Labyrinthian Games

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Welcome to Diretow, a town currently contested by the rival merchant guilds Tic-carrion and Tac-moreau. You and your opponent have each joined one of these guilds and have been tasked with solidifying your guild's hold on the town. Buy property, hire mercenaries, and watch out for the dragon in the race to control the town!

STARTING AND FINISHING THE GAME

Each player takes the 24 claim tokens and the 3 mercenary tokens of their given color and sets them to the side. Place the game board between the two players, then decide who goes first by rolling the die. Whoever rolls higher goes first.

The game board is split into four 3x3 districts, coming together to form one 6x6 town. The winner is decided when a player claims a line of 6 cells, whether they be in a row, a column, or a diagonal, or when a player claims a line of 3 cells – row, column, or diagonal – in any two districts.
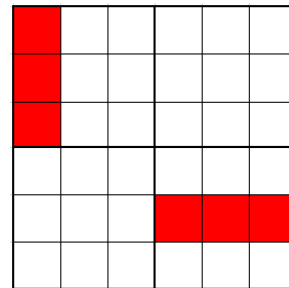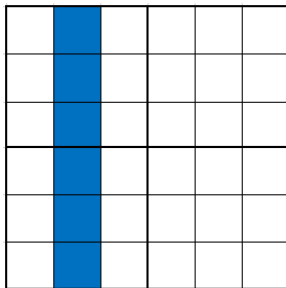
THE TURN

Each turn is split into two phases – claiming and hiring. During the claiming phase, the current player must place one of their claim tokens on any empty cell in the town. Then, they must roll the die. Depending on the result of the die, the player will then either place one of their mercenary tokens or perform a designated action. The results of the die are shown in this table.

