The Hidden Story of A Village

A game about collecting and revealing stories.

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Abstract

It is a 2~4 players game. You are workers cleaning up an abandoned post office that will be replaced by Walmart in the near future. During cleaning, you find letters that have not been sent out, so you start to read them and try to reveal their past by connecting the letters into stories.

Materials

72 mail cards, letter side is the front
15 event cards
7 ending cards
1 first-player token (the seal token)
4 carts
4 recycling bins

RULES
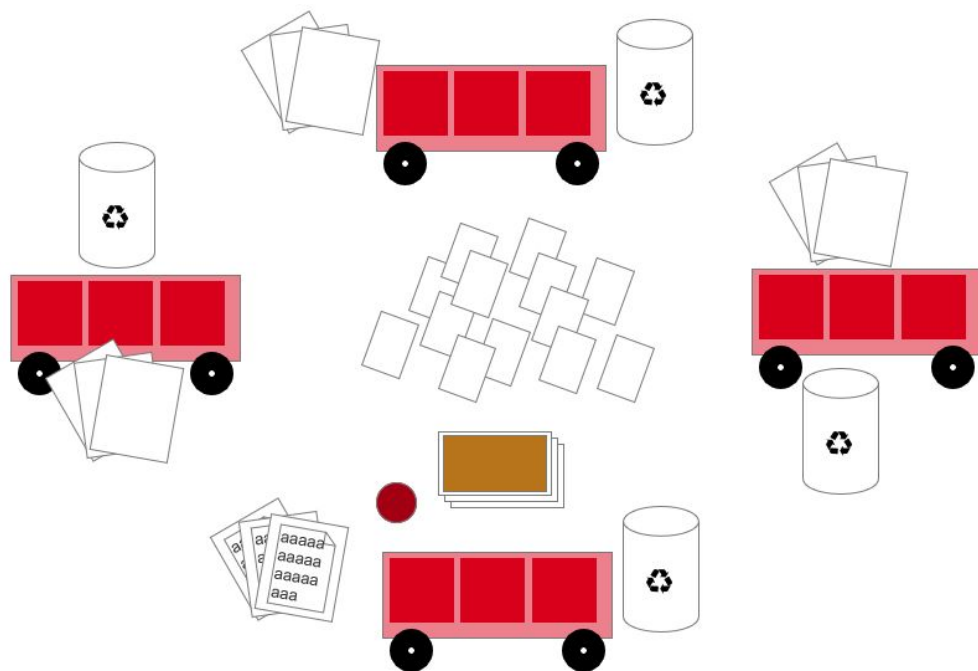
Setup

Every player starts with 3 random letter cards in hand. The letter cards in hand are called a hand deck.
Every player has 1 cart with 3 empty story slots.
Every player has 1 recycling bin.
Every player has 1 sealed pile.

Spread out the rest mail cards face down on the table.
Start with any player, then play in turn clockwise around the circle.

Gameplay
One round that goes through all players is called a day. At the beginning of each day, put the first-player token in front of the first player, this token shows who starts his/her turn the first in this day. Pass the token to the next player clockwise at the beginning of the next day.
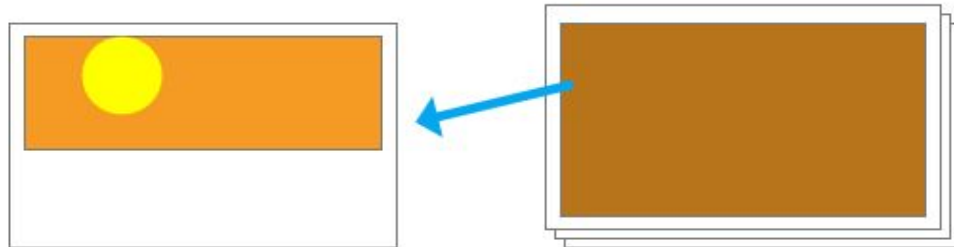
1. The player with the first-player token reveals one event card, and all of you do as what the event card tells you.

