

Volcanic Treasure

Explore, collect, and build to find the lost relic at the top!

Volatile Team

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Luke Lepkowski

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Summary

A group of foolhardy explorers have accidentally blown up an ancient and artifact-filled temple whilst looting it. This mythical temple so happens to be placed above an active volcano! Now with both the seismic activity and the random explosions happening all around, the temple is shifting through the lava. You just have to take one more artifact before you leave... Use your wits and the tiles to outsmart and trap your opponents. Ready your rope, hold onto the ground beneath your feet and grab some artifacts.

History, Antecedents and Related Games

Volcanic Treasure's primary mechanic, where any tiles that the player steps off of disappear, is found in many games, including the board game *Isolation*. In addition, the ability to "collect" these tiles and place them in later turns resembles inventory and building systems in grid-based survival games, such as *Minecraft*.

For navigation, a hexagonal grid is used in the game because each adjacent tile is the same distance away, allowing for simpler movement. For this reason, hexagonal grids have found their place in numerous games involving navigation, including the *Heroscape* games. Also, *Volcanic Treasure*'s mechanic of vertically traversing up and down tiles is one of the core mechanics in the board game *Santorini*.

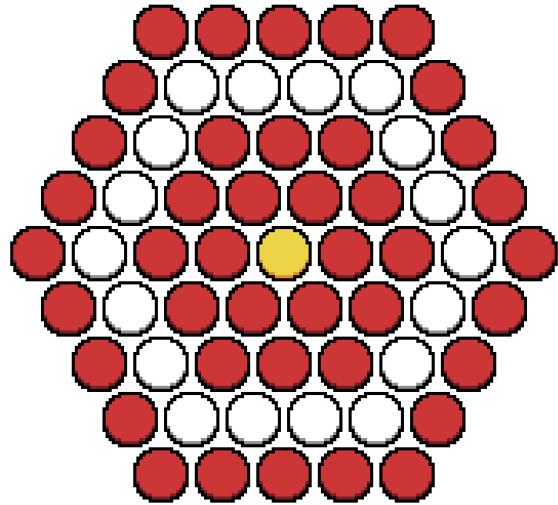
Lastly, lost South American civilizations and the movie culture created around them have served as crucial design references for the game. The exploration, treasures, and hidden perils of *Indiana Jones* and other homages to 30's adventure serials significantly influence *Volcanic Treasure*'s theme and setting.

Gameplay & Set-up

The goal of the game is to reach the treasure before any of the other players do. The treasure itself is located on the highest pillar that players must climb towards. In addition, powerups can be used to alter the board state by shifting how everyone interacts with the path to the treasure.

When setting up the board, a minimum of two tiles should be placed above the used guide markers on the board, unless specified against in the instructions for the mode of play chosen. The only other expectation to the two-tile placement on the board is that the treasure's pillar is in the direct center on the yellow marker. The treasure pillar should be a minimum of three tiles above the average tile height. The board has two modes of play: Compact and Open. Compact mode has tiles placed as far as the white tile markers on the board, and none on the final red hexagon ring. This mode makes for a closer, faster, and more restrictive game. Compact mode runs at around 8 minutes of playtime with two people. Open mode uses all the board space with the exception of the corners of the outermost hexagon, which uses only one tile height compared to the rest of the open tiles using two. Open mode allows for more strategy and player interactions on the map as they go for tiles. An open mode game with three people can run for 30 minutes. Player tokens can be set on any of the outer hexagonal corners; they can be adjacent or equally spaced around the board.

Each turn the player can take two actions: an action can be used on moving, placing a tile on the board, or using a power-up. When a character moves, the tile previously beneath their feet is claimed and removed from the board to be utilized by a later action. There is also a limit to height that can be vertically scaled when moving to an adjacent tile, which is that the player can move only one tile up when traversing. So, if the desired adjacent tile is two tiles above where the player is currently, they cannot move there from their current tile. Tiles can be placed anywhere besides on a tile occupied by a player or the treasure. The "taking" power-up allows for the player to take a tile from almost anywhere on the board. A tile cannot be taken from under the treasure, or from a tile only one above the lava guide layer. For more details, see the rule book in the appendix.

