is ten years old or just came out this year, there is a significant issue in the board gaming industry around creating easy to follow rule guides.

Several examples exist where a game will not live up to its potential just because it has a poorly executed rule book. A modern example that comes to mind is First Martians. This is a superb game by one of the greatest board game companies out there. But honestly, they have had issues with their rule book. To be fair, the game is highly complex so crafting a good rules guide is even more difficult for that game. But it is the author's opinion, this game could have

performed much better on the market if it has launched with a solid rule book.

When crafting your rule book, there are a couple of things to keep in mind: Can someone who doesn't regularly play board games know where to start and how to successfully navigate to the end of the game?

Here are some common best practices to employ:

Make No Assumptions

Do not assume your players know anything about board games. Try not to use board game terms like worker placement, legacy, campaign, meeples, victory points or other common gaming terms without providing an explanation.

Also do not assume that a player will logically know what to do next on their own. For example, if a player draws a card in Candyland, do not assume that they will know that they can advance their pawn to the next color space on their path. This may seem obvious,

but the goal is to be clear and direct when providing the rules of your game.

Start with the Theme

Many great games begin the rules guide with a short story or a vivid description about the theme of their game. For example, the abstract game *Tsuro*, basically consists of a grid and some tiles with lines drawn on them transports the players into the theme with their opening paragraph in the rule book.

The opening paragraph of the rule book reads:

Since time began, the Dragon and the Phoenix have guarded over and guided the intertwining paths of life, maintaining the careful balance between the twin forces of choice and destiny. The two powerful beings share the noble task of overseeing the many roads that lead to divine wisdom. Through its masterful blend of strategy and chance, Tsuro represents the classic quest for enlightenment.

This is a great way to set the tone and story of the game even before you mention a single rule.

Visual Game Setup

After you provide a vivid and engaging statement about your game's theme, the next step is to provide the initial setup of the game.

Some best practices that appear to help players get up and going as quickly and clearly is to provide an overhead image of the game that has been fully set up. In a lot of cases you will see the game board in the middle and the player's starting cards, resources or player board setup as well.

Along with the image, you may include numbered steps next to each item with a brief description. For example, you may see this text box near the image of the board in the middle of the table: "1. Place the game board in the middle of the table." Then proceed with each logical step someone would need to follow to ensure the game is fully set up and ready to go.

You can also include some highlighted areas players may need to know throughout the game. For example, you may want to highlight an area on the table where discarded cards will be placed.

Also be sure to indicate who will be the first player.

The Goal of the Game

Although not required, it may be helpful to let players know the goal of the game near the beginning of the rule guide as well as the end of the rule guide. This is helpful to orient players on the goal of the game. For example, letting players know this is a cooperative game versus a competitive game is helpful. Or letting them know that the lowest score wins or the player with the most money at the end of the game wins.

Walking Though a Round

Most rule books do a good job of walking players through a typical round. One helpful tip is to provide a one sentence recap of each paragraph on a column on the left side of the page. See the rules guide for *The Castles of Burgundy the Card Game* for an example. This trick helps provide a clear reference players can follow that consolidates a lengthy section of rules into one quick sentence.

Another trick is to color code sections. For example, your game may have two main actions a player performs on their turn: play a card and take a card. For the “play a card” section, you could place the text in a large rounded rectangle or text box that has a green background. When you begin to switch over to include the “take a card” section of the rules, you can include that section in blue. This helps as a visual reference for players to keep the two distinct parts of their turn separated.

One final recommendation for this section of the rule guide is to provide as many helpful graphics you can include. Remember different players have different learning styles and including a visual representation can help players understand and retain the rules.

End of Round Rules

Be sure to include specific instructions to players about what happens between rounds. Sometimes there is cleanup, resource refreshing, hand limits and end of round scoring that needs to occur.

This is a great section to use to provide an example of a round or end of round as well. These types of examples can walk a player through common decisions and actions they may experience during a round. Be sure the example provides clarification on the basic rules and that it doesn't cause any additional confusion by including scenarios of rules not referenced in the rules yet.

End of Game Rules and Scoring

Most games do an excellent job with this section of the rule book. Just a couple of notes on things to include.

