

# CASUAL GAME

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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."

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BY JAY CORMIER & GRAEME JAHNS - ART BY KWANCHAI MORIYA



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# LOONACY™

## How the Looneys Customized Their Hit Game

Kristin and Andrew Looney of Looney Labs have an exciting new project—*Custom Loonacy*. *Loonacy* is a CGI Recommended speed game where players race to be the first to get rid of their hand of cards by matching the images in their hand with those on the cards on the table. Looney Labs has produced several versions of this game, including an Uglydolls deck and a retro version featuring things like lava lamps, typewriters, and old spin-dial telephones.

One day, as they were talking about all the different ideas they had for new decks and how they wished they could make them all, it came to them that maybe they could! Andrew has long used the print-on-demand company The Game Crafter to create prototype cards when he was designing a new game. This gave Kristin an idea. It would take a lot of planning and partnership, but what if it worked? Could they produce a custom deck cheaply enough to sell it?

Andy designed a new streamlined deck size and layout for *Loonacy* so that printing could be more cost-effective. The two hired a graphic designer to create a special customizable box, with a hole to allow the title to show through from the card back. Kristin worked with her regular publisher, Delano, to make an entire print run of *Custom Loonacy* boxes and instruction sheets.



JT and Tavis at The Game Crafter used those boxes and rules sheets along with the customized cards they printed to produce finished customized decks. It worked! The first decks made in this way were sold to game stores that wanted their custom logo on a deck, and to couples for wedding favors. These were a great success but were labor-intensive because the Looney Labs team had to create each deck layout by hand.



Then JT had an idea: what if Looney Labs and The Game Crafter partnered to create a web portal that allowed customers to automatically create their own layouts with any imagery they wanted? It took over a year of planning and programming to make it happen, but it was worth the wait. Now *Loonacy* fans everywhere can either customize an existing deck or upload their own images for an entirely unique game—perfect for company events, family reunions, wedding and birthday gifts, and more. And they've kept the price very low—only \$10 per deck.



In today's world, people want to see themselves in the media that surrounds them. Now with *Custom Loonacy*, gamers can easily bring themselves, their friends, families, and brands to the table for some good old-fashioned fun.



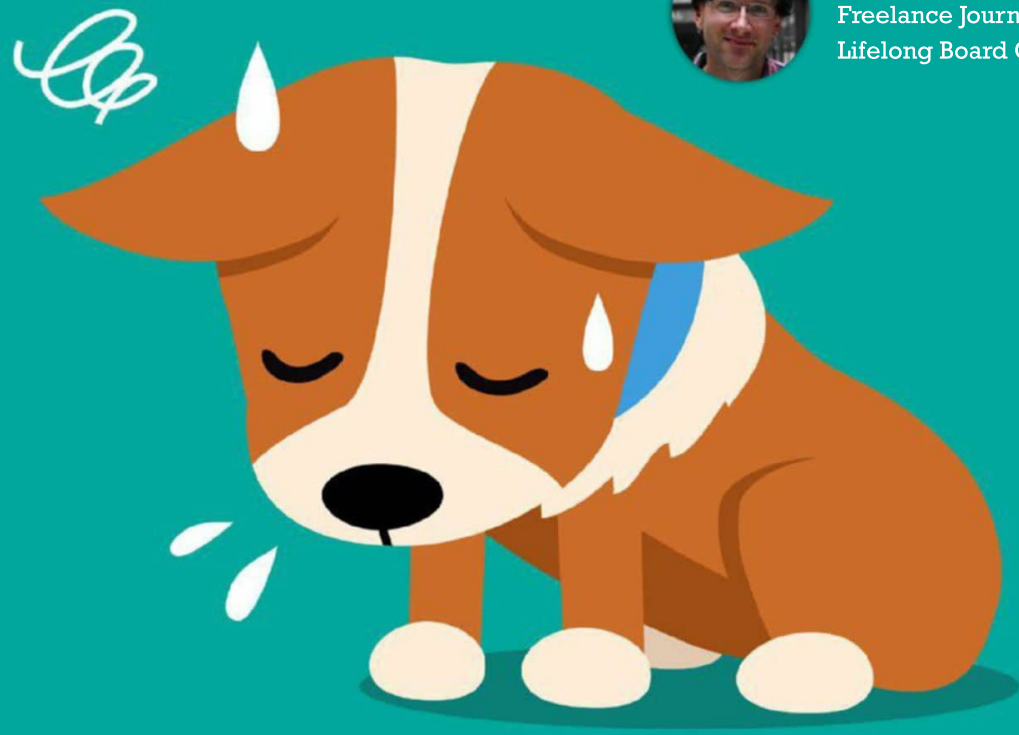
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# Board Gaming Pet Peeves