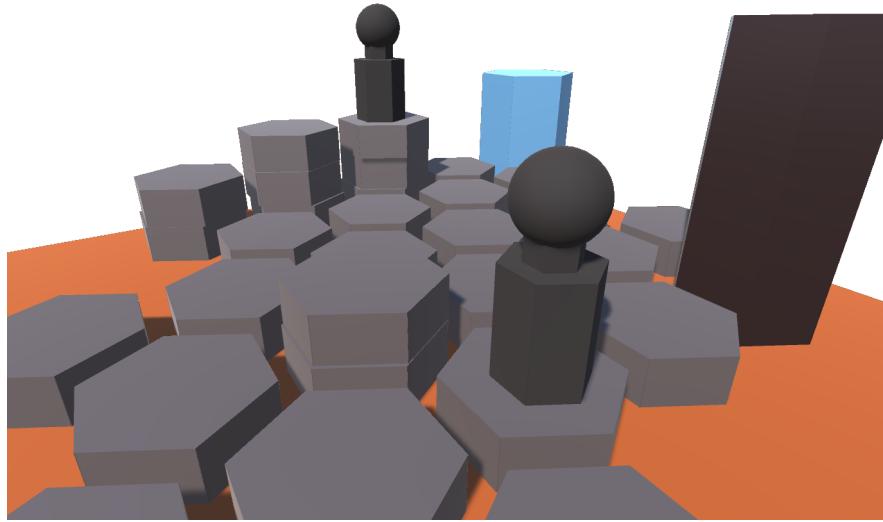




Mechanics

Volcanic Treasure has a basic economy based on resource management, and the most crucial driver of the game's resource management (and one of the most crucial to balance) is how players collect and use tiles as the game progresses. Initially, players could move twice but could only place once per turn; this quickly proved to be an infeasible design because players would constantly be accumulating tiles as the game progressed. Currently, this issue is resolved by allowing players to move twice or place two tiles per turn so that players neither accumulate nor run out of tiles as a net result.

This current game design allows for several intriguing strategies. At the start of the game, players tend to focus on resource collection by circling the outside of the map. Later, the focus gradually shifts to more offensive strategies, including using all of the collected tiles to build up to the center or even to block players who are getting too close to the treasure. This introduces an element of risk and reward because players must choose when to switch strategies and use which actions (and must predict the actions of other players to choose the most opportune times). Additionally, there are various creative ways to utilize power-ups or even other players to win the game. In particular, players have been observed strategically forcing others to block a potential winner in such a way that they are set up to win later on. Strategy, foresight, and skill, rather than chance, are most prominent when playing the game.



This concept art demonstrates what kind of board may be produced over time by the game mechanics, as players build staircases toward the treasure.

Narrative & Theming

You're a world-renowned treasure hunter with many accomplished feats under your belt. You recently caught wind of an ancient artifact held in a small temple in South America. Worse yet, you hear of those ruffian philanthropists sending their own men to try and retrieve it. As a veteran treasure hunter and preservationist, you feel it's only natural for you to secure this treasure. Sadly when you get to the small mountain village, you see the disarray and abandonment this village has faced during the treasure hunt. Explosion holes, unattended crates of dynamite, gadgets strewn around the perimeter, half-eaten fruits and worse, a sad pile of discarded leather hats. You have to put a stop to this urgently!

As you brave the village's stone temple you feel the earth shift beneath you. Suddenly everything is rising and falling with no obvious reason. The room is getting hotter and you can see your competition is inching in from behind. Braving further into the temple, the glistening beauty of the treasure fills up the room. Then the glow of the floor reveals that this whole village was in fact on top of a volcano the entire time, and the room is falling and rising out of the lava constantly. Now, you've just gotta grab that treasure before you get out of this death trap. Ready your rope, hold onto the ground beneath your feet, and grab some artifacts.

