

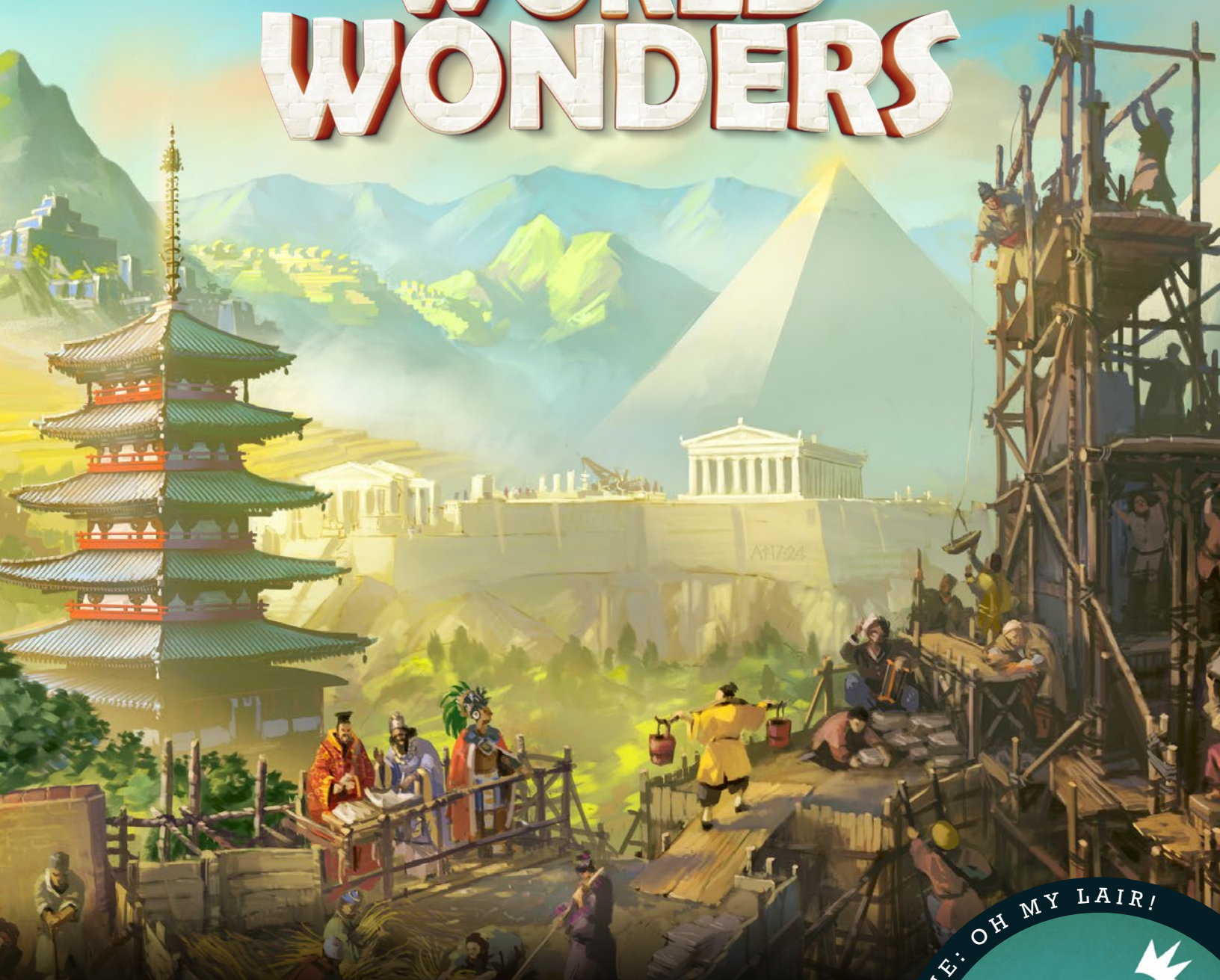
WINTER 2024 / #46



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SPIEL 2023

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CASUAL GAME INSIDER is published quarterly by:



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MADE IN USA



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DragonPhoenixGames.com



Founded in 2009, Stratus Games has designed many original casual games like *Torpedo Dice*, *Eruption*, and *Off Your Rocker*. They are also the creative minds behind Casual Game Revolution and *Casual Game Insider*.

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WORLD WONDERS

Building a city has never been more beautiful!



Bree Goldman

Arcane Wonders
Marketing Manager

You have been tasked with building a glorious city! The ancient leaders gave you great riches to use as you see fit, choosing buildings and monuments to fill your city's streets. As you build, more and more people will be attracted to live in your city. Pay close attention to your opponents, as they may be trying to build the same monument or building as you. Whoever has the most victory points at the end of the game will be declared the leader of the greatest city in all antiquity!

World Wonders brings the wonders of the ancient world to your game table. As your city grows, you will earn lovely wooden monument tokens to add to your city board. Plan carefully to meet requirements and earn the most victory points in this game of polyomino drafting and tile placement.



In *World Wonders*, 1-4 players will compete for the title of greatest leader by purchasing roads, buildings, and towers to add to their city. Each building type provides resources which can attract residents to move into your city. Additionally, you will want to pay careful attention to the requirements of the available Monuments to give yourself the best chance to add them to your city.





World Wonders features delightful wooden Monument tokens representing wonders from all over the world, such as Moai (Easter Island Heads), Machu Pichu, and the Colosseum. While the focus of the game is on purchasing and placing roads and buildings, the Monuments stand out as the truly eye-catching element on the table. When playing this game at conventions or at your local game store, be prepared for people to stop by and comment on how gorgeous your city board looks!



You will have to carefully plan which shapes and colors to add to your city to accomplish multiple goals: meet the requirements of a Monument, create city districts by completely surrounding your buildings, or build next to (but not over) natural resources printed on your player board to earn end-game victory points.



The game comes with 21 of these striking Monuments, with more to come. Keep an eye on the Arcane Wonders social media pages to learn more!

Each round, players will take turns buying roads, buildings, towers, and Monuments. First and second player tokens are also available for purchase, giving you the potential to go early in the next bidding round. The buildings, roads, and towers in the market are limited, so getting first pick can be a huge advantage.



World Wonders will appeal to fans of polyomino games such as *Foundations of Rome*, as well as to fans of strategy games and visual puzzles. It plays 1-4 city leaders ages 12 and over in about an hour, and can be found at your local game store or on the Arcane Wonders website.

www.ArcaneWonders.com



MUNDIUS

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SPIEL Essen



2023: Bigger, Better, Bolder



Blake Evans-Pritchard

Journalist and
Casual Games Enthusiast

It was difficult to ignore the throngs of people that milled around the corridors of the largest board game convention in the world, especially during Saturday lunch when flitting between the different gaming halls proved more than a little challenging.

While SPIEL in 2022 gave the impression that things had returned to some semblance of normalcy following COVID-19, there was no comparison to the size of the event that was held in 2023. It has been over 40 years since the first SPIEL took place, back in 1983, and the event has gone from strength to strength. The organizers boast that 2023 saw the “biggest SPIEL ever” — although this rather depends on the metric that is used to measure this.





Big Changes & Attendance Trends

It is true that the space used by exhibitors was far larger than in previous years (62,500 square meters compared to 50,000 square meters in 2022). However, the number of people attending the convention has still not quite reached 2019 levels. In 2023, there were 193,000 visitors compared to the record 209,000 people who attended in 2019. However, this is still a significant increase compared to the 147,000 people that turned up last time.

“SPIEL Essen has evolved throughout its 40 years of existence – from its humble beginnings in a community college in Essen in 1983 to the world’s leading consumer show for board games that it is today,” says Robin de Cleur, head of communications at Merz Verlag, organizer of SPIEL. “The fair grew, the booths got more beautiful, and more and more people came. But at its core, SPIEL has always been

about experiencing games, playing at the show, and meeting people.”

For any casual board game enthusiast, going to Essen is a wonderful experience. There are plenty of opportunities to meet like-minded individuals, visitors can get a very good sense of some of the great games that are emerging, and energetic demonstrators are on hand to bring the games to life without the need to wade through a tedious rulebook!

However, with SPIEL Essen now becoming so popular, and with the ever-increasing number of new games being released each year, it pays to do a bit of preparation before attending the 4-day fair.



Images provided by Spielwarenmesse eG

Preparing for Essen

On Saturday of the convention, we met board game enthusiast Greta, who had turned up at SPIEL for a day with her mother. Both were local and didn’t have far to travel. Even so, it was the first time they had ever attended the convention. “We wanted to come for a long time since we play a lot of casual and family games at home, but for one reason or another, we never managed to. A few days ago, we heard about the fair on the radio, and we decided to attend,” said Greta.

Greta said that she was enjoying the fair but finding it a bit hectic. “There are more people than we expected and sometimes we needed to wait for quite a long time in order to try a game,” said Greta. “We did not prepare for the fair at all. We’ve just been walking around, and

when we spot a game that we want to try, we look for a table.” Greta and her mother had turned up on what was by far the busiest day of the event. The previous two days, Thursday and Friday, had been noticeably quieter, with less of a wait for the tables.

Beyond choosing which days to turn up, there are other things that visitors do to prepare. “I start preparing one year in advance,” says Alessandro, who has been coming to the fair every year for more than two decades. “The most important preparation starts in January when I begin compiling a long list of games that sound interesting. Over the following months, I work on shortening my list so I end up with around 30 games that I would like to try.”

The Commerce Gamble

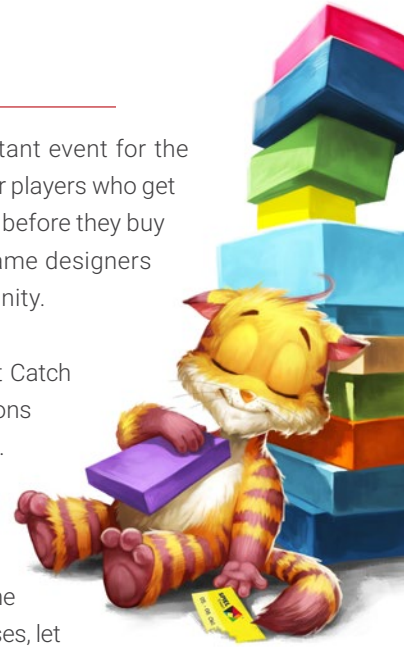
The quantity of games released at and around Essen is staggering, making it even harder to decide which ones to try and walk away with. According to the organizers, more than 1,700 new games were exhibited at Essen, which is a little under half the estimated 3,500 games released worldwide each year.

“Because there’s so many new games on the market today, if you want your game to be visible and to be noticed, it is no longer okay just to make a good game. You have to make an exceptional game. You have to make something that will make a difference,” says Jean-Christoph Giraud, CCO of Asmodee.

While some publishers may be worried about the sheer number of games published every year, Marcin Swierkot, CEO of Awaken Realms, sees this as a positive thing. “There should be that many premieres because you never know what will be the next hit. When a game is fun it is fun. You cannot engineer this...you just never know,” says Swierkot.

This is why SPIEL is such an important event for the board game community – not only for players who get the opportunity to try out new games before they buy them, but also for publishers and game designers who get to connect with the community.

Matthieu Bonin, Head of Marketing at Catch Up Games, shared some of the reasons SPIEL is worthwhile for his company. “After paying for transportation, accommodation, meals, wages, as well as booth space and furnishings, there’s absolutely no way to be sure the sales at the show will cover our expenses, let alone generate any profit. But there can be other benefits to putting your games on an international stage. If you’re lucky enough to catch a bit of spotlight, that could help raise awareness about your games, and in turn lead to new localization deals, and even make your foreign partners’ job way easier when they release the game in their own country.”



Images provided by Spielwarenmesse eG

Extreme Makeover: SPIEL Edition

For 2023, the organizers changed the layout of the show, with thematic halls separated into family games, connoisseur and expert games, and role-playing, trading card, and miniature games.

“We changed a lot of things this year to make SPIEL even more accessible and appealing, and the number of visitors on all days, as well as the general feedback, shows us that we’ve done it,” says Carol Rapp, the Managing Director of Merz Verlag. Exhibitors have certainly appreciated the changes and the renewed popularity of the event.

“Our stand was really well attended on all four days. The game tables were almost always completely occupied. We had significantly more sales at the fair than in previous years,” observes Andreas Finkernagel, Managing Director of the Friedberg-based publisher Pegasus Spiele.

