FALL 2019 / #29

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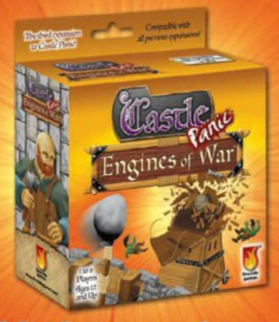




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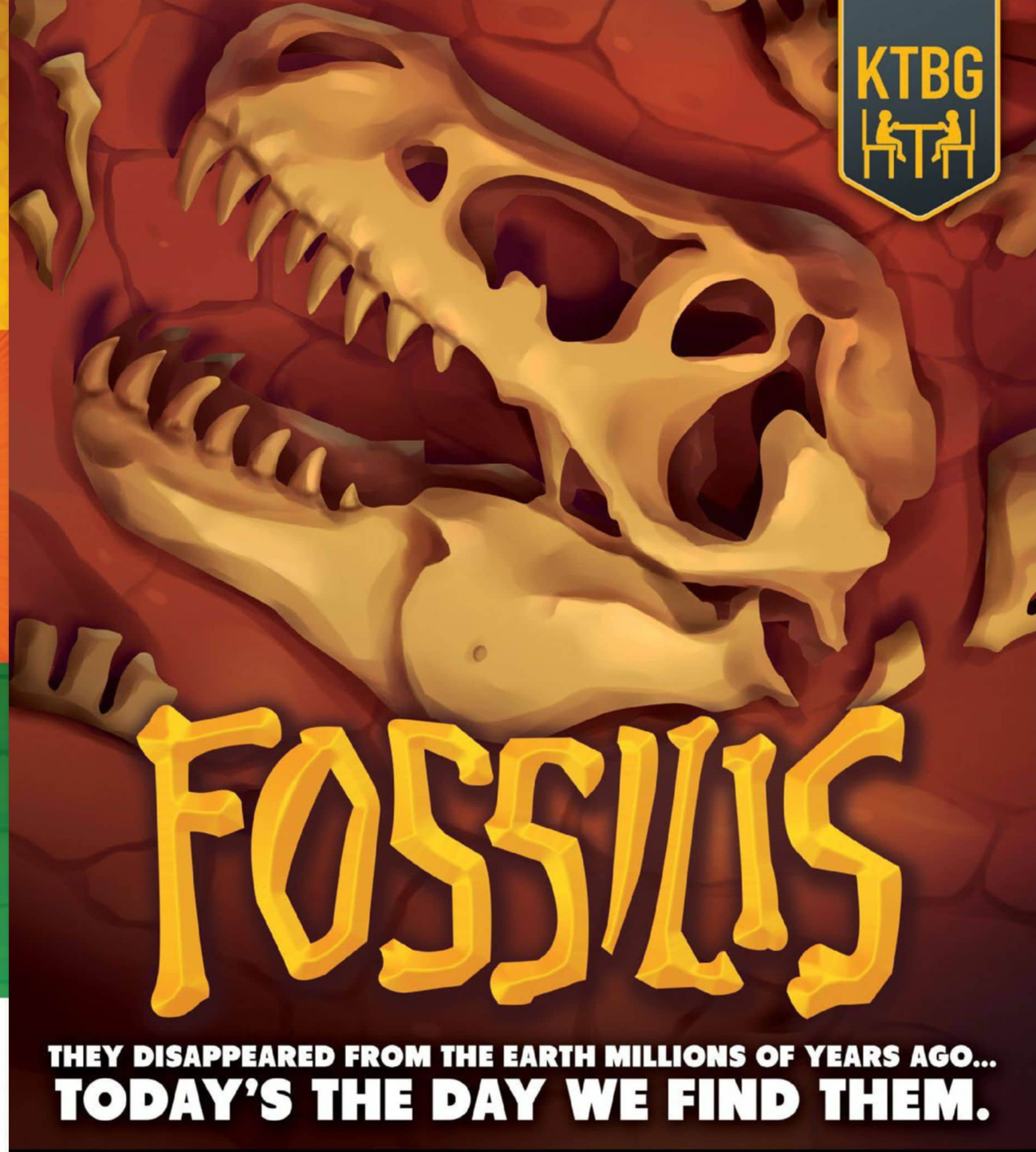


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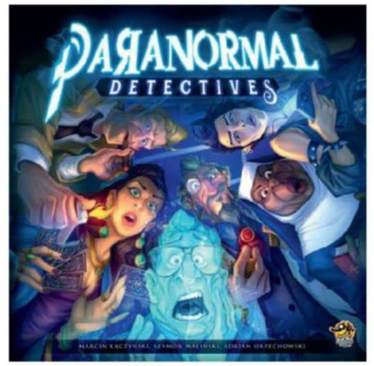
THEY DISAPPEARED FROM THE EARTH MILLIONS OF YEARS AGO...

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LATE PLEDGE ON BACKERKIT

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CASUAL GAME INSIDER is published quarterly by:

CASUAL GAME REVOLUTION

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Queen Creek, AZ 85142
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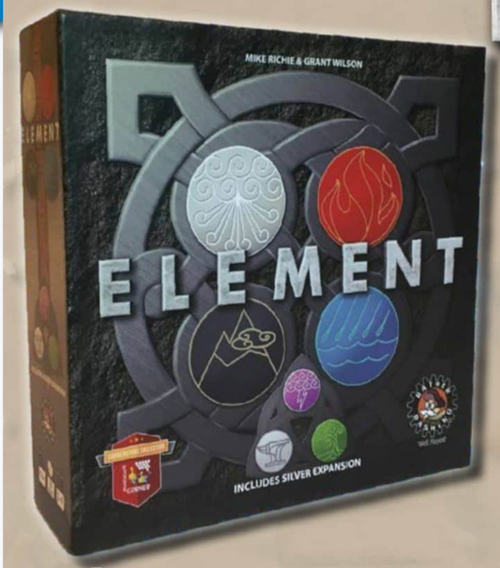
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"A casual board (or card) game is played in under an hour, set up and taught in under 10 minutes, and requires some light strategic thought. Casual games are not specifically marketed to children, but can be enjoyed by anyone from older children to adults."

ELEMENT
SILVER



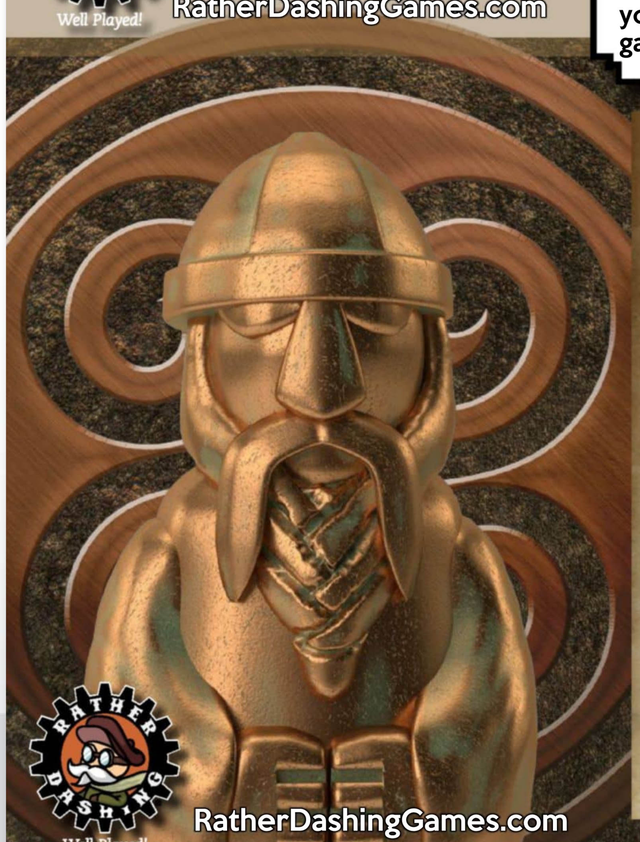
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UltraPRO.com

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KidsTableBG.com

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DailyMagicGames.com

Founded in 2009, Stratus Games publishes quality casual and party games like *Eruption*, *Gold Mine*, and *Off Your Rocker*. They are also the creative minds behind Casual Game Revolution and Casual Game Insider.

StratusGames.com



Paranormal Detectives

A Game Made To Order

By Marcin, Szymon, and Adrian

On a hot summer day, fans, designers, and publishers of board games meet at a holiday resort by a lake in Poland in order to take part in the V Board Games Lab. Once on-site, they are divided into groups supervised by trainers — representatives of Polish publishing houses and authors of board games. Their task: to design a board game during this 72-hour game jam!



Two IT specialists, an educational game designer, and a police detective make up our group. It isn't easy, as we have never met before, much less worked together. So we start talking about our interests both in games and in life, and it turns out we make up a pretty cool team. Despite the differences in our life and work experiences, we find a common language. After all, we were brought together by our passion for board games.

The two game mechanics drawn for our group are storytelling and card drafting. We were afraid of storytelling because the mechanics are difficult to implement. We said our prayers and got to work. It turns out that we already know a few good party games that use storytelling as a device or reoccurring theme: *Concept*, *Black Stories*, and *Charades*. But it's still a long way before we begin to see a light in the tunnel.

We wait to find out what the theme of our game will be, but it turns out to be fairly well-suited for the mechanics of storytelling. The theme is "Phantom Fears," but we still don't have an idea of how to combine theme and mechanics.

So we sit down and start brainstorming. We come up with dozens of ideas, which we mix up and examine from all sides. Our trainer, Irek from Board & Dice, chats with us and offers suggestions while probably thinking "what a tragedy — this isn't going to go anywhere." We keep racking our brains and slowly a concept emerges that will combine the strengths of many known party games into a series of mini-games.

One of our teammates mentions that he once researched divination and spirit conjuring methods. The police officer suggests that we use the "Seven Golden Questions of Forensics" that need to be answered in order for a criminal to be brought to justice. Thus, the concept of the game is born: one of the players takes on the role of the victim's ghost while the rest are psychics charged with guessing the circumstances of the victim's untimely death. Finally, we can see a glimmer of light in the tunnel. But now what? A concept isn't enough. Now we need to transform it into a game.

Our brains are steaming again. From the seven questions, "who, what, where, when, how, why, and with what means," we drop two (what and when) for the sake of the game. It's late, so we head to bed in order to get about three-to-four hours of shut-eye. The next day, we come up with the idea that the ghost player has to answer questions using different forms of communication, e.g., drawing on another player's back, arranging a string, pantomime, etc. We've got it!

We start testing it out using examples of real stories told by the police officer, but something isn't right. It's too hard. "It's an overly open set," exclaims one of the IT experts. But when we create closed categories with multiple answers in each, it's too easy. Suddenly we're hit by another epiphany: let's show the mediums what the ghost looked like at the moment of death. Our trainer likes it and offers some further tips for development. It's not just a glimmer anymore; now we see the light. Things are looking even brighter when the other trainers enjoy their playtest.



We work hard to the very end to present the best possible prototype of our game, *Paranormal Detectives*. And it pays off! Our team is awarded one of the two distinctions for the best game in the Lab. We're all celebrating when we're approached by none other than Filip Miłuński from Lucky Duck Games, who asks us if we'd be interested in a commission for a few more murders. Without skipping a beat, we say yes. It's all clear sailing going forward, as the team at Lucky Duck Games are masters of their craft. Thanks to them, *Paranormal Detectives* has developed into the form we see today. ⚄

Lucky Duck Games

Coming Late October, 2019





SUMMER CONVENTIONS 2019

GEN CON

BOARD GAMING UNDER CONSTRUCTION



Justin Spicer
Music Journalist and
Board Game Experimenter

Photo by Lending Library Logistics

Weeks before Gen Con, the message was sent as far and wide as possible: construction was going to cause headaches for the tens of thousands of visitors to the heartland. The main thoroughfare that connects Indianapolis to its international airport was closed, which meant board game tourists were scrambling to find the easiest and fastest routes downtown. When it's Gen Con, everyone wants to squeeze every minute out of their gaming vacation. Detours will always crop up, but some of those delays may yield a brand-new perspective.

