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The Legend of Zelda: The Four Swords – Board Game Adaptation

# Table of Contents

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Overview.....	3
Rationale.....	3
Audience.....	3
Design Decisions and Goals.....	4
Testing and Revisions.....	5
Rules of Play.....	8

## Overview

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*The Legend of Zelda: Four Swords* is a multiplayer take on classic Zelda gameplay. It forces players to cooperate and work together while simultaneously competing against one another to collect the most rupees along their journey. In its original digital form, one to four players simultaneously worked their way through a series of levels and challenges that required their combined cooperation to complete. These challenges included simultaneously activating switches, pushing blocks, finding keys, and fighting enemies and bosses. While doing this however, players had an opportunity to compete with each other by racing to collect items and rupees. The player with the most rupees at the end was declared the winner.

This simultaneous cooperation and competition lead to some very interesting dynamics between players. Their coordination, or lack thereof, could really make for a fun and humorous experience. The game brilliantly played off of different play styles, and each player's different approach really came out during play. This even made a difference after a level was finished, as players were allowed to vote on who the most cooperative and uncooperative players were, with the chosen players being rewarded or punished respectively.

## Rationale

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This very unique and fun game would lend itself very well to a board game, as it highlighted player interaction off screen as well as on. One of the original idea's unfortunate drawbacks was its heavy reliance on various pieces of hardware. Enjoying the game in its truest form required no less than four Gameboy Advance systems, and four Gameboy Advance to Gamecube link cables, plus a Gamecube and a copy of the game. A board game adaptation would allow for the same kind of cooperative yet competitive experience, while not being chained to excessive hardware combinations. The player interaction would carry over extremely well to a board game, as the original required all four players to be situated fairly close in the same room. The same kinds of responses and interaction could take place with a board game adaptation, and in fact heightened, as players can be more focused on each other rather than a screen.

## Audience

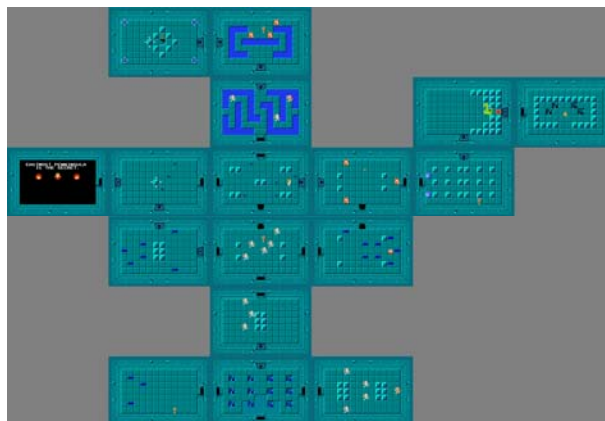
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*Zelda: Four Swords* offers a somewhat simplified take on the *Zelda* formula, which lends itself well to newcomers. A board game would only further dispel the barrier to entry, and allow for pretty much anyone to pick up and play the game. A board game adaptation has the potential to quickly sell to fans of the series, and spread to others as they share the fun with those who may be less familiar with the franchise.

## Design Decisions and Goals

Since the original game was released, *The Legend of Zelda* has grown in complexity, scope, and ambition. In order to make an appropriate adaptation, I looked at various aspects of the series in its different incarnations in order to get a good idea of what main essence of the experience was. Whether looking at the original game or the most recent installment, I felt that that dungeon portion of the games was where the gameplay and design really shined. Carefully planned out dungeons give players a sense of exploration and excitement as they see make their way through meandering dungeons collecting items and pickups as they go.

I wanted my game to capture the same sense of exploration as the original. Noticing that the dungeon layouts were already very grid-like, I began to think about a game where you assembled a different dungeon each time you played. I began designing different tiles that would fit together in certain ways, allowing users some control over the board.



Dungeon Map from [zeldacapital.com](http://zeldacapital.com)

Looking at another snapshot in *Zelda's* history, I found the four player adaptation *The Four Swords* to be really compelling. It managed to maintain the same *Zelda* feel of puzzle solving and exploration, while throwing some interesting complete elements into the mix.



Four Swords image from [pocketchomp.com](http://pocketchomp.com) 1

I liked the idea of competing to see who could collect the most rupees, so I made that the main focus of my game. As players move through the dungeon, they are rewarded for doing things such as defeating enemies, opening chests and hitting switches. The other aspect I wanted to incorporate was

the idea of different items that could be useful to players in a variety of situations. Using the right item on a puzzle or the appropriate weapon on an enemy is a key element of *Zelda*, and something that should be present in an adaptation.

