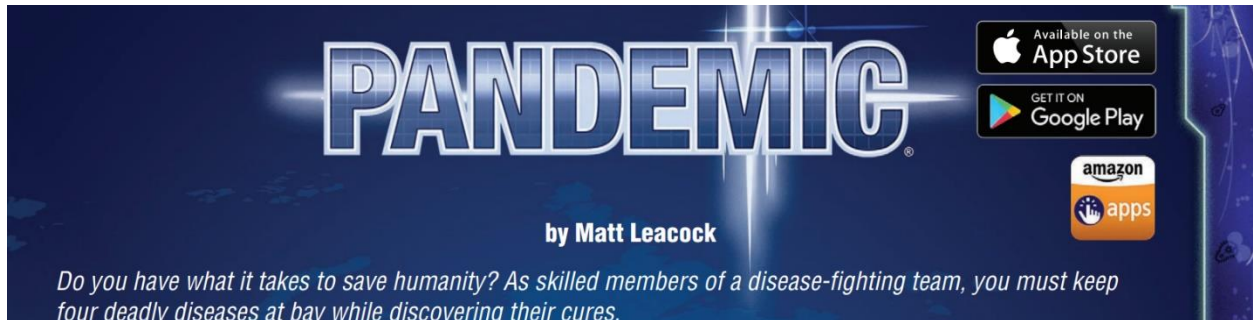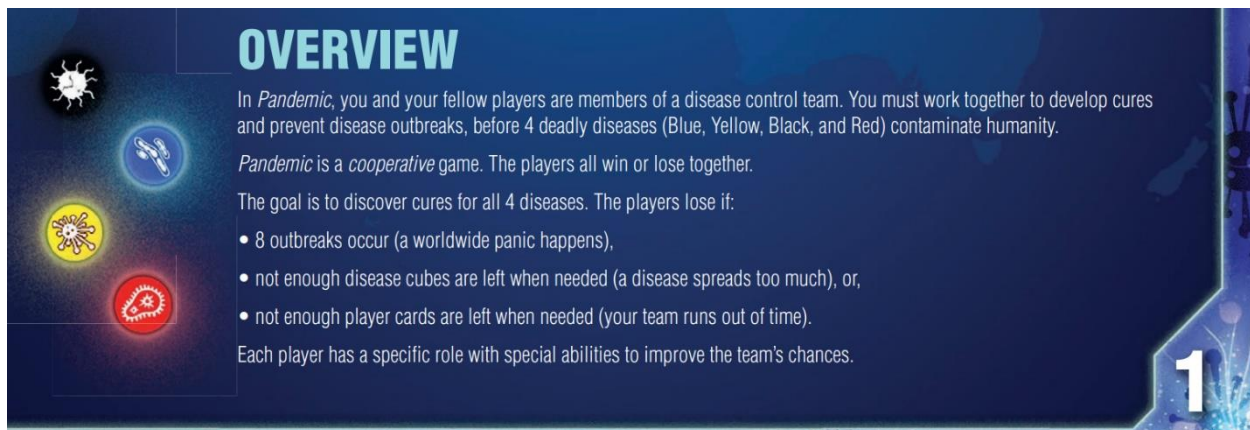# Pandemic

Rulebook Review

Before starting my first round of Pandemic, I was already impressed by the quality of the rulebook. In fact, it is the first rulebook I can remember taking particular notice of – aside from Monopoly's unique quirk of printing the rules on the inside of the box lid.

Pandemic's rulebook does something special: it introduces a number of game mechanics that are likely to be completely novel to the audience, it does this in an extremely clear, user-friendly manner, and manages to do so in just 8 pages. What's more, those 8 pages contain tons of graphics and not all that much text. A novice player with reasonable intelligence but no experience with games more complex than Parcheesi can be confidently set up and ready to play Pandemic in 15 minutes. It takes me longer just get a few family members all seated at the table at the same time.

I do have a couple criticisms of the Pandemic rules, but they're minor and vastly outweighed by the rulebook's strengths (enhanced by the use of reference cards and another small reference printed on the board).

OVERVIEW

In *Pandemic*, you and your fellow players are members of a disease control team. You must work together to develop cures and prevent disease outbreaks, before 4 deadly diseases (Blue, Yellow, Black, and Red) contaminate humanity.

Pandemic is a *cooperative* game. The players all win or lose together.

The goal is to discover cures for all 4 diseases. The players lose if:

• 8 outbreaks occur (a worldwide panic happens),

• not enough disease cubes are left when needed (a disease spreads too much), or,

• not enough player cards are left when needed (your team runs out of time).

Each player has a specific role with special abilities to improve the team's chances.

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This represents some of the best and worst parts of the Pandemic rulebook.

The opening four sentences of the rules lay out very clearly (and with an appropriate bit of redundancy) that Pandemic is a cooperative game and explain what that means: "The players all win or lose together."

Pandemic is often the first co-op game the players have encountered, and this would have been even more likely when it was published in 2008. Its players didn't grow up with other mainstream co-op games like Forbidden Island (2010), Forbidden Desert (2013) or Outfoxed! (2015). Without the all-important context of a shared victory or shared defeat, none of the rest of the rules would make sense, so this information needed to be right at the start of the overview, not presented in a "Winning and Losing the Game" section at the end.

On the other hand, the inclusion of specific loss conditions in the game overview is unnecessary and potentially confusing. At this point the players don't know what an outbreak is, what disease cubes are or how they work, or what the significance of the player cards is. The players are given quite a bit of jargon that they don't know what to do with.

The opening paragraph has already told them what they need to know about what defeat looks like: prevent disease outbreaks before they contaminate humanity. It's not made explicit at this point, but players would have a sense already that they need to stop diseases from spreading (the 8 outbreak and not enough cube loss conditions) and are under some sort of time constraint (the player card loss condition). That's enough at this point in the rules.

Finally, naming the diseases "(Blue, Yellow, Black, and Red)" breaks up the flow of the text without adding anything relevant or interesting. That the different colors represent different diseases is intuitive enough and can be made explicit later in the game setup. Naming them in the overview and with simple color names genericizes the diseases and risks making the game sound a bit dull. "Deadly diseases" is exciting; "Blue, Yellow, Black, and Red" is not. If I'm reading the rules aloud to new players, I'm skipping that parenthetical.

MOVEMENT ACTIONS

Drive / Ferry
Move to a city connected by a white line to the one you are in.

Direct Flight
Discard a City card to move to the city named on the card.

Charter Flight
Discard the City card that *matches* the city you are in to move to *any* city.

Shuttle Flight
Move from a city with a research station to any other city that has a research station.

Pandemic's movement actions unnecessary jargony names. When a rule is given a specific name, players are asked to remember not just the game mechanic, but also what it is called. This can be useful when other parts of the rules or game components reference the rule by name, but in Pandemic, the names of the movement actions never appear again. The players never need to know that a move is called a Direct Flight or Charter Flight.

Compare with the Share Knowledge action farther down on the same page:

Share Knowledge
You can do this action in two ways:

give the City card that matches the city you are in to another player, or

take the City card that matches the city you are in from another player.

The other player must also be in the city with you. Both of you need to agree to do this.

If the player who gets the card now has more than 7 cards, that player must immediately discard a card or play an Event card (see Event Cards on page 7).

CITY

This simply presents a "give" option and "take" option without naming them and treating them as separate actions. It gives the players what they need to know and doesn't distract with extra titles like "Publish Research" and "Attend Symposium."