



PipQuest

Big Ideas on the Board

A SPARK & ANVIL STRATEGY BOOK

PipQuest – Big Ideas on the Board

A Spark & Anvil companion book – free to download and share.

Ages 9-14. Game: backgammon.

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This volume teaches strategy through the app's cast – 4 big ideas, one per chapter.

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*Backgammon mixes luck and skill – the dice are random, but the *choices* are all yours, and good choices win far more often. The other PipQuest books teach the moves; this one teaches how to **play well**, through the cast you know.*

Chapter 1 – Count the Race

Peglegra the Bold is a racer at heart. Backgammon is, underneath everything, a **race**: both players run their checkers around the board and off the far end, and whoever finishes first usually wins. So the first skill is to **count the pips** – add up how many steps each side needs to bring everyone home.

"Before I decide anything," said Peglegra, "I count. Am I ahead in the race, or behind?"

That single count changes your whole plan. If you are **ahead**, run – race for home, avoid contact, don't get hit. If you are **behind**, do not just race (you will lose the race) – you need to slow the game down and set a trap (Chapter 2). Knowing which game you are in is the biggest decision in backgammon.

Say it out loud: *Count the race first – ahead, you run; behind, you trap.*

Your turn: The "Count the Race" workbook pages show a position with the pip count. Are you ahead or behind – and which plan does that pick?

Counting pips feels like maths homework at first. It is the single habit that tells you what kind of game to play.

Chapter 2 – Hit and Trap

Chompus the Great loves contact. When an enemy checker sits alone on a point – a **blot** – Chompus can land on it, sending it all the way back to the start. One hit is a lucky nudge; a **chain** of hits sends several checkers home and can flip a losing race.

But the deeper idea is the **trap**. If you make **points** – two or more checkers stacked on the same spot, which the opponent cannot land on – and line several points up in a row, you build a **prime**: a wall the enemy checker cannot jump. Hit a blot, then wall it in behind a prime, and it may be stuck for many turns while you race ahead.

"Send them home," Chompus grinned, "then build a fence so they can't get back."

Say it out loud: *Hit the lone blot, then wall it behind a prime.*

This is the plan for when you are *behind* in the race: don't run – hit and trap, and let the dice bring you back.

Your turn: The "Hit and Trap" pages show a lone enemy blot. Find the roll that hits it – and the points that build a wall behind it.

Choosing to trap instead of run, when you are behind, is the mark of a strong player. It turns bad dice into a real plan.

Chapter 3 – The Doubling Cube

Windward the Wise carries the strangest piece in backgammon: the **doubling cube**. At any point before your roll, you may offer to **double** the stakes. Your opponent then chooses: **take** (play on for double) or **drop** (give up now for the smaller loss).

"Raise the big sail when the tide is truly with you," said Windward, "and bow out gracefully when it is not."

The cube is pure judgement, and it is where the best players win the most. Double when you are clearly ahead – it forces the opponent to either pay now or risk a bigger loss. And when *you* are offered a double, decide honestly: if you still have a real chance, take; if you are nearly lost, drop and save the bigger points. Misusing the cube loses more games than bad dice ever do.

Say it out loud: *Double when you're clearly ahead; take only if you still have a real chance.*

Your turn: The "Cube" pages show a position and ask: should you double? If doubled, should you take or drop?

The cube feels scary because it is a gamble on your own position. Learning to read when you are truly ahead is a deep and rewarding skill.

Chapter 4 – Bring It Home

Every plan ends the same way: **bearing off** – taking your checkers off the board once they are all home. Peglegra returns for the finish, and here the last big idea appears: bear off **without leaving a shot**. If a checker is still exposed as a blot while the opponent has a checker behind it, one unlucky roll can send it all the way back and cost you the game.

"Almost home is not home," said Peglegra. "Bring everyone in safely – don't leave a straggler for one last hit."

So the endgame is careful: fill your home board evenly, avoid leaving gaps that force a blot, and if the opponent has no checker behind you, race off as fast as the dice allow.

Say it out loud: *Bear off safely – never leave a lone checker for one last hit.*

Everything in this book meets here: you counted the race (Chapter 1), you ran or trapped (Chapter 2), you used the cube well (Chapter 3) – now bring every checker home without a slip.

Your turn: The "Bring It Home" pages show a bear-off position. Find the safe way off that leaves no shot.

*Losing a won game to one last hit stings – and teaches the lesson fast.
Bearing off cleanly is exactly what getting good feels like.*

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