Bonin adds, “[It] was both exhausting and very exciting to get so many people coming and playing our games!”

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SECOND
EXPANSION FOR





What About the Games?

With so many new games on display at the convention, it's difficult to narrow down the best ones. But these are some of the new casual games that really captured our interest.

Graffiti

2-4 players | ages 14+ | 30 minutes

This isn't necessarily a theme I would look for in a casual board game, but *Graffiti* stands out for its colorful artwork, unique set of rules and speed at which it can be played. Players are competing to be the best graffiti artists on the streets of London. They do this by acquiring different colors of spray paint and using it to decorate different sections of an underground tunnel.

No dice are involved. Instead, like many other things in the game, dice rolls are purchased. This is a nice touch and adds to the overall strategy and playability.

The variety of mechanisms at play means that there is a slight learning curve to the game, but once this has been overcome it plays very quickly and is a game that players are sure to want to come back to.



Game photography by:

Violetta Polese

Italian Travel and
Photo Journalist



Sides

2-9 players | ages 10+ | 30-60 minutes

Last year, CGI featured a review of *13 Words*, a neat cooperative word game released by Captain Games. This time, the Belgian publisher has returned to Essen with another winning game along similar lines, *Sides*.

Each round, there are two detectives who must discover what a particular word is by interrogating the witnesses, who provide one-word clues about the word in question. The catch is that the one-word clue can only begin with the letters that are written on either side of a letter-card line. To achieve a high score, players need to guess as many words as possible using as few clues as they can.

The game is a lot of fun and very addictive. It's the kind of game that can be whipped out on any occasion, and almost no explanation is needed to start enjoying it. A nice touch is that the easier words are identified on each question card, meaning that younger kids can enjoy this game just as much as adults.



Faraway

2-6 players | ages 10+ | 15-30 minutes

Faraway is a card game with a twist: the unique mechanism that underpins the game means that it has to be played more than once before the concept becomes clear. But once players have grasped the idea, it becomes very fast-paced and a lot of fun to play.

The box of the game says that players will “explore a mysterious land and fulfill quests on the way back.” This means that players have to think about the game they are playing in reverse.

Throughout the game, each player will lay down a row of eight cards, from left to right. Characters on each card grant victory points

according to certain conditions that are met. However — and this is where the clever part comes in — it is only once the game ends that the cards are played, from the last one to the first. This means that the cards that are placed later in the game influence those that have been placed before, rather than the other way around.

It’s a great idea and really works, but the game has to be played before it can be truly appreciated. A clever priority system in which the cards laid down previously determine the order of play in the next round, increases opportunities for developing different strategies.



CATCH UP
GAMES

The A.R.T. Project

1-6 players | ages 12+ | 40 minutes

One of the criticisms of many cooperative games is that they tend to be short-lived; played a few times and then, once the strategy is properly understood, shoved into a cupboard and quickly forgotten about.

This is unlikely to happen with *The A.R.T. Project*, which is a very well-designed game with just the right amount of luck to force strategy to be adjusted each time it is played. The game comes with four uniquely drawn maps, which lengthen the game's shelf life.

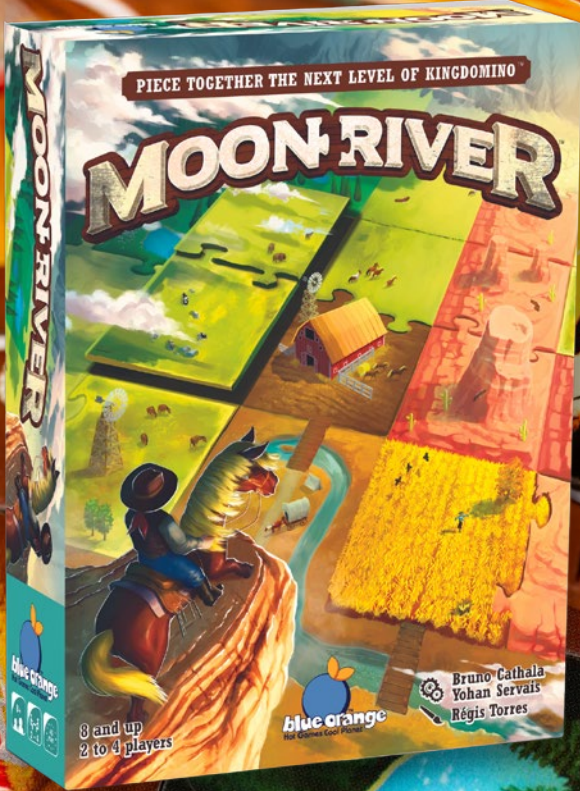
The game also comes with a captivating backstory, based on actual historical events. In the game, each player is part of an Art Rescue Team that is working to prevent a series of heists from taking place in art galleries across the world. Florian Sirieix, one of the designers of the game, says his inspiration for the concept came from what happened during World War II, when a group of people (later known as the Monuments Men) were tasked with safeguarding historic and cultural monuments from war damage and theft.

The idea behind the game is simple enough. Each round, all players draw two mission cards and choose one to play. Mission cards trigger different actions. They consume and earn resources. They increase the number of White Hands (or thieves) in different cities. And they help to determine in which city the works of art that players must protect will appear.

The clever part of the game is the order in which the mission cards are played. Players need to make sure that a played mission card is not consuming resources that have not yet been earned. Players must discuss among themselves in which order the cards should be played, but they are not permitted to look at one another's cards.

Players must try to save all seven works of art before the mission deck is exhausted. Up to six players can play the game. It is more enjoyable with more players, although it is also more chaotic.





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SCAN ME

Tipperary

2-5 players | ages 8+ | 45 minutes

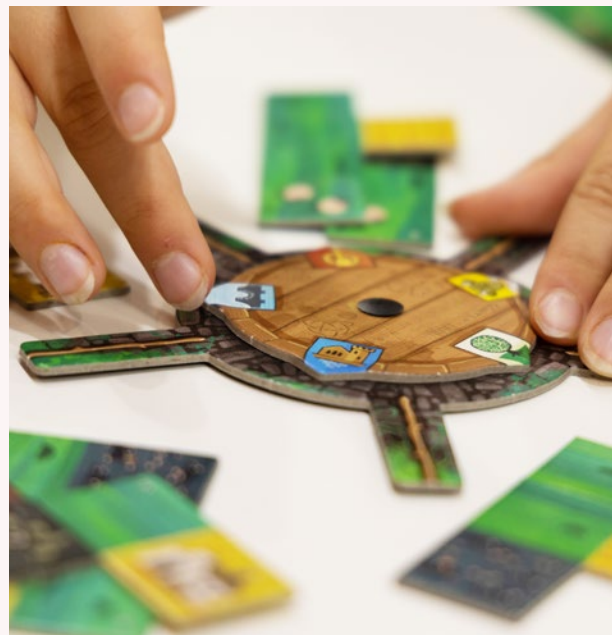
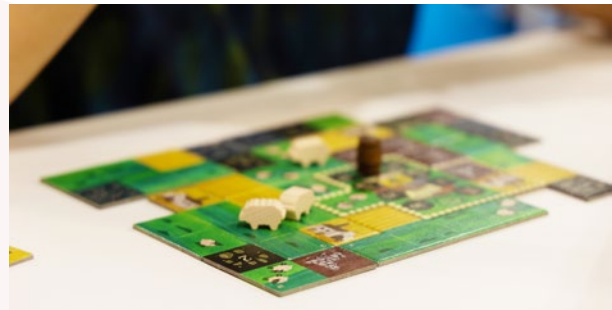
"You live in a small town amidst lush green meadows, extensive bogs, and impressive hills. In the surrounding countryside, you find mystical stone circles and medieval ruins, build new pastures for your flocks of sheep, and produce whiskey in traditional distilleries."

This short blurb from the publisher, printed on the box of the game, says it all, really. This is an endearing family game set in rural Ireland, in which players cultivate the landscape by placing tiles in order to collect whiskey, sheep, and castles.

There are 12 rounds to the game. Each round starts with the selection of tiles, done with a fairly innovative wheel-spinning mechanism. After every spin, players receive two tiles each. One must be placed and the other is discarded.

Each tile contains different components that contribute to the overall score at the end. They are also all different shapes, which adds to the skills in trying to place them.

For those casual gamers that enjoy tile-placement games along the lines of *Carcassonne*, *Tipperary* is an addition worth considering – easy to pick up, quick to play, and varied enough to stay interesting.





Nekojima

1-5 players | ages 7+ | 15-30 minutes

Japan is full of places that have earned the nickname 'cat island,' or Nekojima. This is the inspiration behind this latest addition to the ever-growing world of Jenga-like games of dexterity.

David Carmona, one of the designers of the game, spent some time living in Japan before returning to Europe to found Unfriendly Games. He says that he actually got the idea for the game when renovating his house in France. Nekojima was a handy label to attach to the game that draws upon the time that he spent in the land of the rising sun.

The game is played on a small circular board, which is divided into four zones. On each turn,

players must place two vertical poles attached by a length of string. Occasionally, cats must be suspended from these strings, too. The idea is to avoid being the one to knock the structure over – or to let any of the cats fall.

The game is original, fun to play, and one of those games that can be brought out on pretty much any gaming occasion. *Nekojima* can be played both competitively and as a cooperative game. 🐱

UNFRIENDLY Games





WHAT'S UP?

BOARD GAMING IN 3 DIMENSIONS



Natalie Rodriguez

Writer and Sometimes
Loser to the Box of Rocks

When it comes to board gaming, most people think of moving pieces around a two-dimensional board. However, board games with three-dimensional elements often level up the engagement and strategy. And a bit of dexterity can go a long way in holding shortened attention spans.

Whatever the case may be, it's true that children have some of the best toys – which often provide three-dimensional play. It happens that board games are taking note of this, evolving from the mass-market family and children-centric beginnings of the modern era. Let's explore some games that embrace a world of gaming beyond a mere two dimensions.

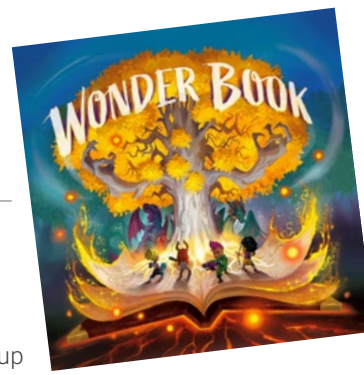


Pop Up

Wonder Book

1-4 players | ages 10+ | 60-90 minutes

Wonder Book (2021) by DV Games is a cooperative game for up to 4 players in which each player takes on the role of a teenager on an adventure. The gameplay is divided into six chapters. Each chapter is played using a pre-sorted deck of cards that contain the rules, story, and challenges for that chapter. During each chapter, players explore a new part of the interactive 3D cardboard book. A deck of cards guides the action. Players start at the first card in the deck and progress through the story until they reach a goal card. Goal cards describe the objective players must complete to advance to the next chapter.



Search Party: Chaos at the Park

1-99 players | ages 8+ | 30-90 minutes

Search Party: Chaos at the Park (2023) is a search-and-find adventure game from Relatable, the creators of *What Do You Meme?*. Players must work together to find items to solve mysteries. A large pop-up board depicts an amusement park with rides, including a Ferris wheel and a roller coaster. Players begin by choosing one of the 15 missions and then take turns drawing cards, moving their pieces around the board, and searching for hidden objects. If a player finds a hidden object, they will receive a clue, which is used to solve the mysteries or to find additional objects. The first team to solve the mysteries wins the game.



WHAT DO YOU
MEME?

The Shivers

2-5 players | ages 14+ | 45-90 minutes

The Shivers (2022) by Pop Fiction Games is a cooperative mystery game using pop-up rooms and immersive storytelling. Players take on the roles of the Shivers family and their friends and work together to uncover the secrets of a haunted house by exploring rooms, interacting with objects — including additional 3D features — and solving puzzles. The Shivers features several storylines played throughout “episodes.” Story cards that slide into the walls change the room slightly in each episode by adding new or different clues, artwork, or details.

