

Tile 13

A piecepack game about designing piecepack games, by Ron Hale-Evans

15th December 2006



A Good Portsmanship game for the piecepack by Ron Hale-Evans

Based on the piecepack community game design contests (traditional)

Version: 1.0, 2006-12-15

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3-6 players, 45-90 minutes

Equipment: One piecepack per player, one extra piecepack, and pen and paper to keep score

Summary

In Tile 13, players take the role of entrants in a series of public piecepack game design contests, similar to the Good Portsmanship contest or the previous contests held by the piecepack community. Just as with the piecepack contests, the winner of the contest becomes the judge of the next one. The object is to gain the most prestige points by designing high-scoring games and entering them in contests.

Each piecepack tile has a specific meaning in Tile 13 and represents a particular *ludeme*, or aspect of a game (for example, a set of components, a mechanic, or a theme). The designers (players competing in the current contest) create games by pulling together ludemes that they hope will closely match the Judge’s expectations (the tiles played by the Judge).

Object of the game

The player with the most prestige points at the end of the last contest is the winner.

Setup

1. Every player takes the tiles and pawns from one piecepack.
2. The tiles from an extra piecepack and a die are set aside for the Judges.
3. The first Judge is picked randomly by die roll.

Turn phases

1. At the start of each contest, the Judge announces the theme of the contest. Some ideas to get you started: “Improving Candyland,” “The Humour of Terrorism,” “How to Bankrupt Wizards of the Coast.” Further ideas are listed in the player aid at the end of the rules.
2. The Judge then plays one tile of each suit, face down. As far as possible, every tile the Judge plays must have a different value (number). The Judge’s tiles represent her “ideal game” for that contest: her expectations and prejudices. The suit of the highest tile should correspond to the theme of the contest.
 - (a) **Example:** The first real-life piecepack contest, Time Marches On, would be considered a Theme contest because it had a theme of clocks and calendars, so the Judge’s highest tile should be Moons. The second contest, Ludic Synergy (which required incorporating components from other game systems), would be considered a Components contest, so the Judge’s highest tile should be Crowns. The third contest, Changing Landscapes (all games had to incorporate the mechanic of a changing board), would be considered a Mechanics contest, so the Judge’s highest tile should be

Arms, and so on. Of course, as Judge, you can make up whatever kind of contest you want; you need not use the themes or titles of real piecepack contests.

3. The Judge announces which of her tiles has the highest value (in case of a tie, the Judge may choose which to announce).
4. Designers conceal pawns in their hands and reveal them on the Judge's count of three. Pawns represent playtesters. Each of your four playtesters specialises in playtesting one of the four aspects of a game: Game Type, Components, Mechanics, or Theme. A playtester doubles the value of tiles in its suit for the designer who plays it. You may play as many playtesters as you have available, even when you are not playing tiles of that playtester's suit. After you reveal your pawn, place it in front of you so the other players can see it.
 - (a) **Example:** Deploying your Mechanics playtester (Arms pawn) doubles the value of all Arms tiles you play on the current turn. Your Theme playtester (Moons pawn) does the same for all of your Moons tiles on the turn you play it.
5. After playtesters have been revealed, each designer creates a game by playing tiles from her own piecepack face-down. Designers must play one tile of each suit if they can, and may play two tiles of one suit of their choice. This means that you will usually play four tiles, but if you play five tiles on some turns, you will play fewer than four on some other turns because you will have used up some suits.
6. The Judge counts to three, and the designers reveal their games.
7. Designers describe their games according to the interpretations listed in the **Ludemes** section at the end of this document, including a game title, game description, advertising slogan, and so on. To interpret the suits and values of your tiles, use something like the following formula: "*Title: The Suns Crowns Game of Arms in the World of Moons*".
 - (a) **Example:** Suns 5, Crowns 4, Arms 4, Moons 4 might be interpreted as "*The Little Corporation: The Cooperative Dice Game of Auctions in the World of the Napoleonic Era*". (You can remember the order of suits with the mnemonic SCAM.)
8. The Judge then scores each designer in turn. The base score for a designer's tile is the face value of the tile multiplied by the value of the Judge's tile in the same suit; a Null counts as 1, and an Ace counts as 10. A designer's base score for the contest is the sum of the base values of his tiles, with bonuses or penalties as follows:

