



"You Want a Piece of This?"

by W. Eric Martin

Whenver you play with a standard deck of cards, you're dealing with more than a mere game—you actually have your hands on an entire game system. After all, the cards themselves aren't the game; they're only tools. Combine the tools with a set of rules, and suddenly you have a game, be it spades, bridge, crazy eights, piquet, or any of the hundreds of other card games created over the past millennium.

Another familiar game system, whether you've thought about it as such or not, is an 8×8 gameboard and a set of tokens. If you label 12 tokens as one color and 12 tokens as another, you can now play checkers. Label them king, queen, knight, and so forth, and a chess set magically appears; label one side black and the other white, and you have reversi (Othello). The number of games you can play is limited only by your imagination and willingness to try new things.

James Kyle, creator of HellRail (published by Mayfair Games) and owner of Glastyn Games, liked the idea of a generic game system, but couldn't find one that matched his ideal. "I wanted something that was like a deck of cards, but designed for family-oriented board games," he says. "The Icehouse set [Looney Labs' square pyramids that come in three sizes and multiple colors] is a great system and has a number of games written for it, but I think if I were to take it to my grandmother's house, it wouldn't immediately say, 'I'm a family game system.'"

WHAT'S A PIECEPACK?

What's a game designer to do when he doesn't find what he's looking for? He goes off to create his own, naturally. Thus was born the piecepack: a set of tiles, coins, pawns, and dice in four suits. (See "Make Your Own Piecepack" on page 10 for a detailed description of the components.)

"I modeled the piecepack on a deck of cards, and a lot of it is fairly obvious," Kyle says. "Suits came from there, and then extrapolating from games on the shelf, you find basic components like pawns and dice. If anyone else had tried to do the same thing, you'd probably get the same result."

Kyle experimented with numerous suits and values to determine what combinations offered the most possibilities while remaining within the parameters of the family-friendly model he desired. He thought about using the binary values 2, 4, 8, 16, and so on. But after considering how baffling the doubling cube is to casual backgammon players, Kyle wisely opted for more familiar values: null, ace, 2, 3, 4, and 5.

"The big challenge was the board," Kyle says. "In order to make the system compact enough to carry around, it couldn't have a set board, which is how I ended up with tiles, making it more flexible." He considered different shapes for the tiles, such as hexagons. Finally, though, he decided to stick with squares, which would make it easier for people who wanted to build their own pieces and less expensive for companies who wanted to manufacture piecepacks.

Simplicity was especially important to Kyle, because he didn't plan to produce the piecepack himself. Instead, in late 2000, he released the design into the public domain, inviting anyone and everyone to create games, produce sets, add elements, and explore.

"The grand hope is for ubiquity," Kyle says, "and although I don't expect it, that's the only thing to shoot for. Every house in the world has a deck of cards, and the only way to potentially match that with the piecepack is through a distribution model similar to that of a deck of cards. If one company manufactured it and didn't make money, that would have been the end of it."

Now, he says, "I don't have to worry whether I'm making money on it or coming up with cash for the next print run. I get to watch people who are inspired create games just for fun, without the commercial overtones."

DESIGNING GAMES, NEW AND OLD

"The piecepack is portable, fitting into a VHS cassette box, and there is a variety of games available, but I was mainly drawn to it as a game-design tool," says Phillip Lerche, designer of six piecepack games, including Black Pawn Trucking, Sarcophagus, and Kingdoms of the Middle Sea. "The challenge for me is to try to create good games within the confines of the components, or to use the piecepack along with other generic playing pieces, such as money."

More than 100 piecepack games are currently available on www.piecepack.org, a support site maintained by piecepack publisher Mesomorph Games. The creativity evidenced by these games is astounding. In addition to translating existing games such as reversi and mancala, designers have created games that have players building skyscrapers, racing worms through a maze, delivering food to picky customers, escaping from prison, and exploring a funhouse. There are games that combine the piecepack with Ice-house pyramids, dominoes, a candle(!), a go set, and—as one would expect—a deck of cards.

