

# **Downturn**

**By Jack Neal**

Number of Players: 2-4 Players.

Time to Play: 60-120 Minutes.

Ages: 12 and up.

## **Goal**

The object is to invest wisely in any of the banks represented in the game and acquire more Victory Points (VP) than your opponents.

## **Introduction**

The Global Financial Meltdown of 2008 is widely considered the greatest shock to the world financial system since the Great Depression fueled by a perfect storm of speculation in the housing market, the mismanagement of hedge funds and a lax regulatory atmosphere. In short, pure unbridled greed.

This game allows you to enter the mayhem as a speculator with immense influence in the affairs of major United States banks heavily invested in real estate throughout the country. Your aim is to invest in these regional banks and build them up. If the banks get large enough, you begin to score points for your efforts. However, as the game wears on, events in the world threaten your more ambitious investments and other major financiers may also decide to make risky investments that run counter to your interests. Likewise, it is also possible for the end of the bubble to never come in this game - and the same investments that can bring about your own downfall may very well make you a very rich person indeed.

The game takes place over four turns or quarters. The game ends prematurely if three banks fail or the financial system fails.

## **Components**

Game Materials:

- 1 Game Board
- 40 Green Cubes, 30 Yellow Cubes, 30 Red Cubes, 1 Blue Cube and 3 Black Cubes.
- 20 each of Red/Yellow/Blue/Green Shares (or square 1 inch plastic tiles).
- 42 Event Cards and 10 Bank Cards.
- 4 Turn Order Markers.
- 1 Leader Marker.
- 1 Draw Bag (or covered box top)
- Scratch pad - Optional, not provided and probably not needed.

## **Assembly**

If you want to make your own game, it is recommended that you use white card stock for the board and cards. Scissors can cut out the six sheets of cards, but it is recommended to use a straight edge based cutter to quickly and uniformly cut the cards. A round corner punch is also recommended to make shuffling the deck a little easier.

As for cubes, try to find some that are roughly 1 cm in diameter or less. Regular tokens, coins and markers will work as long as they are the same size and follow the same proportions detailed above.

Extra sheets are provided to create the shares and markers as well.

## **General Concepts**

The game revolves around investment in various regions and banks in the United States. Each Bank is involved in regional investments and has a fixed upper limit of shares that may be used to govern the bank. Any shareholder can guide the bank and make investments for the bank. Investments are represented by green, yellow and red cubes and are set up in each region. These cubes represent low-risk, medium-risk and high-risk investments. Each cube represents several millions of dollars of mortgages. The value of these investments is derived from the Investment Track on the game board. This value changes over the game based on events that be played by the players or at the beginning of the turn. The game starts with high-risk investments paying off at 5 times the value of the safest investments. However, as the game wears on, there is a chance that the value of these investments will deteriorate. Banks that are weighted too heavily in risky investments can face bankruptcy.

Investments come from multiple sources and last for different lengths of time.

Long term investments are drawn blindly from the bag and placed in regions. From there, banks may decide to assume assets from their home regions although events may shift bank investments as well. These assets stay with their banks unless they are shifted or gradually introduced into the bond market.

Short term investments are played by the players and are listed on the cards held in their hand. Players can use their own cards to invest in an owned bank as each card has a number of various cubes listed on it. Investments are played blindly into the bank's assets while share purchases are public knowledge. However, at the end of the turn, roughly half of each type of investment is converted into a permanent investment (cube) that stays with the bank for much longer periods of time.

These actions are the strongest influence of power for a bank. Each bank also has a set maximum number of cubes and cards that they may have on them at any point during a turn to limit their debt capacity.

The total value of all investment from both cubes and cards determines its profitability or Bank Value (BV). This value is calculated at the end of each turn.

Investments are impacted by events. Events can make the political environment more uncertain which can drag on investments. They are drawn at the beginning of the turn and electively may be activated by the players themselves. Various aspects of the economy and participating banks can be manipulated by event card draws.

The players are dealt Event Cards that can be used to invest in owned banks, played for events or used as collateral for other game actions. Players also start with a fixed number of Personal Shares that can be used to acquire shares in other banks. Personal Shares can also be used to become the Leader for a given turn which allows the player to determine favorable player order, break ties and other benefits.

Banks are bankrupted if they suffer significant losses. If a bank goes bankrupt, each contributing player loses a number of Victory Points (VP) but the economy at large suffers and investment values deteriorate further.

The ultimate goal is to balance greed against cooperation, uncertainty against fear, and risk against reward.

### **Initial Game Setup**

Each player selects a color and receives 20 Personal Shares of their color plus one matching colored small cube to place on the Scoring Track.

Place one Black Cube on the rightmost column of the Investment Track. Place one Black Cube in the middle column ('3') of the Stability Track.

