

DESIGN HISTORY OF WORLD WAR 5

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I love *Risk*. The classic world conquest board game was one of my earliest gaming obsessions, and I harbor fond memories of spending the whole day playing *Risk* with my friends whenever a snow day arose. *Risk* was also one of my earliest game design platforms; when I discovered the card game *Nuclear War*, I tinkered up a set of rules for a combination game I called "Nuclear Risk."

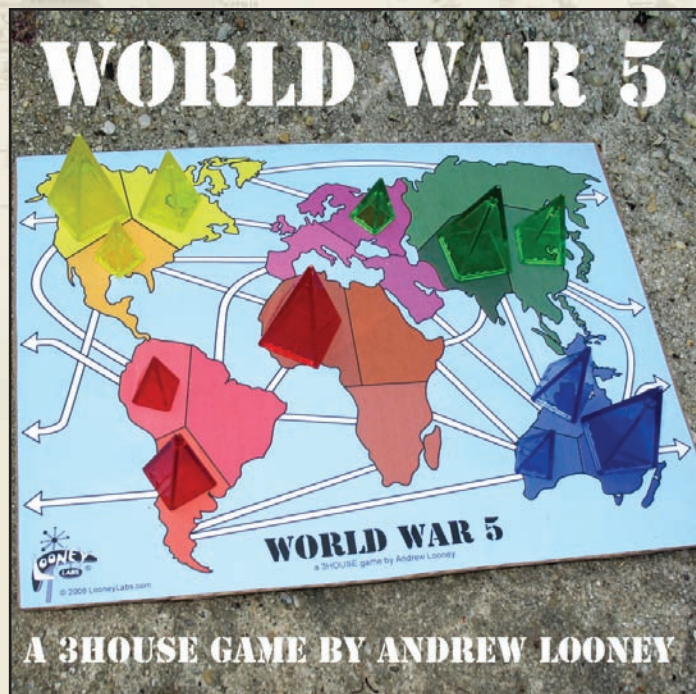
But as much as I cherish it, *Risk* has flaws. The most obvious problem is that the game is WAY too long. It takes hours and hours to play a complete game — that's why we always needed to reserve a whole day, and even then we usually couldn't finish. It's quite a challenge to totally destroy every player, build a massive army, and make a run to victory — odds are that they'll fall short, retreat, and return to the status quo.

Risk has two distinct phases. At the beginning, each player's pieces are deposited randomly all over the world. There's a lot of action in the preliminary rounds as each player seeks to consolidate their scattered forces and use them to conquer their first continent. In the second, much longer phase, each player typically controls one continent (or a couple of smaller ones) and seeks to sustain that control against minor assaults while building up forces for a major assault.

Even though my favorite part of *Risk* is the first phase, I still have criticism. The board has color-coded continents and players use brightly-colored game tokens, but there's no correlation between the two. Secondly, there's the combat system, which is heavy on rolling of the dice. Anyone who's played my games knows I'm a believer in using luck to give the underdog a chance. However, every *Risk* player knows there are times when it's annoying that a tiny army can sometimes hold off an overwhelmingly huge one with a series of really good dice rolls.

At some point, my gaming buddies and I moved on from *Risk* to *Diplomacy*, which addresses several of these concerns. Set entirely in Europe, army (and navy) pieces start in their appropriately colored countries, and luck plays no factor at all — combat has a simple *push* mechanism. If my forces outweigh yours, you must move, and if there's nowhere for you to retreat to, your piece is destroyed.

But *Diplomacy* mirrors many of the same limitations as *Risk*. *Diplomacy* games also take forever — a single turn can typically take over an hour, depending on the amount of negotiation time the players are permitted. Of course, that's what really makes *Diplomacy* cool. Indeed, that's what the game is all about: making deals. But you still need to set aside a whole day for a game. Moreover, you need a large group for the game to really work right — at least six players.



Anyway, for many years I've been pondering the idea of an *Icehouse* game that you'd play on a *Risk* board, with a combat system similar to *Diplomacy*. The problem is with the *Risk* board itself. It's too big and too imbalanced for the kind of game I wanted to craft. So, finally, I realized that I just needed to make my own game board, which I could distort and adapt as warranted. Instead of going with the real-world constraints of differently-sized land masses and human-imposed boundaries, I reshaped the world into six evenly sized land groupings. Each grouping is divided up into three equally sized territories, with each continent connected to every other continent, and with all continents having an equal number of international connections. With the playing field thus leveled, I could proceed to create a vastly easier, fast-playing world conquest game. The goal is simple: conquer another continent while retaining a toehold in your own. All you need is three *Treehouse* sets, six regular dice, and my little world map game board to play.

As with all of my best game designs, this one congealed very quickly, going from design breakthrough to finished rule set in just under two weeks. I'm pleased with the results, and am curious to hear what *Risk* and *Diplomacy* gamers think of *World War 5*.

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Andy is the Chief Designer for Looney Labs. He is an artist-inventor driven by ideas and a desire to create really cool stuff.