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The Premier Guide to Casual Board and Card Games
Issue #14 – Winter 2016



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Game by Shane Willis

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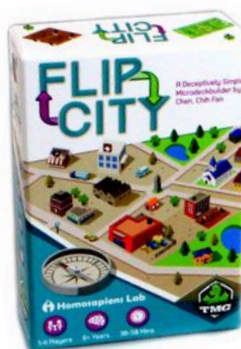
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Editor-in-Chief
Chris James



Editor
Eric Huemmer



Game Reviews
Naomi Laeuchli



Graphic Design
Gregg Lewis-Qualls

Contributing Authors: Matt Thrower, Patrick R. Kelly, Gabriele Berzoni, James Floyd Kelly, Stuart R. Kaplan, Lynn Araujo

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1000 N. Beeline Highway #259
Payson, AZ 85541
(520) 344-0095
info@CasualGameRevolution.com

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FoxMind.com



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Stratus Games publishes quality casual games for bright minds! Our fun line of games includes the award-winning *Gold Mine* and *Eruption*, the hilarious improv party game *Off Your Rocker*, and more.

StratusGames.com



The Red Dragon Inn

You and your adventuring companions have slain the dragon, but can you survive the afterparty? Get ready to crack jokes, throw punches, and spend your last gold piece on the fine brews of *The Red Dragon Inn*! Will you be the last adventurer standing, or will you end up sleeping in the stables?

In *The Red Dragon Inn*, each player takes on the role of a unique adventurer trying to survive a wild night of roughhousing, drinking,

and gambling at the tavern. Because you're all healed up and sober, your Fortitude starts at 20 and your Alcohol Content starts at 0. As the game progresses, those numbers start inching toward each other. If your Fortitude and Alcohol Content markers meet or cross, you pass out and you're out of the game!

Meanwhile, players are enjoying their hard-earned gold in the best way possible: by recklessly spending it! Each player starts with 10 Gold in their stash, and throughout the game that pile will dwindle as they pay the bar tab, engage in drinking contests, and try their luck at games of chance. If a player ever runs out of gold, they get sent to the stables and lose the game!



SLUGFEST GAMES™

This is where your character deck comes into play. Each player has access to a character with their own unique strengths and weaknesses. Mastering your character's advantages will ensure victory against your comrades, so why don't we go and meet our cast of adventurers?

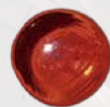


Deirdre the Priestess

Deirdre uses the power of the Goddess to protect and heal her friends and to smite the wicked creatures of the deep dungeons. She'll also smite anyone who treats her like a bimbo, even though she's not above working her good looks to get her way.

The Good: The Goddess keeps Deirdre protected from harm.

The Bad: The Goddess's protection does not help against alcohol. Deirdre is a cheap date.



Fiona the Volatile

This brash warrior maiden is quick with a sword...or axe, or dagger, or any other sharp, pointy thing she can get her hands on.

The Good: She's more than capable of dishing out and taking serious physical abuse, and her formidable constitution allows her to drink a lot!

The Bad: For all her strengths, she's not very good at keeping track of her gold.

Gerki the Sneak

Gerki's a shifty halfling whose pockets are always full of gold. A master of poisons, mechanisms, and stabbing people in the back, Gerki has saved the lives of his friends many, many times. Of course, if he wasn't so darn useful they most likely would have killed him by now!

The Good: Gerki is so good at gambling that some people suspect that he might be cheating.

The Bad: Yeah, he's cheating.



Zot the Wizard

Zot might have had a cushy job teaching magic theory at the Wizards' College, had he not been saddled with Pooky, a psychotic, binge drinking bunny rabbit, as his familiar.

The Good: Zot is good at card tricks, and, hence, is good at gambling. His mastery of many magical spells keeps him well protected, whether he's roughhousing, drinking, or gambling.

The Bad: That rabbit is insane. Seriously.

Fun Fact:

Since The Red Dragon Inn's debut in 2007, it has launched 13 expansions, swelling the cast of available characters to a staggering 29 adventurers! With this vast library of characters, and new ones on the horizons, players have the ability to mix and match new combinations of heroes each game. □



Flip City

Sometimes a game will come along that combines two game genres, turning them into something new and fresh. *Flip City* does just this by merging deckbuilding with a press-your-luck element – and the result is fun, strategic, and addictive.



Naomi Laeuchli

Game Reviewer and
Casual Game Groupie

In *Flip City*, players are building a town. Rather than having a hand of cards, they have a deck from which they can draw. On a turn, the active player can draw as many cards as he likes, one by one. Cards can earn victory points, gold coins, and unhappy citizens. If a player draws too many unhappy citizens, his turn is automatically over. The press-your-luck element comes in when drawing cards. You can always see the top card of your deck but not what is underneath it. Some cards will force you to play them if they rise to the top of your deck, adding more unhappiness and potentially ending your turn. Do you want to keep drawing for more gold to buy new cards? Or stop now and avoid potentially missing out on the buy phase of your turn altogether?

The game calls itself a “microdeckbuilder,” which makes sense because the deckbuilding aspect of *Flip City* is extremely simple. There are only four card types you

can choose to add to your deck (five if you include the optional Office expansion that comes in the box). But the game brings additional depth (and a clever design) by having a different building, with different abilities and bonuses, on each side of a card. For instance, you can add a Convenience Store to your deck, and then later spend gold to flip it over and turn it into a Shopping Mall. You can also flip the cards back again for additional bonuses. Figuring out which cards make effective combinations is a lot of fun, and which cards you flip quickly changes your strategy.

A player wins the game by earning eight victory points in a single turn or playing at least eighteen cards and a Convenience Store. These two separate victory conditions also offer different strategies towards winning, increasing the replay value and giving a vast amount of depth to a seemingly simple game.

Between elegant and easy-to-learn rules, the clever card design, and cozy artwork, *Flip City* is a lot of fun. There is limited player interaction, but turns are quick so you always feel engaged. Since there are always new card combos to try and different approaches to take, you can keep coming back to *Flip City* again and again.



MSRP: \$20
Designer: Chen, Chih Fan
Publisher: Tasty Minstrel Games
1-4 players, ages 8+, 30-50 mins.



Dragonwood

You meet a dragon in the woods. How are you going to defeat it? Strike it with a sword? Stomp on it? Or defeat it with the power of your terrifying (or terrified) scream? In *Dragonwood*, the object is to win the most victory points by defeating monsters in battle.

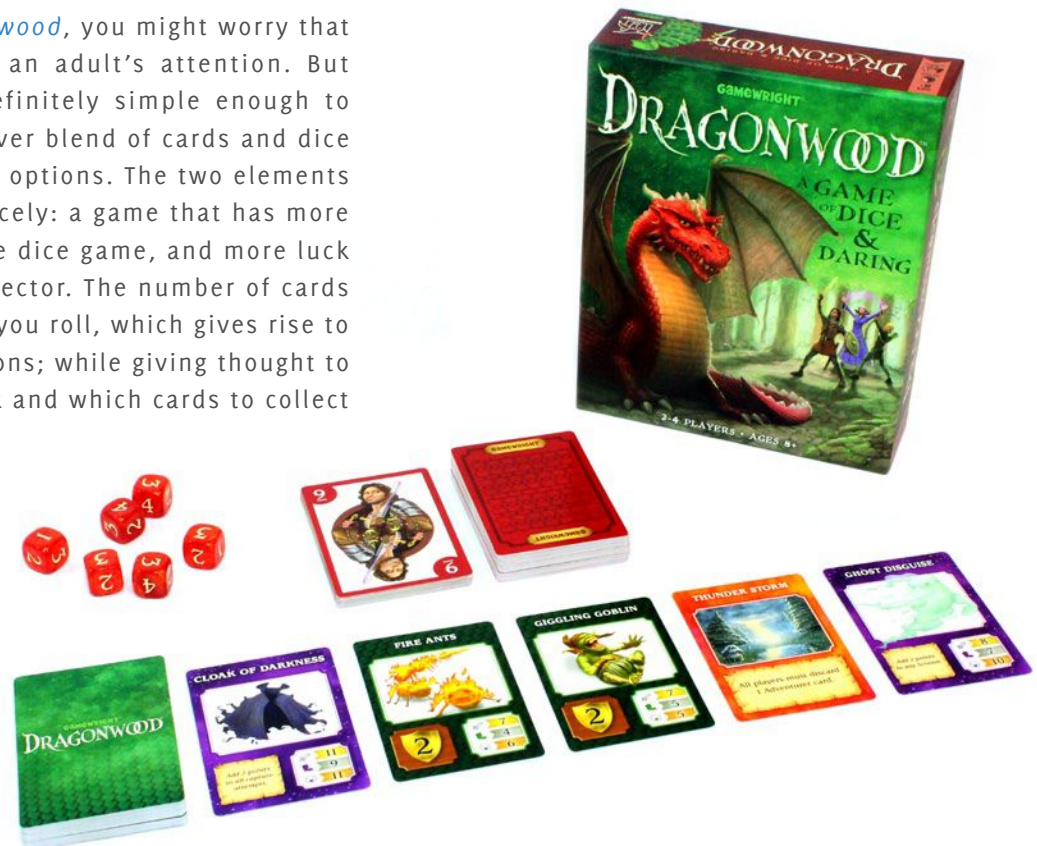
Creature cards are laid out in the middle of the table. Each one requires you to roll higher than a certain number to successfully capture it. To earn dice, you must play Adventurer cards. If you wish to strike a Creature, you must play a specific set of cards. Stomping requires cards that are all of the same number, and screaming needs them to be of an identical color. The number of cards you play determines the number of dice you are able to roll. If you roll the number necessary to defeat the creature, you may place it in your victory pile.