## Six Game Designers Weigh In



**Dann Albright**  
Freelance Journalist and  
Lifelong Board Gamer



If you've spent more than a few minutes reading about board games online, you know that people are very particular. They feel strongly about the games they play, the games they don't play, the people they play with, and the people they'd never play with again.

When it comes to board gaming pet peeves, the intensity gets taken up a notch.

Some people absolutely never allow food at the gaming table. Others can't stand it when someone's on their phone during the game.

Coaching others in a co-op game drives some gamers nuts. Sore losers are perennially unpopular among virtually every group.

But we know all this. Gamers complain about—er, discuss—these things all the time.

So I thought I'd talk to a different group of people. A group that spends a monumental amount of time thinking about and playing board games. And who, I thought, would have some great opinions about what gamers should (and, more importantly, shouldn't) do at the table.

### I'm talking about game designers.

I reached out to a handful of designers to see what really gets under their skin at the game table. Here's what they had to say (and how they've learned to cope).

#### Paul Dennen

Designer of *Clank!*, *Clank! In! Space!*, and *Eternal: Chronicles of the Throne*

"It bothers me when a player is so focused on optimizing their play that they aren't sociable with others at the table, to at least a basic level," says Dennen. "Tabletop gaming is as much about playing with and enjoying the company of others as it is about cracking the code of the game."

As you might expect, this is more likely to be an issue in heavily strategic games than in casual titles. You probably won't see people getting super heads-down



on *Sushi Go!* or *Dixit*. But it's something that can come up in any game, no matter how complex.

"I get that some people are playing more for the gameplay than for the social aspect, and I get that some people are introverts; I am, too. But you can at least try. And if you don't like my silly puns, that's fine. But I'd rather hear you groan than get no response at all because you weren't listening to anyone else at the table."

#### So what does Dennen do in these situations?

"When I encounter this situation with someone that I might play games with again, I try to have a private conversation after the game. If the other player doesn't care about this aspect of gaming, I'd respect their decision and find other people to play with."

You might not want to bail on a member of your game group if they're too focused to be much fun. But you can definitely have a quick chat with them about it after the game is over — they might not even be aware that they do this in the first place.





### Bruno Cathala

Codesigner of *7 Wonders Duel* and Designer of *Five Tribes* and *Kingdomino*

Cathala's board gaming pet peeve is similar to Dennen's: "People taking too much time to make their decisions. On EACH turn. Not because of their ability to calculate things, but just being frozen because they fear not to make the ABSOLUTE best choice."

And from there, things only get worse.

"People want to move back because they have seen a better way (after having taken soooooo much time to take their initial decision)."

Whether you allow "take-backs" or "mulligans" in your gaming group is up to you. But if people are taking a long time to play and they still want to redo their turn, you might have to put a stop to it.



**Fortunately, Cathala presents a very simple way of dealing with this problem:**

"Easy: stop playing with that kind of player!"

### Ted Alspach

Designer of *One Night Ultimate Werewolf*, *One Night Ultimate Vampire*, and *Castles of Mad King Ludwig*

By the time I got to Ted Alspach, I was starting to see a pattern among game designers.

"Players who have really, really bad A/P (analysis paralysis)," explains Alspach. "I don't expect anyone to rush through a game, but when it takes longer for a single player to go than everyone else's turn combined, that's annoying, because they are doubling the time it takes to play the game, and everyone else at the table has to wait for them."