With so many adventures moving around in a heated room, it's no wonder there is so much chaos and shifting of the stone pillars. What's worse is that people are grabbing on for dear life to any and all ground around them. Some rave tacticians are

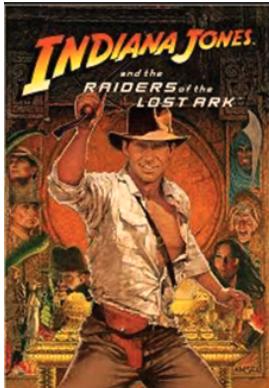
taking chunks of the columns to use as stairs to the treasures, while others seem to be praying to a higher power for aid. Yet, through it all the treasure remains perched above all unaffected. The treasure and its monolithic tower are just beneath the ceiling, looming over all, taunting. If only your planned route stayed in formation but as if by the act of a cruel god, your plans are foiled time and time again. There's no stopping now, you must get that treasure, ready an explosive to foil your adversaries route and hope that your path will hold. Be wary pride comes before the fall so plan carefully to get what's yours!

Visual Design



Color palette for the game, including gold, yellow, gray, dark red, and red. Exact colors can be viewed [here](#).

Mood Board



Volcanic Treasure



Appendix

The appendix is a separate document attached as the file VolatileTeam_DD2_appendix.pdf

Includes:

- rules document
- 4 playtest session documents

Volcanic Treasure

2 - 4 players

ages: 9 to 99 - playtime: 14 minutes to 30 minutes

Getting Started:

Objective - Be the first to grab the lost treasure at the center of the map.

Decide on the first player, then turn's follow a clockwise order. (The player to the left of you goes next).

Summary

A group of foolhardy explorers have accidentally blown up an ancient and artifact-filled temple whilst looting it. This mythical temple so happens to be placed above an active volcano! Now with both the seismic activity and the random explosions happening all around, the temple is shifting through the lava. You just have to take one more artifact before you leave... Use your wits and the tiles to outsmart and trap your opponents. Ready your rope, hold onto the ground beneath your feet and grab some artifacts.

Set-up:

The board has two play modes, compact and open. When playing, each valid tile should have two tiles placed above the marker tiles on the board. {have players place from inside out to avoid placing in a hole issues}

The yellow tile at the center represents where the treasure's tower will be placed. The tower should be above the rest of the tiles by 2 tiles minimum (so a height of 4 in total at the center). Most other tiles should be placed 2 tile's above the recommended guide tiles. Players can be placed in any unoccupied corner as their starting position.

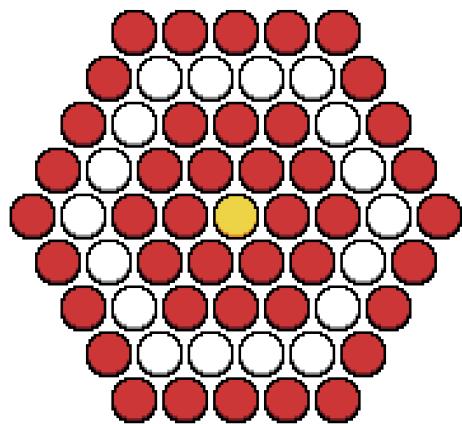
Compact Mode - {using only up to and including the white hex boundary}



Open Mode - {use all the board, the final corners hex are are only one tall}



A 2D representation of the marker baseboard for the tiles to be placed on:



Rules:

Actions

- **Move** - Move your character to one unoccupied adjacent space AND collect the tile that you just stepped off of to your backpack. Each move is to an adjacent tile by the player. They may move vertically one tile above where the player is before moving, and descend down any amount. Don't touch the lava on the bottom row. See **Valid Moves** below for a visual confirmation.
- **Place** - Place a tile from your backpack on any unoccupied space on the board (not on top of players or treasures). You may not make a tower larger than the treasure tower at the center, if the treasure tower height decreases, any towers following the old height may stay, but new towers must follow the new guidelines. See **Tile Placement** below.
- **Powerup** - Remove a tile from **anywhere on the board** (this excludes taking from under the treasure, but you can take from under a player) and add it to your backpack. *You get a new powerup token every few turns.* The number of turns is based off of the player count plus on turns (IE 3 people playing would have a 4 turn wait between getting powerup tokens). The powerups are depicted by a player holding a clear bead to show how many power ups they have.

