

The Straw, the Coal, and the Bean

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In this game inspired on the classic Grimm fairy tale, a dramatic story emerges as you hop, skip, and sabotage your way across the dynamic river board with adorable, clay game pieces.

Abstract:

The ragtag group of Straw, Coal, and Bean are on the run from the Old Lady when they come across a rushing river. This is your one shot at freedom and no stream is going to stand in your way. Step over your opponents, burn bridges, slide over chomping fish, and move your team together.

Our game is a narrative racing-game for three players lasting about 30 minutes. Based on the Grimm story, *The Straw, the Coal, and the Bean*, the game primarily focuses on the second half crossing the river. Each character's strengths and weaknesses are represented by the way they interact with each other and the river system. Coal burns straw. Bean laughs at his friends and dodges fish. Straw lays the path for his friends. Event and action cards also play a large role in the gameplay and the narrative story. The event cards represent a change in the environment, and the action cards represent a character conflict. A story emerges through the player's actions and the continual card play, and players need to strategize how and when to move their pieces in order to achieve the highest score.

Overview:

You have just escaped certain death from the old lady's burning broth and the only thing that stands in your way to freedom is this steady stream. Strategically move your three pieces across the river by using with your pieces' strengths and your opponent's weaknesses. Beware the changing current, the hungry fish, and the malicious Bean and burning Coal. The first pieces across achieve glory for all soup-based products everywhere.

Materials:

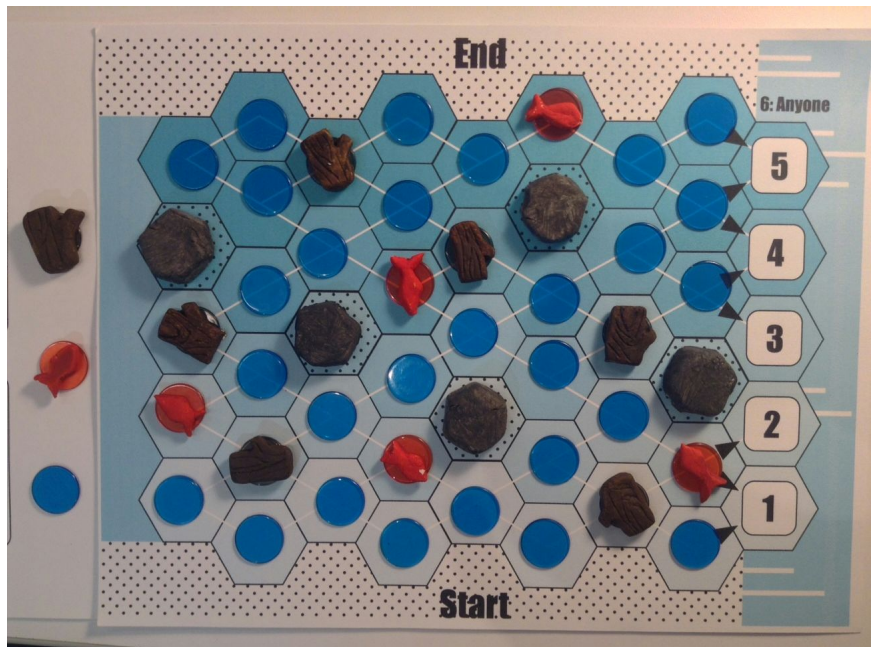
- 1 board
- 9 player pieces (3 of each Bean, Coal, and Straw)
- 6 straw bridges (2 of each color)
- River pieces (5 stones, 7 logs, 6 fish, 30 river tokens)
- 1 deck of event cards
- 1 deck of action cards
- 1 six sided die
- 1 first player card

Objective:

Race across the river with as many pieces as possible to achieve the highest score.

Setup:

1. Place the board and action cards in the center of the table.
2. The last person who ate a bean goes first. Hand him or her the first player card.
3. Place all the starting pieces on the board matching picture. Special icons are on the board to guide you.
4. Place the remaining **one water, one log, and one fish** tokens upriver (where there are no numbers or hexagons).
5. Shuffle the **action deck** and each player **draws one** for start. Then set it aside **face-down**.
6. Shuffle the **event deck** and place it **face-up** on the “**upcoming event**” space. Draw the top card and place it in the “**current event**” space.
7. Each player chooses a color and places the corresponding player pieces on the starting beach. Each player grabs their player aid as well.



Event Cards:

At the beginning of each round, it's the start player's duty to place the top card from the upcoming events deck onto the current event space. The current event's rule will be in effect for one round, which starts with the first player's turn and ends on the last player's turn. These rules supersede the other rules. Players can also foresee the upcoming event.

Turn sequence:

- 1) Player movement
- 2) River movement

1. Player movement:

Five movements: A player gets five move actions per turn. You do not need to use them all

- A piece's first move off the starting beach may be to any hexagon bordering the beach.
- A move consists of moving one of your pieces to another **contiguous hexagon** on the river, or onto a beach.
- **Occupied:** You may pass through another player piece, but you may not end your turn with any of your pieces on the same space as another piece, even your own.
- **Waterfall:** If at any moment the river current pushes your piece off the board, return your piece back to the starting beach.
- Once a player pieces gets across the river, it may not be moved off.
- If Bean falls into the river because Coal burned its bridge, it returns to the starting beach.

Bean, Coal, and Straw each have the following characteristics:

All character can walk on **stones** and **straw**.

Bean and Coal can walk on **logs**, but it's too slippery for **Straw**.

Only Straw can walk on **water**. **Bean** and **Coal** return to start once touching **water**.