Again, it's unlikely that someone is taking forever to play their turn in *Blokus* or *Apples to Apples*. But some casual games require strategic thinking, and that means people can get caught up in running through every possibility and the fear of making the wrong play.

### Alspach favors a straightforward method of dealing with this problem:

"If I see that happening, I call them out on it in order to get them moving faster." It sounds almost too easy to be true. And, as it turns out, it occasionally is. "Sometimes it works, other times, there's simply no hope."

But that wasn't Alspach's only pet peeve. "A secondary peeve is players who put game pieces in or against their mouths. Yuck!"

I'm still waiting to hear if this is a common problem with adults.



### Jamey Stegmaier

Designer of *Scythe*, *Viticulture*, and *Charterstone*

"[W]hen a player has the opportunity to plan ahead for their turn, but they choose not to" is Stegmaier's pet peeve. This lack of planning results "in a much longer turn than is otherwise necessary."



### Don Lloyd

Designer of *Dark Horse*, Publisher of *Dragon Keepers* and *Forged in Steel*



It's interesting to see how the types of games that designers work on seem to be related to their pet peeves. Designers whose games are intended to be snappy don't like it when players spend too much time thinking. Those who create faster, more interactive games get annoyed when people aren't taking part in the social party.

Because Lloyd is a publisher, I wasn't surprised when he told me that his biggest pet peeve is when people pass judgment on a game after only one play — even if they weren't fully paying attention and didn't get in a good play.

Like analysis paralysis, it can result in a very long game . . . but the fact that it could have been avoided makes it even more annoying.



"My primary way of dealing with this is to add some levity to the situation, just to make the person aware (but not to make them feel bad)," says Stegmaier. "And sometimes I'll try to comment on my own actions in the hopes that others will become aware of it too ('Sorry guys, I should have thought about my turn in advance')."

Commenting on your own actions is a great way to let other players know that something is an issue without being confrontational about it. It's a strategy that I use myself, and it can be pretty effective!



It's easy to assume that you don't like a game after a single bad play. But is it really fair? Almost certainly not. This is something I've been working on for a while. Give every game at least two plays before you decide you don't like it. You might find something great that you didn't expect or realize that you were playing the game wrong on your first playthrough.



### Jerry Hawthorne

Designer of *Mice and Mystics*, *Tail Feathers*, and *Stuffed Fables*

Interestingly, Hawthorne broke from the rest of the designers that I talked to. Instead of being annoyed by people who are too into the game, he's irritated by those who aren't into it enough.



"My pet peeve is when you are teaching a game, but somebody is obviously not paying attention, then asks questions while playing that they would know the answer to if they had been paying attention."

Which is exactly why some people ban phones at their game tables. Of course, you don't need a phone to be distracted during the explanation of a game. But it does seem to be a common tool for checking out during a rules run-through.



### What I learned about designers, players, and games



These are the designers of some of my favorite board games, so hearing about their pet peeves was a really cool experience.

And, interestingly, they echoed a lot of the things that irritate me when I'm playing. As Paul Dennen said, tabletop games are as much about the social aspect as they are the gameplay side of things. When people aren't engaging, or they're focusing too much on making the exact right move, the game (and the social interaction) bogs down.

This is one of the great things about lighter, more casual games. They're designed to create social experiences more than brain-burning difficult situations. And while there's a time for every game, maybe serious gamers should take a few more turns at casual titles.

Because in the end, we're all at the table to have fun. 🎲

*The author would like to thank Paul Dennen, Bruno Cathala, Ted Alspach, Jamey Stegmaier, Jerry Hawthorne, Don Lloyd and the other designers who chatted with him about their board gaming pet peeves.*

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## ESSEN SPIEL 2019 For All the Right Reasons



**Josh Hale**

Just a Lawyer Playing Games

The thing is, we have plenty of games to see here in the “colonies” (North America and beyond). Flying to Dusseldorf, Germany is not strictly necessary to learn about cool games or even international games. So the question can, and should be, asked: why Essen?