| 1	2	3	4	5	6
Dragon	Knight	Thief	Guard	Politician	Assassin

THE ROLL OF THE DIE

THE DRAGON: On a roll of 1, the player must roll the die again. This second roll corresponds to one of the six rows of the game board, 1 being the top row and 6 being the bottom. The indicated row is attacked by the dragon, and all claims, both those of the current player and the opponent, are removed.
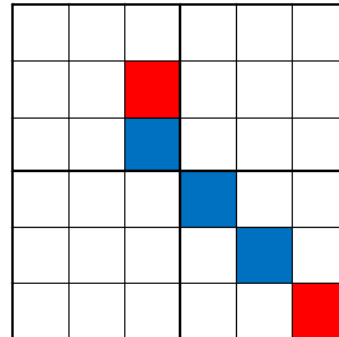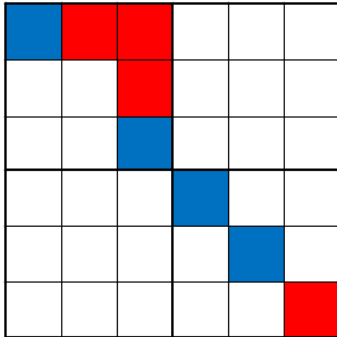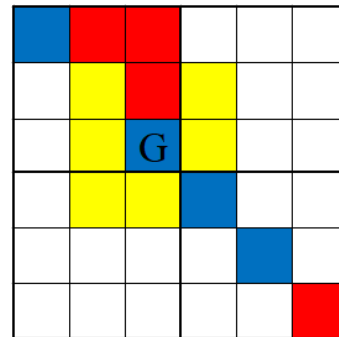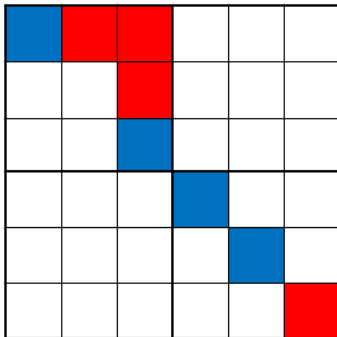
THE KNIGHT: On a roll of 2, the current player may hire and place their knight. The knight is the mercenary token indicated by the shield. The knight may only be placed in a cell that the current player has already claimed, its token being placed on top of the claim token that is already there. If the knight is placed on the board, and a dragon attack occurs in the knight's row, the knight protects against the dragon's fire, and no claims are removed.
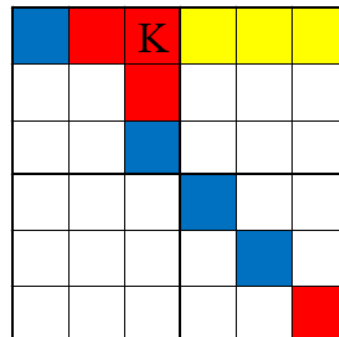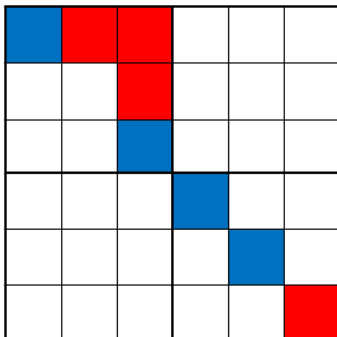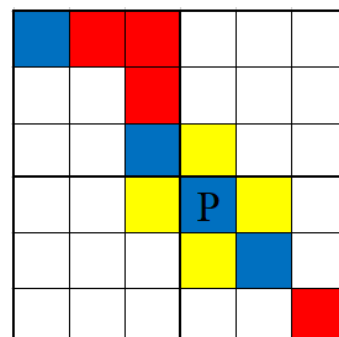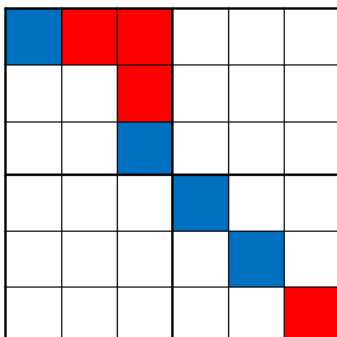
THE THIEF: On a roll of 3, the current player may select any cell claimed by their opponent. The opponent's claim token is removed, and a new claim token is then placed by the current player. The thief can not steal a claim that is currently occupied by a mercenary.
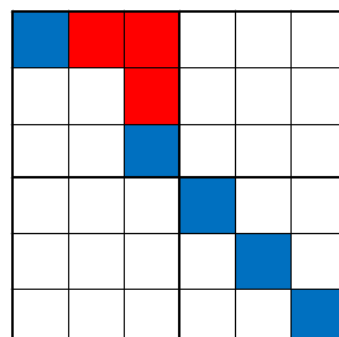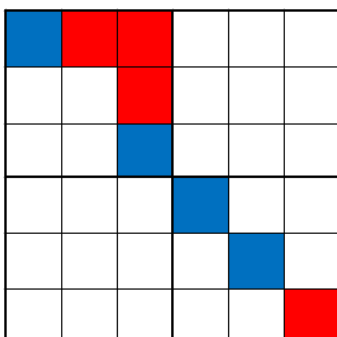
THE GUARD: On a roll of 4, the current player may hire and place their guard. The guard is the mercenary token indicated by the club. The guard may only be placed in a cell that the current player has already claimed, its token being placed on top of the claim token that is already there. If the guard is placed on the board, and the thief attempts to steal a claim from a cell that is orthogonally or diagonally adjacent to the guard, the thief is stopped, and no theft occurs.

THE POLITICIAN: On a roll of 5, the current player may hire and place their politician. The politician is the mercenary token indicated by the scroll. The politician may only be placed in a cell that the current player has already claimed, its token being placed on top of the claim token that is already there. If the politician is placed on the board, the opposing player may not claim the cells directly above, below, left, or right of the politician.

