A Series of Interesting Choices

By Erik Svedäng

2 – 4 players	60 – 90 minutes

Introduction

This is a game designed to help you practice your game design skills. It will guide you through the creative process of making a board game – from coming up with an initial idea, to writing down the rules, and finally testing it. In the first part of the game you will have to design an actual, working game, based on concepts found on a hand of cards dealt to you. Then you will play each others games, earning points if you manage to win in some of them. Finally, you must try to guess what cards the other players used for their games – and also hope that they will be able to figure out yours. The person who manages to do all these things in the best way will be the winner.
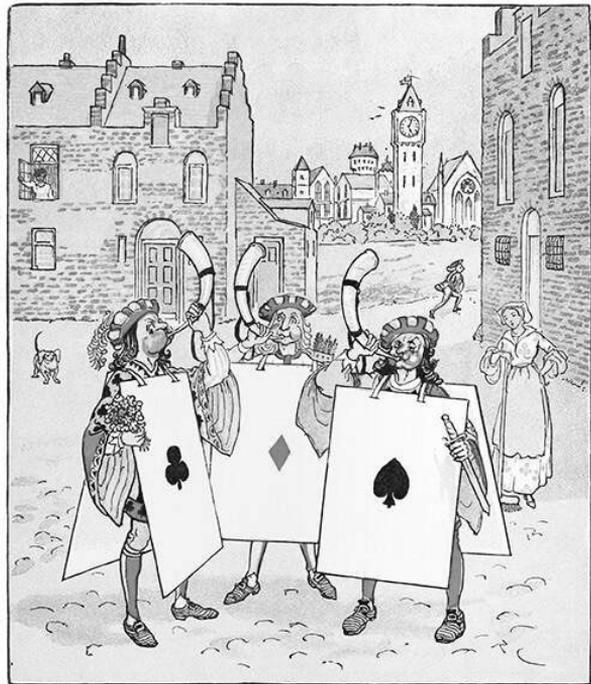
And if you don't win? Hopefully you will have become a better game designer anyways!

Requirements

A Series of Interesting Choices can be played by 2 – 4 players. The two-player version requires a few extra rules which will be pointed out throughout this document.

The concepts found on the cards in the game are based on the MDA-model ("Mechanics, Dynamics, Aesthetics") which can be found in the academic paper *MDA: A Formal Approach to Game Design and Game Research*. Though it's great if the players are familiar with this model it's by no means necessary for playing. What's more important is some knowledge of common board and card games – without that it will be very hard to design something on one's own. In an educational setting the teacher should make sure that everyone has this basic understanding before using the game as an exercise.

Components

- A deck of 72 game design cards
- A pad of game design forms
- 20 bug tokens
- 4 sets of voting tokens (4 of each colour)
- This rules document
- Game design material:
    - ★ 4 sets of small tokens (8 of each colour)
    - ★ Play money
    - ★ A chess board (hexagons on the back)
    - ★ A 5 x 5 board (race track on the back)
    - ★ 12 six-sided dice
    - ★ A standard deck of cards (with letters to enable word games, etc)

Not included: Pencils and some kind of timer (an egg timer or a phone works well)

Game structure

A Series of Interesting Choices is divided into three parts:

1. Design

2. Play testing

3. Voting and scoring

Keeping score

Because you will be playing games within this game, the concept of *points* can be present at multiple levels simultaneously. To make them more distinguishable, the points you need to win *A Series of Interesting Choices* are called **designer points**. Whoever has the most designer points at the end of the game wins. Points within the games designed by the players matter only while playing that particular game.

Keep track of the designer points on a shared piece of paper, or use any other adequate means for keeping score.

Bugs

When messing up various parts during gameplay you will be given a bug token. At the final part of the scoring the two players with the fewest bugs will get bonuses. It's totally OK to collect a couple of bugs – most players probably will. Their purpose is primarily to make you conscious of various things to avoid as a game designer (in a playful way).

Preparations

1. As noted above, make sure that you have a way to keep track of the designer points.

2. Each player picks a colour and takes the matching voting tokens **and** small tokens.
   Put all unused tokens back into the box.

3. Make a pile of bug tokens at the side of the table.

4. Put all the design material (the five boards, the standard deck of cards, the play money, and the dice) in the middle of the table. Let everyone inspect them.

5. Give each player a game design sheet and a pencil. If this is the first time you're playing the game, go through all the fields and make sure everyone understands them. If something is unclear, refer to **Appendix A - The game design form**.

6. Shuffle the game design cards and deal five of them to each player (face down).

Part 1 – Design

Make sure everyone is mentally prepared, then start a count-down timer at **20 minutes**.

Now everyone looks at their five game design cards and reads through them carefully. Let no one else see your cards, they are secret!

Each player gets to change cards twice by discarding any number of them from their hand and drawing up to five cards again (just like in *Five Card Draw Poker*).

When you have used up your two changes (or if you're satisfied with your hand) you should start designing a game **based on your cards**. Do this by filling out the game design form as thoroughly as you can.

When you're done, hand the game design form to the player on your left.