This is just the first phase of big changes coming to Indianapolis, all for the glory of Gen Con. Two of the surrounding hotels and the Indianapolis Convention Center itself will be expanding in the upcoming years. Two new hotels are also set to begin construction in the next year or two with all of these changes coming to a head by 2023.

Yet the construction of Gen Con's host city also reflects the gaming industry that Gen Con celebrates. The continued swelling and expansion of the exhibit hall is not only being tested by the growing behemoth of Asmodee who owns, represents, or distributes for nearly 50 publishers across the globe, but the continued growth of Entrepreneur's Avenue where publishers get their first official booths at Gen Con. What was once the domain for niche publishers is now the home for international giants making their Gen Con debut (Fruerland, Hobby World) as well as publishers that are primed as up-and-coming (Weird Giraffe, Orange Nebula).

Other publishers walk in and put up their own orange barrels, denoting their entry into the fray. Foremost was the announcement from Funko weeks before the convention that they had bought Prospero Hall (the designers behind many of Ravensburger's recent hits including *Villainous*, *Jaws*, and *Horrified*) to launch Funko Games. The company debuted its skirmish/capture the flag style games, Funkoverse, featuring characters from DC Comics, Harry Potter, Rick and Morty, and the Golden Girls. Likewise, longtime card-maker Bicycle found themselves as a first time Gen Con attendee, showing off its first three games.



Fantasy Flight Games continues to reign supreme as the provider of grand ideas with the most popular IP in North America. The announcement on Wednesday night of *Marvel Champions: The Card Game* (a cooperative Marvel LCG) as well as a Marvel miniatures game was met with widescale enthusiasm, whereas the quiet unveiling of *Marvel Splendor* on Thursday morning with a simple banner and a few demo tables speaks to how clever Fantasy Flight and Asmodee are at continuing to construct the narrative of board gaming as mainstream adoption grows.

This growth was reflected in the many publishers who were announcing new games that will become exclusives to Target, Walmart, and Amazon Prime as retailers battle to win the business of board gamers looking for something to preoccupy them after their long commutes — not only back home, but in their daily lives.



However, the biggest construction project Gen Con continues to undertake is the expansion of the board gaming community. Where the giants of the industry are doing their part to show how board gaming and mainstream culture intersect into a superhighway, it's the side streets where people are designing and publishing games that add a unique charm, interesting mechanics, and exquisite art that demonstrate the power of board gaming's growing community.

Speaking with Shawn Stankewich, this came into full view. Shawn is one of three designers behind *Point Salad* — one of three featured games of AEG's Big Game Night event. Not only is Shawn a designer working collaboratively with like-minded and enthusiastic hobbyists who want to be a part of the industry, but he is also behind Flatout Games and the launch of the publisher's first title *Calico* (coming to Kickstarter in the coming months).

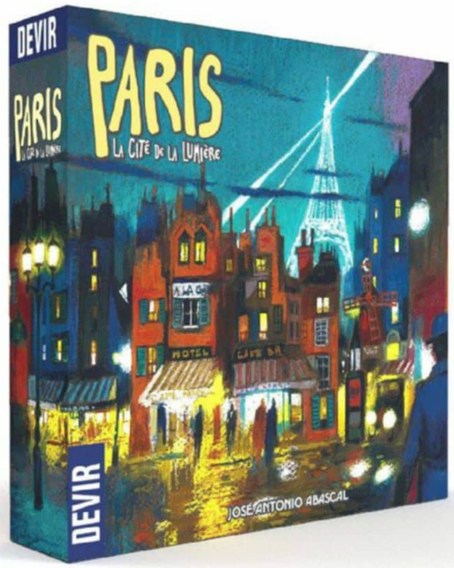
Designers and publishers are supporting each other, not finding much to fight over but rather plenty of common ground. Though these construction projects are DIY and without grandeur, they provide the beautiful scenic detour we all take during the dog days of Gen Con. While the middle of the hall is a swarm of big names and blockbuster IP, it's the outer edges where those brave enough to follow the side streets and back alleys of the ICC find the beauty in board gaming.

NOTEWORTHY GAMES OF GEN CON

Each year, Gen Con is full of surprises. While the convention is often the launching pad for many publishers to announce their new slate of titles, it's often the diamonds in the rough that end up providing excitement and extended curiosity into the holiday season. Here are a few games that made a significant impression during the Best Four Days in Gaming.

1. PARIS: LA CITÉ DE LA LUMIÈRE

DEVIR GAMES | 2 PLAYERS | 30 MINUTES



Seemingly a simple two-player tile and polyomino placement game, *Paris: La Cite de la Lumiere* is a great little puzzle game with purposeful opponent interaction. The game happens in two phases: players begin with eight tiles they must place within the box (which acts as the board) to strategically align the colored squares that best benefit them and hinder their opponents. The second phase involves placing polyomino buildings that fit over the shapes you have created during the first phase, hoping to touch (but not cover) as many street lamps as possible. There are some variable actions and options that can foil your plans, or perhaps you'll use them to hinder an opponent's game plan instead...

GEN CON AT-A-GLANCE



Gen Con photos by Eric Huemmer



2. THE SEARCH FOR PLANET X

FOXTROT GAMES | 2–4 PLAYERS | 60 MINUTES

This app-based logic puzzle coming to Kickstarter was quite the surprise. The two-to-four-player game tasks players with finding gas clouds, asteroid fields, comets, a dwarf planet, and of course, the titular hidden Planet X. Players will navigate a circular board with 12 sectors (the harder version has 18 sectors on the game board's flipside), using the game's app to scan sectors, attend conferences, and peer-review the information received about what lies in each sector. Players will keep information behind shields and have a well-organized paper to keep track of the notes and clues they receive. Once a player believes they know which sector houses Planet X and can identify what lies in the sectors beside it, they enter it into the app and take their chance.

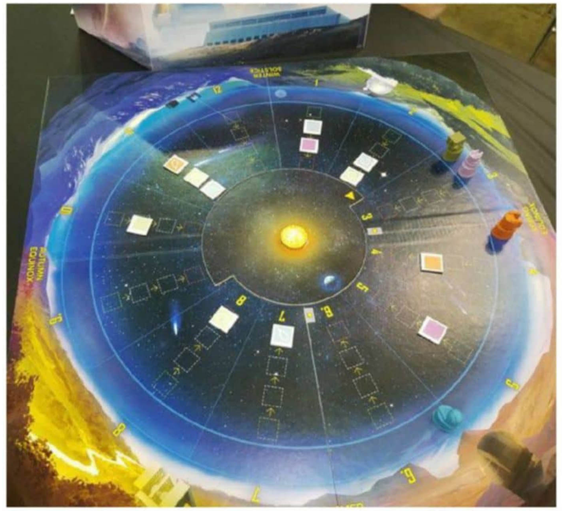


Photo by Justin Spicer

3. WRECK RAIDERS

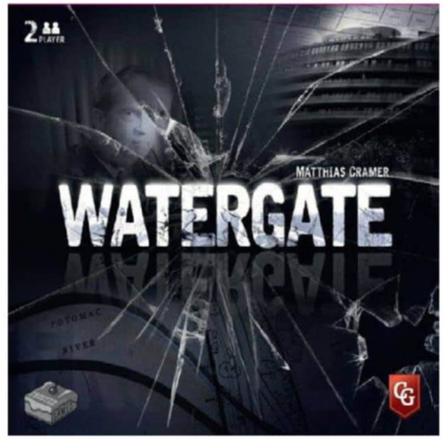
KIDS TABLE BOARD GAMES | 1–5 PLAYERS
45 MINUTES

The smash Kickstarter game from Kids Table meets the lofty standards of the fast-growing publisher. A casual game for serious gamers (or a serious game for casual gamers), Kids Table has created a game that exceeds its motto in theme and mechanics. In *Wreck Raiders*, players take turns drafting from a pool of dice to collect treasures that will help them complete museum contracts. Completed contracts yield goodies that help them create their own aquariums, all of which are worth points and bonuses as well.

The initial immersion may seem a bit much, but *Wreck Raiders* is a family game meant to be as easy for an 8-year-old to play as it is deep for (grand)parents to explore. "Kid's game" is no longer a negative epithet thanks to the work of Kids Table and like-minded publishers striving to make games inclusive and engaging for the whole family.



Photo by Be Bold Games (BeBoldGames.com)



4. WATERGATE

CAPSTONE GAMES | 2 PLAYERS | 30–60 MINUTES

The two-player tug-of-war melds political strategy with board gaming savvy. Playing in under an hour, the battle between Richard Nixon and the Washington Post during the Watergate scandal is now accurately played out in board game form. Nixon is working to stop the Post from connecting him to any informants and scandal, while the Post is feverishly scrambling to find enough evidence to link Nixon to his crimes, all of this well expressed by the game's board and the variable events each player has in their deck of cards to achieve their goal. Even without the political theme, this is a great light-strategy game that will allow gamers to play another game in an evening...or perhaps switch places and try one's luck in the shoes of the other role.

5. ERA: MEDIEVAL AGE

PLAN B GAMES | 1–4 PLAYERS | 45–60 MINUTES

The big box of *Era: Medieval Age* may make this "roll and build" game appear daunting. But it's from Matt Leacock (designer of Pandemic, Forbidden Island, etc.), whose magic touch is crafting light to mid-weight games from heavy ideas. *Era: Medieval Age* is no different, as players roll dice to gain resources to then populate their city boards with a host of Medieval-era buildings, towers, and walls to earn points. These buildings, which are big and sturdy, are the reason for the big box. The game has visual appeal and its tactile nature makes it a great bridge game for casual gamers or children looking to immerse themselves in a civilization simulation game.





6. VALLEY OF THE VIKINGS

HABA | 2–4 PLAYERS | 15–20 MINUTES

As HABA continues to expand its family game line via *Honga*, *Mountains*, and the upcoming *Miyabi*, the yellow boxes also continue to grow in exquisite simplicity that prepares children and casual gamers alike for meatier experiences. *Valley of the Vikings* (which won the Kinderspiel award in Germany in July) will not have a wide release in North America until November, but this bowling and leapfrog game will give players a fun activity mixed with erudite strategy in how to position their pawns as well as those of the other players to reap the best rewards.



Photos by Jon Den Houter

SUMMER CONVENTIONS 2019

ORIGINS

THE START OF A GOOD TIME



Jon Den Houter
Freelance Writer
and Avid Gamer

Over the course of Wednesday, June 12, through Sunday, June 16, over 20,000 people attended the 44th annual Origins Game Fair. Put on by the Game Manufacturers Association (GAMA) and held each year at the Greater Columbus Convention Center in Ohio, what sets Origins apart from other gaming conventions is its focus on playing games. Like in past years, Origins 2019 had a sizeable exhibitor hall that never felt too crowded because so many people were at one of the thousands of tables playing a game they just purchased (or just received in a trade or brought from home). Many of the tables were free for anyone to use, but many more tables were inside the gaming room, which gave convention goers access to the Columbus Area Board Game Society's vast gaming library for an additional charge. If people were looking for others to play a game with, they would set up on one of the tables with a large orange traffic cone and hang the cover of the game they'd like to play off of it.

Origins continues to be a great way to meet people who share a passion for board games. Many of the designers, podcasters, and YouTubers in the board game community were there again this year, and their purpose for attending was the same as everyone else's: to play games. Rodney Smith from Watch it Played told me he loves Origins because he doesn't have to worry about working as he does at other conventions — he just gets to enjoy playing games. Many game designers were also there, both to play games and talk about their new releases. Eric Alvarado showed me his excellent new game, *Vinyl*, while Tony Miller taught me how to play his and John Prather's new push-your-luck game *Fire in the Library*.

It was no surprise to see families and people of all ages demoing a game at one of the dozens of publisher booths. Over 300 games were on display or demoed at Origins this year, and many of them (in small quantities) were available for purchase. While there were other things to do, such as going through True Dungeon or playing in the video game room, sitting down to play a board game proved once again to be Origin's raison d'etre.