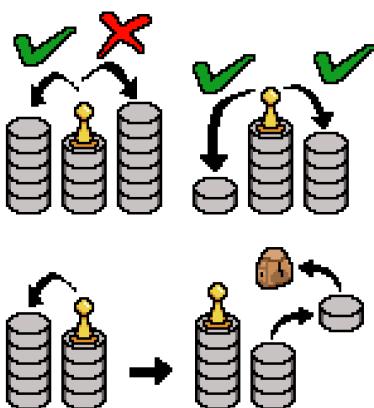
On your turn, you can utilize **two** of the following actions (or you can do the same action twice):

- **Move** to an adjacent spot (and therefore collect tiles you step off).
- **Place** a tile on a valid unoccupied space on the board
- Use a **powerup** (in any order).

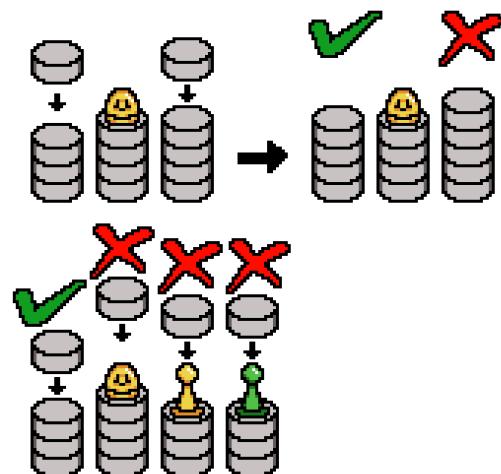
These can be done in any order

Action Illustrations:

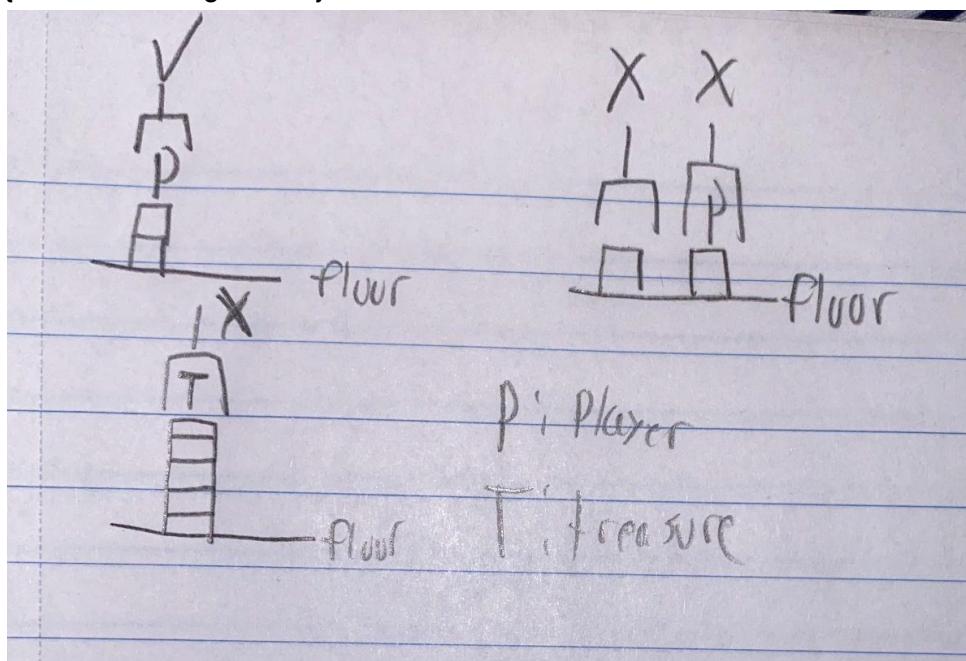
Valid Moves -



Tile Placement -



Power-up:
{add actual images later}



Parts List:

- 1 hex base board
- 119 tiles
- 1 clear bead (treasure)
- 23 clear beads (power-up markers)
- 6 sticks (tile pick-up)
- Hard-tak (tile pick-up)
- 3-4 pawns (player pieces)

Survey QR Link:



Link to View Rules on Device:



Volcanic Treasure

Playtest Form

(make a copy of this form before editing)

Test Coordinator: Quintan Gerharsdstein

Tester names:

Gino Leone

Rahmel Church

Total time spent:

- *Learning rules:* 7 minutes
- *Setting up game:* 4 minutes
- *Playing game:* 15 minutes

Were there any alternate interpretations of the rules or arguments regarding how the game should be played?