Any player who is not done with their game when the timer rings will get three additional minutes to finish up. If they are still not done after that, they must hand their form **as is** to the player on their left.

Design advice

★ The game should not take more than 10 minutes to play, including reading the rules. Don't think too big!

★ If you can't come up with any ideas – base your game on a classic one that you know and modify it based on the cards you've been dealt.

★ Don't use the bugs or voting tokens as pieces in the game you make.

★ If you can't fit a card into your design, don't sweat it. Sometimes it's worth leaving out a card or two for a better overall design.

★ Make use of the conventions in **Appendix B** to shorten your rules.

Part 2 – Play testing

Each player rolls a die – highest roller becomes the first *explainer*. This player reads the rules they were handed and tries to explain the game to the group. The player who designed the game is not allowed to talk about it during this part, except for clarifying bad handwriting or spelling errors.

Use a timer to make sure you're not spending more than **10 minutes** total for learning and playing the game.

§ If a rule is unclear (and it probably will be) the person who explains the rules can come up with a solution and implement it on the fly. In case the actual designer does not like this idea – or the one explaining completely fails to come up with a good fix – the designer is allowed to clarify how that part of the game is supposed to be played, but must then take a bug token.

★ Winning a game earns that player **1 designer point**. If it turns out that the game is infinite – or the timer rings and you can't settle on a winner within just a couple of moves – the designer of the game receives a bug token.

When you've finished the first game, move on to the other ones (the role of being the *explainer* rotates clockwise around the table).

Make sure that you reset the timer before playing each game.

Play testing advice

★ Try to start playing each game as quickly as possible, you can look up things while testing it. If the explainer misses a rule that is clearly stated, the designer of the game is allowed to grunt audibly or point to it as a hint.

★ If something is unclear in the rules, go for the most obvious and conventional solution. The goal is to try to play the game as intended by the designer.

★ When a game makes use of tokens, ensure that each player always play with the colour they selected at the beginning as to not confuse everyone else unnecessarily.

★ Try designing games that allow everyone at the table to participate. If one person has to sit out, let that be the designer. If the game is for two players and you're a group of four – play two simultaneous matches.

Part 3 – Guessing and scoring

After playing all the games it is time to vote on your favourite one. Use your voting tokens to secretly select the color of **another** player (choose the one that made the game that you liked the most). Reveal your votes at the same time. Skip this step in a two-player game.

Each vote grants the chosen player **3 designer points**.

Example: Anna, Bob, Charlie and Doris are playing. Anna and Bob vote for Charlie who will receive 6 designer points. Charlie thinks Doris' game had some very interesting mechanics so he votes for her, giving her 3 designer points. Doris really liked the theme of Anna's game so she votes for her. Anna subsequently earns 3 designer points.

Next, look through your five game design cards and **memorise their titles**, then place them in a shared pile in the middle of the table. Take great care not to reveal any of your cards or to mix them with any of the unused game design cards.

In a four player game the pile will consist of 20 cards (4 x 5), in a three player game it will only be 15. If you're just **two players**, add five cards from the deck to the pile to bring it up to 15 cards (otherwise you'll know exactly which cards the other player chose).

Shuffle the shared pile thoroughly and select a player who will be managing this part of the game. The chosen player flips the top card of the pile and reads it aloud (both its title and the explanatory text).

Players must now try to guess (using their voting tokens) what player had this card and presumably based their game upon it. Place a token face-down in front of you that says the color of the player you think it is.
One of the players will know that they had the card – that player just selects the token that says "me". This does not count as a *guess*, it's just a statement.

In a **two-player** game, if you think that the other player didn't use the card, guess on a third player colour that is not in use.

The players must take care not to reveal if they are the one who had a particular card. If someone gives it away in some obvious way, the rest of the group can punish them by assigning a bug token.

When everyone has put down their token, simultaneously reveal them and award designer points in the following way:

No one guessed correctly

★ No points are awarded.

★ The token of the person who had the card does not count as a correct guess!

At least one person guessed correctly

★ The person who had the card gets one designer point, plus one extra point for each player who guessed **correctly**.

★ Everyone who guessed correctly gets one designer point, plus one extra point for each player who guessed **incorrectly**.

★ Any player who guessed incorrectly gets zero points.

Continue the scoring process by revealing cards from the top of the pile until it runs out.

Bug bonuses

Before the game is over, give the player (or players, if there's a tie) with the least number of bug tokens **five** extra designer points, and the player(s) with the second least number of bugs **three** extra designer points.

In a two-player game the second bonus is not awarded.

Finishing up

The player with the most designer points is the winner. If you have the time, discuss the various games in the group and see if you can improve upon them.

Scoring examples

Example 1

Alice (red), Bert (green) and Cecilia (blue) are playing a three-player game. The card "Multiplayer Solitaire" is turned up. It belongs to Alice so she selects the token that says "red (me)". Both Bert and Cecilia vote for Alice (using their tokens that say "red") since it's really obvious that the card belongs to her. After turning up their tokens Alice earns 3 designer points (1 point + 2 points for each correct guess). Bert and Cecilia get 1 designer point each for being correct, but nothing more since no player guessed wrong.

