

CLUE



Games, More Than Trifles

Your next move will influence whether your opportunities will be more random or strategic.

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“Victorious warriors win first and then go to war,
while defeated warriors go to war first and then seek to win.”

— Sun Tzu

I recently spoke with a publisher who was interested in publishing my book if I paid him US\$4,000. I asked him for his references what I'd get for this, and he said, “Listen, spots are filling fast. This is a great opportunity. I'd like to have you on-board. It's up to you. Let me know what you want to do.”

It didn't take me long to say to myself, “If he's asking for money from me, then he's coming to me for a job. Should I hire a job applicant who said to me, “Hurry, your opportunity is fading fast.” From that point of view, the proper response is a simple no.

I emphasize the simple nature of this response. Do not try to negotiate with someone who is taking advantage of you. To do so is to fail to realize that you are fighting a losing battle. Win first, then start fighting.

The Two Extremes: Random vs. Determined

Games at either end of the game spectrum are uninteresting. The random game might look interesting because of its novelty, graphics, or theme, but it is won at random and involves no skill. The deterministic game might also look interesting, for similar reasons, but it plays to a predetermined end and can be won, if it can be won, by following a formula. Games are interesting when they reflect something of ourselves, which neither random nor deterministic games do.

Most of the games people play are made interesting by combining some human skill or flaw. That could be limited memory, calculating ability, understanding, or communication. The game then becomes one of remembering, calculating, or managing information. In most games, we are playing with ourselves in a way that amplifies something in us.

We call strategic games “serious,” and we see them as ranking our ability. Chess and poker are serious games, as are school and work. Serious games have elements of randomness and determinism built into them. But the fundamental thing that makes a game a game is that it can be scored and won.

Fair and Balanced Games

We can talk about how fair or balanced a game is after we've identified the players and specified the goals. In a competitive game, fair means players have equal powers and equal chances, while balanced means powers and chances are identical. Most multi-person games are balanced because players have identical chances and goals. Players' powers are considered not to be identical, and the game becomes a machine by which the players' powers can be measured. In most cases, we celebrate the winner without knowing or caring much about what their actual powers are.

Balanced games are fair, but fair games don't need to be balanced. Games between children and adults are usually unbalanced, but we can make them feel fair by adding a handicap. We can measure balance, but we cannot measure fairness.

I am particularly interested in unbalanced games because, when they're fair, they can generate

outcomes you don't expect. A game with no clear path to success will require the players to add something new. For example, a competition to design a solar-powered car or a better airplane can generate unexpected novelty.

Interest and Novelty

As curious humans, it's novelty that keeps our interest. As a species with low intelligence and mental energy, we dislike too much novelty. We don't like games that require us to constantly rethink our position. We prefer to think of games compulsively, finding interest in randomness rather than structure.

For instance, sports betting is played largely as a game of randomness with a thin veneer of information. Playing a betting game intelligently involves processing a vast amount of information. Most people don't do this because entertainment holds a greater attraction than winning. Doing the work required to win is not entertaining.

Most board, card, and computer games have limited real novelty. They mostly interest us because we don't know the rules to win, and so we fumble around in competition. We like the theme, like building something, or we like the personal aspect of it. These are technically uninteresting but socially interesting because they generate nothing in themselves. They may foster maturity, insight, and understanding, and they might be entertaining, but this is something that the players add. Without human players, such games would be offer nothing.

Image a role playing game that was played entirely between computers. There would be a challenge in programming the computer player, but there would be little human value to be gained by watching computers play with each other. Imagine two computers playing chess. The gameplay would interest programmers, and it would interest chess players who could compare themselves to the computers, but it would have little value as a spectator sport.

The Interesting Problem

Two forces undermine the quality of games: poor design, and the requirement to succeed commercially. As in the book publishing industry, quality is not understood or agreed upon. The more complex or unusual the product, the more publishers retreat to past formulas. There is not yet any

authority on games, and what's successful in the mass market lags far behind innovation.

For a game to succeed commercially means both easy to produce and easy to play. In recent decades, games have pushed these limits, with some board games having rules that take days to learn and cost nearly \$1,000. You can make almost any game interesting if you add enough detail, but then the game becomes impossible to play.

The board game industry is uncreative. It's a hybrid of the publishing and toy industries, both of which are ruled by sales. It is like the industry for creating romance novels or Barbie dolls in that publishers prefer derivative themes.