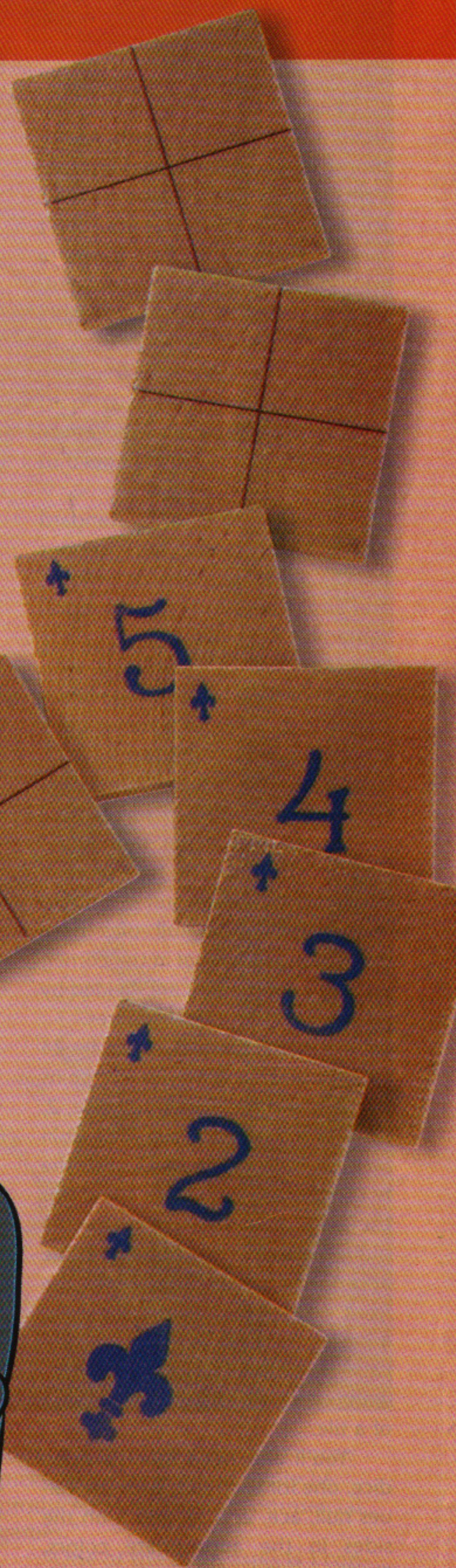
Kyle, for one, isn't surprised by the breadth of game topics or by the melding of materials: "The piecepack is great to experiment with, because you can release a set of rules without worrying about whether the game is commercially viable. When you're trying for commercial success, you can reach only so far or else people won't buy it."

No single word can sum up the multitude of piecepack games. Some have puzzle-solving aspects, while others involve memory, deduction, or strategic placement of tiles. Others require manual dexterity—these include Mark A.

Biggar's Ppolf (a version of Frisbee Golf) and Kyle's soccer simulation in which the tiles form the boundaries of the field and players flick coins that represent their kickers.

Bryan Kornele hasn't published any games to date, but he's found the piecepack easy and fun to fiddle with. "Consisting of just a few bits and tiles, this compact system allows me to use any small table as a playing surface," he says. "I very much enjoy playing some of the games with my seven-year-old, and some of my game ideas come from him. I'm well on my way to becoming a piecepack evangelist."

Regular contests initiated by Kyle and organized by Mesomorph Games have been a driving force behind piecepack game design. Each contest involves a different focus—solitaire games, historical themes, boards that change shape during play, the use of other generic game bits, etc. The winner of each contest sets the rules for and judges the next. "People who design games often wait for something to strike and inspire them, and



Make Your Own Piecepack

Piecepacks in a variety of designs are sold by both Mesomorph Games (www.mesomorph.com) and IcePack Games (www.icepackgames.com), but you don't have to spend any loot if you're willing to spend time instead. Piecepack.org offers downloadable files that allow you to print, cut, and build a piecepack for free.