2. Turns start from the first player. In your turn, you perform the following two actions in a custom order:
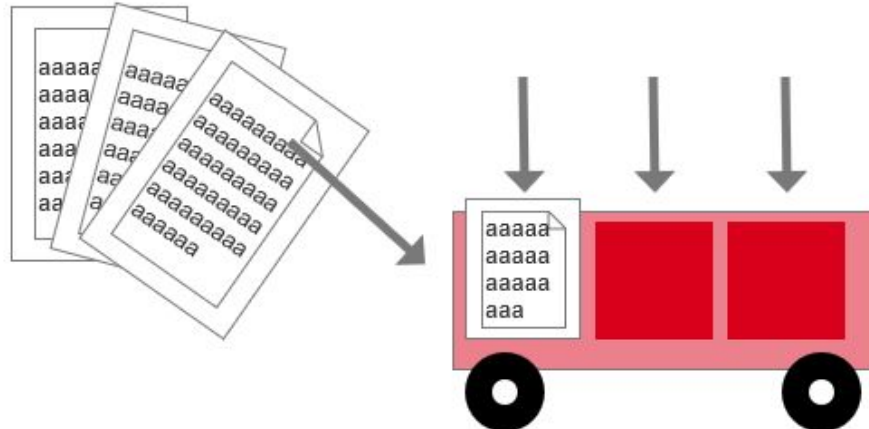
   Place: Put your letter cards from your hand deck into your story slot on the table. The letter cards that you think related to each other can be put in a queue into one slot. You only have 3 story slots at the same time, if the number of queues exceeds, you must choose a whole queue of cards and discard them. Table cards cannot be returned, nor can they be merged or exchanged from one queue to another.
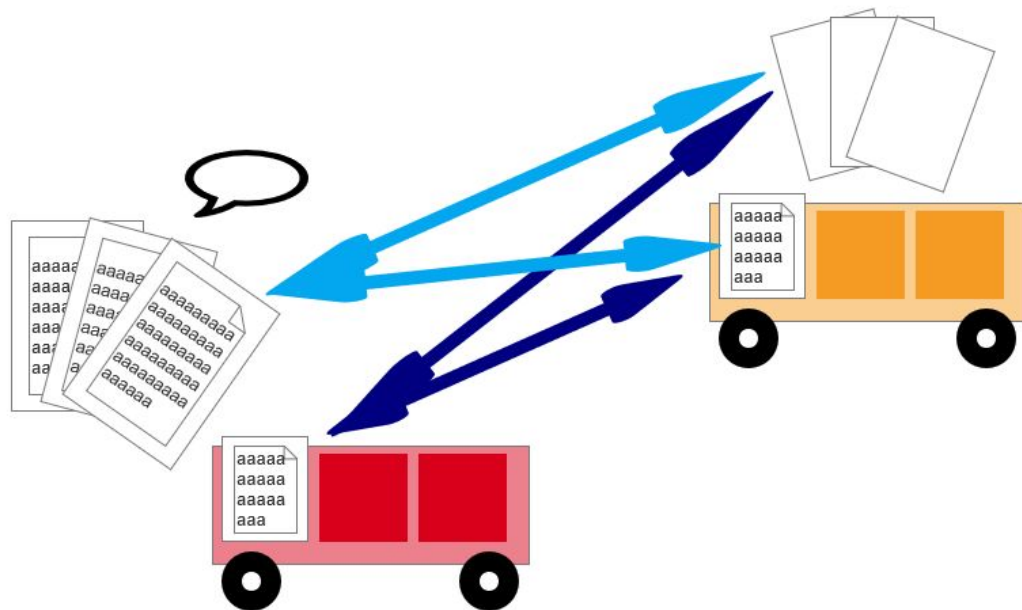
Trade: Exchange any card you have with any players. If you get a card from another player's hand deck, you should put it into your hand deck; If you get a card from another player's story slot, you should also put it into a queue in your story slot; And vice versa.
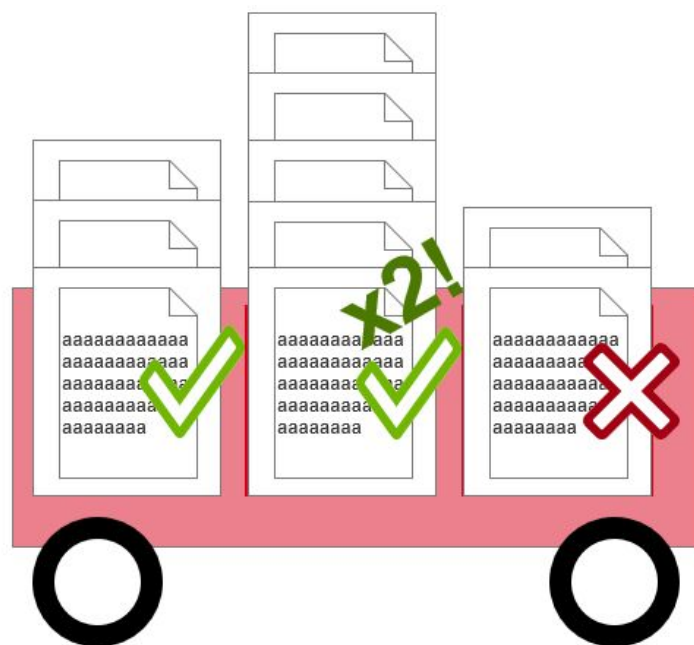
3. **Seal**(optional): If you have a queue of 3-5 letter cards in one story slot, you can choose to seal the story: tell other players about each letter you collect and the whole story of them, other players will decide if it makes sense or not. If it makes sense as a story, you can seal this queue as a story. Every sealed story is placed face-up in front of you. You cannot trade, discard or take back the letter cards from a sealed story.