Be sure to include tie breaker explanations. It can be a dissatisfying if a tie occurs and there is nothing in the rules to help determine how to break that tie. You may also want to consider putting in a special card that the winner can use to snap a photo with and upload to their social media. This is a fun and simple tip you can utilize to help players promote your game on Facebook, Snapchat and Instagram.

Online Rules

One huge limitation of rule books is that you cannot make corrections once the game goes to print. You can address this by including a link in your rules that points to a website. Your web site can help provide updated rules, game variants and feature a

frequently asked questions section. This is a great resource for players especially if your game is complex.

Another benefit of having online rules is that you can provide hyperlinks and videos. These two tools can be more effective than the limitations of print and graphic in a rule book.

You can create a free website using *Wix* or *Weebly*. Both are very easy to learn and use. They also provide templates that will make your online rules look professional. These templates are also mobile friendly.

Rules Videos

Another great tool you can use to explain your rules to new players is to create a video. Creating videos has become much easier with mobile phones. There are several free video editing tools for Android and Apple that make recording, editing and uploading these videos a breeze. Another benefit of uploading the game video is you can host it on YouTube or your website, so it is easy for new players to find.

Be sure to look at *Rhado Runs Through It* and *Watch It Played* to get some ideas on how to create a rules walk-through video.

Chapter 10

Pitching to Publishers

As a quick recap, at this point you should have a well-tested prototype that was created using free or cheap stock art. You should also have a complete rules guide. With those things in hand, you are ready to pitch your game to potential publishers.

You may be asking yourself why you wouldn't pitch your game to publishers earlier in the process and that is a great question. You do not have to wait until you have a solid prototype and rule set to approach a publisher, but it is recommended. The reason is because the game is in a good place for a publisher to take over. If you pitch the game too early, you are heavily relying more on the words of your pitch than a physical game. Words can be powerful, but having a tangible, playable game can best communicate the theme, mechanics and experience of the game.

You also be may be asking yourself why not wait to pitch the game after it has all of the art complete? It turns out that quite a few publishers have their own artists and developers. These publishers may throw away all of the art you have for the game and/or completely re-theme the game. I have heard several famous game designers wish that they had not invested so much time and money in their game's artwork, because in many cases the publishers just stripped down the art and theme and rebuilt it from the ground up.

How do I connect with a publisher to pitch my game?

The answer to this question continues to evolve each year. This is because the popularity of board game has exploded in the US over the last couple of years. A decade ago there may have been a handful of new games released. Just last year, over 1,000 new board games were released. This increase in game

designs and releases is making it more and more difficult to get your game in front of a publisher.

Here are just a few ways you might approach the challenge:

Scheduling Time at a Convention

There are a lot of large board game conventions across the US and the globe each year. These conventions are always well attended by small, medium and large publishers. One strategy you might try to get your game in front of a publisher is to contact the publisher to set up a quick demo/pitch at one of the conventions. This can be a difficult tactic as many of these publishers are extremely busy, but it doesn't take much time or effort to try this tactic. You might find it works best with small publishers or publishers who focus on games like the one you are pitching.

Publisher Speed Dating

Many of the large conventions also have a scheduled publisher speed dating session. This is where you can sign up to get a table at the event. You set up your game at the table and then a publisher will stop by for a 3-5 minute pitch. After the time is up, that publisher will go to a different table and a new publisher will show up at your table for you to pitch the game again.

This tactic can be great as you will be able to show and pitch your game to multiple publishers. The challenge will be the time constraint of pitching your game in 3-5 minutes. Be sure you spend a lot of time in front of a mirror or with a friend practicing your pitch. Some recommendations on using the 3-5 minutes:

Start with a 30 second overview of your game. Include your name, the name of the game, the general theme and what you think makes the game fun or provides a great player experience.

Do not try to play through an entire round of your game. Instead, start in the middle of a round. Explain quickly what has happened already and then walk the publisher through the next step in the turn. Be sure to pick the best moment from the round.

Do not forget to focus on what makes the game a fun experience. Many times, designers will try to get into the nuisances of the rules or the story of how they flushed out the idea for the game. Your goal is to get a publisher interested in wanting to publish the game. Do not forget that.

It's time to be an extrovert. No matter how shy or unconfident you are in that moment, present yourself as confident and excited. Be sure not to take it too far though. There is nothing worse than arrogant and cocky.

