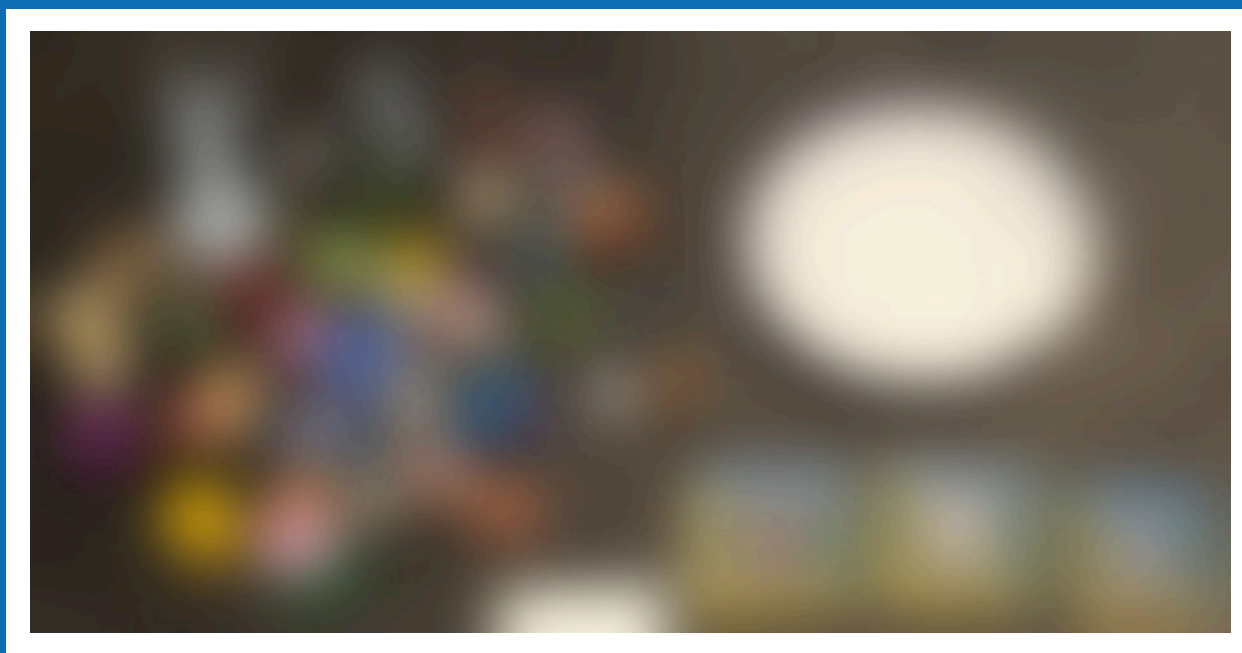


BACK TO THE BOX

RULES OF PLAY



A game by Chris Prime

2-8 players ·
20 minutes · Ages 6+

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WELCOME

Every night your lost pieces try to climb back to their boxes. Can they make it back before the evil vacuum (or toddler) gets them in the morning?

HOW TO WIN

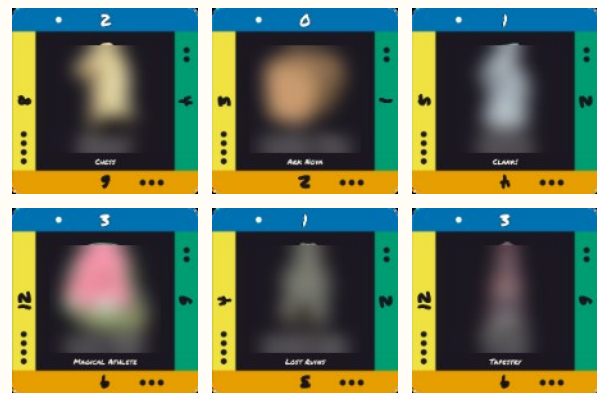
You win by stacking pieces higher and taking risks without knocking anything off the board.

Each piece you place safely scores. Each attempt that knocks something off counts against you. When the game ends, the highest total wins.

HOW TO READ THIS BOOK

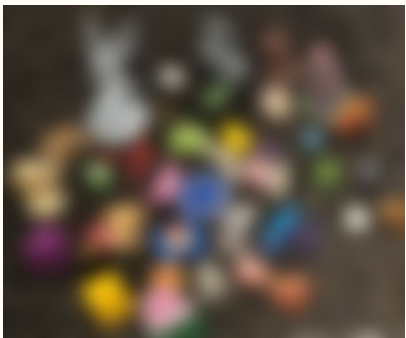
Bold words are game terms. Example and Remember boxes show examples and reminders. They never add rules. The Variant box adds an optional rule: see Playing a longer game, page 7. Each level has a color and dots, so nothing depends on color alone. The quick reference is on the back cover.

