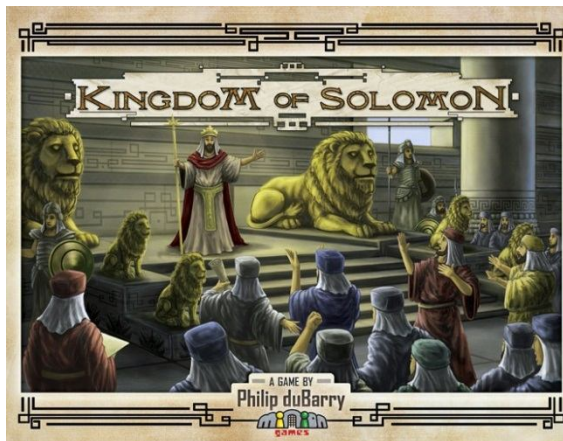


## Building the Temple

### Pevans reviews *Kingdom of Solomon*

I rather enjoyed *Kingdom of Solomon* when I was introduced to it a few months ago. I have now invested in my own copy and it's become something of a hit with the Swiggers games club ([www.pevans.co.uk/Swiggers](http://www.pevans.co.uk/Swiggers)). I thought it deserved a more extensive review than my initial assessment in *To Win Just Once* 124.

As the title suggests, the game is set in ancient Israel and this is what the board depicts. Given the shape of the country, it runs diagonally across the board. The territory is divided into regions, depicted in nice pastel colours that reflect the raw material each produces: food, timber, stone, copper (rare) and gold (very rare). It's no surprise that these are represented in the game by wooden cubes: green, brown, grey, orange and yellow. Most of the regions have a 'building' space as well. Players fill these with their markers when they construct a building.



To the left of Israel, the blue Mediterranean area has spaces for four cards. These are the buildings available to players each round and are only refilled at the very end of a round. On the right hand side of the board are action spaces. Each round, players place pawns on these to be able to take the actions and in the regions of Israel to produce cube(s) of the appropriate material. Action spaces generally give players extra cubes or 'Fortune' cards – in one case (Thief) taking a cube from another player. This makes turn order important, especially if there's a specific action you want.

In addition to the ordinary action spaces, there are three 'Bonus' action spaces. These provide particularly powerful actions. One gives the player one of each cube (though it's only available with four players), another provides the player with three 'Fortune' cards and the third makes them first player – and provides some victory points. This last is an interesting one as the points scored depend on the player's current position in the turn order. So taking this as fourth player is really valuable. It also changes turn order during the round, so the player who takes it will get some actions before their opponents.

However, the crucial point about the 'Bonus' actions is that you have to play all your remaining pawns to get them. This gives an interesting twist to the decisions of what actions to take. How many pawns is a bonus action worth? Is it worth an extra pawn for the last player to grab it in front of the others?

Players each have 5-6 wooden pawns (depending on the number of players in the game), five rectangular building pieces and a couple of markers in their colour. They use one marker to show turn order while the other indicates their score on the track round the edge of the board. Each round, players take it in turns to place a pawn on a region or on an action or place all their pawns on a bonus action.

Once everybody's placed their pawns, players take their actions and collect materials. This time, each player does their stuff in one go. They decide the order of the actions, but they do everything before anyone else gets a chance. As I've already mentioned, one action can move a player into first place in turn order. This applies for the rest of the round as well as the start of the next round. However, it's usually the last or second-last player who takes this action, so it doesn't have much impact immediately.

Turn order matters for the next part of the round, where players can buy materials from or sell them to the market – in reverse order. The market is a matrix on the board showing the prices for four cubes in each of the five materials. This grid starts empty, so initially players can only sell, turning materials cubes into victory points. Players can only buy, spending victory points, what other players have sold (you can't buy and sell the same material in the same round). The price is shown by each space on the grid and players will, of course, sell the most expensive and buy the cheapest.