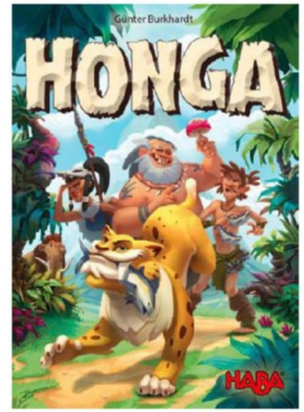
NOTEWORTHY GAMES OF ORIGINS

HONGA

HABA | 2–5 PLAYERS | 30–45 MINUTES

Honga gets its name from the saber-toothed tiger that roams the ancient village in which the game takes place. Players vie to become village chief by getting victory points, which they can earn by carrying out various actions on their turn. What makes this game stand out is its ingenious action-selection mechanism. On their turn, players place on the board an action disc, which is a circle divided into four quadrants. Each quadrant has zero to three hands pictured on it, with a total number of four hands on each disc (or five if a player possesses the mammoth tooth and so gets to draw from the mammoth deck). There are nine different actions players can take on their turn, depending on where players place their disc and how they orient it.

For every hand on the disc that touches an action space, that player can perform that action one time. So, if one quadrant of a player's disc has three hands on it, whatever action space that quadrant is touching that player can perform three times. The fun of the game is deciding what are the best actions to take, and then determining how to best place and orient the action disc to do as many of those actions as possible — all the while making sure to have at least one hand touching Honga's action space to pet him so that he doesn't come to your camp and eat a valuable resource! The interesting and challenging decisions, along with the excellent components and theme, made this my favorite game of Origins.





DRAFTOSAURUS

ANKAMA | 2–5 PLAYERS | 15 MINUTES

In ***Draftosaurus***, players design their own dinosaur park by placing a colorful assortment of dino meeples into paddocks on their individual player boards. On the first turn, players draw six dino meeples from the bag and choose one to place into a paddock on their board. Each paddock has different rules for end-of-round scoring, such as having all different dinos, having pairs of like dinos, etc. On every subsequent turn, players draft dinosaur meeples (similar to *Sushi Go)* and place them into their paddock for scoring. *Draftosaurus* is a fresh take on the drafting mechanism that makes it easy, quick, and fun to play, making it a fantastic filler and perfect for families. *Draftosaurus* is technically for ages eight and up, but I saw five- and six-year-old kids having a great time playing the game with their parents at Origins.





OBSCURIO

LIBELLUD | 2–8 PLAYERS | 40 MINUTES

Lillebud, the publisher of *Mysterium*, has created a new game that could be called "*Mysterium* 2." In ***Obscurio***, players are wizards who must escape from a library over a number of rounds by choosing the correct door — represented by an image card — out of seven possible image cards. The grimoire (akin to the ghost in *Mysterium*) displays two other image cards from his or her hand to point the other players to the correct door.

What's unique to *Obscurio* is that the grimoire can additionally place an arrow token on each of the two images, pointing the players to a specific detail of each image. Another unique aspect is the addition of a traitor mechanism. Before voting on which of the seven image cards they think the grimoire is pointing them to, players close their eyes and the traitor selects up to two image cards to include as part of the seven. Interestingly, the traitor does not know what the correct door looks like, so he or she must choose based only on the two cards and arrow tokens that the grimoire has played. Then players open their eyes and vote on which of the seven image cards they believe is the correct "door." (They all don't have to vote for the same image card.)

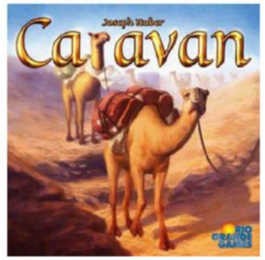


Players win or lose the round depending on how well they chose, and the traitor wins by leading the group astray — without giving him or herself away! The addition of the arrow tokens makes the game easier to win than *Mysterium*, but the addition of the traitor makes *Obscurio* harder and adds a new element of challenge and fun.



CARAVAN

RIO GRANDE GAMES | 2–4 PLAYERS | 45 MINUTES

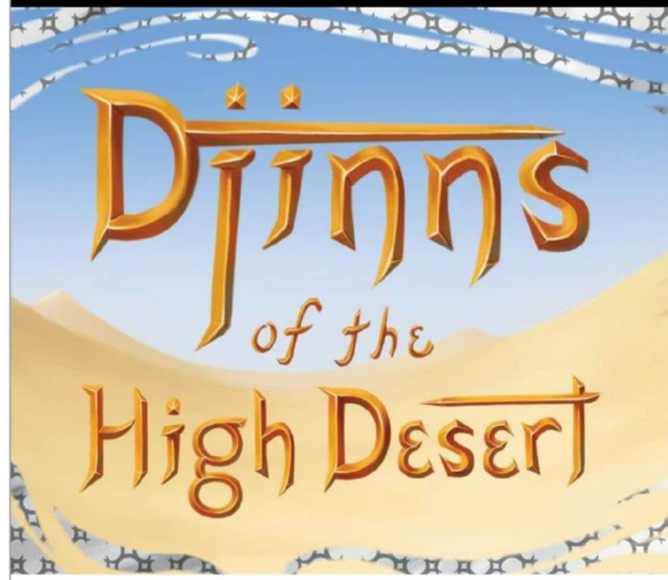


Caravan is an abstract pick-up-and-deliver game with a clever theme — merchants using camel caravans to deliver their goods to market. The board is a 7 by 7 grid of 49 spaces. Some of the spaces are markets of specific colors to which players need to deliver the goods of the corresponding color. Goods of various colors are replenished at set locations throughout the game; the challenge is for players to place their five camels (or six in the easier variant) to create a continuous caravan — having one camel on each successive space — for the goods to make it to market.

Many times the path between the goods and the market is longer than five spaces, which means players have to send their goods as far as they can with their camel caravan, then move some of their camels to finish the path to the market. The game is simple to learn yet provides some complex puzzles: how can a player get a series of goods to their respective markets while moving their camels the least number of times? The goods come out randomly and goods of different colors have different point values, making each game unique. I played the game twice at Origins, and each game felt very different from the other. I highly recommend *Caravan* for people who like puzzles.









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Will it be Seven of Nine? She's got the Doctor's mobile emitter, and Voyager got home early, but if Picard never becomes Captain then the Battle of Wolf 359 doesn't happen and her reality depends on that…

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LOONEY LABS

GaleForce Nine

Hosting a Party?

Have One of These Games on Hand



Dann Albright
Freelance Journalist and
Lifelong Board Gamer

Where did you play your first modern board game? I'm not talking about *Monopoly* or *Scrabble*. I mean something designed in the past 20 years. There's a very good chance you played it at a party. Lots of people get introduced to board games at parties — probably because board games are such great party activities. They bring people together, get everyone talking and laughing, and put people in hilariously weird situations.

The eight board games listed here will do all of those things, and if you're looking for a game to keep on hand for a party (or when you just have a couple of friends over), give these a look.

Codenames

Czech Games Edition | 2–8 players | 15 minutes

While it's only been out for a few years, *Codenames* by Czech Games Edition has made a big splash. It was designed by Vlaada Chvátil, who's known for designing very heavy, very complex strategy games...but it's a simple word-association game that's fantastic for parties. Players split into two teams and each team nominates a spymaster. Both spymasters know the identity of their team's spies, represented by 25 "codename" cards on the table. It's the spymaster's job to give one-word clues to the rest of their team in an effort to get them to choose the right cards. If your team picks the right cards faster than the opponent, you win. It's that simple. But it also has a few surprises up its sleeve. If either team picks the codename that represents the double agent, they immediately lose. And spymasters can give one-word clues along with a number (like "alligator, three") to let their team know to look for more than one card using that same clue. It's a fast-paced game that plays up to eight people and can be taught in just a few minutes. With follow-up versions with themes like Disney, Marvel, Harry Potter, and After Dark, you'll never run out of hilarious combinations of cards to play with.



Secret Hitler

Goat Wolf & Cabbage | 5–10 players | 45 minutes

Another party game that's made quite a name for itself is *Secret Hitler*. Players are randomly put into two groups: liberals and fascists. One player gets the Secret Hitler card. The fascists need to install Secret Hitler as their leader before the liberals figure out who the Führer is. Players use political intrigue and special rules to figure out who's who. The role of president rotates around the table, but they get to nominate a chancellor to work with. If the president and chancellor enact fascist policies, they could be fascists — or they may have simply been dealt bad cards. Can you trust them when they say they had no choice? Both teams race to pass their own policies while the fascists gain new powers as the game goes on. It's a tense race that's full of suspicion and subterfuge, and it plays up to ten players.





One Night Ultimate Werewolf

Bézier Games | 3–10 players | 10 minutes

If you've ever played *Mafia* or something like it, you know the basics of *One Night Ultimate Werewolf*. Each player is dealt a card that defines their role: werewolf, troublemaker, seer, or villager. If the villagers find the werewolf, they win. If the werewolf survives, the werewolf wins. It's that simple. But the *One Night* series from Bézier Games throws in special powers, a companion app, and lots of different themes and roles that you can combine; why not try *One Night Ultimate Vampire/Werewolf*? Or *One Night Ultimate Alien/Daybreak*?

There's a reason this is one of the most popular party games out there. It's super fast to teach, plays up to ten players, and each round only takes about ten minutes. If you like party games and you don't have this in your collection, you're missing out.



BANG!

dV Giochi | 4–7 players | 20–40 minutes

A deck of cards. A Spaghetti Western theme. And a bunch of other players who are hoping to shoot you before you shoot them. That's *BANG!* by dV Giochi. At the beginning of the game, everyone gets a role with a unique victory condition. So you might be trying to eliminate the outlaws and renegades. Or kill the sheriff. Or protect the sheriff. Whatever your goal, you'll complete it by drawing cards to shoot at other players, upgrade your gun, hide behind barrels, or ride away on a horse. You'll also use your character's special powers.

This is a quick game that anyone can learn and play. It only takes around 30 minutes to play, and it's a great game for a competitive group. There's very little working together — just grab your gun, start shooting, and hope you're the last one standing!



Captain Sonar

Matagot | 2–8 players | 45–60 minutes

You have to be willing to invest some time and effort in this one, but it's absolutely worth it. It's unpredictable, difficult, hilarious, and tense. Two teams crew opposing submarines. As a Captain, Chief Mate, Radio Operator, or Engineer, you'll need to make fast decisions (that often involve shouting) while trying to keep an ear out for what your opponents are doing. If you can manage the chaos and score a few hits with your torpedoes, you'll sink your opponent and win. It's hard to accurately describe what a game of *Captain Sonar* is like. You're flying blind, unsure of where your opponent is. You get occasional hints based on what you overhear. You'll mistime things, make bad decisions, get lucky guesses, and feel the thrill of victory when you land a successful hit. It's madness and an absolute blast. Matagot's *Captain Sonar* is best with eight people — both subs get a full crew of four. But you can also play with four or six (though I can't vouch for how much more difficult that will be).



The Mind

Pandasaurus Games | 2–4 players | 15 minutes

Looking for a little less deduction in your life? Instead of something big and complex like *Captain Sonar,* try *The Mind* from Pandasaurus Games. It could be the simplest game you've played since Peekaboo. You start with a deck of cards numbered 1–100. In the first round, everyone gets one card. Then you have to put them in the middle of the table in ascending order. But here's the catch: you can't communicate with the other players. At all. All you can do is look at them and try to time your card as best you can. If you get all the cards down in the correct order, you win the round. In the next round, you each get two cards. Then three. And so on. If someone plays a card higher than a card in your hand, your team loses a life. Lose lives equal to the number of players and you're out. Make it through the required number of rounds based on your player count and you win. It doesn't get much simpler than that. But it's strangely addicting.