Each region on the board starts with **three** Green Cubes. The remaining cubes are placed into the Draw Bag and shaken. Each region then draws a number of cubes to equal the Starting Value (Green Square) on that region.

Place **one** Green Cube **for each player** in the Bond area.

Remove any Bank Cards if they have more players listed on the card than the number of players. Place the Bank Cards within reach of each player near their home region. Randomly draw a cube for each Bank in play and place it on the Bank Card.

Shuffle the Event Cards but do not deal them yet.

### **Initial Auction**

An initial auction is run to determine initial owners of any of the banks. Randomly determine the starting player and proceed to bid clockwise. Each Bank is put up for auction **in Auction Order** listed on the Bank Card. Bidding starts at 2 Personal Shares. At least one Bank must be floated.

The highest bidder wins. If the highest bidder wins, two of his Personal Shares are placed in the Bank. The remaining Personal Shares used as part of the winning bid are discarded. Losing Personal Shares are kept by each player. Banks may be skipped and may be founded during the game if one is available.

### **Game Turn**

Each Game Turn is broken down into the following phases:

1. Leader Auction.
2. Initial Event Card Draw.
3. Player Actions.
4. Bank Valuation and Scoring.
5. Cleanup.

## 1. Leader Auction

Each game turn there is an auction to determine who gets to be the Leader.

The Leader has many perks and gets to make decisions regarding the following:

- Player order for the game turn.
- Deciding how to resolve how certain Events play out.
- The order in how banks are valued.
- Resolving ties for Most Profitable Bank bonuses.
- Filling and removal of Regional Cubes at the end of each turn.

Players bid Personal Shares to be Leader. Players may either raise their bid or pass. The auction continues until one player remains. All Personal Shares used for bids are discarded. If all players pass, turn order is simply reversed from the round prior.

Turn 1: The player who wins the first Bank bids first and bids are made going clockwise. If all players pass, the player who won the first Bank bid becomes Leader. The Leader then distributes a turn order token to each player.

Turns 2, 3 and 4: Bidding starts with a player who was not leader and closest to last in turn order. If no bidding is possible, this player becomes the Leader.

## 2. Initial Event Card Draw.

Before the players begin play, three Event Cards are drawn from the Deck and are resolved immediately.

If an Event moves the Stability Track to the lowest ('1') space, the Investment Track is reduced by one and the Stability Track is returned to the middle position. Likewise, if the Stability Track moves to the highest ('5') space, the Investment Track is moved up one space and the Stability Track is reset to the middle position.

Event Cards that take place at the end of the turn or have lasting effects are displayed face up on the side of the board.

Event Cards may add or subtract investment cubes from a bank. If the number of cubes added would exceed the Bank's Max Cube value, the cubes are still added. Event Cards can add or subtract investments to active Banks that have at least one share.

Any Event Cards which remain in play for the remainder of a turn should be placed face-up next to the game board.

Unless stated otherwise, discarded cubes are placed on the side of the board and do not re-enter the game.

For some events, the Leader decides how an event is resolved. This may involve determining which players draw first, which banks are to be evaluated first, etc. These event cards are marked accordingly.

If at any point the Event Card pile is exhausted, all discarded Event Cards are reshuffled back into the deck.

### 3. Player Actions

After this draw, each player is dealt seven cards. Players then proceed to play in Turn Order and must perform one of the following actions:

- A) Play Event: A player may discard one Event Card to activate the event listed on the card. The event must be resolved immediately by the rules already described for handling Event Cards above.
- B) Buy Bank Share: A player may discard one Personal Share and play 1 Event Card to gain one share in a Bank. This event card is considered an investment and is placed **face up** in the bank's pile. The Personal Share is placed on the Bank. The Bank must have less than the maximum number of shares for an owner to buy a share.
- C) Sell Bank Share: A player may discard one Personal Share to sell one of his owned shares in any bank. Both shares are discarded.
- D) Personal Investment: A player may play an Event Card **face down** as an investment to any Bank that they are a shareholder in. This card is not revealed until the end of the turn. If a Bank has the maximum number of permanent investments and investment cards (cubes + investment cards), this action cannot be performed.
- E) Regional Bank Investment: A player may discard an Event Card to move a cube from a Bank's home region to the bank. If a Bank has the maximum number of permanent investments and investment cards (cubes + investment cards), a player cannot transfer cubes to that bank. The player must be a shareholder in the bank to perform this action.
- F) Regional Development: A player may discard an Event Card in order to draw three cubes from the bag. At least one of the drawn cubes must be played in any region that has less than the maximum allowed in that region. Any unplaced cubes are returned to the bag.
- G) Personal Bond Investment: A player may discard a Personal Share and an Event Card to take one cube from the Bond area. The Bond area must always have at least as many cubes as there are players. Any cube may be selected. Bond cubes are worth a variable number of VP at the end of the game based on the Bond portion of the Investment Track.
- H) Bank Asset Swap: A player may discard one Event Card to move one investment cube of any color from one bank he owns to any of his owned banks. This investment cube must be profitable (i.e. worth more than \$0 on the Investment Track) when the asset is swapped.
- I) Reorganization: A player may discard exactly two Event Cards to regain one Personal Share from the discard pile. If there are no Personal Shares in the discard pile, this action cannot be performed.
- J) Discard: A player may take no action and discard one card from his hand.