POP
FICTION
GAMES



Photo provided by the publisher



A Game of Cat and Mouth

2 players | ages 7+ | 10 minutes

In *A Game of Cat and Mouth* (2022) by Exploding Kittens, two players use magnetic paws to fling balls through a large rainbow cat's mouth. The game is quick to set up; simply open the box, insert the cat's head in the middle (and optional bumpers on the sides), then add the nose and teeth. Exploding Kittens also has an app to organize tournaments so the whole gang can try.



MC MILLER



Fire in the Hole

2-4 players | ages 6+ | 15-40 minutes

Fire in the Hole (2022) is a fun and chaotic game for 2-4 players of all ages by McMiLLER. Players take on the role of pirates trying to sink a pop-up pirate ship by firing cannonballs into it. The first player to sink the ship by landing four cannonballs on the ship orthogonally wins the game. Aiming can be tricky, thanks to wearing an eye patch and the angle of the multi-level ship.

Buckle Up

Disney Big Thunder Mountain Railroad

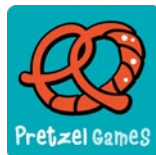
2-4 players | ages 9+ | 45 minutes

To celebrate Walt Disney World's 50th anniversary, Funko created a way for everyone to bring the fun home with their *Disney Big Thunder Mountain Railroad Game* (2022). A sculpted mountain and mine tray mimic the iconic attraction. The game is part marble race and part deck builder. Just when you think your fortunes are made, the cards can deal a twist of fate like dynamite or dinosaurs.

Funko GAMES



Photo provided by the publisher



Camel Up

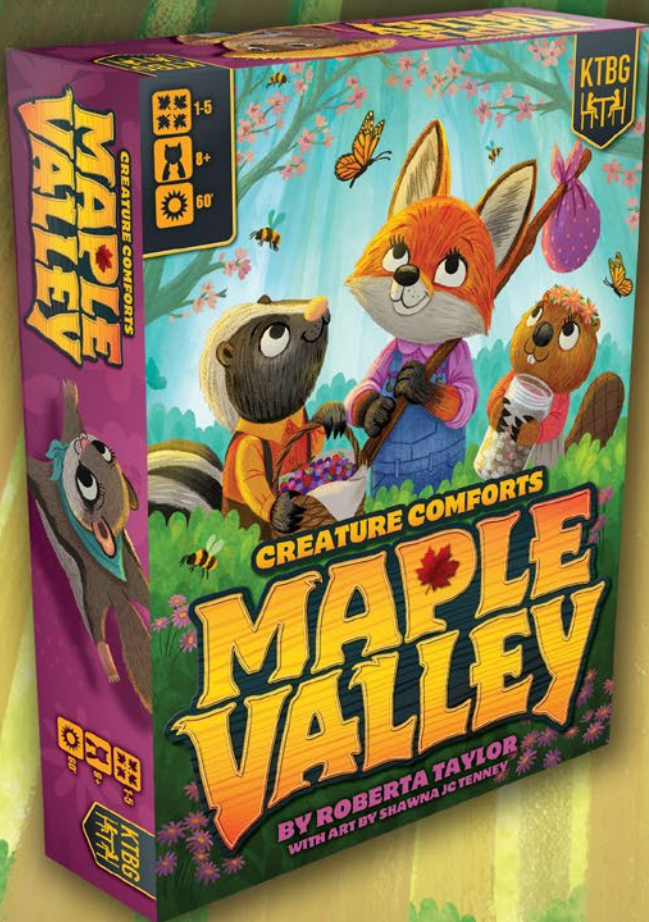
3-8 players | ages 8+ | 30-45 minutes

Camel Up (2018) by Pretzel Games brings the wackiest of camel races to your home. A desert oasis pops up when unfolding the board, and a plastic center pyramid becomes the dice roller. Players place their bets on racing camels. Instead of sharing a space, camels stack vertically and may travel around the track together and the winner may be carried across the finish line. Adding in two crazy camels who run the course in the wrong direction and some strategic spectator interference, and you just might bet on the wrong camel!



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Catapult Feud

2 players | ages 7+ | 20-30 minutes

Forget the Montagues and Capulets – *Catapult Feud* (2021) by Vesuvius Media pits the Chauforts against the Cunningfields with much more fun. Two players build castles with bricks, set up troops, load catapults, and launch them! The game lasts until one person has troops standing. The *Catapult Feud: Siege* expansion adds female characters and a ballista; *Catapult Feud: Artificer's Tower* allows players to launch honeycombs and includes siege engines. In *Catapult Feud: Vikings!* players add Viking longships to the table as an extra strategic planning step before the attack.

Level Up

Santorini

2-4 players | ages 8+ | 20 minutes



ROXLEY

Santorini first appeared on gaming tables nearly 20 years ago. It has been through several ideations and rebranding since then. *Santorini* is a simple strategy game involving moving builders up and down levels as you construct the city. You can block your opponent by putting one of *Santorini*'s iconic blue domes on the building. Greek gods and heroes add complications, which makes developing a strategy more challenging. In *Santorini New York* (2020), once again players are tasked with constructing buildings, this time skyscrapers, in turn-of-the-20th-century Manhattan. Special role cards impact construction efforts.

Roxley is also reimagining the Greek version of the game. *Santorini: Pantheon Edition* has updated rules, new gods, and new components. Roxley has also created a cooperative expansion titled *Santorini: Riddle of the Sphinx*, which uses a unique storage feature that looks more like a binder than a box. The successfully crowdfunded game has an estimated delivery of May 2024.

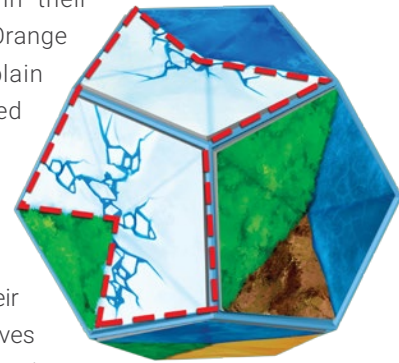




Planet

2-4 players | ages 8+ | 30-45 minutes

Players have the whole world in their hands in *Planet* (2018) by Blue Orange Games. After starting with a plain magnetic dodecahedron (12-sided shape), players select continents representing oceans, deserts, mountains, or frozen lands. Players receive animal cards for meeting conditions for animals to inhabit their lands. Players also achieve objectives based on the area covered by certain continents and how they border other continents.



Holi: Festival of Colors

2-4 players | ages 13+ | 20-40 minutes

Holi is a two-day Indian celebration celebrating the arrival of spring and the triumph of good over evil. In addition to other activities such as dancing, revelers throw colored powder or "gulaal" on other people to spread joy. *Holi: Festival of Colors* (2020) by Floodgate Games takes the celebration to new heights – three levels, to be exact. Players use tokens representing power and spread joy up, down, and across the board. Cards determine the pattern in which the colored powder travels. Players also collect sweet treats along the way. The player who spreads the most joy on the boards and on the other players wins.

Photos provided by the publisher



Photo provided by the publisher

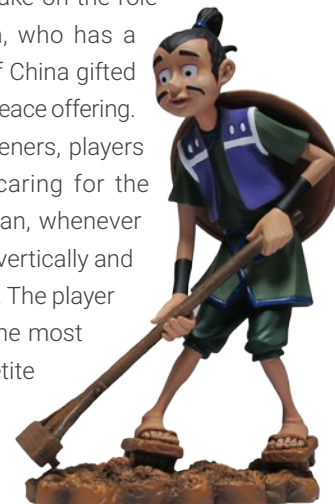


Takenoko

2-4 players | ages 8+ | 45 minutes



In *Takenoko* (2011) by Bombyx, players take on the role of gardeners for the Emperor of Japan, who has a beautiful bamboo garden. The Emperor of China gifted the Japanese emperor a Giant Panda as a peace offering. Pandas eat bamboo – lots of it. As gardeners, players must manage growing bamboo while caring for the panda who likes to eat as much as he can, whenever and wherever he can. The bamboo grows vertically and in different colors (green, pink, and yellow). The player who manages his land best by growing the most bamboo while feeding the voracious appetite of the panda wins the game.



Stack Up

Qawale

2 players | ages 8+ | 15 minutes

Inspired by nature, *Qawale* (2022) by Gigamic is a game of stacking stones along paths. Each player is given eight stones. Neutral-colored stones are placed in each corner. On each turn, a player adds a stone to any pile and moves the pile, dropping a stone on each space crossed. The first player to get four stones in a row wins.



KOSMOS



Catch the Moon

2-6 players | ages 6+ | 20 minutes

In *Catch the Moon* (2017) by KOSMOS, players place wooden ladders that touch other ladders or become the uppermost ladder in the stack. Stacks become wider and taller, and the chance for ladders to collapse upon each other increases with each move. Players receive raindrops when the structure collapses; the winner is the player who earned the least raindrops.



Reef

2-4 players | ages 8+ | 30-45 minutes

Reef (2018) by Next Move Games is an abstract strategy game in which players build and grow a colorful coral reef by selecting colors and patterns. Cards allow players to choose which piece to play. Pieces are stacked to fulfill pattern requirements. The player who has the most points when the supply of pieces or cards is depleted is the winner.

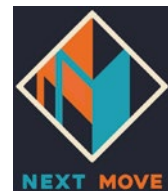
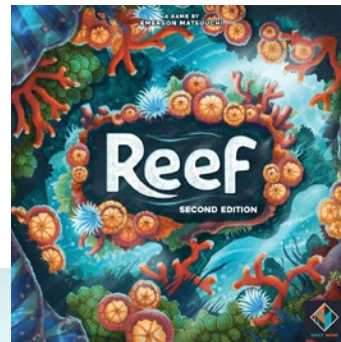
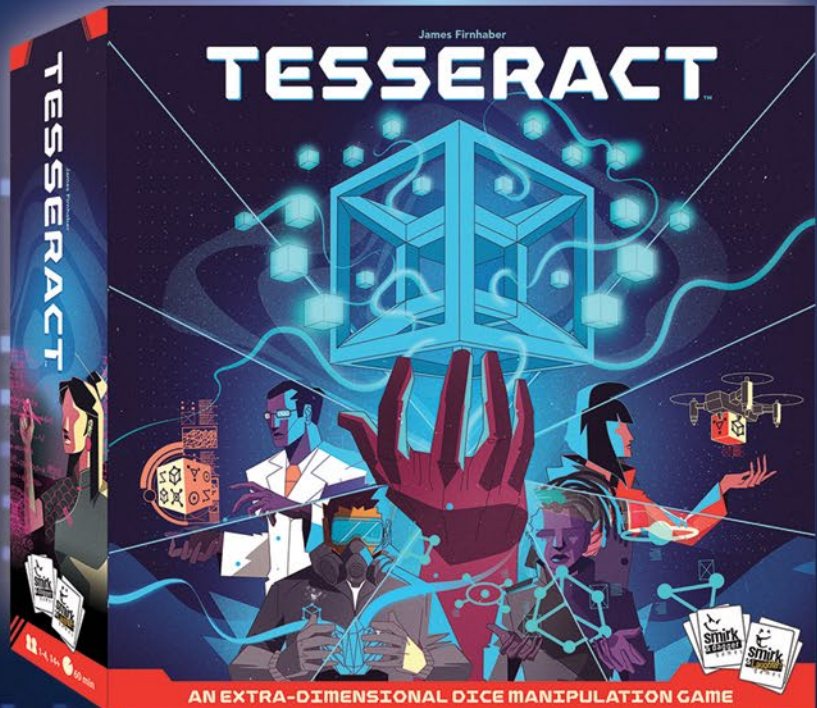


Photo provided by the publisher

If you're stuck in two dimensions, it's time to think beyond the flat board. Several games are popping up with exciting 3D twists, offering a fun and tactile experience akin to some of the best kids' toys. These games bring a new level of fun and creativity to your tabletop adventures, no matter your age – so give them a try! 🎲

TESSERACTION

TM



1 - 4 Players, 60 - 90 min, 14+

In this challenging cooperative, dice-manipulation game, a cube of 64 dice represents the TESSERACT.

Your team will disarm it by taking cubes off the Tesseract, adjusting their values, transferring them between labs - and ultimately, isolating them into the Containment matrix.

To win, the matrix must be completely filled by a cube of each value and color, which shuts the artifact down. Remove the last cube or cause too many Breaches to occur - and you lose, destroying our world.

Features a rotating turntable and 64 custom dice!

LOGISTICS MANAGER

Smooth Operation
Whenever you Contain a cube, you may Adjust it first.

