



# CASUAL GAME

I ■ N ■ S ■ I ■ D ■ E ■ R

## CHRONICLES OF CRIME THE MILLENNIUM SERIES



1400

### GEN CON ONLINE

Read the highlights from the first major virtual game convention

### STORY- TELLING

The best games, past and present, that create a rich story-driven experience





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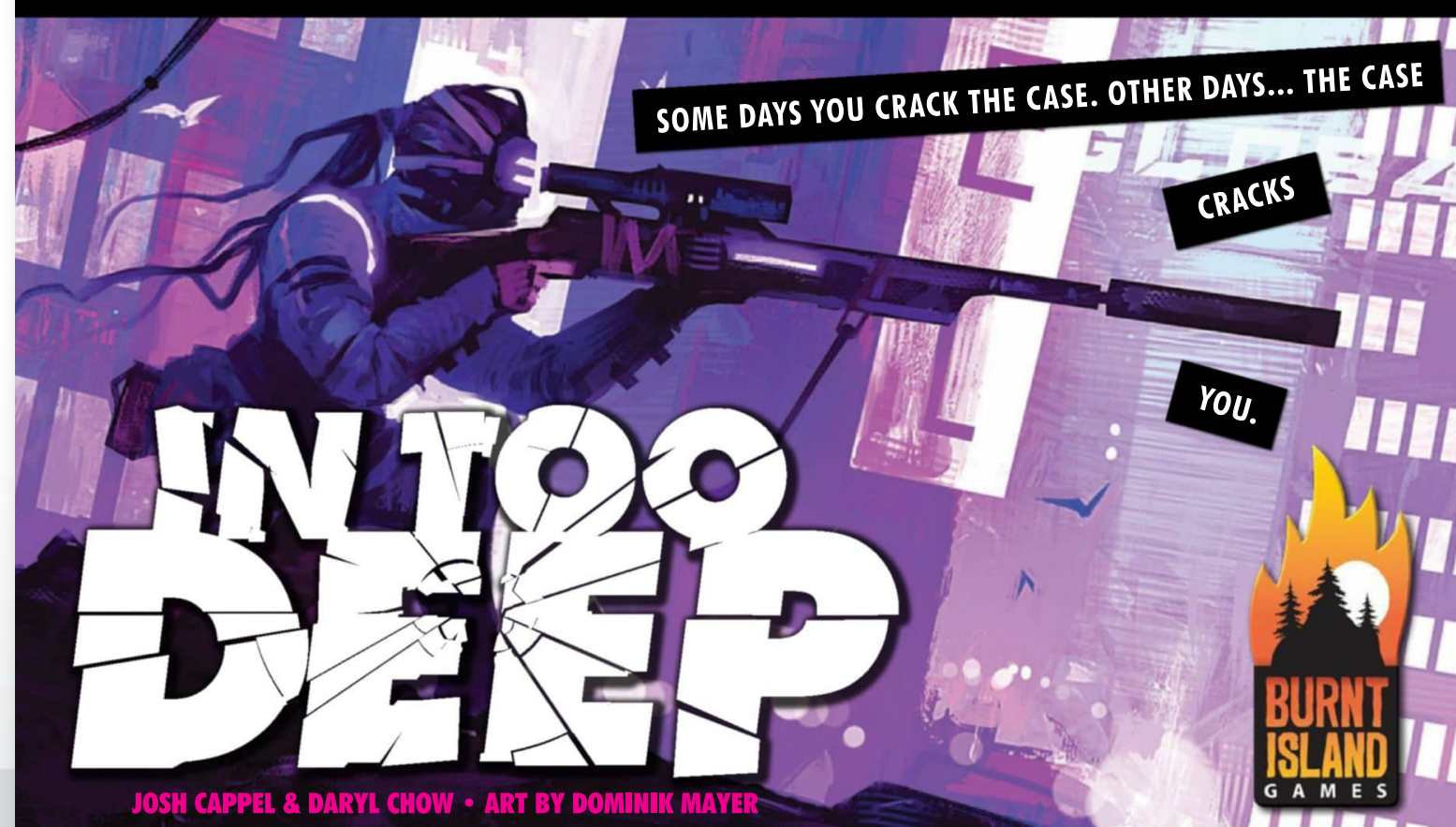
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"A casual board (or card) game is played in under an hour, set up and taught in under 10 minutes, and requires some light strategic thought. Casual games are not specifically marketed to children, but can be enjoyed by anyone from older children to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



JOSH CAPPEL & DARYL CHOW • ART BY DOMINIK MAYER

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Lucky Duck Games is an international tabletop game publisher on a mission to bring highly innovative and engaging board games to all tables.

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Gate Keeper Games exists to actualize epic game ideas and treat every guest like they are a dear friend in our home. Creator of *The King's Armory*, *Halfsies Dice*, and many other popular game and dice products.

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Arcane Wonders, founded in 2012 by Bryan Pope, publishes strategic, competitive, and social board and card games to enjoy with your friends, including *Mage Wars*, *Sheriff of Nottingham*, and *Onitama*.

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[GrandpaBecksGames.com](http://GrandpaBecksGames.com)



The Op, also known as usaopoly, is behind your favorite board games & puzzles with brands fans love. We are passionate about bringing family & friends together to create memorable experiences through play!

[TheOp.games](http://TheOp.games)



Alley Cat Games are an independent board game publisher, releasing titles such as *Dice Hospital* and *Chocolate Factory*. We focus on creating unique tabletop experiences that are bursting with theme.

[AlleyCatGames.com](http://AlleyCatGames.com)



Smirk & Dagger thrills to create games that cause a stir...richly themed games designed to make you 'feel' something when you play.

[SmirkAndDagger.com](http://SmirkAndDagger.com)



IELLO is a globally recognized board game publisher. IELLO's goal is to bring the world games that are irresistible, intriguing enough to pick up, and impossible to put down.

[IELLOUSA.com](http://IELLOUSA.com)



Fireside Games publishes highly thematic games for a casual good time! You can defend your castle against monsters (*Castle Panic*), collect the most cats (*Here, Kitty, Kitty!*), fight off bears (*Bears!*), build steampunk airships (*Dastardly Dirigibles*), and cast spells on villagers (*The Village Crone*).

[FiresideGames.com](http://FiresideGames.com)



KTBG (Kids Table Board Games) makes casual games for serious gamers and serious games for casual gamers. Burnt Island Games focuses on mid-weight games that are easy to learn and reveal surprising depth and richness.

[KidsTableBG.com](http://KidsTableBG.com)



Czech Games Edition is a group of people who love board games and enjoy creating them for players like themselves. They've produced over 40 board games and expansions, including *Codenames*, *Sanctum*, *Letter Jam*, *Tzolk'in*, and *Through the Ages*.

[CzechGames.com](http://CzechGames.com)



Quick Simple Fun Games has been in business since 2015, and has learned a lot in that time. We are bringing fun games that are easy to learn to our community.

[QuickSimpleFun.com](http://QuickSimpleFun.com)



Blue Orange Games is a leading creator of tabletop games that excite and challenge all ages. The company is driven to inspire families to "unplug" and connect over a game.

[BlueOrangeGames.com](http://BlueOrangeGames.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*.

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# CHRONICLES OF CRIME

THE MILLENNIUM SERIES

## 1400



It is the year 1400 and you are Abelard Lavel, a knight living in Paris. Since you were a child, strange prophetic dreams of past and future crimes have haunted you. You managed to put your power to good use, solving mysteries that nobody else could. Now thanks to your growing reputation, the people of Paris seek your help. Will you come to their aid?

*Chronicles of Crime* is back with a brand new standalone game, the first of three that make up "The Millennium Series". Fans of the original *Chronicles of Crime* will find the same award-winning tabletop experience while getting to explore a new setting and face the challenges of solving crimes in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. *Chronicles of Crime: 1400* at its core is a cooperative, narrative-driven game of investigation for 1-4 players.



Players take on the role of Abelard Lavel who, blessed with prophetic visions, has taken it upon himself to root out evil in the city of Paris. At the start of each new case, players will be presented with glimpses of visions that Abelard has seen. Features seen in these visions might be familiar — however, they could also be completely unknown, or even, have not yet taken place! It'll be down to the players to make the connections between the visions and reality and put the pieces of the puzzle together.

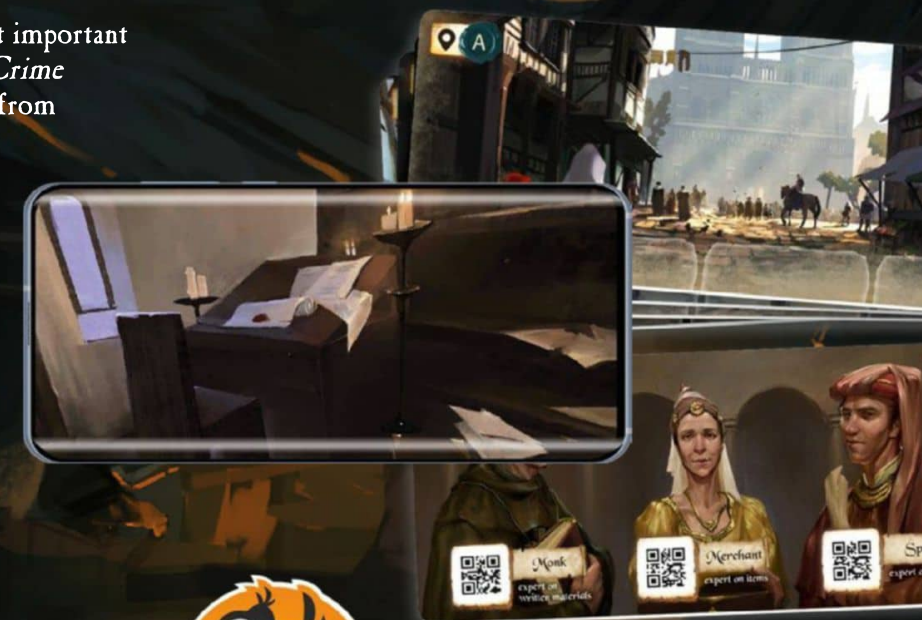


Our protagonist will be left without the benefits of modern technology and crime scene investigation tools, but that doesn't mean he won't have some tricks up his sleeve. Abelard's furry companion Perceval can track down the owners of items and perhaps sniff out some lies from suspects who aren't being honest about their whereabouts. At home, Abelard's family are also able to support him on cases. His sister, a merchant, knows something about almost any object found in Paris; his uncle, a monk, has a wealth of knowledge about written texts; and his brother, a king's spy, can often find information on the people Abelard is investigating.

The characters and the story form the most important and compelling part of any *Chronicles of Crime* case. You will meet a variety of characters from professors to market vendors, the nobility to the peasantry, and it will be down to you to decide who is worth your time investigating and who is going to waste your time with their personal issues. Surrounding each case is a vivid world depicted not only in beautiful locations but also in virtual reality crime scenes. Players will use the *Chronicles of Crime* app to inspect all the details of each crime scene, and they'll have to cooperate to pick out the important evidence.

*Chronicles of Crime: 1400* offers an incredibly immersive and engaging tabletop experience that is unlike anything else in board games and will be available in stores worldwide.

Coming November 2020







**Justin Spicer**  
Music Journalist and  
Board Game Experimenter

This is an unprecedented time for all of us. As we search for solace and comfort in our hobbies, the gatherings, groups, and conventions we have leaned on for so many years have been forced to cancel for everyone’s safety.

While we contemplate how to best proceed due to the ever-present Coronavirus, and yet still crave the adrenaline rush and unfettered excitement of convention season, we must push through and try to find the silver linings in an otherwise tough year. It was a similar experience for Gen Con.

Peter Adkinson, owner and CEO of Gen Con, lamented that when conventions were canceling and Gen Con had to follow suit, the future for Gen Con was bleak. But the organization behind North America’s biggest board gaming convention rallied

around technology. Much like the players and people who flock to conventions to play the latest and greatest with friends and strangers alike, board gamers turned to the technological substitutes to keep the hobby sociable.

Even though Gen Con did not take place physically in Indianapolis this year, the paired-down online version serves as a reminder that next year can be even bigger and better. While many publishers and designers were hit hard personally and professionally with the ongoing global pandemic, there was still an air of excitement that helped many cope with the disappointment of being unable to descend upon Indiana’s capital for an extended weekend of geekery.