It's time to have some thick skin. This game may be your baby that you've nurtured up to this point. But know that you are going to face rejection and critical feedback. Do not get defensive or hostile no

matter what negative feedback or comments you receive. Remember that a publisher's feedback is gold. Write notes during or after the session, especially if you hear the same comment more than once.

Follow-up when appropriate. If a publisher tells that they are interested and would like to talk more, make sure you get something scheduled as quickly as you can. Or if they let you know they would consider your game if you made some changes. Make the changes and resubmit it to them. Take any kernel of hope and ride it as far as you can, without being annoying or stalker-ish.

Game Competitions

It is surprising how many board game competitions are going on at any given time. Be sure to keep up-to-date with the publishers and board game web site competitions. I have seen several games get published or Kickstarted this way. The competitions for these contests seem pretty soft overall. In many

cases, even large competitions max out at a hundred developers.

Unpubs

A lot of conventions have areas for unpublished developers. These are a great place to play test a game, but it can also be a great place to run into publishers who are there to scout new games.

Game Publisher Submissions

Some game publishers have an area on their website where you can submit your idea for a game. Be sure to utilize that opportunity. Also, be sure to follow the publisher's submission guidelines. Many publishers won't even look at the game if you do not follow their process.

Facebook Groups

There are a few Facebook groups dedicated to uploading sell sheets to potential publishers. A sell sheet is a one-page summary of your game. It usually includes a visual layout of the game, some information about theme and a list of things that make your game unique or fun. I was shocked to see how many publishers are actually mulling around the Facebook groups.

Final Words of Advice

The most important thing you need to do is learn as much as you can about the board game publishing companies. Be sure you know the company name, what types of games that the company publishes and who the major players are for each company. You should be able to identify a president or scouter for a major publisher as soon as you see them wandering around a board game conference.

Along with this, network with as many people as you can. Volunteer to work a publisher's booth at a convention, sign up to run a demo of their games at your game store and listen to their podcasts. If you are serious about getting your game published, you are going to need to be knowledgeable about the industry and you're going to have to network to gain this knowledge.

If you do get picked up by a publisher, be sure you understand what they will do with your game, what happens to game in the event they end up doing nothing with it and how you will get paid for royalties. There are a lot of standard publisher contracts you can review online to get a better sense of this before you sign the dotted line.

Chapter 11

Final Prototype

You may decide that you want to do the publishing part yourself. This means that you are going to be responsible for the promotion, selling, printing, distributing, storing and customer service for your game. The final prototype should have everything ready you plan to hand off to your customers.

If you do decide to move forward with self-publishing, the first thing you are going to need to do is to finalize all aspects of your game. This means that you are going to need to find the final art for the game, maybe through a website or created by an artist. You are also going to need to determine the final quality of the cards, board and components.

The next few chapters will lay out the rest of the process.

Chapter 12

Self-Publishing Basics

Now it's time for the hard part. As game designers, our natural talents may not be strong in the skills and competencies required to self-publish. If you find that you are unable to perform the steps in this chapter, it may be time for you to consider partnering up with someone who is.

Kickstarter Basics

Kickstarter is currently the most popular place to try to get financial support to launch your game. There are other similar platforms that you can use like *IndieGoGo*, but a lot of self-publishers (and large publishers) are finding the most success on *Kickstarter*.

These types of sites are called micro-investment sites. They are sites that allow individuals from across the globe to support ideas or products they believe in. In a sense, they are backing the product. For board games, this plays out in two general ways. For games that already exist, it

can be used a pre-order system. This allows a publisher to determine the interest and see how many people want to pay and pre-order a copy of their game through Kickstarter and then the publisher has the funds to print copies and ship it to the backers. Another way Kickstarter is used is to see if there is support for a game idea. You may not have anything to show for the game other than a couple of ideas. Or you may have a good prototype and you are ready to take the next step to production. This is another good way Kickstarter can help beginning game designers.

Getting started on Kickstarter is very easy. Sign up for a free account and then click the link to “Create a New Kickstarter Campaign.” A campaign has several sections that you walk through.

Basics

The first section is the “Basics”. On this page you will upload a photo of your game, a brief description and the amount of the funding goal. For the photo of your game, you will need to use the graphic design software from the previous chapter to create a 1034x576 pixel image. There are several examples of other Kickstarter games. Generally,

you will want to choose an image, box or cards that convey the theme and player experience for your game.