Dixit

Libellud | 3–6 players | 30 minutes

How about a game where there's really no winning or losing? I mean, sure, there are points in *Dixit* and you can win. But it's so much more about the experience of playing than it's about competition. Each round of *Dixit* is simple: one person says a word or a phrase, and everyone lays down a card that they think matches that word. It's sort of like *Apples to Apples*. But instead of everyone choosing a card with a word on it, the cards show gorgeous, abstract art. Every piece of art has many different parts, opening the way for a wide variety of potential meanings. For example, one card shows a snail facing a huge, spiraling set of stairs. That could mean lots of things. You might focus on the snail. Or the stairs. Or the fact that the stairs or spiraling. Or the bucolic background. The levels of meaning are complex and can get very deep. They can also be superficial, tenuous, and ridiculous. You do keep score throughout the game, but to be honest, I can't even remember how to do it. It really is one of those games that you don't play to see who wins.





Telestrations

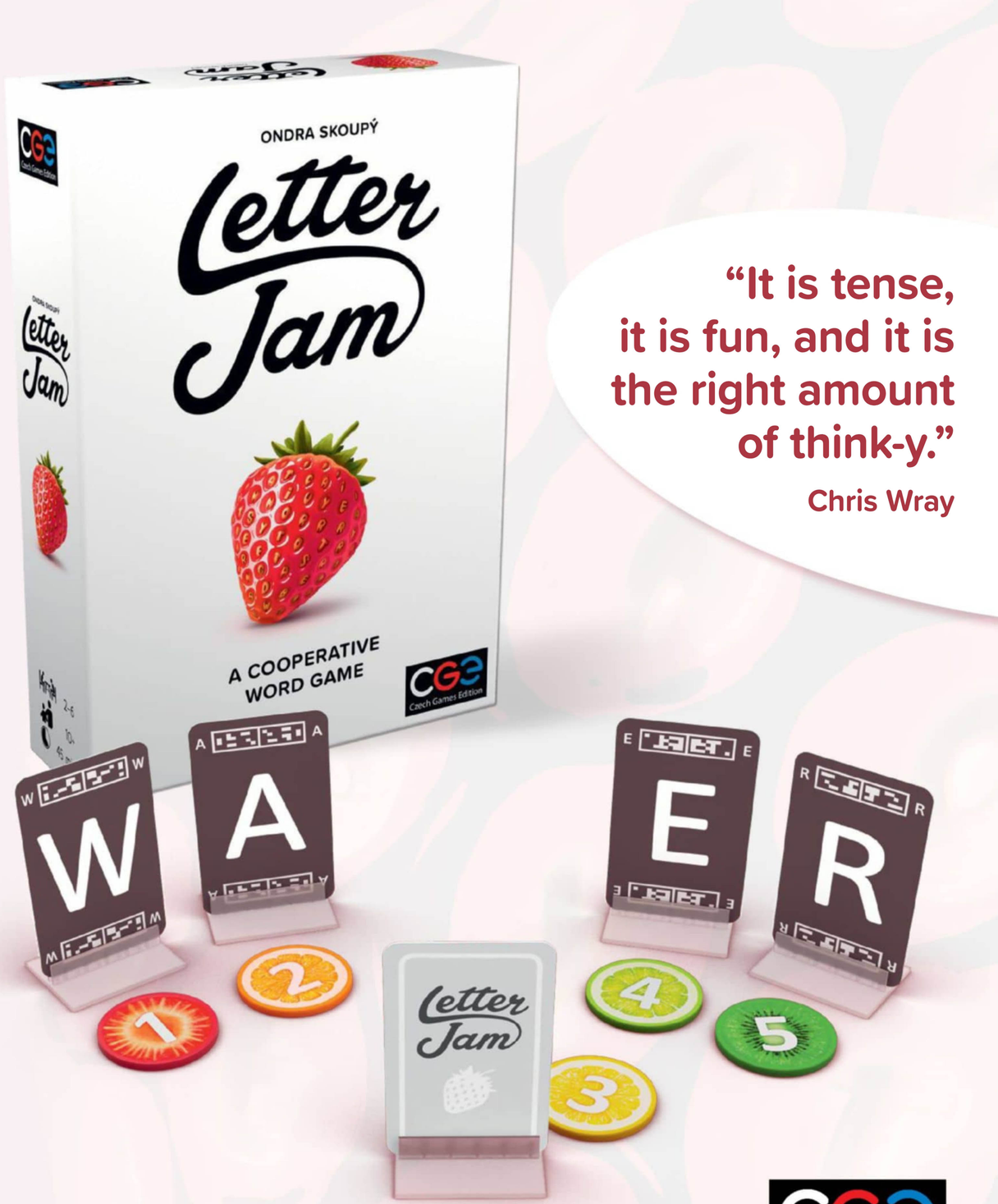
USAopoly | 4–8 players | 30 minutes

If you were to combine the old game of Telephone with *Pictionary*, you'd get *Telestrations.* (In fact, I first learned this game as "Telephone Pictionary" and just used a few sheets of paper.) At the beginning of each round, everyone rolls a die and receives a word. They draw a picture of that word, then pass their board to the next player. The next player writes what they think the picture shows. Then they pass it, and the next person draws that word (which may or may not match the original word). By the end of the round, everyone's original idea has been mangled — and looking back through the history of words and images is hysterically funny. It's a really simple idea, but it never fails to entertain.

Any Game Can Be a Party Game

These games are great for groups that like goofy games that put you in funny situations. But any game can be a party game — it just needs to fit the number of people you have and their taste in games.

No matter what kind of game group you have, though, it's good to have some of these on standby for your next gathering.



"It is tense, it is fun, and it is the right amount of think-y."

Chris Wray

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Smooth Sailing:

3 Tips for Streamlining Your Gaming Experience

What board games do you play the most, and why? Are they the ones with the best mechanics, or an immersive theme you can really appreciate? What about play time? Maybe you don't have time (or patience) for those multi-hour epics. While longer, more complex board games are great in their own way, you probably find yourself reaching for games with a combination of quick setup, shorter playtime, and easy to teach rules. So why is that?

If you're a regular host of board game nights or bear the title "Bringer of Games" to your friends and family, then you understand that there's actually quite a lot that goes into making a board game night successful. It's the setup and teardown, the understanding of how to best teach a game so as to not be intimidating, and how to keep the game running smoothly without worrying about additional components, rules, etc. Casual games have risen in popularity for the beforementioned reasons when it comes to what I'll be calling "board game management."



Ian McEachen
Doomsday Prepper
(Except, Like, With Board Games)

1 Speed Up the Boarding Process

Board game setup is something designers are paying attention to, and it is seemingly one of the easier things to nail about a game. Much shorter games tend to have shorter setup and teardown, while longer games take more time. There is something elegant about some smaller games like *Coup* or *Love Letter* that allow you to jump right in without shuffling multiple decks of cards, setting up player mats, or distributing resources across a table-sized board. Likewise, games with a lot of setup can really affect a player's experience if the directions are unclear or complicated. If you're hosting a game night or bringing your game to one, you don't want players to be waiting around a table while one person ponderously sets up the game.

It's not uncommon to see games that take half an hour to set up, with *Mansions of Madness* or even *Big Book of Madness* being examples of this. (I'm not sure if the madness is a recurring factor here.) A group's first game can easily take four hours to complete, especially including rules explanations, character and board setup, and some of the usual analysis paralysis. There are solutions out there, like token organizers, or setting the game up beforehand, but that's not always an option.



The setup time alone for Mansions of Madness can take 30 minutes to complete. For a better game night experience, go for games with an easier setup — or at least consider setting up the game in advance.

Another part of the setup is explaining the rules. Though this is less related to the physical board game setup, it's an integral piece of the experience. A good rulebook can greatly improve a player's initial experience, and there are even some who consider it to be as important to a board game as the mechanics. YouTube channels like Watch It Played or videos created by the publishers themselves can be helpful resources to cut down on lengthy explanations and poorly-written rules.

That said, most games tend to have reasonable setups, even if it means shuffling a few decks. Having an easy setup is what oftentimes separates a good game from a great one, and if you can play a game that sets up twice as fast, that means you can play it twice as much as one that requires a lot of assembly. A game designed with easy setup will oftentimes be hard to notice because the experience takes the forefront. It's only when you run into games that are real beasts to set up that you realize how easy some of your favorite games are in contrast.

However, if you must play a game with a long or difficult setup, do your game group a favor and set it up in advance. This will make the game much more inviting to play.

2 Choose the Right Luggage for Your Goods

Board game storage is another facet of managing your collection. All too often, you will find board games that come in large, nearly-empty boxes when they could instead be placed into wallet-sized containers. But there are plenty of games — *Dice Forge* and *7 Wonders Duel* are good examples — that get it right. Games with a little more time and effort put into the box design are a tremendous boon to gamers. Instead of having components just shoved in, some publishers push for plastic inserts that are molded for the pieces and provide excellent dividers. But alas, that's not always the case. It's understandable that aesthetically, when you have board games on bookshelves, having all your games coming in at the same height and size makes a collection look better, but it's ridiculous how much space is being wasted.

There are some creative workarounds for great games with not-so-great packaging. *Splendor* is a fantastic game whose box is a little big for what fits inside it. *Race for the Galaxy* is also composed mainly of cards, packaged in a box the size of *Catan*. There are people on communities and forums like Reddit who cut down board game boxes into smaller sizes, and are able to get dozens of games to fit into three cubby-holes on a bookshelf.



Then there are games with the opposite problem. *Carcassonne* and *Mysterium* have so much in them once you've included expansions that after you've punched out all the tokens and assembled the miniatures, everything barely fits into the game box. Collectors and hobbyists often like having their miniatures displayed anyway, but something about how much extra effort massive games like this take to transport can be frustrating. Portable games like *Love Letter*, *Sushi Go*, and the *Tiny Epic* series offer a better experience when gaming away from home.



It does bother me that some games take up too much space while others could do with a little more space, but exceptions can be made for games that have expansions that fit into the base game box. Stonemeier Games released a "Big Box" for their hit board game *Scythe,* which can fit all the contents in one box and typically isn't too expensive. *Smash Up* released *The Bigger, Geekier Box* expansion that provides new content as well as enough dividers and foam inserts to comfortably house the original base game and future expansions.

The best games offer simple-yet-effective storage solutions, without expecting players to shell out fifty plus dollars on organizers. Games like *Disney Villainous* and *7 Wonders* come with built-in organizers and even thematic storage for tokens. Having components within easy reach makes games easier to teach while making for a smoother overall playthrough.

3 Hire a Crew to Sweep the Deck

Take *Betrayal at House on the Hill* for example. In order to play, you first have to set up floors tiles and shuffle them. Then the same with shuffling the omens deck, the events deck, and the items; tokens and the haunt tracker need to be ready to use, etc. There are also a lot of systems to manage, like remembering when the haunt triggers, and making sure a new player understands new rules added if they become the traitor. This makes a game that some are hesitant to teach, even if they receive plenty of requests to play it.

This leads into the topic of administration, which is the upkeep during the game, like shuffling cards, resetting components, and moving trackers. In *Sentinels of the Multiverse*, you have to manage effect tokens, track the environment, and control the villain along with his relics and minions. In *7 Wonders*, it's dealing out each new age of cards to players. Basically, anything that requires you to do something to keep the game going like controlling the overall game's mechanics requires someone with a firm grasp of the rules to handle correctly. Moving your piece around a board, or playing a card from your hand doesn't really fall into that admin role, more so moving enemy pieces, and game systems that in a video game would be controlled by the AI.

And speaking of AI, more games are using apps and even VR to control systems that are either too boring or too complex for players to handle. It also allows a level of obfuscation that can lead to more surprising moments for players. Being able to delegate the game's admin to an app instead of putting it on the players makes games go faster and feel smoother. In some games, the line between admin and intended gameplay can be blurry, as some people like admin and some designers like to give players control of vastly complex systems.

Apps can take away a little of the tactile feel, but the time saved more than makes up for that, either by reducing admin to the point where most don't care that they're using an app or, in the case of *XCOM*, providing an experience that would be hard to replicate without the technology intertwined. That's

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the type of admin-reducing experience that should be prioritized, over just adding an app to games that can be played without one. Games like *XCOM* demonstrate the recent innovations in board gaming, and act as cool initial experiences for new players. Whether you like them or not, these "new experiences" help invite others to the hobby. These include games like *One Night Ultimate Werewolf*, where everyone can play without people having to sit out to run it.