ACTION: Transfer 2 cubes to another player's lab.

LINGUIST

Morphology
At the end of your turn, you may relocate one cube on the Tesseract.

ACTION: Translate a cube on any lab to any value.

QUANTUM MECHANIC

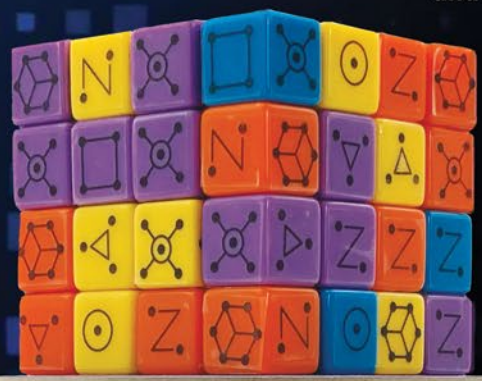
Ingenuity
If you take 3 different actions on your turn, you may take a 4th different action.

ACTION: Retool
Swap a cube in your lab with a Primed cube.

Reclaim
2

Take a destroyed cube of any color, reroll it, and place it in your lab.

11 asymmetric Researchers

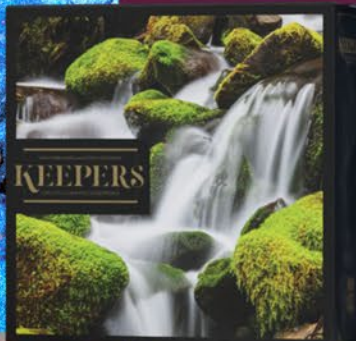


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& Heather Vaughan

the Zeitgeist of Modern Gaming Art



Sarah T. Moore

Student Journalist and
Board Game Enthusiast

Illustrator Heather Vaughan doesn't think of herself as a "board game person," but after working on *Beneath Nexus* with her now husband, Tom Panico, board games became a part of her life.

Vaughan said Panico was designing the game with their mutual friend and wanted it to be an art-heavy card game. She was a few years out of art school at the time and said it was the first time she saw game art and product design as a viable option for her career. "They needed an extra hand with the art and I said, 'Well, I'm not doing anything. At the very least, they'll be alright portfolio pieces and I can take on some of the heavy lifting.'"





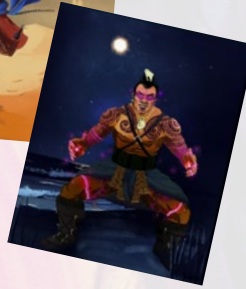
Origin Story

After working on *Beneath Nexus* (released by Silverclutch Games in 2016), Vaughan met Doug Levandowski at a Game Makers Guild meeting in Philadelphia. Levandowski co-designed the *Kids on Bikes* roleplaying game with Jonathan Gilmour, with Vaughan's self-described "messy-sketchy" illustrations featured prominently throughout the initial game and its subsequent versions and variants. "I did *Kids on Bikes* with them and that snowballed into everything else."

Vaughan said when she met Levandowski and Gilmour, she was unaware of their "clout" among game enthusiasts. The game did well, with its initial Kickstarter campaign raising over \$93,000 in 21 days.

The connections Vaughan made through working on *Kids on Bikes* led her to more opportunities to create art for board games. Eventually, Vaughan got an email for an officially licensed *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* game. "I cried when I got that email. I was so excited. I've had a lot of cool jobs and I've been fortunate enough to work on a lot of cool things, but every once in a while, you get a job that you're like, 'I'm a fan of this. I am a huge fan of this. I love consuming this media. This is my thing.'"

The game was published in 2020 as part of Restoration Games' *Unmatched* series. Vaughan said the most surreal part of drawing the cards and making art for the game was learning that with licensed games using intellectual



property, the actors had to sign off permission for their likeness to be used.

"Knowing that maybe Sarah Michelle Gellar saw my art, that's kind of crazy," she said. "On top of being fortunate enough to do art for a living and make money doing it and pay my bills doing it, I got to contribute to a fandom. It's wild I get to be part of that officially."

Vaughan also worked with Restoration Games on *Unmatched: Teen Spirit*, featuring characters from Marvel Comics.



Photo provided by the publisher





From Concept to Creation

The briefs Vaughan receives for game art vary widely, from creating a few pieces of art from a detailed prompt to creating 72 different card designs.

Once Vaughan takes on a project, she sends at least one round of initial sketches to her client, followed by tighter color work, before finalizing the files and adding any additional edits. But before she sends over any artwork, Vaughan said she does research.

“When I did *Berried Treasure* it’s a lot of fun going through and looking up different types of delicious treats that one could have at a bakery that these little grabby animals are going to try and steal in this game,” Vaughan said. “I’ll flip through *Fine Wine* or *Bon Appétit* and just get

a feel for ‘What does food photography look like? What are the tropes in food photography?’ so I have a little bit more visual language when I’m going into drawing these things.”

Berried Treasure was published by Restoration Games and Eagle-Gryphon Games in 2021 and features critters competing to steal slices of pie in a 2-5 player board game. *Berried Treasure* is one of over a dozen games incorporating Vaughan’s artwork, but even as she builds up her game art portfolio, Vaughan still doesn’t see herself as a participant in the hobby. However, she said she has played most of the games she worked on once, and enjoys occasionally playing party games with her friends and family, with a particular fondness for *Pictionary*.



Berried Treasure





“People get kind of freaked out that I don’t play games. For a lot of illustration, it’s all the same. Not knowing that the market existed for art really didn’t change the fact that I’m still illustrating. I’m just still working to a brief, so if I have to do an RPG cover, that is no different than doing a magazine cover, that’s no different than doing a book cover. Those are all the same. It’s the same job, it’s just a different purpose.”

Vaughan said that her biggest struggles with illustrating for games includes staying on top of scheduling and

making sure her art looks consistent. “Sometimes these games take months to draw and the art you make at the beginning of that process and the art you make at the end of that process needs to look like it came from the same person.”

Especially when she is working on multiple projects at the same time, Vaughan said it is easy for her art process to go through a change that affects the style of her illustrations.



Heather Vaughan’s past clients have included the Philadelphia Eagles, Dark Horse Comics, and Restoration Games, among many others.

Going Full-Time

Vaughan said her father was a fine artist, who specialized in wildlife paintings. Being around his work was part of what inspired her own. “I always wanted to be like him and from the word ‘Go,’ I was always going to be an artist when I grew up.”

Vaughan went on to attend The University of the Arts in Philadelphia, where she made the switch from watercolor and ink illustrations to fully digital pieces to better meet her deadlines. She said her style imitates the look of her traditional work: sketchy and oversaturated.

While she was in school, Vaughan said she “went with the flow” as she saw her peers aspire to work on children’s

books and create editorial illustrations for magazines. “I don’t think I was really given a good scope of what the possibilities were in art, I just knew I wanted to do art.”

Beneath Nexus and *Kids on Bikes* were some of the first major projects Vaughan worked on after graduating from her university. Although her style and process have changed since then and there are things she would do differently, she is still proud of what she created. Vaughan said *Kids on Bikes* will “forever be probably the most recognizable thing I’ve done in board games.”

Vaughan left her full-time office job in the winter of 2019 with support from her family, but said she disagreed with

the idea that for an artist to be successful they have to be pursuing art full-time. “There is no shade and working full-time in a non-artistic field and being a professional artist is okay and, honestly, usually the only way you can afford to do it – just because the nature of freelance is so fickle. Being part-time does not mean you’re not a real artist. I just got lucky.”

Vaughan said she’s been maintaining her connections in board games, but recently has been focusing on sequential art and illustration for comics. Vaughan said she still keeps a part-time job in an unrelated field to

help get out of the house and prevent creative burnout. While she loves getting to draw for a living, creating on demand is an incredibly taxing experience.

“I think a lot of people look at creatives and think that it’s fun and they’re never working a day in their life because they’re doing the things they love,” Vaughan said. “It’s still a job. There are days when you hate your job and I think that’s normal and there are times – good hunks of time – when your job is tough. And I think sometimes people outside of that forget it’s not a hobby at that point.” 🎮



Close-up shot of the components from Unmatched: Buffy the Vampire Slayer by Restoration Games, illustrated by Heather Vaughan (photo provided by the publisher)

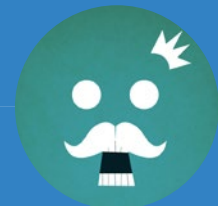


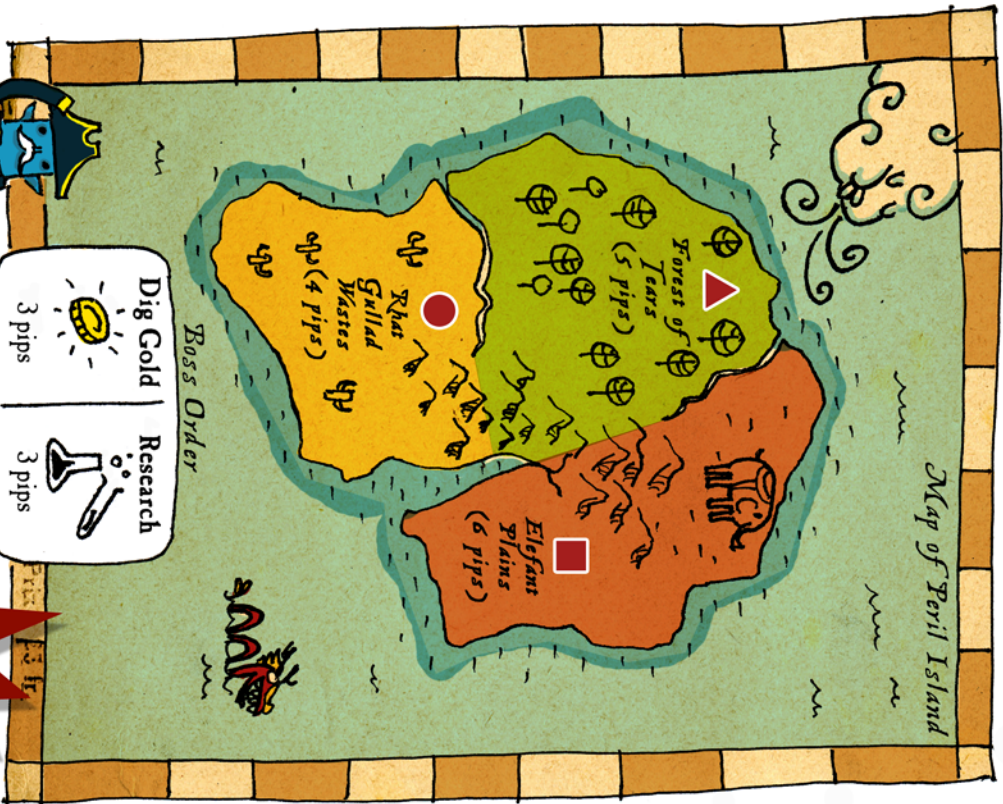
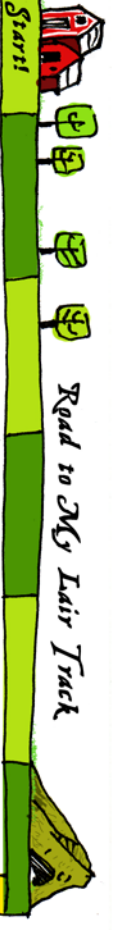
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COURTESY OF: EXPERIMENTAL PLAYGROUND

CGI
+ PNP

Oh My Lair!

By Jason Sondoh & Robertson Sondoh, Jr.
Art by Robertson Sondoh, Jr.
experimentalplayground.blogspot.com



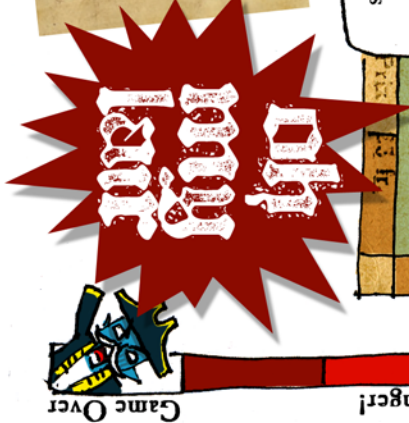


Buying minion

One minion costs 2 Golds. Your maximum minions you can have is the total of 2 + region you control at any time.

