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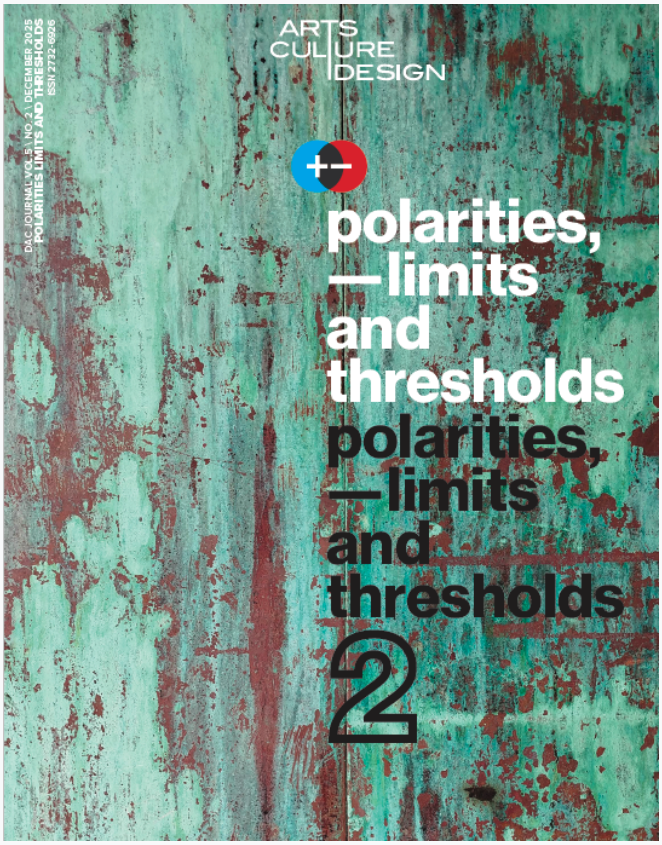

DESIGNING THE NARRATIVE

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DESIGNING THE NARRATIVE: TELLING COLONIALISM THROUGH RULES, ILLUSTRATIONS AND COMPONENTS

ABSTRACT

This article explores how rules and mechanics in board games, in conjunction with their setting – illustrations and components – form the narrative that the game transmits to the player. Rules, even abstract ones, represent elements of the board games' setting and it's in their relationship with the game as an object that we can find the message that a board game transmits. While board game themes have not always been defined by designers, and rules have not always been designed with themes in mind, they are still vehicles for transmitting hegemonic societal values and narratives, even when not consciously intended by the designers or publishers. With the development of board games as authorial art objects, and the increased focus of designers on their games' narratives, the study of how rules contribute to, or even contradict, the intended narrative becomes increasingly relevant.

In this study, we develop a comparative documentary analysis of the rules, artwork and components of three board games: Settlers of Catan, Spirit Island and Pax Pamir second edition. All these games have settings relating to the topic of colonialization, central in the history of board games. We analyze how the rulebooks and artwork of these three games construct different narratives all relating to the same topic, and, at the same time, the way that the narrative intent of the designer may be reinforced or undermined by the ways that the colonialization processes are represented in the rules.

INTRODUCTION

We are currently witnessing the golden era of board games (Antunes, 2023; Konieczny, 2019). The board game medium is continually growing in the 21st century, both at the level of the increased number of games produced, and at the level of continual evolution of game design. Notably, this rise starts after the popularization of video games. This leads researchers to theorize about the board games' position in the post-digital movement (Scoats & Maloney, 2024), due to the value placed on the materiality and sociability inherent in the hobby (Rogerson et al., 2016), in accordance with post-digital values (Cramer, 2014). This golden era, while centered in Europe and North America, is not exclusive to these regions (Junior, 2021).

From the 1990s onwards, with the popularization of eurogames outside of Germany (Woods, 2012), the design of the game – understood as the design of the game's rules (mechanisms and mechanics) – became the focus of the industry, that attempted to continually evolve board games' mechanics, and of the gamers, who sought, as they still do (Rogerson et al., 2016), varied and innovative games (Woods, 2012). This tendency led to a higher recognition of designers as authors – aided by the creation of board game design awards and board game magazines – which was also embraced by game publishers that used designers' names and recognition as a marketing point (Woods, 2012).