For the brief description, be sure you use a paragraph that will capture your potential backer's interest. Based on the success of other Kickstarter games, it is a best practice to highlight what makes the game fun and what genre it fits in. For example, here the description of Martin Wallace's Kickstarter description for his new game *AuZtralia*.

Exploration, economics, adventure and high-tension combat in a game for 1-4 players. How will you save humanity against the Old Ones?

This description provides the mechanics, the type of game, the number of players and theme in a couple of short sentences.

The last item you must select is the funding goal. Keep in mind that with Kickstarter you must reach the goal, or you get nothing, and all the backers get their money back. Setting the goal too low may make it look like you aren't serious, or you are not confident your game will fund. Setting the goal too high risks losing all the money and having to re-Kickstart your game, which is not fun at all. Try to find the sweet spot. If this is your first game, \$1,000 is a

good starting goal. Be sure that whatever goal you fund generates enough backers you get the pricing you need to print your game because the more copies you print, the cheaper the game.

Rewards

The next section for a Kickstarter campaign you will need to fill out are the rewards. The rewards determine what your backers will receive based on the amount of money they give you to support your Kickstarter campaign. For example, you could set a reward of \$10 for backers to receive a print-and-play copy of your game. This a copy of the game, usually in PDF form, they can print and cut out themselves instead of getting a professional version of the game shipped to them.

Another example is a reward for a single copy of the game for \$40. Be sure the price you set will cover the cost of printing and shipping the game. Also keep in mind that Kickstarter will take a 9%-11% cut of your funds for their fee as well. There are a lot of horror stories of self-publishers who didn't do a good job calculating the cost and ended up

having to pay money out of their pocket instead of making a small profit or breaking even.

The last consideration is shipping. Kickstarter allows you set shipping prices for the US or for backers outside of the US. This topic is addressed specifically later in the book.

Other popular options to add to your rewards are stretch goals. A stretch goals are an overall goal you are trying to achieve for the Kickstarter. These are set to help save costs on the printing as you may have a certain cost breaks based on the number of backers. Many self-publishers use those cost savings to add stretch goals. For example, a stretch goal might be to achieve \$10,000 in support. If that \$10,000 goal is reached, all backers will receive a free “promo” card. Or instead, all of the game components will be upgraded from plastic to wood. There are several creative stretch goals you can incorporate into your Kickstarter.

You can also set up expensive rewards up in Kickstarter too. Some campaigns have a \$100 reward where the backer can provide a photo of themselves to be made into a card in the game. Or a reward for \$125 can be added for the deluxe version of the game with upgrade cards and

components. Or you can add rewards for add-ons. Like a reward for \$110 gets you a copy of the game plus an exclusive book of art from the game. You can find a lot of creative examples on other Kickstarter campaigns.

Story

This is the section of your Kickstarter where you provide everyone the details of why they should buy your game. You can include a brief story on the theme of the game or how the idea for the game started. You can include photos of the game board, cards or layout. You can provide game rules or a bullet list on what makes your game fun and a unique playing experience. This is really where you are going to need some marketing skills.

You should also use this section to include reviews of your game. You can send some prototypes of your game to various board game reviews and get quotes or videos of their review of your game. Some of the reviewers will do this for free, but a lot of the well-known reviewers may charge you a review fee. Just know that if you really want to take your Kickstarter campaign to the next level and have

success, reviews are one of the most important features you can have on your page.

Kickstarter Video

Another important element for the Kickstarter page is having a video added to the “Story” page of your Kickstarter campaign. Kickstarter campaigns featuring engaging videos typically generate a lot more backers than a campaign that does not have a video. A video is a great way to visual communicate the theme of your game, what it’s like to play the game and to highlight what makes your game a great experience.

You have a couple of things to consider when creating your video.

Low Budget Cell Phone Video

Our smart phones can serve as a really good video camera. If you decide to go this route, be sure to invest in a tripod or hand stabilizer if you are going to hand-hold the camera while filming. You can find very affordable options on Amazon if you are trying to keep your costs down. It is

important that you use these accessories though, because they will instantly add a higher production value to your video.