Many publishers found their operations slowed as the Coronavirus ravaged production lines and shipping routes in Asia and Europe at the beginning of the year. Some publishers struggled to survive, while others found a lifeline thanks to retail outlets and friendly local game stores that quickly adapted to curbside pick-up and home delivery to keep people safe at home and supplied in games.

## Internet (Game) Explorer

Yet Gen Con Online tried to capture the excitement that typically builds this time of year. The will to adapt is what fueled a scaled back Gen Con experience. Though not quite the door-busting behemoth that is the physical exhibition hall, there was still a digital store for attendees to buy the latest games on offer. Likewise, the halls that were once filled with gamers playing demos took to Tabletop Simulator, Tabletopia, and communication platforms like Discord. While the physical proximity could not occur, the focus on the community was still alive.

It was not the same. It can’t be the same. Nothing can replace that physical bond of friends and strangers breaking down walls when they meet face-to-face over boards, cards, and dice. While the digital space is vaster than the Indiana Convention Center, Lucas Oil Stadium, and the whole of Indianapolis’ downtown that plays host to Gen Con in normal times, it’s the rubbing of shoulders and sharing of stories over food truck specialties and the constant din of gamers spread across a small-but-notable plot of land that makes Gen Con what it is.

Still, it survives. It survives because we wanted it to; we needed it to. It’s that need that has everyone looking forward to next year. We continue to hope that Gen Con 2021 is the big board gaming party we desire, but also an industry-wide catharsis. People who save up a whole year for their Gen Con trips will be hopefully looking at fatter wallets and deeper pockets at a time when the industry not only needs the financial support but a boost to morale as well.

And beyond the camaraderie, Gen Con is about the games. And though this year saw a significant drop in game releases and teasers associated with Gen Con, there was still the buzz of the community with Gen Con Online. There was still great news and new releases to salivate over. Players were still able to connect over Discord and Tabletop simulators, while publishers crafted unique messages for attendees to discover in the vast expanse of Looking Glass — Gen Con’s virtual representation of the seemingly endless exhibition hall many so desperately missed. Streaming platforms such as Twitch and YouTube became the vehicles by which publishers, designers, and content creators came together to inform official and unofficial Gen Con Online attendees of what to expect in the coming months.

There was still the spark of spontaneity that makes Gen Con a yearly adventure. Despite the best laid plans, the hurdles of technology caused delays in feeds, curated conversations and panels to break down into friendly chats, and people left stranded when their GMs didn’t show up for an organized D&D game



*Peter Adkinson (owner and CEO), David Hoppe (president), and Genevieve (show maskot) made an appearance in the Gen Con Online opening ceremonies.*

(a holdover from physical Gen Cons). All of this kept the hype alive, not just for this year but for future iterations where we all hope to congregate shoulder to shoulder without fear (but perhaps a little more mindful of communicable safety precautions).

With this in mind, look no further for a source of continued hype. Publishers, designers, artists, manufacturers, and more are working hard to bring us the latest and greatest, and we can continue to celebrate the spirit of Gen Con even after Gen Con Online has passed. Within these pages is a list of the many games that have us excited about what’s coming at the end of 2020 and into 2021. Within these pages is evidence that hope springs eternal and keeps our beloved industry moving forward. 2020 is a difficult year for all of us in many ways, but our board gaming community is stronger than ever. And there are games to bond over.





## Academy Games

**One Small Step**, a worker placement race to the moon between the US and USSR in the '60s, was the big prize from Academy Games. The official announcement of the upcoming fall release of **Battle Royale** was also notable. The game is based on the book of the same title that inspired a genre of fiction and video games that continue to dominate both of those industries.



## Game Brewer / Amuza

Game Brewer has already had a great 2020 with the successful crowdfunding campaign for **Paris**. However, Gen Con was to be the official launch of their family game publishing house named Amuza with three new games: **Pizza**, **Circus**, and **Bugz**. These games will be hitting Kickstarter in the early fall.



## Kids Table / Burnt Island Games

**Fossilis** was the crown jewel of Kids Table's upcoming lineup last year at Gen Con. It's now a fully-realized product ready for a larger audience after a successful Kickstarter campaign. The "grown up" sister publisher, Burnt Island Games, is preparing **In Too Deep** which hits all the right notes of epic detective and double-cross genres. *In Too Deep* is anticipated to hit Kickstarter in the fall.



## Flatout Games

The new publishing house came to Gen Con last year with a prototype of its tile-laying puzzler, **Calico**, ahead of a Kickstarter push. Thanks to the clever design, as well as the owners' success with their AEG design **Point Salad**, *Calico* was a Kickstarter success that's starting to fulfill to backers and soon to be released to wider retail in partnership with AEG. Now the Flatout crew is preparing for its next big Kickstarter in the form of **Cascadia**, another tile-layer that continues to improve upon a tried-and-true mechanic.



## HABA

HABA's line of children's games continues to grow and swell, but the big news came from the announcement of the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary edition of the classic HABA racing game, **Monza**. HABA also expanded into roll-and-writes with **5er Finden**.



A large advertisement for the Loki Games collection. It features a background illustration of a cat detective named Charlie in a trench coat and hat, holding a magnifying glass. Various game boxes are displayed, including 'Detective Charlie', 'Super Fly', 'Zoo Run', 'Troll Dragon', 'SOS', 'Monza', 'Kraken Attack!', 'Farmini', and 'Villains Battle'. Each box has a 'LOKI' logo and icons indicating player count, playtime, and age. A red banner at the top right says 'COMING FOR FALL 2020'. At the bottom, there is a URL 'IELLOUSA.COM/COLLECTIONS/LOKI' and social media icons for Pinterest, Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook. The Loki logo is in the bottom right corner.



## Kosmos

The Adventure Games series returns with **The Volcanic Isle**, with its unique take on the choose-your-own-path gameplay sweeping the hobby. Spiel Des Jahres nominee **My City** gets a wider release, as well as the much-anticipated western release of **Targi: The Expansion**.



## The Op

Last year, the publisher formerly known as USAopoly was deep into their rebrand. This year, The Op went all-in with a lot of different IP-based games that leverage the publisher's relationships with its deep bench of inventive designers. **Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>: Horror at Camp Crystal Lake** is a suspenseful bag-builder where each pull could invite Jason to you. Likewise, the escape room series that introduced itself with the cartoon classic Scooby-Doo is now the basis for **The Shining: Escape from the Overlook Hotel**. The Op is also using the Harry Potter franchise to test its hand with the light-Euro **House Cup Competition**, which allows players to represent the four houses of Hogwarts in a race to win the House Cup.



## Portal Games

**Detective: A Modern Crime Board Game** continues to be a winner for Portal Games, and 2020 is no different with the latest installment, designed by Rob Daviau. Portal promises more *Detective* games in this vein with unique theming and mechanics outside of the big box. *Imperial Settlers* offshoot **Empires of the North** has its first expansion with **Barbarian Hordes**, adding a new faction with its own unique twists to complement *Empires of the North*'s great gameplay.

Sadly, Portal had something up its sleeve for Gen 2020 that had to be put on the backburner. But a lineup of games in conjunction with the convention's online component provided its own buzz and excitement.

## Queen Games

Besides the release of **Winter Kingdom** from award-winning designer Donald X. Vaccarino, Queen Games caused a stir with the announcement of the **Stefan Feld City Collection**. The series' first two entries just recently wrapped up a successful campaign on Kickstarter, with the promise that at least another six titles will be included in the collection.



## Z-Man Games

While much of the buzz from Z-Man is focused on the announcement of **Pandemic Legacy: Season 0**, it's the recent retail release of **Pandemic Hot Zone: North America** that could entice casual gamers with its scaled down *Pandemic* gameplay. With three diseases to "cure" in a 30-minute playtime, it may be the introductory or niche *Pandemic* game to scratch that co-op itch in a time when we're all very much in the throes of a real pandemic. For escapism, there is also the new **Infinity Gauntlet: A Love Letter Game**, which is a one-versus-many variant on the classic and beloved card game.



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**KICKSTARTER**  
11 to 30 November 2020

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500 backers  
will receive  
epic loot!

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30-90  
TIME

14+  
AGES

1-4  
PLAYER  
BOARDGAME

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As the drums of war shake the foundations of this world, the Alliance and the Fallen Empire call their mighty forces to arms to fight on the battlefields of Thaera. May destiny decide who will survive and carry the Crown of Darkness.

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# GAMES & STORYTELLING

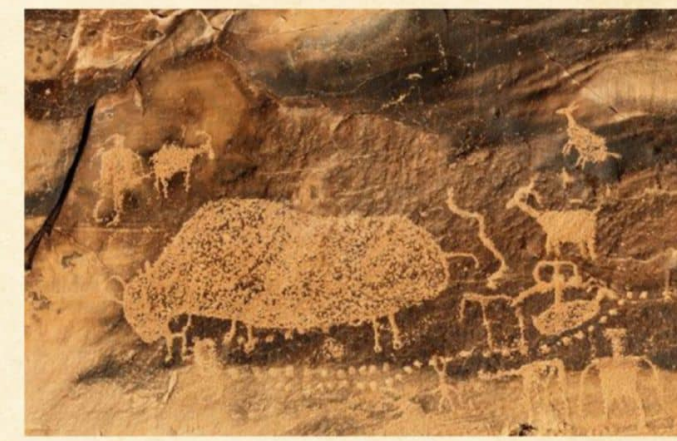
## TWO SIDES TO EVERY STORY



**Bayard Catron**  
Game Wizard, Reviewer,  
and Event Organizer

**I**magine you are a prehistoric human. What is your life like? You may spend your days hunting, tending crops, or crafting. But what do you do in your free time? You likely gather around a fire with other members of your community to tell stories or play games. Storytelling and games have been cornerstones of our civilization and essential to human expression. But when did they first combine? What is the connection between these two pillars of our society?

Storytelling predates the written word and likely began shortly after the advent of spoken language. The earliest storytellers used visual aids to enhance their narrative – gestures, facial expressions, and artwork created on rock walls, living trees, and their bodies. Storytelling was used to explain the world and its origins; as a technique for teaching and learning; to connect individuals to the community; to pass knowledge and values to the next generation; and, of course, to entertain.



Left: Big Buffalo Petroglyph, Nine Mile Canyon, Utah. Right: an antique Chess set. Below: Village Life in The Olden Time — The English Illustrated Magazine 1891–1892.

With the advent of the printing press, stage plays, cinema, radio, television, and now the internet, prose and narrative have remained ubiquitous in our culture. As Reynolds Price wrote in 1978, “A need to tell and hear stories is essential to the species *Homo sapiens* – second in necessity apparently after nourishment and before love and shelter. Millions survive without love or home, almost none in silence; the opposite of silence leads quickly to narrative, and the sound of story is the dominant sound of our lives...”

Games, too, have been a part of the human experience since the beginning. Tombs dating from pre-dynastic Egypt have been found to contain *Senet* boards from 3500 B.C.; multi-thousand-year old games from Africa and Asia are still widely played to this day: *Mancala*, *Chess*, *Go*, and *Backgammon*. While some are abstract, some tell a story – *Chess* has its intrigue and leaping knights, ending in the capture of a king. And the game industry, now with its younger cousin the video game industry, is growing every year. Readers of *Casual Game Insider* need no primer on the importance of games.

## MORE THAN PARLOR TRICKS

The confluence of games and stories likely first played out on the ancient stage. The Oscan Games, a series of masked absurdist farces popular in Rome in 391 B.C., are some of the first known examples of improvisational comedy. Storytelling is still a popular activity in improv – you can try it yourself at your next party: sit in a circle and have each player say a single word in turn as a story unfolds. With funny players, the results will likely surprise and delight you.

During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the middle and upper classes in the United States and Great Britain had more leisure time than ever before. This sparked interest in parlor games – simple activities played indoors at small parties. These games took a variety of forms, some of which included collective writing and/or drawing. Examples include *Consequences* and *Exquisite Corpse*, collaborative writing and drawing games inspired by French surrealists in which players have limited





information about the rest of the story, producing an absurd partial stream of consciousness.