WHAT'S IN THE BOX



44 cards

each naming one real game piece



44 pieces

one matching each card



1 board

– a shallow dome that rocks on its curved side

SETUP



Setup for 4 players. Numbers 1 to 4 match the steps.

- 1 Put the board in the middle of the table, flat side up, so it rests on its curve and tilts freely.
- 2 Gather all 44 pieces in a **supply** to one side, within reach of everyone.
- 3 Shuffle the cards and deal 2 to each player. Put the rest face down in a **deck** within everyone's reach.
- 4 Turn the top 3 cards of the **deck** face up in a row beside it. This is the **market**.
- 5 Choose a starting player.

ON YOUR TURN

Beginning with the starting player and continuing clockwise, take one turn each. On your turn, do one of two things.

Draw a card

Take a **market** card.

or

Play a card

Place a piece on the board.

REMEMBER

Your **hand limit** is 4.

EXAMPLE

*Ava has 4 cards in hand, so she can't draw: she must play. She reveals the Knight and announces **green**. She takes the Knight from the **supply** and sets it on a piece that is touching the board. Nothing falls, so she scores **green**: 4.*

REMEMBER

Once you let go of your piece, you can't touch it again.

DRAW A CARD

Take one of the 3 face-up **market** cards into your hand, and refill the **market** with the top card of the **deck**.

Your **hand limit** is 4. With 4 cards in hand you can't draw, so you must play. If you don't have any cards in hand, you must draw one.

PLAY A CARD

- 1 Choose one of the cards in your hand and reveal it.
- 2 Announce the level you are attempting — **blue**, **green**, **orange** or **yellow**. You are locked in before you touch anything.
- 3 Take the matching piece from the **supply**.
- 4 Place it on the board.

Until you let go, you may keep hold of your piece, even while it touches other pieces on the board. Once you let go of your piece, you can't touch it again.

If you disturb the board but nothing falls off, keep going: it's still your turn and you haven't failed.

It's still your turn for a few seconds after you finish placing your piece, or until the next player starts placing theirs, whichever comes first.

Then either you scored it or you knocked something off. Either way, your turn ends and play passes clockwise. If nothing falls, see Scoring a placement, *page 5*. If something falls, see Knocking pieces off, *page 6*.

Once the **deck** is empty, a **market** card you take is not replaced. When the **deck** and the **market** are both gone, keep playing from your hand. If your hand is empty as well, you're done for the game.

SCORING A PLACEMENT

If nothing falls, you score the piece you just placed. Which number you score depends on how many pieces are underneath it once it settles, counting the shortest path down to the board.

- Blue** — touching the board, even if it also rests on another piece.
- Orange** — two pieces underneath. A stack of two below you.

- Green** — one piece underneath. The piece below you is touching the board.
- Yellow** — three or more underneath. The top of the stack. Worth the most, and the hardest to reach.

If your piece rests on more than one piece, follow whichever route reaches the board through the fewest pieces. Resting on one piece that touches the board and another that sits on a stack of two counts as one below: **green**. If your piece touches the board, it's **blue**, even if it also rests on another piece.

That is where the piece ends up, not what you announced. You score the level it settled on, even if that's higher or lower than the level you announced. The level you announced only matters if something falls.

READING A CARD

Every card carries all four numbers, one on each edge. Read the one on the level you earned.

- 1 Blue** edge — touching the board. The Adventurer scores 1.
- 2 Green** edge — one piece underneath. The Adventurer scores 2.
- 3 Orange** edge — two pieces underneath. The Adventurer scores 3.
- 4 Yellow** edge — three or more underneath. The Adventurer scores 4.
- 5 Dots** — every edge repeats its level as one to four dots, so the card reads correctly without relying on color.

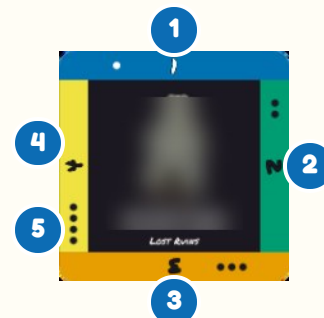
The middle of the card shows the piece to take from the **supply** and, in small print, the game it comes from. Match the piece by its picture. The name and the game are just for fun. Each number is printed to read the right way up when its own edge is at the top.

Pieces are not worth the same at every height. Some score nothing on the board and only start paying once they're lifted onto other pieces — you may still place them flat for zero if it suits you.

Others climb steeply, and are worth several times more at the top of a stack than at the bottom. Those are the ones worth the risk.

EXAMPLE

Ben announces **green** for his Adventurer. It settles touching the board, still leaning on another piece. Nothing falls, so he scores **blue**: 1.



The Adventurer. Numbers match the list.