There is no one answer that will fit every gamer out there. For me, I can come up with several reasons to travel to the SPIEL—some of which are even valid business reasons. One reason was to be able to say that I went; another to feel cool, which I am assuredly not.

One of my favorite reasons to attend the Essen SPIEL is seeing board games that I would never have seen at Gen Con, Origins, PAX Unplugged, or any of the other U.S.-based conventions. Some of these games are available if you search for them, while some are most assuredly not. Though I certainly do not search for what is “popular” when looking for something new to bring to the table, I do tend to seek out what is cool. So, with my fellow CGI readers in mind, let me tell you about some of those cool board games that I found at Essen SPIEL this year.



### Misty

Helvetiq | 2–5 players | 15 minutes

Misty is a simple card drafting game where you are making a panel of steamed-up windows that your child has made steam drawings on. It uses a card drafting mechanism where you choose a card from your hand and pass the remaining cards to your neighbor. The game is cute, simple, fits in your pocket, and usually can be played in under 10 minutes. Helvetiq has made some excellent casual games, and their quality is always top-notch. I really love the idea of pocketable games that are more than a deck of simple playing cards, and that also lead to fun conversations.



### Mint Cooperative

Five24 Labs | 1–4 players | 15–30 minutes

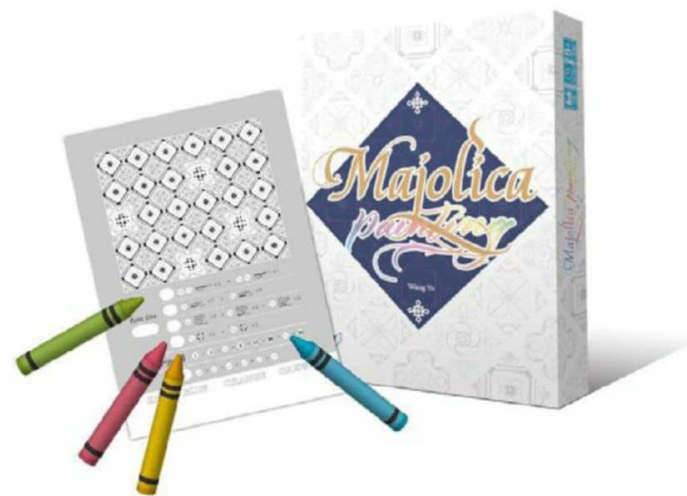
(I am the attorney for Five24 Labs, so take what I say with a grain of salt.) Jon Gilmour and Brian Lewis were the lead game designers behind the recent buzzworthy *Dinosaur Island*, and that same teamwork has led to the simple pleasure of *Mint Cooperative* — an asymmetrical co-op game about saving the city (or county) that generally lasts no more than 30 minutes, and mostly wraps up under 15. This is one of those titles that I have personally pegged as a gateway game to get casual gamers more interested in a “heavier” mechanic. Though the game is quite simple and fits inside a mint tin, *Mint Cooperative* scratches an itch for hobby gamers while keeping the subject matter and gameplay casual.



### Majolica Painting

Blue Magpie Games | 1–8 players | 25 minutes

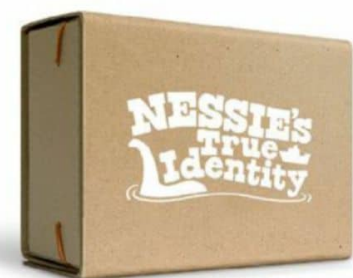
*Majolica* was an ultra thinky game from Asia last year that was an answer to *Azul*. To some, *Azul* was too simple; therefore *Majolica* introduced cascading effects that would boggle your mind. Now, in *Majolica Painting*, the same creative team comes back with a flip-and-write game (no dice, just cards). This game is simple and can be played anywhere, and frankly offers one of the more pleasurable aesthetics in a roll-and-write type of environment, as you are actively creating a work of art. Think of it like adult coloring with strategy blended in.