Many parlor games were “do it yourself,” but there were premade boxes available for purchase as well. *What Did You Buy?*, first published in 1850, consists of a series of cards for each player with random items printed on them. One player would read a story with words missing while the others took turns flipping the top cards from their decks to produce incongruous and silly items that

filled in the blanks. *Mad Libs*, conceived a century later, continued this tradition.

*Paper Telephone*, another collective writing and drawing activity, has enjoyed great success in its commercial incarnation, *Telestrations*. Players pass around booklets and write text in response to the previous player’s drawing, or draw something inspired by the previous player’s text. By the end, things have often changed in hilarious and unexpected ways.

## WHEN BOARD GAMES LEVELED UP

But the real moment that it became possible to play out a story was the inception of *Dungeons & Dragons* in 1974. In *D&D*, each player builds a character to play in a nearly-limitless game world, collaborating with the Dungeon Master and fellow players to create a unique story with unforgettable moments. It is impossible to overstate the influence this game has had over the past half-century — not only did it create an entirely new genre, but it also created common concepts like “leveling up” and “character stats” that are widely used



throughout all genres and platforms of gaming. And the game itself is more popular today than ever.

## OTHER NOTEWORTHY STORYTELLING GAME MILESTONES:

### COLOSSAL CAVE ADVENTURE (1977)

This was the first interactive fiction computer game, followed by *Zork* and many others; Infocom marketed their games as “Like waking up inside a story.”

### CHOOSE YOUR OWN ADVENTURE BOOKS (1978)

First published in 1978, these books were an early example of “gamified” books.



### KINGDOM DEATH: MONSTER (2015)

Controversial for its dark and mature content, *Kingdom Death* provides a very adult take on a sprawling adventure.



### ABOVE AND BELOW, NEAR AND FAR, SLEEPING GODS (2015, 2017, 2020)

Profusely illustrated by auteur Ryan Laukat, these games include voluminous storybooks in which players decide their path.



### THE 7<sup>TH</sup> CONTINENT (2017)

This solo or cooperative game offers exploration and survival in a truly vast game world.

### GLOOMHAVEN (2017)

*Gloomhaven* and its sequel are two of many games that provide a *D&D*-like adventure without a game master. They took the gaming world by storm, breaking crowdfunding records on Kickstarter.



### FORGOTTEN WATERS (2020)

This semi-cooperative adventure ups the ante with a fancy app that tracks the game and provides sound effects and professional voice actors.



SOON ON  
**KICKSTARTER**  
11 to 30 November 2020

The first  
500 backers  
will receive  
epic loot!

**NEVER  
SURRENDER**  
ARKENSHIELD

30-90  
TIME

14+  
AGES

**1-4**  
PLAYER  
BOARDGAME

DEFEAT IS NOT AN OPTION

The 1-player mode is a very special experience. Without a fellow player, you can go up against an NPC in a race for the Crown of Darkness and have a whole lot of fun while trying to fight back the enemy Assassins.

[www.arkenshield.com](http://www.arkenshield.com)

PLAY. IF YOU CAN



# MAKING A LONG STORY SHORT

But story-driven games do not exist solely in the heavy hobby genre of board games. As casual gaming becomes a more defined and sought-after genre, many publishers have found a market for games that tell a story in under an hour.

## DIXIT

Libellud | 3-6 Players | 30 Minutes

*Dixit* is a card game of wonderfully colorful and whimsical paintings. Each player chooses a card from their hand and submits it privately to the Storyteller, who adds one of their own cards to the pile, mixes them up, and lays them out for all players to see. The Storyteller wants to tell a story about the picture they chose, such that at least one person will choose it correctly. If no one (or everyone) chooses correctly, the Storyteller gets no points, so they do not want it to be too obscure nor too clear. The charming thing about this game is it can be played with people of varying ages, as there is no text to read — only pictures. Stories can take the form of a spoken sentence, a song, a single word, or even a sound effect. It's the same concept



as *Apples to Apples* but in visual form. *Huh?* by Eagle-Gryphon games uses the same mechanism but from a more pop culture perspective.

## DELVE

Indie Boards & Cards | 2-4 Players | 60 Minutes

*Delve* is a tile-laying game of dungeon exploration with a “Choose Your Own Adventure” aspect. Players create the dungeon by laying down tiles and battle for treasure when a room or corridor is completed. Along the way, they face challenging narrative encounters and must select their path.



## BEFORE THERE WERE STARS

Smirk & Laughter Games | 3-6 Players | 40 Minutes

Roll and select dice to form constellations that will inspire grand tales. Players each tell the stories “of their people” throughout the game: from the creation of the world and the beginning of civilization, to the rise of a great hero, and the eventual end of days.



## NEWS@11

Infectious Play | 3-6 Players | 30-45 Minutes



## TATTOO STORIES

Bicycle | 4-6 Player | 15-30 Minutes

In *Tattoo Stories*, a “customer” gives you five chosen prompts on cards and in just three minutes you must consult with them and draw the best tattoo design you can. Ideally, your design should tell a story — and when it's done, YOU tell the story and pitch to the customer why your design is best.



**So what can we conclude about stories and games? Perhaps they come from the same place inside us. Each has a beginning, middle, and end. They both can involve mystery, revelation, pivotal choices; each involves a series of interesting decisions as the development progresses.**

**Both can create experiences outside our everyday existence: an exciting contest, dangerous exploration, fierce battles, a tragic betrayal, or a revealing journey. It is not so much that games and storytelling have merged, as they were always, in essence, the same — it is the barriers between them that have dissolved. They are merely varying expressions of this game called life.** 🎲

SOON ON  
KICKSTARTER  
11 to 30 November 2020

THIS IS MY  
KINGDOM  
ÅRKENSHIELD

30-90  
TIME


14+  
AGES

1-4  
PLAYER  
BOARDGAME

THE GATES OF THY'AN

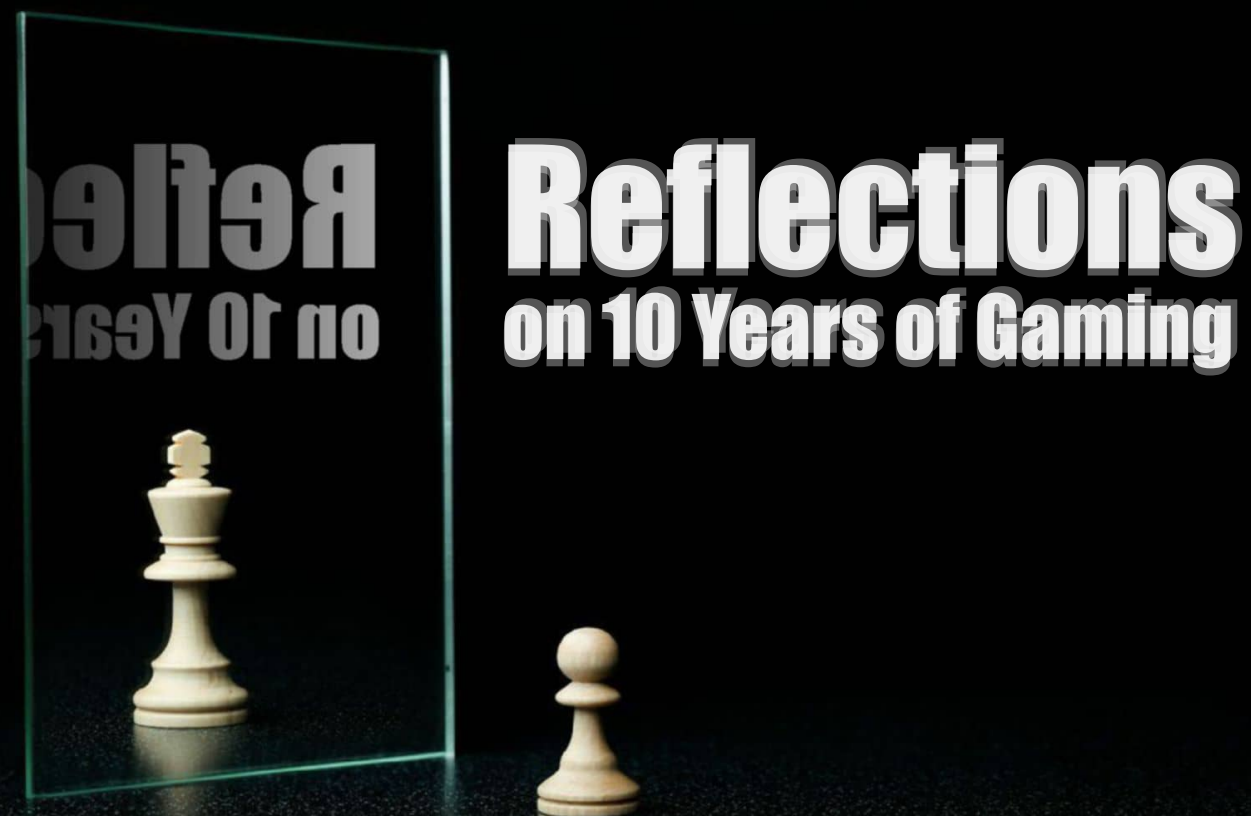
Arkenshield is a turn-based, – deck building – game for 1 to 4 players. It combines components of a boardgame with those of a card game and explicitly avoids the use of dice. Gather Companions around you, cross the Gates of Thy'an and conquer the mighty fortress in the eternal ice.

www.arkenshield.com

MADMAKI  
BOARDGAMES

PLAY. IF YOU CAN





### Dann Albright

Freelance Journalist and  
Lifelong Board Gamer

I've been playing board games my entire life, but I started getting into the hobby around 2010. My then-girlfriend, now-wife introduced me to *Ticket to Ride* in grad school. Soon after, friends showed us *Carcassonne*, *Lords of Waterdeep*, and *Kill Doctor Lucky*.

Since then, I've attended gaming conventions, played an insane number of games, and even gotten paid to write about them a few times. I've made a lot of new gaming friends, too.

Because I've been playing board games pretty seriously for a decade, I thought I'd share some of the things I've learned — as well as some advice on how to make the most of the hobby.

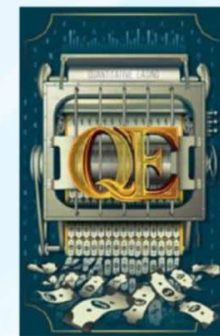
## 1

### There are a lot of games out there

Board Game Geek has around 120,000 entries. Of course, many of those are expansions, promos, games with a standard deck of cards, and other things we don't want to count. Let's say 75% of those aren't actually games, just to be safe. That still leaves 30,000 games. If I try 500 in my lifetime, I'll consider it a success. I probably own about 25 right now, and I'd (very roughly) estimate that I play 40 different titles each year.

That's a staggering amount of variety. There are casual games, party games, solo games, cooperative games, heavy games, real-time games, campaign games, dexterity

games, and dozens of other kinds of games that you can try. You'll find the kinds of games you like, and we'll talk about that shortly. But never stop trying new *kinds* of games. There will always be games that combine things you like in new ways. Or even things you don't like in a way that somehow works for you. And some games are just so off-the-wall that there's nothing else like them (my current favorite example of this is *Q.E.*). Keep trying new things. It's one of the best parts of this hobby.



## 2

### Don't underestimate simple games

Some of what I consider to be the best games out there have simple rules that belie great strategic depth. *Arboretum* is a favorite example. There are 6-10 suits of eight cards, numbered 1 to 8. All you have to do is put them in your arboretum and score paths of different trees. How hard could it be? Turns out it can be extremely hard. It's an absolute brain burner.

Never underestimate a small or simple game. They can pack a big punch, and being surprised is one of my favorite things about simple games.



## 3

### You can like whatever games you want

I don't especially like auction games. Sure, I adore some games that include auctioning as part of the game. I love *Tulip Bubble*, which is basically all auctioning. But in general, if a game is largely driven by auctions, I'm hesitant to play. I just don't like bidding on stuff.

And I've come to learn that that's totally fine. Maybe you don't like card games. Or dice games. Maybe you're not big on social deduction or hidden roles. Not a fan of roleplaying? That's cool. You don't have to be! You don't have to like the

current super-popular party game, and you don't have to play it (though I encourage you to try it once).