Board games' definition as an authorial art form (Woods, 2012), evidenced by gamer's curatorial collecting tendencies (Rogerson et al., 2016), alongside the increasingly higher control of the final product by the designers, leads the way for the study of the medium through the lens of narrative and theme. Even though some may consider board games (and tabletop games in general) as a poor medium for transmitting narratives, this is a wrong assumption. Despite the lack of opportunity that board games present for direct storytelling, through setting, mechanisms and the games as an object a narrative is constructed and understood by the player (Duncan, 2019). In fact, board games, due to their interactive nature, are particularly adept in imparting their narrative (Flanagan & Jakobsson, 2023). However, due to the way this narrative is transmitted, the designer must find ways to convey their intentions through setting, themes, components and illustrations. The way that the designers design these elements to work together, or not, to create the intended narrative is precisely what we seek to understand with this research.

COLONIALISM IN GAMES

While games have not always been considered as storytelling mediums, they have a long history of acting as representations of different aspects of the societies they are a part of. Folk games – games that are part of a society's cultural heritage, usually without a known author (Donovan, 2018) – such as Chess, serve as an example that even pre-modern games represent parts of the context in which they are played, whether intentional or not. In Chess's particular case, the different pieces on the board, in the European tradition, represent the King, Queen, Knights and the general population (amongst others), giving more importance and ability to the higher class of pieces, to the point that you must sacrifice your other pieces in protection of the King. The queens being the most powerful pieces (in terms of movement options) is also a reflection of societal perceptions – at the time when chess was adapted from its Indian or middle easter origins (Flanagan & Jakobsson, 2023) – as queens were seen as "'mad' for demonstrating almost super-human strength in the defense of their kingdoms' interests" (Carretta, 2024, p. 215)1.

As printing techniques developed in Europe in the 18thd century, board games entered into their "mass produced" era (Donovan, 2018). During this period we find the proliferation of "race2" games, best identified by the popular (at the time) Goose Game

(Flanagan & Jakobsson, 2023). Games were printed with their rules directly on the board and had an explicit moralizing goal. Publishers and designers shared political and societal perspectives through this medium (Donovan, 2018; Flanagan & Jakobsson, 2023). Games were based on luck, with movement decided by the roll of the dice, and when a player landed on a space in the board it served as a moralizing moment (Carretta, 2024), as spaces represented different societal values, whether positive or negative. In here we can once again observe the marriage between rules and narrative, given that the negative moral spaces usually also meant that the player had to track back, or stay put for a certain period of time (Arnaudo, 2018).

It's during this era of board games that colonialism becomes a common theme in the medium. European colonial empires felt the need to create consensus amongst their population regarding the colonizing efforts by defending and reinforcing the ideal of empire, and by teaching players about the far-off places of said empire. Colonies were shown through an orientalist and exotic lens, showing the general population the rich resources they have to offer (Flanagan & Jakobsson, 2023). These territories are presented, commonly, as part of a journey in which the player witnesses all the different places and societies through travelers googles (Flanagan & Jakobsson, 2023).

With the advent of the popularization of eurogames, jumpstarted by the one-two punch of the mass appeal of Settlers of Catan and El Grande outside of Germany (Woods, 2012), we observe the process of the "strategic twist" (Antunes, 2023): games in which randomness is a core mechanism start being replaced by board games were strategic choices that may be taken by the player are the sole (or main) way to achieve victory (Costikyan, 2011; Schreiber, 2011).

Eurogames mark the start of the modern phenomenon of board games (Donovan, 2018), as games that focus mostly on their mechanics (Costikyan, 2011; Woods, 2012), with an aversion for representation of direct conflict in favor of resource management and efficiency puzzles (Sousa & Bernardo, 2019). Themes in eurogames are secondary to their rules, often being defined by the publisher as a means to attract a particular audience (Flanagan & Jakobsson, 2023; Paz, 2025; Trammell, 2019; Woods, 2012). Often, in the "traditional small business model" (Trammell, 2019) of board game productions, designers think about themes and narrative in last place. They are aware that publishers may require any changes for commercial reasons (Trammell, 2019), therefore rules were treated as blank canvases to which you could add many different skins.