Example 2

Next up is the "Multiplication" card that Bert had. He didn't really manage to work that into his design so Alice and Cecilia incorrectly guess on each other. No points are awarded to any player.

Example 3

The next day the group is playing a game again, but this time Dave has joined. His card "Strict Elimination" comes up. Cecilia correctly guesses that it's his card, but both Alice and Bert choose Cecilia. They earn nothing, while Cecilia gets 3 designer points (1 for being correct and 2 for the incorrect guesses). Dave gets 2 designer points, 1 base point + 1 point for the correct guess from Cecilia.

Example 4

Jonas (yellow) and Ossian (green) are hanging out in a pub and has decided to play a match. During scoring the card "Push Your Luck" comes up. It was added from the deck and does not belong to either player. Jonas thinks it's Ossians card and gets no points. Ossian guesses correctly by using his token that says "red", he then earns 2 points (1 for being correct and 1 for Jonas' incorrect guess).

Appendix A – The game design form

Here are clarifications for all the fields of the game design form:

Title – Every game needs a name.

By – Write your own name here.

Tagline – This is your chance to "sell" the game, or just explain what it's about in one snappy sentence. If you really can't come up with anything here, it's OK to leave it blank.

Nr of players – Try to figure out how many players the game will work for. Ideally it suits your current play group so that everyone can try it out.

Components – What of the game design materials are needed for your game? Use short names like "tokens", "small board" or "dice". Don't pick too many components or the game will get unwieldy very quickly.

Setup – State what the players need to do before starting playing. It might be things like "deal five cards each" or "place your tokens on the back row of the board". If you're using one of the boards, you can draw the setup position on the right.

Goal – You must absolutely not forget to explain how to win your game! Select one or multiple of the check boxes, depending on what suits your design.

Turn order – Normal turn order means clockwise around the table, also called *round robin*. Simultaneous moves can be found most famously in *Rock, Paper, Scissors*.

Rules – The meat of the game – how to play it. Try to limit the number of main points to three to avoid making the text too packed. Simplicity is key! Also try to make use of conventions often found in games, see the next page for more information.
If you run out of space you can write on the back of your form, but this will give you one extra bug token.

Appendix B – Conventions

To cut down on the amount of text in the rules you can make use of **conventions**. You don't have to write down a rule at all, as long as it follows a convention. If your playgroup has other preferences, make that clear before playing so that everyone agrees on what conventions to use.

Starting player – The starting player is decided by each one rolling a die – highest roll starts.

Reroll ties – Always reroll ties (when using dice) unless some other solution is specified in the rules.

Ko-rule – Any move that exactly repeats a previous game situation is not allowed.

Rounding – Round down when dividing.

Score keeping – If a game uses score, just keep track of it using dice, tokens, or a piece of paper.

Chess movement – You can refer to the pieces in Chess to explain how things move.
The pieces are Pawn, Knight, Bishop, Rook, King, and Queen.

Card values – Aces are high and worth 14. Jacks are 11, Queens 12, and Kings 13.

Tricks – In card games with tricks you have to follow the suit of the lead (first) card, if at all possible. Otherwise discard any card. Highest card of the lead suit is the winner and starts the next trick. If using a trump suit, you can **only** play that if you can't follow suit. Highest trump then takes the trick.

Poker hands
The poker hands are as follows (in value order) – Pair, Two pairs, Three of a kind, Straight, Flush, Full house, Four of a kind, Straight flush, and Royal Straight Flush.

Appendix C – Faster scoring method

In case you find the normal rules for guessing and scoring a bit too cerebral, here's a quicker way to play that part of the game:

1. Gather the game design cards from the players and shuffle them together face down (just like in the basic game).

2. Turn the shuffled cards face up and place them in a grid in the middle of the table. Have someone read the titles of all of the cards aloud.

3. Randomly decide a starting player. The turn passes clockwise after that.

4. On your turn you pick a game design card from the grid in the middle of the table and try to guess who it belongs to. You can't pick a card that belongs to you!

   If you guess correctly both you and the owner of the card get 1 designer point each. Discard the card afterwards.

   If you guess incorrectly the card is immediately discarded and its owner is not revealed. That way there is some mystery to how many cards some players have left.

5. If it's your turn and you can't pick a card because all of them are yours, you have to reveal this fact. This also makes the game end. You won't get scored for the left over cards.

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Game Overview

1. Deal five game design cards to each player.

2. Let everyone change cards twice.

3. Fill out your game design form and pass it to the left.

4. Play the games one at a time (explain the one you got).

5. Vote for your favourite games.

6. Shuffle the chosen game design cards and then guess who they belong to, one at a time.

7. Award bug bonuses.

Scoring (designer points)

Winning a game while testing it: **1**

Each vote for favourite game from another player: **3**

No correct guesses on your card: **No points to anyone**

If there's at least one correct guess:

   Owner of card gets **1, plus 1 for each correct player**

   Correct players gets **1, plus 1 for each incorrect player**

Least bugs: **5**

Second least bugs: **3**