

BOARD GAME DESIGN COMPETITION 2026

Official Competition Document – Rev 1.0 (Last updated:05 May 2026)



COMPETITION RULES AND GUIDELINES.

Presented by: Return Revolution Board Game Design Studio, Cape Town

Submission Deadline: 15 July 2026, 6:00 PM

"We dare you to dream big, to design boldly and to develop joyfully, as we build a thriving, fun-filled community around the adventure of a new board game design competition in South Africa."

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The adventure begins with a blank piece of paper...
... and now you get to tell the story.

1. Competition Overview

Return Revolution invites designers, creatives, families, friends and aspiring board game makers across South Africa to design an original, playable board game as part of our annual Board Game Design Competition.

By keeping our rules clear and simple, we aim to provide maximum creative freedom while maintaining a level playing field. The focus is on creativity, fun and the joy of bringing a new game idea to life.

Our aim:

- to build community

Connecting local and aspiring board game designers with a growing audience.

- inspire playful & creative connection

We want more people around fun-filled tables, creating and playing more board games together.

- to showcase local talent

Shining a spotlight on our own very best undiscovered board game designers in South Africa.

- and to gain momentum

For local designers to have their games developed, produced and enjoyed by more players.

Entries are open to all individuals residing in South Africa.
Whether you are a first-time designer or someone who has been sketching game ideas for years, this competition is for you.

R550 entry fee per game submission.
(Multiple entries per person is allowed).

Entry fee includes:

- Starter Kit (Couriered to you via PUDO locker system)
- Competition Guidelines
- List of welcome Themes, Mechanics & Components
- Access to Community & Support

2. Board Game Design Rules

The following rules define the boundaries within which your game should ideally be designed. They are intentionally broad and these constraints exist to inspire creativity, not limit it.

The big overarching request is this:

- no evil / dark-themed games,
- no explicit content,
- no dragons, spells, zombies or spirits, etc.
- no drinking games.

We are looking for **family friendly**, uplifting, joyful, strategic games.

2.1. Originality

Your game must be an original design, created by you and submitted to Return Revolution during the competition period (15 May – 15 July 2026). Existing published games, re-themed editions of existing games, or direct copies of other designers' work will not be accepted.

“We're not asking for a perfect game — we're asking for YOUR game.”

2.2. Themes, Mechanics and Components

Your game design must incorporate one theme and a selection of mechanics from the lists provided below. How creatively and cohesively you combine these is part of what the judges will assess.

If you have a theme, mechanic, or component not listed below that you would like to use in your game, kindly ask one of the judges to pre-approve.

Available THEMES include:

- Nature,
- Space,
- Food,
- Ocean
- Adventure
- Proudly SA
- Sports
- 'Abstract'

The idea behind requesting these 'more specific' themes is to find locally designed games that we'll also enjoy playing. If you have another great theme idea, please feel free to use it.

Suggested MECHANICS include:

- Deck / Engine Building,
- Area Control,
- Worker Placement,
- Tile Laying,
- Cooperative Play,
- Set Collection,
- Tableau Building,
- Resource management.

We are not looking for another "30 Seconds"-style game or some more "Monopoly"-look-a-likes. The idea behind suggesting some of these 'more involved' mechanics is to encourage you to design more boldly. If you have another great mechanic idea, please feel free to use it.

Readily available COMPONENTS to choose from:

- Board
- Cards
- Tiles
- Standard Dice and/or Custom Dice
- Coins / Resource Tokens
- Meeples, Standees,
- Cubes
- Dexterity items

Again, these are some of the components that we can readily make / or supply. Let us know if you need something more custom.

You may add additional components beyond those listed, or those provided in your "Starter Kits", but all specified components must be present and functional in your game.

2.3. Gameplay Length

Your game should have a target play time of between 20minutes and 60 minutes for a standard session. Note: Games that run significantly under or over this range without strong justification may be poorly voted for by judges.

3. Submission Guidelines

All entries must be a physical, playable board game (or card game) submitted in hard-copy format.

Digital-only submissions will not be accepted.

Please read the following carefully before submitting.

3.1. Physical Prototype Required

Submit a fully playable physical prototype of your game. It does not need to be professionally produced. It can be hand-drawn and handmade, or designed on a computer, printed, and just neatly cut / made up. The Starter Kit items can be used as 'backings or substrates' to add your game onto. Ideally, your game should fit into the provided box.

Shipping via the PUDO locker system is preferred.

All submissions must be sent to:

PUDO Locker: Pinehurst Shopping Centre, Durbanville, Western Cape.

Piet van der Westhuizen, 083 700 4222, piet1vdw@gmail.com

- Shipping costs are the responsibility of the entrant.
- Please ensure your package is well-protected for transit.

3.2. Submission Deadline

Your submission must arrive at the above address before 15 July 2026 at 6:00 PM.

What to Include in Your Package:

1. Your fully playable game prototype (all components, cards, board, dice, tokens etc.),
2. A printed copy of your rulebook / instruction sheet,
3. The completed entry form (provided in your Starter Kit),
4. A link to your submission video (can also be sent via email or WhatsApp),

Submission Video

Include a short video (3–5 minutes) showing your game being played or demonstrated. This can be sent via Email or WhatsApp, uploaded to YouTube (unlisted), or sent via any accessible link.