Enchantments can also be won in battle. These are not worth victory points, but they do give a player powerful abilities that he can use in future battles. Event cards occasionally appear when you draw new creatures, which is a nice touch to bring home the theme of adventurers questing through a forest.

When you first see *Dragonwood*, you might worry that it won't be able to hold an adult's attention. But while the gameplay is definitely simple enough to appeal to children, its clever blend of cards and dice offers intriguing gameplay options. The two elements complement each other nicely: a game that has more strategy than your average dice game, and more luck than your average set collector. The number of cards you play impacts the dice you roll, which gives rise to fun press-your-luck decisions; while giving thought to which monsters you attack and which cards to collect

is important if you hope to become the greatest hero in *Dragonwood*. The artwork is gorgeous and the components live up to Gamewright's usual high standard. It's a light game that is a perfect opener to a game night but also fun for repeated plays over the course of an evening.

MSRP: \$15
Designer: Darren Kisgen
Publisher: Gamewright
2-4 players, ages 8+, 20 mins.



Renaissance Wars

Renaissance Wars is an elegant trick-taking game, with a rich and nuanced theme that adds weight to the gameplay.

In this game, players each take on the role of a famous figure from Renaissance history. As you earn money, you advance forward through the Renaissance era. The object of the game is to be the first player to earn enough money to reach the Age of Enlightenment. Money is earned by collecting sets of cards and taking tricks. Different event cards are added to the deck as the game progresses, which capture the feeling of moving forward through history. Many of the game cards feature historical drawings and paintings, and you can tell that the designers were passionate about their theme.

At first, the game can seem daunting, since the rulebook uses its own terms for familiar concepts. But you quickly realize that the mechanics are ones that will be familiar to most players (trick-taking, trump cards, card suits), and the game immediately becomes accessible.

During the first phase, players compete in skirmishes. The starting player plays a card. Other players do not have to follow suit and may play any card of their choice. After a player wins a skirmish, he may earn money by playing a card combination such as four

MSRP: \$50

Designers: Karen Boginski, Jody Boginski-Barbessi

Publisher: U.S. Games Systems

2-4 players, ages 12+, 40-60 mins.

queens or six card types from one suit. After the skirmish phase (which continues until the deck runs out), the battle begins and players again compete for tricks, but this time there are set rules for which cards you may play and when. The two different rule sets for the skirmishes and the battles ensure that you have to think ahead and plan strategies for two different scenarios.

There are some small opportunities for backstabbing other players, and each character comes with its own unique abilities. For instance, William Shakespeare can write plays and Christopher Columbus can set sail to discover new lands – this all adds to the enjoyment.

Playing *Renaissance Wars* feels like an immersive experience. It does an excellent job of evolving a trick-taking game into something with a little more heft. If you're looking for a longer game, this one is perfect as the main feature for a game night.





The Resistance: Avalon

Social deduction isn't for everyone, but if you enjoy games like *Werewolf* or *Coup*, then *The Resistance: Avalon* is filled with all the bluffing, backstabbing, and trickery you could possibly want.

Players are each dealt a loyalty card, which secretly informs them whether they are a loyal follower of King Arthur, or a Minion of the evil Mordred. Every round a certain number of players are selected to go on a quest. Players all vote on the group chosen for the quest and no group can be sent without a majority vote. After the vote has passed, the quest begins. Each player on the quest has a success and a failure card. Each of the questers secretly plays one of these two cards into a pool, which is then revealed. Depending on the quest, one or two failure cards will result in an unsuccessful mission. In order for the heroes to win the game, they must successfully complete three of the five quests.

What sets *Avalon* apart from its sister game, *The Resistance*, is the inclusion of characters. One player is secretly dealt the Merlin card. Merlin is on the side of good and knows which players are evil. However, Merlin has to be careful not to be too obvious when sabotaging Mordred's team, because at the end of the game Team Evil may assassinate the player they

believe is Merlin. If they're correct, they win the game. There are a slew of other additional characters, each with their own unique abilities. Trying out different combinations of them is a fun way to keep the gameplay fresh and to mix things up.

The game is well-balanced for the number of players allowed, and while any theme would work for the game, the Arthurian setting is perfect.

Players have a lot more information than in *Werewolf*. You have to keep track of who voted whom onto the quest, which players were on missions that failed, and determine who is Merlin. This kind of bluffing and mind game certainly won't be for everyone, but for those who do enjoy these elements, *The Resistance: Avalon* is one of very best games of its kind.

MSRP: \$20

Designer: Don Eskridge

Publisher: Indie Boards & Cards

5-10 players, ages 13+, 30 mins.





IOTA

IOTA is a clever little game that comes in a tin box that can fit in the palm of your hand, be carried anywhere in your purse or pocket, and be taught in five minutes.

MSRP: \$8

Designer: Gene Mackles

Publisher: Gamewright

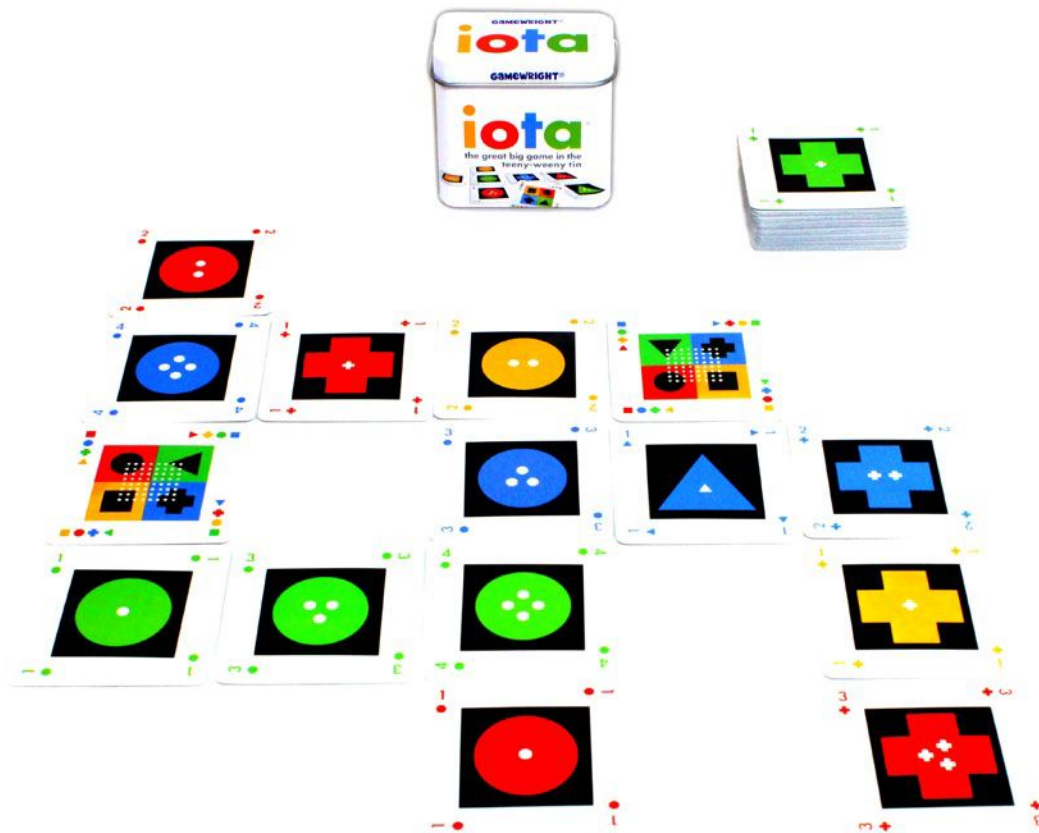
2-4 players, ages 8+, 30 mins.

IOTA is simple and doesn't believe in overcomplicating itself. The game consists of 66 cards. Each card has one of four different colors, shapes, and numbers. Cards are played on the table in straight lines, adding on to other lines, and building off of other players' cards. The goal of the game is to score points by creating sets of 2 to 4 cards. In each set, each feature of the cards must either be all the same or all different. The points you earn equal the number displayed on each of the sets onto which you played that turn. Wild cards can be used to help create sets, but if another player can replace it with a card from her own hand, she may pick it up to use again.

Since any two cards can create a set, players are virtually never stuck without a valid move. This means that unlike other abstract, pattern-based games, you never become

frustrated, repeatedly drawing cards until you can finally make a legal combination. At the same time, keeping an eye out for plays that will earn you the most points keeps the game challenging. When a player successfully completes a set of four cards, the points they earn that round are doubled. If you complete a second set of four cards on the same turn, those points will be doubled again. This ensures that players can make dramatic comebacks and that no one is out of the running until the last card is played.