However, even with themes and narratives taking a back seat, colonialism continued to be one of the most common (Flanagan & Jakobsson, 2023; Foasberg, 2019). Despite the lack on intention on the designers and publishers part, the use of eurogames' particular mechanical tendencies of favoring economic management, resource production and gathering, colonialism is presented to the gamer trough an European colonialist lens (Flanagan & Jakobsson, 2023; Foasberg, 2019). The particular post-World War II German aversion to representing armed conflict in media (Sousa & Bernardo, 2019; Woods, 2012) that influences eurogames' design, leads to a lack of representation of the conflicts between colonists and native populations (Robinson, 2016). This results in a presentation of the colonial process – by placing players in the position of colonists – as the brave efforts of the colonizing nations that overcome strange foreign lands and their exotic dangers (Flanagan & Jakobsson, 2023). Some

games, such as Goa, explicitly recognize the presence of native populations in colonized places, however, both the description of these people and their homelands are going only so far as to mention the relevant characteristics for the colonization, something that's reinforced in the mechanisms in place that assume the colonizers capacity to act unimpeded by native populations, colonizers' ownership of the land and their eventual prosperity (Foasberg, 2019). When native people are represented in the rules, however, it is usually in the form of obstacles or resources without any real agency (Costikyan, 2011; Flanagan & Jakobsson, 2023). It should be noted that, even when native population are represented as resources (generally workers), mentions or depictions of slavery are still excluded from the explicit narrative of the games.

Although eurogames are the basis for the design tendencies of modern board games, the practices of design and the traditional means of producing board games have evolved to the point in which the themes are increasingly being defined by the designers, who have also started to create modern games with specific narrative intent, (Arnaudo, 2018; Junior, 2021; Paz, 2025; Anonymous 2025) trying to associate mechanisms with, often, counter-hegemonic, or at least, alternative themes and narratives. However, with the risk-aversion characteristic of the board game industry (Trammell, 2019), and the general "geek" context of attempted "depoliticization" of many artistic mediums (Robinson, 2016), designers are forced to adopt tactics that allow their games to be produced (Emigh, 2016). These tactics include creating print-to-play games, print on demand production runs, or sharing rules digitally for players to use other games' components in play (Emigh, 2016). However, the tactic that seems to be preferred by designers and that has the most mass appeal is production through crowdfunding (Roedenbeck & Lieb, 2018). This tactic allows creative freedom in the design process, particularly in the narrative and thematic design, skipping the risk involved in the production of a game that may not sell well (as the game is only made if enough funding is achieved by the crowdfunding campaign), although creating a game trough crowdfunding campaigns also introduces certain pressures in the way the game is designed and produced (Anonymous 2025). Both Pax Pamir, 2nd edition and Spirit Island were produced while using this tactic.

METHODOLOGY AND OBJECTIVES

The research for this paper was based on a qualitative methodology. We completed a documentary analysis of the three board games' rules, components and artwork, through the means of a thematic categorical analysis (Bardin, 2012; David & Sutton, 2004). The categories we used emerged from the research and were organized in three broad themes: artistic representation; constructed narrative; mechanisms and mechanics. We chose these three particular games in an attempt to compare a traditional eurogame with more modern games produced through crowdfunding in the different ways that they explore a colonialist setting. We chose Settlers of Catan due to being the board game responsible for the popularization of eurogames, and, therefore, genre defining. The remaining two games were selected based on two criteria: popularity on the BoardGameGeek (BGG) platform – a database commonly used as a reference point by researchers (Pobuda, 2018) – both games are in the top 100 best games list; and games that explicitly desired to offer an alternative, or counter-hegemonic, narrative of colonialism.

