

PLAYTESTING & REVISION

VERSION 1 (THE ORIGINAL)

Pox v.1 used the initial set of rules as described in the previous section.

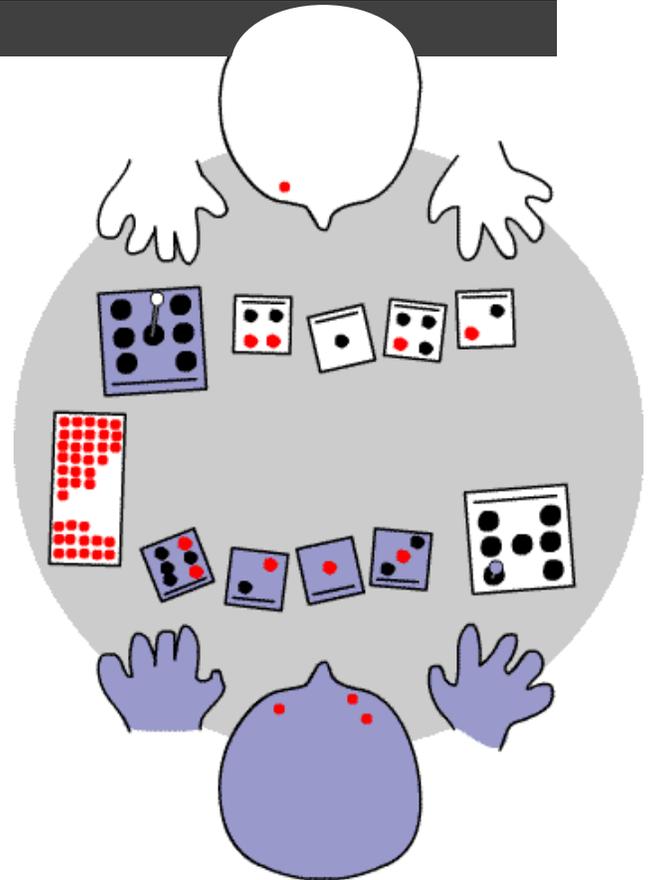
PLAYTEST #1

Saturday, February 2nd, early evening, Howard Kim & me

This first playtest established the playing setup you can see in the image at right. Both players line up their own dice to face themselves, but set up their voodoo boards to face their opponent.

Feedback from Howard:

- Initially thought that sticking pox dots onto dice would be tedious, but actually found it fun
- Wanted to not only stick the pox dots onto opponent's dice, but also to stick the pox dots onto the opponent's face.
- Game lasted about 15-20 minutes



PLAYTEST #2

Saturday, February 2nd, early evening, Kelsey Livingston & me

Tried a very minor change—I incorporated Howard's suggestion that opponents should not only apply the pox dots to one another's dice, but also to one another's faces. It didn't work so well—I realized that even the normal stickers-on-face mechanic wasn't for everyone, much less the sticking-stickers-on-each-other's-faces thing.

Feedback from Kelsey:

- Something exciting should happen when a die face becomes completely infected
- Different colors of stickers could mean different things
- Colored stickers on dice reminiscent of Rubik's cubes
- Liked the voodoo theme, felt that I should take it further
- Wasn't a fan of the stickers-on-face mechanic—hard to keep track of one's own score
- Maybe go for fewer than ten pox dots on face to end game but add ability to heal in some fashion

ANALYSIS

PROS

- Overall the mechanics of infection work, are novel & seem promising
- Rules are not too complex
- Stickers on face increase player buy-in (/endogenous value?) because people care about their appearance
- Theme is intriguing and can be expanded upon further
- Stabbing pins into voodoo board can be a tactile pleasure

CONS

- Putting stickers on dice can be tedious
- Clean-up is time-consuming, especially if one tries to conserve stickers for more than one use
- This game is wasteful of stickers
- Hard to track one's own score when score is kept using stickers on faces
- For consistency's sake it seems that opponents ought to put stickers on one another's faces, but this can be socially uncomfortable

VERSION 2 (ADDED REWARD FOR COMPLETION OF DIE FACES)

Rule change: *Your voodoo takes effect. Put a pox sticker onto any non-infected dot that occurs in the position where you stuck your pin. **If in doing so you infect the last un-infected dot on the face of a die, your opponent must place a pox dot on his or her face.***

PLAYTEST #3

Saturday, February 2nd, evening, Vimal Sathish & Oscar Ramirez

In order to keep track of my game rules and make for easier play, I printed out a few cheat-sheet-style cards to help players keep track of what to do during their turns. I also went back to letting players stick the pox dots on their own faces rather than on each other's.