The market provides a neat way for players to pick up the odd cube that they need. It also lets them turn excess materials into victory points. However, there's no limit on holding stuff between turns, so there's no need to sell anything you think you might need in the next turn or two. In fact, the number of cubes is limited, so hanging onto them may deprive other players of what they need. Note that there are only a limited number of spaces at the market, though, so if you do want to sell, you may need to do so sooner rather than later. This is particularly true at the end of the game when players are looking to get extra points for their remaining materials.

Players buy or sell one cube at a time, preventing any one player from hogging the market. Conversely, if a player passes their turn, they will not be able to buy or sell any further cubes this round. This makes for some interesting tactical options around the market as the game continues.

The final part of each round is building: there are three different things players can build. I've already mentioned that four building cards are available and each player may construct one each round. The cost of a building – in materials – is shown on the card. As the buildings are visible from the end of the previous turn, the materials required are often a focus when players are deciding what they want to do each round.

The biggest reason for constructing buildings is that they are the main source of victory points. As soon as a player constructs a building, they score the victory points printed on the card. In addition, each building card provides an action space. In subsequent rounds, the building's owner may place a pawn here and gain the resources shown in



the normal way. On top of this, most buildings allow the owner to place a marker in one of the regions on the board. This reserves the region for that player and regulates the placement of roads – the second thing players can build.



Some Building cards (courtesy of Minion Games)

As well as their one building, players can build any number of roads in a round – provided they have the materials needed and suitable places on the board. Roads are used to join regions on the board. They can only go between a player's buildings or between a player's building and a region without a building space. Once in place, roads allow players to gain the materials from all the connected regions with a single pawn. In fact, players can get the materials several times, if they manage to place several pawns in the same group of regions.

This makes roads really valuable, especially if they are built early on.

The third thing players can build is part of the great Temple. Each section (there are three different types) requires specific materials. Again, players can build as many sections in a round as they can afford. They place a (white) block on the Temple schematic on the board to show the completed section(s) and gain either victory points or a Temple token – a cardboard chip – for each, as they choose. The player with the most tokens is High Priest ... until someone gains more Temple tokens than them. The privilege of being High Priest is that they may place a pawn in a region containing another player's building. This can be very useful. Even more useful are the 20 points scored by the player who's High Priest at the end of the game. This is the equivalent of a particularly good building, so it's useful, but won't win the game on its own.

The game continues until the Temple is complete, one player has used all their building markers or all the building spaces on the board are occupied. The players complete the round and score up. On top of the player's scores through the game, there is the bonus for High Priest. Any remaining materials cubes are worth points and players get any points from Fortune cards. The player with the most points wins, of course.

I haven't said much about the Fortune cards yet. Players have various opportunities to draw these and can play them at any time. Cards generally provide a couple of cubes, so it's a way of holding and using cubes other players don't know about. However, players are only allowed to hold three cards in their hand at the end of the round, so they can't hoard too much this way.

On the face of it, *Kingdom of Solomon* is another worker placement game. However, once you look more closely, the game has some clever wrinkles that lift it out of the ordinary. Requiring players to go 'all-in' to use a bonus action spaces is a clever way of making these more powerful actions more expensive. It gives players something extra to think about when deciding where to place their pawns – and considering what their opponents are up to.





*Kingdom of Solomon* in play at Swiggers games club

Clearly it's important to get buildings, for both the points they score and the extra actions they provide. However, everybody can see what's needed for each building and what materials everybody has, so it's obvious who can buy what. This is when turn order is important – and the Fortune cards can be useful, providing cubes your opponents don't know about.

Another question is whether it's worth being High Priest. The privilege is certainly useful, as are the points at the end of the game. However, my feeling is that it's not worth fighting over. If two players are putting their resources into racking up Temple tokens, they are giving their opponents a freer hand with the buildings. On the other hand, letting one player keep High Priest seems too much of a good thing.

All in all, I'm enjoying *Kingdom of Solomon*. The game's straightforward mechanisms fit together really well and provide an entertaining challenge. Okay, it's not the deepest game around, but there's plenty to think about and lots of replay value.

*Kingdom of Solomon* was designed by Philip duBarry and published by Minion Games. It is for 2-4 players, aged 12+ and takes about an hour to play. It gets a solid 8/10 on my highly subjective scale.

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