The study was orientated by three objectives all related to the guiding research question: how do board games' components, illustrations and rules create and condition the game´s narrative and theme? The objectives are as follows: understanding the designers explicit intended narrative; understanding how rules, components and illustrations contribute to the intended narrative; understanding how rules components and illustrations may contradict the intended narrative and what is this contradictions impact. With these objectives we wish to understand the way that the game as an object, the rules and the setting interact, whether in intended ways or not, in order to create a narrative that is transmitted to the player through play.

ANALIZING THE GAMES

GAME DESCRIPTION

While all three games we analyze focus on depictions of colonialism, the lens through which each approaches the topic differs significantly. In this subchapter we will present a short description of each game, its mechanics and the explicit intended narrative that is presented to the players.

Starting off with Settlers of Catan, it was originally published in 1995 and designed by Klaus Teuber. The older of the three games, it follows a lot of design conventions, that itself helped to cement, common to eurogames. The narrative and setting are secondary towards the gameplay rules, noticeable on the lack of space devoted to them in the – typically short (Woods, 2012) – rulebook. Gamers are presented with the Island of Catan and told that it is their job as "settlers" to develop the island and explore its resources. There is no further explicit narrative guidance given to the player nor a contextualization of the place in which the game takes place. The player's turn starts when they roll two six-sided dice. The result of this role determines the hexagonal tiles that produce their corresponding resource this turn, and each player receives one of such resources per each adjacent village they have, or two in case they have a city instead. The tiles and resources that exist in the game are as follows: lumber, produced in forest tiles; wool, from pastures; grain, from fields; brick, from hills; and ore from mountains. There is also one extra tile called desert that does not produce anything. After the production step, the players whose turn it may trade resources with other players (at any exchange rate agreed upon by the players), with the resource bank (at an exchange rate of 4:1), or with one of the ports on the island, if they have a city in the port's intersection, with more favorable exchange rates of 3:1 or 2:1 in case they are a port exclusive to a particular resource. Players can later use their accumulated resources to accomplish the build action, with different combinations allowing for the building of four different game elements: villages, cities (upgrading a village); roads; or the purchase of a development card.

Each player starts the game with two villages and an adjacent road to each, and their objective is to have 10 points. Points are acquired by having buildings, a village is worth one point and a city two, having the longest road, worth two points, having the largest army (by playing the most Knight development cards), also worth two points, and from development cards that are worth one point. When a player reaches 10 points, they immediately win the game.

Pax Pamir, 2nd edition is the reedition of this game that marks the beginning

of Wehrlegig Games as a board game publisher. Originally published by Sierra Madre Games, this edition of the game (from 2019) was designed by only one of the two original authors, Cole Wehrle, with the objective of better representing the setting and intending narrative through gameplay. Cole Wehrle and Wehrlgig Games seek to produce games with historical themes, while trying to simulate or represent certain aspects of the historical setting they take place in. In Pax Pamir, 2nd edition's rule book the author clearly delineates his intentions of designing a game that presented the "great game" – the historical conflict between the Russian and English empires in central Asia – through the eyes of the Afghan population, instead of the more common depictions of the conflict that focuses on the European perspectives.

The game seeks to simulate the political intrigue and the influence games that took place after the fall of the Durani empire. Players embody Afghan leaders that must use their influence and cunning in order to manipulate the actions of one of the three coalitions involved in the conflict: Afghan; British; Russian. Players create their tableau by buying cards from a shared market. Cards have special abilities that allow players to take actions such as mobbing and building armies, building roads, buying gifts for their coalition, battling and betraying. Players seek to have the most influence with the coalition that can achieve dominance on the board – a coalition is dominant if they have more four pieces that each other coalition – that can be accumulated by giving gifts to the coalition, playing cards affiliated with the coalition or getting trophies (betrayed cards). During a game dominance is checked when one of the four dominance cards is bought or leaves the shared market. During this check players receive points if they have the most influence in the winning coalition or, in the lack of a dominant one, being the player with the most influence discs in play. Players may change coalitions throughout the games by taking actions that earn them influence with a new coalition. The game ends after the last dominance check or when a player has four points more than any other player.