The video should ideally show you, the designer, explaining:

- the theme and overview of the game,
- the core gameplay (mechanics) and,
- give the judges a sense of how the game plays and feels.

Photos of your game are also welcome and encouraged – especially when shared on your social media.

4. Judging Criteria

General note on artwork:

Although artwork is a very big factor in one's experience of a board game, it is not an essential factor for this competition. "Extra points for hand-illustrated components." Although AI placeholder art would be acceptable, please don't spend your precious family time on wasted hours of generating 'pristine' art. **What matters is that the game is original and playable as submitted.**

Submissions will be evaluated by a panel of 5 judges, including Piet (founder of Return Revolution) and 4 additional judges to be announced on RR's Social Media. Each submission will be assessed against the following five criteria:

4.1. Fun Factor

Is the game enjoyable to play? Does it create moments of excitement, tension, strategy or laughter? Although taste and preference differs, fun is the heart of every great board game. So although subjective, this is the most important criterion.

4.2. Theme & Concept

How well does the game's theme come through in the overall design? Is the concept clear, original and engaging? Does it feel like a game with its own identity, story and world?

4.3. Mechanics & Theme Interaction

Do the mechanics serve the theme? Are they intuitive and well-balanced? The best board games have mechanics that feel like a natural extension of the theme. Judges will assess how cohesively these elements work together.

4.4. Quality of Submission

How complete, clear and well-presented is the submission? This includes the prototype, the rulebook and the overall care taken in presenting the entry. High production value is not required - clarity and playability are. The Video won't form part of the 'judged items', but may help to better present your game.

Winning Game Announcement

Winners will be announced after the judging period closes (+- 1 month after the submission date). The winning game will be featured across Return Revolution's

channels and winners informed via email. All finalists will be notified directly to receive prizes.

5. Important Dates

15 May 2026 - Competition starts.

15 May – 15 July - Design Period.

15 July 2026 - Submission Deadline — physical entries must arrive via PUDO.

Winners Announced – TBA (Somewhere in August, once judges have concluded playtesting and voted on best design).

6. Prizes:

Grand Prize:

R3000 Cash Prize + a number of printed copies of your game (the number of copies would depend on the game's requirements and components).

Runner Up:

R1000 + a selection of board games from Return Revolution and Skycastle Studios.

Spot Prizes:

A selection of board games (sponsored by Skycastle Studios) and other spot prizes will be awarded on ad-hoc basis. (Entrants are encouraged to 'go beyond' as things like the most creative Social Media post about the competition, or funniest game artwork, or best video, etc. might be awarded for their effort.)

7. Intellectual Property, Creative Ownership & Copyright

7.1. You Own Your Design

Entrants retain full intellectual property and creative ownership of their submitted games. Return Revolution does not claim ownership of any submitted designs, mechanics, artwork or concepts.

7.2. Rights to showcase your game

By entering, you grant Return Revolution a non-exclusive, royalty-free right to feature/ showcase your game name, photos, video and a description of your game in promotional materials related to the competition (social media, newsletter, website,

etc.). Under no circumstances does this imply potential publishing intent, transfer of ownership, or future claims to your game. Designers may (but is not required to) also share content relating to the design competition, their design processes, or resulting games. Tagging Return Revolution in such posts would be appreciated but not required.

7.3. Publication Consideration

Designers will have no expectations of their submitted games being published beyond the scope of the competition. All submitted games may however be considered for future publication opportunities, by or in partnership with Return Revolution. Any such arrangement would be a separate agreement negotiated directly with the designer and any parties involved.

7.4. Original Work

By submitting, you confirm that your game is entirely your own original work and does not infringe on any existing copyrights, trademarks or intellectual property held by third parties. Return Revolution accepts no liability for submissions that violate third-party copyrights, and no claims on Intellectual Property will be entertained, but simply passed on/ referred to the designer.

7.5. Return of Prototypes

Return Revolution will make a reasonable effort to preserve and return prototypes after judging. If the designer would like their copy returned, the shipping costs would be for the designer's account. However, we cannot guarantee the condition of returned items. Please do not send irreplaceable originals if so valued.

8. Additional Notes

Judging is Final

All decisions made by the judging panel are final and not subject to appeal or dispute. Judges are required to declare any conflicts of interest prior to the judging process.

Disqualification

Return Revolution reserves the right to disqualify any entry that violates the rules, misrepresents the designer's work, infringes copyrights, or is submitted after the deadline.

Rule Updates

Return Revolution reserves the right to update or clarify these rules. Any changes will be communicated to all registered entrants via email. The most current version of this document will always be available at www.returnrevolution.co.za.

Contact & Questions

Questions about the competition, rules or submission process can be directed to Piet at Return Revolution – via email, the website, or WhatsApp. We aim to respond within 2–3 business days.

Community

We encourage all entrants to share their design journey, process and prototypes on social media. Feel free to tag us @returnrevolution or use #RRDesignComp2026. There is a local BGBSA Community - Designers WhatsApp group, if you'd like to join, feel free to ask. The board game community is what makes this all worthwhile.

We can't wait to see what you create.

Piet & the Return Revolution board game design competition team

www.returnrevolution.co.za