When one player runs out of cards, each player then has one remaining chance to perform a player action. This phase of the turn is then complete.

If at any point there are no more Event Cards, all discarded Event Cards used as Events are reshuffled back into the main deck along with any discards for the turn and recycled.

#### 4. Bank Valuation and Scoring:

At the end of the turn, all cards played as investments for each bank with at least one share are revealed. **The Leader decides the order** that each bank's Bank Value (BV) is calculated based on the current column of the Investment Track. Each cube is worth its corresponding color on the Investment Track. Banks are determined to be Profitable, Bankrupt or Solvent.

Profitable Bank: A Bank is considered Profitable if it has the minimum number of cubes for a Dividend AND its Bank Value (BV) is **\$1 or more**. In this case, each owner will receive 1 VP for each share they own.

Bankrupt Bank: A bank may be Bankrupt under the following two conditions:

- The bank has no assets, i.e. no cubes and no investment cards. This rule only applies to Banks with shares. Unowned Banks cannot be bankrupt.
- The bank's cubes meet or exceed its Dividend Value and the BV is **-\$5 or less**.

Solvent Bank: A bank that is neither profitable nor bankrupt (i.e. worth \$-4 to 0) is considered solvent. No VP will be awarded for owning shares in a Solvent Bank.

#### *Bank Value Examples:*

*All of the below examples apply to a bank that has a Dividend of 4 Cubes and a maximum of 8 Cubes. The Investment Track has Red Cubes worth -\$2, Yellow Cubes worth \$-1 and Green Cubes worth \$1.*

- *Example #1: A bank has 3 Red, 4 Yellow and 5 Green for a BV of \$-5. Since the BV is \$-5 or less and the number of cubes exceeds the Dividend Value, the bank is considered Bankrupt.*
- *Example #2: A bank has 3 Red cubes for a BV of -\$6. Since the total number of cubes is less than the Dividend Value, the bank is considered Solvent.*
- *Example #3: A bank has no cubes. It is considered Bankrupt.*
- *Example #4: A bank has 1 Red, 1 Yellow and 3 Green for a BV of \$0. The bank is considered Solvent.*
- *Example #5: A bank has 0 Red, 2 Yellow and 6 Green for a BV of \$4. The bank is considered Profitable.*

"Bank Rescue": A bank may be saved by Bankruptcy by the contribution of three Personal Shares from any combination of owners. Any contributed Personal Shares are discarded. If a bank is rescued, no VP are awarded and it is not eligible for any scoring for the rest of the turn.

Bankruptcy: If a bank is not saved from Bankruptcy, all cubes are removed from play entirely and all players lose 3 VP if they own any shares in the Bank. All Bank Shares are discarded.

Finally, the Investment Track is immediately moved down one column - which adversely affects any remaining banks in the queue.

The Bank may then be restarted by any player. A restarted Bank starts without any assets or cubes.

#### End Of Turn Scoring:

At the end of the turn after all Bankruptcies have been resolved, scoring is performed.

1. Each owner in a Profitable Bank receives 1 VP for each share in that bank.
2. The Majority owner of the bank with the highest BV receives a 3 VP bonus. The second highest owning player (Minority Owner) receives a 1 VP bonus.

- Ties are resolved by the **Leader**.

*Example #1: The most profitable bank has two shares held by each player in a two player game. The Leader decides he should receive the 3 VP bonus while his opponent receives 1 VP.*

*Example #2: Three players (including the Leader) have one share in the most profitable bank. The Leader decides to give himself a 3 VP bonus and his friend a 1 VP bonus. The remaining owner in the bank receives nothing.*

*Example #3: Two players have two shares in the biggest bank. The Leader has one share. The Leader must select a winner for the 3 VP between the other two players and he arbitrarily picks the first player. The second player receives 1 VP. The Leader does not receive any VP.*

- Only Solvent and Profitable Banks may be considered for this bonus.
- Rescued Banks are not considered for this bonus.

## 5. Cleanup:

### A: Process Short-Term Investments

At the end of the turn, each bank absorbs cubes from its home region based on the investment cards that were played into it. The total of each type of investment is the total number of cubes divided in half, rounded down. If there are no matching cubes in the region to take, the bank does not absorb them. Permanent investment cubes are not counted for this action. Cubes are absorbed in red, yellow and green order and the maximum number of cubes must be enforced with each cube being added.