Spirit Island was published in 2017 and designed by R. Eric Reuss is a game that depicts the conflict between colonialists (called invaders in game) and the spirits that inhabit the titular island. The game's designer, Eric Reuss, states in the rulebook that his inspiration for creating this game was the realization that all board games he previously played, with colonialist settings, always presented the western colonialist point of view to the player, as well as the understanding that such tendency was taken for granted, and therefore a default, by other players close him.

While set on a fantasy island, full of supernatural spirits, the game aims to represent real colonization efforts while placing the players in the shoes of the ones that struggle against it. Players are spirits with unique powers, related to their elements or supernatural theme, that work together in order to expel the colonizers. Each turn, players must play cards from their hand. Every card has an energy cost (gained at the start of each turn) and unique effects that may assist other players, destroy Invaders, move them, reposition the Dahan, remove Blight, generate fear or trigger a wide variety of other abilities. Throughout the game, players can gain new Power Cards by discarding others. Each card also shows elemental symbols and when these elements appear in specific combinations, they can unlock a spirit's innate powers. Automatically, the invaders expand, build and ravage based on the cards of the invaders deck. Each turn, one card is revealed from this deck, showing a specific terrain type. It's the players' goal to limit

Figure 1
Illustration of the Development Cards in Settlers of Catan (Authors, 2015)

Figure 2
Resources and Terrains of Settlers of Catan (Authors, 2015)

this expansion, as the game ends when enough blight (damage to the land as a result of the invaders' ravaging action) accumulates or when a player's presence on the board is eliminated. In order to win players must generate fear, which can be done directly through cards and abilities or, most commonly, through the destruction of settlers' villages and cities. Also present on the board are the Dahan. They are the island's native population and are working together with the spirits in order to eliminate the colonizing threat.

COMPONENTS, ILLUSTRATIONS AND RULES

The relation between these three games' rules, components and illustrations and their narratives and setting is very different. However, there is a much clearer distinction between Settlers of Catan and the other two in the way that the designer sook to impart their intended narrative on the players.

As mentioned before, Settlers of Catan follows closely the formula of the eurogame both relating to the subordination of theme and setting to mechanics, and to the common tendencies in the representation of colonialization (Foasberg, 2019; Schreiber, 2011). Players are presented with land without previous population, a land rich in resources ripe for the taking that they must explore without reservation. There is no direct conflict between players, the closest to it is the use of the robber piece that may take resource cards away. Players compete to see which player more effectively explores the resources of the island, following the trend of representing this process through an economic management point of view. Native people are not present, unless one interprets the robber as their representative, and therefore there is no conflict in this process. However, Settlers of Catan does stand out in comparison to other eurogames of the time in the representation of a colonial land. The illustrations and components of the game seem to clash in their temporal and geographical representation of the island of Catan. Medieval and European neoclassical buildings coexist with cranes and armored knights, all supposedly located on an island undergoing colonization (as the game's name suggests), yet without any representation of the colonial as exotic (see figure 1). The resources depicted are typical of those found in Europe (particularly notable with wool), rather than the kinds of resources one might expect to be portrayed as part of colonial exploration (as seen in Figure 2). This indicates to us that the game exhibits a common trait of eurogames: a lack of thematic and narrative definition, where these elements are applied over the mechanics like a final coat of paint, merely to help sell the product – which is, in essence, the rules. In any case, the illustrations and components (by their indistinctness) present a form of colonization devoid of victims and exploitation. The colony is created on virgin lands, occupied and made productive by the "discoverers3" or "settlers."

Also breaking with common eurogame depictions of the colonial reality is the lack of profit for the colonial empire. The only possible reference to a colonial exploitation that benefits a (presumed) imperial country is mechanical, through the ports that allow for more efficient resource exchanges (with the resource bank) but which only allows the player to trade resources already present on the island for others also present, unlike what would be expected of colonial resource extraction. A sterile version of colonialism is presented, consisting of a "terra nulius" (Foasberg, 2019), with features very similar to

those of Europe, ready to be exploited by settlers who do so without any violence – except, once again, for the robber, who appears as the only obstacle or hindrance to the players' actions. Even then, the robber being (mostly) activated randomly is always controlled by one of the players, thus functioning more as an agent of competition between settlers than as a challenge to colonization. The lack of intentional narrative design by the original designer is noticeable in this abstraction of the colonial process. Even more than in other colonial eurogames, in which the process is represented without reference to conflict, it is completely represented by economic management and expansion so abstract that could be applied to any setting.