For the many games that don't have a companion app available, spreading some of the admin tasks to multiple players is a good idea. This reduces downtime and eases the burden on the person who is teaching and running the game (you).

All Aboard!

These three areas of gameplay — board game setup, storage, and administration — are often not discussed when it comes to people's enjoyment of a game. But in my experience, they are important factors to consider for creating streamlined gameplay.

Next time you're preparing to have some friends over, or hosting a family game night, there are a few small things you can do that go a long way in improving everyone's experience with a game. Choose games with a quick setup time, or set up a game ahead of time so players can see the visual elements and jump right into playing.

Look for games with good storage or use homemade or store-bought storage solutions to help pull out and store away components faster. Finally, check to see if there are any companion apps available to cut down on administration, or distribute tasks equally among players so no one person feels overwhelmed.

By using these strategies, you can reduce the barriers that keep people from sailing smoothly into the lifelong journey of board gaming.

A COMPLETE GAME FOR YOU TO PLAY & ENJOY!
COURTESY OF: PNP ARCADE

Night Class (Episode 1)
A Superhero Roll & Write by Jason Greeno
Published by Epic Endeavor Games
www.EpicEndeavorGames.com

OPENING THE FLOODGATES

Creating Experiences through Game Publishing



Jesse Tannous
Writer, Gamer, Editor, and Professional Nerd



For a game creator whose goal was to "tie positive experiences in life that can also be experienced in a game," Floodgate Games owner Ben Harkins has managed to successfully do just that.

Harkins took some time with CGI to reflect on the genesis of Floodgate Games and how his ideas have grown into the popular and unique series of games that Floodgate offers today.

A Leap Back in Time

Back in 2011, Harkins was at a gathering with his regular board game group, and they had just finished playing a game about time travel when Harkins thought, "That wasn't much fun, I can do better than this."

Harkins went home, gathered his ideas, and went about the task of designing his own board game about time travel. He didn't subscribe to the notion that one needs years and years of educational background before approaching game design and publication — he just dove right in. As he soon discovered, the path to success consists of luck, talent, and the will to see the process through to the end.

His first game, a time-traveling strategy card game called *Legacy: Gears of Time*, grew to the point where people wanted to "trade me money for a board game that I had made," Harkins recalled, chuckling. It was then that he remembered thinking, "Hey, I have this game that people seem to like, so I'm gonna try putting it on Kickstarter."

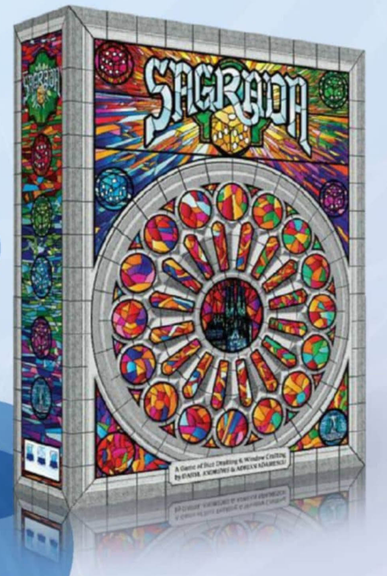
Harkins told us that the whole experience was a bit different for him because (by today's standards) it was fairly simple. Kickstarter was still in its infancy at the time, and he found that the novelty of the new platform worked to his advantage. "When I started, Kickstarter had maybe 16 game creations for possible backing and now there are like hundreds," Harkins said.

With the success of *Legacy: Gears of Time*, Harkins officially had his first game designed and published. The follow-up to this was *Epic Resort* — a quirky worker-placement game featuring heroes looking to relax.

Around 2014, Harkins started looking at games from other designers and ended up signing a game called *Vault Wars* by John Gilmore. Publishing *Vault Wars* opened up opportunities to work with even more games and designers. In only three years, Harkins had graduated from simple game creator to full-blown game publisher.



The Floodgates of *Sagrada*



But it wasn't until 2017 that Harkins realized that he had a bona fide "game-changer" in *Sagrada*. The concept of drafting colored dice to create miniature stained-glass windows provided such a distinct blend of theme and game design that, once implemented into game-friendly play, resonated with board game fans everywhere.

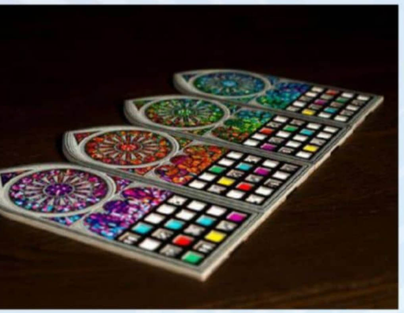
Sagrada put Floodgate Games on the map and allowed Harkins to make the business of game creation and publication his full-time focus and livelihood.

Taking that step from hobby to career has enabled Harkins to work solely on making games for people. Now he is involved in the development and art direction, seeing each game through from creation to publication. This is a place where Harkins feels right at home, and one where he sees his input as adding value rather than being an obstacle to other game creators or art designers.

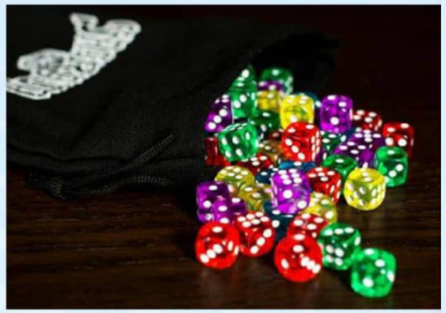
Publishing games is no small task. Harkins recalls getting samples from maybe seven manufacturers simultaneously — by far the most challenging component of game publication.

"I think, from what I can tell, most people don't necessarily want to become a game publisher when they have a game they've been working on," Harkins explained. "To be successful as a publisher, it takes so much more than that. I have run into designers who have found themselves in that situation and they are kind of looking for an 'out' once they realize they have become a game publisher."

The realities (and headaches) of board game manufacturing and promotion aside, being a board game publisher means continuing to innovate and find unique ideas to design and market.







In Sagrada, players draft and place colorful dice on their stained glass windows to fulfill patterns and score points.

Man With a Mission

So…what does Harkins believe must go into a good board game design? He recounts his own company mission statement in answering that question: "Create everlasting experiences through gaming."

"It is in the experiences you are having that brings interest and longevity," Harkins remarked. "People need to ask themselves, 'What kind of experience am I having when I play this?' or 'What is bringing my friends and family together?'"

Games must have high moments and the ability to keep people engaged. They should be easy to learn and fun to play for the casual gaming fans, but also have depth in order to "scratch the itch" of the hardcore gamer.

"Projects that are better suited for Kickstarter versus ones I'm interested in [publishing] contain a level of expandability," he explained. "A big part is having things like 'stretch goals' and beyond — I prefer to release a whole experience up front."

Of course, each game presents its own challenges. "I have a game that will be announced soon but has been in the works for two and a half years and has had at least three revisions," Harkins said.





Above: Ben Harkins at Con of the North 2015, posing at Gen Con 2017 with Sagrada designer Daryl Andrews and graphic designer Peter Wocken. Below: Harkins demoes a game at PAX South 2019.

Escaping to the Real World

Recently, Floodgate Games seems to have found a formula for creating unique games each time.

Once again, Harkins goes back to the mission statement for Floodgate Games each and every time a challenge arises.

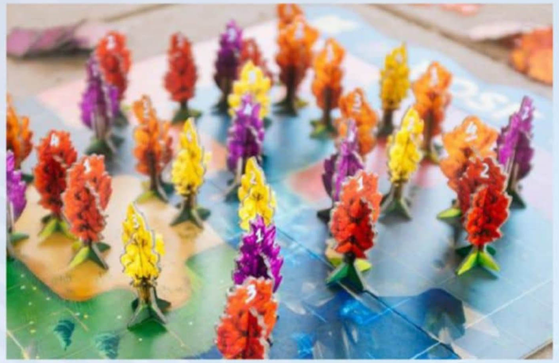
"I have started to focus on our mission of 'creating everlasting experiences through gaming' with unique themes that are relatable to folks in real life," Harkins said.

Harkins believes that games today should tie into positive experiences in life and then make it possible to be experienced in a game. "Not everyone is looking for a deep fantasy world behind the game or a gigantic story behind it," Harkins said.

There are quite a few gamers who are under-served that want to "flex the muscles of their strategy brain" without having to dive deep in the lore of a fantasy world.

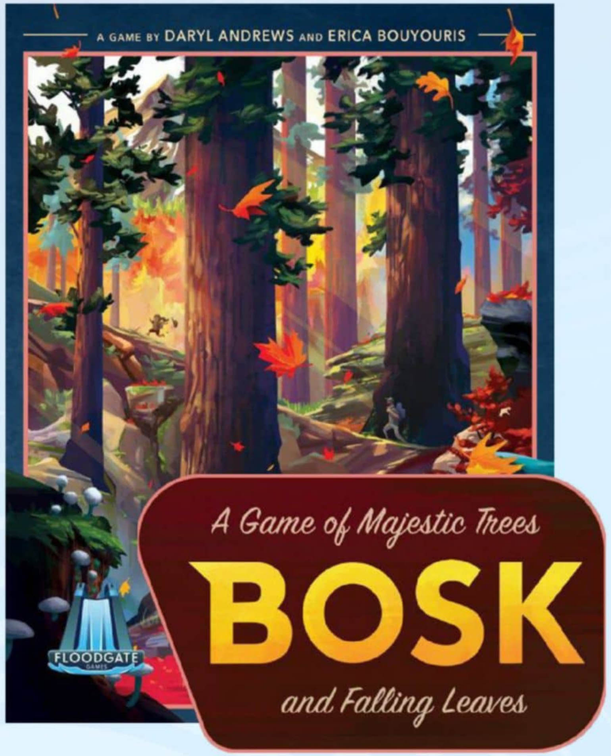
The biggest opportunity for creating games that bring both hardcore gamers and their families or casual gaming friends to the same table is finding an experience that doesn't fall into the prevalent fantasy or science fiction themes. An example of this success came when





a board game enthusiast said, "Man, this is one of the only games I can get my spouse to play with me."

In much the same way, Floodgate Games' *Bosk* offers players a chance to experience nature by wandering through a beautiful national park. Players are the intimate caretakers of their trees and hikers enjoy the journey; there's strategy involved with *Bosk*, but one that's mixed with the joy of real-life "escapism" firmly set in the theme of the board game.



Harkins also tried to explain the difference between games he decides to publish and what many would term gateway games. "The term 'gateway game' is encompassing a broad category of 'game weight' in a sense, whereas not necessarily pertaining to the relatability of the game," explained Harkins. "And that is the subtle difference of the games I am trying to create."

In this way, and through most of Floodgate Games, Harkins has realized his company's mission statement. With the hard work and focus of a full-time game publisher, he seems poised to continue to do so.

