

# “Gotta get 'em all!” – A Game about Billionaires and Climate Obstruction

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## EXTENDED ABSTRACT

This paper uses the case study of an analog collaborative game about violent climate activism to explore how games, through active literacy and play, can get players to adopt critical literacy and not only see but articulate perspectives that lie outside of hegemonic thinking.

Active literacy, performing a newly learned skill through play and interaction, lies at the core of games as learning tools (Gee, 2003). This paper aims to explore, using research through design (Khaled et al. 2018), how games can be used to get players to step outside of the capitalist hegemonic world views and actively use critical social science concepts and perspectives. The concept the game aims to teach it's players to use is *climate obstruction* (Forchtner, 2026; Nadal, 2026). Climate obstruction postulates that there are powerful groups who are preventing us from meaningfully addressing climate catastrophe.

Climate obstruction here is defined as “future actions that prevent the people of the world from effectively addressing climate change.”

This perspective is somewhat absent from the mainstream conversation about climate change, but features for example explicitly in the UN report “Making peace with Nature” (U. N. Environmental Program, 2021).

*“Some individuals and organizations also have substantial stakes in maintaining the status quo. These vested interests may oppose changes that disrupt their livelihoods, market shares and future revenues.”* (U. N. Environmental Program, 2021:104).

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The notion of barriers, or of an opposition, to effective climate action appears several times in this section of the report. Research has shown that extreme wealth needs to be seen as an issue for climate action even from the perspective of climate science (Robeyns, 2019; Vasconcelos et al. 2014). There is even a game that investigates the connection between climate action and extreme wealth and that shows how the wealthy will sacrifice the poor if they can isolate themselves from climate catastrophe (Burton-Chellew et al. 2013).

Thanks to recent investigative journalism, it has become clear that this is not a theoretical argument any longer. The first time the story about the ultra-rich planning for apocalypse bunkers broke widely was through media theorist Douglas Rushkoff retelling of how he had been invited to council a number of ultra-wealthy investors on how to survive after an apocalyptic event inside a private bunker or community (Rushkoff, 2022). Since then, we have gotten used to that tech billionaires build their private apocalypse bunkers on Hawaii like Mark Zuckerberg (Nolan, 2023), and that the panic industry is booming where wealthy clients can hedge a plan b for the climate catastrophe (Kraft, 2025).

In this context, this article discusses the design logic and process of *"Gotta get 'em all!" – A Game about Billionaires and Climate Obstruction*, a satirical analog game about self-defense against the richest and most powerful who actively stand in the way of us building a humane future and meaningfully addressing climate change. The game is anchored in examples of other activist games (Haiven, 2025a; Pixel Pushers Union 512, 2020), games supporting civil action and activism (McBay & Holowka, 2025), games about activism as a communication tool or way to make sense of ones actions (Nordgren & Vaske, 2025), and activism as an inspiration for game design (Estaris, 2025). These sources inform both the aim of the case study as well as the over-arching design research. The goal of the design is a kind of critical literacy (Prax, 2022) that lies in the break from hegemonic perspectives and the active use of alternative approaches. The game has the goal of making hegemonic power and violence visible *"so that one can fight them"* (Foucault and Chomsky, 1971). This means that it also draws from literature on how games can find their best way of making an impact (Fayolle, 2025) and how they can effect their players long-term. (Whittle, 2025).

The core gameplay centers around creating a wanted poster for one of the richest people on earth that is used to argue for why this particular rich person is the one we should stop first. Players will get an envelope with the picture of one of the wealthiest people in the world and will be tasked to prepare pitching them as a worthy target for political assassination with the help of a poster they make. The poster is created by researching the ways in which powerful individuals (and the systems they control and create) obstruct our shard path towards a free and humane future by preventing us from effectively addressing climate change. Players can use their phones for research and get access to crafting and note-taking materials as well as glue. After an initial phase of clarifying what obstruction is, players are sent to research their target, discuss with team members, and note down their findings. After the research phase, they have time to create the poster and prepare the pitch to the other teams. Finally, teams pitch why their billionaire should be addressed first. All players vote and the team that gets the most votes for their target wins. After the game, there is a debriefing to both discuss the game, explain the intention, and make sure that players get the possibility to work through possible difficult emotions.

The imaginary setting of the game has the player take the role of a member of a group of assassins who must pitch their respective target as the most important one. This is a dark satirical game that, in agreement with Haiven, sees it as “*important to make space for transgression, ambiguity, and chaos, for teasing, for roleplaying, and for exploring our darker motivations and the systems that surround us*” (Haiven, 2025b, in an interview about his recent game *Billionaires and Guillotines*). Haiven (2025c) also argues for the concept of dark playbour and the playgrom in a similar context. The setting is purposefully over-the-top but also contains a strong bias for action and already has players do something: make a poster. Players should walk away thinking that while we of course cannot kill people, we must find other ways to defend ourselves against the powerful. This would also have them already actively engage and in this way work against the petrifying effects of climate anxiety (Clayton, 2020; Eriksson et al. 2022). Research on sustainability game jams has shown this paralysation happening and could also attest that the antidote is pragmatically working, together with a team that also shares the same fears and pressure (Wirman et al. 2023).

The game has been tested in several early iterations and is currently being developed for an online print-to-play release. Following the development process from a research-through-design perspective (Khaled et al. 2018), especially considering the highly sensitive and political subject matter and the need to get the tone and humour right without impacting players negatively. A central questions to discuss is if and how to use real billionaires or imaginary ones, or as a compromise, made-up ones that make it clear whom the game is referring to, for example *Kelon Kusk*. This example is used because this is one of the most well-know billionaires that can be used to illustrate the category of obstruction to players.

Preliminary results indicate the players do actively use the concept of obstruction in their presentation and, after some initial struggle to separate it from past unethical behaviour, understand it well enough to be able to explain it. Playtests have led to discussions about if and how climate obstruction justifies violent self-defence and, if not, how else we can address obstruction by the powerful and wealthy. The debriefing did show that while some players experience stress in relation to the ideal of violent action, even in a game, others experience it as cathartic and as a space for an honest conversation about the issues we are facing in addressing climate change, something that could be described as intersectional pleasures.

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