No characters can walk on **fish**.

Bean

Eaten by fish: If a fish is bordering your Bean piece **at the end of your river movement**, the fish eats Bean and your Bean piece is placed back to the starting beach.

Coal

Burns the straw bridge:

- Once Coal lands on a straw bridge and then leaves the space, the straw bridge piece is removed from the board and given back the player to whom it belongs for later placement. Anyone standing on the burnt straw bridge will fall into river and go back to the starting beach.
- If Coal's last movement was on a straw bridge, it will fall into the water and go back to the starting beach.
- Coal cannot burn the the actual Straw player piece.

Straw

Leave straw bridge: When Straw leaves a water space, he must leave behind a straw bridge of his own color. If he has no more straw bridges of his available two, he must pick one of his straw bridges already laid and place it in the new location. The Straw piece also acts as a straw bridge so any player piece may walk across the Straw piece but it may not end its turn there.

Action Cards:

Once per turn, each player may also **spend two movement actions to draw** an action card. Action cards can be played at any time unless otherwise stated on the card and discarded to the side. Action cards **supersede any other rules**. Enacting an action card costs no action movements.

Once you have used your five actions (or chose not to), the river movement occurs.

2. River Movement:

1. **Roll the dice** to see where the river current begins. If you roll a **six**, you choose which number space to move into first.
2. Move one of the two river pieces **toward the numbered space**, and place the first chosen river piece next to the three available river pieces upstream. (**Stones can never move** and river pieces can move with player pieces on top of them.)
3. Choose another river piece to move into the empty spot. The piece must come from one of the two upstream spaces contiguous to the blank space. Use the white lines to guide you.
4. Continue until you reach upstream of the river and then choose one of the available four pieces to place in the empty space.
5. After the river movement is complete, check to see if **your bean** piece is bordering a fish token. If it is, return your bean piece to the starting beach. Other player's bean pieces are only affected at the end of their own turn.

End Game:

The game ends one of three ways:

1. A player places all three of their pieces on the other side of the board.
2. All six spaces on the other side of the river are full.
3. There are no more event cards to place in the current event space.

Count up your points to determine the winner:

- The pieces that made it across the river receive points based on the order they arrived:
1st=26 pts / 2nd=24 pts / 3rd=22pts / 4th=20pts / 5th=18pts / 6th=16pts
- Any remaining player pieces on the board receive points equal to the row they are in. Each row 1 through 5 is color coded to indicate which row they are in and how many points they receive.

The player with the most points is the winner. In case of a tie for first, the tied player with a piece higher on the finishing order wins.

Long live the Bean, Coal, and Straw!

Design Statement

The story of the Straw, Coal, and Bean brings together three unlikely characters in a tale of adventure. From the start of our prototyping, we recognized these characters would serve as the focal point of our story. Our three initial prototypes focused on the stew of the old woman, the journey of our three characters, and finally their journey across the river. Each of these prototypes had interesting gameplay but only one brought across a strong narrative element where characteristics of the bean, coal, and straw really shined: the journey across the river.

Our initial prototype of the river was very interesting but a bit chaotic. The river was represented through rows of poker chips. Players would move the bean and coal around the river on top of pieces of straw and logs. Once they moved, they would push a poker chip into the game from up-river. The feeling of moving around the river was quite interesting but suffered from some difficult obstacles. These obstacles came from our fuzzy rules about where a player could move and how much force you were allowed to push a poker chip into the game. The system was a bit too chaotic for a player to feel like he could make meaningful decisions on the river devolving into no one making it across the river.

At this point, we began to explore how to make the river a more controlled and meaningful experience. Our natural observation was to create a grid of river pieces that move. But this isn't very interesting nor does it replicate a river very well. We wanted the river to *feel* like a river. Taking lessons from numerous terrain based games, we shifted the river into a hexagonal grid. This allowed the river to still maintain its randomness, give the player a bit of meaningful choice in its movement, and truly feel like a stream moving downriver. We used a die roll to originate the flow so as to replicate a random river, but gave the player the authority to guide the river for more choice. In the process we also discovered the river movement was a nice counterbalance to the dangers of moving close to the waterfall since it's easier to influence the river further from the waterfall.

Once we determined the river movement, we were able to focus on our character's attributes. We caused coal to burn through the straw and likewise can not stand on straw without falling into the river. We countered this movement with the bean who is light and not on fire. Because the bean is food, we found it natural to add obstacles of fish in the river for the bean to deal with. Very quickly we had given each of our characters identity in our narrative. There was obstacle, struggle, tension, and climax. The primary issue with this iteration was the straw. The straw was only serving to be utility with little character. We overcame this by making the straw a character that drops straw along his movement. This gave straw an identity in the overall game further pushing our narrative and it also ended up mirroring the required cooperation that occurred in the story.

Through multiple playtests, we found the narrative was very simple with little variation game to game. We decided to introduce components to mitigate this problem: event cards and action cards. Event cards allow the environment as a whole to be dramatically different causing fish to sometimes be on a feeding frenzy to the straw being stingy and not dropping any straw bridges. We also added in action cards which vary and also obfuscate who is in the lead at any given time. These cards created the variation the game truly needs from round to round. Playtesters were also confused by the system, so we tried to simplify the artistic design and make relatable pieces to guide them along.

The last iteration we made was the win condition. The game came to an abrupt ending when only two players needed to make it across. Also, the result for losing a piece was too severe. To mitigate these problems and add more drama, we created an point track on the other side of the river. After fiddling with the numbers, we created a point structure to reward getting all your players across the river close to the same time.