Games could be far more interesting, but creativity exists only in narrow sectors. At card and board game trade shows, you'll find two-person operations producing innovative, low-cost ideas, and large companies producing nothing of interest.

Here is the fundamental problem: how to create an intelligent puzzle without revealing the secret ahead of time? To answer this, the game Dungeons and Dragons was one of the first to introduce a new type of player, the Dungeon Master. The Dungeon Master is an intelligent actor, a non-playing character, who applies a hidden algorithm that responded to the players. You cannot do this with dice or any random mechanism. You need either a computer or a human.



Clue

Clue is a popular game designed in 1949 by Anthony Pratt, a British solicitor's clerk. Like Monopoly, it has been released in many versions that only differ in appearance but are otherwise identical. It is a mystery-themed game with a random game mechanic. It requires attention but no skill. It rewards conversation, not strategy, and this is the source of its popularity.

While it has a crime detective theme, there is nothing detective about Clue. It is a random game played by elimination. There are six players, six weapons, and nine rooms. You're looking for the single player-weapon-room combination missing from a known list of combinations. The first person to identify it wins.

The game uses dice to foster the illusion of novelty, making different players feel they're in the lead. No one is in the lead. If all players were equally attentive, then the winner is entirely random. The dice simply shift the odds to make the game less fair.

Clue is popular as a family game because the theme is easy to understand. I picked up a version at a thrift store that had nice graphics because my son likes the game. I resolved to improve the game, and the rest of this post is what I did.

Better Than Random

Since Clue is a random game, anything that adds intelligence will improve it. Improvements come at the cost of more complexity and higher production cost. The interesting problem is how to add the least that improves it the most.

I built on the game's mystery theme by first turning it into a treasure hunt. The destination would remain the same—one of the players used one of the weapons in one of the rooms—but there would be clues hidden in the game. Discerning these would enable a player to uncover the winning combination. My “improved” version of Clue extends the board, adds more cards, and changes some rules.

I further improved the game by having it flip from a treasure hunt to a battle. Isn't this the way most novels play out? This movement of theme is what's missing in most games. There needs to be an end game.

Games become better when they become less fair, as long as this is controlled by the players and is not a prejudice of the game. If the game is unfair because “black always has the advantage,” then it's not interesting. But if one or another player gains the advantage as a reward for more careful play, then the unfairness becomes interesting.

This has become recognized over the last few decades. And while these changes are penetrating the more adaptive fields of board and computer games, which are variations of the same thing, they have not yet led to improvements in competitive games, like football, tennis, and golf, which are social models. These games of social behavior have not improved at all.

From this, we can predict that there will be new forms of team sports unlike what that exists today. Future social expectations will involve more insight and aptitude.

The insights explored here are the mechanisms of story writing, drama, and life. The speed of change is determined by the creativity of the people involved, and the environment's ability to include change. Game-playing is emerging as social art, but changes will happen first in the formal game environment.

The New Rules

To play my *New Clue*, you need to know the old Clue's rules. If you don't know them, you can read them at UltraBoardGames.com or WikiHow.com. You're basically removing some cards from a

deck, shuffling the rest, dealing them out, and playing a game where the first person who guesses what cards are missing wins.

Here are my changes. You don't need to play the game to appreciate how these changes improve the game. With these changes, the players now follow a story.

1. Each game's story can only be played once.
2. One player is the murderer in every game, but doesn't know it until the end.
3. The game board is extended so that there are more ways to get to get around. You can now escape if necessary.
4. Each player has an alibi that they reveal to other players. Some are better than others.
5. Locations hide clues.
6. Players still use the old mechanism to guess the murderer-weapon-room combination. In the *New Clue*, they are led to this combination more quickly and reasonably.
7. The winner is not the person who reveals the winning combination until the perpetrator is caught or surrenders. If you turn out to be the perpetrator, then you must try to escape.

This Game is Better

These changes make Clue better for two reasons. First, the game is less fair; the thinking person gains the advantage. And second, the game has an endgame for which you cannot plan. What was previously a puzzle becomes a race. This makes all plots interesting. Think of any movie you like: Star Wars, China Town, Casablanca, Dracula, or Good Will Hunting. In every one, the final resolution hinges on an unstable situation that's the story has built.