Mid-range DSLR Cameras

Many recreational photographers have modern DSLR Canon or Nikon cameras. If you or someone you know has one this may be a good option for you. DSLR cameras that can shoot videos create extremely high quality, professional videos with very little effort. In most cases, you can use the standard lens that comes with the camera and set the camera to auto mode. If you use this method, please make sure each shot is in focus. This is the most challenging aspect of using DSLR cameras.

High-End Cameras

If you are looking to create Hollywood quality videos, there are options to rent high-end cameras at an affordable cost. You will have to put down a large chunk of change as collateral in case you damage the equipment. This option is only recommended if you have a lot of filmmaking experience. This option should not be used by an amateur

filmmaker, as these high-end cameras can be extremely complicated to use.

Filming and Editing

Regardless of the camera you choose, you are going to need to film and edit the video. When filming, the two most important aspects are lighting and sound. Be sure that you have ample natural light if you are shooting indoors. Also be sure that you can hear the person talking and try your hardest to eliminate all background sounds like air conditioners, traffic and wind.

What to film?

You have a lot of creative room when creating your video. You should create a broad outline of the sections of your video. For example, you may want to start the video by filming yourself in front of your game shelf talking about the idea and theme of the game. Second, you may want to show an overhead shot of the game positioned on the table and walk through the game basics. Lastly, you may want to end with another shot of you with the game thanking everyone who is supporting the game.

Before you film, be sure to capture those sections on paper and make notes and write down the general dialogue you want to say during filming. Having a structured plan will save you tons of time instead of you trying to wing it and create the video on the fly.

Production Companies

Video just may not be your thing. You can always have a company do the video for you. The primary down side is that this can be very expensive and may take a long time to get through the entire process.

Kickstarter Launch

After you complete all of the steps listed above, you are ready to launch your Kickstarter. You will need to enter your bank account information. This is where Kickstarter will send your money if you successfully fund. One important note is that Kickstarter will take a cut of your funds. If your project doesn't fund, there are zero fees. If it does fund, US fees are assessed by:

- Kickstart fee = 5% of total funds raised

- Plus payment processing fee = 3% + \$0.20 per pledge
(or 5% + \$0.05 per micro pledge)

A lot of first-time game designers cut their profit margins so close that they forget about these fees and ended up having to cover some of the costs out of their pocket. Try to avoid this by really planning out your expected costs as much as possible.

After you click the “launch” button, your game design will appear for the entire world to see. Kickstarter has some built in filtering and sorting that is relevant to your game. For example, Kickstarter has a “games” section. In that section are subsections like tabletop, card, video game, etc. Be sure you select the best category to help your potential backers find you the easiest. For board games, the recommended subcategory is “tabletop games”.

When potential backers are on the Kickstarter page, you are really hoping they use the “newest” sort. This is only time your game will be guaranteed to be at the top of a list. Kickstarter also has an option to sort by popularity. If you are at the top of this list, congratulations, you are on your way to success. Kickstarter’s default sort is called “magic”. The algorithm that is used for the magic sorting

feature is secret. But several researchers believe it is based on a combination of the number of backers per day, the traffic and video plays and the conversion of traffic. Being at the top of this list will get you the best exposure. The challenge with these sorting methods is you are competing with 200-300 other games and you have very little control over these algorithms.

Another important phenomenon to understand is the “Kickstarter dip”. Kickstarter campaigns usually get most of their funding in the beginning of the launch. Then you usually see a huge negative dip. And then at the end you may see another surge of backers. Anything you can do to time your promotions of the game during this dip will help you keep momentum all the way through the campaign.

Successfully Funded! Now What?

When you successfully fund your Kickstarter campaign, take a moment to celebrate your success. You have now officially secured funding and pre-orders for your game. You really just have two steps left, printing and shipping your game to your backers, which will be covered in the next section.

Life Outside of Kickstarter

It is important to note that Kickstarter is not the only method to self-publish your game. Another self-publishing option is to sell your game on your web site. You can take pre-orders or print-on-demand as you sell individual copies. This method is extremely challenging because you have to find a successful way to market your game and get potential buyers to your web site.

Another self-publishing method is to approach distributors or direct to stores. This method will require a lot of phone calls and self-promotion. This may be one of the most difficult paths to self-publishing for the average game designer.