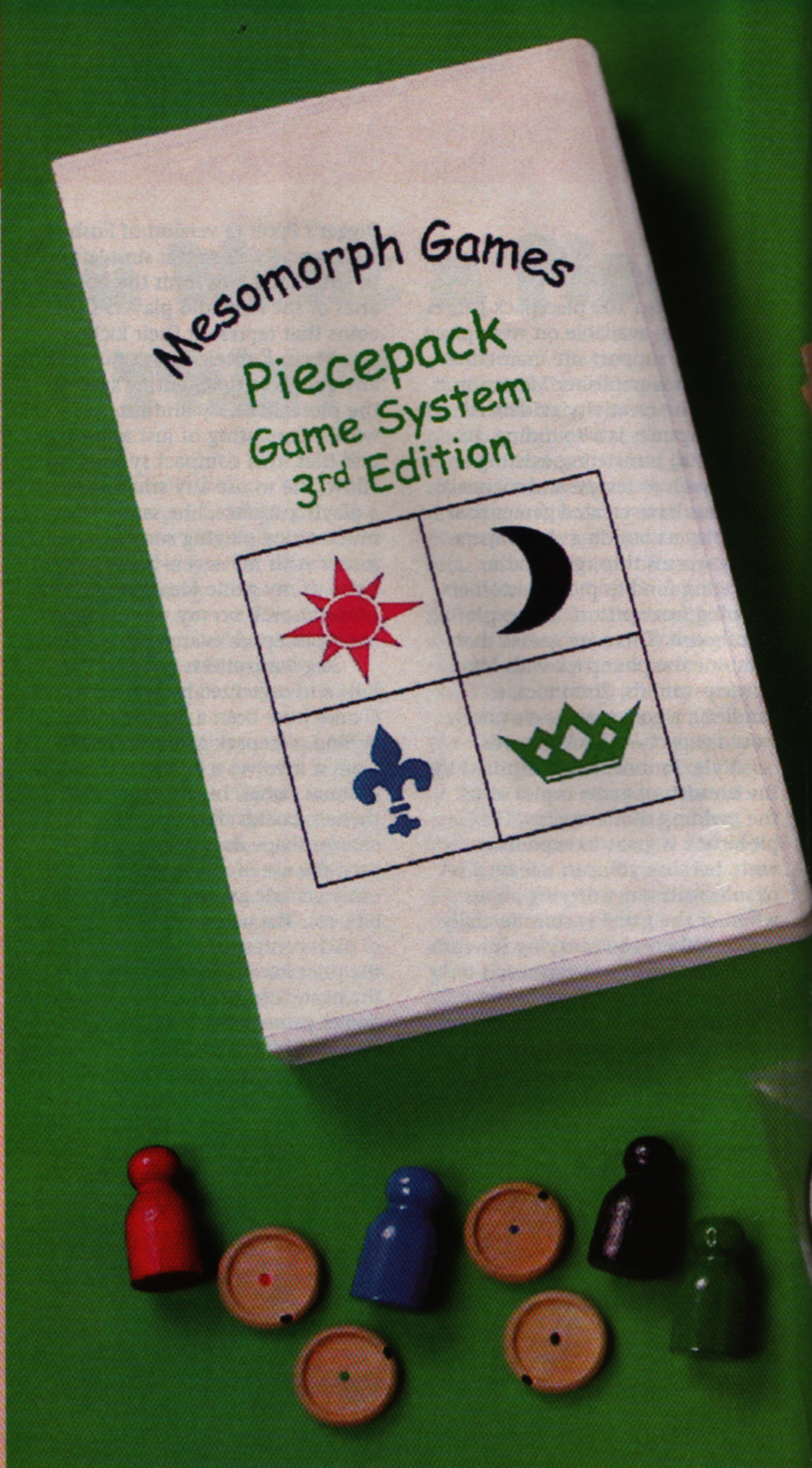
If you've got the skills, tools, and desire to create a piecepack from scratch, here's all you need to know:

The four suits of a standard piecepack are suns (red), moons (black), crowns (green or yellow), and arms (blue, and typically represented by a fleur-de-lis).