IOTA takes a familiar game concept and perfects it. What it does, it does really, really well. Plus, you can easily take the pint-sized tin with you wherever you go. Just make sure you have enough table space available when you break it out.





Pickles to Penguins

What do hammers have in common with coffee mugs? What links records to pancakes? And what about rolling pins and spoons? Making these connections is exactly what *Pickles to Penguins* is all about.

Players are each dealt twenty-five cards. Each of these cards features a type of object, place, or animal. The rest of the deck forms the draw pile. Two cards are drawn from the deck and placed in the center of the table. Players must think of a connection between either of the two items shown and one of the cards in their hands. When a player makes a connection, he says it out loud (i.e., “both piggy banks and safes are used to keep money”), and places his card on top of the one to



which it connects. Play continues until one player has gotten rid of all his cards. There are over five hundred cards included in the game, each of which is double-sided, so you don't have to worry about the same cards reappearing too often.

Gameplay is often fast, chaotic, and comical. With everyone playing at once, you have to think fast if you want to keep up, and it's not uncommon for things to get a bit crazy. Needless to say, *Pickles to Penguins* is a lot of fun. It is one of those games that is better the more people you have playing. We recommend bringing this out when you have a large gaming group together. ☐

MSRP: \$27

Designer: (Uncredited)

Publisher: Outset Media

2+ players, ages 8+, 5-20 mins.

★ RECOMMENDED GAMES ★

For a complete list, visit CasualGameRevolution.com/games

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Alpha Bandits
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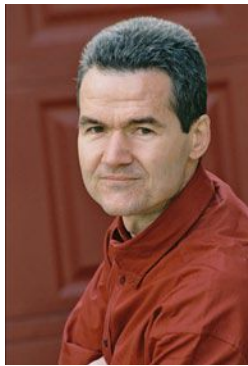
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The reality, of course, is that most hobby games don't make that much money. The majority of designers make games for the fun and fascination of it. That their hobby happens to earn them a little extra income is just a happy coincidence. Yet there are a very few who've managed to live the dream; people who earn enough from game design to make a living.

THE PATH TO FULL-TIME GAME DESIGN

Amongst the full-time designers is probably the most famous game designer on the planet, Reiner Knizia. (*Lost Cities*, *Samurai*, and *Ra* are a few examples of his work.) Being a fellow gamer, you'd expect him to understand that yearning so many of us feel. I had the pleasure of interviewing him, resplendent in his trademark bow tie, and he doesn't disappoint.



Reiner Knizia

"Everybody becomes a game designer, a hobby game designer, because they love games," he told me. "You'll keep it as a hobby and you gain a lot of experience, and then, if you are lucky, you gain some successes. Then, when you feel yourself reasonably established already in the world of games, I think doing the jump to full time is not so risky."

This slow and steady route is the way most of us presume full-time designers get to where they are. It was how Knizia came to be where he is, after accumulating some savings during his tenure as a senior manager in the banking sector.

It's not, however, the only route. With some luck and a lot of skill, some designers risk going full-time after one super-successful release. One such is Antoine Bauza. When I asked him about how he came to be full-time, he answered with two words: "*7 Wonders!*"

He was already part-time in paid employment when his first game *7 Wonders* came out in 2010. Following its rise to fame, he was able to switch over to game design full-time. "Thanks to the success of this game, I can go on designing more games," he continued. "That's hugely lucky. I'm aware of that!"

THE PROCESS OF PLAYTESTING

If you've ever tried to design your own game, you'll know that one of the key activities is playtesting – the iterative loop of playing your game over and over again, gathering feedback, and incorporating changes for more testing. I suspect it's one of the main hurdles at which most amateur designers fall. Personally, I've never managed to stomach it for more than a handful of rounds.

For Reiner, however, it's actually one of his favorite parts of the job. "Playtesting is the lifeblood of game design," he stated. "So essentially we play every day. I enjoy playtesting. You have a certain feeling in your head how it should be, and then you test this against reality. It's almost like a little Christmas every time

you play it. Because I see what really comes out. What works and sometimes, very frustratingly, what does not work."

Antoine offered similar sentiments, telling me that "finished games are not exciting anymore. When a game is done, I don't like to spend time on it, I want to make something fresh, a new project." He admits it takes him around 200 playtests and 2 years to finish a design.

For Reiner, it takes him anywhere between a few months and several years. "They need to ripen," he said. "They need to have their time. You can't force it."

When most of us playtest, we do it with our established gaming groups. But that's often not an option for a professional designer. "I always make an effort to play with the target group," Reiner explained. "So for kids games I go to school, and with family games I try to play with normal families, who are casual players."

Doing so creates an unexpected and fun paradox. "If they love the game," he continued, "they become real players, and then they're spoiled for being the real target group!"

MARKETING GAME IDEAS

I can't help but wonder if this love of playtesting might be one of the keys that separate successful designers from amateurs. Another could be a seemingly boundless supply of ideas. The two men found inspiration everywhere: from media, other people, other games — so many that Reiner described it as being "like a curse." What's perhaps more surprising is how much energy full-time designers have to devote to other activities in the industry, softer skills than the cycle of design and test. Reiner explains it well, using an example that's readily at hand as we talk.

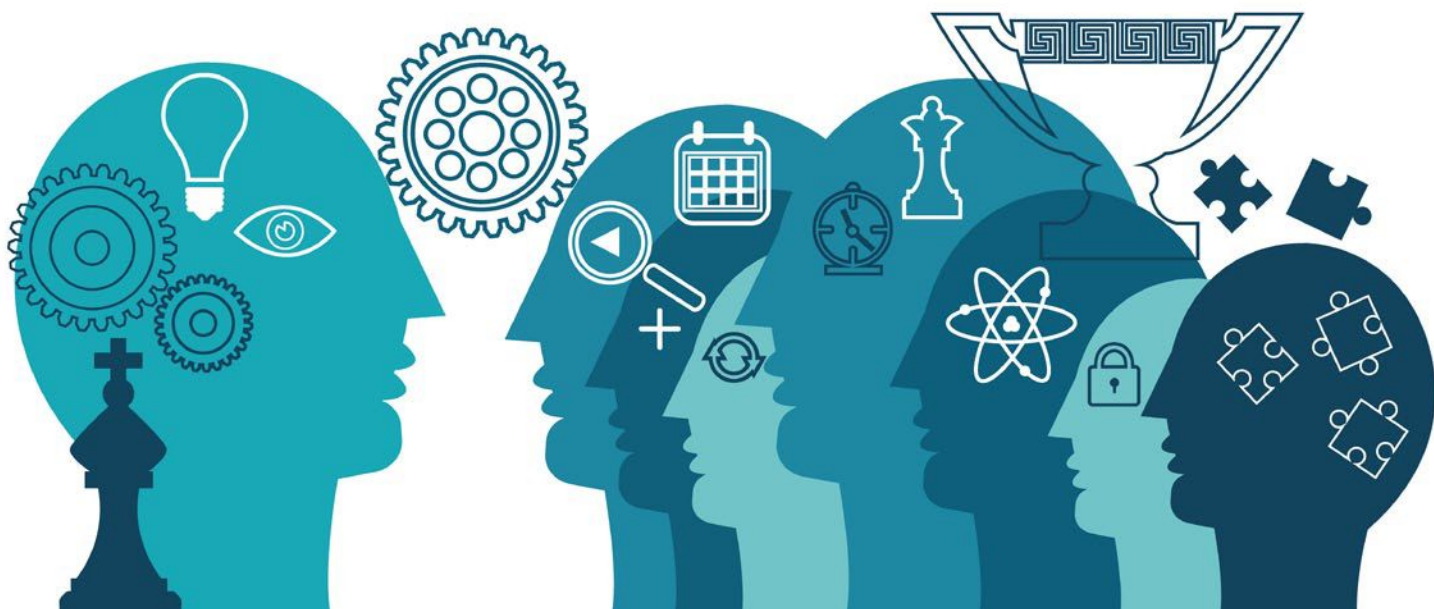
"If you give an interview, I cannot send somebody else and say, 'Do the interview,'" he pointed out. "Also, if I talk to publishers, it has to be me that does that. I think I understand my games best. So I travel a lot, talking to the publishers, seeing their reaction to the games."

Working with different types of players is vital because they give the designer different kinds of feedback. "The most striking feedback you get from kids," Reiner told me. "You do not need to ask them if the game is good or not. You ask them, 'Do you want to play again?' You watch them, you see what they do. They don't treat the pieces nicely, or arrange them neatly in front of them."

He points out that this sort of communication has to be a two-way process. "I see their reaction and I learn," he continued. "I learn better what to show them next time. They're much closer to the final market: the people who buy the product. So I think this feedback is vital and I would never personally use an agency to market my games."

Antoine has to travel a lot, too, for similar reasons. "I travel each year to four gaming conventions: Cannes, Tokyo, Indianapolis, and Essen," he revealed. "My other travels are to visit publishers and my co-designer friends."