And remember, you can always use the tips in this book to finding a publisher to take on this part of the process for you. It is important to note that it may be more difficult to get a publisher to pick up your game after you attempt or succeed on Kickstarter. One reason is because the primary audience may have already backed your game. Publishers may view this as you have already tapped those that may be interested in the game. This reason isn't

always the case, because if you find huge success on Kickstarter, a publisher may want to continue to ride that wave of success.

Mass Manufacturing Options

If you did successfully Kickstart your game and you need to print a large number of copies, it is time to find a manufacturer. You have several options to choose from in the US, in China and across the globe. Some key factors to consider are price, quality and turnaround time. James Mathe, one of the greatest board game gurus out there, has put together the definitive list that takes all of these factors into account. You can find the list on:

www.jamesmathe.com/hitchhikers-guide-to-game-manufacturers/

When you review the list, be sure to look at other factors that are important as well. One important is the minimum print run. If you got 500 backers who

ordered your game, you do not want to use a board game manufacturer that only does a minimum of 1,000 copies. Another important factor is customer service. This is especially important if you are using a Chinese manufacturer. You want to be able to have open, direct and constant contact with the manufacture. The last important factor is the ease to get quotes and the ability to provide sizes and files. You want to get an accurate quote on the cost to print and ship the games to you. You also want a clear and straightforward way to communicate the card sizes, board quality, game components and graphic uploads with the manufacturer.

If you are working with a Chinese manufacturer, there are two surprises you might experience. The first surprise is Chinese New Year's. There is a period of about a month early in the year where there will be zero work on your product. Be sure to plan your timelines appropriately around this holiday. The other

surprise is that it takes a long, long time to ship from China to the US. Plan accordingly.

Shipping Basics

Shipping is one of the most difficult aspects of board game publishing. You have to make sure you understand shipping costs, value added taxes and duty fees. You also have to plan for lost and broken packages in transit. Luckily, there are several tools to help you navigate this process.

Drop-Shipping

Drop-shipping is when the manufacture sends the finished product directly to the customer, bypassing you. Many manufacturers do not offer this option. If there is an option, you may also have a high handling fee associated with the service. The up side is that you do not have to do the shipping work yourself.

Self-Shipping

Most game designers have done this at some point in their career. Many times it is convenient to have the manufacturer ship all of the games to your home. Then you put the games in envelopes or boxes, print a mailing label and take it to the post office to ship. In the end, this is probably the most profitable method of shipping. But many game designers will tell you to avoid this method if you can because the time and energy it takes is very taxing.

Fulfillment Centers

This appears to be the preferred approach by experienced game designers and publishers. The manufacturer ships the games to a fulfillment center and that center repackages and ships the games on your behalf. This will save you a lot of time and effort of doing this in your home, but there will be a fee associated with this service. This service may also end

up saving you money for international shipping as well.

Jamey Stegmaier, with Stonemaier Games, has a website has a ton of information on the topic of shipping. The site also provides a lot of great supplemental material on how to design and publish games as well. Jamey is one of the leaders in this space and has done a tremendous job of sharing his experiences and lessons with the world through his web site: www.stonemaiergames.com.

Final Notes

I hope that this book helps guide you through the process of designing your game and getting it out to the world. My hope was to condense the last four years of my challenges and successes, so that you can make it through the process that much faster and with great success.

The parting advice I want to leave you with is to finish a game. I have run into so many people who have ideas for games or half-designed games that have been in their heads or on scraps of paper for years. Don't let the game exist in your head or in a notebook. Let it exist as a tangible, playable game. Even if the game ends up being terrible. It is so much more important to me that game designers craft a tangible, playable product. In my opinion, you have not fully created a game, until you make it through the entire process where you have a game that can be played by others.

My other parting advice is, help other designers. New designers need your guidance as they struggle through the process. Tell your neighbor who wants to design the next *Monopoly* that he really needs to try out some modern board games. Tell the new person who just showed up at

your local board game meetup that you'd be happy to help them play test their game.

Note: If you help someone play test your game, always ask them what stage the game is in, how long it will take and what makes it fun. It is okay to turn down a play test for an experience you will dread.

And finally, best of luck. This is a highly competitive industry with some amazing and brilliant game designers. It is my hope that you are able to join them with brilliant designs and great success.



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