When all is said and done, life is really all about the memories created through these shared experiences. ⚄

FLOODGATE GAMES

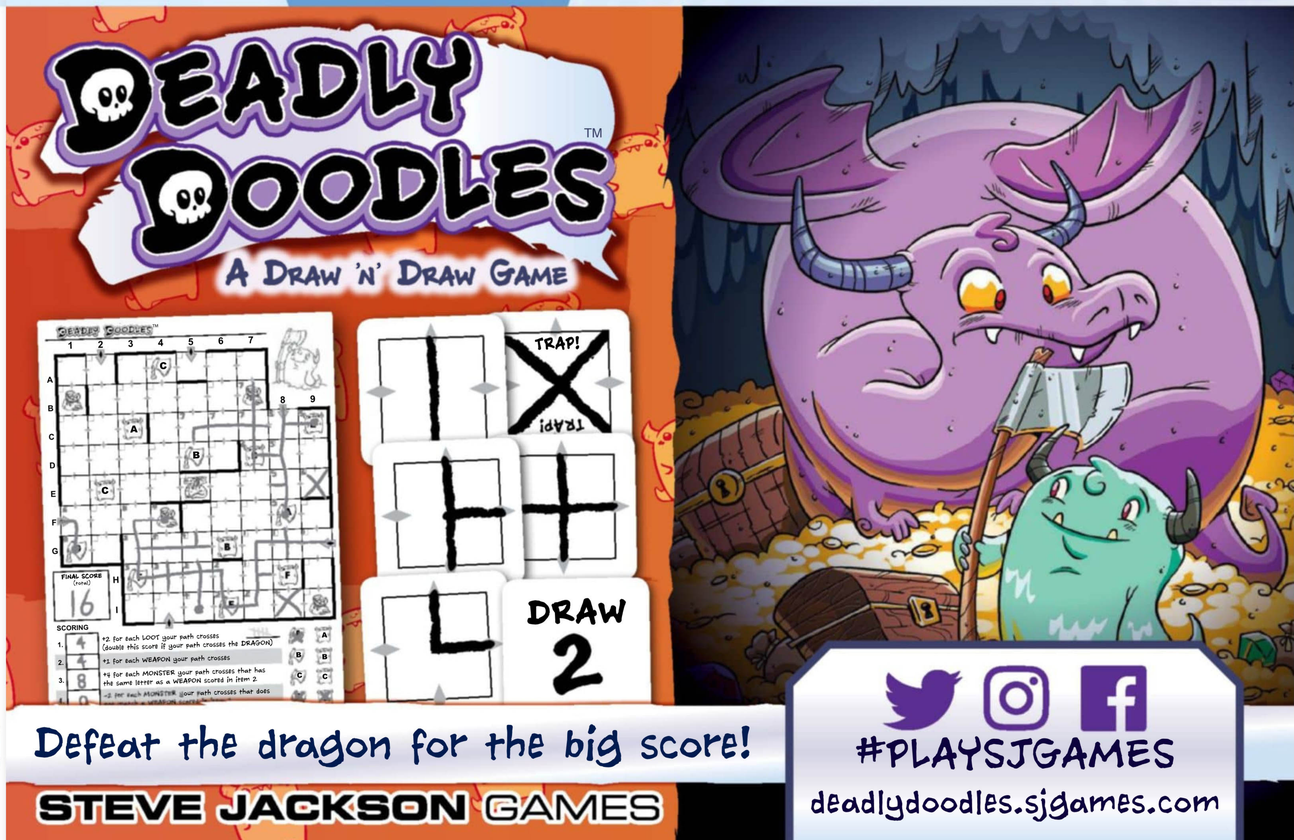


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2019 LUCI GAME DESIGN AWARDS

The annual indie tabletop game design competition, the Northwest LUCI Awards, returned for its 4th year thanks to PlaytestNW, Evergreen Tabletop Expo (ETX), and DigiPen Institute of Technology. The LUCI Award recognizes unpublished prototype games from indie game designers and offers a great opportunity to showcase the up-and-coming talent in the tabletop community. The LUCI Awards are often just the first step for these innovative games before they go off into the world and onto even greater successes.

Eight semi-finalists were selected to showcase their game before a panel of judges, made up of prominent game designers and tabletop community influencers, at ETX. After all games were presented to the panel of judges, two finalist games were selected for a live streamed hot seat Q & A with the judges to decide the winner.

WINNER: BEST GAME DESIGN 2019

Cabinet of Curiosities by David Iezzi took home the award for Best Game Design 2019 by wowing the judges with its unique layering of different game mechanics into a fun and strategic spatial bidding game. Players take turns placing bids for items like feathers and potions in hopes of having the most valuable collection by the end of the game. *Cabinet of Curiosities* is a highly competitive game and had everyone wanting to play again and again!

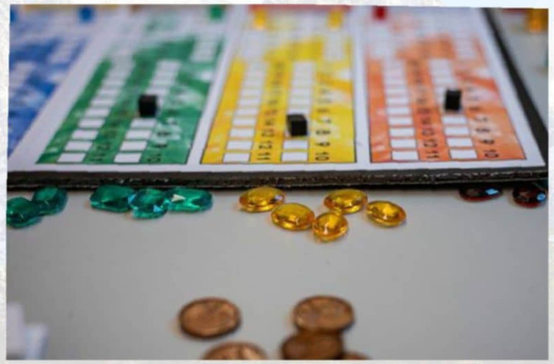




Cabinet of Curiosities by David Iezzi won Best Game Design at the 2019 Northwest LUCI Awards (game artwork by David Iezzi; photos by Be Bold Games, BeBoldGames.com).

RUNNER-UP

If abstract strategy games are your jam, ***Mandalaca*** by Rob Lewis is sure to keep you engaged and excited to play again! *Mandalaca* uses the pick-up-and-drop-off mechanic that you are familiar with in *Mancala* but brings it into a new world of shifting color dominance and strategic point collecting. The harmonious game board and easy-to-learn gameplay really helped *Mandalaca* stand out as a finalist for the LUCI Awards.





PEOPLE'S CHOICE AWARD 2019

Every year the attendees of ETX vote on their favorite game out of the LUCI Award semi-finalists to determine the People's Choice Award. ***Gem Cataclysm*** by Beau Johnson and Nicolette Butler of Very Best Friend Games earned this award for their game, which features buying and selling gems in a volatile fantasy market. Inspired by stock-market Eurogames, Gem Cataclysm gives players a range of actions to perform in order to influence the price of gems. With over a year of heavy playtesting in the Seattle area, *Gem Cataclysm* is a game that is ready for publishing.

HONORABLE MENTION

All eight judges agreed that they couldn't let this competition pass without mentioning ***Rising Tides*** by Just Us Games. This cooperative survival game takes on climate change and rising sea levels in an interactive game that actually uses water! Created as part of a climate change themed 48-hour game jam, Rising Tides is the impactful educational game about climate change that should be shown everywhere!



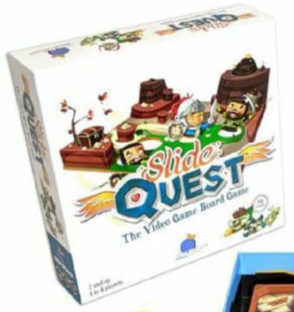


Photo by PlaytestNW (PlaytestNW.com)

A BIG THANK YOU!

The greatest joy of the annual Northwest LUCI Awards comes from meeting fellow game designers and passionate gamers in our tabletop community. We had many returning judges this year that also included many past LUCI Award winners. Thank you to the judges, game designers, and volunteers who made this contest and event possible! We look forward to seeing you all again for next year's competition!

The judges for the LUCI Awards included prominent game designers and tabletop community influencers, many of which were past LUCI Award winners.



Inspired by classic side-scroller video games, *Slide Quest* is a truly unique dexterity game in which players must work together to help a hero complete their quest.





Naomi Laeuchli
Game Reviewer and
Casual Game Groupie

Four levers are slotted into the side of the game box. A platform covered in holes is balanced on top of these levers, and a map is placed over the platform. Each map will have a number of traps and spaces where enemies may appear. A small hero figurine is placed on the start location. Players must work together by tilting the board with the levers in order to complete the map's win condition. You may have to guide the hero along a particular path to the exit mark, or you may have to nudge villains into specific traps. The hero starts with a certain number of lives that can be lost if the hero falls into a trap, if a stick of dynamite is knocked over, if an enemy is pushed into the wrong trap, or if the boss is pushed into a trap before defeating the other enemies. If you ever run out of lives, you lose the game.

Slide Quest

Designed by Nicolas Bourgoin, Jean-François Rochas

1-4 PLAYERS | 15-45 MINS | AGES 7+ | $28 MSRP

INTERACTIVE — INDEPENDENT

Players can choose to either play a Mini Quest, in which they must complete five maps in order to win, or the Grand Quest, in which players must complete all 20 of the increasingly-difficult maps. The game includes a dial that lets you save the number of lives you have and the map you are on if you need or wish to take a break while playing through the Grand Quest mode.

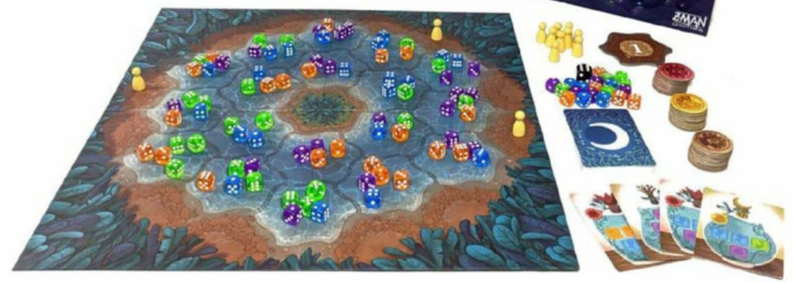
Slide Quest ensures that every player is involved while still putting stress on cooperation. Working together is vital, but each player needs to make their own judgment calls and is responsible for their own lever. Each side of the box also has a unique color to help players communicate direction.

There are a few questions that can arise that are not specifically covered in the rulebook, but other than that the components are good quality. There's plenty of detail in the maps, and the hero himself is a solid and colorful game piece. The game also has a satisfying difficulty escalation, and you can play a variation in which you are up against a timer each map — run out of time and you lose a life. This is a solid and thematic addition once you're familiar with the game.

Slide Quest is unusual, creative, and just sheer good fun as you challenge yourself, tackle increasingly tough challenges, and ultimately save the day and complete the quest.

Players are attempting to collect glowing sea creatures (represented by four different colors of dice) in order to fill healing jars in the lovely, colorful world of *Noctiluca*.





The game is played on a board with a series of hexagons. At the beginning of each round, dice are randomly rolled and distributed among the hexagons, with five on all the outer spaces and four on the inner spaces. The twelve pawns are distributed evenly between all players. Each player also begins the game with two jar cards face up in front of them. The rest of the jar cards are divided into four piles and set aside, with the top cards of each pile visible. Each jar shows various colored dice you need in order to complete it.

On your turn, you place a pawn on an empty shore space along the edge of the board. There will be two straight lanes of hexagons leading from where your pawn is standing. You select one lane, announce a number one through six, and take all the dice in that lane showing that number. You then place as many as you can into your jar cards. (When placing dice on a card, the number is not important, only the color.) Extra dice that you are unable to place are handed to the next player, who can select one die if able to add to their jars. The dice continue to go around the table until they have all been placed, while any dice that cannot be placed by players are discarded.

Jar cards come in three different colors. When you fill all the dice spaces on a jar card, you take the top scoring token that matches the card's color and then select one of the four face up cards from the jar draw piles. (Scoring tokens of a single color increase in value as more are taken.) The round ends once all dice have been placed, and the game ends after two rounds. Players score points for their tokens, for certain filled jars, for having completed the most jars in a color, and for a personal objective of collecting dice of a specific color.

Noctiluca is eye-catchingly beautiful and very streamlined in its ruleset. While there is minimal player interaction, you never feel as if you are off playing your own game — you constantly have to stay aware of what other players are working towards and try not to hand them too many dice while claiming the ones you need. Strategic yet light, *Noctiluca* offers interesting challenges and choices, and even includes an intriguing solo variant. The atmosphere and gameplay are both relaxing, while the puzzle is engaging.

Noctiluca

Designed by Shem Phillips

1-4 PLAYERS | 30 MINS | AGES 8+ | $35 MSRP

LUCK — STRATEGY

INTERACTIVE — INDEPENDENT

BUGS ON RUGS



Bugs on Rugs **is a set-collection and card-drafting game with open information. Each round, the last card left undrafted initiates a special effect, so what you leave behind can be just as important as what you take.**



At the beginning of each round, two cards for each player, plus one extra, is dealt faceup into the center of the table. Players take turns drafting one card each in clockwise order, then draft a second card in counterclockwise order. The final card left in the center of the table is moved up to a line that forms 'the wall' and performs its wall ability. There are nine different types of bugs, and each one has its own unique wall ability. For example, the ladybug lets each player draw a bug card from the deck into their hand, while the fly forces everyone to pass a card from their hand to the player on their right.