He's also upfront about how much he dislikes these sorts of activities, something many of us could relate to. But, like Reiner, he obviously feels that it's important to do them himself rather than employing an agent.





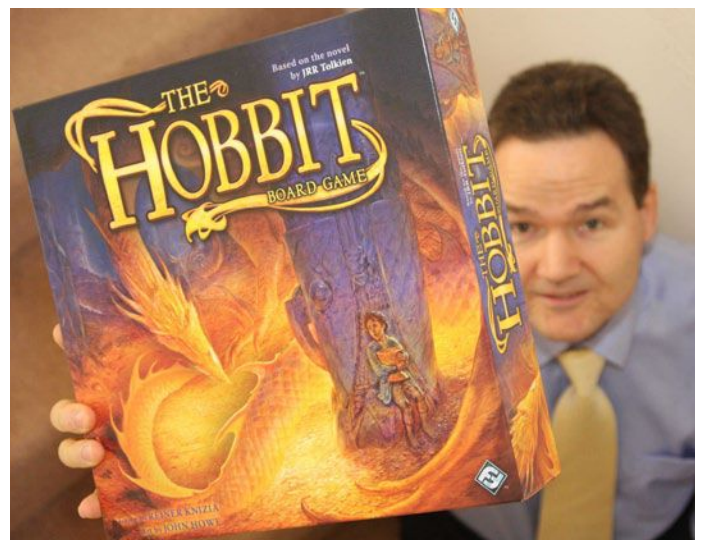
Antoine Bauza poses with his game Hanabi, which won the Spiel des Jahres award in 2013.

KEEPING THE PASSION ALIVE

The biggest question I had, though, was one close to my heart. As much as I love writing about games, there are times when it can suddenly feel like work. When you're sitting on an unsavory assignment on a niche title, or up against a tight deadline, for instance. Doing something as a professional can suck the joy out of it. I wondered: does the same thing eventually happen with game design?

Antoine sympathizes, if only just a little. "Like other jobs, you sometimes don't want to do it and dream of making something else," he said. "But designing games for a living was my childhood dream. So I'm quite happy where I am today!"

Reiner is even more positive. "It's as pleasurable as ever," he gushed. "The best dream job I could have because I love what I do. I think that applies to any



Reiner Knizia pictured with The Hobbit, published in 2010 by Fantasy Flight Games



job. If people that didn't like games had to design them, they wouldn't do a good job. So it's not the specifics of the job, just the love of it. Do what you're good at and what you want to do."

He does concede that there are advantages to part-time design. "I enjoyed having both the job in the bank and the hobby of the game design, because when you stand on two feet, the one refreshed the other," he explained. "You know, if I sit in this long, unproductive meeting, then I could also do some game design and vice versa. So I think it keeps you sharp. If you have all the time in the world, there's a risk you become inefficient. The task expands until the time is used up."

For all that Reiner eulogizes about mixing design and desk work, and tells me about how important it is that people love their job, I can sense there is something else. He's a man who so clearly delights in what he does, so full of ideas and passion, that there must be something more. Eventually during our conversation,

I stumbled on what it is. An additional motivation that all game players can relate to.

"I work in an industry where you're actually delivering something which people really love," he pointed out. "I was in the mortgage business and people like their mortgages, but it's not something they get really enthusiastic about. Games bring a lot of enjoyment to lots of people, and that's a great reward which I could never get from mortgages however much I liked that job." □



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Raising a Gamer:

Lessons Learned by
“The Board Game Dad”



Patrick R. Kelly

*Gamer Dad and Host of
Blue Peg, Pink Peg Podcast*



While board games help us develop and foster laudable skills and experiences, our hobby is merely an enjoyable means to these greater ends. This is especially true when it comes to playing games with our children. Or at least, it should be.

So, rather than asking, “How do you raise a child that loves board games?” the question that I wish to take up is, “How do you use board games to raise children who know they are loved?” Short answer: “I don’t know.”

Before you write me off completely, hear me out. My children are only eleven and thirteen, so the jury is still out. However, this is an outcome to which I have focused my attention for many years. And while I do not have any proven tactics to share, I do have some insights and experiences that are worth recounting. In other words, I have made A LOT of mistakes and hopefully my failures can provide you with the guidance that I lacked.

The Game is Not the Thing

It was early on a Friday night when my daughter brought me a battered *Clue* box with an expectant look in her eyes.

In a moment that will not make it onto my “father of the year” clip tape, I looked up at her and said, “You want to play a game? Cool; what do you want to play?” My daughter stared at me for a moment and then silently turned to return the box to the shelf. As I watched her turn and leave the room, I realized I had lost a moment.

As my loutish behavior shows, if you want to use board games as a way to assure your children that they are loved, whatever your gaming taste, you must be resolved to meeting your children where they are. And while this is a guideline that most board gamers initially follow, patience can wane. Most of us can feign enthusiasm for the first few games of *Battleship* and *Candyland*; however, the tenth or eleventh request to play these games is often met with groans.

Of course, like many board gamers with young children, I sought to expand my children’s gaming palette by buying and teaching them age-appropriate games that were more engaging than the old standbys. To the credit of both my children and the games’ designers, these games quickly became collection favorites and my children often asked to replay them. However, my children still asked to buy and play games that I found tedious and uninspired.

After what I have named “The Clue Snafu,” I decided to treat every game that I played with my kids as my favorite game. I made my answer to every board game offer a resounding “Yes!” – and every time I played, I found something to adore about the game I was playing.

Through this process I learned a few things. The first thing I learned is that any game can be made fun with a healthy dose of good-natured smack talk and the occasional in-game “side bet” that results in the losing party wearing a shaving cream beard. The second thing I learned is that kids who have fun playing “mindless”





games are more likely to have fun playing heavier games. Finally, I learned that when playing games with children, very often the game is irrelevant. When my children opt to play a roll-and-move board game, a luck-based

card game, or a mindless dexterity game, chances are they are more interested in talking and laughing than they are in playing.

Sometimes Parents Should Be Seen and Not Heard

It was a (different) Friday night and my daughter had invited two of her friends over to our house for a sleepover.

Throughout the years, often at my children's insistence, I had served as occasional game master for groups of children ranging in size from two to eight. On rainy days or after night had fallen, I would often select a title for the group to play, teach the rules, and oversee gameplay. Among some of my children's peers, I had gained a reputation as "the board game dad."

Shortly after the girls had arrived, they asked me if I had a fun game that they could play. Pleased by the request, I pulled out *New York: 1901* and proceeded to tell the girls how they could acquire plots of land and build skyscrapers.

The four of us sat together and played out a game, talking and laughing throughout. As we completed the game, both of our guests asked to play again. Notably, my daughter was silent. Notwithstanding this, I consented to play another game.

Throughout the second game, my daughter was distracted. She played, but without any real focus or obvious joy she had shown during the prior game. The game eventually ended and the girls dispersed to the upstairs bathroom where they concocted exotic (and, one might say, disgusting) facial treatments from the contents of our kitchen.

The next morning, after her friends had been picked up by their parents, I asked my daughter if she enjoyed playing the game. She looked at me quite seriously and said, "I wish we had only played once." Upon hearing this, I realized I had made a portion of her play date into my own. I recognized that I had allowed my desire to be "the board





game dad” overwhelm my obligation to be “the dad.” It was a sobering and important recognition.

It is flattering to be admired, even by 12-year-olds. This is compounded by the fact that my children are proud of my hobby and how much fun many of their friends have when I teach them a new game. However, in that moment, I realized I need to be sure to put my children first. Not every moment is the right moment for a game.

After that night, when their friends asked to play a game, I privately checked in with my kids to see whether it was something that they really wanted to do. And if so, if they wanted me to participate. Very often, they didn’t. If not, I demurred and let the kids float off to another activity, fading into my appropriate place in the background.

As a result, I have played fewer games with my kids than I used to. However, when we do play, I am confident we are all enjoying the experience.

Failure is the First Step Toward Success

It was a Sunday afternoon, and my son and I were playing a game of *Kemet* with one of my gaming groups.

As we played, I noticed that my son was mounting a number of ill-advised attacks. As he prepared to attack another player in one of his temples, I pointed out to him that the numbers did not favor him and that his move would likely damage both him and the other player, to the benefit of the rest of the table.

In response to my uninvited instruction, my son cast a knowing look my way and said, “I am trying something, dad.”

Properly chastened, I apologized and watched his gambit play out. While his initial combat ended as predicted, I came to realize that he was trying to draw an opponent to that temple so that he could set up a later attack at another location on the board. In fact, as I looked back upon the game, I realized that all of his attacks had been variations of this tactic. While his efforts were unsuccessful, his gentle rebuke showed me that, when it came to game play, my boy was his own man.

This moment prompted me to reflect upon a difficult truth. I realized that if I did my job correctly, my guidance was eventually going to become unnecessary. When we play games with our children, we walk a delicate balance between teaching them how to play well, and letting them play well. Early on, we have to walk our children through the choices they can make within the context of a game. We point out options and help them figure out which one will produce a desired result.

