

# Exploring Experiential Fidelity in Boardgame Adaptations of Videogames

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## INTRODUCTION

Boardgame adaptations of videogames are often perceived as capitalizing on popularity rather than delivering a well-adapted experience (Watson 2024). Yet, BoardGameGeek.com (BGG) lists over 2000 entries under the “Video Game Theme” category, with half published from 2018 onwards, indicating consistent interest in adapting between mediums. Recently, *Slay the Spire: The Board Game* (Dworetzky et al 2024) received popular acclaim, reaching the BGG Rank of 17<sup>th</sup> best game overall<sup>1</sup>. Some players posit this success is because it “feels” like the videogame (Ashley 2024). This implies that, anecdotally, players expect these adaptations to maintain some perceived intended *player experience* (PX) – i.e. the personal experiences of play engendered through game designs and shaped by player-game interactions and the broader contexts of the game and the player (Soraine and Rogerson 2026).

Previous works explore the complications in adapting between videogames and non-interactive media (i.e. books and films), particularly focusing on fidelity of content, like characters, narratives, and world (Randall and Murphy 2012), and visual representations (Gerling et al. 2013). However, scant work exists on capturing *fidelity of PX* between two forms of interactive media. This is partially due to the difficulties in operationally defining PX as a concept (Soraine and Carette 2025) and capturing its relational elements between the contexts of a specific player and specific game. Jørgensen (2018) proposes comparisons are possible along the *qualified dimension* of games – i.e. the specific conventions and expectations players hold about groups of games. In this way, we could more reasonably consider how the game designs engender a PX comparative to player’s expectations about the source game.

In this work-in-progress paper, I present a preliminary analysis of two contemporary videogames, *Slay the Spire (StS)* and *Wilmot’s Warehouse (WW)*, and their respective boardgame adaptations, *Slay the Spire: The Board Game (StS:BG)* and *Wilmot’s Warehouse (WW:BG)*. I employed formal analysis and close playing techniques (Fernandez-Cara 2014, Lankoski and Bjork 2015, Bizzocchi and Tanenbaum 2011) to explore how the mechanisms, structures, and components of a

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game engender PX and reflect on how the similarities and differences in their respective PX. This involved multiple play sessions of both the videogames and boardgames, independently and with others, as well as discourse about the experience with co-players and my own reflections. My preliminary findings, begin to consider, and invite commentary on, what experiential elements are relevant to preserving PX when adapting videogames to boardgames.

## **SLAY THE SPIRE (MEGA CRIT 2019)**

*StS* is a single-player, roguelike deck-builder, where players pick a character and try to climb the Spire. The game is divided into three acts<sup>2</sup>, each with fifteen randomly generated encounters and a boss fight. Combat is turn-based and strategic. Players draw cards from their deck (max 10 in hand) and play them using the limited energy they have each turn. Non-combat encounters may give players the opportunity to add, remove, or upgrade cards in their deck. The overall gameplay experience is concerned with optimal deck construction, optimal turn-to-turn play, and creating synergies with equipped items. As part of the roguelike experience, players are anticipated to die frequently on runs, but on death they unlock new relics and characters to play in their next run.

*StS:BG* is a co-operative, roguelike deck-builder, similarly divided into three acts, where players engage in card-based combat (no hand limit) to advance towards a boss fight. The board game structure and mechanisms are somewhat simplified to make it conducive to co-operative tabletop play, with fewer rooms per act and only a few being randomly generated. Enemy health and damage numbers have been scaled to make the manual tracking more manageable. Card rarities, costs and effects have been adjusted for both game balancing and because of physical constraints. The game also allows for unlocking more cards and items but only after winning all three acts.



Figure 1: The table layout of *Slay the Spire: The Board Game* showing the map, character board, game tokens, and cards.

## **WILMOT'S WAREHOUSE (HOGG AND HAGGETT 2019)**

*WW* is a puzzle game, where the player(s) must first organise warehouse inventory, and then find and deliver the correct stock to customers. The gameplay is simple, with difficulty caused by the time pressure in both the “organise” and “search” phases. The

cooperative mode necessitates more verbal communication as players establish a shared organisation system and delegate tasks. Every three rounds, players may purchase upgrades for their character and reorganise their stock without time constraints. The increasing number of items and stock in the warehouse makes this feel like a game of attrition, where inevitably your organisation system will fail and you will not be able to deliver items on time.

*WW:BG* is a cooperative memory-based puzzle game played in two phases. In the stocking phase, players work together to organise thirty-five items on a grid within a time limit. This is complicated by cards that introduce specific communication rules for a specific round. After seven stocking rounds, players enter the customer phase where they have five real-time minutes to match the inventory cards to the right spot on the grid. The “communication” and “stocking” phase feel like the videogame, though with more rules to accommodate for the finite number of items. However, the reduced warehouse space and singular items made it feel less daunting than the videogame.

## PRELIMINARY ANALYSIS

From analysing my close play, I interpret *WW:BG*'s PX as closer to its videogame source than *StS:BG*. Both adaptations are adjustments (Leitch 2009, 98), requiring mechanical changes to make them more suitable to the multi-player tabletop context. For *WW:BG* the scale of the game is drastically reduced and the difficulty along with it. However, the core PX of communicating with your teammates to create your personal organisation system was untouched and even enhanced by these changes. Comparatively, *StS:BG*'s minor tweaks in balancing left the combat feeling similar, but the roguelike elements felt lacking. Boucher et al (2025) define roguelikes through two experiential aspects: *variety* and *meaningful deaths*. While *StS:BG*'s combat experience feels strategic like the videogame, the co-operative gameplay and rebalancing leave the players with little fear of dying and ending a run prematurely. Combined with tying ‘unlocks’ to winning instead of deaths, *StS:BG* has made death the end state of the game instead of a meaningful part of gameplay like in the videogame.

## CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

These case studies are preliminary work exploring PX of adaptations, which require further exploration. The current games mechanics align well with tabletop play, allowing for clear mechanical adaptations with minor changes. However, these minor changes had meaningful PX implications. Future work should consider examining PX fidelity of less clear adaptations, such as the action-based roguelike *Dead Cells: The Rogue-lite Board Game* (Bauza et al. 2024).

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## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> As of May 15<sup>th</sup>, 2026.

<sup>2</sup> The game unlocks a fourth act after completing the initial three with one of the main characters.