Game Phase

1. Upkeep
2. Order
3. Buy
4. Hero Move



Resources	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
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Experimental Playground (c) 2012 By Robertson Sondoh Jr & Jason Sondoh

You know the drill. Cut along the grey line and store it so you can play this game again and again!

Tokens!

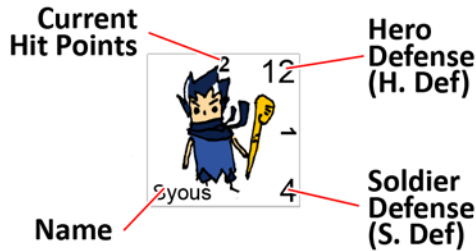
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 Igul 1 2 2 3 3 3 2 3	 Yazu 2 2 3 2 1 2 2 2	 Lizardman 3 3 1 3 3 3 3 3	 Golem 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1
 Troll 3 3 2 2 2 2 2 2	 Slime 2 2 3 3 1 1 2 2	 Cyclop 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3	 Fungus 2 2 2 2 2 2 2 2
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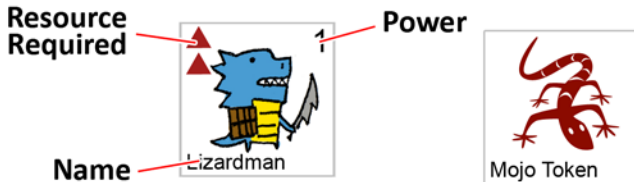
You are a dungeon lord and you are drinking your favourite cavern coffee when suddenly your spy informs you that a hero wants to slay you. It's that time of the year where heroes will come out and try to destroy you and your lair. Prepare for the attack!

Oh My Lair is a solo game where you control your minion to conquer region, collect resources to summon creatures, and defeat the hero before he reaches you.

TOKEN ANATOMY



Pic 1: Hero Token



Pic 2: Creature Token

Pic 3: Mojo Token

ALL YOU NEED TO PLAY

5 to 6 six sided dice and a cutting tool.

OBJECTIVE

The objective of the game is to defeat the hero before he reaches your lair.

SETUP

Cut and separate the tokens into creatures and heroes piles (all facing down). Pile the mojo token faced up. Then, draw 4 heroes and put 3 of them on each region on the map of Peril Island, heroes you put here will become **soldiers**. Put 1 hero face down on the starting space of **Road to My Lair Track**. Draw 3 creatures and put them facing up on the bottom of the game board, this place is call **The Pit**. You start the game with 2 minions (2 dice) and 1 mojo token.

GAMEPLAY

There are 4 phases in the game.

1. UPKEEP
2. ORDER
3. BUY
4. HERO

UPKEEP During upkeep you will recover back your entire minion that you have.

ORDER During order phase place your minion either on the dig gold action or research action or attack a soldier on region of the island or dig resources from controlled land. Then roll for each action where you put your minion.

Dig Gold – For each 3 pips on the ‘Dig Gold’ you gain 1 Gold.

Research – For each 3 pips on the ‘Research’ you draw 1 creature and put it on The Pit facing up.

Attack a Soldier – To attack a soldier you need to get a total of soldier defense number of pips to deal 1 damage to the soldier. With each damage you turn the soldier token anti-clockwise indicating his current HP. If somewhat you DID NOT do any damages during the attack you lose 1 minion at the end of the attack.

If you manage to defeat the soldier (HP equal zero) you receive 1 resource based on where your minion defeated the soldier and you unlocked the region. NOTE: Only minion can attack soldier.

Example: 2 minions were placed on Rhat Gullad Wastes which contained the soldier Oiram (S. Def 2). You rolled a 2 and a 3 with a total of 5. Oiram received 2 damages.

Dig Resource – You need to roll equal to indicated pips (on the map) to get 1 resource. NOTE: You must defeat the soldier protecting the region before you can collect the resource.

Examples: 1 minion was placed on the Forest of Tears (5 pips). You rolled a 4. You did not get any resource because you need 5 pips to get 1 resource.

BUY You may buy minion at this phase. Your maximum minions you can have is the total of 2 + region you control at any time. One minion costs 2 Golds.

You may also summon creature at this phase. You must fulfill the creature’s required resources to summon it. After summoning update your resources and then put the creature on the ‘Road to My Lair Track’. You must put the creature strategically anywhere in front of the hero. You cannot put creature at the back of the hero. You may only put 2 creatures on the same space.

NOTE: You can only summon creature from The Pit.

You may also buy some mojo token(s) at this phase. Each mojo token costs 1 Gold. Mojo tokens are use to reroll a die; each token reroll 1 die. After a token is used, return it back to the mojo token pile.

NOTE: There are only 3 mojo tokens available, so the maximum number of tokens you can have is 3 tokens.

HERO During this phase the hero move 1 space forward on the ‘Road to My Lair’ track. If the hero moves to a space with your creature(s) a battle occurs. To battle, you total up your creatures’ power. Roll the total amount of dice equal to the total creatures’ power. For each total of hero defense pips you deal 1 damage to the hero. Turn hero token anti-clockwise to indicate his current HP. If you manage to reduce the hero’s HP to zero you win the game. At the end of the battle your creatures will automatically die. Put them back into the creature pile. If the hero reaches the last space then you lose the game.

Example: Syous moved into a space contained 2 creatures you summoned under previous phase (Lizardman with Power 1 and Firekin with Power 3). A battle occurred. You creature total power is 4 (1+3=4). You rolled the power dice and get a total of 16 pips. Only 1 damage was dealt to Syous.





GAME-CHANGING BOXES: BOARD GAMES WITH THEMATIC PACKAGING



Andrew Brassleay

Journalist Searching for
Great Family Games

Theming components and rulebooks is a great way to ensure games instantly immerse players in a game. But what about game creators who go the extra mile? It's one thing to build a thematic game that brings people into the fold, but these tabletop games make full use of their boxes and inserts for total theming, sometimes even incorporating them into the gameplay itself.



BANANAGRAMS

1-8 players | ages 7+ | 15 minutes

As a general rule, boxes that don't have the desired eight equiangular points are nothing more than an irritant; a pox on your shelving that disrupts all equilibrium for the sake of a publisher's eccentric whim.

If you must have them in your collection, two or three will be the maximum before your storage space goes out of whack. One of these games should be the classic *BANANAGRAMS*. Not that there's anything particularly fruity about it, but creating crosswords out of letter tiles as quickly as possible may otherwise be a dry sell were it not for the yellow, fabric fruit that the game is packaged in. With no pointy edges, it also stores quite well when wedged between other regularly-shaped games, or for travel purposes.



ROLL CAMERA!



1-6 players | ages 11+ | 45-90 minutes

Malachi Ray Rempen's mastery of moviemaking magic has not one, but two exceptional theming surprises. First, its clapperboard opening will have would-be directors start gaming sessions with a call of "Action!" Secondly, the component tray is styled in the form of a film canister. This comes with its own lid, ensuring that everything can be stored easily and efficiently at the end of play, whether players have a shot at an Oscar-winner or an absolute turkey.

DIVE

1-4 players | ages 8+ | 20-30 minutes

Not only is Anthony Perone and Romain Caterdian's underwater-themed game beautifully drawn and created with transparent cards adding hidden depths, but it also possesses a box insert that contributes to the ocean adventure. The blue-tinged plastic and individual spots for aquatic critter components ensure that it feels like you're truly a denizen of the seabed.



NIAGARA

3-5 players | ages 8+ | 30-45 minutes

Flat surfaces don't tend to lend themselves too well to incorporating the peril faced when hurtling toward the world's most famous waterfall, which is where the box comes in on this Rio Grande Games title. Both its top and bottom are deployed as the riverbed and bank of the Niagara River as players attempt to canoe with care while collecting gems. Those who get too close to the end of the line will find themselves falling into the deep. Victor Boden's illustrations provide a seamless transition from board to box, ensuring that every part of the game is brought to life.



BLOCKBUSTER

4-10 players | ages 12+ | 30-60 minutes

Those longing for the days of yore of renting videos from the shops can at least have one VHS-shaped box on their shelves, thanks to Big Potato Games. The publisher got some additional life out of this old retailing dog in 2020, perfectly theming the external art – mocked up in Blockbuster's familiar (well, to a certain generation) ticket-stub logo and video case aesthetics. Add in the back-of-the-board VHS artwork informing the gamers to "Be kind, rewind," and it's almost as if we're back in the mid-90s.

TREASURE ISLAND

2-5 players | ages 10+ | 45 minutes

Marc Paquien and Vincent Dutrait's scavenger hunt is a beautifully crafted game in all respects. And that extends to the packaging itself. Open the box (once you've finished gazing at Dutrait's stunning cover) and you'll find an insert laid out like a deck of a ship complete with a smuggling compartment for the components. Once you've had your fill of the treasures that lie in wait there, it'll be time to bluff your way to finding Long John Silver's secret horde.



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MARS OPEN: TABLETOP GOLF

1-8 players | ages 8+ | 30-60 minutes

Dennis Hoyle ensured that all physical parts of his interplanetary dexterity game were put to practical use. With its outer and inner artwork doubling up as a Martian backdrop, complete with sand traps, it becomes part of the gamer's course. Use it either as a hilly obstacle to a lofted putting green (or red, in this case) to aim at, thanks to the box insert included for the job – which also stores your golfing accessories. Why Mars as a sporting setting? Well, cards used instead of balls to flick, depicting the Martian surfaces' reduced gravity compared to Earth, create an out-of-this-world design.



THE GHOST IN THE ATTIC

1-6 players | ages 10+ | 60 minutes

Every element of The Mystery Agency's escape-room-esque board game is designed to terrify its players. First off, the outer box is a dated, brown, nondescript package. Upon opening, the game itself is padlocked and the only component accessible at this point is the faded 1950s newspaper cutting telling of The Ghost in the Attic's deadly origins and that its makers have tried to hunt down every copy of it due to a spate of unexplainable deaths that occurred to those who bought the game on its release.

Yes, there is a game within the box. Once opened, the fun will be found less in the gameplay – a rather drab roll-and-move game that is deployed to build the sense of a cursed artifact – but more in exploring the product itself for clues. Just maybe don't go up in the attic until you lift that curse!



TRAPPER KEEPER GAME

2-5 players | ages 8+ | 25 minutes

Prospero Hall's card drafting game evokes the nostalgic popularity of these colorful folders. The box simulates the look and shape of the '80s and '90s iconic products, meaning that gamers must stash away a variety of quizzes, notes from classmates, and report cards with the overall aim of being declared the coolest kid in school.



ICECOOL

2-4 players | ages 8+ | 30 minutes

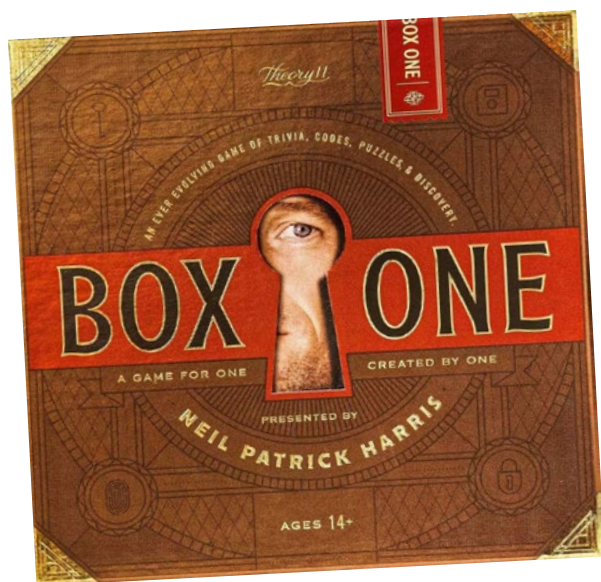
Another game that makes additional use of its outer packaging, *ICECOOL* — and its sequel, *ICECOOL2* — uses the bottom of the box as part of its gameplay, forming part of an icy school that players will flick and maneuver their penguin pieces around to avoid the furious teacher who's attempting to get the chicks back to class.



BOX ONE

1 player | ages 14+ | 3-4 hours

Theme? What theme? A brown non-descript box with the eye of creator Neil Patrick Harris (yes, that one) peering out at the gamer through a keyhole might not give too many hints as to what's to come, but there's more than meets the actor's eye to Box One. This escape-room mystery really does make full use of all its assets. To say much more will lead into spoiler territory, but fair warning: don't expect to get more than one playthrough out of this theory11-produced solo puzzler.



