

Aesop's Gambit

For 2-8 players, ages 8 and up, 20-30 minutes to play.

The characters of timeless fables enter the arena. In various contests, each seeks to best one another with a unique combination of traits:

Wit: The wise and cunning ensnare the fools.

Hunting: Predator or prey? It depends.

Pride: Vanity loses to the humblest of creatures.

Pathos: A little compassion goes a long way.

Moxie: Courage and stamina are essential.

Set-up: Shuffle the 20 Predicament cards and place in the center. Shuffle the 55 Character cards and deal 4 to each player. Shuffle the remaining Character cards and place in the center. Divide the Stones (56) among the players: 2 players get 28 each, 3 (18), 4 (14), 5 (11), 6 (9), 7(8), 8 (7). Any leftover Stones go into the pot. Each player gets one Mojo token.

The last player to cross a stream on foot leads first. Place the Bid/No-Bid die in front of the lead player. The Mojo die is rolled with the Bid/No-Bid die only when a player has Mojo but no Stones.

Objective: Accumulate the most Stones.

Play:

1. Turn over the top Predicament card. Each Predicament has 3 of the 5 traits in order of importance, from left to right.
2. The lead player rolls the die to determine if it is a bid or no-bid round. (Rotate lead player each round clockwise) Each player then chooses a Character card and places it face down. Each Character has a score for each of 5 traits, from 0 to 6.
3. For a bid round, each player antes 1 Stone (opening bid). Bidding takes place as in traditional poker. Each player in the contest may fold (losing that Stone) or call (matching the bid). The bid is limited by the smallest pile among the players that call. The player with the smallest pile is then “all-in” in this case. Example: if Anne (starting player) raised to 5 Stones and Bob only has 3 Stones, Bob can go all-in with 3 Stones and Anne pulls 2 Stones back to her own pile. (Side bets are allowed if players wish to go above the minimum)
4. For a no-bid round, the played cards are turned over once everyone has played one.
5. The contest is resolved by comparing the Predicament traits to the Characters. Start from left to right on the 3 Predicament traits. If a Character has the highest score on the first trait, that is the winner. If there is a tie between one or more Characters, the next trait is compared, and similarly with the third trait if needed.
 - 5a. For a bid round, the winner collects all bid Stones.
 - 5b. For a no-bid round, each losing Character gives to the winner the number of Stones equal to the point total next to the Character (ranges from -4 to 7). If a losing player has a Character with a negative value, that player instead collects that absolute value in Stones from the winner. Example: Anne wins the round with the Tiger (+7 value), but Bob plays the Grasshopper (-4 value) and Curt plays the Swallow (+2 value). Anne owes 4 Stones to Bob, but Anne collects 2 Stones from Curt. The value of the winning card (Tiger) does not factor into the exchange of Stones.
6. At the end of each round, each player draws another card to maintain a hand of 4 Characters. A player that lost all of his Stones, but has Mojo draws a 4th card, but will not play one until back in the game.
7. Players are sidelined when they lose all of their Stones. Any debts are resolved after collecting any winnings first. Example: Anne has 3 Stones left and wins a no-bid round in which Bob has a -4 card, Curt has a +2 card and Diane has a -3 card. Anne collects 2 Stones from Curt and now has 5 Stones but would be unable to fully pay off Bob and Diane. Payments are made evenly so that Bob and Diane both get 2 Stones. Each is still owed more Stones, but the last one is put in the pot for the next round because it can't be split evenly. The sidelined player discards his hand.
8. Mojo: can be used two ways:

8a. To avoid paying debts in a No-Bid round. Whether winning or losing the hand, any player that owes an amount can avoid the debt by using a Mojo token. The Mojo token is surrendered into the pot for the next Bid Round.

8b. To make a recovery. When a player has no stones, he is sidelined until the Mojo die is rolled star-side up. That player then surrenders the Mojo token into the pot for the next Bid Round. The recovered player(s) collect one Stone from every player that has 4 or more Stones. No player can drop below 3 Stones, so does not have to give up any Stones if this would occur. Example: if Anne and Bob are recovering on the same Mojo roll, and Curt has 4 Stones, Curt does not have to give up any to Anne and Bob.

9. Players are eliminated if they lose all of their Stones and Mojo, until one winner remains. Game may also end when all 20 Predicaments are used. Whoever has the most Stones wins.

Alternatives:

The lead player decides between bid and no-bid, and turns the die to that option.

For bidding, a simpler format is used: everyone still antes 1 Stone, but only the lead player can raise and there is only one round of bidding.