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a game by Jonathan A. Leistik

Object

To guide the rocketball into your opponent's goal by altering the playing field.

You Need

- A Rocketball field
- 76 vortex chips
- The windbag (A bag to put the vortex chips in.)
- A rocketball chip
- A four-sided die (That's right, four sides. You can get them at hobby gaming stores. If you don't have one, you can just use a six-sided die and re-roll when you get a 5 or 6).

You can get all of these pieces (except the four-sided die and the windbag) by visiting:
<http://www.invisible-city.com/bazaar/index.htm#rocke>

Setup

The playing field.

Place the rocketball field in the middle of the table with one goal facing each player. All squares start the game empty except for the middle square, which starts play with the rocketball in it.

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Setup, continued

The short ends are the North and South ends of the field, with the long sides being West and East. There are two three-square goals in the middle of the North and South ends of the field. The player closest to the North goal is the North player and the player closest to the South goal is the South player. The arrows pointing in alternating directions along the East and West edges of the field indicate which direction the rocketball goes if it tries to go off of the field.

The windbag.

The windbag begins the game with 76 vortex chips in it. The vortex chips represent wind, which you may use to try to steer the (intensely hot) rocketball. During play, the player who has possession of the windbag gets to place the next vortex chip on the field. Once placed, the arrows indicate the direction the wind is blowing in that area of the field.

The rocketball.

As previously mentioned, the rocketball starts play in the center of the field. Like the vortex chips, the rocketball also has a specific facing, indicating the direction it is pointing. The rocketball always moves in a straight line unless it is redirected by passing through a vortex or by bumping into a wall.

Starting the game.

Once the field is set up, roll the die once.

Die Result	Rocketball begins game facing	Player who begins with windbag
1	North	North
2	East	North
3	South	South
4	West	South

Play

Each round of play has three steps:

1. The rocketball moves.
2. The player holding the windbag places a vortex chip on the field or rotates a placed vortex chip 90 degrees.
3. Control of the windbag passes to the other player.

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Play, continued

Move the rocketball.

The player holding the windbag must roll the die once and move the rocketball that many squares in the direction the rocketball is facing.

If the rocketball enters a square with a vortex chip in it, then turn it so that it is pointing in the same direction as the arrow on the vortex chip and continue moving, now in the new direction.

If the rocketball tries to move off of the edge of the field, then keep it in the same square and turn the rocketball so that it points in the same direction as the arrow on that edge of the field and continue moving normally. Changing the rocketball's direction in this fashion uses one of its moves for that turn. This means that a rocketball facing a wall that tries to move one space will stay in the same square and just change its direction.

If the rocketball enters the North goal, then the South player scores one point. If the rocketball enters the South goal, then the North player scores one point. Reset the board to its starting configuration if this happens, and roll the die again to determine a new rocketball facing and starting player.

Place or rotate a vortex chip.

The player with the windbag may place a vortex chip on the board or rotate one of the vortex chips already in play.

Placing Vortex Chips: Vortex chips must be placed facing North, South, East, or West. Vortex chips may be played in any square on the field except:

- the center square of the field or
- in any square that is currently occupied.

Rotating Vortex Chips: If you do not place a vortex chip, then you must rotate one vortex chip 90 degrees. You may not rotate a vortex chip that:

- is in the same square as the rocketball or
- that was rotated by the other player last turn.

If there are no vortex chips to rotate, then you must place a chip instead.

Pass the windbag.

Once you've played or rotated a chip, your turn is over. Pass the windbag to the other player.

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Rocketball!

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Winning

The first player with two points wins the game.

Origin and Credits

The idea for Rocketball came to me just as I was drifting to sleep on 12/18/00. I wrote the rules up and created the demo board and chips for the game on 12/19/00 over lunch and between taking calls and finishing training modules at work. Sharon and I played it for the first time that evening, and several rules were changed to make the game fairer to play. On 12/20/00 I spent time in between calls and training fitting Rocketball into the ICP Games District template and adding to the rules for clarity and readability. On 12/21/00 I came up with most of the Variants, and I wrote them up on 12/22/00. The rules were edited for clarity and grace by Sharon on 1/15/01, and these edits were implemented by Jeremy in two big bursts on 1/15/01 and 1/23/01.

As with many games, the idea for Rocketball seemed to just spring into my head nearly fully formed and solidify in the scope of about 5 minutes. Upon more careful self-examination, I think that I've been trying to think of rules for a tile-based game for at least a month now, and Rocketball is the result of this month-long backburner stewing. I like the image of a rocket screaming around the playfield like a mad banshee, blazing red-hot — conjuring massive gusts of wind to buffet it about being the only way to guide it. The game has a critical random component that the players can not directly affect, a component that the players need to think ahead of and predict what it will do in order to successfully guide it and win the game.

Rocketball is the perfect game for passive-aggressive players. It's all about trying to win by indirectly affecting the goal-making object. I also like the use of a bag of chips that's passed between players to alter play; it opens up the possibility of having different types of chips other than vortex chips like walls and bumpers and gives both players equal access to game resources (See Appendix A, Variants).

Credits:

Concept, development : Jonathan A. Leistiko

Editing : Sharon J. Cichelli

Graphic design : Jeremy P. Bushnell

Enjoyed this game? Let us know: jonathan@invisible-city.com

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Appendix A: Variants

Unlike the Variants for most of my other games, the following ones are completely and totally untested. You have been warned...

Bumpers.

Before the game begins, put 6 to 8 bumper chips in the windbag — just add them without removing any other chips. If you draw a bumper, then just place it as if it were a vortex.