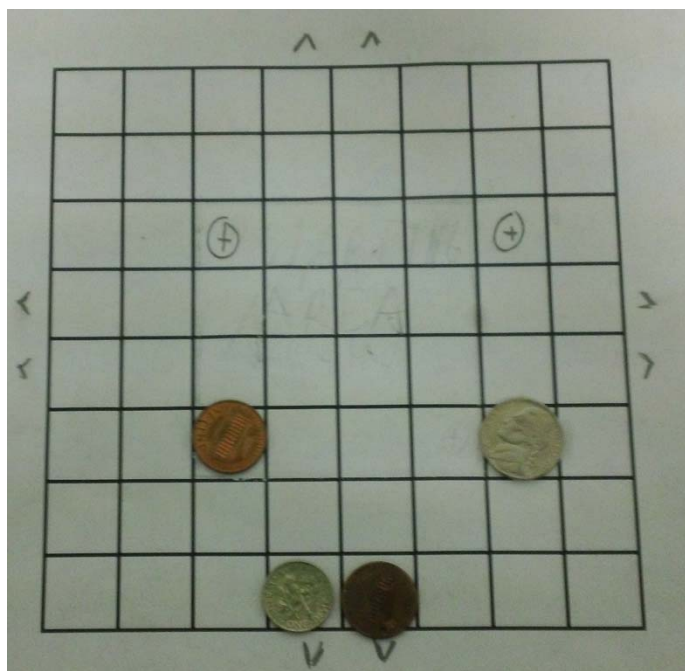
## Testing and Revisions

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I had the opportunity to test my game several times during its development. Each test led to interesting discoveries and flaws I had overlooked during the initial design process. After each test I examined what I thought worked and what didn't, going back to the rule set and making revisions for the next round of testing.

The first time I tested was with three players. From this test it was evident that the game lacked not only balance, but incentives for the players. I had asked players to complete each room in the dungeon before moving onto the boss, but there was no reward for completing a room. Both other players I was playing with just ran from treasure chest to treasure chest without really caring about the main goal of the game.

The next test I did was with four people. They seemed to grasp the main elements of the game well enough, but most of the time they seemed to just be going through the motions. I needed a way to make players work together just as much as they worked against each other. At that point the rewards for helping each other were not significant enough to make others go out of their way to help. The testers also revealed a critical oversight I made when designing the board. I had each person spawn in a specific spot on the board that led to the first two people to go completely blocking the first door from the other two.