- (a) If a designer's tile matches another designer's tile from the current contest exactly, their games are considered unoriginal, and the base value of those tiles is zero.
 - (b) However, if as designer one of your tiles matches one of the Judge's tiles from the current contest exactly, then that tile is worth double. Congratulations! You have successfully pandered to the Judge!
 - (c) Any playtester (pawn) a you play doubles the value of your tiles of that suit.
 - (d) Bonuses can be combined, so a tile that matches one of the Judge's tiles and also matches the suit of your playtester is worth quadruple, not double.
9. The Judge determines a winner. All designers, including the winner, receive the base score for their games in prestige points, plus bonuses or penalties as described above. The designer with the highest score for that contest is the contest winner and receives an additional prize worth the same number of prestige points as her game (in other words, she receives a total of double the normal number of prestige points for her game). If two or more designers are tied, the winner is the one with the lower previous score; if there is still a tie, the winner is picked randomly from the tied designers by die roll.
 10. You receive a base score of zero for a contest during which you are Judge. The Judge may optionally designate a Runner-Up (the designer with the cleverest or most interesting game description). In that case, both the Runner-Up and the Judge receive as a bonus half the score for the winning game (before the prize).
 11. At the end of a contest, each player places the tiles he played during that contest in front of him, facing outward toward the other players, creating a game board called his *corpus*. The outermost row of the board is the player's latest game. The order in which the tiles must be placed is Suns, Crowns, Arms, Moons (*SCAM*), running from low to high values within each suit. This will enable the other players to see easily which tiles have already been played. The Judge's tiles are placed with the other Judge tiles to form a Judge corpus. Playtester pawns are placed beside the tiles they tested. No piece played on this turn (tile or pawn) may be reused on a later turn.
 12. If five contests have been played, the game is over, and the last four of the Judge tiles are discarded. Otherwise, a new contest starts with Phase 1, and the winner becomes the Judge for the next contest.

Brainstorming

Tile 13 can be used as a brainstorming tool for game designers. Simply draw tiles or coins randomly, a few at a time, and interpret them according to the **Ludemes** section below. If you wish to randomise your selections further, you may select among sub-options with the dice.

Afterword

The theme announcement for the seventh real-life public piecepack contest, Good Portsmanship, reads, “In the spirit of free and open source software and culture, every entry must be a translation, or ‘port’, of an existing game to the piecepack.” This game ports the metagame of the piecepack contests to the piecepack itself. It is a non-competing entry in Good Portsmanship because I am the judge of that contest.

Many people told me that a game about game design would be too abstract, “clever”, or hard to understand. Then I played Tom Wham’s satirical game *File 13*, about the trials of game designers submitting games to a major game manufacturer. (The so-called *File 13* is the wastebasket where most of the game submissions end up.) *Tile 13* is not a port of *File 13* – the games are really nothing like each other – but Wham’s game gave me confidence that a game about game design could be playable, so the title is an homage.

During the design of this game, which stretches back to 2002, my friend Kevan Davis independently devised an online Ludemetic Game Generator that randomly combines ludemes (which he also gleaned from BoardGameGeek) to generate game designs. It’s fun – give the wheel a spin.

Credits

Most of my thanks are due to my game design group, EGGS (Experimental Game Genesis of Seattle). Thank you for many rounds of playtesting and creative suggestions. Thanks especially to Mark Haggerty, Marty Hale-Evans, Gorm Nykreim, Alex Rockwell, Tim “AlphaTim” Schutz, J.T. Thomas, and Eric Yarnell. Thanks also to the regulars and visitors at Seattle Cosmic Game Night, especially Kathy Kizer. I’m sure I missed some people; please let me know if I left you out.

