TOXIC GNOME - Rules

Players: Two to five

Synopsis: Toxic Gnome is a word game in which players race up a board that acts like a treadmill, slowly speeding up. The object is to eliminate all other players by causing them to fall off the back of the treadmill.

Setup: There are 48 tiles altogether. To play an easier game, remove the difficult tiles (marked with a small D). To play a harder game, remove the easy tiles (marked with a small E). A standard-length game begins by placing 12 tiles in a "treadmill" on the table—to play a shorter or longer game, adjust the number of tiles.

Each player begins by placing a token on any letter of the bottom tile of the treadmill. It is a good idea to mark the end of the "danger zone" with another token. This begins one tile up, as shown on the right.

Play

Players take turns moving up the board by connecting the letters to create a word. Proper nouns and abbreviations are not allowed, as per most other word games. Letters can be connected horizontally, vertically, or diagonally in any direction. Each subsequent word must start with the letter that the player begins resting on. For instance, in the picture above, the left-hand player could form TAFFY, then YOUR, then RAZORS, then SEMIC, bringing them to the top row. (Note the tendency for pieces to move to the right, since many letter combinations in English are more frequent than their reverse.)

In forming a word, players may pass over one another and may land on the same letter. It is also acceptable to return to the same letter twice in the course of forming a word, and "wild" spaces can be treated as a different letter each time they are visited. However, no player may form a word that has been formed previously during the game.

If a player cannot find a word they like, they may instead choose to move space horizontally, or one space backwards (vertically or diagonally). They may not move forwards.

Moving the treadmill

When a player forms a word that ends in the uppermost row of the board, the board "treadmills". All the tiles in the danger zone are discarded, and the same number of new tiles are drawn and placed on the top of the board. The new danger zone is then extended by one tile. Thus the first treadmill involves a loss and gain of one tile, the second treadmill involves a loss and gain of two tiles, and so forth. Any players on the discarded tile are eliminated from the game.

If one of the new tiles drawn is a red word (MAMBO, SLIDE, or TWERK), then the player who has just reached the uppermost row can elect to offset the treadmill by one square in either direction with that tile, though they do not need to do so.

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