### Nessie's True Identity

itten | 2+ players | 20 minutes

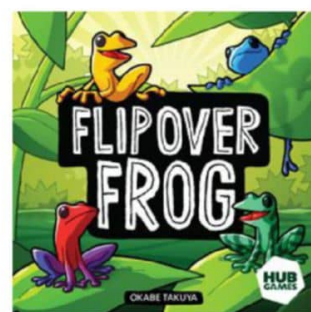
The masterminds behind *Tokyo Highway* bring a social/word deduction game in a matchbox-sized format. This game should have one of the smallest carbon footprints I have ever seen. One player (The Witness) comes up with a word, while the rest of the players have to provide guesses. The catch is that the players will know if one of their guesses is correct, but not which one. Cute, simple, and definitely worthy of your time.



### Flip Over Frog

Hub Games | 2–4 players | 15 minutes

Recently known for their deeper games like *Holding On: The Troubled Life of Billy Kerr*, Hub Games brings us this cute abstract that just calls to be put on your table and played. *Flip Over Frog* is a fresh take on area control that is easy to learn yet includes a surprising amount of depth (not counting the stacks of frogs). This game was an utter surprise to me, as I know the folks at this company, and they never told me about this release. For cuteness alone, you need this in your life.



## The Lesson from Essen

Here's the rub—we would not be going to these conventions if we did not enjoy gaming. But gaming alone would make these conventions less exciting for me personally. I have made some of the very best of friends attending conventions all over the world, with board games being the great uniter. I miss these folks a month or two at a time. They are my convention family, and for a casual gamer, they make the conventions truly worth attending. Essen SPIEL allows me to make new friends from many different countries that I may not ever have the chance to meet at U.S. conventions.

That alone makes the flight across the pond a worthy endeavor. Now...how do I get to Tokyo Game Market? 🇯🇵



Left: players of all ages duel it out in Konami's Yu-Gi-Oh! booth. Right: commentators discuss the show during a live stream. SPIEL 2019 photos by Max Metzler (courtesy Friedhelm Merz Verlag).



Josh Hale is the owner of MeepleGamers, another media outlet in board games. He is a single father, lawyer, works for publishers, and pretty much a geeky nerd (it might be a nerdy geek, but he always mixes those two up). He enjoys board games, travel, camping and the Ohio State Buckeyes Football team (Yes, SPORTSBALL). He is grooming his daughter to one day take over MeepleGamers (sure to stay within the child labor laws at all times, he thinks).

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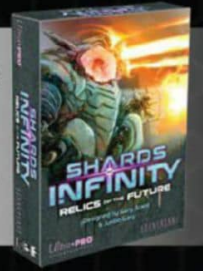
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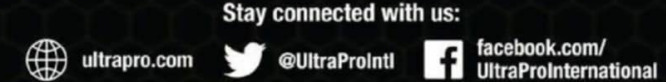
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# of DICE and MEEPLES

## The Overlooked Past of Your Favorite Game Components



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

### Take notice.

With all the marketing, graphic detail, animation, and flair attached to gaming, it's easy to overlook the often underrated but very significant gaming components in the modern era of board games. For many, the appeal of a game comes from elaborately designed miniatures or specialized pieces that set it apart from anything else on the market. Even board design has become more intricate to sell players on game immersion, while the introduction of digital apps has added another layer of game management and interaction.

Dice and other more "traditional" pieces have their established uses but are not necessarily the glitter or highlight of a board game experience. But don't overlook the lowly pawn or cubic dice—after all, we have been playing with them for the past 5,000 years. They've been around for a bit and have earned their place in gaming history.

### From Senet to Scene It?

The oldest known board game, called 'Senet,' dates back to around 3100 B.C. in Predynastic Egypt. Depicted in several murals and hieroglyphs and whose full name translates to "the game of passing," Senet consisted of a rectangular grid board with 30 square spaces organized into three rows of 10, with playing pieces easily compared to pawns and throwing sticks used as a randomizer to determine movement.

