

Introduction:

Arson! is a collaborative card game where players try to save the world from its future under dystopic, oligarchic overlords. You must burn down the system, but will you be able to grow a movement from the ashes?

Objective:

Work with your fellow **activists** to reach level 3 on the pressure meter.

Overview:

You are in a race against **the opposition**. While you are trying to increase the pressure to meet your movement's demands, **the opposition** is increasing the pressure to stop you. To increase pressure you need to hit movement **milestones**, to achieve your goals you'll need organizational and monetary power, cumulatively represented by **capacity coins (caps)**. You must play your cards simultaneously against the system to compete for caps and collaborate with your peers. Engage in **Organization Building** to gather **caps**, leverage **awareness and Problematization** to protect your progress, mount **Direct Action** campaigns to beat back **the opposition**, and prioritize **Reinvestment** to develop new capabilities.

Logistics:

4-6 Players

20 minutes

No prior knowledge required

Materials:

72 Eco Tokens

Base Deck (24 cards)

Action Deck (20 cards)

Event Deck (20 cards)

Pressure Meter

Logistics Tracker (x6)

Rulebook

Setup:

Separate the Event Deck into 4 suits, and shuffle all suits and the Action Deck separately.

Each player receives 1 of each of the base cards. These are marked with a star in the bottom right corner (Organization Building, Awareness and Problematization, Direct Action, Reinvestment). Each player should start with 4 cards.

Distribute 2 **caps** and a **logistics tracker** to each player.

- Place 1 **cap** in your **base**.
- Place 1 **cap** beside your **logistics tracker** – this represents your **supporters**.

Place the **pressure meter** and remaining **caps** in the center of the table to form the **political sphere**.

- Set the **activists' marker** and the **opposition marker** to 0 on the **pressure meter**

Draw the top 4 cards of the **action deck** placing them face up, visible to all players, to form the **workshop**.

Gameplay:

Each round consists of 3 phases: Plan, Resolve, Refresh

Plan Phase:

Each turn, players simultaneously choose 1 **action** from their hand. They place their chosen **action** face down in front of them. This card will interact with **the opposition's action**.

Once all players have chosen their **action**, deal one action face down from **the opposition deck** to each player.

Resolve Phase:

Once everyone is ready, all **actions** are turned face up and resolved.

Actions resolve in the order shown on the **logistics tracker**:

(Organization Building → Awareness and Problematization → Direct Action → Reinvestment)

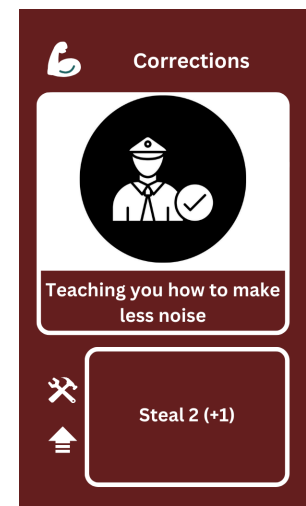
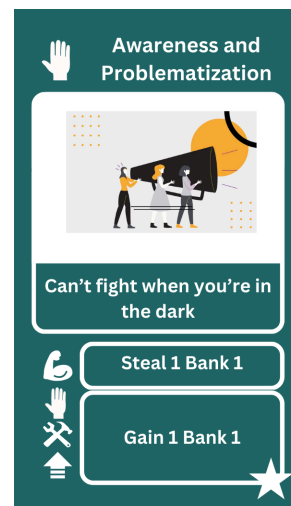
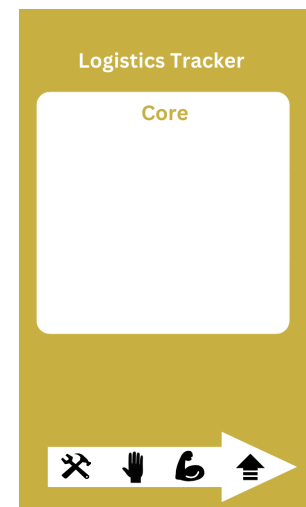
Actions of the same type resolve simultaneously.

Actions have different effects depending on the **action** the **opposition** plays.

- In the example, the activist would steal 1 and bank 1. If playing against a non-direct-action card, they would gain 1 and bank 1.

If an **action** lacks an icon, it has no effect when played against that **archetype**.

- In the example, the opposition card has no effect because it lacks the Awareness and Problematization icon.



Reinvestment cards have different effects depending on whether you can afford to progress a milestone.



Refresh Phase:

After all **actions** have been resolved, determine the most common **archetype** played by **activists** in the turn.

