The "In" Crowd
A ruthless popularity game for the Piecepack by Ian Schreiber and Jeb Havens
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Copyright (c) 2004, Jeb Havens (Jeb_Havens@Hotmail.com) and Ian Schreiber
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2 Players, 40 Minutes
Equipment: 14 tiles, 24 coins, 4 pawns.

Theme

You and your opponent each control members of opposing posses, both vying to control the all-important In Crowd. You must strategically dispatch your posse members in an attempt to out-cool your opponent at each step along the way to ultimate popularity.

Object of the Game

Your objective is to get the most points. You get points by placing your coins (posse members) at the outer edge of the Popularity Pyramid, and moving them to the top.

Setup

Place nine tiles in a 3x3 square, then four more tiles centered on top of those in a 2x2 square, then one tile centered on top of that (see fig. 1).
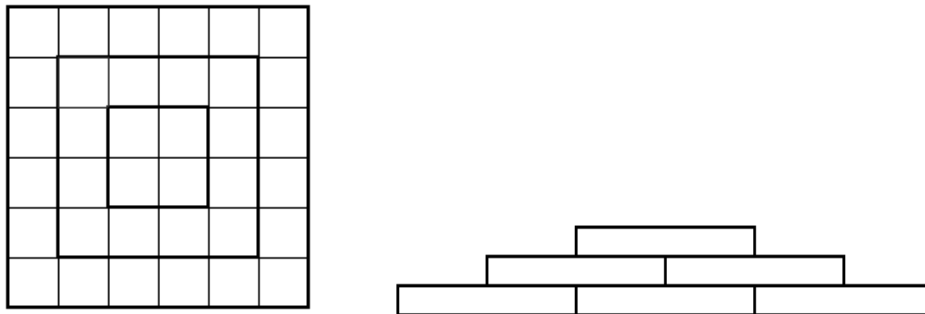

Figure 1. Top and side view of the Popularity Pyramid.

Each player takes all coins of two colors into their hand, and places the two pawns of matching colors in front of them to remind everyone whose posse controls which colors.

Play

Determine randomly who goes first. Play then alternates until the game ends.

On your turn, you must do exactly one of the following:
1) Place one of your coins from your hand onto the board, in the [suit face up] position, on any unoccupied square on the outer edge (bottom level of the Popularity Pyramid).
2) Call a Coolness Vote for any unoccupied square on the middle level of the Popularity Pyramid, provided the three adjacent squares on the bottom level are occupied by coins (see fig. 2).
3) Call a Coolness Vote for any unoccupied square on the top level of the Popularity Pyramid, provided the five adjacent squares on the middle level are occupied by coins (see fig. 2).
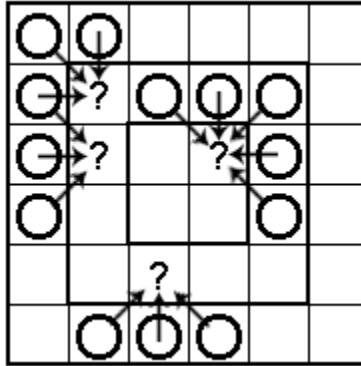
Figure 2. The spaces with question marks show which spaces could be called to a vote. The arrows indicate which coins would have influence over that space.

When a vote is called, the three or five coins that have influence over that square are turned face-up. Whichever player's coins add up to the higher number is clearly the coolest posse in that area, and takes their *highest-valued* coin involved in the vote and places it in the square in question. All other posse members slink away, as the non-advancing coins from the vote are removed from the board and returned to their owners' hands. (Null coins count as 0, Aces count as 1.)

Game End and Scoring

Players score points for every coin of theirs that reaches the Inner Circle (top level of the Popularity Pyramid) based on the value of the coin as follows:
Coin with a value of 5: 1 point. (It's not much of a challenge to get the kids who were born cool into the Inner Circle.)
Coin with a value of 4: 2 points. (If you can get a B-crowd kid into the Inner Circle without the help of the A-crowd, you deserve some credit.)
Coin with a value of 3: 4 points. (If you can get a science geek to the Inner Circle, you may as well just win.)

When all four squares of the Inner Circle are occupied, the game ends, and whoever has the highest score wins. In case of a tie, whoever had the highest score before the final vote (with only three top spaces filled) wins.

Using the other 10 Tiles

If you're playing on a solid surface with tiles that have some thickness to them, we recommend using the remaining tiles as shields. Stand them on their sides, five in front of each player in a line, and you can each place your coins just behind them face-up. This you each look at what coins you have remaining, without revealing that information to the opponent.

Variants

Players should agree before the game starts, whether or not they can peek at their own coins on the board after they've been placed. The recommended compromise is that players may look at their own coins on the bottom level only.

Appendix: Contributions

Jeb was stacking tiles in a two-level pyramid for aesthetic reasons; Ian added a third level and decided it looked like we could make a game out of it.

Jeb decided each player should have two suits' worth of coins, Ian came up with the placing and voting mechanism, and Jeb modified it by deciding that the top level should require a vote of five coins rather than just three.

When we had to decide which coin was moved up after a vote, Jeb developed the idea of moving the highest coin on the winning side, and returning the others to their owners' hands.

Ian came up with the scoring mechanism and tiebreaker as a way of rewarding players for the difficulty of getting coins other than 5's to the top, and making sure the game would never end in a draw, respectively.

After some playtesting, Jeb had the clever idea of using pawns to keep track of what colors each player is. The recommendation on how to treat peeking at one's own coins came out of mutual negotiations during the first playtest game when we both started forgetting what we'd placed where.

After a lot of thought about how to add some theme to this abstract game, Ian suggested it be some sort of political voting system, and Jeb morphed that idea into the "In Crowd" theme presented in the rules.

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