



Army Brats
 A game for the piecepack by Don Kirkby & Alan Price
 Version 1.7, 2004-06
 Copyright © 2004 Don Kirkby and Alan Price
 2-4 players. 20 minutes.

Equipment

1 piecepack (<http://www.piecepack.org>).

Summary

Welcome to Fort Biloxi. Your parents have sent you to military school to "help you focus". What could be scarier than military school? How about being one of the new kids? Luckily, you have a cunning plan. You and the other new kids (the other players) are going to try to get expelled so you can go back to public school with all your friends.

Setup

The tiles represent the classrooms at school with each suit as a different subject: Arms are weaponry studies, Crowns are military history, Suns are desert survival, and Moons are poetry class. (Poetry class? Well, it's actually a year-long analysis of "The Charge of the Light Brigade" with discussion of the strategic importance of cavalry in modern warfare.) Place all the tiles suit side down and shuffle them. Place them in a 5x5 square with a hole in the centre and flip them suit side up. The coins are absentee passes for different subjects and days. Place them all suit side up and shuffle them. Put them beside the tiles where everyone can reach them.

Give a pawn and the matching die to each player, any extras are removed from the game. Roll the dice to see who goes first, null is worth zero, ace is worth one, and the highest roll goes first. Players tied for first place roll again. All players place their pawn in the home room hole at the centre of the board. Flip each player's die so that the ace is facing up, and place them all next to one of the corners of the board.

Objective

You want to get expelled first. Your cunning plan is to get caught with illegal absentee passes. The more useful the passes, the more honour demerits you get. Any student who gets 20 or more honour demerits gets expelled. All the new kids have made a pact to help each other by trading passes, but the first one expelled wins the game. Lucky for you, there's a thriving black market in absentee passes.

Each pass is valid for one class for one day. The class is represented by the suit as described above, and the day is represented by the value on the other side. Null for Monday, ace for Tuesday, up to five for Saturday. (Did we mention that you have to go to school on Saturday? That's another reason you want to get expelled.) For example, the three of Moons lets you get out of poetry on Thursday. If you can hoard several passes for the same day, you can skip a day of school. If you can hoard several passes for the same class on consecutive days, you can wait a few days to do your homework.

Play

Starting with the first player and proceeding to the left, take turns. On your turn, you must either go to class or trade passes with another player. If you have no legal move, each opponent who has any passes must give you one pass of his choice.

Go to class

Move your pawn to an unoccupied adjacent tile along a row or a column. Every class has at least one student who sells illegal absentee passes. Since you're a new kid they'll give you free passes to get you hooked. When you move into a class, draw a pass from the same subject as the class you just moved to. If there are no passes of that subject left in the pool, there's a scarcity and the seller will demand you discard one of your passes from that subject instead of drawing one. If there are no passes of that subject left in the pool and you don't have any of that subject to discard, you cannot move to that class. When you draw a pass, peek at the day and then leave it in front of you with the suit side up. You can always peek at the day of your own passes.

Trade passes (one for one)

All the new kids have made a pact to help each other by trading passes. However, because each of you thinks you're a bit smarter than the others, you've all tried to make the trading rules as complicated as possible. Each of you thinks this will confuse the others enough to let you get expelled first. Sadly, it will just make all of you take longer.

If you have a pass for the same subject as the class you're in (the suits match), you may trade it for a pass of the same subject. Choose an opponent to trade with, and say what you're trading. If you were on a crowns tile, for example, you could say, "I'm trading Jane one for one history passes." Your opponent may choose which of her passes to give you as long as it matches the subject you asked for. Obviously, you can only trade with an opponent who has at least one pass for that subject.

Trade passes (one for two)

If you have the pass that matches the subject and value of the tile your pawn is on, you may trade it for two passes of the same subject. Choose an opponent to trade with, show that the subject and value of your pass matches the tile, and say what you're trading. If you were on a moons tile, for example, you could say, "I'm trading Bob one for two poetry passes." Your opponent may choose which two of his passes to give you as long as they match the subject you asked for. Obviously, you can only trade with an opponent who has at least two passes for that subject.

Trade passes (one for one of any subject)

If you have the pass that matches the subject and value of the tile your pawn is on, you may trade it for one pass of a different subject. Choose an opponent to trade with, show that the subject and value of your pass matches the tile, and say what you're trading. If you were on a moons tile, for example, you could say, "I'm trading Lisa one poetry pass for one history pass." Your opponent may choose which of her passes to give you as long as it matches the subject you asked for. Obviously, you can only trade with an opponent who has at least one pass in the subject you ask for.