*Example: At the end of the turn, Dixie Bank has 2 Red Cubes already on its books and three investment cards were played for a total of 2 Green Investments, 3 Yellow Investments and 1 Red Investment. Dixie Bank can have a maximum of 5 cubes, so three slots are available to fill. The Southeast Region has no Green Cubes available, 5 Yellow Cubes available and 2 Red Cubes available.*

*The Red Investment is ignored, as it is worth 0 cubes (1 divided by 2 = 0.5, rounded down to 0). The three Yellow Investments are worth 1 cube (3 divided by 2 = 1.5, rounded down to 1). One Yellow Investment cube is added to Dixie Bank from the Southeast. Finally, the two Green Investments would be worth one Green Cube from the Southeast. However, since there are no Green Cubes available, none are transferred.*

### B: Restock Bond Market

If possible, each Bank contributes a combination of yellow and/or green cubes to the bond area based on the current turn.

- Turn 1: 1 Green Cube.
- Turn 2: 1 Green Cube OR 1 Yellow Cube.
- Turn 3: 1 Green Cube AND 1 Yellow Cube.
- Turn 4: End of Game.

### C: Restock Regions

Regions must have at least the starting number of cubes at the end of their turn. The **Leader** decides in what order to replenish any cubes with draws from the bag. Cubes must be replenished region by region until the starting number of cubes are placed. If no cubes are in the bag, cubes are not replenished.

If a region has more than the maximum number of cubes allowed (the black square on the map), the **Leader** decides which cubes are removed to meet the requirement. Removed cubes are discarded from play.

### D: Handle Discards

Any cards used for events are discarded from play. All Event Cards used as Investments are shuffled back into the deck.

## The End

The game ends early if a total of three banks have gone bankrupt (and the turn is played out to the end). Otherwise, the game ends at the end of the fourth turn.

At the end of the game, the value of any Bonds for any player are added based on their value on the Investment Track, rounding down. Furthermore, 1 VP is given for every two Personal Shares still held by the player, rounding down.

The winner is the player with the most Victory Points. If there is a tie, the player who owns the most Banks wins. If still tied, the player who has the most shares in all of the Banks wins. Finally, if all is tied at this point, the Event Card deck is shuffled. Each tying player draws one card. The person who draws the highest number in the lower-right corner of the card is declared the winner. Ties are not possible.

## Change History

### 0.9- 6/20/09

- Original Written Version.

### 0.9.1 - 6/23/09

- Added rule to allow Banks to reform after bankruptcy.
- Added rule to allow random draw of first cube for Banks at game setup and removed restriction of leaving banks shuttered.
- Removed rule where having no cubes in a Bank would trigger a bankruptcy.
- Removed rule where a final Event Card is drawn after all players have played their Event Cards.

### 0.9.2 - 6/25/09

- Fixed some wording on some rambling sentences.
- Removed region on card restrictions on Regional Development.
- Added clarification for lowest bank value on "Brokerage Bailed Out Over Weekend" event.
- Added rule detailing how to remove cubes from board if there are too many in a region.

### 0.9.3 - 6/26/09

- Improved card layout legibility.
- Changed end condition for third bankruptcy so that the game ends at the end of the current turn.
- Changed Market Crash cards so that they always drop at least one rung.

### 0.9.4 - 7/29/09

- Added additional investment migration rules.
- Added reference to Investment Track for bonds in final game scoring.
- Added clarification for Regional Investment actions to be used only for shareholders.
- Added "leader" rules to decide resolution order for determining player order and sequencing during events.
- Removed ability for banks to ignore Event effects.
- Dropped the number of shares required to bail out a bank from 4 to 3.
- Added clarification for reshuffling Event Cards if the deck runs out of cards.
- Added clarification to Event Cards for Leader Order where appropriate.
- Dropped number of cards on reorganization from 3 cards down to 2 cards.

- Changed regional refills to be at the discretion of the Leader.
- Changed tie breaker for biggest bank bonus to be at the discretion of the Leader.
- Added scoring for Personal Shares still held at the end of the game.
- Amended final tie breaker.
- Changed starting bond cube amount to match number of players.
- Fixed wording on starting auction to allow banks to be skipped.
- Clarified instances when all players pass for Leader Auction, turn order is reversed or goes to the first bank winner.
- Clarified start/max indicators on map.
- Added credits.
- Changed investment value of red cubes on most prosperous level from 6 to 5 for easier mental calculation.

## **Credits**

Initial Design and Playtesting  
Jack Neal

Additional Playtesting  
Justin Neal  
Betsy Neal

## **Programs Used**

Hex Draw, Open Office, Nandek, Paint.NET and Inkscape

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