The Strategy Game Designer's Cheatsheet

Golden Rules

- **Obvious choices should not be choices**
- **Players should understand the game mechanics**
- **Clear feedback on choices is required**
- **Give the player less variables, more choices**
- **Don't play known outcomes**
- **Offer risk-versus-reward type decisions.**
- **Don't offer systems that the player does not interact with**

Ways To Play

- **Inclusive Play** - All players remain in the game until it ends.
- **Exclusive Play** - Individual players drop out of the game.
- **Cooperative Play**
  ◦ Against the computer
  ◦ Against the clock
  ◦ With a common goal
- **Competitive Play**
  ◦ Free-for-all
  ◦ Teams and Alliances (either temporary or permanent)
  ◦ Against AI players and/or human players

Strategic Scales

- **Offense VS. Defense**
  ◦ Does your game play well either way or is it weighted towards one side?
  ◦ Is playing defensively a viable option?
  ◦ If defense is not a viable option, consider removing it.
- **Strategy VS. Luck**
  ◦ Luck and strategy are opposites.
  ◦ Give choices between a high-risk and low-risk.
  ◦ Give choices between using a luck element and not using it at all.
  ◦ There is no strategy in subjecting all players to a single luck element in which there is no decision making.
- **Light VS. Heavy**
- **Many VS. Few**
- **Slow VS. Fast**
- **Power VS. Speed**
- **Power VS. Mobility**
- **Efficiency VS. Volume**
- **Diversity VS. Homogeny** (Generalization VS. Specialization)

Considerations

- **Options with drawbacks and benefits**
  ◦ There need not always be a "right" answer, but always clear consequences.
  ◦ Consider making the keys to victory a hindrance during game play.
- **Feedback Loops**
  ◦ Negative Feedback - Reward losers, punish winners. Slows down the game. Creates game balance.
  ◦ Positive Feedback - Reward winners, punish losers. Speeds up the game.
- **Visibility**
  ◦ Knowledge of the playing field
  ◦ Knowledge of other players and their resources
  ◦ Knowledge about the future play or rules of the game itself.
  ◦ Randomized goals, game phases, or expectations of game play.
- **Emergent Strategies**
  ◦ Is there only one right way to play or are there several viable approaches?
  ◦ Strategies emerge when there are interactions between game components.
  ◦ Do the components of the game only do one thing?
  ◦ How can different parts of the game interact with each other in combinations?
- **Keep or Play?**
  ◦ Consider adding reasons to *not* play resources immediately.
  ◦ Penalty or a reward for holding on to something?
  ◦ Resources may be best played at a specific time
- **Reward strategic play. Punish thoughtlessness.**

Ways To Win

- **Elimination** - Eliminate, destroy, move, or remove opponents, obstacles, targets, or non-playing characters. Consider a percentage of the whole.
- **Acquisition** - Acquire something or a certain level of something: money, resources, cards, tokens, opponents, or items on map.
- **Points** - "Points" are an abstract representation of value. Points can be awarded for anything. Points can be adjusted if the game is unbalanced.
- **Physical Goal** - Get to a location or several locations. (A "race").
- **Abstinence** - Win by *not* doing something or by doing something efficiently.
- **Riddance** - Get rid of something or "go out".
- **Spacial Dominance** - Possess or control an amount of physical area on a map.
- **Key Target** - Remove, destroy, create, acquire, or convert a key target or targets. Key targets can be per-game, per-player, or inter-player.
- **Diplomacy** - Win by default (lack of other players), resignation of opponents, declaration of a draw or tie, voting for a winner, or periodically voting for a loser.
- **Time** - Win by being the fastest or first.
- **Combinations** - Complete multiple simultaneous victory conditions.
- **Variable** - Complete one of several *different* victory conditions.

Ways To End

- **Elimination** - Remove all players or competitive forces from the game.
- **Acquisition** - A specific number or percentage of items or resources have been collected.
- **Points** - Score a number of points.
- **Physical Goal** - One or more players reach a specific physical goal or *all* players have reached the goal.
- **Riddance** - Get rid of something or "go out".
- **Spacial Endings** - All space or a specific portion of space is used up, controlled, or owned by players in general or by a specific player.
- **Key Target** - Capture, destroy, or collect specific target(s).
- **Diplomacy** - Players decide when the game is over: popular vote for a winner, a resignation, or a decision to draw or tie.
- **Combinations ("And" Endings)** - Meet two or more ending conditions.
- **Variable ("Or" Endings)** - Allow any number of multiple ending conditions.
- **Exhaustion** - Exhaust an available resource or all resources combined.
- **Inability to Play** - The game ends when one or all players cannot make a legal play.
- **Time** - A time limit expires.
- **Random** - Randomly determined before the game starts.