Sticks and organic casting devices such as bones were historically considered to be the precursors of dice. These tools often featured markings or darkened sides to distinguish various outcomes.

But it would still be nearly a thousand years before the cubical dice resembling something like the modern iteration would start appearing in Egyptian and Chinese excavations dating to 2000 B.C.

The most common and standard piece in board games is still the iconic six-sided die, but iterations of this have evolved into sides and shapes that vary greatly—even though the origin of the classic six-sided shape and design took thousands of years to refine.

### The Dice Age.

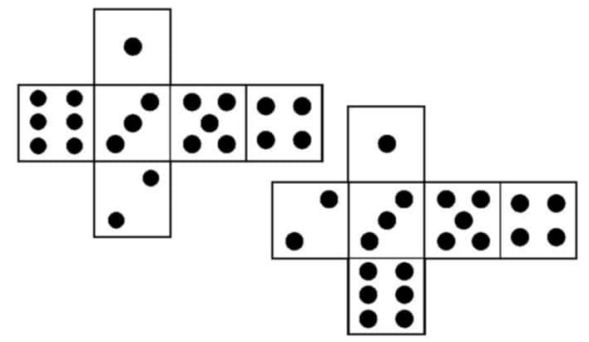
What we think of as a simple gaming piece has had quite a bit of variation throughout history. While you may have never noticed modern six-sided dice are configured in a style known as "Sevens," denoting the fact that each opposite side tallies up to seven (1-6, 2-5, 3-4), this was not always the case—and with a total of 15 unique possible configurations, dice excavation has shown variance in this sort of structure. Still, the vast majority of the discoveries studied by these researchers fall into either the "Sevens" or "Primes" configurations (where opposite sides add up to unique prime numbers, e.g., 1-2, 3-4, 5-6). Interestingly, what the study seems to show is a cultural shift toward the "Sevens" configuration.

The number seven also holds a divine place within religion. Seven is a repeated and 'holy' biblical reference—even representing perfection. In Judaism, there are seven heavens;



*Senet Gaming Board Inscribed for Amenhotep III with Separate Sliding Drawer, ca. 1390-1353 B.C. (photo by Brooklyn Museum)*

In 2013, researchers studied over a hundred different cube and cuboid dice excavated from around the Netherlands which were housed in more than 20 different museums and archaeological depots. Their purpose was to study and catalog the differences and the evolution of dice as evidenced by these samples, which could be reliably dated from pre A.D. 650 to post A.D. 1450.



*Left: dice template for the "Primes" configuration; Right: dice template for the "Sevens" configuration we use today*

in the first sura (chapter) in the Qur'an, there are seven verses and the number has recurrent meaning in Islam.

From approximately A.D. 1250 to 1450, nearly 90% of the sample dice showed the Primes configuration had gained a surge of popularity. But in the years following until roughly A.D. 1600, Primes dice grew fewer and fewer until they



Left: ancient bone dice from Bohemia, Moravia, and Slovakia (photo by Kozuch on Wikimedia Commons, licensed under CC BY-SA 3.0); Right: Egyptian six-sided dice, dated from 30 B.C. to A.D. 330 (public domain)

were all but phased out in place of the Sevens configuration commonly seen today. Evidence also seems to suggest that the creation of dice and the markings on them, commonly referred to as ‘pips,’ pretty much happened at the same time.

Many dice have been discovered that have their numerical markings in Roman numerals or other marks, but various styles of the ‘pip’ seem to dominate. In the samples studied by the researchers out of the Netherlands, three different common styles were identified: the standard single dot, a single dot surrounded by a concentric circle, or a single dot surrounded

by two concentric circles. Cataloging the samples over time revealed a steady movement to simplification with early samples showcasing all three styles in similar numbers, and later samples heavily favoring the single dot approach.

While the materials of dice in other parts of the world may have varied, the majority of the components that were part of this study showed that organic materials like bone, ivory, and antler far outweighed any other type of resource, with 96 of the 110 samples coming from such a source.

## This is How We Roll.

Regardless of the material, ancient players weren’t above a little crooked action when rolling the dice.