- Add an **action** to the **opposition deck** using the following table:

Most Common action archetype by activists	Archetype of action added to the opposition deck
Grassroots	Direct Action
Awareness and Problematization	Grassroots
Direct Action	Awareness and Problematization
Reinvestment	Reinvestment

Activists pick up all their resolved **actions**, **opposition actions** are returned to the **opposition deck** and shuffled, and a new round begins.

Game End:

The game ends when the **opposition** or the **activists** reach level 3 on the **pressure meter**.

If both **opposition** and **activists** would reach level 3 simultaneously **caps** are still paid but the **pressure meter** remains at level 2 and gameplay continues.

Activists maximize pressure:

Your movement has amassed too much power and momentum to be ignored! You overcome the opposition's attempts at thwarting you and enact systemic change. The world is saved... for now. What will the next fight be?

Opposition maximizes pressure:

Your efforts, while well-meaning, were not effective. You have watched as your movement fell further behind, and now it is too late to recover. The system has reestablished itself, co-opting some aspects of your messaging, while ultimately doing nothing of substance.

Safety Tools/Best Practices:

Arson! is a collaborative game, as such you are encouraged to use the plan phase to converse with your teammates. While the decisions you make are ultimately your own, you could make joint decisions for greater payoffs. It is important to be respectful of your fellow activists if you are going to have a sustainable movement and an enjoyable playthrough. As such it is encouraged to have a conversation beforehand acknowledging that all players have the right to make their own decisions, to make suggestions and ask questions respectfully, and potentially employ some of the following tools.

Let People Make Mistakes:¹

While it might be tempting to jump in and make decisions for others, this essentially removes your friends from play and prevents them from improving. Instead, letting new players make mistakes leads to them learning the game, and allows you to play in new ways. Players with a fresh perspective may also discover new strategies that experienced players overlook.

The Person To The Left Rule:

To avoid one person taking over a conversation or “quarterbacking,” you can put some boundaries on who can give advice and when. With the Person To The Left rule, you can only get advice from the person sitting to the left of you, and they can only give advice if you ask them for it. You are welcome to choose your seats strategically so new players and experienced players are paired.

Highlight Problems Without Giving Solutions:

Another way to avoid taking away others' agency is to change how you frame input. By highlighting problems, everyone can remain engaged in discovering solutions rather than being prescribed one. One example of how to do this is “we need to achieve X and Y, and stop Z from happening,” rather than “you play X and spend Y.”

Card Effects:

Gain: Take **caps** from the **political sphere** and add them to your **supporters**. There is no limit to the amount of **caps** a player can have in their **supporters**.

¹ <https://www.board-game.co.uk/how-to-avoid-quarterbacking-in-board-games/>

Secure: Move **caps** from your **supporters** to your **core**. You can spend **caps** from your **core** as normal but are safe from stealing unless otherwise specified. There is no limit to the amount of **caps** an **activist** can have in their **core**. If you ever run out of **caps** tokens, use anything you would like to represent **caps**! There is no limit on the amount of **caps** that can be in play at a given time.

Take: Take **caps** from the **opposition** and add them to your **supporters**. **Caps** cannot be taken from a **core** unless otherwise specified. If the **opposition** does not have the full amount available to take, take as many as you can. If multiple **activists** are taking simultaneously, distribute **caps** as evenly as possible with the remainder going to the **activist** with fewer **caps**.

Exhaust: The exhausted card resolves, but cannot be played next turn. It remains face-up next to the owner's **logistics tracker** instead of returning to their hand. Its owner may play their other cards as normal. During the next turn's Refresh phase the exhausted card returns to its owner's hand, ready to be played again.

Progress a milestone: Increase 1 level on the **pressure meter** by paying that level's price, split between all players who played a **reinvestment action** that turn. You must progress a Milestone if you have played a corresponding card and have sufficient **caps**. You may only increase 1 level per turn. If the activists increase the **pressure meter** in a turn you do not take the alternative action on the **reinvestment** card.

Buy an action: Pay the number of **caps** shown on your **action** to the **political sphere**. Take an action from the **workshop** and add it to your hand. After an **action** is bought, draw a new card to replace it in the **workshop**. If your played **action** instructs you to buy you are obligated to do so if possible. If you can not afford to buy, do nothing.

Educational Goal:

The learning objective is to teach effective organizational skills. This is done by associating the various tactics represented by the cards with use cases and implicit cost-benefit analysis. Optimal play is achieved through effective communication between players about their planned actions, and tailoring those actions to the opposition.

Debrief:

How hard was it to topple the opposition?

What worked, what didn't? Did the best strategy change throughout the game?

How similar is this to a representation of our society and governmental system?