However, eventually we have to take a step back and let them make their own choices. Sometimes, we have to let them make choices that we wouldn’t. Sometimes, we have to watch them fail, fully aware of the impending outcome. Sometimes, we have to watch them blunder along, silent and confident that they either know what they are doing or will learn from the experience.





One of the key ways that we show children love through board games is letting them learn to succeed at playing them – without our guidance, instruction, or intervention. Board games are a laboratory for decision making, critical thinking, taking chances, and much more. In order to make games fun and rewarding, we have to give them the basic tools for developing their own play style and then get out of the way.

Of course, this is the lesson that lies at the heart of parenting. Parenting is about pointing our children in the right direction: teaching them the rules of the game, offering a few tips about how to navigate those rules, and then letting them develop their own style of play. You have to let them try new tactics, and occasionally you have to let them fail, so that they employ a better strategy in the future.

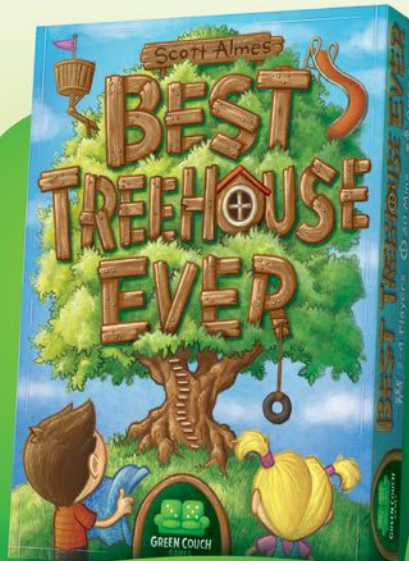
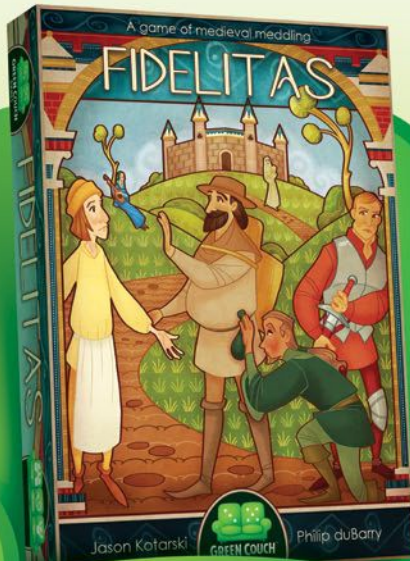
As I previewed at the start of this article, each of these lessons I had learned from the mistakes I made. However, there is one final lesson that I have learned from all of this: I have found, as with board games, when it comes to parenting, success derives from identifying failing strategies and refining them. I have to be honest with myself about my errors. I have to be confident

enough in my skills to try again. And above all, I have to keep my central objective in mind: raising children who never doubt they are loved. □



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Gabriele Berzoni

*Lifetime Gamer and
Essen Spiel Fan*

Every year Essen, Germany, plays host to The Internationale Spieltage SPIEL. Also known as simply “Essen” or “the Spiel,” this four-day convention is one of the world’s largest gaming events. At the Spiel, you can find the top game designers all at one location; meet and chat with the staff over at BoardGameGeek and other publications, watch million-dollar business deals taking place, see the up-and-coming games before they hit the market, and test prototypes of games that aren’t even finished. Each year the Spiel continues to make changes, expanding the number of booths, exhibitors, kinds of games featured, and more. But at its core, Essen’s Spiel is put on exclusively to sell and promote the latest-and-greatest board games available.



Above: Packed gaming halls at Essen 2015; Below: A large game of Settlers of Catan

Ever since my first Spiel nine years ago, this event has been one of the greatest gaming experiences of my entire life! As you make your way through the main entrance, just imagine seeing an enormous fair center filled wall-to-wall with every kind of game available! The view of the Main Hall is simply magnificent. The larger game publishers have booths right at the entrance that are not only huge, but incredibly eye-catching; their signage drawing you in with new games, promotions, and opportunities to play their tested-and-true titles.

Off the Main Hall, there are several halls and galleries that branch off. This year, as with past years, my favorite was the first gallery that features more of the medium-sized publishers – both established names and up-and-coming companies in the industry. Asmodee had an impressive booth this year, allowing both press and players to meet with representatives and shop. Filled with game lovers, you could easily playtest a game with someone from a different continent and still have a blast!

Each of the halls not only featured different companies but also different areas of the industry, as well. Hall 1 held medium-sized companies as well as featured sellers of used and discounted games. Hall 2, on the other hand, featured more role-playing publishers, companies that focus on supplying LARP materials, and booths for medium-to-small sized publishers.



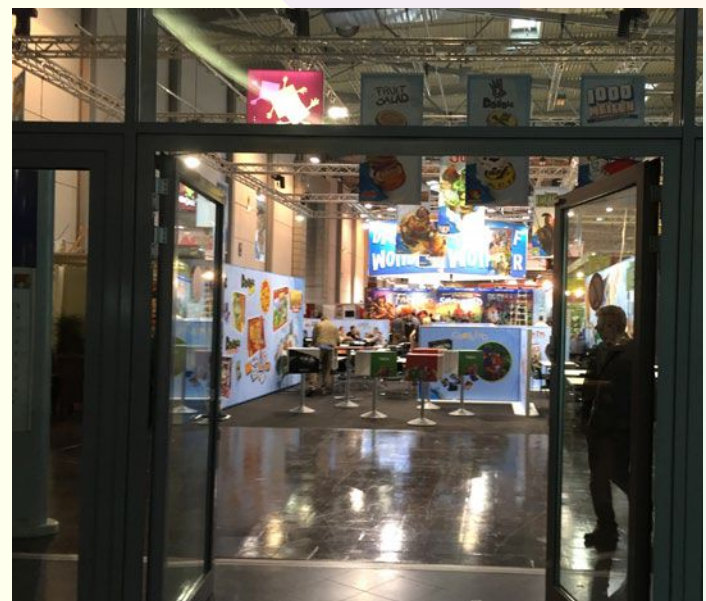


Above: Empty gaming hall after the crowds have dispersed; Below, Top: The exhibit halls buzz with excited visitors; Below, Bottom: One of the many entrances to the exhibit halls.

The “Galeria” was a spacious hall that focused more on younger audiences. This had everything from children’s toys and games to baby furniture, model trains and helicopters, inflatable toys, and so on. The great thing about Essen is that it has something for everyone, regardless of age. And needless to say, the Galeria had plenty of children running around (which actually worked out for me since I brought my 6-month old) and made for an entertaining experience.

Seeing as the Spiel is one of the largest game conventions in the world, it wasn’t a surprise at the sheer number of halls and side rooms. And each of the halls were packed with vendors and attendees of all kinds. There were halls that featured small companies that only offered one game, but even here you could find some really interesting games that could be making it big in the months to come. Many of the up-and-coming publishers had their start as a small booth in a side room, so I always try to make a stop in there. Four days sounds long for a fair like this, but I could have used at least one more day.

In fact, the convention reserved one of these side halls for a special event this year: a Guinness World Record attempt for the largest game of Settlers of Catan. With an official judge present, they had 1,040 players sit down to one large, winding game of Settlers, and set the world record! It was incredible seeing thousands of people making deals and moving sheep. (I never thought I would write that.)





This year's Essen closed with 162,000 turnstile attendees: gamers, editors, journalists, and vendors from 41 different countries. For four days I walked the beautiful halls of the "Essen Messe," the fair center in Essen, searching for the best casual games of the fair. I spoke with 50 game designers and company representatives from around world about their titles. There were so many fantastic games featured at this year's convention that it was very difficult to narrow them down to my favorites. Nevertheless, the following are my top five games of Essen 2015:

7 Wonders: Duel

(Repos Production – 2 players – 30 min.)

If you liked the original 7 Wonders game, you'll definitely get a kick out of 7 Wonders: Duel. And even if you haven't played the original, it's not required to fully enjoy this latest release from Repos Production. Two players compete to build four Wonders of the World and become the most powerful civilization in the process.

Each turn, a player draws a card that can either be played, sold for currency, or placed under a Wonder to progress it towards completion. There are several ways to win, with the most direct way being the first civilization to build the 4th wonder – because, after all, there can only be 7 Wonders! You can also win by progressing your civilization's Military or Science. It's fast-paced and challenging every time.



Maze Racers

(FoxMind – 2 players – 20 min.)

This is a tricky-funny-crazy game where you have to build the most difficult maze you can imagine for your opponent to run through. Each player has his own board and can choose from a variety of magnetic walls to use: long, short, curved, etc. When both mazes are complete, each player swaps mazes and an hourglass is brought out. The first person to move the tiny metal ball to the finish line and back to the start wins, but there's a catch – if a player's maze doesn't work (the finish line is inaccessible), that player loses the game!



Jolly Roger

(Ares Games – 4-10 players – 30 min.)

A light party card game where each player is a pirate in a crew searching for treasure and glory. At the start of the game, one player is nominated as the Captain, who chooses a Quartermaster to be in charge of drawing destinations, collecting and burying treasures, etc. The Captain also chooses a player to punish and to keep from getting too much treasure. If the rest of the players disagree, they can call for a mutiny and select a new Captain, and the game continues on! The player with the most treasure at the end of the 10th round wins.