Everyone has a suspected player who is the perfect ‘roller’ in a game. And crooked or ‘gaffed’ dice have been discovered in ancient Egypt, the Orient, prehistoric North and South America, and even in Viking graves.

The perfect rolls may not have always been manipulated and could have been a result of the raw materials available or the skill of the craftsman, but dice today are sophisticated and scientifically calibrated to a point where the Vegas casinos can immediately recognize a facsimile and a potential cheat.

In fact, it was not even until the 16<sup>th</sup> century that dice games were even studied in any sort of mathematical or

analytical way. The prevalent attitude had been that dice or other casting objects fell in a particular way as an indirect consequence of gods or other supernatural forces.

Don’t even try to disrupt a seasoned player from a dice routine.

Blowing on dice, handling dice, protecting and preserving ‘lucky’ dice apart from other dice is an art form for many gamers. Even placing the dice in a particular position before the roll (highest number up) and calling out as the dice are thrown matters—a lot it seems. Walk the smoky rooms in any Las Vegas casino to see just how important dice are to the game; ask any *Dungeons & Dragons* player about their dice-jail whenever an important roll comes up lacking.

## How to Win Friends and Influence Meeples.

Setting the dice aside for a moment, game enthusiasts today have so many different components and pieces to interact with that it’s hard to keep track of them all. They may not be as ubiquitous as dice, but anyone with a passing interest in board games will find familiar components being used throughout the hobby.

For example, the humble term ‘meeple’ is a common word used to identify what is typically a small wooden playing piece in the shape of a person. The meeple and miniature may seem synonymous, but the latter is thought to have a more detailed 3D rendering, where the meeple is typically a simpler shape and design. The origin of the word ‘meeple’ is uncertain, even though much of the board game community attributes its popularization to the board game *Carcassonne*.

Named after the medieval fortified city of Carcassonne in southern France, the game of *Carcassonne* is a German-style, tile-based board game for two-to-five players. It was originally designed by Klaus-Jürgen Wrede and was published in 2000 by Hans im Glück in German and by Rio Grande Games (until 2012). It received the Spiel des Jahres award in 2001 and is currently published by Z-Man Games. Described by many as a ‘gateway game,’ it grew in popularity thanks to the simple-yet-strategic mechanics and family-friendly design.

To many veteran players, *Carcassonne* was the game that first ignited their interest in board games as a hobby and the term ‘meeple’ spread and is now considered a standard gaming component. But in parallel with the explosive growth of board gaming, even the iconic meeple is evolving—from the ITEMeeples in the *Tiny Epic* series to animals (animeeples), vegetables (vegimeeples), and everything in between. The meeple you know today may be quite different tomorrow—or replaced altogether.



The classic meeples of *Carcassonne* (photo by Scott King Photography)



ITEMeeples from *Tiny Epic Quest* by Gamelyn Games (photo by Scott King Photography)





Left: custom meeples from *Dungeon Heroes* by Gamelyn Games; Right: marble dispenser from *Potion Explosion* by Horrible Games (Photos by Scott King Photography)

Our tools and technology have advanced and the possibilities that the gaming hobby offers today are greater than they have ever been. Game designers have been working diligently to introduce new components or unique game mechanisms to be the next staple in the hobby—from marble dispensers (*Potion Explosion* and *Gizmos*) to electronic circuitry

(*Forbidden Sky*), and even companion apps. But don't ever feel embarrassed about holding a special place for your dice or other gaming components. After all, these essential components have been found buried by the side of human beings as treasured objects throughout history. 🎲

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Photo by Scott King Photography



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## Recon Mission

A Search and Write Game by Chris James  
Published by Stratus Games  
Print more sheets at [www.StratusGames.com](http://www.StratusGames.com)



# RECON MISSION

A Search and Write Game by Chris James  
For 2 players, 30 minutes, ages 8 and up

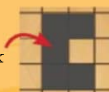


**YOUR MISSION** Be the first to complete a map of your enemy's base by searching for and locating all of their structures.