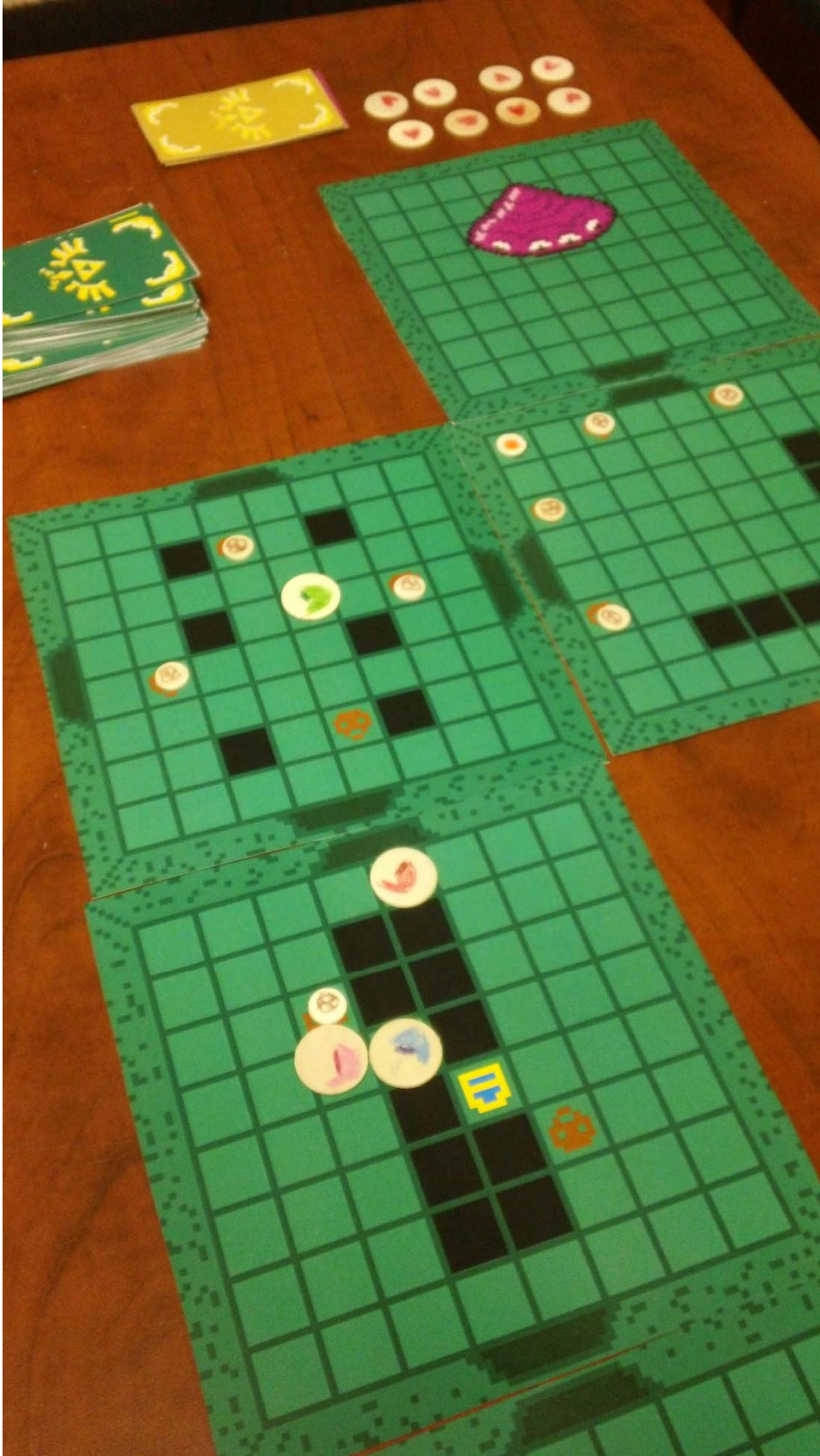
First two players blocking the doorway

This led me to some serious design revisions. I took another look at my combat and revised the reward system. Combat now becomes much easier with more people, but still offers a reward to newcomers who join a battle. I also realized that items played way too small a role in the game. I have since heavily increased the number of item cards. One of the testers gave me a good suggestion That I should have players start with different items so that combat was less monotonous and so that players could explore different strategies early on in the game.

I tested again with only two people playing the game. This led me to the concession that I should focus my game solely on four player games. Narrowing my scope this way allows for a much more refined experience for four player games. Some of the changes and mechanics I incorporated were working, but the systems I designed didn't really translate well to less than 4 people.

After making further refinements I was able to get in one final test with four people. From this test it was apparent that some of the changes I had made were working pretty well. The improved rewards for combat and completing rooms seemed to balance the game a lot better than before. I made a somewhat late decision to simplify the system I had for clearing rooms. I had originally made two types of rooms, ones where the goal of the room was to stand on a switch tile, and some where the goal was to defeat all of the enemies. I realized that defeating all the enemies was a bit of a chore, and the game flowed much better when players had the choice of facing some enemies or avoiding them. Making all the rooms have switches simplified the game a bit and helped to make a leaner, less drawn out experience.

After several rounds of testing, I think I have found a decent balance of cards for the loot and chest piles. During the last test, one player avoided combat as much as possible, while another faced almost every foe he encountered. In the end the two players had almost exactly the same amount of rupees. I considered it a good sign that the two different strategies were both viable. I feel the enemy drop pile might have a few too many hearts in it, but the last round of testing saw some really lucky dice rolls, so it might actually be balanced out pretty well.



# Rules of Play

## Overview

*The Legend of Zelda: The Four Swords* is a game for four players. The game plays out as you and your friends work your way through a sprawling dungeon on a quest to defeat the final monster Sliniara. As you traverse the dungeon, be sure to collect as many rupees as you can. The player with the most rupees after Sliniara has been defeated becomes the champion.