There are 24 square tiles, with six tiles in each suit; the values null, ace, 2, 3, 4, and 5 are included once in each suit. The face of each 2 through 5 tile has the numeral in the center and a small suit symbol in the upper-left corner, both in the color of the suit. The face of each ace has only a large suit symbol in the center, while null tiles have only the small symbol in the corner. The backs of the tiles are divided by a cross into four equal squares.

To match the tiles, there are 24 round coins, again with six coins per suit, and the values null, ace, 2, 3, 4, and 5 in each suit. The coin faces are marked in black with the numeral (for 2-5), with a spiral (for the ace), or with nothing (for the null); the backs show the suit in the appropriate color. On both the front and back of each coin, make a hash mark near the edge to indicate direction. Coins should fit within a small square on the back of a tile.

You'll also need four six-sided dice, one for each suit, with the values null, ace, 2, 3, 4, and 5 on the sides in the appropriate colors. Finally, you'll need four pawns with bases no bigger than the coins, again in the appropriate colors.



the contests have been great from that standpoint," Kyle reports.

"The latest contest, Solitary Confinement, was one of the more productive," says Karol Boyle, co-owner of Mesomorph Games.

"There were only a handful of solitaire games before, and now there

are more than 20." (See James Kyle's "Fujisan" on page 76 for a sample game that you can try right now.)

"Our first set in 2001 came out with seven games," Boyle says. "Now there are more than 100, and a few years from now there will likely be hundreds more."



PICKING UP THE PIECES

While game design is a fun option, many piecepack users simply enjoy the great variety and style of games. "At first what seduced me was the elegance of the concept," says Michel Fortin. "The game-designing aspect was

attractive, too, but I soon found that creating a new game was not as easy as I originally thought. However, what makes me rate the game so highly is the quality of the available games, including the originality, the game mechanism, the clarity, of the rules, and the

humor. I firmly believe that some piecepack games could easily be produced as successful commercial games."

"One of the main aspects I consider when judging a game's worth is what it asks of me. A game like

CONTINUED ON PAGE 76

FUJISAN

A SOLITAIRE PIECEPACK GAME THAT TAKES 10 MINUTES

Created by James Kyle, 2004

SUMMARY

Four Shinto priests have embarked on separate pilgrimages from their various prefectures to the top of Mount Fuji. You must find pathways for them to move up and down the mountain until they can all reach the summit. Often, this will require you to guide them into positions from which they can assist one another.

SETUP

Place the tiles facedown in the configuration shown at right. The top two steps of the mountain are double-layered for aesthetic reasons only.



Shuffle all coins facedown so that the values are hidden. Turn one coin faceup onto each space of the mountain as follows: Place two sun coins on the rightmost step of the mountain, then moons on the next, then crowns, then arms, then suns, and so on up, then down the mountain.

Place a Priest (pawn) beside each space at both ends of the mountain.

If, after setup, there are no legal moves (see "Moving a Priest" below), roll all four dice. Choose one of the dice and move the Priest whose suit matches that die the number of spaces shown on the die. If there are still no legal moves, foul weather prevents the ascent.

MOVING A PRIEST

1. A Priest may move onto a space if the coin's value matches the number of unoccupied spaces the Priest must move in a straight line to get there (including the destination space itself, but not including the Priest's starting space). For example, a Priest may move onto a space containing a coin with a value of 4 if there are three unoccupied spaces between it and the Priest.

2. Occupied spaces (containing intervening Priests) are not counted when determining if a Priest may move onto a particular space. For example, a Priest may move onto a space containing a coin with a value of 2 if there are three occupied spaces and one unoccupied space between it and the Priest.

3. A Priest may move freely between the spaces of any given step of the mountain; that is, a Priest may move back and forth in the same column. This is the only manner in which a Priest may move onto a space containing a null coin.

4. Once a Priest lands on the top tile of the mountain, he will refuse to leave it, but he can move back and forth (in the same column) or to and fro (between the columns). Note: A Priest may pass over the top tile as part of a move.

5. A Priest must enter the mountain from his own starting row; that is, he cannot move back and forth while he remains on the ground.

GOAL

The Priests will be content when they all reach the top of the mountain.