Bumpers may not be placed:

- adjacent to a wall
- within two spaces of a Goal (two spaces away diagonally is OK, though)
- directly adjacent to another non-vortex, non-rocketball chip
- or diagonally adjacent to a non-vortex, non-rocketball chip.

When a rocketball enters a square with a bumper, roll a die.

- On a 1 or a 2, the rocketball turns 90 degrees clockwise.
- On a 3 or a 4, the rocketball turns 90 degrees counterclockwise.

Bumpers can never be chosen by a player for "turning."

Twisters.

Before the game begins, put 6 to 8 twister chips in the windbag — just add them without removing any other chips. If you draw a twister then just place it as if it were a vortex.

Twisters may not be placed:

- adjacent to a wall
- within two spaces of a Goal (two spaces away diagonally is OK)
- directly adjacent to another non-vortex, non-rocketball chip
- or diagonally adjacent to a non-vortex, non-rocketball chip.

When a rocketball enters a square with a twister, roll a die.

- On a 1, the rocketball faces North.
- On a 2, the rocketball faces East.
- On a 3, the rocketball faces South.
- On a 4, the rocketball faces West.

Twisters can never be chosen by a player for "turning."

Variants, continued

Gusts.

Before the game begins, put 6 to 8 gust chips in the windbag — just add them without removing any other chips. If you draw a gust then just place it as if it were a vortex.

Gusts may not be placed:

- adjacent to a wall
- within two spaces of a Goal (two spaces away diagonally is OK)
- directly adjacent to another non-vortex, non-rocketball chip
- or diagonally adjacent to a non-vortex, non-rocketball chip.

When a rocketball leaves a square with a gust, move it one square in the direction indicated by the gust without changing its facing. This counts as one of the squares that the die told you to move.

Gusts may be rotated by players in the same way that vortexes are.

Barricades.

Before the game begins, put 6 to 8 barricade chips in the windbag — just add them without removing any other chips. If you draw a barricade then just place it as if it were a vortex.

Barricades may not be placed:

- adjacent to a wall
- within two spaces of a Goal (two spaces away diagonally is OK)
- directly adjacent to another non-vortex, non-rocketball chip
- or diagonally adjacent to a non-vortex, non-rocketball chip.

When a rocketball enters a square with a barricade, roll a die.

- On a 1 or a 2, the rocketball turns 180 degrees.
- On a 3 or a 4, the rocketball blasts the barricade to bits! Remove the barricade and continue moving the rocketball as you normally would.

Barricades can never be chosen by a player for "turning."

Variants, continued

Moguls.

Before the game begins, put 4 mogul chips in the windbag — just add them without removing any other chips. If you draw a mogul then just place it as if it were a vortex.

Moguls may not be placed:

- adjacent to a wall
- within two spaces of a Goal (two spaces away diagonally is OK)

When a rocketball enters a square with a mogul, check to see how much movement it has left in the turn.

—If it has one point of movement or less left, then nothing unusual happens.

—If it has two or more points of movement left, then ignore any chips in its path and move it to the square that it would end its movement in. Resolve the effect of any chip in that square. If the square that it ends in is a goal, then score the goal normally. If the square that it would end in is outside the playing field and in a non-goal area, then the player who controls the windbag must:

- Place the rocketball in the center square facing any direction (N, S, E, W) that they want it to,
- Roll the die and move the rocketball accordingly, then
- Finish their turn as they normally would.

Moguls can never be chosen by a player for "turning."

Djinns.

Before the game begins, put 2 djinn chips in the windbag — just add them without removing any other chips. If you draw a djinn you may go through the windbag and pick one chip to place this turn. If you choose to rotate a chip, then the djinn does nothing special. Remove the djinn from play at the end of the turn.

Tug-of-War.

Instead of trying to guide the rocketball into the other player's goal, the object is to guide the rocketball into your own goal. I don't really think that this changes the game much mechanically, but may make it interesting to play. (Jeremy adds: toggling the game between "regular" mode and tug-of-war mode might make for a suitably frantic and disorienting game. Set a kitchen timer to buzz at suitable intervals — ten minutes? — and every time it buzzes, the goal that you're aiming for reverses.)

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Variants, continued

Assault!

Each player starts the game with a rocketball in one of the three squares adjacent to their goal. Each rocketball should be marked so you can tell which player it belongs to. The object is to get your rocketball into the other player's goal. If your rocket ends up in your goal, then it restarts in the square it began in. If both rocketballs share a square, then they collide, causing a colossal explosion, and the game ends. During the "Moving the Rocketball" step, both rocketballs move simultaneously, using different die rolls to determine their movement. During the chip placement/rotation step, the player with the windbag goes first, followed by the player without the windbag (who then gets the windbag at the end of the turn). Players may not rotate chips that were placed on that turn or ones that were rotated by the other player on the previous turn.

Drifting Winds.

Instead of placing a chip or turning a vortex, players may choose to move a non-rocketball chip one space North, South, East, or West. Chips moved in this fashion may only enter vacant squares and must be in a legal position after they have been moved.

Appendix B: Design note

If you decide to make up additional windbag chips for Rocketball, do not create any effect that allows the players to directly affect the state of the rocketball, such as the facing and the speed of the rocketball. Doing this would violate the cardinal premise of the game: Nothing can directly touch the rocketball and survive. Also do not create any effect that allows players a "last ditch" chance to keep the ball from entering their goal (ex: a one-use "Blocker" chip). It's hard enough to get the ball into the goal without adding an "unskilled" element to the game to block their efforts.



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