Celestia

(Blam! – 2-6 players – 30 min.)

Each player is on a beautiful 3D paper model of a flying ship, traveling through the different sky levels of Celestia. Each turn, a player becomes the Captain and rolls 2-4 dice that represent the different dangers that inhabit Celestia's skies. After the dice are cast and the players see what dangers await them on this voyage, each player must determine if he is brave enough to stay aboard and collect more and more treasure, while facing greater-and-greater risks the further up they travel. If the Captain isn't able to best the challenges, players return to the start and a new Captain is chosen. The first player to 50 points wins.

Skyliners

(Z-Man Games – 2-4 players – 30 min.)

Skyliners is a building game where you have to build the perfect skyline! Each player is given skyscrapers to build with special instructions to meet. They then bet on which of the buildings they'll be able to see after each turn, as other players build in the same area. Having good spatial awareness really helps with this game.



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Seeing as the Spiel has a large hall featuring games for children, I also have a recommendation for the best children's game of the show:

Mysterious Dragon Cave

(Drei Magier Spiele – 2-4 players – 20 min.)

Imagine a cave filled with various colored crystals, with players wanting to catch as many crystals as possible. Each turn, a player rolls the dice to make the dragon go from one crystal patch to the next, trying to find crystals to collect at each. If the player moves a dragon to the right crystal patch, the dragon's flame lights up and they get that crystal! The crystal changes position each time thanks to an ingenious system of panels that go underneath the board before each game.



Other worthwhile mentions from this year's Spiel:

- **Potions Explosion**
Brew potions with a lot of marbles.
- **Bang! The Duel**
Shoot the sheriff first or game over!
- **Pingo Pingo**
A party game with a lot of enraged penguins.
- **Ekö**
A war between elementals.
- **Brick Party**
A plastic brick fiesta.
- **Unusual Suspect**
A psychological deduction game.
- **Amphipolis**
Save the relics.
- **Rush and Bash**
A crazy, "wacky" race.
- **The Tower**
Can your monster exit the tower?
- **Revoltaaa**
Robot vs. ducks: who would win?

There are also so many more! Though it may be a bit of travel for some, it's definitely an experience worth making at least once in your life. Make a holiday of it, and I guarantee you won't be disappointed. I can only imagine what they will have at Essen 2016! ☐

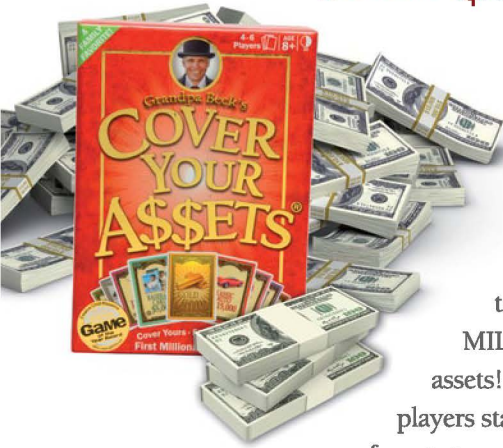




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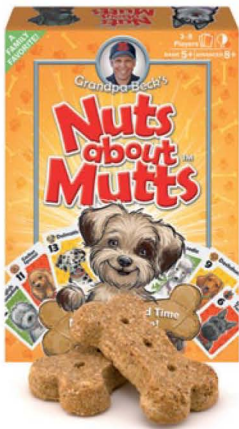
Skull King™ is an exciting card game where every hand can be a winning hand... if you play your cards right! With a “Yo Ho Ho,” players simultaneously bid how many tricks they will win. Scheme to make sure you win exactly how many you bid. You'll enjoy the depth of this game with the Trump cards, Pirate cards, Escape cards, and the special Tigris and Skull King cards. Easy to learn, but it involves keen strategy and intriguing scoring options!



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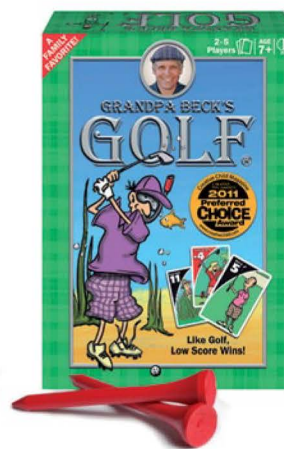


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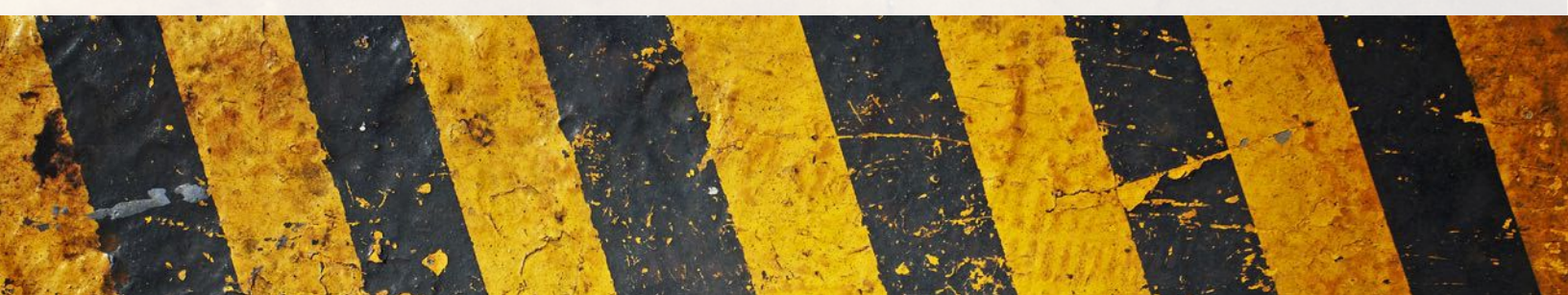


BOARD GAME MYTHS BUSTED

MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT GAMING



James Floyd Kelly
*Full-time Technology Writer,
Part-time Swashbuckler*





The fact that you are reading *Casual Game Insider* is probably a good clue that you've already caught the Board Game Bug (sorry, there is no cure...and it only gets worse with age). Whether you own a handful of games or too many to count, you know the fun that can be had with other players around a table covered with items such as folded boards, cards, dice, meeples, and a rulebook. But here's the thing: not everyone feels the same way about board games. Many only know a few basic games they played in their youth, over and over again, and view the hobby as too simple or repetitive. Others may be quite happy with the classics and are unwilling to try new things. You might even find some who view board games as something for children, or see them only as something geeks do on Friday nights. (To be fair, Saturdays also work great.)

There are myths galore that non-gamers buy into, thinking the hobby just isn't for them. Below are 10 common board game myths and how they can be addressed. These certainly aren't the only myths out there, but they are a good place to start the next time someone declines your invitation to a game, or raises an eyebrow when they overhear your discussion about the perfect *Settlers of Catan* strategies. (Note: some games may not include a board at all, so "board games" will be used as a general term for all similar games.)

10

NEWER BOARD GAMES ARE FAR MORE COMPLICATED THAN THE OLD STANDBYS

It is true that board games have evolved with more complex rules and strategies over the last decade, but this isn't true for every game. Some of the most entertaining games are also the simplest; new games such as *Pairs* and *Sketch It!* show that short and fast games can be just as fun and engaging as rules-heavy favorites such as *King of Tokyo* and *Splendor*.

New games can often be intimidating with an inexperienced player hesitant to learn the rules of a new game. One way to help would be to point them to gameplay videos online, whether on YouTube or the publisher's website. These days, many new games will have a handful of reviewers posting video of the gameplay, often in short 5-10 minute segments.

09

DIGITAL BOARD GAMES ARE THE FUTURE

While playing digital board games online with distant friends is appealing, it also lacks aspects of the game that draw people to the table. Whether it's the tactile nature of the cards and components in a player's hands, or being able to watch a competitor work on a strategy, in-person games aren't going to go away any time soon. The number of new games that have been developed recently shows just the opposite — the board game industry is growing.

One thing you'll want to keep an eye on, however, is the mix of technology and traditional board games. New games such as *X-COM* allow players to use a phone or tablet to view virtual animations and events when pointed at the table, enhancing the physical game.





THERE'S NO REPLAY VALUE WITH BOARD GAMES

There are thousands of gamers out there who would argue that some games never get old. Ask any board game player and they will likely be able to give you a list of board games that they would play at the drop of a hat – anytime, anywhere. Add in the fact that so many games

today come with rules variants as well as expansions, and this myth quickly falls apart. Today's board game designers know that replay is something gamers want, so it's no surprise to find new games that come with alternative rules or diabolical expert-level win scenarios.



YOU NEED TO HAVE A DEDICATED GROUP TO PLAY BOARD GAMES

Unless you really enjoy playing solo games or digital opponents, having a group of living, breathing human opponents is still considered the best way to enjoy a good board game. In between turns, there's the banter that includes both game-related talk as well as just catching up on work, school, and life. Good friends don't need a game as an excuse to get together, but it's a fun reason to!