VARIANT

Country Road: Once all four Priests have reached the summit, move the coins at the peak to the Priests' original setup positions at the two ends of the mountain and continue until all four Priests have left the mountain. Treat the spaces at the peak as nulls. Once a Priest leaves the mountain, he will not step back onto it.

SAMPLE FUJISAN PUZZLE

Created by James Kyle

The diagram below is a top view of the starting position in a game of Fujisan; thus, the four center squares correspond to the summit of the mountain diagram in the SETUP section above. Using small objects to represent the monks, which start at locations A, B, C, and D, can you follow the rules of Fujisan and help them all climb to the summit?

Answer, page 58

A	5	1	2	2	1	3	1	5	0	2	3	0	C
B	3	4	0	3	4	0	5	1	2	5	4	4	D

"You Want a Piece of This?"

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 11

Ricochet Robot requires a good understanding of spatial relationships, quick thinking, and careful planning, while a game like Fluxx requires merely a tolerance for change and a sense of humor," adds game enthusiast Paul Blake. "Piecepack rates highly with me largely because it allows for and encourages any and all levels of thinking. To me, it's a game with lots more games inside it—a tiny package with immense possibilities."

Wei-Hwa Huang has won the annual World Puzzle Championship several times. He rates games solely on his estimate of how long, as he puts it, "I'm going to enjoy playing the game until I get bored of it and feel that it is a waste of space. Since a piecepack set has enough components for lots of possible games, it gets a high rating."

When it comes to piecepack games, BoardGame Geek regular Iain Cheyne says that he's found a fair share of klunkers among the gems. However, he explains, "I like the piecepack most of all because of its flexibility and portability. No matter where I am or who I'm with—even if I'm alone—I always have a suitable game."

Feedback from designers and players has led to expansions and changes, such as Mesomorph's 4 Seasons, which adds four more suits and colors, and its Playing Cards Expansion, which adds the familiar suits hearts, diamonds, clubs, and spades. Kyle says, "I didn't have any specific mechanics in mind when I created the piecepack, and I take a hands-off approach to it at this point. I expect it to evolve as people try things out and like the changes enough to make them standard."

That long-term approach to evolution is essential to Kyle's quest for piecepack ubiquity. "Most of the card games we know and play were transmitted to us as part of our oral history and didn't come from Hoyle's," he says. "It may not happen in my lifetime, but I'm interested to see in the future whether more families pick up the piecepack and play with it so we get designs that can be passed on." ■

ANSWERS

THE MONA LISA CHALLENGE COVER

- cell phone
- airplane
- sailboat
- automobile
- trees on left and right
- columns on left and right (originally in the painting but cut off by someone later)
- necklace
- brooch at front of dress
- watch
- rings
- glass on balcony
- pen on balcony
- waterfall and river in background
- hair clip on right side of her head
- eyebrows (probably in the original and removed accidentally when it was cleaned later)
- lipstick
- eye shadow

You could also include:

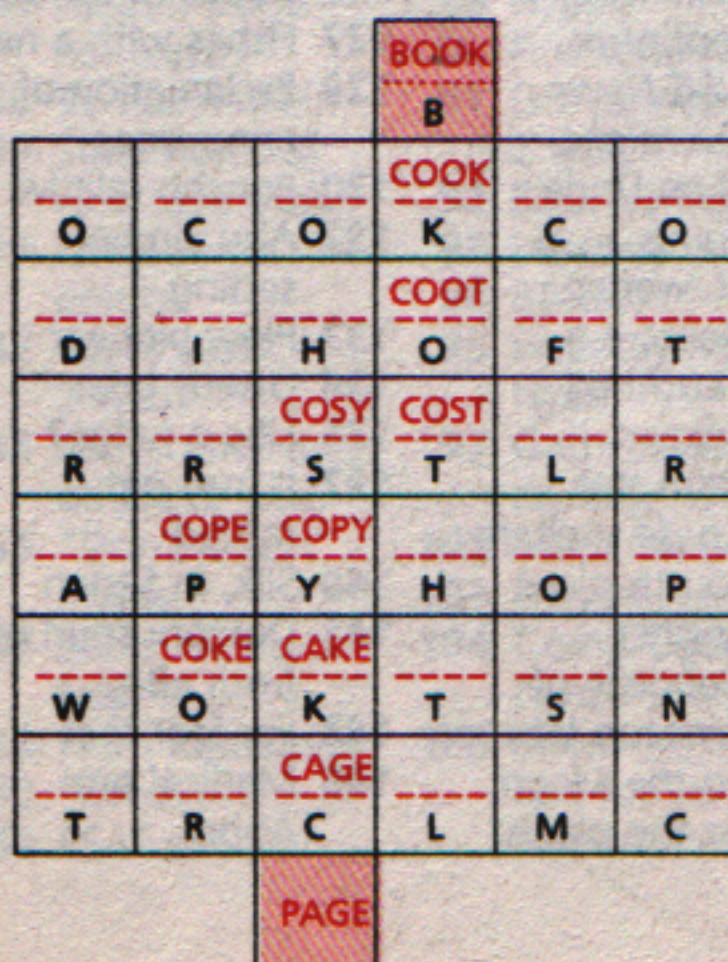
- extended sky (in order to fit this magazine's cover)

6 YOU WANT A PIECE OF THIS? FUJISAN PUZZLE

A 5 1 2 2 1 3 1 5 0 2 3 0 C
B 3 4 0 3 4 0 5 1 2 5 4 4 D

- Move C left five spaces onto 5. (Initially, C is the only monk who can move.)
- Slide C down onto 1.
- Move D left five spaces onto 5 at the summit. (D now cannot leave, but it can slide to other locations.)
- Move C left over D and three unoccupied spaces onto 3.
- Move B left over C and four unoccupied spaces to 4.
- Move C three spaces left onto 3.
- Slide B up onto 1, C up onto 5, and D left and up onto 3
- Move A right over B, C, D, and five unoccupied spaces onto 5.
- Move A left one space onto 1.
- Slide A over and left onto 0.
- Move C right over B, D and five unoccupied spaces onto 5.
- Move C left one space onto 1.
- Slide C over onto 5.
- Move B right over D one space onto the 1.

17 WORDLINK MAZE



12 FIND-ING TIME

From left to right and top to bottom:

ingredients, Dinglehopper (fork from *The Little Mermaid*), mountain goat, Duke Ellington, stockings, Ingrid Bergman, Molly Ringwald, fire extinguisher, Robin Givens, Springfield (Illinois), Henry Kissinger, Ingmar Bergman, Kraft Singles, *The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers*, walking stick

chain gang, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, linguine, *Remington Steele*, fringe, Peter Jennings, stringed instruments (or strings), shingles, shin guards, hummingbird, *Jonathan Livingston Seagull*, Butterfinger, Placido Domingo

Lexington (Kentucky), Arlington National Cemetery (JFK's eternal flame), Pekingese, United Kingdom (flag), Denzel Washington, Laura Ingalls Wilder, *Jingle All the Way*, fingers (one of many sets)

kingfisher, ringmaster, astringent, Pringles, lemon meringue pie, derringer, ringlets, Debra Winger, Kingston Trio, Bloomingdale's, ingot, *The Distinguished Gentleman*

Kim Basinger, earrings, Cingular, James Ingram, Jerry Springer, *Kingpin*, Ben Kingsley, syringa (flowers), bingo, Newt Gingrich

Ginger Grant, lingerie (catalogue), Zingers, Gringotts Bank (from the *Harry Potter* series), hinge, Ringo Starr, Westinghouse

dinghy, slingshot, Florence Nightingale, dingo, Buckingham Palace, stingray, Singapore (flag), flamingo, Ernest Hemingway book (*The Old Man and the Sea*), gingerbread, Klingon

14 TRIVIA BLACKJACK ANSWERS

Hand #1: The Good Ol' USA
of Hits to win = 0
Card 1 = 10, Card 2 = 1 (11), Hit 1 = 4, Hit 2 = 2

Hand #2: World Facts
of Hits to win = 1
Card 1 = 10, Card 2 = 2, Hit 1 = 9, Hit 2 = 7