THE ASSASSIN: On a roll of 6, the current player may target any of their opponents currently claimed cells or placed mercenaries. The targeted token is removed from the board. The assassin can not remove a claim that a mercenary currently sits on.
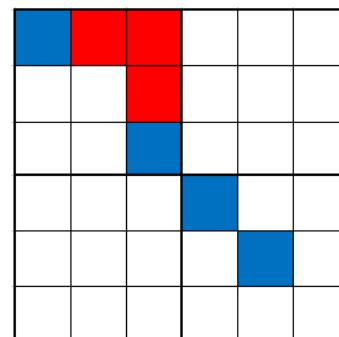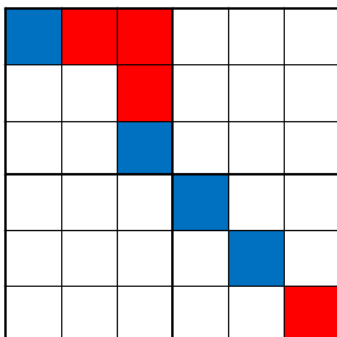
AN EXAMPLE OF PLAY
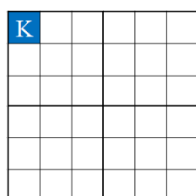
Tic (Red) and Tac (Blue) sit down to play. They roll the die to see who goes first. Tic rolls a 3 and Tac rolls a 6, so Tac goes first. Tac makes their first claim and rolls the die, resulting in a 2, so the blue Knight is placed in the only available space.
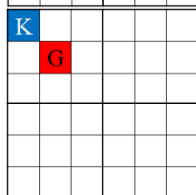
Tic then takes their turn, making a claim and rolling the die, resulting in a 4. This results in the placement of the red Guard in the only red space.
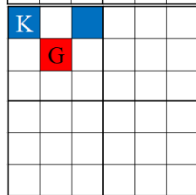
On Tac's next turn, they roll a 3, the thief. However, the red Guard prevents the red space from being turned blue, and the thief has no effect.
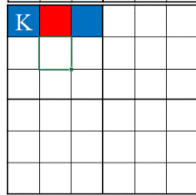
On Tic's second turn, they roll a 1, prompting a dragon attack. Tic rolls again, resulting in a 2. As a result, the dragon burns through the second row, removing the red space and the red Guard.
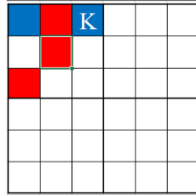
Tac makes a claim and rolls another 2, moving the blue Knight. Tic, then makes a claim and rolls a 3, allowing red to steal a blue space.
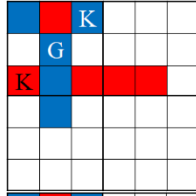
A couple of turns later, Tic rolls another dragon attack, this time on row 3. However, the red Knight is in row 3. This means that the dragon's attack is thwarted, and no pieces are destroyed.
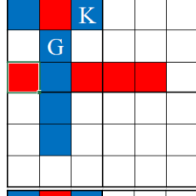
On the next turn, Tac rolls a 6, the assassin, and chooses to remove the red Knight from the board.
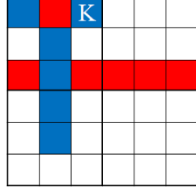
Tic then makes a claim, achieving the first three-in-a-row in a district of the game, and rolls a 6, choosing to remove the blue Guard.

Unfortunately for Tic, on the next turn, Tac makes a claim and rolls a 3 allowing blue to steal a cell and achieve six-in-a-row.
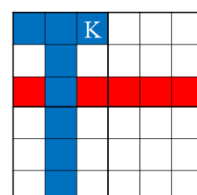
SAMPLE OF THE ART