- Not really sure what the game play modes meant / the limits to placing for them
- Wasn't sure on when they would get power-up at first
- rules had no indicator to where the player should start the game
- the actions were clucky to understand
- what is the backpack?

What strategies did testers seem to use?

Make a zig-zagging stairway on one side of the tower and use the power todig under from someone

How many testers used power-ups, and what situations were they used in?

Sometimes to just spite the other player, at the end the power-upwas used to make a power play to get to the treasure. The game had the power up refreshing every three turns so the players could hold multiple and then use multiple in one turn.

When did the winner become evident, and what strategy did they use to win?

There is a board concept in tic-tac-toe called forced loss where there are two options for the player to win and the opponent cannot block both in one turn. Out of the two games, this was how the player won both times, they had the correct distance to make it to the to and had two routes so if one was foiled, they would take the other.

How did the other testers feel about losing?

They lamented about seeing their plan too late to make action.

Did everyone seem engaged in the game?

Yes, it was a rocky start at first but 4 turns in they were both looking intently at the oard.

Overall feedback received:

- Rules were hard to understand

-the pieces are hard to grab and look at to tell evivation at a glance

Other notes:

After this rules were adjusted after this playtest for better description of the powers and how to use them.

Volcanic Treasure

Playtest Form

Playtest 3 (10/21/2022)

Test coordinator: Luke

Tester names: James, Zach

Total time spent:

- *Learning rules:* 3 min
- *Setting up game:* 1 min
- *Playing game:* 6 min for first round, 25 min for second round (estimated)

Were there any alternate interpretations of the rules or arguments regarding how the game should be played?

- Players read the descriptions of actions but did not read the part about using 2 per turn and just assumed they could only use 1.
- Players were not sure if they could have multiple power-ups at once. (They played assuming they could accumulate multiple power-ups and use them later.)
- It was unclear whether power-ups would be gained on the 1st, 4th, 7th turns, etc. or on the 3rd, 6th, 9th turns, etc.
- Players asked if they could go on the same spaces as other players, but they naturally decided not to because it would be difficult to fit multiple players on the same space.
- There was some confusion over lava/base layer being different colors.
 - “Is that the lava? It’s white.”
- Initially, there was a little confusion over whether you can go on lava, but natural intuition cleared that up for the most part.

What strategies did testers seem to use?

- Initially, testers would circle around the outside of the map before going into the middle to try to tower up. From this point forth, turns would be spent in two ways. If another player was getting close to the tower, they would block them. Otherwise, they would collect tiles and try to tower up themselves.
- Players can go two tiles below the treasure (making it look as if they cannot step up to the top) but then can use their powerup to lower the treasure and their move to step up and win on their next turn.

How many testers used power-ups, and what situations were they used in?

- Power-ups were rarely used except once in the first game (which left the player defenseless and let the other player win).

When did the winner become evident, and what strategy did they use to win?

- In the first game, the loser used his power-up earlier, leaving the other player to just climb to the top. Blocking is not always a viable strategy if the player is only one tile away from the tower.
- Winning often came as a result of other players not realizing that the winner was so close to winning. This adds a strategy (of watching other players) to the game, but it also made winning feel somewhat random because it depended on other players not paying attention to the winner.

How did the other testers feel about losing?

- Losers felt somewhat flustered because they did not realize that the other player was so close to winning. Much of the time, losing could have been prevented if they had noticed, so they felt frustrated or unsatisfied. The end of the game often comes as a surprise, which could have also played into these feelings.
- I also think that the feeling of losing partially came from the fact that the winner was already evident when the loser had to play their turn, forcing them to make a move that they knew would be useless.

Did everyone seem engaged in the game?

- Both players seemed engaged overall, although there seems to be some downtime in between turns after players are done planning their next move.

Overall feedback received:

- Good game but unwieldy prototype items.
- Suggestions:
 - Turn counter for gaining power-ups
 - Ability to heighten tower instead of lower it
 - Smaller board in terms of numbers of spaces but each space should be larger (easier to move and pick up)

Other notes:

- There was a funny interaction in the 3 player game, where player 1 set up player 3 to win and just trusted that player 2 would block.
- Used chess pieces for players in the second game

Volcanic Treasure

Playtest Form

Test coordinator: Quintan

Tester names:

Crash test 10/24

Total time spent:

*time pressed, i had to cliff notes it -Q

- *Learning rules:* 2.5 minutes
- *Setting up game:* 3.5 minutes (i helped)
- *Playing game:* ~5 minutes

Were there any alternate interpretations of the rules or arguments regarding how the game should be played?

