Review: Sagrada, a top dice-drafting board game, goes digital

Enlarge / Sagrada on Steam.

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Sagrada is one of the best dice-drafting games on the market. It makes excellent use of the inherent randomness of dice while still providing copious opportunities for strategic thinking and long-term planning. It's also a visually appealing game, easy to learn but displaying more depth the more you play it—especially by making players think about how early choices may restrict their options later. And it's about building stained-glass windows. Delightful.

These days, there's a digital version of *Sagrada* out from Dire Wolf Digital, maker of several of the best digital board game adaptations on the market (including 2019's *Raiders of the North Sea* and *Yellow & Yangtze*, which were both on my list of the best board game apps of 2019).

The base game of *Sagrada* allows two to four players to collect dice that are then placed on their individual 4×5 grids. Some spaces show specific colors or die values (but not both) that you must match in order to place something there. The game

lasts ten rounds. In each round, the start player will roll two dice per player plus one more, after which the players choose dice in a snake draft (so, with three players, the players would draft in order 1-2-3 and then 3-2-1) and place them on their boards.

There are limits, though. The first die you place must be somewhere on one of the 12 edge spaces; all dice afterwards must be placed orthogonally or diagonally adjacent to a die you've already placed. You can't place two dice of the same color or same value next to each other, and you have to match anything already printed on your screen.

There are also three Tools available in each game, each of which costs you one or two favor tokens to use (you'll probably get to use them a maximum of three times, if that). The Tools let you do something that would otherwise violate the rules—moving a die you've already placed, ignoring a color restriction on your screen, or flipping a die to its opposite face value, for example.

Each player gets a private objective at the start of the game, which awards points equal to the sum of the face values of all their placed dice of one specific color. Then, all players score the game's three public objectives, which reward you for avoiding repeat colors or values in rows or columns, or for how many pairs of dice you have with specific values (1-2, 3-4, or 5-6), or for how many times you put dice of the same color diagonally adjacent to each other. You lose one point for each unfilled space on your grid.

The app gets all of the salient information on to one screen for you to see at a glance, with icons rather than text representing the various end-game bonuses and the three tools available to use in that game. You can see text descriptions on Steam by moving the cursor over each item, at which point you get the full text from the card in the physical game. Once you've played a few times, the icons for the objectives are easy to grasp at a glance. (The icons for the tools are a bit more arcane; even after multiple plays, I generally didn't remember what those icons meant.)

The app offers local pass-and-play, local play versus AI opponents, and asynchronous online play. The AI opponents are fair, coming in three levels but with the medium players closer to "easy" and the hard AI players good but

inconsistent, sometimes missing opportunities to use tools or take dice late in the game that might score an additional objective. Online play has been scant during Early Access testing but the app itself works fine, with options for private and public games and notifications when it’s your turn.

Sagrada itself is very color-centric, making the app visually appealing with its cute-but-functional animations. (The app also offers a Color-Blind Mode where each color has a unique pattern on it.) The most useful function by far is the way the app tells you when and where you have a legal play, although the key decision is really which space will be most advantageous without restricting future dice placements.

Dire Wolf’s board game apps have just about all been outstanding—the only ones I don’t care for are the ones where I don’t like the underlying game. *Sagrada* is another hit, maybe the company’s best yet because the game itself was already so good.

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