KNOCKING PIECES OFF

Anything that leaves the board is off — it goes back to the **supply** and it stays there. Nothing is ever put back on.

When it happens	What you do
Before you place — you disturb the board while reaching, steadying or positioning, and something falls	Return the fallen pieces and your own piece to the supply .
While you place — the piece lands, but something else falls	Return the fallen pieces to the supply . Your piece stays where it landed — taking it back would only disturb the board further.

EXAMPLE

Cleo announces **yellow** and places her *Huge Baby*. It lands, but a *Knight* falls off. The *Knight* goes back to the **supply**, and her *Huge Baby* stays where it landed. Her *Huge Baby* card goes onto her **penalty pile**, turned to **yellow**: 12 counts against her.



A **scored fan**: each new card on top of the last, with the earlier cards' colored bands showing.

If your own piece falls off the board, it's treated the same as knocking anything else off.

Either way the card you revealed goes onto your **penalty pile** rather than your **scored fan**, turned to the level you announced — not wherever the piece ended up. Its number counts against you. Nothing else happens to your cards. Your turn ends and play passes clockwise.

If a piece that someone scored earlier is knocked off, they keep that card in their **scored fan**.

If the table can't agree on who was responsible for a fall, or whose turn it was, no one is penalized. Return all fallen pieces to the **supply**.

KEEPING SCORE AS YOU GO

Place each scored card in front of you, turned so the level you earned sits along the top edge. The number reads the right way up.

Place each new scored card on top of the last, slid down so only the colored band of the earlier card still shows above it. Your cards build a vertical fan of colored strips, your **scored fan**, and your score is the column of numbers running down it.

Cards from knocked-off attempts build your **penalty pile** beside your **scored fan**, laid out the same way and turned to the level you announced. Your **penalty pile** counts against you.

EXAMPLE

Over one game you score three pieces and knock a stack over once. Here are your **scored fan** and your **penalty pile** at the end, and how each card got there.

Piece, and where it went	Edge	Points
Knight — Straight onto the board	Blue	2
Coffee Mug — On top of one piece	Green	1
Huge Baby — On top of a stack of two	Orange	9
Adventurer — Announced orange , then brought the stack down	Orange	-3
Total		9



Scored fan



Penalty pile

Read the numbers down the **scored fan**: $2 + 1 + 9 = 12$. The Adventurer attempt counts against you, so the total is $12 - 3 = 9$. Both are built the same way, each new card on top of the last.

The Coffee Mug would have scored 0 on the board; lifting it one piece earned 1. The Huge Baby earned 9 two pieces up — three times the 3 it scores on the board. Reaching that high is also what costs the most when it goes wrong: the Adventurer attempt at **orange** took 3 straight back off.

ENDING THE GAME

The game ends when the **deck** and the **market** are empty and every player is out of cards.

Add up the numbers showing on your **scored fan**, then subtract the numbers showing on your **penalty pile**. Highest total wins.

If two or more players tie, the win goes to whoever scored the highest number on a single card in their **scored fan**. Still tied, it goes to whoever has the most cards in their **scored fan**. Still tied after that, the players share the win.

COMMONLY FORGOTTEN RULES

Once you let go of your piece, you can't touch it again.

You are locked in before you touch anything.

Your **hand limit** is 4.

Nothing is ever put back on.

VARIANT · PLAYING A LONGER GAME

Agree on a target score before you start — 40 is a good first try. Play a full game as normal, but instead of declaring a winner, everyone keeps a running total. Clear the board, return all pieces to the **supply**, reshuffle the cards and deal again. Choose a random starting player for each new game.

Play further games until at least one player has reached the target. Once a game ends with someone at or over it, the highest running total wins. If two or more players tie on the highest running total, break the tie the same way as in a single game, using only the cards from the last game. Everything else is unchanged.

QUICK REFERENCE

On your turn, do one of two things.

DRAW A CARD

Take one of the 3 face-up **market** cards into your hand, and refill the **market** with the top card of the **deck**.

Your **hand limit** is 4.

PLAY A CARD

- 1 Reveal a card from your hand.
- 2 Announce the level you are attempting.
- 3 Take the matching piece from the **supply**.
- 4 Place it on the board.

Once you let go of your piece, you can't touch it again.

LEVELS

-  **Blue** — touching the board, even if it also rests on another piece.
-  **Green** — one piece underneath.
-  **Orange** — two pieces underneath.
-  **Yellow** — three or more underneath.

Score the number on the edge of the level where your piece settles.

SOMETHING FALLS

Anything that leaves the board goes back to the **supply**.

The card you revealed goes onto your **penalty pile**, turned to the level you announced.

GAME END

The game ends when the **deck** and the **market** are empty and every player is out of cards.

Scored fan minus **penalty pile**. Highest total wins.