FINAL GIRL

1 player | ages 14+ | 20-60 minutes

If you fancy a monstrous movie night, then you can forgo streaming and try out Van Ryder Games' mix-and-match horror trope series. The Core Box for this single-player game is necessary to play out the tale of each horror heroine from instantly recognizable settings such as Panic at Station 28, Camp Happy Trails, and Rest in Peace on Maple Lane. But it's in the presentation of each individual saga that the boxes come to life, the cover of each detaching to reveal maps and mechanics tailored to each battle for survival.





NEW YORK SLICE

2-6 players | ages 8+ | 30 minutes

Why must you make us hungry, Bézier Games? *New York Slice*'s production values are superbly salivating. Not only do the slices feature photo-realistic images of everyone's favorite Italian dish and the instructions come in the form of a dine-in menu, but the game comes delivered in the form of a pizza box, folding lid and all. Once that's all admired, it's time to tuck in and build the best pizza possible.



PANDEMIC: 10TH ANNIVERSARY EDITION

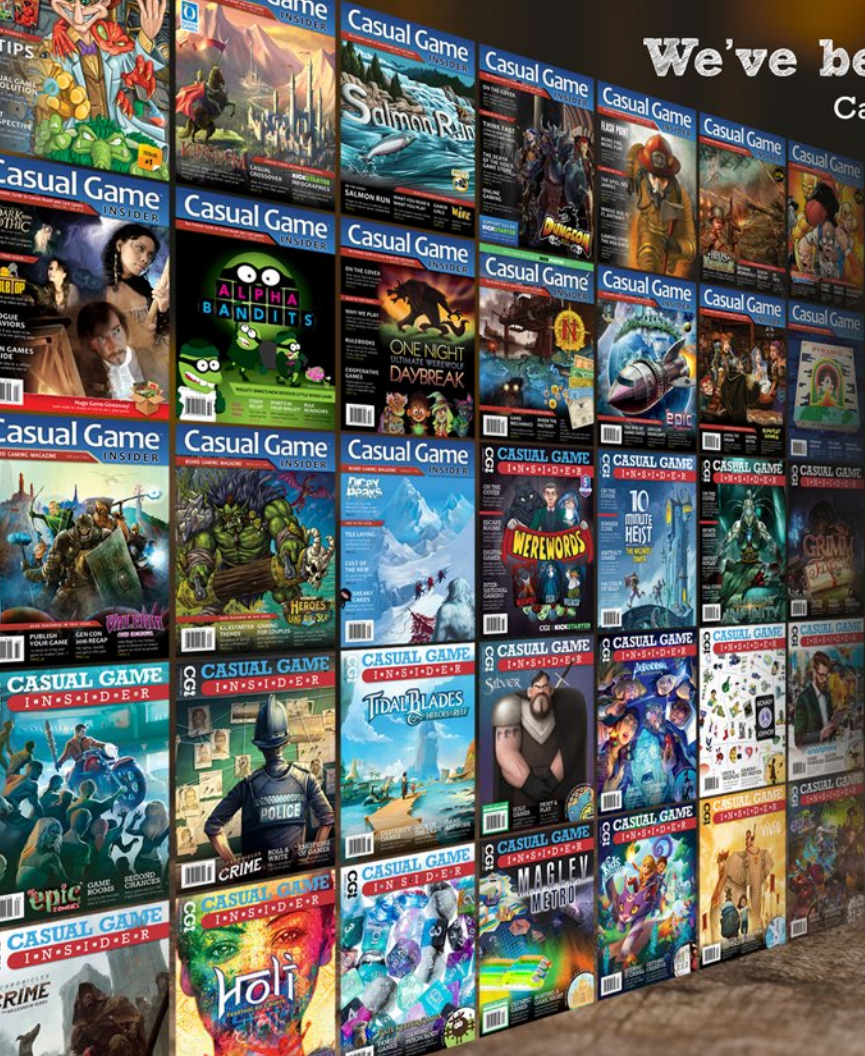
2-4 players | ages 8+ | 45 minutes

Hard to get hold of as it may be nowadays, this special edition of Matt Leacock's disease-themed classic deserves special praise. Encased in a light-green clasped medical tin, *Pandemic*'s 10th Anniversary Edition aims to combat any awkward storage issues by coming complete with its own wall-mount tabs, for easy access in true first-aid-kit style. 🏥



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What's in a Name?

The Sibling Success of Brotherwise Games



Justin Spicer
Music Journalist and
Board Game Experimenter

“We weren’t necessarily a family of gamers,” begins Chris O’Neal, one half of the sibling duo behind Brotherwise Games. “But we were definitely a family that celebrated nerd culture, particularly fantasy, science fiction, and everything in between.”

If you’ve seen any game from Brotherwise, interest and passion for fantasy have likely caught your attention. But much of what transformed Brotherwise from a side project born of brothers with different career paths and 8 years between them (Chris is the older brother) was the game that started it all: *Boss Monster*.



8-BIT TO LEGIT

"The arrival of home consoles was a watershed in my development," explains Chris. "And the early generations of Nintendo consoles essentially defined Johnny's childhood. We can both distinctly remember playing *The Legend of Zelda* in our home in St. Louis and thinking the world had changed."

That zeal for adventure allowed the brothers, finally within the same city limits, to find the spark to chase an idea. It began as a friendly bet between Chris and Johnny, with the idea of designing a game and the loser (the person not to complete their design first) buying the winner a game. Though Chris won the bet, it was Johnny's iterative idea that eventually led to *Boss Monster*. Detailing the genesis of the game in their own *Turn Order* magazine, Johnny states "I played with a few different themes" (*Turn Order*, Issue 1). Those included a game about high school drama before they finally settled on the side-scrolling homage that is *Boss Monster*

Yet the art style was not settled upon until Chris convinced Johnny that pixel art was the way to go

BOSS MONSTER MASTER OF THE DUNGEON™

Releasing in 2013, *Boss Monster* became an instant attention grabber and success for Johnny and Chris and has spawned a sequel, expansions, and games within its own universe including *Overboss* and *Dungeon Kart*.

For the better part of 3 years, much of Brotherwise's focus was on the world of *Boss Monster*. "Boss Monster has been our biggest property to date, even if you look at just the *Boss Monster* line. We've moved over a million copies across that line," expounds Chris. "So, expanding the IP into other games made a lot of sense, and we think it's helping to establish the IP, and Brotherwise as well."



— another tip of the Minish cap to their formative years playing Nintendo. "Boss Monster's devotion to those video games is the most obvious echo from that time...the golden age of video games strongly influenced our entire gaming aesthetic," summarized Chris.



UNCOVERING THE NEXT GAME

Yet, the brothers knew that *Boss Monster* was just the first step toward something bigger, but what that would be came in the form of a game neither brother had an initial hand in designing. “Our first external design was *Unearth* from Matthew Ransom and Jason Harner. It was an encounter that was mostly driven by those two wonderful guys, and we’re really glad that we met with them and played the game.”

Unearth represents the first time Johnny and Chris took a chance on something outside of their purview, and Chris expresses excitement more than 6 years later that it happened. “*Unearth* taught us so much

more about making games than *Boss Monster* did. With *Boss Monster*, we were the progenitors of everything, and every decision was made from that position of ownership. With *Unearth*, suddenly we were stewards of someone else’s work. That really changes how you think about things and some of the projects we’ve enjoyed the most have come from outside designers.”

UNEARTH

RECLAIM. REBUILD. REMEMBER.



BUILDING ON SUCCESS

Those challenges can be traced to the trends of the industry, but the brothers’ own professional backgrounds also began to shape their new movement. Chris has a Ph.D. in Ecology, while younger brother Johnny studied film and business before beginning in brand marketing with toy companies Mattel and Spin Master. Yet, Chris’s academic know-how coupled with Johnny’s understanding of market trends and habits helped build Brotherwise step by step.

In the beginning, Brotherwise built its reputation on the back of Kickstarter, conventions, and word of mouth. “Kickstarter made the modern age of

board gaming, and we were definitely one of the companies that benefitted from that revolution,” Chris explains. “The ability to easily raise capital up front removed the biggest barrier to entry for hobby games publishing.”

Yet, with the signing and publishing of *Unearth*, Brotherwise bypassed crowdfunding for a straight-to-retail approach. “Not every game was made for Kickstarter, and no matter how our games get their start, retail is a critical part of our overall strategy.

KICKSTARTER

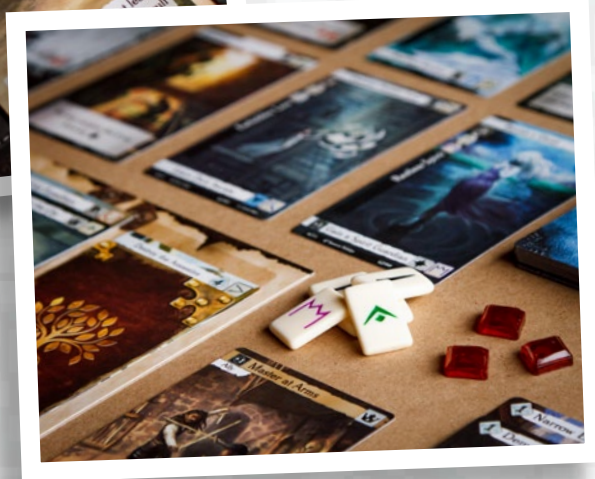


"Game stores provide the ideal environment for our games to be seen, talked about, and played. Kickstarter is great for building buzz, but retail is where buzz turns into reality," summarizes Chris.

As Brotherwise has grown and expanded, they utilize a two-prong approach to connect with

these crossing streams of board gaming interest. "[Kickstarter] continues to be a cornerstone of our business, but for different reasons. Now, Kickstarter lets us connect directly with our fans through a portal they are very familiar with and look to almost daily."

CALL TO ADVENTURE



FULL-TIME BOSSES

Despite their continued successes, it took Chris and Johnny time to turn Brotherwise from a side hustle into a full-time job. "There was probably a window there where we could have gone full-time with the company but chose not to," states Chris. "Johnny worked in brand management for toy companies before taking the leap to Brotherwise, so his experience there and the lessons he learned about product development have been directly applicable to our success. The more time he spent in toys, the more he learned about making and selling this sort of product."

Chris continues, "By the time [I] made the leap to Brotherwise, I was managing big teams of people and working at the highest levels of

West Coast universities. This experience has also proven helpful as so much of games publishing is managing teams of people to make something magical."

That magic continued with the 2019 release of *Call to Adventure*. This game turned into another hit for the brotherly design duo, spawning its own continued successes much the same as their original *Boss Monster* design. Similarly, Brotherwise continues to publish games from other design talent, including both *Castles by the Sea* (designed by Jon Benjamin and Michael Xuereb) as well as *Empire's End* (by John D. Clair) in 2023.

MONUMENTS AND MINIATURES

The twosome hasn't outgrown those fantasy roots that took hold in their St. Louis home as children. As Brotherwise enters its second decade of operations, they have begun to expand their offerings outside of board games, reflecting both their own interests as well as the changing tide of the industry.

And at the center of this is their own *Call to Adventure*, and the chance to collaborate with science fiction author Brandon Sanderson. "We encountered Brandon while working on another of our favorite projects, the *Name of the Wind* expansion for *Call to Adventure*," begins Chris. "Author Patrick Rothfuss and Brandon run in the same circles, and so we reached out to Brandon and pitched a *Stormlight Archive* expansion for *Call to Adventure*. To our delight, he said yes, and a long and fruitful relationship was launched. We've recently signed a multi-year exclusive partnership with Brandon to develop games and collectibles in his *Cosmere* universe. Brandon's worlds are so grand,

so epic, that we could make games for the rest of our careers and not exhaust that pool of ideas."

However, one can never stay still in the board gaming hobby, and Brotherwise keep looking to expand upon the worlds they have already created. "We are growing, both in staff and aspiration, and that's very exciting. We've got some huge *Cosmere*-centered games in the works, including the *Stormlight* RPG launch for next year. Will there be more *Boss Monster*? You bet, including the long-awaited launch of *Super Boss Monster* next year. Will there be new games? Absolutely, we're focused on keeping the heart of Brotherwise growing; unique, approachable games with original IPs that transport players to new places. That's how we got started in the business, and it's the core of who we are as creators." 🎲



MLEM

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Expedition starts
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and crush



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playmat inside!