You'll develop your own tastes as you play. That's part of the fun of this hobby. Like what you want to like and — this is important — let other people enjoy the games they're into. Don't give your friend a hard time if they enjoy abstract games when you're not a fan. Keep trying new things to refine your taste and find where it overlaps with your gaming friends. But don't worry if you don't like everything your group does.



## 4

## The gaming community is a great one

Let me head this off right now: yes, the gaming community has some problems. We aren't as diverse as we should be. If you read gaming forums, you'll find that we often obsess about things that aren't important. And there are examples of gatekeeping and toxicity like many hobbies out there. But 95% of the time, you find a good group of gamers that embodies all the great things about the community. They want to teach you the games they love. They're happy to chat about strategies that are fun or work well. They're generally understanding of balancing your hobbies with your responsibilities.

I've met some of my best friends around a gaming table. I've met some obnoxious gamers, too. But they often fade away, while the meaningful relationships stick with you. It's a great part of this hobby that shouldn't be overlooked. If you don't have a gaming group, try joining one on Facebook or Meetup. Find a local game store and attend a few of their game nights. See if anyone in your town runs a gaming website or podcast (that's how I got into the scene in my area — I met the Heavy Cardboard podcast hosts on Twitter and found out that they lived nearby). There's a game group out there that can become *your* game group. Go find it.

## 5

## Not everyone will be a gamer

Yes, you'll find a game group. But your boyfriend, spouse, sister, or best friend may not be in it. That's just how it is. I'm lucky that my wife and my sister-in-law are both really into games. My brother isn't as much of a gamer. And we're all cool with that. It's important to remember that finding the right game to appeal to someone won't always turn them into a board game fanatic overnight. You can spend a ton of time trying to find the right theme, mechanics, or format of a game that will turn them into a board gamer. In many cases, it's just not worth any undue pressure to like board games. They'll come to it if they want to. If not, no worries!

## 6

## Don't buy into the hype

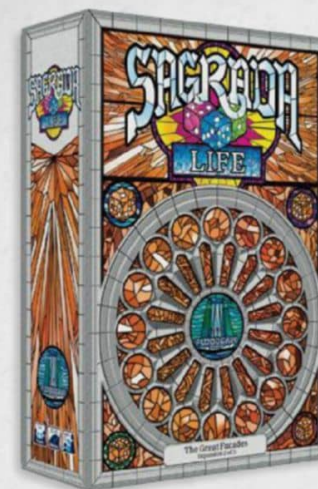
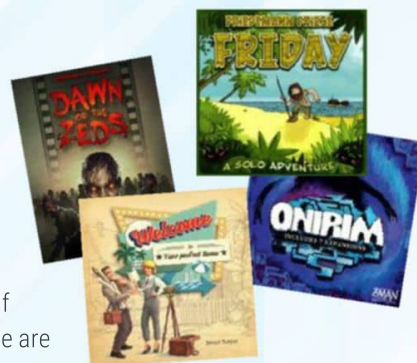
I'm going to sound a bit like a crotchety old man here, but I think board game hype is getting a bit out of hand. Kickstarters are pulling in millions of dollars for games that might have very early positive reviews, but only a handful of people have played. Campaigns are very expansive and include interviews, playthrough videos, previews of miniatures, and more. It's getting a little crazy. By all means, kickstart the new titles from your favorite designers. There's nothing wrong with that. But keep in mind that publishers (and reviewers, even if they seem impartial) make money by getting you excited about upcoming games. Just keep some perspective and don't get caught up in the hype cycle.

## 7

## Solo games are here to stay

I'm relatively inexperienced when it comes to solo board games. I've played *Scythe* solo a couple of times and spent a few hours playing *Dawn of the Zeds* on my own. I haven't had a chance to dig into *Onirim*, *Friday*, or the solo version of *Welcome To...*

But I've really enjoyed the solo games that I've played. And, based on the amount of solo-able and solo-only games that are being released in 2020, it seems like other people are enjoying them, too. Some people don't get it or feel that the social aspect of board gaming is an integral part of why it's fun. That's fine. But many people are expanding their views on what constitutes a board game. Solo games can be a blast and give you a great way to relax, play something challenging, and not have to worry about coordinating a group activity (which, depending on the state of the COVID-19 pandemic when this gets published, may not be an option anyway). If you haven't yet, I highly recommend giving solo gaming a try!



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## 8

## 9

## 10

**Turns**

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	

Figure	Points
	4
	3
	2
	1
Total	

**Turns**

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
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8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	



**DON'T SKIP  
THESE  
ALTERNATIVES TO**



**Andy Matthews**

Senior Software Engineer and  
Founder of Meeple Mountain

**IN 1971...**

A man named Merle Robbins had an argument with his son about the rules for Crazy Eights. In a flash of inspiration, he wrote his own set of rules for a new game and dubbed it “**UNO**.” In **UNO**, players attempt to empty their hand of cards by playing them to a shared discard pile. This new game contained cards of four different colors numbered 1-9, Wild cards, Skips, Reverses, Draw 2 cards, and the infamous and iconic Draw 4 card. When a player has a single remaining card in their hand they must announce “**UNO**” to the table to make sure everyone knows they might be able to go out...effectively painting a target on their back.

After raising the \$8,000 needed to print 5,000 UNO decks and selling them out of his barbershop, Robbins sold the rights to **UNO** to International Games for \$50,000 plus ongoing royalties. After nearly 50 years, and over 150 million copies sold, **UNO** is still the undisputed king of custom card games. Love it or hate it, **UNO**'s success isn't an accident; it features simple gameplay, colorful artwork and graphic design, and a level of strategy that leaves room for players to chat with friends and family while playing the game.

# Port Miao

## Roll and Steal

### Rules

1-2 Players  
Game Sheet  
pencil & eraser  
1-2 dice  
1-2 pawns

In Puerto Miao roll and steal you will have to compete to be the cat that manages to steal the most fish from the fish shop (game area) using the dice to move and successfully steal each fish.

### How to move:

The cat or cats start at the start box in the middle of the fishmonger's shop (play area)



First, you must roll 1 die to indicate the number of squares you can move, you can move up, down or sideways, but not diagonally (this die is valid for all players in case of playing in pairs).

When you land on the appropriate square, you can either get an effect or try to steal a fish, depending on which square you land on.

### Effect of the boxes

### Fish boxes:

Each square has a difficulty to steal the fish successfully, you must overcome the corresponding value by throwing 2 dice (if you only have one you can add the value by throwing it twice), in case of playing accompanied each player must throw the dice individually for the result.

If you exceed the result (marked in the corner of the fish box) mark it in your cat's point area, you can mark it with a point, line or add it up, you'll see that each fish part gives you a certain amount of points.



At the end of the game (turn 20) you must add up the total number of fish stolen.

### Effect boxes

**Repeat Roll:** Roll one more die to keep moving.

**Bonus roll:** You can use this bonus to add a value to the difficulty roll to get a fish, when you fall in this box mark it with a diagonal and your initial in case you are not the only player, when you must make a roll to steal a fish from a box you can mark with another diagonal (creating an "X") in this box to activate it, after that this box is deactivated.

**Stealing:** Roll one die and depending on the value you can get a fish according to the result on the table beside the playing area.



**Delete negative frame:** Removes an "X" from a frame to re-check that box.



**Used squares:** each used square must be marked with an "X" once you fall on it, so you can no longer fall on that square in the following moves.

If you can't advance during a move roll you will have to pass the turn and during the next turn you will win a replay roll valid only for that turn.

### How to win

The game consists of 20 turns in which you must gather the largest amount of fish, add the corresponding points, if you play alone try to get your best mark by stealing, if you are accompanied get more points than the other cat to beat him.



Even though **UNO** dominates the card game market, there are still loads of other options. Below are six light card games that I think could replace **UNO** on your family's game table.



**PUSH**

2018 | 2-6 Players | 20-25 minutes

At the top of the list is a game that I think could easily unseat *UNO* as the king of light card games. In *PUSH*, players “push” their luck in trying to collect more points from a shared deck of cards than their opponents.

On your turn, you'll flip over the top card from the deck, placing it into one of three piles of cards. Each pile can only contain one card of each number (1 through 6) and one card of each color (red, blue, purple, yellow, and green). As long as you have a valid spot to place the card, you're safe. But if you can't put the card into one of the three stacks, you bust, and your turn is over. At any point before you bust, you can choose to stop and take all of the cards in a single stack and place them into your Bench. Then in clockwise order, the next player gets to choose one of the remaining stacks until all stacks have been taken. All of this still happens if you bust; you just lose the chance to select a stack, potentially giving lots of points to your rivals.

One thing to remember is that cards currently in your Bench are still vulnerable until they've been Banked. Mixed in with the point cards are several Roll cards. When selecting your stack and it contains a Roll card, you must roll the

included six-sided die and take your chances. If it comes up black, you're safe. But if it displays one of the five colored faces then you must discard all cards of that color from your Bench. On their turn players can always pass to Bank all cards of a single color, making them permanently safe.

*PUSH* is easily one of my favorite games of 2019, and I've happily taught it to dozens of people at game nights I've attended. It's one of the few games that I don't bother teaching the rules first...I simply start dealing the cards and explain as I go. It's easy to play, and even though the rules seem simple, the choices you have to make aren't easy. In many cases you're forced to choose between two good options, or even worse between two bad options. Try it and you might just *PUSH UNO* back into the closet for good.



**FIVE CROWNS**

1996 | 1-7 Players | 30 Minutes

*Five Crowns* is one of the few mass-market games you'll ever hear me recommend, but it deserves it. *Five Crowns* is a rummy-style game with five distinct suits (hearts, spades, clubs, diamonds, and stars), played over 13 hands. For each hand, the card that matches the number of cards dealt in the hand is wild. In the first round, players are dealt three cards (with the 3 card being wild), all the way up until the 11<sup>th</sup> round where players receive 13 cards (with the king card being wild). This leads to the game's tagline: "It's not over until the kings go wild".

On your turn, you must draw from either the top of the deck or the discard pile, then discard one card from your hand. In between drawing and discarding, players can lay down sets (cards with the same number from different suits, also called a book in *Five Crowns*), and runs (cards all of the same suit in an unbroken sequence). The round is over when someone has laid down all of their cards and discarded their remaining card from their hand. The other players tally up the points remaining in their hand, and a new round is started. After all rounds are played, the winner is the player with the least points.

I was skeptical of this game when I first heard of it...but I'm delighted to have been introduced to *Five Crowns*. It's been a favorite of my wife's family for many years, and will likely remain in heavy rotation for years to come. My mother-in-law is superhumanly good at this game; so much so that barely a game of *Five Crowns* goes by where I don't accuse her of witchcraft at least once. It has a bit more meat than *UNO*, but it's got many of the same characteristics, and because you're only directly affected by the person to your right, it's a perfect game to play when you want to catch up with friends around the gaming table.





## 3 NO THANKS

2004 | 3-7 Players | 20 Minutes

If you're looking for a dead-simple game, it doesn't come much easier than *No Thanks*. In this light "anti-bidding" card game, players are paying for the privilege of having the fewest points at the end of the game.

Players draw cards from the top of the stack of cards, numbered 3 to 35, and do their best to avoid taking the card by paying a single chip into a central pot for the right to say "No Thanks". The round continues around the table, with each pitching in a chip until one player can't or won't "chip in"; that player takes the card (along with all the chips in the pot) and places it in their personal tableau. At the end of the game, that card will be worth its face value in points.

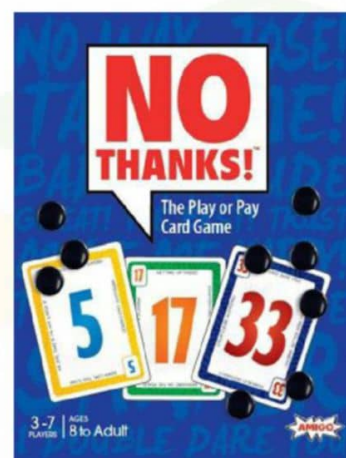
However, if players can get unbroken sequences of cards, only the lowest card in that sequence counts against you. If you've got a 20, then picking up that 19 card means you'll

have one fewer point at the end of the game, and taking a 21 is essentially free!

Even though *No Thanks* has a dead-simple ruleset, there's still quite a few tactical choices to be made.

