

Bread and Circuses

A Bluffing Game of Noble Philanthropy

The peasants are revolting! As a noble, if you can provide them with food and entertainment, you can convince them not to cut off your head, and make money off them to boot.

Introduction

Bread and Circuses is a bluffing game in which 4-10 players are nobles trying to placate angry peasants with food and fun. Players gain more gold by offering something fewer other players are, but if the peasants aren't offered both bread and circuses, they riot, hurting all players.

Components

8 "Bread" Tiles

8 "Circus" Tiles

8 "Abstain" Tiles

120 Gold tokens (56 "I", 32 "V", 32 "XV")

8 Disclosure Cards

16 Sabotage Cards

1 Riot Counter (Board and Chip)

Setup

Each player takes one Disclosure Card and the

Bread, Circus, and Abstain tiles of one color. The other tiles and Disclosure Cards are not used.

Shuffle the Sabotage cards. Deal 2 to each player in a 6-8 player game, and 3 to each player in a 4-5 player game. Players may look at their own Sabotage cards. Cards dealt out are not used this game.

Each player starts the game with an amount of Gold equal to the number of players.

Each player places his or her Disclosure Card in front of him or her face-up.

Place the Riot Counter in view of all players. Set the counter to "0".

Tiles

The Bread, Circus, and Abstain tiles are the primary mechanism for gaining points during the game and its core mechanic. Each player keeps these three tiles throughout the game and uses them to gain favor with the peasants (or benefit from the labors of other nobles).

Sabotages

The Sabotage cards let players interfere with their rival nobles' plans. Each Sabotage card has two components: Timing and Effect. The Timing describes when a card can be played during a round, and the Effect describes what happens when the card is played.

Turn Sequence:

Phase 1: Negotiation. The players discuss who should offer which resource (bread or circus), and who should not provide any resources at all (abstain). Players can use any persuasive resources at their command – including alliances against other players, tit-for-tat arrangements, threats of sabotage, and outright bribery (see *Bribery* below) - to negotiate. While negotiating, players should keep in mind that if no player offers Bread, or if no player offers a Circus, the peasants will Riot to everyone's detriment.

Disclosure: During Negotiation, players have the option to disclose what resource they intend on playing. This provides all players with information that could potentially help avoid a Riot and earns the player who discloses Gold if he or she is honest about his or her disclosure.

To Disclose, a player selects his or her Bread, Circus, or Abstain tile and places it face-down on either the Bread icon or the Circus icon on his or her Disclosure Card. When Disclosing, a player tells the other players that they are playing the tile indicated on the Disclosure Card. Players may not Disclose that they are Abstaining (although they may simply tell the other players that they intend to do so).

A player is not required to Disclose honestly. A dishonest Disclosure provides no direct benefit or penalty, but it does allow a player to take advantage of his or her naïve opponents. On the other hand, dishonesty discourages opponents from trusting that player in the future.

At any point during the Negotiation Phase, a player may choose to take back their disclosure and pick his or her tile up off the Disclosure Card. Players may only Disclose or take back a Disclosure during the Negotiation Phase.

Bribery: Among the options for persuading other players is offering another player Gold or other in-game (or, depending on your group, out-of-game) favors in exchange for a favorable play. Bribes can be open-ended or defined, ranging from “play Bread” to “play any card except Abstain” to “be honest about your Disclosure”.

No mechanics govern honesty in bribery – a player could demand payment up front and refuse to follow through on the bribe, or a player could bribe an opponent to take an action, then refuse to pay the bribe after the action is taken. If desired, some suggested guidelines for bribery rules are discussed in “Optional Rules” at the end of this rules document.

Round 2: Play. Players who have not Disclosed each select his or her Bread, Circus, or Abstain tile and places it face-down on the play surface in front of them.

Phase 3: Reveal. All players reveal the cards they Disclosed or played.

Phase 4: Score. Check to see if, after applying any modifiers from Event cards, there is at least one Bread and at least one Circus. If there is not at least one of each, the peasants riot; advance the Riot Counter by one.

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Regardless of whether there is a Riot, players receive Gold for their play as follows:

- Each player who Disclosed and whose played tile matches his or her Disclosure gains 1 Gold.
- Each player who played Bread gains an amount of Gold equal to the number of Circuses (modified by Event cards as appropriate).
- Each player who played Circus gains an amount of Gold equal to the number of Breads (modified by Event cards as appropriate).
- If there is not a Riot, each player who played Abstain gains an amount of Gold equal to the number of Breads plus the number of Circuses.
- If there is a Riot, player who played Abstain lose Gold equal to the number of players in the game.

At the end of the round, check to see if any of the conditions listed in Ending the Game have been met. If not, start again with the Negotiation Phase.

Ending the Game

The game ends when one of the following conditions is met at the end of a round:

1. A player has an amount of Gold equal to the number of players times five (15 Gold in a 3-player game, 20 Gold in a 4-player game, etc).
2. The Riot Counter is at five or higher.

When the game ends, the player with the most Gold is the winner. If there are two or more players tied, play continues until there is only one player in possession of the greatest amount of Gold.

Optional Rules

Regulated Bribery: This game is designed for Negotiation to be managed and enforced via social contract, and for some groups, navigating that social contract is part of the fun of the game. However, other groups have found it useful to create pre-arranged house rules regarding bribery to prevent hurt feelings and to discourage truly opportunistic players from taking advantage of less devious (or more sociable) friends. One such pre-arranged rules set for bribery could include:

1. Bribes must be in the form of Gold payment or a promised future in-game action in exchange for an action.
2. Bribes are not to be paid until the promised action is taken, and once the promised action is taken, the bribe must be paid.