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Manipulate towers to capture your opponents and fill potions, as your wizards race to reach Ravenskeep properly prepared.



Naomi Laeuchli

Game Reviewer and Casual Game Groupie

The board is made up of sixteen spaces in a circular formation. Towers are placed on the first nine spaces, and players spread out their wizard meeples on these towers. Ravenskeep is the final destination, which is placed behind the towers. On your turn, you must play two movement cards, resolving them in order, and then draw back up to three cards. Movement will allow you to move one of your meeples or a tower (or stack of towers). Sometimes, a card allows you to choose between the two. Often, it will list an exact number of spaces that you must move, but sometimes a die is rolled to determine how many spaces it will move.

If you move a tower so that it stops on a space or tower with at least one visible wizard, then it covers these

wizards, and they are imprisoned. When you imprison any number of wizards, you flip one of your empty potion bottles to full. You may use these filled potions to cast one of the spells in the game. Spells move towers and wizards around the board in different ways, and players choose at the start how many they want to play with. When you spend a potion, it is removed from the game.

When you move a wizard and it ends its movement on Ravenskeep, it goes inside and stays there for the rest of the game, and Ravenskeep is moved forward to the next empty space or empty tower top with a raven symbol. The game ends once a player has all his wizards in Ravenskeep and has no empty potion bottles left. After everyone has an equal number of turns, the player who has accomplished both goals and has the most unspent, filled potions wins the game.

Wandering Towers feels like an instant classic. It offers a perfect balance of simplicity and strategy, it has great table presence, and it's fun to stack the towers and capture wizards. There's so much back-and-forth interaction in this game, and there's also a light memory element as you try to remember whose wizards are under which towers.

In a strange choice, not enough wizard meeples are included to allow you to freely choose any color across all player counts. Otherwise, the components are great (the towers only need to be assembled once) and the mechanics are simple but very engaging. Adding extra spells to the mix also introduces more strategy and variety for manipulating the board.

Wandering Towers

Designed by Michael Kiesling, Wolfgang Kramer

1-6 PLAYERS

30 MINS

AGES 10+

\$45 MSRP



LUCK

STRATEGY



INTERACTIVE

INDEPENDENT



Gap is a simple game, but that simplicity hides a scoring system that is fun to manipulate while still keeping it a low-key and easy-to-learn game. It's perfect for a relaxed evening.



Each player is dealt a hand of cards, and four cards are placed in a display. Cards are numbered 0-9 and can be one of five colors. On your turn, you play a card from your hand in front of yourself then check the display. If there are any cards of the same number, you take them all, placing them face-up in front of yourself. If there are none of the same number, then you must take one card that is one digit higher and one that is one digit lower from the display, if available. If neither of these are present in the display, you add the card you played to the display. If, at the end of your turn, there are fewer than four cards in the display, you refill it from the deck. It is now the next player's turn. This continues until everyone has played all the cards in their hands.

Each player then scores points for the cards in front of them by counting the cards of the color they have the most of. From this count, they subtract the number of cards of the color they have the least of to determine their score for the round. If there's a tie for the most or least of a color, the tied colors are combined. If there is an equal number of cards in all the colors, no points are subtracted. The game continues for multiple rounds until someone reaches a certain number of points, and the player with the most points wins.

In this game, you are going to have to play every single card in your hand, and most (maybe even all) cards in your hand will end up in front of you counting towards

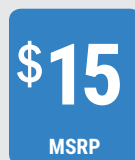
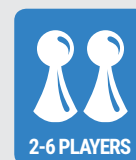
your score. This allows you to plan ahead and try to push towards collecting certain colors.

The cards are shiny with metallic foil, making **Gap** a little fancier than you might expect — but it's certainly appreciated. The rulebook provides suggestions on different scoring goals based on the game length you'd prefer, although you probably want to stick to the shorter games.

There is a notable amount of luck in what cards are on display, especially near the end of each round, but the more you play **Gap** the more you learn how to plan for those final turns, and how to use your cards in hand wisely. Rounds are fast and you have a chance to make comebacks. It's a clever, light game.

Gap

Designed by Rico Besteher, Frank Noack



LUCK

STRATEGY



INTERACTIVE

INDEPENDENT





Organize your picnic from tablecloth to food to win donuts and have the best picnic ever.



Each player has two picnic cards. Each rectangular card is divided into three sections and each section has one of four types of food items and one of four types of tablecloth patterns. Choose one card to play in your picnic area and pass the other to the player on your left. Add the card that is passed to you to your picnic area. Your picnic area must fit in a 4-by-4 grid of card sections. When placing a card, it must be placed next to or overlapping (partially or entirely) at least one card already in your area. Once you have placed both cards, start a new round by drawing another two cards. After four rounds, the game ends, and players score their picnic areas.

Points are scored for having elements of the same type (both food and tablecloths) adjacent to one

another. If you have a group of adjacent, matching elements, add up how many are in the group, subtract two from that total, and the final number goes towards your score. Consequently, only groups of three or more matching elements score points. After everyone has added up all their points, the player with the most points wins the game.

The gameplay is simple, but the puzzle at its heart is quite tricky as you try to figure out how to best lay each card. The space you're working with is tight, and a card can be weaved over and under through multiple cards, making an almost pretzel-like puzzle to consider. At least one section of the card must be visible, which can throw a wrench in your sets if you're not careful. There is also an advanced mode that adds extra scoring elements, with points based on placement of specific elements in your grid. This adds a great extra layer of complication when considering card placement without adding too much extra weight to the rules themselves.

The game plays lightning fast, and it's easy to play several games of *Picnic Twist* back-to-back. The box is a cute idea, but ultimately is prone to getting squished or bent and can be frustrating to store. Outside of the box, however, *Picnic Twist* is a well-thought-out, fast little puzzle game in which it's quite satisfying to pull off a high score. Plus, support for up to nine players in this type of game is a rare bonus.

Picnic Twist

Designed by David Amorin, Ramón Redondo

1-9 PLAYERS

15 MINS

AGES 9+

\$18 MSRP



LUCK

STRATEGY



INTERACTIVE

INDEPENDENT



2-4 Players. 6 Silver Tokens.
84 Unique Abilities on 312 Cards.
27,132 Possible Combinations.



← **NEW FOR 2024** →

Step into a bustling marketplace of ancient Egypt, where fortunes await those who can master the art of collecting goods, selling sets, and enlisting the aid of formidable allies.



The board is filled with face-up goods tiles and face-down characters. On your turn, check which way the Ankh is pointed on the board. You may take any tile shown along the line it is pointing (horizontally, vertically, or diagonally), and move it to that tile. But if you skip over any tiles, they go into your corruption pile. Additionally, the tile you take determines which direction the Ankh will point next. When you take a tile, it goes into your hand. Some tiles show a coin symbol. When taking one of these, you may choose to discard it to draw a random coin from the bag.

Instead of taking a tile, you may play a character from your hand or sell a set. When you play a character, its special ability is triggered, and it is removed from the game. When selling a set, you must play three tiles of the same type. If you have already sold a set of that

type, add this new set to the previous one. The first five times a set is sold, you may look at the five pirogue tokens and choose one to use its ability immediately.

If you wish to take a tile on your turn, but the line on which the Ankh is pointing is empty, you refill the board. If this occurs when there are no more tiles in the draw pile, and the active player has no characters in hand or sets to sell, the game immediately ends. The other player discards any sets in their hand, and all remaining tiles in hand go into each player's corruption pile. The player with the least corruption gains coins, and then each played set is scored. Some goods tiles will show scarabs. For each set, you multiply the number of tiles in the set by the number of scarabs depicted across all of them. You then add up the points shown on all of your coins, and the player with the most points wins.

Sobek: 2 Players

Designed by Bruno Cathala, Sébastien Pauchon

2 PLAYERS

20 MINS

AGES 10+

\$30 MSRP



LUCK

STRATEGY



INTERACTIVE

INDEPENDENT



Sobek: 2 Players has a unique tile selection mechanism with the rotating Ankh, and you not only are constantly considering which tile you want, but also how that will turn the Ankh, and which tiles it will make available to your opponent. You have to keep an eye on your corruption while also making sure you collect enough tiles with scarabs to make your sets valuable.

Turns are very fast, keeping both players engaged. You're also going to be tracking which tiles your opponent is going after, while some characters add some slight take-that to the gameplay, making for solid player interaction.



The king is dead! But who will take his place? Vie for influence, win over clans, and compete for the crown and throne.



Each player is dealt a hand of 10 cards. Three cards are placed face-up into three columns to form the display. On your turn, you take one action from several available options. You can play an influence card face-up in front of you; these must be played in order, 1-6, and throughout the game, you can have up to five sets (one for each color in the game). You can discard a card from your hand, placing it in one of the three columns in the display, and draw two cards from the deck. You can discard one card to a display column and take all the cards from another column whose top-most card matches the color or number of your card. You can discard three cards of one color to take one of the five face-down quest cards; these are kept secret and they score points at the end if you have certain cards in your hand. Or, you can play an advocate card, which has special abilities such as allowing you to take any two cards from the display.

On your turn, you may also claim a clan card if you have a three or higher in your set of that clan's color. Each clan has a unique ability, and once claimed cannot be stolen or discarded. Each player may only claim one. You can also claim one of the five honor cards if you meet the requirement shown on it. The game ends once all quests and honors have been claimed or the deck runs out. Tally the highest card in each of your sets and add the result to your points from completed quests and honors. There are also a few additional cards in the deck that score a few bonus points based on your cards. The player with the most points wins.

Inheritors is a beautiful combination of simple actions and strategic gameplay. It's as easy as playing a card on your turn, but the choices of your actions are weighty, and there are trade-offs when deciding which cards to keep and which to part with. The clans can offer helpful bonuses, and deciding which one to commit to can also be a tough choice, especially when racing against other players to claim a specific one. Each card discarded to the display can also end up in an opponent's hand, so you must be careful.

The game feels tactical but still quite accessible. The artwork is rich and stunning. *Inheritors* offers an excellent blend of being easy to learn while offering ample strategic depth once you're immersed in the gameplay.

Inheritors

Designed by Jeffrey CCH, Kenneth YWN

2-4 PLAYERS	30-45 MINS	AGES 10+	\$20 MSRP
LUCK	STRATEGY		INTERACTIVE
INDEPENDENT	LUCK		

Aurum is a unique trick-taking game that is all about avoiding the suit rather than following it.



Players split into teams of two. There are five suits of base metal cards, numbered 1-10. These cards are dealt out to the players, while the gold cards are placed in a supply. Each player starts with a gold zero in their gold collection pile. At the start of a round, you look at your hand and play one card to make your bid. The number on the card represents how many tricks you believe you and your teammate will win. Between you and your teammate, whoever bids the highest is the bid that you go with. Players then start playing tricks.

In this game, the trick-taking gameplay is fairly standard: everyone takes turns playing one card, and the highest card wins, with gold being the trump suit. However, instead of having to follow suit with the first card played into a trick, you may only play a base metal card whose

suit has *not* already been played into the trick (gold can be played by multiple players). You can choose to play a gold card from your gold collection to trump a trick. Between tricks, you can also discard a gold card to replace a bid card for yourself or your teammate.

Once everyone has played into the trick, the player who played the highest card takes the trick. But the player who played the lowest non-gold card takes a gold card from the supply of the same number they played, adding it to their collection, and leads the next trick. Play continues until a player does not have a valid card to play, and either cannot or chooses not to play a gold. If a team has taken fewer tricks than their bid they earn no points; if they took more tricks than their bid, they earn points equal to their bid number; or, if they earned exactly their bid, then they double those points. You also earn 1-3 points for each gold card in your collection, with higher cards being worth more points. The team with the most points wins the round and earns a gold nugget. The team that wins two out of three rounds wins the game. A three-player game works much the same, but with no teams and a few minor rule tweaks.

Aurum

Designed by Shreesh Bhat

3-4 PLAYERS

30-45 MINS

AGES 7+

\$15
MSRP



LUCK STRATEGY



INTERACTIVE INDEPENDENT



Aurum cleverly blends familiar trick-taking mechanics with unique twists that really change up how you approach the game's strategy. Balancing winning tricks with acquiring gold is crucial, offering players a lot to consider. The artwork and cards are impressive, although the rulebook could be a little stronger. This is an excellent trick-taker up there with the best of the genre.