If you've already got the 20 do you take the 19 on the first go-around to make sure you get it, or do you "send it around" and fish for more chips? Do you pick up the 18 and hope to get the 19 at some point? Decisions are compounded by the fact that any chips at the end of the game count in your favor and reduce your score.

I've taught *No Thanks* to many, many people and it's always a hit. You'll definitely want to say "Yes please" to *No Thanks*.



## 4 L.L.A.M.A.

2019 | 2-6 Players | 20 Minutes

If you're a board game fan then you've probably heard of the Spiel des Jahres, the highest honor in the world of board gaming. Originally created in 1978, the Spiel des Jahres (along with the sister awards the Kennerspiel des Jahres, and the Kinderspiel des Jahres) is meant to reward excellence in game design and promote top-quality games in the German market. In the past 10-15 years, the Spiel des Jahres has trended towards lighter and more family-oriented games, including nominees and winners like *The Mind*, *Kingdomino*, *Codenames*, and the 2019 nominee *L.L.A.M.A.* from Reiner Knizia.

In *L.L.A.M.A.*, as in *No Thanks*, players are striving to have the lowest score by playing their cards to a central discard pile. The deck is thin, composed of just 56 cards (numbers 1-6, and eight "llama" cards). On your turn, you can play a card from your hand to the deck if you can play the same number, or one higher, as the card displayed on the top of the discard pile. Llama cards can only be played on top of 6's or other llamas, 1's can only be played on top of llamas or other 1's, etc..

The round ends when either one player discards their last card or everyone has folded. Any cards remaining in your hand count against you at their face value (llama cards are



*L.L.A.M.A. designer Reiner Knizia, right, at the 2019 Spiel des Jahres nomination ceremony*



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**Potential Date**  
Do they sound compatible?



**Your Custom Profile**

**cindr**  
Profile Name: **Orcana** Pronouns: **She**

**Compatibility Matcher:**  
(Choose 1 primary trait and 2 secondary traits.)

Treasure	Hoarder	Investor	Spender
Climate	Hot	Mild	Cold
Lifestyle	Active	Relaxed	Hibernates
Social	Solitary	Amiable	Outgoing

Likes: **Battle** Dislikes: **walks on the beach**

Love Points: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21

Score: **10**

**Swipe Right**  
and flip to check  
actual compatibility...

**LIN**

**Treasure**  
Hoarder **Investor** Spender

**Climate**  
Hot Mild Cold

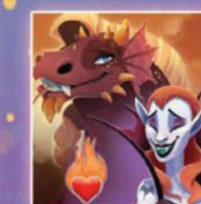
**Lifestyle**  
Active Relaxed Hibernates

**Social**  
Solitary Amiable Outgoing

**D Succeed at The Next Step with Lin**  
Gain a Try Again token, if you don't already have one.

**When Burned by Lin**  
Place Lin on the bottom of the App deck. Lose a Love point.

**The Closer the Match, the Better the Odds for Love!**





10 points). However, any cards with the same number stack and only count once. Therefore, a 1 and three 3's would only total 4 points. The best thing I can say about *L.L.A.M.A.* is that upon introducing it to a friend of mine, a bit of a grump when it comes to new games, he harrumphed: "I heard *L.L.A.M.A.* sucks; it didn't deserve the Spiel des Jahres nomination", but

after finishing a game he admitted "that was way better than I thought it would be". *L.L.A.M.A.* is a fun and simple game with some really neat push-your-luck gameplay. It's definitely worth picking up. Besides, how many other game designers would be willing to wear a llama costume to an awards ceremony?

## PEARLS

2019 | 2-6 Players | 15 Minutes

*Pearls* is a fun, lightweight set collection game in which players dive to the ocean floor to collect valuable pearls in order to sell them to local jewelers.

*Pearls* offers players two choices: collect all pearl cards of a single color from a central display, or play any number of pearl cards of a single color from your hand into your scoring area where they'll be worth face value at the end of the game. Playing smaller sets allows you to be more flexible and collect points more rapidly, but if you wait for a larger set you may be able to collect a bonus card based on the total number of cards you play. Keep in mind that you've got a hand limit of ten cards, so your choices aren't always as straightforward as "pick up the good cards". If there are



three juicy 5's in the display, but you've only got room for two cards, you'll have to leave them for your opponents.

The rules are simple, the artwork is simple yet beautiful and vibrant, and *Pearls* is fun to play.

## KARIBA

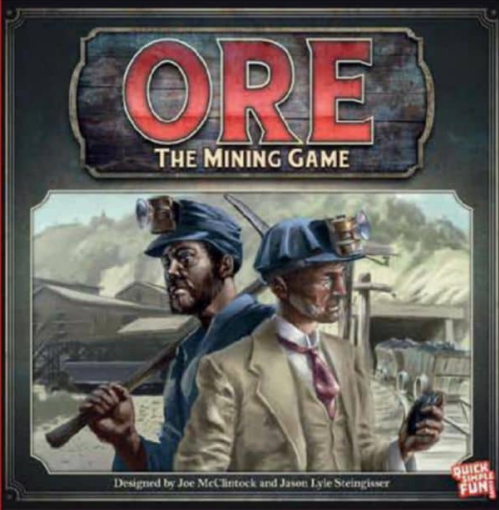
2010 | 2-6 Players | 15 minutes

*Kariba* is a delightful and whimsical game about bringing animals together around the watering hole for a little kum-ba-yah...until the big dogs roll in and try to take over. In *Kariba*, players place as many cards of one type of animal as they wish from their

hand to a shared watering hole. If the total number of cards on that number exceeds three or more, then

your animal scares away the next smallest animal. You'll collect the scared-away animals into your scoring pile where they'll each be worth one point (no matter the number on the card).

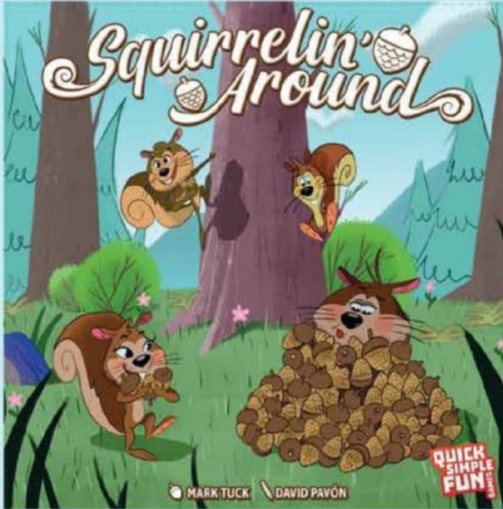
Like the other games on this list, *Kariba* is simple and easy to play. The artwork is composed of simple, colorful shapes and the effect is quite pleasing. *Kariba* comes in a teeny box (smaller than a smartphone in fact) but it's packed with goodness. Because you have to play at least one card every turn, *Kariba* forces you to make moves you'd rather not, and because the stack "breaks" at three animals, you always have to be on the lookout for someone who can come along and play on top of the very stack you planned to take. I can't recommend *Kariba* highly enough.



In *Ore*, each player is a Mining Company seeking to expand their profits by manipulating the price, and contract fulfillment for various types of Ore. Only 7 Turns to master the Mines and your opponents. Every Turn builds the tension and your score, will you be the Master, or fall to one?

**AVAILABLE NOW**  
2-5 Players - Ages 10+ 60-90 minutes

In *Squirrelin' Around*, each player is a Squirrel Champion competing in the Winter Games for Squirrels. You will collect sets of Berries and Acorns for the winter, with the best set collector winning the game. Each turn you will place a Tree branch which determines who gets which Berry or Acorn, then you will place another tree piece. If you think the tree will not go higher you can place your champion. Your Squirrels need you to win, now show them you are the best!



**AVAILABLE NOW**  
2-4 Players - Ages 8+ - 30-45 Minutes



In *Chakra* players need to Harmonize their Chakras by getting the correct colored gems into the matching Chakra. It will not be easy. This can be done by grabbing the right gems at the right time, and moving your gems into the correct spot. Whoever completes 5 Chakras first wins.

Be Zen, achieve Harmony, align your Chakras.  
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# HONORABLE MENTIONS

There's such a large number of light card games that creating this list was much harder than I expected. The games listed above would be my personal choice to replace UNO, but my colleagues had their own ideas. Here are two Honorable Mentions that didn't quite make the cut.

## 1 TEAM PLAY

2015 | 3-6 Players | 30 Minutes

As the name indicates, this is a team game, one of the only ones on this list in fact. But don't let that stop you. *Team Play* is an excellent card game in the same vein as *Hearts*, *Bridge*, or *Canasta*. In this game, teams attempt to collect sets of cards in their hand to match mission cards laid out on the table. Example mission cards are "1 2 3 4 of any color", "red 3 of a kind", or "two cards that add up to nine". Teammates can pass cards to each other, but can't otherwise communicate. The goal is to have the highest number of points from mission cards at the end of the game.



## 2 THE GAME

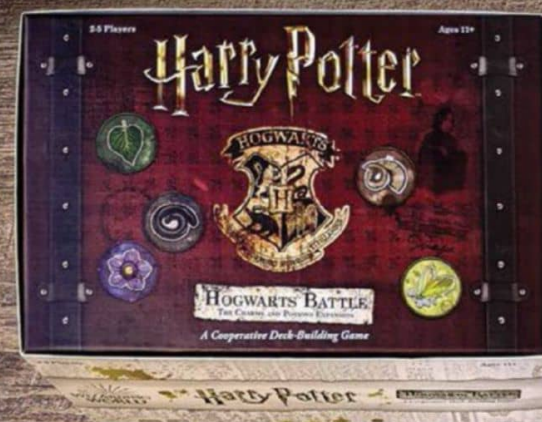
2015 | 1-5 Players | 20 Minutes

If you're tired of getting trounced by grandma every time you play a card game together, then *The Game* just might be the right "game" for you! Whereas every other title on this list is competitive, *The Game* is cooperative, which means that grandma can be on your team for a change! In *The Game*, players take turns playing cards from their hands to a shared play area consisting of four piles: two ascending and two descending piles. The goal is for all players to empty their hands. The catch is that players can't speak to determine where, when, and what cards they will play. The cards in the deck are uniquely numbered from 2 to 99, and card placement follows a set of simple rules. The real challenge of *The Game* is not only actually winning it, but effectively communicating with the other players using the limitations that the game sets forth. And the other challenge, of course, is trying to stop playing. *The Game* is a fun and relaxing game that you and your family and friends will want to play again and again.

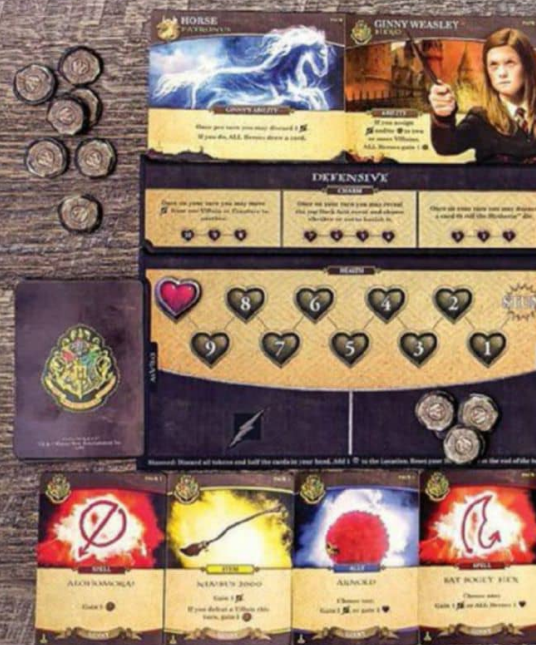


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**Jesse Tannous**  
Writer, Gamer, Editor, and  
Professional Nerd

Most parents would agree that staying home amid the COVID-19 pandemic and spending a lot of time together as a family is a throwback to their own childhood — those evening meals together after school and work, running around the backyard, helping the kids with their homework, and of course, playing board games.

This family-centered experience and the realization of childhood dreams is often a driving force in the board game industry. We had the opportunity to have a heart-to-heart with Bryan Pope, founder and CEO of Arcane Wonders, who explained how his entire industry experience has revolved around family and the launch of his flagship title, Mage Wars.