4. **Draw** two cards from the letter card pile in the middle. You can have at most 5 letter cards at hand at the same time; If the number will exceed the limit after you draw, you must discard the corresponding number of letter cards before you draw new ones. (For example, if the number will turn 7 after you draw new letter cards, you will have to discard 2 letter cards first before you draw.)
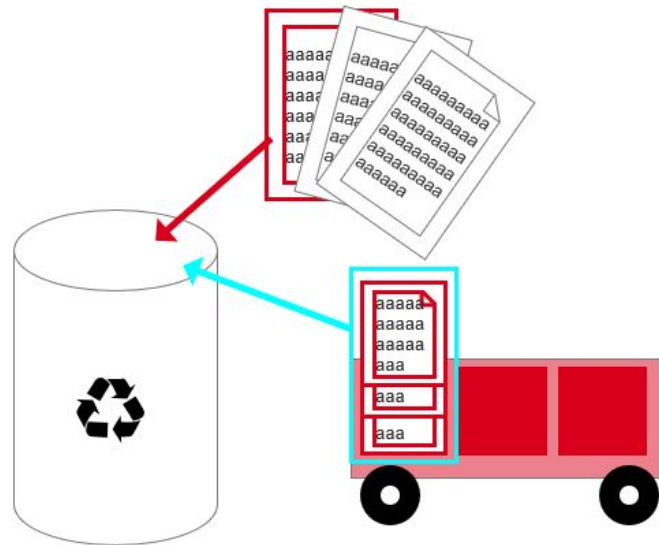
5. **Discard**: Put the letter cards that you want to discard into your own recycling bin. Discarded cards can't be viewed, traded, returned, or re-arranged into a story queue. Aside from reaching the maximum number of letter cards in hand deck, you can also choose to discard at any time during your turn.

6. End Turn. The next player starts his/her turn. End day if all of you have played a turn, and pass the first-player token to the next player clockwise, unless there is a special event.

Ending
When all the letter cards in the middle are taken, the game enters the final round.
Get your ending cards according to the stories you collected: you get the ending card of the character who you collect the most letter cards about. You may read them out to others.

PLAYTEST LOGS AND FEEDBACK

10.29.2019
      in-group playtest
Feedback:
1) It's hard to find 5 letters that can be put together as a 'story' in a linear storyline.

10.31.2019
      in-group playtest
Changes:
- mix the storyline with each other
- take away some less crucial letters (letters that do not affect the story)

Feedback:
1) The new story feels good, however, that may be because playtesters are the designers. Playtesters outside the group are needed.

11.04.2019
      short playtest (Jingyi Julia Rosaita Lu), did not reach the end
Changes:
- add bonus mission cards for players in story pile
- add more anonymous letters that can connect to any story

Feedback:
1) The bonus mission cards seem not necessary. Reasons as follows:
   a) They belong to letters but do not fit in the story, thus making players jump out of the game.
   b) The mission itself is hard to achieve.
2) About the in-game storyline:
   a) People like letters with names better and want to find out the complete story.
   b) Anonymous letters make trading harder.
   c) Letters and characters that connect with each other should be kept within a certain range. Anonymous letters with neither enough content nor enough connection with the main story should better be removed.
   d) For anonymous letters that lost their names, part of the name (for example the initial letter of the word) should be kept to give the player enough clue.
3) About the event card between days:
   a) Weaken or remove the "Caught a Flu" event. The time to finish one round is relatively long, being unable to participate because of an event card will make players feel they are completely kicked outside of the game.
4) About how we describe the rule:
   a) Jingyi recommends telling the backstory (tell players they are workers cleaning up a postoffice) before starting the game so that players can get immersive.

b) Julia hopes the backstory of the post office will not affect the playthrough too much. It feels good currently though. The preface should not be too long, or players might get distracted.

11.05.2019
critique (Eric)

Changes:
- remove bonus mission cards
- remove more anonymous letters

Feedback:
- 4 players might be too many
- there's a gap between a large amount of mechanics and the open ending
- new players may not be able to keep track of the stories
- players may not care about others' stories
- possible solutions:
    - secret cards that prove a secret
    - satisfying endings about the story content
    - players set endings for each other
    - envelops with endings
    - end after end

11.05.2019
in-class playtest (Stephen, Varun, Harry, Steven)

Feedback:
- rules need to be explained more clearly
- need a longer goal: for example, to reveal the characters' relationship
- let players use other players' published stories?