Hand #3: Sport Stats
of Hits to win = 2
Card 1 = 3, Card 2 = 2, Hit 1 = 6, Hit 2 = 6

Hand #4: On the Movie Marquee
of Hits to win = 0
Card 1 = 9, Card 2 = 10, Hit 1 = 3, Hit 2 = 6

Hand #5: Creatures Real and Unreal
of Hits to win = 2
Card 1 = 3, Card 2 = 6, Hit 1 = 4, Hit 2 = 4

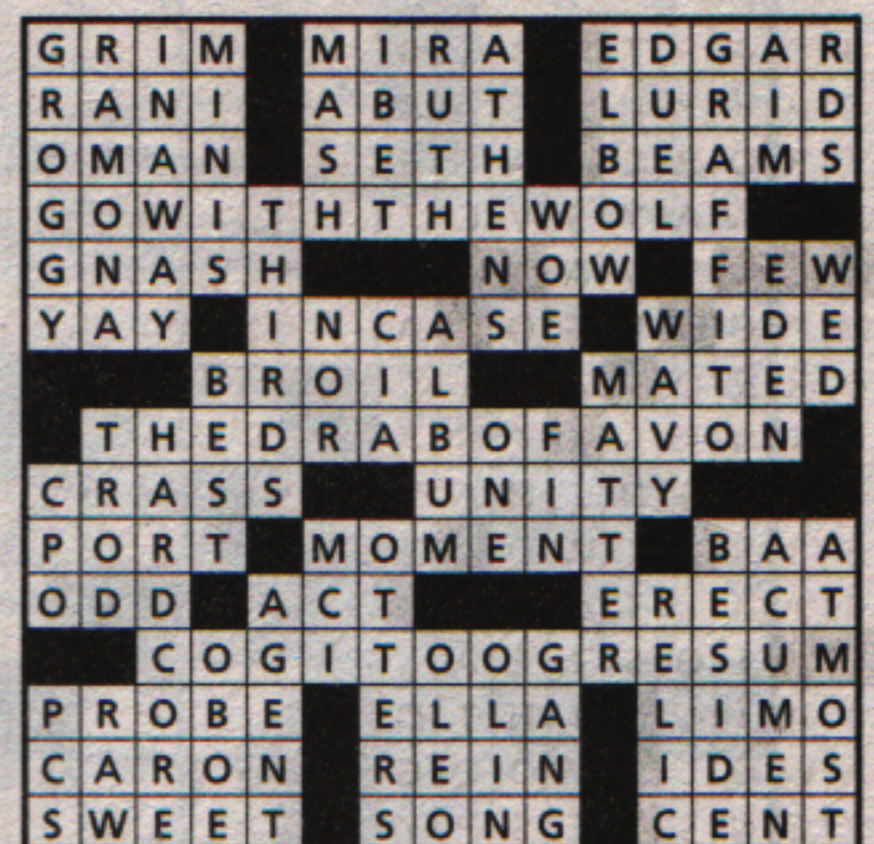
Hand #6: Math and Science
of Hits to win = 0
Card 1 = 10, Card 2 = 8, Hit 1 = 4, Hit 2 = 2

Hand #7: Miscellaneous
of Hits to win = 1
Card 1 = 10, Card 2 = 7, Hit 1 = 4, Hit 2 = 2

19 PHIL IN THE BLANK

- Dr. Phil
- Sundance Film Festival
- The Philippines
- Philharmonic
- Millard Fillmore
- Philadelphia
- Infiltrate
- Filly
- Philanthropist
- Chlorophyll
- Filthy rich
- Filibuster
- Phyllis Diller
- Punxsutawney Phil