## From Wage to Mage

Pope began the interview with some personal history and how board games started as a family activity that evolved into a tradition. This eventually came into its own as a full-time, hands-on business with his family working (or at least involved) with the company in some capacity. Arcane Wonders was essentially created because of a game he developed with his family to play at home. It was so popular within this small group, he decided to finally take that intimidating step and publish it (but more to come on that).

Pope shared that while he was always fond of playing board games, he couldn't find a game that he was truly happy with or that he didn't want to tweak or update in some way. "I made my first game when I was seven years old — a haunted house game. I just loved [board games] my whole life, and I told my kids as they grew up that one day I would start a company that would publish games," Pope said. But the push to follow through with creating and publishing a game came years later for Pope.

"When my son was in his 30s he said, 'Dad, you know what...you're never going to do it, you just talk about it,' and I was like, wow, he's



right — I never really got around to it. So I just decided I was really going to make it happen."

At the time Pope, his family, and even friends would regularly get together to play a card game the family had created based on their love of fantasy and magic. This would eventually become Arcane Wonders' first release, **Mage Wars**. Pope credits his oldest son Benjamin as co-designer of *Mage Wars* (originally *Mage Wars Arena*) and the one who suggested that it should be their first game.

## The Winds of Change

Pope described how they evolved as a family to develop *Mage Wars* — it all started with a little bit of magic.

"We were all *Magic: The Gathering* fans, but we didn't like some of the ways things worked there. When we had casual neighborhood

tournaments with kids, I was always printing them proxies because they couldn't afford the actual cards. I wanted everyone to be on equal footing, I wanted to create a mage simulator where it feels like you are *actually* a mage. What would magic feel like if it were real? If you know a spell, you should just be able to cast it and not worry about drawing it."

Pope described how he and his family experimented with this early version of *Mage Wars* and making equal footing work. They developed a game where all players received the same cards, and simply playing them at the right moment determined a win or loss. Little by little, they left *Magic: The Gathering* behind and began to host tournaments where a dozen or more people were in the room.

Pope knew that he was on to something, but the actual publication would not happen until Pope's son threw down his challenge of just doing it. The concept of equal footing, in theory, is good. In application, however...it's a bit more challenging.





## The Magic of Mathematics

Pope says the difficulty lies within a mathematical card balance. "If you could imagine playing a game of *Magic: The Gathering*, and you could just play any card in your deck, at any time — all the cards would have to be very carefully thought out with every other card because you could pull any combo you want. That's what he had to do with *Mage Wars*."

At the time, Pope's oldest son, Benjamin, was a game design student at SMU Guild Hall. The task of setting up and creating all the different card possibilities and scenarios ended up requiring "a village," or in this case, his son's team of talented colleagues. They got to work developing different algorithms that ultimately ended up on a whiteboard.

## All in the Family

All of Pope's children playtest the company games. Most had something to add regarding development, too. Pope's oldest son, Benjamin, with the degree from SMU Guild Hall was trained in game design and game theory. With his knowledge of calculus and math, Pope tasks his eldest with the job of "seeing" the math behind each game.

"I think every game is governed by excellent math that is invisible to the players," Pope said. *Mage Wars* wasn't the only game from Arcane Wonders that saw Benjamin playing a central figure in the design. "Benjamin is also the co-designer of *RWBY: Combat Ready* which is selling pretty well, and he is working on an expansion for it: *JNPR and the Vitale Festival*. They're working on a mode for letting it be one player versus all the others, so the villain is no longer automatic but is controlled by a player with special cards and tactics to use against the players," Pope said.

Pope's daughter Danielle, on the other hand, can play a game and give immediate and insightful feedback. He recalled a game they were reviewing and it was Danielle that pointed out some really important tweaks. "I played it with her one night and she gave me

Like a lot of game design, it came down to math. Adding up all the different equivalences that would allow a player to choose any card in the deck, at any time, and it would work with any other card, was a challenge. But it was worth the effort and one of the key factors in the ultimate success of Pope's *Mage Wars*. Pope was also eager to not only share the origin story of *Mage Wars*, but even hint at what the future holds for their flagship series.

"We are pretty excited, we have a *Mage Wars* project that we are working on now. We are going to be coming out with that in the next couple of years. We have a huge team working and we are about to make a formal announcement as well as provide some art and samples so that we can let everyone know it is legit — it is coming," Pope said.



The family of Arcane Wonders founder and CEO, Bryan Pope, playtesting a game prototype

three things to fix and five others to consider. We typed up that feedback almost word-for-word as if it came from me and sent it off to the designer and they replied that it was some of the best feedback they'd ever gotten."





# The Wonder Continues

Arcane Wonders didn't stop with the success of *Mage Wars*. The publisher has since put out a host of board games that are well-known and highly regarded in the community. What makes Arcane Wonders stand out in the industry is their success with titles across different genres — from social shenanigans with *Sheriff of Nottingham* and *GoodCritters*, to the release of their recent Eurogame *Smartphone Inc.* and the expansion *Smartphone Inc. Update 1.1*. (Check out CGI's Spring 2020 issue for more details!)

And let's not forget *Onitama*, which continues to be popular for casual gamers and critical thinkers alike with its simple-yet-layered gameplay. Pope gave several reasons for fans of the game to be even more excited about what's yet to come from Arcane Wonders.

"We have some great expansions for *Onitama* planned. *Onitama Legends* is an intense arena battle for up to four players that introduces different factions with special powers. We have another one called *Light and Shadow*, which introduces Ninja pieces that are hidden off the board in secret. Since you don't know where they are, you are trying to kill the opposing master while also trying to find their ninjas. We are going to have a deluxe edition [of *Onitama*] as well, with a little bit nicer pieces, a little more elegant for those who want something nice-looking for their coffee table."



## Behind the Curtains of the Game Industry

Pope is well aware of the impact that COVID-19 has had on the industry, as well as other businesses and families. "I know that it's hurt everyone, sales are down, it's hard to get your games moving with factories and shipping. But I'm not worried about it, things are already starting to come back around, like some of the distributors are back to shipping again, some of the game shops are open again. Things are starting to pick back up and I think things are going to be okay."

He admits that the cancellation of trade shows is hurting many companies, especially those businesses that market almost exclusively through that avenue.

"But I'll be honest with you, those shows wear you out. The preparation, the planning, then the actual show itself, and then the recovery, cleanup, and follow-ups for weeks after. It is a lot of stress and a lot of work, and really most of the time you break even on a show, you might make some profit, but you kind of break even to do all this marketing because it's very expensive to get all your crews there."

Pope needed some time off, and even though he wishes that the circumstances of being forced to take a break were different, he personally needed the time. He also reflected on how worthwhile the trade shows are after having the time to assess them.





"I might be unique in that though, to be honest. If you ask other CEO's, they would probably say 'oh, you have got to have that trade show,' and there is no way they'd want to miss it. And I might have given that answer, too, until I was actually forced to not do any actual shows."

Pope is not unsympathetic to the other industries that are suffering, and is genuinely concerned about the health of many companies.

"I know there are a lot of people out of work, and that is terrible. I really hope this situation clears up and things go back to normal," Pope said.

Arcane Wonders has not laid off any workers and even though sales are waning a bit, Pope is focusing on the future, and using this time to plan and even catch up – which, he explained, is never possible in his industry.

For Arcane Wonders, the future is as hopeful as ever. Pope and his family are a prime example of resilience through difficult times. Despite the challenges that most families face, it is certain that the magic of gaming together can't be dispelled – not even by a global pandemic. 🎮

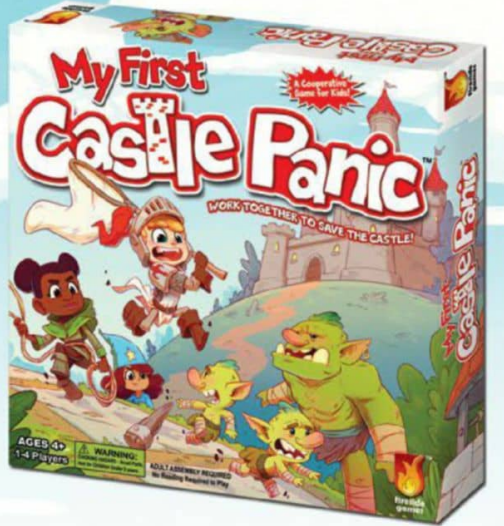


# My First Castle Panic



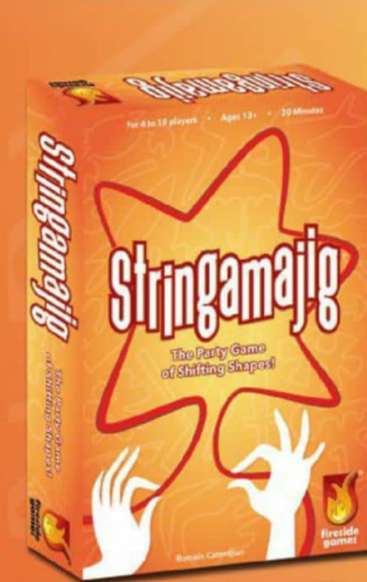
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*Starlink* is a drawing game where you draw constellations in the night sky, and create your own unique celestial nightscape!



The round board is placed in the center of the table. On your turn, you draw the top card of the deck and choose one of the two words written on it. The timer is started, and while it runs you must try to draw a depiction of the word on the board by connecting stars. You may use as many stars as you wish, but all lines must be straight and you can't use a star that is already part of another drawing. As the timer runs, the other players can attempt to guess what you are drawing. When a player makes a guess, they take the timer and place it in front of themselves. If they are incorrect, they cannot guess again until someone else has taken the timer.

You may continue to draw and players may continue to guess as long as the timer runs or until the word is guessed. If no one guesses the word before the timer runs out, then the drawing is erased from the board. If

a player guesses the word, the guesser and the drawer both earn points equal to the number of stars shown on the card. The drawer also earns an extra point if the drawing fits inside the telescope game piece, which adds a fun extra challenge. Once each player has drawn twice the game ends and the player with the most points wins.

*Starlink* keeps its mechanics and scoring system simple and allows the core idea of its gameplay to shine through. The board is a beautiful depiction of the stars, and slowly filling it up with the many constellations is a joy to watch unfold. Looking over the board at the end of the game is part of the fun.

The components are solid, and the board is a large enough size to give you a lot of room to draw. However, you do need to clean the board after you play, and the white dry erase markers don't seem to last too long. You might want to pick up some extras if you plan to play often.

If you enjoy drawing games, *Starlink* will tickle your fancy. The unique aesthetic sets it apart, while the game offers enough of a challenge to keep you engaged. It takes skill to determine the best way to link the stars in straight lines to create your images, and the restrictions make the game accessible even for those without a great deal of artistic skill.

## Starlink

By Markus Slawitscheck, Arno Steinwender

3-6 PLAYERS

30 MINS

AGES 8+

\$20

MSRP

INTERACTIVE

INDEPENDENT

This abstract strategy game calls on you to use one of your senses that is often underutilized in gaming: can your sense of touch lead you to victory?

## HELVETIQ



In *Four Senses*, everyone plays the game with a blindfold on (you can alternatively drape a covering over the board and game pieces if you're uncomfortable wearing the sleeping masks that come in the box). The game board is a four-by-four grid with 16 holes. There are three different types of game pieces: a flat disk, a flat disk with a hole through the center, and a two-level piece that is flat on one side and has a hole on the other.

On your turn, you must first attempt to feel out on the board what your opponent did on their turn. You then select a game piece (while still blindfolded) and place it in one of the holes on the board. Each hole can only hold two pieces. The only way you are allowed to create a third level is by placing a two-level piece on top of a single-level piece (it cannot be the other way around, nor can you create a fourth level). To win the game, you must align four identical pieces (with the pieces being at any height), align any four pieces at an identical height, or align three pieces of any type in ascending order of height so that there's a piece at one level, a piece on the second level, and finally a piece on the third. If a player places a winning piece and doesn't realize it, any player who notices it on a subsequent round can steal the win.

In a three-player game, you play three rounds, with the winning player of each round earning five points, and the player who went two turns before him earning three. The player with the most points after three rounds wins.

The rules of *Four Senses* are quite straightforward and the gameplay is fast, but the core mechanic at the heart of it is unique and different. It forces you to rely on a sense seldom used in gaming, and can consequently be quite challenging. There is also a memory aspect to the gameplay, as you try to remember where pieces were previously — to not only plan your best move but also figure out what your opponent's plan is and try to block it.