Feedback from Vimal & Oscar:

- Both wanted to be able to stick the pox dots on each other's faces (Maybe it's a guy thing, heh. More likely a personality thing, really...)
- Liked the way the game starts off slow-ish but then avalanches—maybe let the game go on longer
- Increase the number of pins? Maybe give an extra pin to the player with more infection to encourage reversals (I think this would make for too arbitrary an ending)
- There's lot of incentive to go for the middle square, not so much for the middle sides—add an incentive?
- Maybe change the propagation of infection so that each infected spot can only infect one other spot per turn... might be interesting, but would probably slow game down too much

PLAYTEST #4

Saturday, February 2nd, late evening, Stephen Dewhurst & me

Feedback from Stephen:

- First player has advantage—make it fair by keeping the number of turns even. If first player would win, let second player have one last turn
- Initially felt that maybe the first player contagion rule (“Your opponent must put a pox dot on his or her face for each infected dot position that occurs on more than one die”) should exist, but came around
- Maybe infection of one’s own dice cannot spread to position one’s pin is in?
- Maybe ability to quarantine a die and only roll three of your four dice
- Confirmed my fear that I ought to change the dice dot configuration so that threes are diagonal one way and twos the other—this evens out the probabilities of the corner dot positions and puts more emphasis on paying attention during gameplay rather than relying on a consistently superior strategy. Makes for more meaningful player choice?

PLAYTEST #5

Saturday, February 2nd, late evening, Stephen Dewhurst & me

Feedback from Stephen:

- Yeah, really should change dice so that threes are along one diagonal and twos the other...
- Is there a set pattern that is most likely to win? like blackjack, there may be some strategies that are more statistically favorable
- Decided he really liked first player contagion rule because it created two different and competing strategies one could follow in attempting to win—either (1) getting pox dots onto the opponent’s face by having them roll such that multiple infected dots came up in the same position, or else (2) getting pox dots onto the opponent’s face by completely infecting die faces
- Maybe instead of always ending the game when someone gets up to ten pox dots, both players roll at the beginning of the game to determine the number of turns the game will last—different game lengths will call for different strategies

ANALYSIS

PROS

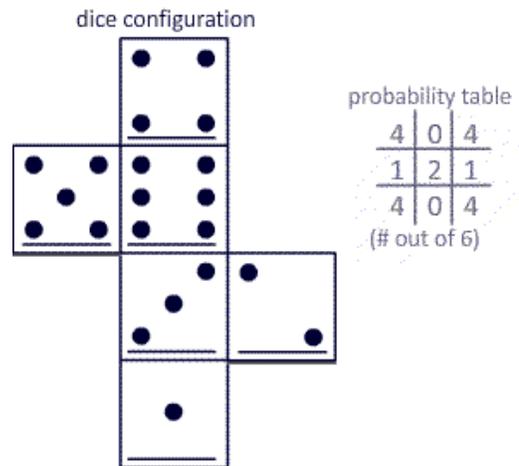
- Reward for completion of die faces seems to make the game somewhat more supporting of strategy (as opposed to purely luck-based—still definitely a heavy luck element)
- Some people do like stickers on faces, seems to invite a fun social element for a certain personality type
- As infection spreads, pace of game and scoring speeds up, helps sustain interest
- People want the game to go on longer, which means it’s sustaining player interest

CONS

- Ratio of luck to skill not readily apparent
- Some skill involved is really subtle—ex: ability to perceive/track the state of opponent’s dice
- Hard to sense the full impact of rule changes—feel kind of like I’m flying blind
- Current probabilities make it so some choices are obviously and consistently better to those who are paying attention to strategy... will have to try and wash marks off dice in order to fix this

VERSION 3 (DICE OVERHAUL, CHANGED PROBABILITIES)

On Sunday morning I carefully washed all my foam dice with soap and water to remove the pen markings that designated the bottom of each die face. It worked (and the dots didn't come off in the washing, hooray!). Then, I redrew the bottom markings in keeping with the figure at right, changing the probability distribution.