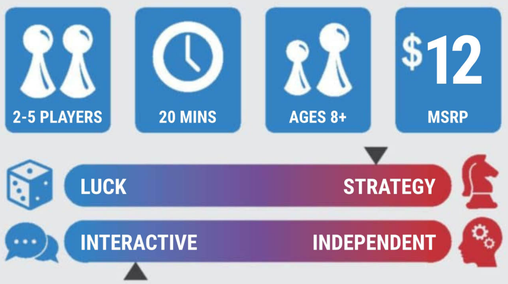
Play continues until the game end card is drawn and the final round completed. Players then group their cards by card type, reveal them simultaneously, and score their hands. Each bug sores in a different way. Ants, for example, score extra points for the player who has the most of them; beetles are worth five points each if you have an even number but only two points if you have an odd number; spiders are worth seven points if you discard a fly to feed it. Two mosquitos can be grouped together to act as a wild card for any other bug group.

Bugs on Rugs is a light card game that has some surprising depth in its scoring. It's not uncommon in drafting games for remaining cards to be discarded at the end of the draft, so it's a clever twist on the genre to have that remaining card actually have quite an impact on gameplay. You need to carefully consider how that final card ability could affect you and how to best use it to your advantage.

There are a lot of abilities to keep track of, while some of the symbols on the cards can be confusing. But once you learn what each card does, the gameplay is smooth and fast. There's a lot of open information to use when planning your strategy, but there's just enough that's kept secret to ensure some surprises. With cute buggy artwork, *Bugs on Rugs* offers a surprising amount of depth and fun in a small package.

Bugs on Rugs

Designed by Peter C. Hayward



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With visually stunning creative packaging and presentation, *Blockbuster* is a treat to look at and an enjoyable party game for movie fans that scratches the nostalgic itch.

Players divide into two teams. The goal of the game is to collect one movie card from each of the eight genres. Each round, one player from each team is selected and a head-to-head card is drawn. This gives a prompt such as movies with planes or movies with superheroes, and the two players take turns naming a movie that fits, restarting the timer after each movie name. The first person to run out of time loses the head-to-head battle. The winner then draws six movie cards, looks at the movies listed on them, selects three, and hands the rest to the loser. Both players place one movie card on each of the three sections on their side of the board.

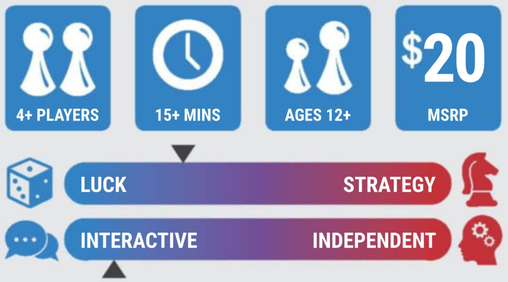
The winning team then goes first, followed by the opposing team. The player who won the head-to-head battle starts the thirty-second timer and attempts to get their team to guess their three movies following the rules for each section. In the first section, you may only use one word to describe the movie; in the second one, you must use a quote from the movie (or make something up if you don't know one); the third section has you act out the movie silently. If your team guesses all three movies, you may use any remaining time to attempt to guess cards on your opponent's side of the board. Then the opposing team takes a turn.

Any cards that were not guessed are then discarded and a new round begins, with two new players being chosen for the next head-to-head battle. Once per round, your team can also steal a movie card from your opponents by discarding three movie cards that belong to a single genre.

Blockbuster is definitely a party game that will only be enjoyable for movie fans, but it doesn't require all players to have an equal level of knowledge. The different types of clues also mean that each movie card can be explored in different, fun, and imaginative ways. The head-to-head battles are challenging and tense — but they can also be too powerful for the winner, who assigns all three movie cards to the opposing team. This can leave them feeling frustrated if they're stuck with three movies they've never heard of. But this can be fixed with a house rule of assigning only one card.

Packaged in a VHS-inspired case, aesthetics alone make it an easy game to get on the table, and there are enough twists to the trivia-game format to make *Blockbuster* fun to play and more than just a novelty item.

Blockbuster
Designer uncredited





Bumúntú has a theme inspired by African folklore, and lovely components with solid, attractive tiles. Choose eight of ten animal types to play with, fill the board, and let the games begin!

To set it up, you take the eight tile types that you're playing with and lay them at random on the game board in an eight-by-eight grid. Place the scoring track to the side; this will also show, in a row, eight different ways tiles can score. Shuffle the scoring tiles for each animal represented on the board and deal one onto each of the eight scoring methods.

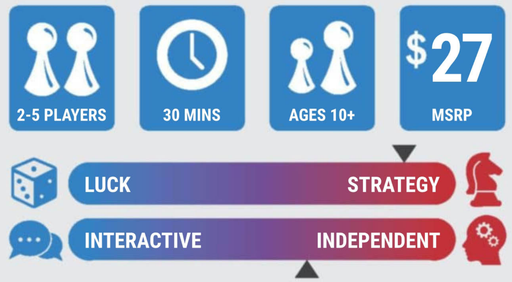
On your turn, you may spend food chips to move your pawn one space on the board for each chip. You then choose to either move your pawn one space in any direction (but do not collect any tiles) or move according to the animal tile you are on (if applicable). Each animal gives you a unique movement ability, such as moving in a straight line any number of spaces, jumping from one tile to another, or moving and then pushing an opponent one space. After using an animal's movement, you collect the tile you used and remove it from the board.

Each tile also has a special icon in addition to the animal depicted on it. These icons will give you food chips, score points at the end of the game, or allow you to swap any two adjacent scoring tiles on the scoreboard. There are sixteen animal tiles that let you affect the scoring tiles, and the game ends once the last tile is collected. Players then score points based on what tiles they have, with each animal scoring according to the position of its tile on the scoreboard. For example, some animal tiles will score based on the number you have, while others may only give points to the players who collected the most tiles of that animal.

Bumúntú is a simple-to-learn strategy game with nuance in the strategies opened to you. It feels a bit uninteresting at first, but the fun escalates as more and more tiles are removed from the board and you start to battle with your opponents for the best remaining tiles. Additionally, there's a lot of variety between games, from the ability to mix and match which animals to include, to the randomized setup of the board.

The manipulation of the scoring system also keeps the game suspenseful, as you can never be certain exactly how many points you're holding until the end of the game. *Bumúntú* is an abstract game with a high production quality — it can be enjoyed equally by families and adult gaming groups alike, making it a good fit for nearly any game collection.

Bumúntú
Designed by Tim Blank





The heist is over and it's time to divvy up the loot. But you have to hurry because the cops are on their way!

Arcane Wonders

At the start of each round of ***GoodCritters***, the player who is currently the boss draws a number of loot cards equal to the number of players, plus two. Loot cards are worth varying amounts. The boss decides how to distribute these cards (it does not have to be equal and they do not have to give a card to everyone). Players then talk, argue, and try to make deals. You can also place your threat token on another player. Finally, once each player has selected an action card, the next phase begins. Action cards are revealed, starting with the boss, and resolved in clockwise order. Each player has five actions to choose from: skim (the first time this card is resolved each round, the player takes the top card from the loot draw deck), rob (this allows you to steal one loot card from the player's stash whom you placed your threat token on), guard (this protects you from a rob attempt and allows you to steal a loot card from the player who attempted to rob you), vote yes on the division of loot, or vote no.

If the vote passes, the player who is currently the boss remains in the position and the cards are divided as planned. If it's a tie, the cards are divided as planned but the current boss loses the position, which moves to the next player in clockwise order. If the vote fails, the cards are returned to the center of the table, and a new player becomes boss. Rather than drawing a whole new set of loot cards, the new boss will draw two new ones for the next round and redistribute the cards. The game ends once the police card is drawn. The player with the most money in loot wins the game.

The artwork is fun, and the rules and setup are relatively simple. With a full player count, discussions may run long, but the game does offer rule variants to circumvent this issue. The multiple layers of social interaction is where the game shines. There are negotiations and deals that can be kept and broken between rounds, there's the question of who is boss and whether or not to vote on the distribution or get into the weeds with skimming and robbing. There is also the ability to bluff with your threat token — just because you place it doesn't mean you have to use it. Alliances can be formed and broken, and there's lots of room for different tactics and ways to play the game.

GoodCritters
Designed by Fabian Zimmermann

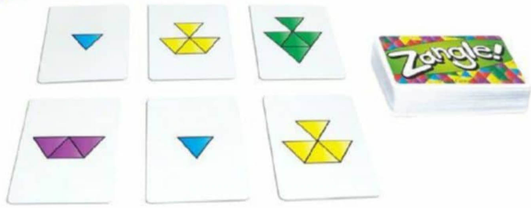
4-8 PLAYERS | 30 MINS | AGES 12+ | $25 MSRP

LUCK — STRATEGY

INTERACTIVE — INDEPENDENT



Zangle! is an enjoyable, visual puzzle about spotting patterns and testing your speed.



SET ENTERPRISES INC.

Each player is dealt ten cards. You flip four of these face up in front of you and keep the others as your draw pile. Four cards are also placed face up in the center. Players are encouraged to learn the rules in turn-based mode before moving on to speed mode, where they race against each other simultaneously.

Each card shows patterns created by triangles. You must combine two or more cards using the triangle patterns to create the pattern shown on another card. You must use cards from the center of the table as well as from your hand. You then remove the cards, replenish those in the middle from the general draw pile, and replace yours from your personal draw pile. If you are ever stuck, you can add a card to your hand from the general draw pile. The round ends once someone runs out of cards, and players earn one point for each card still in their hand and/or draw pile. The player with the lowest number of points after a set number of rounds wins the game. In speed mode, the winner of each round takes a handicap for subsequent rounds, such as playing with their non-dominant hand or covering one eye.

Speed mode adds a frenetic element of fun to the game while the puzzle aspect is satisfying. Some players might find the pattern searching challenging, but the handicaps help keep things balanced. ***Zangle!*** is easy to pick up but harder to put down, as you keep wanting to try again and improve.

Zangle!
Designed by Marsha J. Falco

1-6 PLAYERS | 45 MINS | AGES 6+ | $13 MSRP

LUCK — STRATEGY

INTERACTIVE — INDEPENDENT

OTHER RECOMMENDED GAMES
For a complete list, visit CasualGameRevolution.com/games

CASUAL GAME RECOMMENDED





Fantasy Ranch is Major Fun!



The Concept

You started when you were young. Riding the trails, corralling horses through the wilderness, guiding them through shows and into camp to add to your herd.

Next, you bought a barn and a small patch of land — just enough for a few horses. Can you make your ranch into the talk of the town? With a lot of hard work and planning (and a little luck), folks will flock from miles away to admire the ranch and the beautiful show horses you've raised.

Fantasy Ranch is a collection of six horse-themed games enjoyable by a wonderfully wide range of players, whether you're a greenhorn or a grizzled ranch hand.



The Components

The production quality of Fantasy Ranch is top-notch. There is a double-sided main board along with dice and tokens. There are also six double-sided ranch boards. Each player receives a player aid/ranch mat with photos from an actual horse ranch.

Two elements will most likely produce 'oohs' and 'ahhs' when revealed: the horse cards and horse figures.

There are 57 small wooden horse figures in five different colors and patterns. They are ridiculously charming.

The 57 horse cards each feature a lovely photograph and game icons representing the horse's abilities and talents.

All these elements combine to create a beautiful tableau as the game unfolds. Don't be surprised if someone stops the game to take a pic or two of their ranch.

The Mechanics

There are two basic game modes: Trail Ride and Fantasy Ranch. Each of these modes has a beginner, intermediate, and advanced set of rules, each one building intuitively on knowledge and experience from the prior.

Trail Ride has a roll-and-move mechanism at its core. You will move along paths to reach a camp space at the end. However, the goal of the game is to collect horses that will increase your score. There are spaces to buy and sell horses along the way. There are terrain features which may make moving more difficult. And there are show spaces along the paths that could allow you to collect resources and additional horses. As you move through the levels of Trail Ride, you unlock new ways of scoring your herd, providing some strategic decisions about which horses to collect.