Scoring for a three-player game can be a little dissatisfying, but *Four Senses* is a clever and thoughtful two-player game, with plain-yet-nice quality wooden pieces, and it has a simplistic charm to go with its inventive gameplay.

## Four Senses

By Mitsuo Yamamoto

2-3 PLAYERS

10-20 MINS

AGES 8+

\$30

MSRP

LUCK

STRATEGY

INTERACTIVE

INDEPENDENT



Can you master the motions to convey the image in this party game of drawing pictures in the air?



In *El Maestro*, players take turns being the Maestro. The Maestro draws a card and examines the image. The image always shows at least two objects that relate to each other, such as a flower in a pot or a top hat and magician’s wand. The objects are drawn with pink and yellow lines. Standing back from the table, the Maestro draws the objects in the air, using hand gestures, starting with the shapes drawn in pink. The game suggests various hand signals to help convey more complex ideas as you air draw, such as gestures for below, inside, or on top; it also encourages you to come up with your own hand signals. While learning the game, the Maestro is allowed to name the signals they’re giving, but once everyone is familiar with the gameplay the Maestro cannot speak.

The other players each have a drawing pad and attempt to copy the shapes the Maestro is drawing, then write down the name of the two objects they believe are on the card.

Each player earns one point for each correctly named object (or if several players wrote the same word, even if it was incorrect). The Maestro also awards two points to the best drawing and one point for an honorable mention. The Maestro earns three points if at least one player guessed both objects correctly. Otherwise, they score two points. The game ends after four rounds, and the player with the most points wins (though we recommend playing enough rounds so that everyone can be the Maestro).

*El Maestro* is one of those party games where the joy is in the experience and not the competition. It is a delight to slowly master the signals, both as the Maestro and as the players attempting to read them. When they start to flow together, it is deeply satisfying. The scoring system feels a little off, with the Maestro earning at least two points regardless of results. But we like that there is an incentive for the other players to try to copy the air images closely to score extra points.

The components of *El Maestro* are great, with a stand that shows the image card to the Maestro while hiding it from the other players. The artwork is attractive and there’s a nice variety in the types of images displayed. If you enjoy party games where you are constantly pushing yourself to improve, *El Maestro* has a unique mechanic and is thoroughly enjoyable.

# El Maestro


By Valéry Fourcade



3-8 PLAYERS


30 MINS


AGES 10+


\$25 MSRP


INTERACTIVE


INDEPENDENT





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The dice manipulation game where the dice are your patients!

1-4 PLAYERS
45-90 MINS
AGES 10+

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2-6 PLAYERS
3-15 MINS
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## Kittin

Stack cats in this fast paced game featuring wooden cat meeples!

2-8 PLAYERS
3-15 MINS
AGES 6+

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Attack the castle! Loot gold and diamonds, and knock the king about as you fling your troops right into the heart of the enemy base in *Flyin' Goblin*.



The castle is built into the box, with 16 individual rooms, a tower, and roof platforms balanced on the walls. At the start of the game, each player begins with two goblin soldiers. Every round, players simultaneously use their catapults to launch their goblins into the tower. You must keep your catapult a set distance from the game box, but may move it around as long as you keep it on your side of the board. The first player to launch all their goblins shouts “finished”; players continue until only one has any goblins left, at which point that player gets one final launch.

Next, each player checks where goblins landed in the game box. Depending on the room a goblin ends up in, you may take different actions. Examples include taking coins, taking diamonds, rotating the box, and stealing from an opponent. At the start of the game, the king is

placed on his balcony. The first player to knock him off takes the balcony piece (which offers an extra bonus when landing a goblin in the tower) and places the king on any roof platform. If another player knocks him off this platform, they take the balcony, and so on.

During the next phase, players can spend coins to buy more pieces. Typically, you may only buy one piece each round. However, there is a room action that allows you to buy more. There are four types of pieces you can buy: regular soldiers; captains, which are launched like soldiers but activate a room’s ability twice when they land; robbers, which are placed on a wall platform and earn you one diamond per turn as long as they are not knocked off during the launching phase; and totems. You have four totem pieces that you use to build your totem on one of the roof platforms. If it is ever knocked down, you place all pieces back on the platform except for the highest piece, which you must purchase again. If you complete your totem, you win the game. Alternatively, you can win the game by collecting a certain number of diamonds.

*Flyin' Goblin* blends strategy with dexterity in a satisfying way. As you improve your aim, you can begin to consider which rooms will best serve your purposes, while choosing which pieces to buy also changes your strategy. Knocking an opponent’s piece off the walls also adds an extra layer of player interaction while keeping all the chaotic fun that dexterity games can bring as goblins go awry.

## Flyin' Goblin

By Corentin Lebrat, Théo Rivière

2-4 PLAYERS

30 MINS

AGES 8+

\$35  
MSRP

LUCK

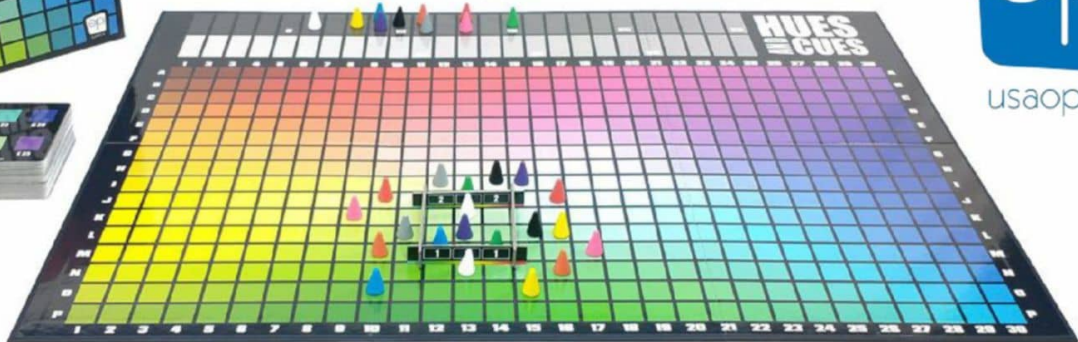
STRATEGY

INTERACTIVE

INDEPENDENT



In this party game about colors and shades, can you clue players in on the one color (out of over four hundred) that is yours?



Each round of *Hues and Cues*, a player takes on the role of clue giver. They draw a card and choose one of the four colors shown on it. They then give a one-word clue that does not name the color, refer to its position on the board, or indicate anything in the room. Each other player then places a guess token on the color square that they believe is the clue giver’s color. The clue giver may then choose to give a two-word clue, in which case the other players each place a second guess token on the board. No two guess tokens can ever occupy the same color square.

The clue giver then places the scoring frame on the board, with the correct color in the center of the frame. The frame encloses a nine-by-nine area. Any player who has a guess token on the correct color scores three points. Any guess tokens on a square directly surrounding the correct square earn two points. Any guess tokens on a space directly adjacent to the outside of the frame earn one point. Finally, the clue giver earns a point for each guess token inside the scoring frame. This means the clue giver can earn up to nine points on a perfect round, while guessers can earn up to five. Once everyone has been the clue giver twice (or once in a game of seven or more players) the game ends and the player with the most points wins.

*Hues and Cues* is a fascinating party game in which the clues are never as simple as you think. With a truly

impressive range of color shades on the board, you need to carefully consider your clue choices, as it’s easy to accidentally mislead the other players. It is intriguing to see how different players view different colors and to hear the discussions that can result from a particularly tricky clue. The scoring system is also well-executed, with players scoring points for coming close, and ensures the game plays nicely with a larger group.

The rules are incredibly simple, and we appreciated how they clearly laid out what was allowed (or not allowed) when giving clues. Players with color blindness, however, will have a huge disadvantage in this game. Otherwise, it is a great fit for players regardless of age, and one adults and children alike can enjoy together.

## Hues and Cues

By Scott Brady

3-8 PLAYERS

30 MINS

AGES 10+

\$25  
MSRP

INTERACTIVE

INDEPENDENT



A relaxing and thoughtful two-player game, *Stellar* has you searching the cosmos for black holes, planets, and moons.



At the beginning of the game, each player lays out their twelve telescope cards. You place one starting celestial object card face-up on any of your telescope cards and another face-up in front of you to start your notebook area. You are then dealt two cards. On the table is a row of five cards numbered one through five, and a card is dealt from the deck to each.

On your turn, you take a card from the row and add it to your hand. You then play one card from your hand onto one of your telescope cards or to your notebook. Each card shows a number — you must then take the card from the row slot whose number matches the number on the card you just played, and play it to the location (telescope or notebook) that you did not play your first card to. If the card you drafted into your hand would have been the one you would have to play, you instead

draw the top card of the deck and play that. Finally, you draw new cards to refill the row.

There are five types of celestial object cards. When adding a card to your telescope, if you already have a copy of that object there, you must play the new one adjacent to it. If you cannot legally add a card to your telescope but must add it, you play it face-down. When adding cards to your notebook, you are attempting to make sequences for each object type. There is a sixth object type, satellites, which can be used as wilds to help with sequences.

Once both players have filled all twelve slots on their telescope, the game ends. For each type of object, you count up all the star icons shown on the cards of that type in your telescope, and multiply that by the number of cards in your longest consecutive sequence of that card type in your notebook. Your telescope is also divided into three sections. You add up the numbers shown on your cards in each section, and the player with the highest result in each section scores ten points. Finally, you earn ten points for having each object type in your telescope.

*Stellar* is aesthetically and thematically attractive. It's a neat little game of math and strategy, where choices have multiple layers and repercussions. Your first action dictating your second is a clever mechanic, and the scoring system has surprising depth. It's a thoughtful game with minimal direct player interaction, but strategic gameplay forces you to keep an eye on your opponent.

# Stellar

By Ben Pinchback, Matt Riddle

2 PLAYERS

30 MINS

AGES 8+

\$20  
MSRP

LUCK

STRATEGY

INTERACTIVE

INDEPENDENT

*Super Cats* is a single game split into two episodes of feline superhero action!



During episode one, each player has five cards in front of them cat-side up, and the six actions are shown in the center of the table. Each action has a number associated with it, from zero to five. Each round, players simultaneously choose an action by showing a number of fingers after chanting “SU-PER-CATS!”. Any players who show the same number cancel each other out, while the player with the highest unique number performs the action associated with that number. The actions will allow them to flip a certain number of their cards over to their super cat side and can affect the next round. The first player to flip all their cards wins the first episode.

During the second episode, the winner goes up against the evil RoboDog, which the other players control. Again, all players simultaneously raise zero to five fingers, this time chanting “RO-BO-DOG!”. If the winner raised a unique number, that same number of the RoboDog’s twelve cards are flipped; flip them all and this player wins episode two as well! If the winner matched with one or more RoboDog players, a super cat card is flipped back to the cat side for each player that matched. If they are all flipped, the RoboDog players win.

The two-part gameplay gives *Super Cats* an engaging story despite its short playtime. The artwork is cute and creative and the rules are light and breezy. It’s a great blend of theme and mechanics as you try to predict your opponents’ decisions, and both episodes bring their own twist to the gameplay. 🐾

# Super Cats

By Antoine Bauza, Corentin Lebrat, Ludovic Maublanc, Nicolas Oury, Théo Rivière

2-5 PLAYERS

15 MINS

AGES 8+

\$10  
MSRP

LUCK

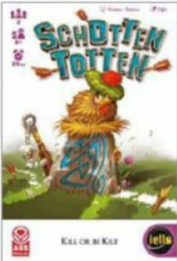
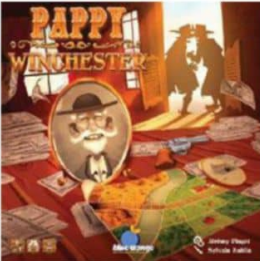
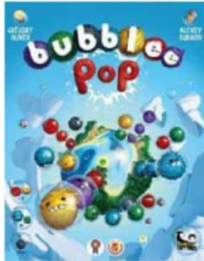
STRATEGY

INTERACTIVE

INDEPENDENT

# OTHER RECOMMENDED GAMES

For a complete list, visit [CasualGameRevolution.com/games](https://CasualGameRevolution.com/games)





# Gridopolis is Major Fun!

## The Concept

*Gridopolis* is a game of construction and capture. Players build a multi-level modular board and then use pawns and kings to jump and capture their opponent's pieces. Teleporters and blockers present challenges and opportunities in equal measure. And the game board itself will shape every decision you make as each player has a chance to add new elements to it as the game unfolds!