PLAYTEST #6

Sunday, February 3rd, afternoon, Bard McKinley & me

Feedback from Bard:

- Hard to perceive strategy
- Player contagion requiring only two infected dots in the same position seems too easy
- Completely infecting an entire die face should be more rewarding—maybe tie in the effect with the number of dots on the completed die face. Since sixes are so hard to complete, make them huge—a way to heal?
- Face stickers make it hard to keep track of one's own score—use voodoo doll with pins instead?
- Maybe add a way to cure infected dots, but probably not necessary
- Applying stickers to dice gets a little tedious—maybe make dice with drilled holes to insert pegs

ANALYSIS

PROS

- Available positions to infect are now more balanced, probability-wise—choice is less obvious and more meaningful

CONS

- The “skill” involved in this game may be too subtle, maybe things really do ultimately come down to luck, in which case the choice of where to infect isn't that meaningful

VERSION 4 (DECREASED CONTAGION, INCREASED FACE-COMPLETION REWARD)

Rule change: *Player contagion: If ~~more than one die has~~ **all four dice have** an infected dot in the same position, the infection spreads from the dice to the player. Your opponent must put a pox dot on his or her face for each infected dot position that occurs on ~~more than one die~~ **all four dice**.*

Rule change: *Your voodoo takes effect. Put a pox sticker onto any non-infected dot that occurs in the position where you stuck your pin. If in doing so you infect the last un-infected dot on the face of a die, your opponent must place a pox dot on his or her face **for each dot on the newly-completed die face**.*

PLAYTEST #7

Sunday, February 3rd, afternoon, Brad Michael & me

I timed this game—it lasted about 15 minutes.

Feedback from Brad:

- Liked the infection idea/mechanic
- Maybe for rolls in which there is no change (no propagation of infection, voodoo does not affect any dots, etc) there should be some sort of backlash?
- Liked stickers on face, liked score uncertainty
- Maybe use whiteboard dice? (I think the markings would come off in the course of rolling)
- Foam dice are not as much fun because they don't roll as much as normal dice and make little sound. Maybe hollow plastic dice with weights inside would be more satisfying
- Felt like game could be longer—maybe go up to more than 10 pox on face

PLAYTEST #8

Sunday, February 3rd, late afternoon, Lauren Etta & me

I timed this game—it lasted about 10 minutes.

Feedback from Lauren:

- Wished it were easier to keep track of where she'd stuck her pin in past turns—maybe instead of one pin you move around, use lots of pins?
- Putting stickers on face is cool for kids... maybe not as much of a hit with an older audience
- Agreed that using voodoo-style doll with pins to replace face stickers would be good—easier to see score & in keeping with theme

ANALYSIS**PROS**

- Increased reward for completion of a die face is exciting
- Seems like both players continually feel a sense of risk—the person who's ahead towards winning does not get too comfortable because there are sometimes reversals
- People still want the game to go on longer

CONS

- If there really are two fairly balanced strategies one can pursue in this game, decreasing player contagion while greatly increasing the face-completion reward negates the balance
- Rolling infection in the same position on all four dice happens so rarely that one could just drop the player contagion rule without much effect

VERSION 4.5 (RESTORED CONTAGION)

Reversed one of the earlier rule changes from v.4...