## Components

- 14 Board Tiles
  - 1 starting tile
  - 1 boss room tile
  - 12 main room tiles
- Position marking tokens
  - 4 player marker tokens
  - Heart tokens
  - Death tokens
  - Chest tokens
  - Enemy tokens
  - 6 Switch tokens
- Cards



- 100 green loot cards
  - 40 1 rupee loot cards
  - 30 1 heart loot cards
  - 20 5 rupee loot cards
  - 10 bomb loot cards
- 20 blue treasure chest cards
  - 5 10 rupee chest cards
  - 5 1 bomb chest cards
  - 4 hookshot chest cards
  - 4 1 arrow chest cards
  - 2 1 fairy chest cards
- 8 orange switch reward cards
  - 4 5 rupee switch reward cards
  - 4 10 rupee switch reward cards
- 4 purple starter cards
  - 1 hookshot starter card
  - 1 bow and arrow starter card
  - 1 bomb starter card
  - 1 fairy starter card
- 11 golden yellow boss reward cards
  - 5 10 rupee boss reward cards
  - 3 20 rupee boss reward cards
  - 2 30 rupee boss reward cards
  - 1 50 rupee boss reward card
- 1 6 sided die

### Setting Up the Board

To start the game, you must first set up the dungeon. Set aside the tile featuring the starting area and the tile with the large purple enemy. These are the starting tile and final boss tile respectively. Shuffle the remaining tiles. Place the starting tile in the center of the play area, making sure that you have plenty of room in at least one direction to build the rest of the board. Take turns taking tiles from the top of the shuffled stack and placing them next to each other on the table. . The doorways on adjacent tiles must match up in order for the two tiles to be placed next to each other. Once all the regular room tiles have been placed, the boss room tile should then be placed. There must be at least two regular room tiles separating the boss tile from the starting tile.

Once all the tiles are placed, place enemy, chest, and switch tokens on the corresponding spaces on the board tiles. These represent elements still active on the board. For example, enemy tokens on the board denote that that enemy is still present. Once an enemy is defeated, a switch has been stepped on, or a chest has been opened, the corresponding token should be removed from that space.

### Setting Up Players and Additional Pieces

Distribute 5 heart tokens to each player. These represent your life. If you take damage during combat, you must flip one of your hearts over to show that you have lost some health. Take 8 more heart tokens and place them close to the boss room tile. These represent the boss Sliniara's health. As players do damage to the boss, flip over its hearts to show how much health it has remaining. Next, take the four purple starter cards and shuffle them. Have each player draw one of the four cards to keep as his or her starting item card. Finally, place the green loot cards, blue chest cards, and orange switch reward cards within reach of all the players. Place the golden yellow boss reward cards aside until the boss has been defeated.

### Placing Player Tokens and Starting the Game

Have each player roll the die one time. Whoever rolls the highest number gets to choose his or her player token and place it anywhere within the starting area. The person with the next highest number chooses his or her player token and places it second, and so on. If there is a tie, players involved should reroll the die to resolve the tie. The player who places his or her token last gets to take the first turn.

### Turns

Each player's turn consists of up to three phases. These phases are movement, item usage, and combat. All three phases may not occur during a single turn, but no phase should happen more than once in a single player's turn.

### Movement

The movement phase of a player's turn usually happens first, though the player may choose to use an item before moving. During the movement phase, a player may move his player marker up to six spaces on the map. A player can move less than six spaces, but must move at least one. Players can only move in cardinal directions, i.e. up, down, left or right, not diagonally. Moving to an adjacent room through two aligned doorways counts as moving one square. Squares filled in with black are pits that the player cannot walk over. He or she must go around them. Players also cannot move through each other.

Once a player enters a room, he or she cannot exit it through any other door than the one through which he or she entered without first standing on the switch spot in the room. The switch opens up all other doors leading from a room. An easy way to keep track of this is by noticing that a player cannot move one room that still has its switch token into another room that still has its switch token. Similarly, a player cannot move from one room that still has a switch token into the boss room.

If during his or her turn, a player moves into a space bordering a space with an enemy token on it, including diagonals, that player is halted in his or her tracks and enters combat with that enemy. A player cannot move until combat with all adjoining enemies is resolved.

## Combat

As stated above, when a player moves into a square adjacent to a space with an enemy token, that player engages the enemy in combat. During the combat phase, a player tries to defeat the enemy by rolling above a certain number on the die. The number a player has to roll depends on how many players are adjoining the same enemy space.

If one player is attacking an enemy, he or she must roll a 5 or 6 to defeat that enemy.

If two players are adjacent to the same enemy, a player must roll a 3 or above to defeat the enemy.

If three or four players are adjacent to the same enemy, a player must roll a 2 or above to defeat the enemy.

