



RULES AND DEVELOPMENT

PENGUICON 2018

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*“Don’t lose me and don’t make me work too hard to understand how to play your game.”
– The Forbidden Limb podcast*



WHO I AM

Ian S. Stedman

Co-Owner / Chief Creative Officer @ Magic Meeple Games, LLC.

(Formed in 2015; Previously Gamer's University / G.U. Games)

NAU Graduate, BSBA

Published Game Designer

(Professionally published first in 2014 and Multiple Self-published)

Game Design / Rulebook Playtesting & Consulting

Background:

Former I.T. Guy (lots of technical doc writing)

Former DJ/Voice Talent for KZPT-FM Tucson

Former CAD Drafter



WRITING EFFECTIVE RULES

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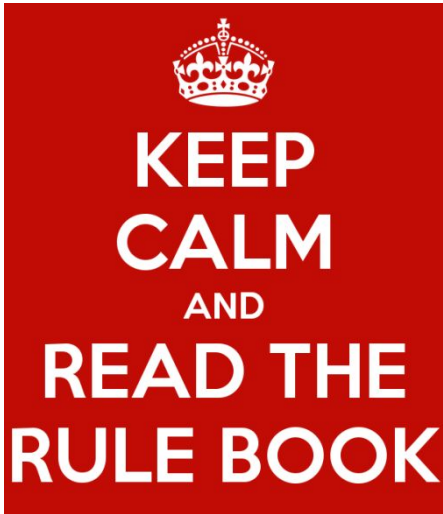
WHAT IS A RULEBOOK?

Most players would rather watch a YouTube how-to-play video or be taught how to play by another person than read a rulebook.

Your rulebook is essentially a player's **last-resort option to learn how to play your game.**

It must be perfectly clear, or the game cannot be played (at least not to the designer's expectations.)

Your game should ALWAYS have *some form* of written rules.



WHO IS YOUR RULEBOOK FOR?

The answer is not always “For the players.”

Your *final* rulebook will be written for strangers, but in the beginning/prototype stages, your rulebook is for *you*.

During this early design phase, treat your rulebook like a Journal. Don't worry about it being readable to anyone else **at this stage**, as long as it makes sense to *you*.

Prototype/Playtest Stage Rulebooks are mostly:

- Basic framework for how the game is played
- Reminders to yourself about things you discover during play
- Quick notes and changes to the game over time

They can be simple bulleted lists or pictures, but a more formal rulebook should exist before you give the game to a tester to be played without you present.



THINGS TO CONSIDER AS YOU PROCEED

These kinds of things tend to come up toward the end of the process. If you keep them in mind early and often, you can save a lot of work in the long-run...

- **Language Dependency** - Age Level, Native Language, **Symbols?**
- **Establish Consistent & Coherent Nomenclature** - Never refer to your “Quest Deck” as “The Deck of Quest Cards” interchangeably.
- **Player Roles** - If more than one exists they need names, and we need to know who is who and why.
- **Rules Variations** - Will you include any variants? If the theme and components accommodate it, consider doing so (this adds value)
- **Quick-Reference Tools** - If you were able to give each player a blackjack-sized card for the most important rules, (and in most cases, you can and should) what would it say? What if you were able to give them a 3” x 6” card instead?
- **Active Voice/Passive Voice & Mode of Address** - “You”? Or “The Active Player”?
- **Multiple Booklets?** - Warning: If you are new to this...



- **Title**
- **Table of Contents**
- **Brief Credits Section**
(Optional, sometimes on inner cover)
- **# of Players / **Age Range** / Estimated Play Time**
- **List of Components**
- **Quick and Flavorful Summary/Explanation of Game Experience** - “What are we doing and why do we care?”
- **How to win**
(if there is room, but it can go on page 2)
- **Can I watch a Video somewhere?**
(What about errata?)





WHAT'S NEXT?

- **Setup (extremely important)**
- **How to actually play the game!**
 - Definitions
 - Sequence of play
 - Special Cases
- **How/Why/When does the Game End?**
 - Who wins (or loses) and why?
- **Variants**
 - Only tell me what is different, please!



TOWARD THE END...

- **Symbol Definitions / Keyword Glossary**
- **Credits / Legal / Acknowledgements**
 - All that tiny print you see in the back of everyone else's rulebooks? Yours should look pretty much *just like that*.
 - Designer(s), Developer(s), Artist(s), Graphic Designer(s), Honorary Producer(s), Backers, Muses, **PLAYTESTERS**
 - “Ink is free”





THE BACK COVER

The only thing more important than the cover of your rulebook is what is on the back of it.

The back cover is your most valuable space for the most important rules in your game. What are the things that players refer back to the most when learning how to play?

Take advantage of this PRIME REAL ESTATE for things like

- **Round Sequence, or “What Can I Do when it is My Turn?”**
- **Symbol Definitions**
- **How [whatever the most complex thing is] Works**
- **If nothing else, use this space for “Quick Game Setup”**

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FAQ? NO!

- **FAQs are for things that the rulebook missed.**
 - Board Game Geek is an excellent home for living FAQ documents
- **No finished rulebook should have a FAQ.**
 - Anything that would be in a FAQ section should just be included in the appropriate section of the rulebook.
- **If there is a fringe case that cannot be neatly explained in any other way than a Q/A format, then do so! (But keep them in the relevant rule sections)**
- **Incorporate all FAQs into an updated rulebook (but not *as* a FAQ) for the next edition.**



TIPS FOR ~~REIVSION~~ REVISION

- You **Don't** Have To **Do It Alone**.
- Print a physical copy of your rules for each new playtest session and **write all over it**.
- Paragraphs are boring and difficult to scan, turn anything you can into a **bulleted list** or numeric **sequence of steps**.
- **Clarity vs. Brevity**
 - Always always always err on the side of **Clarity**.
 - Ask your play testers if they feel that certain rules could be explained more efficiently.
 - If there are redundancies they can still be found and trimmed back.
- **This is a technical document. It has to make sense and deliver accurate directions; not impress your English Lit. professor.**
 - If your rules are *more* understandable because you *didn't* use complete sentences, it probably isn't because you did something wrong.



THINGS THAT ARE AWESOME!

(FROM THE PLAYER'S PERSPECTIVE)

- **DIAGRAMS WITH NUMBERED CALLOUTS**
- **OXFORD COMMAS**
(Oxford Commas Save Lives, don't be ambiguous.)
- **FLOWCHARTS**
- **SYMBOL-DRIVEN GAME SYSTEMS** (Language-free)
- **SHORT RULEBOOKS** (1-2 Pages)
- **INDEX/GLOSSARY**

If your rulebook is more than 15 pages, consider installing a glossary toward the end of the rule book for all of the key terms your game employs, during the final stages of revision, each entry can be given the page number the relevant rule is found on.



IT'S Q/A TIME!



Thank you very much for inviting us!

Feel free to reach out:

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(Re)sources:

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