The pieces the players use are below.
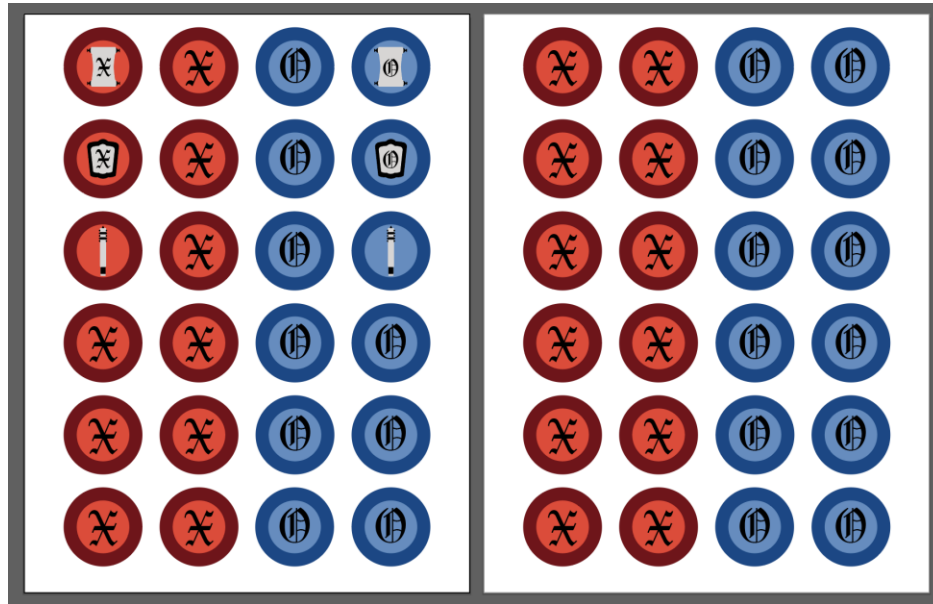
The game board is styled as a map.

The town consists of 5 areas: Zewrixhelian, a trading market; Gyldtra, the mining quarry for ore; Feorubam, the farm town that consists of the working and poorer class citizens; Fintascwer, the fishing harbour; Smicoaþe, the smithing, forge area where the richer folk live (surprisingly).

PLAYTESTING AND ADJUSTMENTS

Our initial concept consisted of a 3x3 grid with only three possible dice rolls: the Knight, the Thief, and the Dragon. In this initial version, the Knight and Dragon each had effects that lasted a specific duration, until the start of the next turn for the Knight and the end of the next turn for the Dragon. The thief also operated through a contested die roll.

During our playtesting, we discovered a number of issues with this version of the game. The contested die roll involved with the thief also meant that it could feel dissatisfying to roll the thief, as it could just as likely be a wasted roll as a beneficial one. By removing the contested die roll, the thief is more consistently useful, increasing player enjoyment.

The set duration as opposed to permanent placement forced the players to keep track of too many variables, and it was common for the players to forget to remove the effects at the intended times, limiting the availability of play. To remedy this, we classified the "mercenary" pieces as either permanent tokens or instant effects. This helped avoid the need to keep track of as many things, making the game more accessible.

With the introduction of permanent pieces, however, the effect of the knight, which prevented dragon damage and placement, became much too powerful, especially given the fact that it protected multiple cells within the grid. In an attempt to remedy this, we first limited the knight's influence to only its own cell, however this lessened the knight's power to an insignificant level. In order to balance this, we expanded the grid to a 6x6. This allowed the pieces with an area of influence - the Knight and the Dragon - to maintain their effect on multiple spaces of the grid.

With the larger grid, we found that a larger selection of pieces was needed in order to prevent one player from winning too quickly. We first attempted to require six cells be claimed in any given row, column, or diagonal, but found that this led to large portions of the board remaining untouched while the two players fought over a smaller portion. By expanding the number of winning combinations, requiring the players to be the first to win two out of four possible Tic-Tac-Toes, we found that players were more willing to play in districts other than the one the other player had already begun claiming, in order to lock down their own area of the board.

With more options available, we also decided to expand the number of potential die rolls, making full use of the six sides of our game die. In order to have enough effects, we removed the area denial abilities from the Knight and the Dragon, and made this effect into its own piece, the Politician. We also introduced the Guard as a means of balancing the Thief, which offers the exclusive means of claiming two cells in a given turn. We also introduced the Assassin, a piece capable of dealing with the three permanent mercenary tokens, allowing a player who is behind the means to loosen their opponents grip on a district.