Thanks to David Parlett for his definition of *ludemes* as “the ludic equivalent of genes” in his *Oxford History of Board Games* (1999). Parlett is, knowingly or not, tying the history of games to the growing science of *memetics*, or the study of self-replicating ideas (memes).

Thanks must go to the team at BoardGameGeek and all its contributors for their extensive listing of ludemes, from which I grabbed many of the ones listed in this game. Thanks also to the volunteers at the Open Directory Project; I grabbed the names of most of the sports listed from their exhaustive Sports listing. In the example contest theme section, I listed the theme of every contest theme up through the current one (Good Portsmanship). I also stole a few ideas for contest themes from the About.com game design contests.

Once again, thanks to my wife Marty Hale-Evans for editing this ruleset.

Links

File 13 (BoardGameGeek listing):

<http://www.boardgamegeek.com/viewitem.php3?gameid=2916>

BoardGameGeek ludeme list:

<http://www.boardgamegeek.com/UserCreateItem.php3>

Sports page at the Open Directory Project:

<http://dmoz.org/Sports/>

Everything piecepack:

<http://www.piecepack.org>

Themes of the real-life piecepack contests:

<http://www.ludism.org/ppwiki/Competitions>

The Ludemetic Game Generator, by Kevan Davis:

<http://kevan.org/ludeme>

History

1.0, 2006-12-15: Listed sample contest themes at the suggestion of a playtester.

0.4, 2006-10-07: Runner Up rule added. Doubling by Judge's pawns eliminated. Only five contests. First Judge chosen randomly. In a tie (unlikely), contest winner had the lower previous score. All Judge's tiles must be different, and Judge announces highest tile. No joint judging. Clarified turn phases.

0.3, 2006-09-24: Decrufted and resurrected as a non-competing entry in the Good Portsmanship contest. Theme returned to the piecepack contests. Playtester doubling added. Doubling by Judge added (playing pawns). Tried

to add more chances for strategic tradeoffs and player interaction and conflict. “Style” renamed “Game Type”; ludemes reorganised. Swapped the roles of Nulls and Aces. Winning a contest now doubles the prestige for your entry. Eliminated solitaire and two-player modes.

0.2, 2003-09-10: Strengthened Solitaire Mode for the Solitary Confinement Contest. Theme changed from game design contests to the gaming marketplace. Numerous playability fixes, such as limiting the number of tiles a designer can enter a contest with.

0.1.2, 2002-11-17: Rearranged “Style” (Suns/Red) section. Added “Psychological or Social or Religious” for Ace Theme. Lots of changes in the pipeline from two playtests, but no time to make them yet; however, they are incorporated in successive playtests.

0.1.1, 2002-10-20: Added Links. Joint Judging. Ranked ludemes more intuitively. Moved Ludemes section to end. Clarifications.

0.1, 2002-10-19: First version typed in.

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<http://www.gnu.org/copyleft/fdl.html>

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Tile 13 player aid: Ludemes

Suns: Game Type

- N: *Children's, Party, Roleplaying, or Storytelling*
- 2: *Action or Dexterity*
- 3: *Collectible, Expandable, or Deck-Building*
- 4: *Real-Time or Simultaneous Movement*
- 5: *Partnership, Team, Solitaire, or Cooperative*
- A: *Turn-Taking*

Crowns: Components

- N: *Math or Word*
- 2: *Paper and Pencil*
- 3: *Tiles, Dominoes, or Polyforms*
- 4: *Dice*
- 5: *Card*
- A: *Board or Miniatures*

Arms: Mechanics

- N: *Movement*: Exploration, Mazes, Racing, Travel, Transport.
- 2: *Brain-Bending*: Clues, Deduction, Matching, Memory, Musical, Pattern Building, Pattern Recognition, Puzzles, Riddles, Trivia.
- 3: *Political*: Diplomacy, Negotiation, Rule Making, Voting.
- 4: *Financial*: Auctions, Betting, Bluffing, Commodity Speculation, Resource Management, Set Collection, Stock Holding, Trading.
- 5: *Conflict*: Combat, Warfare.
- A: *Area*: Area Enclosure, City Building, Empire Building, Territory Building.