## The Components

*Gridopolis* has a wonderful set of basic building components that snap together to create multiple game boards. There are pads that make up the spaces the pawns and kings will move on. Then there are links that join pads together. These links have little nubbins that connect to posts, so game boards can be stacked together to form a three-dimensional play space. *Gridopolis* is aptly named because you'll feel like you've created a small cityscape each time you play.

There are suggested layouts for your first few games, but once you understand the basic concept, the sky's the limit — each game board in *Gridopolis* can rise from the imagination of the players.

## The Mechanics

You'll find many echoes of classic, almost universally known, games like *Checkers* and *Chess* in *Gridopolis*.

Your turn consists of selecting a pawn to move one pad (one space) in any direction, including diagonal movement AND including moves up or down! Every pawn has a home row marked by the Kingerizer pieces. A pawn's move can never be backward toward its home row.

Jumping is not only allowed in *Gridopolis*, it's the essence of the game. You can jump over your own pieces to extend a pawn's movement. If you jump over an opponent's piece, you capture

Each player begins the game with six large, colorful pawns. These pawns can be flipped over to become Kings during the game. There are Kingerizer pieces in each player color; they nest into the pad spaces along the edge of the board to indicate a player's home row.

Also included are Hyper-pads and blocker tokens that create different patterns of movement on the board when they are in play.

Once the board is built (including Hyper-pads), pawns are then placed on opposite sides and separated by a neutral unoccupied area. Now you're ready to play!

it and remove it from the board. And just like its classic cousin, you can chain together multiple jumps to capture multiple pieces in a single move. You can even sacrifice your own piece by jumping off the board to make a capture! Your opponent gets the Kamikaze piece, so this move is one of desperation, usually.

If you can maneuver a pawn to the home row of an opponent, it flips over and becomes a King. Kings move just like pawns EXCEPT they get an optional bonus move after the first. This extra move gives you a ton of flexibility and adds new decisions and strategies to every turn.



If you land on a Hyper-pad, your piece beams immediately to another space with an empty Hyper-pad on the board. The *Gridopolis* board may look big, but with even just a few Hyper-pads, no space is safe...or very far away!

Envisioning and anticipating possible jumps across multiple levels makes *Gridopolis* a lovely dance between aggression and safety. Can you extend your pawn's reach without risking

## What Sets This Game Apart?

Planning for the unknown sets *Gridopolis* apart. Instead of moving a pawn or king on your turn, each player has two additional options:

- You may place a blocker token on the board
- Or you may add a new space to the board.

A blocker token is played to an unoccupied pad. That space is eliminated from play for the rest of the game.

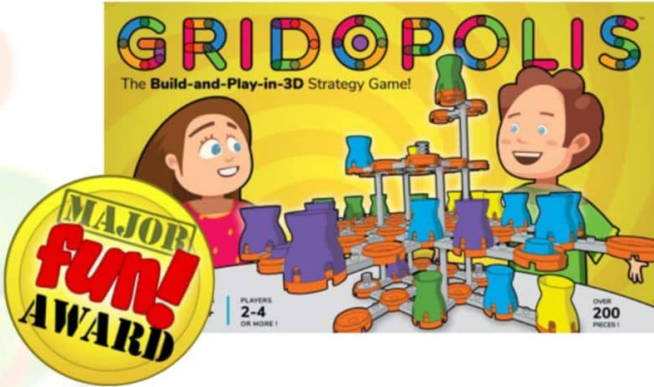
To add a new space to the board, you select pieces from a mini-construction kit each player starts with at the beginning of the game. You have three pads (with connector links) and two posts. You can add a space to any level. You can even add a level to the board with a post! These options blow the game wide open.

The board is not a static thing in *Gridopolis*. You have to account for and anticipate not only where your opponent might move, but how your opponent might change the very landscape of the game!

If the board was too sprawling, this could lead to brain-lock. By limiting the number of spaces a player can add to the board, *Gridopolis* encourages players to consider their options from different angles and perspectives in a very literal and fun way!

capture or exposing your home row and allowing other players to create kings?

For a longer game, you can play until only one person has a piece remaining on the board. For a shorter game, you play a set number of turns and score based on how many pieces you collect and how many you have remaining on the board. High score wins.



## Final Thoughts

It's a tricky thing to build a game on the back of such well-known classics. There are so many poor examples floating through the world of games. They invite comparison with the greats and are almost always found wanting.

What *Gridopolis* accomplishes is special and noteworthy. It strikes a lovely balance between familiar and new elements. It offers players a fun remix of the original. The classics are still recognizable in some form, but *Gridopolis* sings to new generations of players with a voice that is distinctive enough to rise above the chorus of wannabes.

*Gridopolis* combines the Lego-like joy of building with a meditative fun akin to a game of 3D chess against Mr. Spock on the Enterprise. And, as *Gridopolis* is the first in a series of games using these same components, it's encouraging to imagine many new paths to Major Fun building from this common ground. 🎲


**Stephen Conway**

*on duty as Major Fun  
and host of The Spiel*




Gridopolis


Designed by SchultzeWorks Design Studio



2-4 PLAYERS



20-60 MINS



AGES 8+

\$75

MSRP





# Your Turn!

A Spotlight on the Gaming Community **CGI**

## Starting Player

“My family nearly always uses Rock-Paper-Scissors to pick start player. Sometimes this selection process becomes an event all on its own.”

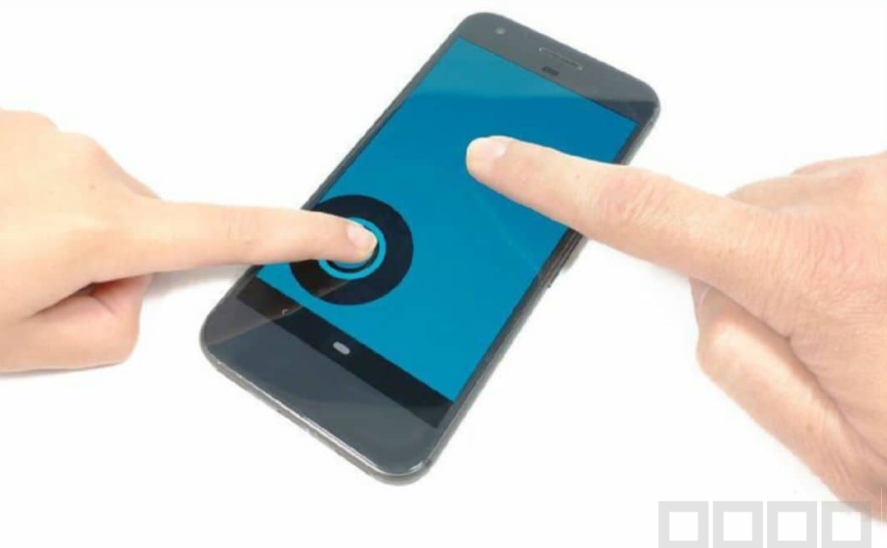
— Mike R.



## What Are Your Unique Gaming Traditions?

“We shuffle player tokens underneath the table to see who goes first.”

— Max O.



“We always use a ‘finger chooser’ app called *Chwazi* to select a start player or divide into teams.”

— Daniel R.

## Winning & Losing

“We play games and the loser has to do dishes.”

— Cindy F.



“The loser gets to flip the table...not the actual game table, but a miniature version with components stacked on top. It’s funny, but also very satisfying to vent frustration.”

— Chris J.

## Feline Observers

“We have to leave the box top on the table next to the board game, so that our cat can sit and oversee the game.”

— Sylvia P.





# Relationships

“When I know I am getting together with my family, I’ll pick a day and make it a marathon day. We play every game we have until someone drops dead asleep and the elimination of players begins.”

— Awilda C.



“To celebrate our wedding anniversary, my husband and I play through all the Spiel des Jahres winners since the year we got married. It is a fun way to spend a few days and it helps us recall what our life was like as each of those great games entered our collection.”

— Alexa C.

“We have a tradition that when I can’t sleep at night, I will occasionally get my teenagers (who are usually still up) to come play a game. They call it ‘Late Night Game Night.’”

— Jeremy S.



Next Issue: How have games changed your life?

Send your ideas and photos to: [editor@CasualGameRevolution.com](mailto:editor@CasualGameRevolution.com)



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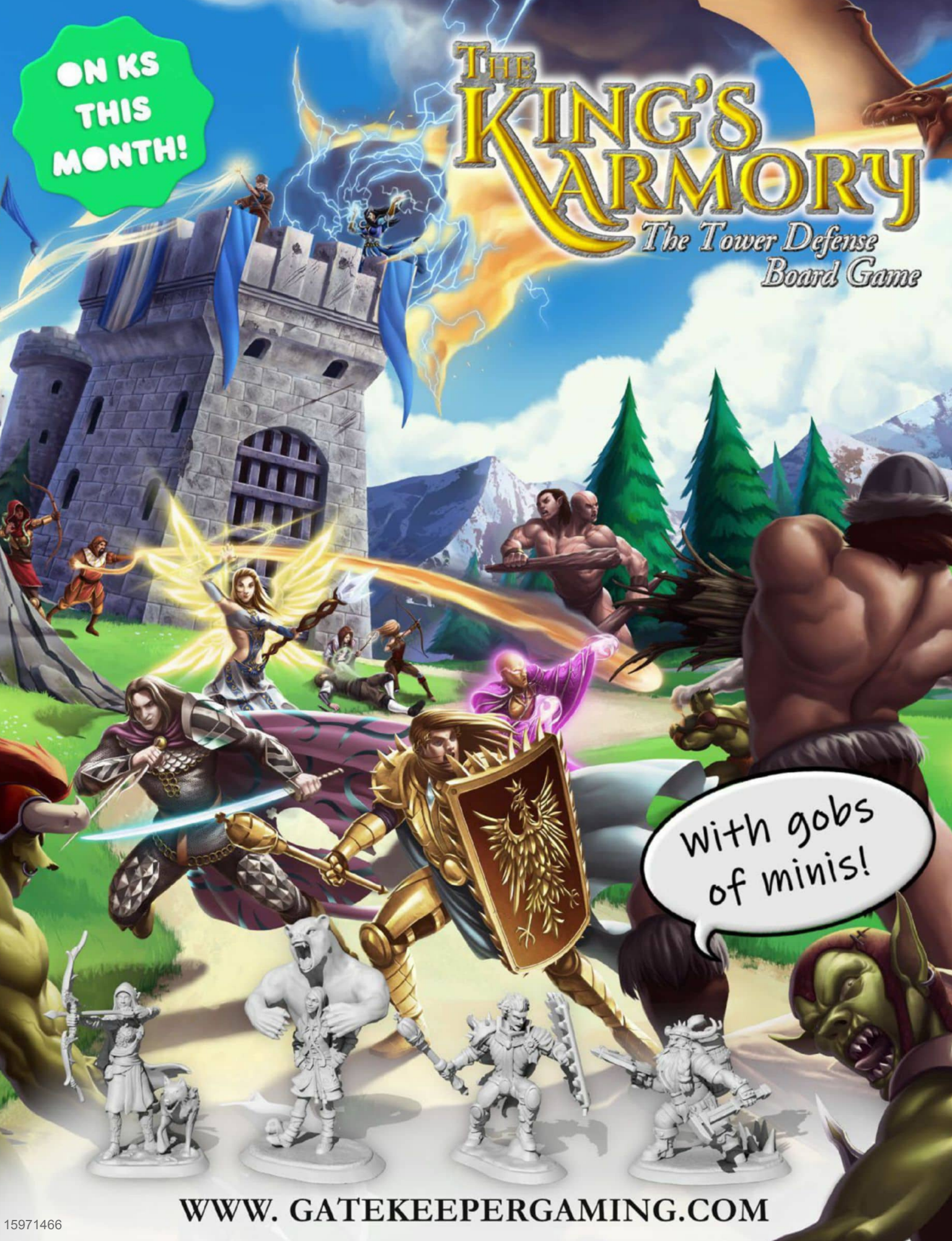




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