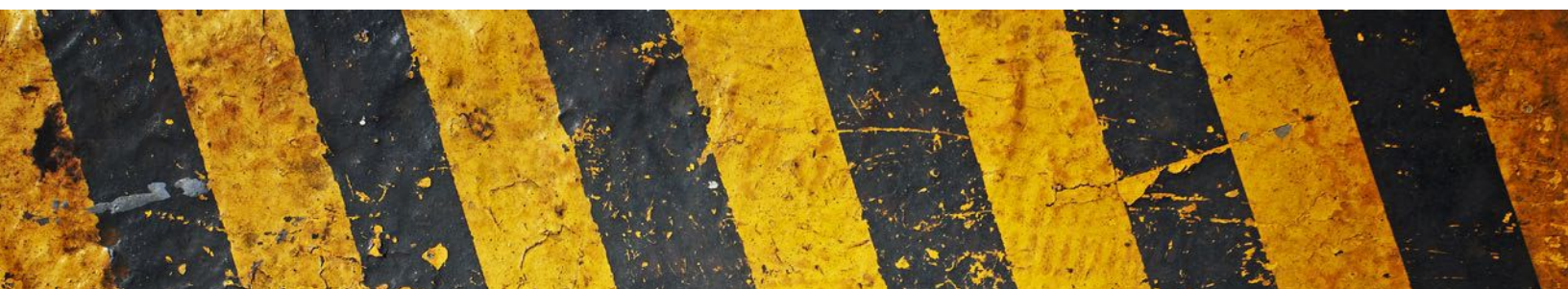
But having a dedicated group of friends isn't required to enjoy board games. Not only are there board games that can be played by yourself, but gaming groups continue to pop up (check online or at local comic book/hobby shops). These are an excellent way to find gamers in your area to play with, and they could even evolve into that dedicated group you are looking for!



I'M TOO OLD FOR BOARD GAMES

There is a good reason most board games don't have an upper-limit on the age recommendation on the side of the box. In the same way that crossword and Sudoku puzzles keep your mind sharp, a good board game will give you plenty of chances to keep your neurons fit and healthy. These titles can include intricate mechanics, difficult puzzles, or abstract thinking that may not appeal to younger audiences.

The same can be said for games in the market that have more mature themes: zombie survival, murder mysteries, and complex resource management. Keep in mind that most game designers are adults – they know what appeals to adult gamers and tend to create accordingly.





05

THE ONLY GOOD BOARD GAMES ARE THE CLASSICS

Most of us cut our teeth on the classics – *Monopoly*, *Risk*, and *Yahtzee* – and there’s no denying that the simpler rules and gameplay can still be useful when introducing our hobby to a younger generation. But as with food, our tastes in board games tend to change as we mature, and the classic board games can become a bit stale. Board game design and development is at an all-time high, which means more variety in themes, rules, and ultimately more options for game night.



04

THERE AREN'T ANY BOARD GAMES THAT ARE GOOD FOR FAMILIES OF MIXED AGES

It is true that board games are often divided into kid-friendly or adult-themed varieties, but this doesn't mean there aren't games that can fit both. There are plenty of games that families can play together without worrying about adult themes or complex rules. Games such as *Apples to Apples* and *Choose One!* can feature simple rules that offer a challenge to both kids and adults.

Likewise, be on the lookout for games such as *Flash Point: Fire Rescue* with more complex rules but also with fast-play rules or novice-friendly startup

scenarios that can give younger players the chance to learn the basics. Plus, the cooperative nature of *Flash Point* and other titles like *Forbidden Island* and *Castle Panic* can create a fun and engaging experience for the whole family.





03

NEWER BOARD GAMES ARE REALLY EXPENSIVE

It's true that today's complex board games can come with a substantial price tag, but keep in mind that these advanced games often come with a larger amount of detailed components. More cards, tokens, dice, and other game elements add to the cost, but they also tend to add to the enjoyment, complexity, and replayability of a board game. Many of these games start off being crowdfunded, and are offered at a reasonable price in the development process.

Even better, many games have shrunk in size and are low priced – just take a look at all the various portable games found in this magazine such as *Cover Your Assets* and *Arcadia*. It's not hard to find new, fun, and very addictive games for less than the cost of a dinner out for two.

02

NEWER BOARD GAMES TAKE HOURS TO PLAY

There is something satisfying about finishing up a three hour game session with your friends (especially if you win), but not everyone can set aside that kind of time for a single game. Thanks to the growth of the board game industry and the rise of casual games, games now offer up a wide variety of game-length options. Many board game publishers will now put game time estimates on the boxes. That way, if you know your family or gaming group prefers fast games, you might not want to grab that 90+ minute game this time around. And even if you prefer long-play, you can always squeeze in a game of *Flip City* or *Tiny Epic Galaxies* while you wait for your fellow players to show up.



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01

ONLY "GEEKS" ENJOY BOARD GAMES

The biggest myth that hangs over the hobby is that board games are only for geeks. However, we need to accept the fact that everyone is a geek about something: knitting, baseball, classic cars, or even photography. While there are tons of board games that apply to what is seen as the traditional geek – namely fantasy and science fiction themed games – new games continue to pop up that focus on other

themes. Surprisingly popular games that don't fit the fantasy/sci-fi themes include *Wits & Wagers*, *Ticket to Ride*, and *Off Your Rocker*. The fact of the matter is that board games can be enjoyed by all ages and all interests. The days of board games being just for "geeks" is over – we're all geeks, so find a game that interests you and get playing!

While the above myths related to board games can be argued to be true, hopefully you've seen that these myths regarding board games are just as likely to be false. It all depends on the game, right? For every example of a game that supports one or more of the above myths, gamers can provide plenty of examples that completely dispel these myths. Ultimately, the best way to prove to someone spouting a board game myth is to sit down and play a game; busting myths this way will never be easier or more fun. □



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U.S. Games Systems: Past, Present, and Future



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For nearly 50 years, U.S. Games Systems, Inc., has been a leader in Tarot cards, card games, and specialty playing cards. With their visionary leadership and solid teamwork, they are making a mark in the modern board gaming scene with unique titles like *HOOYAH*, *Escape From Alcatraz*, and *Backstab*. This is their story.



Stuart R. Kaplan

Founder and Chairman of
U.S. Games Systems, Inc.

My earliest publishing venture came about while I was earning my degree at the Wharton School, University of Pennsylvania. To earn extra money, I created and sold for 25 cents each Dating Application Forms that assisted students in meeting each other.

After graduation, I worked on Wall Street for ten years. In 1965, John Wiley & Sons published my first book, *Mining, Minerals & Geosciences*, a world source directory, which was selected by Library Journal as one of the 100 Best Technical Books of the Year.

The subject matter was admittedly dry and limited. I dreamed about creating something more lighthearted and appealing for the general public. At the time, the Vietnam War was raging and young protestors were burning their draft cards. Thus, the *Student Survival Board Game* was born, a game that spoofed college life with students trying to survive the dreaded Student Draft Notice Cards. The game was printed by a local printer, and with the help of my wife and children (two of whom now work at U.S. Games), the first 10,000 units were assembled in the basement of our house. *The New York Times* wrote a half-page article about the game, and my career instantly refocused from Wall Street to games.

In 1968, I visited the Nuremberg Toy Fair in Germany looking for games to import and distribute in the



The Four Art Department Women (from left to right): Nora, Lynn, Paula, and Jody



Student Survival Board Game: the first game created by Stuart Kaplan and published by U.S. Games

United States. On the last day of the fair, I spotted a deck of 18th century tarot cards. Intrigued with the enigmatic artwork, I bought the rights to sell the *Swiss 1JJ deck* in the U.S. I enjoyed investigating obscure subjects and after months of research, I wrote a book called *Tarot Cards For Fun and Fortune Telling*. I sold this illustrated guide to interpreting the *Swiss 1JJ Tarot deck* packaged with a reprint of the tarot deck. Henry Levy of Brentano's in New York was my first customer. At the time I had no idea that sales would eventually exceed one million copies. Other products in our early days were children's card games, deluxe playing card decks, magic decks and historic reproduction decks.

As my fascination with all things related to card games grew, so did my collection of rare and antique card games, tarot cards, Napoleonic Bone Boxes, rare books on the history of tarot and playing cards, and oil paintings of card players. This growing collection has been featured in museum exhibits ranging from Greenwich, Connecticut to St. Petersburg, Russia. In 1997, *Art & Antiques Magazine* selected my collection of 18th century Napoleonic POW bone boxes as one of the 100 Top Treasures in America.

Nearly 500 items from the collection were sold off in 2006, though parts of the collection remains in the private offices of U.S. Games Systems in Stamford, Connecticut. Of particular note are 200 different versions of the game of *Authors* published by over 50 different game companies during the past 150 years. U.S. Games is now the only publisher continuing to keep this classic game in print.



During the past 48 years, U. S. Games Systems has diversified into a product line of 400 different tarot decks, card games, and specialty playing cards. Though most product development is done by the talented team of “designing women” in our Art Department, U.S. Games works with a select group of game designers including Maureen Hiron, who created the family card games *Continuo*, *Duo*, *Tripolo*, and *Hexago Continuo*.