I gave them my interpretation (ie, the action options, 2 actions, get to the center and moving takes the old tiles under them) I was also doing rules during set-up so time may vary

What strategies did testers seem to use?

(compact mode)

Rush center, use gathered tiles to make tall towers then make a stepping stone tower to make it higher so the power-up cannot take form both large towers. Use you power-up to stop someone else building step by step

How many testers used power-ups, and what situations were they used in?

In the 5 turns, all 4 were used, situations were described in strategies

When did the winner become evident, and what strategy did they use to win?

2 turns from win, they had two routes set up to make it to the top, both could not be disabled in time.

How did the other testers feel about losing?

Wanted to learn more of the game theory of the game to get the game states better

Did everyone seem engaged in the game?

yes

Overall feedback received:

Very quick, very simple. Maybe have more power-up options to use the token on.

Maybe make the treasure totem in the center larger 4 instead of a minimum of 2

Other notes:

They had 17 minutes total to play, so I quickly ran the process, it showed issues itself, but probably not what we are immediately looking for.

Volcanic Treasure

Playtest Form

(make a copy of this form before editing)

Test coordinator: Quintan

Tester names:

Crashtest 10/24

Total time spent:

- Learning rules: 3 minutes
- Setting up game: 3 minutes
- Playing game: 20 minutes (i think 19 rounds)

Were there any alternate interpretations of the rules or arguments regarding how the game should be played?

I had to reiterate about the vertical progression for movement

What strategies did testers seem to use?

Rush center and build up 1 (tower at 5 high) they built to 3 high. Place equal tower height. Then a placement session by all making a varying board state spiraling to make a staircase (top was at 5 height). Making paths noone else can follow then a player takes away the future path with a power-up. After 6 more turns the bridge has shifted sides. The player has made it to the end, in 2 turns out. He mostly won by holding on to tokens and letting the other players play defensively. The other two didn't have more than one token between them. There was a point where the tokens went from full defense to more strategy of leverage.

How many testers used power-ups, and what situations were they used in?

Quite a lot, one hoarded and the others used to hinder all players

When did the winner become evident, and what strategy did they use to win?

3 turns out, they made a large bridge when the others didn't have enough power-ups to stop them.

How did the other testers feel about losing?

They couldn't do too much to stop them, kinda independent

Did everyone seem engaged in the game?

Yes, it was a slog sometimes first

Overall feedback received:

Stalemate was not felt. You win based on the mistakes of those before you. The 3 turn power-up turn economy feels too often with more than two players. Exchange tiles for tokens? Make it easier to get in other people's way. Need better ways to block. Need more incentive to collect tiles. Bank extra actions? Game felt slow but not a stalemate for 2 of the 3, one was just kinda stuck at the bottom row. Still very much to force a stalemate if someone decides so. You are only really interacting with the next player with the optimal strategy. Getting your own win is a secondary win condition, the main goal is to grief. You can't make ground in the same spot, if you are losing ground from the other players. Slow strategies to use over spanning turn scapes. Hard to set up a way where you are one turn out from winning and no one can stop you. Victory felt it was due to someone else's blunder, not your strategy. Game needs another mechanic to make it a bit more complex. More than one place on the board to aim for. Allow for varied starting layouts. What if win conditions were more complicated? Points? A way to allow for diverging gameplay? Special tiles for each player. Mechanics are kinda at odds with the goal. Would like to see digging down to be an offensive move. Points would allow for more player freedom. If there is a direct single win condition, vultering becomes a better option. Digging is the central mechanic, building around it more. More strategy is desired though some form of extra mechanic. Hidden information could help, points could help with splitting objectives.

Other notes:

- Powerups need to scale with player # (maybe player # + 1), currently too much for many players
- Hardtack under pawns
- Turn tracker for the cooldown
- Pawn color
- add a skip action if they don't want to do anything (nothing is always a good option)
Keep tower, but they have to dig to the tile at the bottom (single yellow on guide board)???
- very simplistic, add something now to give the gameplay a kick