Rule change: *Player contagion: If ~~all four dice have~~ **more than one die has** an infected dot in the same position, the infection spreads from the dice to the player. Your opponent must put a pox dot on his or her face for each infected dot position that occurs on ~~all four dice~~ **more than one die**.*

PLAYTEST #9

Sunday, February 3rd, evening, Stephen Dewhurst & me

I timed this game—it lasted about 15 minutes

Feedback from Stephen:

- Might need to up the ending score in order to give different strategies time to play out

ANALYSIS

PROS

- Player contagion works again now, might be decently balanced against die face-completion
- Despite rule changes, game is still fairly straightforward

CONS

- I don't actually know if strategies are balanced, or how much impact such strategies have in any case
- If I wanted to up the ending score in order to make a longer game, stickers-on-face mechanic is unwieldy

VERSION 5 (INTRODUCED VOODOO DOLLS)

New game material: more pins

New game materials: one white and one purple poppet (aka voodoo doll)

Rule change: *The game is for two players—one plays white, the other, purple. The white player plays with the four white dice, the white pin, **the white poppet**, and the purple voodoo board; the purple player plays with the four purple dice, the purple pin, **the purple poppet**, and the white voodoo board.*

Rule change: *The goal of the game is to infect your opponent's dice in such a way that the infection spreads to your opponent. If ~~your opponent is the first to get ten pox dots on his or her face~~ **you are the first to stick twenty pins into your opponent's poppet**, you win.*

Rule change: *Player contagion: If more than one die has an infected dot in the same position, the infection spreads from the dice to the player. ~~Your opponent must put a pox dot on his or her face~~ **Stick a pin into your opponent's poppet** for each infected dot position that occurs on more than one die. If the player gets up to ~~ten pox~~ **twenty pins**, he or she loses the game.*

Rule change: *Your voodoo takes effect. Put a pox sticker onto any non-infected dot that occurs in the position where you stuck your pin. If in doing so you infect the last un-infected dot on the face of a die, ~~your opponent must place a pox dot on his or her face~~ stick a pin into your opponent's poppet for each dot on the newly-completed die face.*

I didn't happen to have any voodoo dolls lying around, so until I could obtain some I kept track of player pox points using tally marks on paper as a substitute for pins in dolls.

PLAYTEST #10

Sunday, February 3rd, evening, Stephen Dewhurst & me

I timed this game—it lasted about 16 minutes.

Feedback from Stephen:

- Game still has possibility for upsets & reversals, which is good

PLAYTEST #11

Monday, February 4th, early evening, Daren Makuck & me

I timed this game—it lasted about 12 minutes.

Feedback from Daren:

- Enjoyed the game, wanted it to be longer
- Maybe the goal should be to infect your opponent's dice completely

PLAYTEST #12

Tuesday, February 4th, during Game Design class, Zikun Fan & Greg Whose-last-name-I-don't-know

I needed to pay more attention to the game setup here. I didn't spend enough time explaining the rules and I drew up the score sheet in a confusing way such that I kept wanting to mark points down under the wrong person's name.

Feedback from Zikun & Greg:

- Not enough player choice or strategy besides memory task of recalling where you have previously stuck pins
- Cool idea overall
- Confusing

ANALYSIS

PROS

- Everyone I talk to seems excited about the

CONS

- Still question of whether there is

- Game is still engaging even without face stickers—people still want it to be longer
- voodoo doll thing even if we're just using tally marks at present
- strategy/whether choices are meaningful
- The system of tally marks I'm using until I can get voodoo dolls is not intuitive—the person with the higher score (of pox points) loses
- Playtesting with new people so often means few testers develop enough familiarity with the game to explore strategies in any depth
- I really don't like how pins in voodoo board yields infection dots on dice which then somehow yield... more pins? Infection on dice being converted into pins in voodoo dolls makes no sense! Pins in voodoo objects can convert to infection/disease, but converting back is really weird

VERSION 6 (CRAZY EXPERIMENTAL DICE-ONLY VERSION)

Rule change: The goal of the game is to infect your opponent's dice ~~in such a way that the infection spreads to your opponent~~ **completely**. If you are the first to ~~stick twenty pins into your opponent's poppet~~ **infect every dot on each of your opponent's four dice**, you win.