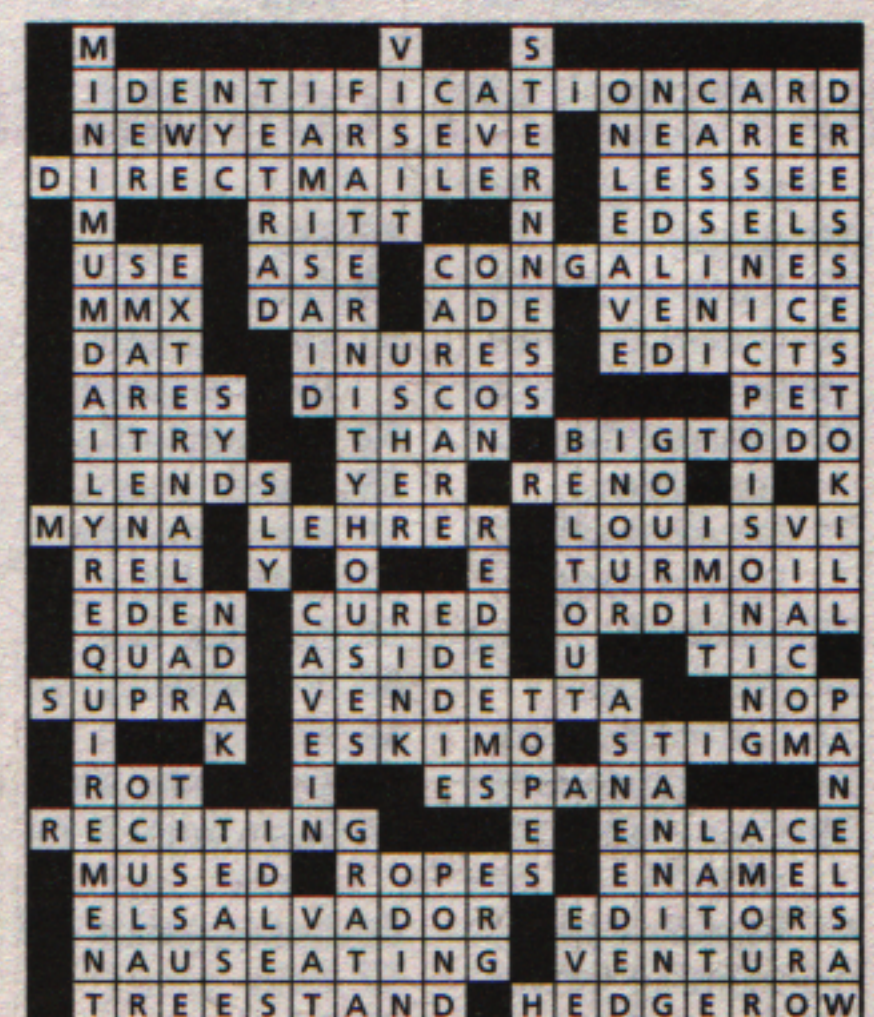
19 WE'RE BACK



20 LYRICAL LOCALES

- L, Liberty Bell: "Streets of Philadelphia" (Bruce Springsteen)
- J, Radio City Music Hall: "New York, New York" (Frank Sinatra)
- M, Sears Tower: "My Kind of Town (Chicago is)" (Frank Sinatra)
- E, Vegas Strip: "Viva Las Vegas" (Elvis Presley)
- G, Rock and Roll Hall of Fame: "Cleveland Rocks" (Ian Hunter)
- A, Gateway Arch: "Meet Me In St. Louis" (Judy Garland)
- B, Golden Gate Bridge: "I Left My Heart in San Francisco" (Tony Bennett)
- C, Hollywood Walk of Fame: "I Love L.A." (Randy Newman)
- H, Big Ben clock tower: "London Calling" (The Clash)
- K, Ginza: "Woman From Tokyo" (Deep Purple)
- I, South Beach, "Miami" (Will Smith)
- N, Elvis Statue: "Memphis" (Johnny Rivers)
- O, Arc de Triomphe: "I Love Paris" (Nat King Cole)
- P, Bourbon Street: "The City of New Orleans" (Arlo Guthrie)
- D, Buddhist Palace: "One Night in Bangkok" (Murray Head)
- F, Rose Parade: "The Little Old Lady (From Pasadena)" (Jan and Dean)

22 PENCIL POINTERS



44 CROSS ADDITION HINT

42-Across is 7129