Moons: Theme

- N: *Educational, Moral, Psychological, Social, or Religious*: Bible, Dating, Propaganda. . .
- 2: *Sports*: Archery, Badminton, Baseball, BASEketball, Basketball, Billiards, Bocce, Boomerang, Bowling, Boxing, Cricket, Croquet, Curling, Cycling, Darts, Fencing, Fishing, Football, Frisbee, Golf, Greyhound Racing, Gymnastics, Handball, Hockey, Horse Racing, Hunting, Jai Alai, Lacrosse, Martial Arts, Moopsball, Motorsports, OSBall, Paintball, Ping Pong, Racquetball, Rodeo, Running, Show Jumping, Skateboarding, Skating, Skiing, Sled Dog Racing, Sledding, Snowboarding, Soccer, Softball, Squash, Tennis, Track and Field, Volleyball, Weightlifting, Wrestling. . .
- 3: *Present*: Ballooning, Calendars, Clocks, College, Criminal Underworld, Drinking, Environmental, Espionage, Farming, Game Design, High Finance, Movies, Music. . .
- 4: *Past*: American Civil War, American Revolution, Ancient Times, Biblical Times, Middle Ages, Napoleonic Era, Old West, Pirates, Prehistoric Times, Renaissance, Roman Empire, War of the Roses, World War I, World War II. . .
- 5: *Science Fiction and Fantasy*: Arabian Nights, Arthurian Cycle, Dungeons, Far Future, Haunted House, Heaven and Hell, Mad Scientists, Mythology, Near Future, Robots, Space Travel, Swords and Sorcery, Time Travel, a particular author (e.g. J.R.R. Tolkien). . .
- A: *Abstract*: no theme.

Tile 13 player aid: Example contest themes

- *Abstract Expressions*: Design a piecepack game with no theme or a very “thin” theme.
- *Allowable Deductions*: Design a piecepack deduction game.
- *Can You Expand on That?* Design games using standard piecepack expansions, such as the Four Seasons set or the Playing Cards set.
- *Changing Landscapes*: Design piecepack games with mutable boards.
- *CPPGs*: Design collectible games using custom piecepacks.
- *Did It Move for You Too?* Design games in which players move simultaneously.
- *The Eightfold Path*: Design games for an 8-by-8 board.
- *The Expertise of My Areas*: Design a game in which area occupied by pieces plays a significant role.
- *Flick Lives!*: Design games that involve flicking piecepack coins.
- *Games of Mystery and Imagination*: Design a game with a theme from science fiction, fantasy, or horror.
- *Good Portsmanship*: Design piecepack games that are translations, or “ports,” of other games.
- *History Repeats Itself*: Design a game about historical happenings.
- *Ludic Synergy*: Design piecepack games that incorporate another game system, such as Icehouse or dominoes.
- *No One Will Enter This Contest Because It's About the Bible*: Design a piecepack game to teach people about the Bible, the Koran, the Book of Mormon, the Lotus Sutra, or some other favourite scripture.
- *Playing Dice With the Universe*: Design piecepack dice games.
- *Play Nice!*: Design games with an emphasis on taking turns.
- *Sense of Appreciation*: Design a piecepack game that involves play money.
- *Shared Pieces*: Design a game with shared pieces (players do not have an exclusive right to move specific pieces on the board).
- *Solitary Confinement*: Design a solitaire piecepack game.
- *Support Athletics*: Design a sports simulation.

- *Time Marches On*: Design a game about clocks, calendars, or time-keeping.
- *Unequal Forces*: Design a game in which one player starts with fewer pieces or is otherwise handicapped.
- *Visible But Inaudible*: Design games to keep the kids quiet while the adults play chess variants.
- *Working It Out With a Pencil*: Design piecepack games with pen and paper as integral components.