Can you list absolutely everything in this very simple, but very addictive party game?



Every card lists a category. Each player is dealt three cards, and then a small draw deck is created. Draw two cards from the deck and place them face-up on the table. On your turn, you must say one thing that fits one of the face-up categories and something else that fits the other. You have roughly ten seconds for each category and cannot say something that has already been said for that category. If you can't think of something for one of the categories, take the card (and any beneath it) and add it to your penalty pile before drawing a new one to replace it, or play a card from your hand on top of it to change the category. If you manage to think of something that fits both categories, you choose to either discard a penalty card or draw another card into your hand.

If you do the latter, then you also draw a third category card to play face-up on the table, meaning for a time there will be three categories that players must give answers for. Play continues until the draw pile runs out, and the player with the fewest penalty cards wins.

Everything Ever is such a fun and simple idea. The huge number of categories included is impressive, and it's satisfying to list things off, trying not to give in to brain freeze when you're up against the clock. It's easy to teach and set up, and you can pull it out anywhere with many types of groups. If the time pressure or difficulty of responding to multiple categories doesn't suit you, it's very easy to adapt the game to your style. 🎲

Everything Ever

Designed by Nathan Thornton

2-10 PLAYERS	20 MINS	AGES 12+	\$20 MSRP
INTERACTIVE		INDEPENDENT	

★ OTHER RECOMMENDED GAMES ★

For a complete list, visit CasualGameRevolution.com/games





Steam Up is Major Fun!

The Concept

Steam Up is a restaurant known for its sumptuous servings of Dim Sum. Magical creatures come to sample the best bite-size gourmet dishes from bamboo baskets stacked high. Luckily, each animal arrives with an appetite and an agenda for their ideal meal. May the fullest stomach win!

The Components

Steam Up is a feast for the eyes. A rotating cardboard lazy Susan is the main playing area of the game. On it, you will stack 18 small bamboo steamers. In these steamers, you will place an assortment of the five Dim Sum dishes.

In the standard version of the game, Dim Sum dishes are cardboard. In the deluxe edition, the dishes are three-dimensional figurines. On the menu, we have shrimp dumplings, meat dumplings, sticky rice wrapped in lotus leaves, barbecue pork buns, and phoenix claws. These dishes will be mixed together and drawn from a bag. There are also round food tokens matching each type of dish. They form a food token bank.

The Mechanics

The goal of *Steam Up* is to collect the most Hearty Points. You will do this by eating Dim Sum from steamer baskets and tracking the dishes you eat on your animal board. You will score points based on

Fate and Fortune cards are placed on the scoreboard. Twelve magical animals, one for each member of the Chinese Zodiac, come to dine during *Steam Up*. Each animal has a unique board and wooden figurine.

To play, the steamer baskets will be filled randomly with 2-4 pieces of Dim Sum. Steamers will be stacked three high and placed on the board. Each player selects an animal board and draws two Fortune cards from the deck. Grab your chopsticks and get ready to dig in!

the rules for the animal you are playing, plus bonus or penalty points for excess food or extra cards. The game ends when the fate deck runs out or the steamer track reaches zero.

Each round begins by drawing a Fate card, an event that will affect the round. Then, in turn order, players perform two different actions. There are five actions to choose from:

- Collect a food token.
- Draw one fortune card, rotate the board.
- Play one fortune card, rotate the board.
- Discard two fortune cards, collect a food token.
- Collect a steamer basket.





A core concept in *Steam Up* is the Feast Zone. Based on the number of players, your feast zone will be half, one-third, or one-fourth of the board. You can only collect baskets that are at least partially in your Feast Zone, so rotating the board to the right position becomes a central part of the game.

Once you have a steamer basket in your Feast Zone, you can collect it if you turn in food tokens that match the Dim Sum in the basket. Remove the basket, place the Dim Sum on your animal board, and score Hearty Points based on the rules for your animal. Then lower the steamer track by one.



What Sets This Game Apart?

Fortune, Fate, and magical animals each add new flavors of fun. Fortune cards allow players to swap dishes, baskets, food tokens, or change player order. Fate cards are events drawn to begin each round. They introduce dice rolls to the game. Some gain, while others may lose based on a roll or the current score. Finally, each animal has a backstory with unique abilities and scoring rules. The pig is a food blogger, and scores points for filling columns on its board. The tiger scores more for eating seafood. The ox can collect baskets outside its Feast Zone. These elements make every game of *Steam Up* a new experience with different challenges to navigate.

Final Thoughts

Steam Up brings the brilliant chef and author Anthony Bourdain to my mind. He saw food as a bridge between people. Enjoying food from any corner of the world can open a door of understanding between us. I think games do the same thing. A game is a vehicle for social interaction. A game allows us to understand and know each other in ways that might be more difficult without the rules, the safe space it creates, and its artifacts of play to bridge the gap. *Steam Up* creates a feast for any player's appetite for fun. Beyond this accomplishment, the game introduces us to the traditions of Dim Sum and Chinese cuisine. Enjoying *Steam Up* opens a door to understanding as you play. Our world becomes richer and more interesting the more doors like this we open. *Steam Up* certainly leaves us hungry for more. And this is a sure-fire recipe for Major Fun. 🍴



Stephen Conway is the director of The Spiel Foundation, a non-profit organization dedicated to making the world a more playful place.

Steam Up

Designed by Pauline Kong, Marie Wong, Haymen Lee
Art by Tim Cheng, Grace Tjahyadi, YDXArt



Time to Teach/Learn: 3-4 minutes



Your Turn!

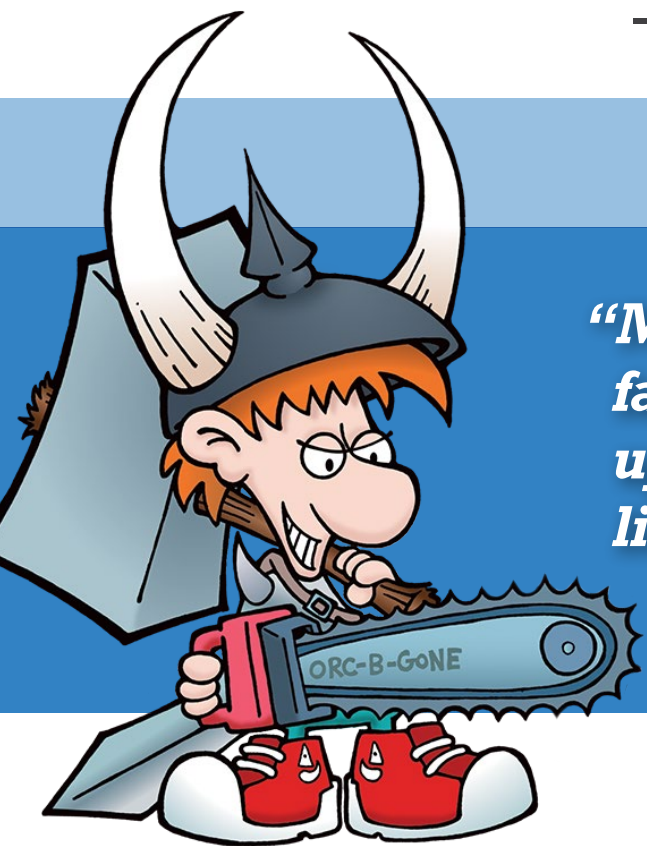
A Spotlight on the
Gaming Community



What is your favorite card game?

“Fluxx. I love the ever-changing goalposts!”

— Josh C.



“Munchkin — it’s a game group favorite, everyone can pick it up and it is a riot to play (both literally and figuratively).”

— Andrew L.

“Right now, it is The Crew. It is getting a lot of play in my group right now as a filler at the beginning and/or end of the night.”

— David R.





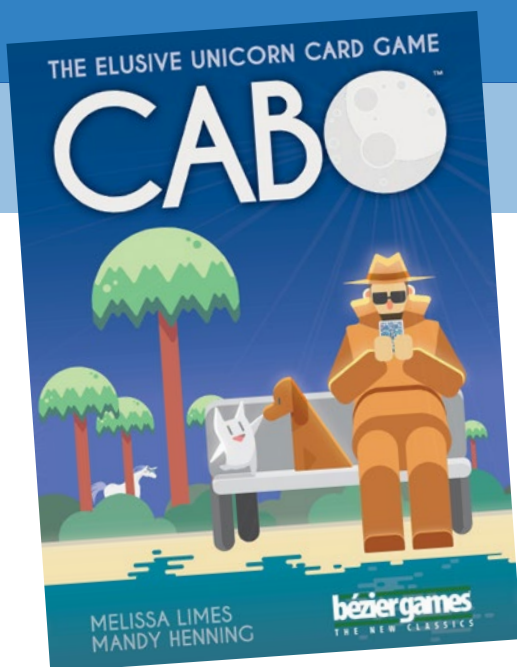
“Love Letter, a manly man’s game! Misleading but surprising title, cutthroat gameplay.”

— Josh W.



“I really like The Game from Pandasaurus — it’s cooperative but engages your brain on a competitive level at the same time, as you try to constantly better your score. Also, the rules are simple enough that you can teach anyone in just a few minutes!”

— Erik V.



“Cabo. Highly replayable with a nice mix of memory and luck.”

— Julie S.



“Marvel Legendary. It’s fun, easy to learn, and the system allows for a lot of gameplay variety, which makes the game feel very thematic for all of the characters, villains, and schemes.”

— Suzannah H.



“Think I’ll go old school here: Rummy 500. My grandmother taught me when I was young and we’d play together, and now I still play to this day with my wife.”

— Jon S.



“Rage, we call it Raging Daisies, because it can get quite heated during gameplay.”

— Karl S.



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“*Deadly Dowagers* — I absolutely love the theme, and how heavily researched the game is!”

— Nicole F.

“*Texas Hold’em* will always be my favorite card game because you can win some serious scratch playing it.”

—Tabitha O.

“*The Bird Told Me To Do It*. It’s brilliant and broken (in a good way) and no one has ever played it despite being from one of the best well-known designers [Carl Chudyk].”

— Jeffrey B.



“*CuBirds*, because it has cute art and is one of the few games that I win on a consistent basis.”

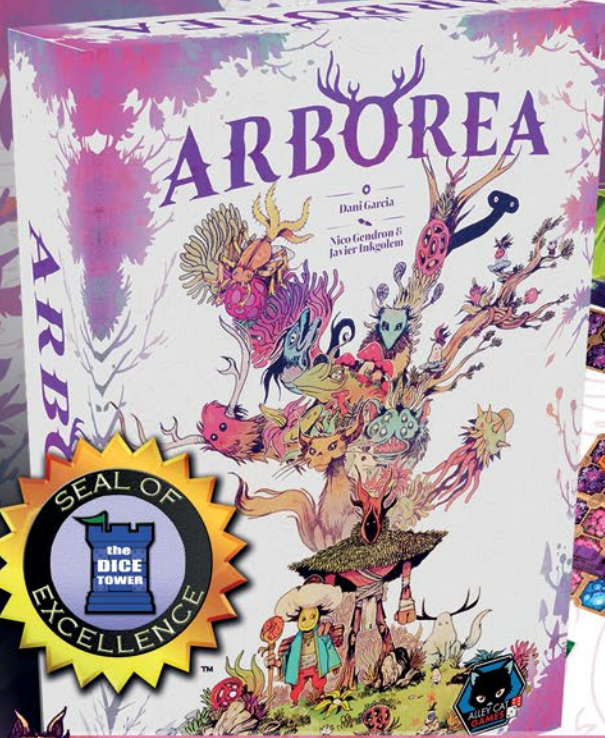
— Jason Y.



Next Issue: Which game has the best components?

Send your ideas and photos to: editor@CasualGameRevolution.com

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I had so much fun with this!

- Tom Vasel, Dice Tower

I love this game... 10/10, cannot wait to play more!

- Matt Sall, Bell of Lost Souls

One of the best dungeoncrawlers I've ever played.

- Mike Kelly, One Stop Co-Op Shop



A cooperative dungeoncrawl board game from the world of The Red Dragon Inn



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