Rule change: ~~*Player contagion: If more than one die has an infected dot in the same position, the infection spreads from the dice to the player. Stick a pin into your opponent's poppet for each infected dot position that occurs on more than one die. If the player gets up to twenty pins, he or she loses the game.*~~

Rule change: ~~*Your voodoo takes effect. Put a pox sticker onto any non-infected dot that occurs in the position where you stuck your pin. If in doing so you infect the last un-infected dot on the face of a die, stick a pin into your opponent's poppet remove one pox sticker from your own dice for each dot on the newly-completed die face.*~~

This was a crazy test version... I was intrigued by Daren's idea of having the end goal of the game be to infect the opponent's dice completely. It seemed like this might make for a cleaner, tighter version, with no need for stickers-on-face or pox points or voodoo dolls. I also thought that the way the spread of infection accelerates over the course of a game would sweep things through to a speedy conclusion, but it didn't.

PLAYTEST #13

Tuesday, February 4th, during Game Design class, Lauren Etta & Carlos Pineda

I timed this game... Lauren and Carlos were troopers, but exhaustion set in after 30 minutes and we called an end to the thing.

Feedback from Lauren & Carlos:

- Too much healing! Halfway through the game we changed it so one only removed one pox dot from his/her dice upon completely infecting a face
- Even with reduced healing, is way too long and not as much fun as the old version

- In ordering turn actions, voodoo should take effect before infection propagates—because the voodoo is the active involvement of the player (and the spread of infection more passive), is more fun when player actions take effect sooner rather than later

Suggestions from Jesse:

- Maybe play until someone rolls all completely infected faces instead of until all a player's dice are completely infected
- Could have two pins on voodoo board—one good (preventing infection of that position on own dice), one bad (infecting that position on opponent's dice)
- Maybe add yahtzee-ish dynamic in which opponent rolls before you choose the infection point, but you cannot place the pin in that location again until you have placed a pin in each of the other positions, at which point pox board is cleared again
- Maybe lose stickers & make scoring per-turn only—each turn doesn't affect later turns

Suggestion from Andy Jih:

- Maybe use player contagion as a way of blocking off parts of the pox board—when board is entirely inaccessible, play ends

ANALYSIS

PROS

- Got rid of weird “voodoo pins to infection back to voodoo pins” conversion
- Incorporated an element of healing, which lots of people had asked about in previous versions
- Was theoretically nice

CONS

- Was pretty dreadful in practice
- Went on way too long
- Acceleration of infection flattened out, giving things a grinding feeling
- Bored us all to tears—we quit before the end

VERSION 5 (RETURN OF THE VOODOO DOLLS)

Reverted back to Pox v.5, because v.6 wasn't an improvement at all.

PLAYTEST #14

Tuesday, February 4th, early evening, Seth Sivak & me

Feedback from Seth:

- Maybe play with pins with little numbered flags, so can see what you've already done—if not for actual game, then at least for testing purposes
- Propagation of infection is cool, interest curve is cool

- Would like to be able to keep track of past voodoo board moves more easily
- Maybe instead of having many little separate dot stickers, use one large square sticker on each die face and use markers on it to track infection—could simplify infection process & make clean-up much less of a hassle

ANALYSIS

PROS

- Way better than v.6

CONS

- I still *really* don't like the pins-to-infection-to-pins thing

VERSION 7 (TWENTY-ONE PIN VERSION)

Voodoo dolls are complete and ready for use!

Rule change: *The game is for two players—one plays white, the other, purple. The white player plays with the four white dice, ~~the white pin~~, the white poppet, and the purple voodoo board; the purple player plays with the four purple dice, ~~the purple pin~~, the purple poppet, and the white voodoo board. **Each player also gets a stash of twenty-one pins.***

Rule change: *The goal of the game is to infect your opponent's dice in such a way that the infection spreads to your opponent. If you are the first to ~~stick twenty pins~~ **transfer all twenty-one of your pins** into your opponent's poppet, you win.*

Rule change: *On your turn: Stick ~~your~~ **a pin** into one of the dots on your voodoo board. **You may not stick a second pin into any dot unless all dots on the board have a pin in each, and you may not stick a third pin into any dot unless all dots on the board have two pins in each.** Your opponent must roll his or her dice in response.*

Rule change: *Player contagion: If more than one die has an infected dot in the same position, the infection spreads from the dice to the player. ~~Stick a pin~~ **Remove a pin from your pox board and stick it** into your opponent's poppet for each infected dot position that occurs on more than one die.*