Pax Pamir, 2nd edition and Spirit Island, on the contrary, very clearly try to represent elements of their setting through mechanics and subsequently creating their narrative – as is explicitly stated by the designer in the rule book of both games. Pax Pamir's card suits reveal the models of power valued by the game, with a particular emphasis on the importance of information. Each suit is associated with different forms of action, reflecting the representations of power that the game conveys. The game devalues direct combat between players (and coalitions), aiming instead to equally emphasize the ability to influence through conflict via espionage and betrayal (illustrated by the purchase of gifts and the assassination of cards). This devaluation of conflict cannot be confused with the lack of representation of it in eurogames, instead it is a favoring of the representation of other types of resistance and struggle that the game focuses on. Despite this, the represented struggle is not that of the general population facing the imperial powers, but of the elite that plays them against each other in a way that guarantees them standing once the conflict is over. While players' actions contribute to this narrative of political intrigue and scheming, particularly the mechanic that allows players to change coalitions, the players' goals in-game seem to conflict with the stated narrative intent. Even though the designer presents players ultimate objective as the guarantee of Afghan independence, the way the game attributes points through coalition dominance, as well as the possibility that multiple, or even all, players support the same coalition (that may not be the Afghan) creates the idea that one empire will succeed over the others, instead of the intended careful maintenance of the delicate balance of power that makes such dominance impossible. This intention is, however, enforced by the difficulty of placing pieces on the board which forces prior planning, at the same time as the constant changes in the board situation and cards available for purchase encourage players not to stick too rigidly to a specific plan.

Spirit Island, on the other hand, is able to more closely correlate its anti-colonial message and narrative with the players' actions and goals. By creating the game as a cooperative one, the designer is more successful in constructing a colonialist narrative of conflict, one that is not reduced to competition between colonial powers. However, it does not escape the tendency to deny agency to the native population: the game's focus, also evident in its illustrations and components, is on the land itself, depicting the land's rejection of colonization and how it, with only marginal support from the native people, fights against the colonizers. This somewhat aligns with colonial representations of settlers struggling against hostile terrains and climates.

The "Dahan" (name of the fictional native population) are granted even less agency than the colonizers themselves, who, as automatic opponents, have a complete

Figure 3
Pax Pamir's card illustrations
(Authors, 2025)

system managing their actions independently of the players' will (players merely need to move the pieces to the correct spots). In contrast, the "Dahan" have no form of action by their own "initiative"; they only attack when directly attacked, and they can only act when a player plays a card or activates an ability that allows manipulation of these pieces. The narrative conveyed is that of the colonizers as an almost unstoppable force destroying the land, which in turn tries to reject and expel them. The "Dahan" are marginalized within their own story, and their continued presence or absence on the board is not even a victory or, more importantly, a defeat condition. The theme presented is one of natural conservation, portraying colonialism as the exploitation and destruction of the land, with success defined as creating enough friction against the invading forces to make them abandon their attack.

More than in the other two analyzed games, Spirit Island illustration and components are an integral part in setting the narrative and mood of the game. The greater direct representativity has the effect of increasing player immersion in the game and their actions. The armies are not abstract; they are pieces shaped like people, and the colonies are houses that the player can see on the board (see Figure 3). Interestingly, the Dahan are represented only by their houses (Figure 3), which can be dehumanizing for players less attentive to the rulebook and cards illustrations, who might not realize that the Dahan are not some kind of sentient mushrooms – something plausible given the game's fantastic elements. The land is depicted as idyllic and suffering when in contact with the colonizers, with illustrations evoking the damage the land endures and the anger it feels in its retaliations. The rulebook itself is framed in every page by

Figure 4
Naturalistic themes and idealistic representation in the illustrations of Spirit Island (Authors, 2025)

Figure 5
Pax Pamir's Board and components (Authors, 2025)

Figure 6
Pax Pamir's card illustrations (Authors, 2025)

vines a naturalistic imagery (see Figure 4). The colonizers are represented with a set of references that align them with the imagery of the Spanish colonizer, through their clothing, the use of galleons, and most notably, the helmet commonly associated with the Spanish "conquistadores", even though the Spanish are not one of the colonial powers that can attack the island in certain game modes.