Perhaps the best-known card game in our catalog is Ken Fisher’s *Wizard Card Game*. Since its introduction in 1986, *Wizard Card Game* has sold over 3 million copies worldwide and has been translated into 15 languages. This award-winning trump game has spawned an entire *Wizard* product line with bidding wheels, a large index version, *Wizard Junior*, *Medieval Edition*, *Deluxe Edition*, *Fantasy Wizard*, and a Combo Pack with *HeartSwitch*, a card game inspired by *Hearts*. Each year we send two players each from the United States and Canada to the World Wizard Card Game Tournament, which was held in Prague in 2015.

Historically-themed games, especially military history, have continued to be a signature part of the company’s lineup with card game series based on the Civil War, the American Revolution, and the Old West, to name a few. U.S. Games has enjoyed a long



Michael, Stuart, and Jennifer Kaplan



Vintage Authors Games

partnership with the History Channel®, developing card games such as *Lewis & Clark Exploration Card Games* and *Notable Black Women*.

U.S. Games teamed up with game designer Mike Fitzgerald to develop *History’s Mysteries Game* and *The People’s Choice: A Presidential Card Game*. I first recruited Mike Fitzgerald in 1994 to create the *Wyvern* card series, which became wildly popular. Demand for *Wyvern* decks was so tremendous that as soon as the decks arrived here, we were shipping out orders directly from our parking lot with no time to even bring stock into the warehouse. After *Dragon Hunt* (a *Wyvern*-based game), U.S. Games produced Mike Fitzgerald’s first *Mystery Rummy* card game, *Jack the Ripper*. The series developed such a loyal following that when *Escape from Alcatraz* launched, we responded to popular demand and brought back the other four *Mystery Rummy* titles as well.

Mike Fitzgerald also developed *Sloop* and *HOOYAH Navy SEALS Card Game*, a cooperative game where players work as a team to complete each mission. Created as a tribute to the bravery of the real-life Navy SEALs, the development of *HOOYAH* entailed a great deal of research and input from experts. Taking raw gameplay and historic content and transforming it all into a visually compelling game is exactly what our amazing Art Department excels at.





Some of U.S. Games Systems' popular card games: *HOOYAH Navy SEALS Card Game*, *Mystery Rummy: Escape from Alcatraz*, *Wizard Card Game*, and others



Lynn Araujo

Director of Communications,
U.S. Games Systems, Inc.

Nearly all of the production and design work for our games is done in-house by our dynamic Art Department, headed up by Creative Director Paula Palmer, with Art Director Nora Paskaleva, Senior Art Director Jody Boginski, and myself doing most of the writing. Jody's son Joe, who created his own Tarot deck and card game called *Omegaland*, does illustration for some of our games.

Because *HOOYAH* involved so much research and development, launching the game at Essen Spiel was a challenging but rewarding journey. Seeing the game evolve from bare bones concept to publication under the art direction of Jody was an exciting process to be part of. The level of design brought to the game was utterly impressive, from Joe's illustrations on the Navy SEALS cards, right down to the game instructions, which Jody made look like a leather military instruction manual. These special features are the things that gamers seem to notice and appreciate.





Renaissance Wars, the newest board game from U.S. Games Systems

Since we create our products from the ground up, all of us involved feel quite invested in making sure players thoroughly enjoy our games. Stuart encourages everyone on the staff to optimize their talents and to work collaboratively. This supportive atmosphere builds tremendous loyalty and teamwork. Paula, Jody, and I have worked together as a creative team for over ten years. Paula is the card shark of the group. She and Stuart have a friendly-but-ongoing rivalry over *Wizard* and *HeartSwitch*. (He usually wins!) When we are testing new game concepts, Paula has a real knack for zeroing in on what might not be working and finding ways to improve playability.

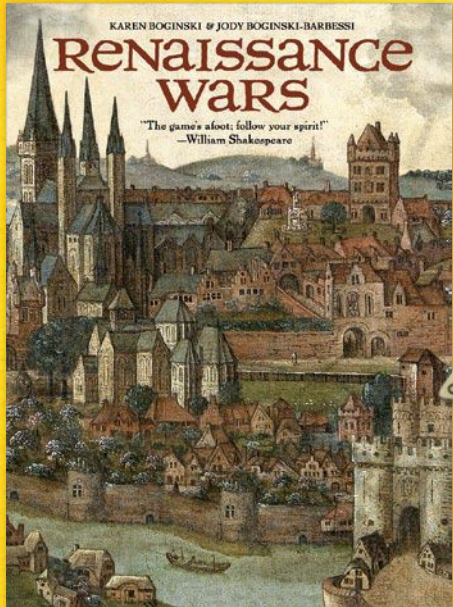
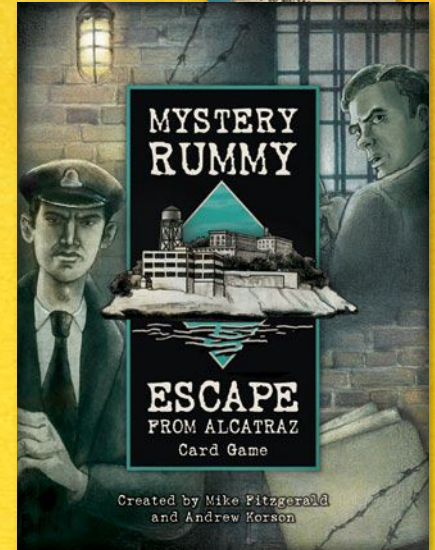
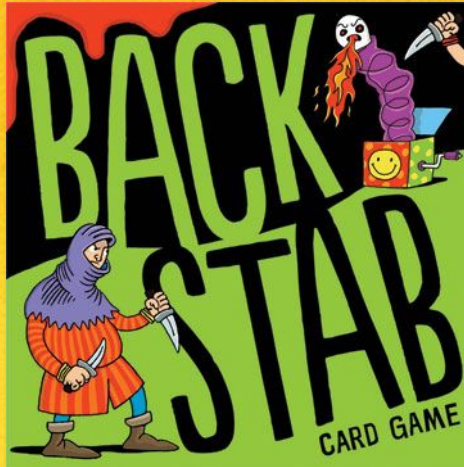
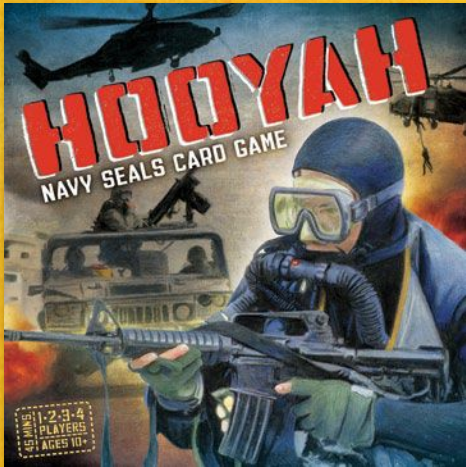
Jody is the visionary; she can look at bare bones gameplay and envision exciting graphic elements and presentation that take the game from the ordinary to the extraordinary. I was first impressed by Jody's ability to give every game unique 'flavor' when she and I worked together on the *Banana Split Card Game*. Her intricate

illustrations were so appealing while we were working on the game I used to dream about rainbow sprinkles! Jody's creative style is incredibly diverse; she is as comfortable updating children's games with retro appeal as she is creating offbeat, edgy designs as she did for *Backstab*, *HeartSwitch*, and *Escape from Alcatraz*.

The publication of *Escape from Alcatraz* was also a real team effort with all hands on deck. The art department worked closely with Mike Fitzgerald playtesting early versions of the game. Jody and Joe created the graphics and illustrations. Nora designed the packaging and instructions. In partnership with Eagle-Gryphon Games, *Escape from Alcatraz* was successfully funded on Kickstarter with Paula as the campaign mastermind. Nora put her considerable talents to work, taking my simple script (recorded by Mike Fitzgerald after a cold!) and creating an intriguing product video complete with crashing waves and sound effects that set the suspenseful mood for *Escape from Alcatraz*.



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The latest release from U.S. Games is *Renaissance Wars*, the brainchild of Jody and her sister Karen Boginksi, a very active gamer. Together they conceived and crafted this deluxe board game with intricate gameplay and exceptional presentation. Jody's creativity comes through in all the extra artistic flourishes and special components she added to make *Renaissance Wars* an all-absorbing tabletop game experience. Because *Renaissance Wars* is a far more complex game than U.S. Games Systems had ever done before, we decided to use the Kickstarter platform again to introduce this gem to the game world. Once again, the creation of the videos (with our now seasoned team) was almost as exciting as creating the game itself.

Now that U.S. Games has diversified and ventured beyond basic family card games, the company is well positioned to take the talents and skills of its seasoned creative team even further. U.S. Games Systems may go in a number of different directions including more game apps, new content-rich games inspired by history and legend, or even working with up-and-coming designers who bring fresh ideas to the table! ▢



Stuart Kaplan and office mascot Lily

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