If a player rolls the target number or above, he or she defeats the enemy and can claim the reward, but if the player fails to roll at least the target number, he or she loses a heart, and remains engaged in combat with that enemy until his next turn, where he must roll again.

If a single player defeats an enemy, he can draw two cards from the stack of green loot cards.

If two players are engaging an enemy and one of them defeats the enemy, both players take one card from the stack of green loot cards.

If three or four players are engaging an enemy, and one of the players rolls a two or above, that player alone gets to draw one card from the stack of green loot cards.

Once an enemy is defeated, its enemy token is removed, and players can pass by that space freely.

## Player Death

If a player loses all of his or her hearts during combat, that player is given a death token, and his or her character marker is moved to a space just outside of the room in which he or she was defeated. In other words, a player respawns outside the room he or she died in. Players always respawn with three out of their five hearts.

## Opening Treasure Chests

If the player ends his or her turn on a treasure chest spot with its token still present, the player can draw one card from the blue chest card stack. The treasure token is then removed from the board.

### Standing on Switches

If a player ends his or her turn on a switch spot with its switch token still present, the player can draw one card from the orange switch card stack. This also opens all doors in the room, allowing all players to progress to rooms beyond. After a player stands on the place, the switch token is removed from the board.

### Item Usage

Items can be used before movement, after movement, or before combat. With the exception of the heart card, players can only use one item card per turn. If a player is trapped in combat, he or she can use an item card instead of rolling against the enemy. Once any item card is used, it is placed in a discard pile.

### Item Cards

- Heart Card
  - Heart cards can be used at any time to regain one of the player's lost hearts. Players can hold on to heart cards and use them when they need them. Using a heart card is a free action. The player may use a heart card and another card in the same turn
- Arrow Card
  - This card can be used to fire an arrow in any direction. Arrows have a maximum range of four squares from the player. Arrows instantly kill enemies, without the need for the player rolling. Arrows can be used against the boss to do one damage.
- Bomb Card
  - Bomb cards affect the area immediately surrounding the player. They instantly defeat all enemies adjacent to the player, including diagonals. If any other players are caught in the bomb's area of affect, the player using the bomb card can steal one card from each other player caught in the blast.
- Hookshot Card
  - The hookshot augments a player's movement around the dungeon map. Before or after his or her movement phase, a player can use the hookshot card to move up to an additional 6 spaces in any cardinal direction. The hookshot can only move the player in a straight line, and it cannot move a player from one room to the next. The hookshot can allow a player to jump over the black pit spaces that he or she would normally have to walk around. Like any other item, the hookshot is used up after one use

- Fairy Card
  - The fairy is a passive card. If a player loses all of his or her hearts during combat, the fairy card is activated. It allows the player to be instantly revived where they fell with no penalty. It brings the player back to life and refills three of his or her hearts. The player does not receive a death token if a fairy is used.

### Approaching the Boss

In order to enter the boss room, four of the five switch tokens must have been removed from the board, including the one from the room leading to the boss room.

### Fighting the Boss

Combat with the boss is similar to combat with any other enemy. The boss becomes easier to defeat the more players are engaged with it, but the reward for each player decreases. Players can use items on the boss. Bombs and arrows both do 1 damage to the boss.

If only one player is engaging the boss, he or she must roll a 5 or 6 to damage it.

If two players are engaging the boss, they must roll a 4 or above to damage it.

If three players are engaging the boss, they must roll a 3 or above to damage it.

If all four players are attacking the boss they must roll a 2 or above to damage it.

If one player is alone when the boss is defeated, he receives 50 rupees for defeating it.

If two players are engaging the boss when it is defeated, they both receive 30 rupees for defeating the boss. Additionally, the player dealing the winning blow gains an additional 10 rupees.

If three players are engaging the boss when it is defeated, all three players receive 20 rupees for defeating the boss. Additionally, the player dealing the winning blow gains an additional 10 rupees.

If all four players are engaging the boss when it is defeated, all players gain 10 rupees for defeating the boss. Additionally, the player dealing the winning blow gains an additional 10 rupees.

All rewards from defeating the boss come from the golden yellow boss rewards stack of cards.

### Determining the winner

Once the boss is defeated and the rewards have been dealt out, players total up their individual rupee totals. For each death token a player has, he or she must subtract 20 rupees from their total. Once all totals have been determined, the player with the most rupees is deemed the champion.