By contrast to this more directly representational style of illustration and component design, Pax Pamir, 2nd edition opts for more abstract depictions of the setting. The game seeks to represent the region where it takes place. The terrain is primarily presented in a stylized manner; however, the people are depicted according to the portrait painting trends contemporary to the time of the game's setting (see figures 5 and 6). Additionally, the iconography present in the various components aims to evoke the imagery of the intersection between Central Asian culture and Islamic religion, through the use of floral and geometric patterns, as well as the use of cloth as the material for the board (traditional in this region) (Figure 5). The game's art, alongside its components, is consistently evocative of its setting, so much so that at no point can the player dissociate or abstract themselves from it while interacting with the components—except when focused solely on their personal board.

CONCLUDING REMARCS

It's clear after this analysis the difference in the ways that Settlers of Catan and the two remaining games make use of their components, illustration and rules as part of the narrative building process. While the eurogame seems to have not been designed with any narrative intent in mind, both Pax Pamir, 2nd edition and Spirit Island intentionally designed their rules with the simulation of some aspects of the game's theme in mind, having used as well their component's design and all illustrations as a way to immerse the player in the games' settings. Even so, in both games, several elements of the rules (and illustrations in the case of Spirit Island) contradict the intended narrative goal of the designer.

It is clear that Pax Pamir, 2nd edition was designed by a historian seeking an accurate representation of the specific historical period being portrayed. The focus on the perspective of Afghan actors reinforces what the designer explicitly states in the rulebook as a desire to represent this conflict without relying on the perspective of colonial forces or framing this history through the lens of the "Western imagination." The use of visual elements that evoke these places and cultures is done without resorting to the exoticism common in this type of game, and the inclusion of components such as the fabric board, typical of traditional games from the depicted area, indicates that these elements were included from a place of respect and an effort to represent local cultures. Even though it is not the place of these researchers to assess the success of that intention. The focus on political intrigue – and the mechanical experience it provides – however, prevents the game's perspective from aligning with that of the majority of the Afghan population during this period, leaving the narrative confined to the actions and experiences of the local political elite.

In Spirit Island It is also clear that the game's narrative goal is to recreate the processes of colonization, although in a fantasy setting, with the explicit design objective

of producing a game that represents these processes from the perspective of those who were victimized by them, giving players the opportunity to fight back against those same processes. However, the game's narrative, alongside its mechanics, ends up sidelining the actions of the native people in favor of the game's more fantastical elements - the spirits. The "Dahan" have no real agency in the current version of the game, as they are weakened by disease, and when they did have narrative agency, in an earlier stage, they acted in a manner similar to that of the colonizers now (this is part of the games lore, described in the rulebook). The narrative that emerges is one of colonialism as primarily a force that destroys the natural land, and only secondarily as a destroyer of local cultures and exploiter of their people.

As games continue to evolve as an artistic medium, the challenge to convey narrative through rules, components and illustrations will continue to be posed to aspiring designers. Even with the depoliticization attempts inherent in "geek" culture (Robinson, 2016), the tendency that can be observed in the medium is one of increased narrative focus and increased expectation of a match between rules and their setting. This goes alongside the apparent continuous shift of the perception of games from a product to an art form: as game's production and distribution methods continue to evolve, placing more autonomy in the designers' hands, who are increasingly considered as authors.

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1. Own translation

2. Race games refer to games using a track of spaces in which the players compete with the goal of reaching the final square first, not to race as a social construction.

3. In the Portuguese edition, the game is called Os Descobridores de Catan (The discoverers of Catan) instead of the original settlers. We imagine this is an attempt to adapt the game to the Portuguese marked whose colonial imagination is more closely associated with discovery that settling – the period is commonly referred as "os descobrimentos" (the discoveries).