This new version has three phases, much like a novel. The first phase is discovery. Here, all players are equal and interested in sharing information. In the second phase, players develop theories and alliances and competition develops. In the final phase, the murderer is revealed and alliances are upset. In this final phase, the murderer turns on all the other players and tries to escape.

The downside to this new game is entirely in the realm of production: it is harder to produce because it requires a crafted plot. And the revelation of that plot is made difficult because, in a game as different from a book, the author cannot control how the plot develops.

Novels, plays, and computer games have an internal structure. The binding of the book and the order of its pages ensure how it is read. In plays, the order of revelation is controlled by the actors who tell the story.

Someone must be called from outside the game to assemble each play through. This is the role of either the computer program or the dungeon master. In this new version of clue, which is not a computer game, I rely on a Dungeon Master. They must pick the three cards that make up the game's solution, and hide them in the secret envelope.

Play the Game!

If you'd like to play this improved version of Clue, I will give you almost all you need here. You need a copy of the original game, and it seems that any version will do. It can be bought cheaply:

www.amazon.com. Any version will do.

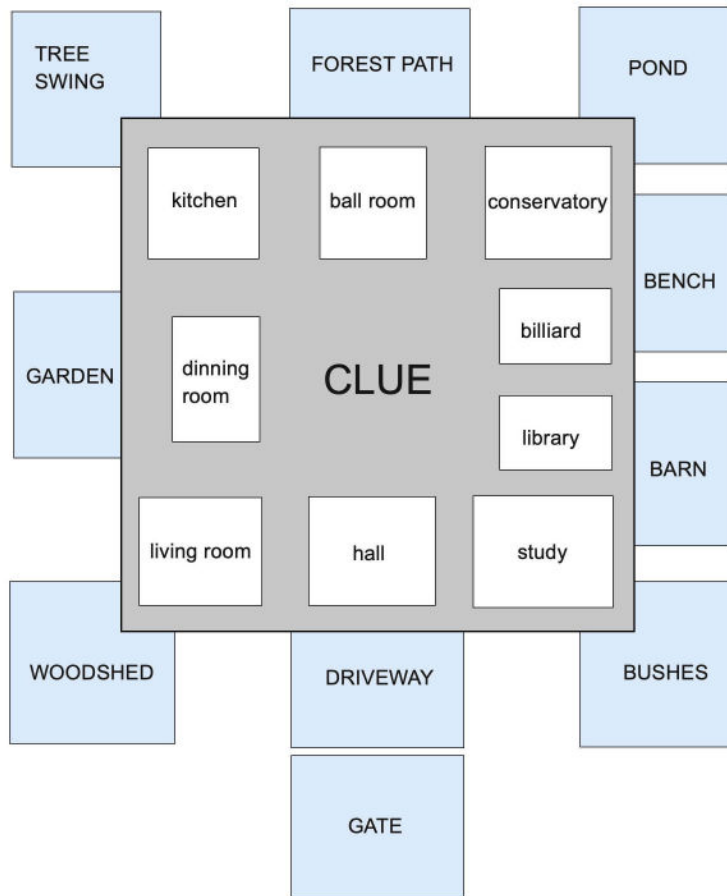
In addition, you need to print the board extensions and the clues, and you need a Dungeon Master to assemble the secret envelope, but that's all they need to do. Anyone can do that.

Extensions to the Basic Board

Here's a PDF with all the New Clue instructions and board extensions. Print them, cut them apart, and position them around the board as shown:

Extended Board Layout

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Extensions to the Rules

The rule extensions and two different plots are written in this PDF:

<https://www.mindstrengthbalance.com/mindwp/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/A-NEW-CLUE.pdf>

The Secret Answer

Each of these plots point to a single answer that is not random. The secret answer envelope, provided with the standard game, must be packed by hand. The instruction for which three cards are to be placed into this envelope are on the last page of each plot, lightly camouflaged in order for you to print them but not read them. Hand this last sheet to your Dungeon Master and instruct them to pack the secret envelope and return the remaining deck of cards face down.

If you play this game, please let me know how it went!

References

History of CLUE: <https://www.ultraboardgames.com/clue/history.php>

Instructions: [https://www.wikihow.com/Play-Clue-\(Cluedo\)](https://www.wikihow.com/Play-Clue-(Cluedo)), and
<https://www.ultraboardgames.com/clue/game-rules.php>

Purchase the original game: https://www.amazon.com/Hasbro-A5826079-Clue-Game/dp/B01JYVHMVA/ref=sr_1_5