Rule change: *Your voodoo takes effect. Put a pox sticker onto any non-infected dot that occurs in the position where you stuck your pin. If in doing so you infect the last un-infected dot on the face of a die, ~~stick a pin~~ **remove a pin from your pox board and stick it** into your opponent's poppet for each dot on the newly-completed die face.*

PLAYTEST #15

Thursday, February 7th, early evening, Lauren Etta & me

Feedback from Lauren:

- Use chip clip or some other indicator to hold pins so you can tell which one was placed last
- Maybe your voodoo doll should sit with your opponent (I think people identify more with their voodoo doll if it hangs out on their side of the table)

PLAYTEST #16

Sunday, February 10th, morning, Stephen Dewhurst & me

Minor change—made little felt cap things for pins to make it easier to tell which pin was placed last. After sticking a pin into the pox board, player should move little cap onto it.

I timed this game—it lasted about 16 minutes.

Feedback from Stephen:

- Wished for some way to make sticking infection stickers unnecessary, but enjoyed the pins
- Thought again that maybe I should lose the first player contagion rule, but no...
- When die face is completed, only one pin should be removed from pox board—rest should come from the stash, otherwise die face completion becomes too strong
- Make it so full die faces count for spread of infection but not for player contagion?

ANALYSIS**PROS**

- Moving existing pins from the voodoo board to the voodoo doll is not so heinous as having infected dice spontaneously generate new voodoo pins against all nature and logic
- Voodoo dolls seem to be marvellous toys that people really like

CONS

- Still kind of weird to have voodoo board for infecting dice, which then gives you access to a voodoo doll of your opponent. If you're trying to get at your opponent, why go for the dice? Why not just start with the voodoo doll?
- Even though people like playing with pins, the infection stickers are still considered an annoyance
- Rules are starting to feel a little convoluted—kind of on the tipping point

VERSION 8 (QUARANTINE VERSION)

Tried out quarantine rules in which players only have to roll three of their four dice, their choice. I was wondering if this would make for more of a feeling of strategy and player choice.

PLAYTEST #17

Sunday, February 10th, morning, Stephen Dewhurst & me

I timed this game—we stopped about 10 minutes into it without finishing.

Feedback from Stephen:

- Felt that this version required more strategy, but trade-off was that it was not as fast-paced

ANALYSIS

PROS

- Might be better for people who really enjoy strategy and don't mind slower play

CONS

- Changed the whole feeling/rhythm of the game—stole away the momentum

VERSION 9 (MODIFIED TWENTY-ONE PIN VERSION)

Rule change: *Player contagion: If more than one die has an infected dot in the same position, the infection spreads from the dice to the player. ~~Remove a pin from your pox board~~ **Take a pin from your stash** and stick it into your opponent's poppet for each infected dot position that occurs on more than one die.*

Rule change: *Your voodoo takes effect. Put a pox sticker onto any non-infected dot that occurs in the position where you stuck your pin. If in doing so you infect the last un-infected dot on the face of a die, ~~remove a pin from your pox board and stick it into your opponent's poppet~~ **stick a pin into your opponent's poppet** for each dot on the newly-completed die face. **One of these pins may be chosen out of the pins stuck into your pox board; the rest should come from your stash.***

PLAYTEST #18

Sunday, February 10th, morning, Brad Michael & me

Dropped quarantine rules, and implemented minor changes—pins to stick into opponent's poppet always come from one's stash, except when a die face is completed, in which case one may pull one of the pins from his or her pox board as a special bonus.

Feedback from Brad:

- Liked the changes
- Recommended I print out new cheat-sheet style cards to help people keep track of what to do during their turns

ANALYSIS

PROS

- Hopefully balances two competing strategies, player contagion and dice face completion

CONS

- Still don't feel like I have a handle on the strategy vs. luck dynamic—getting there might require computer-based simulation of dice infection to enable Monte Carlo method
- Rules feel less clean and straightforward than I'd like
- I'm dissatisfied with the interactions between dice, infection, pins, and players. As fun as the voodoo dolls are, they still don't fit quite right story-wise—the stickers-on-face thing had a very intuitive logic, comparatively