Winning

You get honour demerits by getting caught with a useful set of passes. A set of three or more passes for consecutive days in the same subject are useful, and two, three, or four passes for the same day are useful. Remember, nulls are for Monday, aces are for Tuesday, and so on up to fives for Saturday. Here are three examples of useful sets where "c" stands for crowns, "a" stands for arms, "s" stands for suns, and "m" stands for moons: 2c, 3c, 4c, 5c make a sequence of four in history, Nc, Ac, 2c, 3c, 4c make a sequence of five in history starting with a null and an ace, and 2c, 2a, 2s, 2m give you the whole day off on Wednesday. You do not have to get caught with a set as soon as you get it, you can wait to build a more useful one. You may get caught at the end of your turn, or after someone has traded with you.

When you are ready to get caught, leave the passes in your desk because there's a desk inspection after every class. Open your desk by picking up the tile from under your pawn and placing it in the hole at the centre of the board. Leave your pawn in the new hole. Show the set of passes to the other players and you've been caught. Passes for the same subject on consecutive days earn you one demerit for each pass. Two, three, and four passes for the same day are worth two, five, and nine demerits, respectively. Keep score by moving your die clockwise around the outside of the board, one tile for each demerit. The first player to go once around the board by earning at least twenty demerits gets expelled and wins the game. After you've been caught, return the passes to the pool suit side up, and shuffle the pool.

Getting caught with more than one combination

After a trade, both players may want to get caught. Hand out demerits for all of the current player's sets first. If he has twenty or more demerits, he wins the game. If not, deal with the other player's sets normally, and continue with the next player's turn.

Credits

Alan contributed the following elements: trading coins one for two that match the colour of the tile, drawing a coin when you move, and the winning conditions. Don contributed the following: change trading to one for one and allow one for two when the tile matches the number as well, discard coin to allow move when all coins are drawn, shuffling board for next round, keep score with dice, and dealing with no legal move. More scoring combinations were added after several playtesters suggested it.

Many thanks to the friends and family who helped with playtesting.

Strategy

If your opponents are trying to make sequences, they will likely trade away their fives and blanks. This makes fives and blanks good passes to collect for making a set on the same day. A set on the same day takes longer to get than a sequence, but it's worth more demerits, and you end up with lots of extra passes that you can use to make more sets.

Two classrooms next to each other with matching subjects will let you move back and forth and draw a pass on each turn. If your opponents don't do anything to stop you, you will have a sequence after three to five turns.

If your opponent is drawing a lot of passes in one subject, be defensive! Draw some passes of the same subject, or block her movement with your pawn. If she is drawing from all four subjects, she may be trying to get a set on the same day. It's difficult to really defend against this, but you can be disruptive with trading. Especially watch for subjects where she only has one pass - she probably needs it.

Canadian Army Variant

It's the same idea, but more lenient and fewer people. Try this variant for a two player game with more strategy. All rules from the regular version apply, with these changes:

Winning

You can only get demerits for sets of four or more passes.

Strategy

In order to get a sequence of four, you must have the two and the three. Therefore, if you have the two or the three, your opponent can't make a sequence in that subject without trading with you.

Player Reminders

Suits & Subjects	Values & Days	Trading Rules
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Arms = Weaponry Studies Crowns = Military History Suns = Desert Survival Moons = Poetry 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Null = Monday Ace = Tuesday 2 = Wednesday 3 = Thursday 4 = Friday 5 = Saturday 	You always trade away one pass. What you get back depends on the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> When pass matches subject of tile: one pass of the same subject. When pass matches subject and value: two passes of the same subject OR one pass of a different subject.

Licensing

Permission is granted to copy, distribute and/or modify this document under the terms of the GNU Free Documentation License, Version 1.1 or any later version published by the Free Software Foundation; with no Invariant Sections, no Front-Cover Texts, and no Back-Cover Texts. A copy of the license can be found at <http://www.gnu.org/copyleft/fdl.html>.

Revision History

Revision 1.0	2004-03-30	dk
First version		
Revision 1.2	2004-04-05	dk
Significant changes after testing with four players. Keep coins between rounds and use dice for scorekeeping. Simplify board shuffle.		
Revision 1.6	2004-06-22	dk
Add military school theme.		