Fantasy Ranch is played over five rounds. Each round, players will select one action: buy horses, buy new locations on their ranch board, or collect six resources. At the end of a round, a horse show is held. Players will enter a horse in the competition, rolling dice based on the talents of each horse. Collect horses and build ranch locations that provide trophies to score points.

There are many gamerly elements added as you progress from level to level, including twist of fate cards that provide secret ways for you to score, hired hands that provide a temporary ability or bonus, and a deck of horse show cards that make the competitions change from game to game. There's even an area control element added at the highest level, where control of ranch boards can shift from player to player depending on the size of your herd.



What Sets This Game Apart?

Passion sets *Fantasy Ranch* apart. This game is the brainchild of two horse-crazy sisters, Keshia and Antastasia Swanlund. Their passion seeps into every aspect of the game, from the information on the horse cards to the detailed ranch profiles and the actual equestrian sponsors whose products are included on the board and cards. This isn't crass commercialism; it demonstrates their deep connection to the subject which enhances the enjoyment of the game. You can't fake this level of love and attention to detail. And you don't have to be a horse nut like them to be pulled into the experience. If anything, their passion may inspire you to want to learn more about horses!

Fantasy Ranch

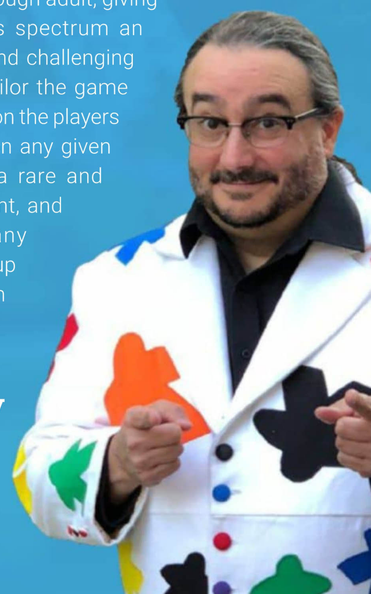
Designed by Keshia Swanlund, Anastasia Swanlund

2-4 PLAYERS | 15-75 MINS | AGES 5+ | $40 MSRP

Final Thoughts

I want to close by emphasizing the amazingly flexible game experience *Fantasy Ranch* provides in a single box. Name another game that can accommodate players from ages 5 through adult, giving each player along this spectrum an opportunity for a fun and challenging experience. You can tailor the game you want to play based on the players you have at the table on any given day or night. This is a rare and noteworthy achievement, and just one among many reasons you will rustle up a herd of Major Fun each time you play. ⚄

Stephen Conway
on duty as Major Fun and host of The Spiel



Your Turn!

A Spotlight on the Gaming Community CGI

What game has been in your collection the longest?



"*Catan*, it's just timeless and an easy gateway game for new players."

— Reed M.

Photos by Scott King Photography

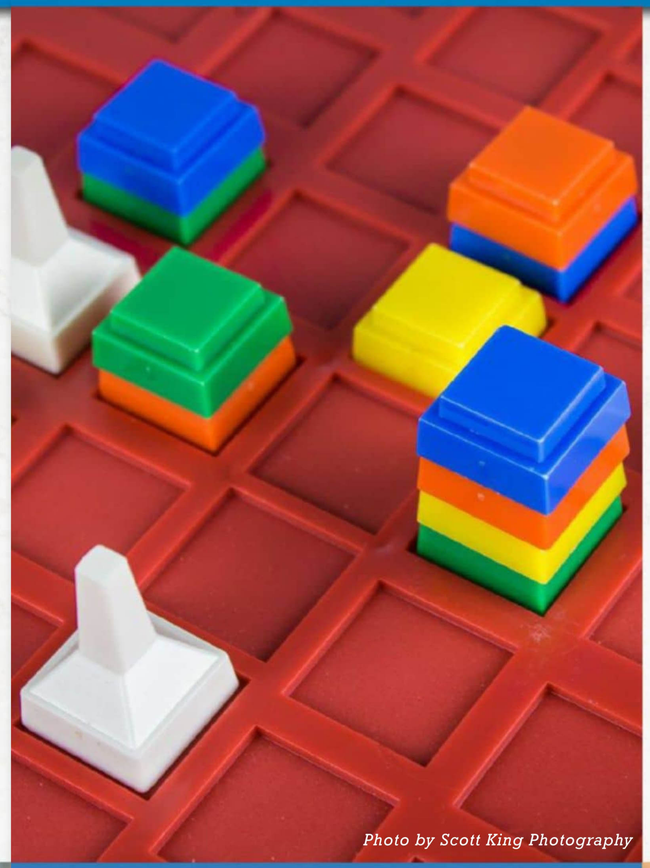


Photo by Scott King Photography

"I used to play the game Can't Stop at my Grandma's house with my brother and cousins. Now we own it and still play it once in awhile."

— Katie Weiss

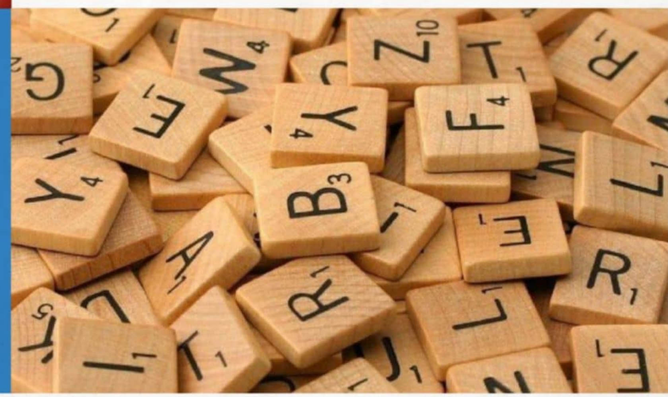
"*Ticket To Ride*. Only choosing one of three possible actions every turn leads to fast play and no wait times, which is ideal to pique the interest of new gamers."

— Nicholas R.



"It's not the newest, or the coolest, or modern by any means, but *Scrabble* has been in my collection since I was a kid and it still gets table time more times a year than any other game I own."

— Kristopher O.



"Trivial Pursuit. It's a tradition to play this game when my grandma comes to visit. It used to be my great-grandma's game (she bought it in the 1980s) and has been passed down through the generations!"

— Alecia G.

"*Payday*. I have the same copy I bought when I got married the first time, in 1981. I played with my kids, now playing with grandkids — it's awesome."

— Amber B.



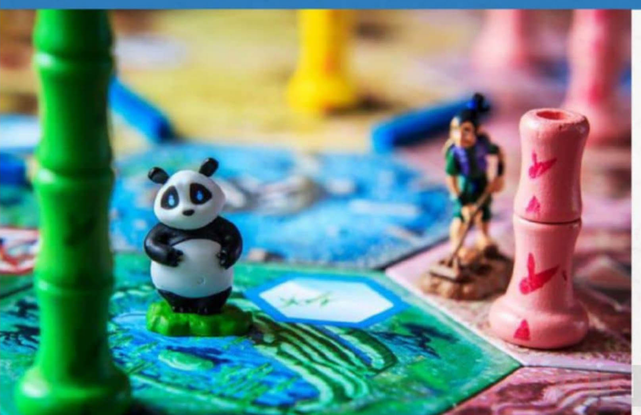
Photos by Scott King Photography

"The oldest game that still gets semi-regular play would be *Carcassonne*. Bought it in 2005 or so, when we first started getting into Eurogames (we finally got tired of *Cranium*)."

— Jamie B.

"*Careers*. I still enjoy this game very much. Although probably not considered a modern game now, it was certainly ahead of its time when originally published."

— Michael S.



"*Takenoko*, *Betrayal at House on the Hill*, *Dixit*, *Carcassonne*...the classics never get old. Also, if I'm with a group of people that haven't played games before, these are the best and easiest to teach!"

— Jim H.

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Photo by Scott King Photography

"*Stone Age*. It is one of our family's favorite worker placement games and we will always take the opportunity to teach it whenever we can. It was one of the first 'modern' games we picked up."

— Michael C.

"The original *Monopoly* game. It will always be my all time favorite. I love to be the first to buy Boardwalk and Park Place."

— Sherrie S.



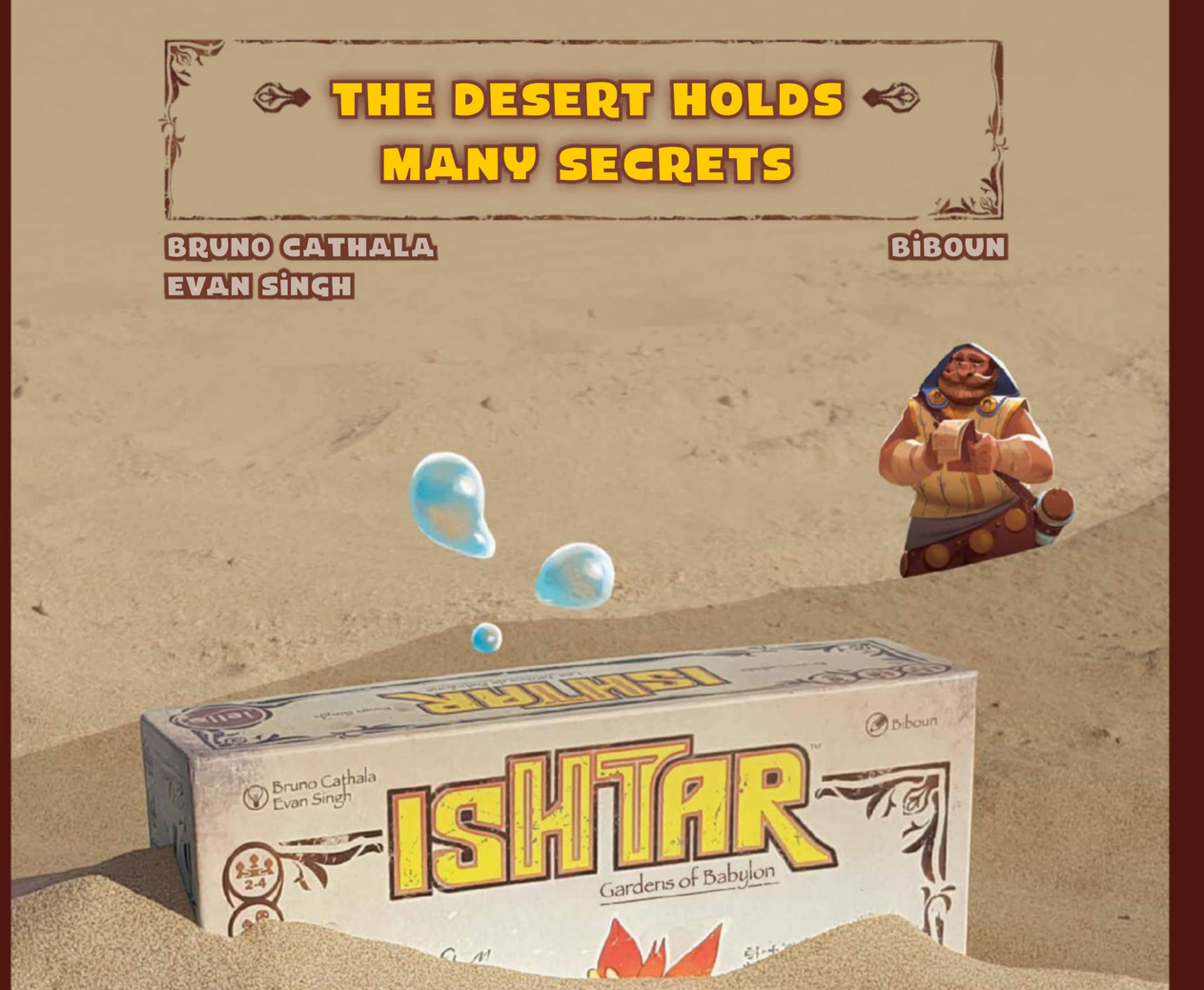
Next Issue: What is the best game you ever backed on Kickstarter?

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

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