**INSTRUCTIONS**

- Both players draw all six structures onto their own base map in any orientation (with at least one blank square between them).
- Take turns, starting with the younger player. On your turn, choose an empty square on your enemy base map and call out the coordinates (for example, "Bravo 7"). In response, your opponent will reveal information about this square on their base, and you write it. There are three possible options:
  - "Confirmed"** - This square is part of a structure. Fill it in.
  - A number from 0 to 8** - This square is not part of a structure. Write the number, which is how many of the 8 surrounding squares contain part of a structure.
  - "Jammed"** - The signal is jammed. Write a question mark. This square cannot be called out again. (Limit 3 uses per player. Can be used on any square.)

"Confirmed"  
Fill in the blank



"Three"  
Write the number 3



"Jammed"  
Your opponent doesn't want you to know!



Opponent crosses out

**MISSION COMPLETE** Play continues until one player believes he or she has created a complete map of the enemy base. This player shouts "Mission Complete!" and the map is compared to the opponent's original base map. If the map matches exactly, the player who completed the mission wins! Otherwise, the opponent wins (even if their map is incomplete).

**Note:** You don't have to call out every structure square to win. The enemy base map can (and should) be completed logically using the information you have received. **Tip:** it is helpful to mark or cross out any squares that you believe are empty.



## MY BASE

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
A												
B												
C												
D												
E												
F												
G												
H												
I												
J												
K												
L												



## ENEMY BASE

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	Phonetic
A													Alpha
B													Bravo
C													Charlie
D													Delta
E													Echo
F													Foxtrot
G													Golf
H													Hotel
I													India
J													Juliet
K													Kilo
L													Lima

JAMMER



RUNWAY

Fold Here  
(to shield your sheet)



# LET'S PLAY!

## The Power of Gaming at Every Age



**T. Caires**  
Obsessed Tabletop Gamer and  
Games Manager at HABA USA

It's no surprise that play is making a comeback. Researchers across the world are in agreement that we need to play more as children and well into adulthood. Play is important for a healthy brain and body, and it is one of the best ways for us to learn. Games create a set of rules and a safe world for all of us to play in together, be it something as simple as Go Fish or as complicated as Agricola. In early childhood we develop and use cognitive, social, and emotional skills as we play within the limits of our agreed-upon games. It's also something that we should continue to do well into our later years, as researchers continue to discover the benefits of game play for even the oldest among us.

And playing together, the young and the old?  
**Even better.**

Images provided by Freepik.com and Flaticon.com

**ENEMY BASE**

**MY BASE**

**JAMMER**

TOWER BARRACKS HOSPITAL HANGAR COMMAND

Runway

**MY BASE**

**ENEMY BASE**

**JAMMER**

TOWER BARRACKS HOSPITAL HANGAR COMMAND

Runway

Phonetic: Alpha, Bravo, Charlie, Delta, Echo, Foxtrot, Golf, Hotel, India, Juliet, Kilo, Lima

Grid coordinates: A-L, 1-12

Fold Here (to shield your sheet)

Images provided by Freepik.com and Flaticon.com



## 1 WHAT'S IN A GAME?

To play a game is to play within the structured rules of an agreed-upon world. The players all agree to pretend within the limits set by the game, be they physical or mental only. For example, nothing limits a player from drawing a card from the bottom of the deck except for the restrictions we create that say they cannot do that. Playing a game requires the cognitive skill of being able to pretend that the rules and limitations of a game are real – something children as young as two years old can start to understand and benefit from. Even though we are pretending while we're playing games, we are still flexing our brains.

What this really means is that we can start playing games with children at a very young age to help them develop a variety of skills they'll use throughout their lives. Games like HABA's line of *My Very First Games* are developed specifically to help nurture and grow little gamers. The games feature large pieces that are easy for children to grasp and manipulate, and work on simple skills: color recognition, quantities, gross and fine motor skills, memory, problem-solving, and social interactions. These and other games designed for a younger audience provide a guided experience for adults to introduce the concepts of rolling a die, taking turns, and playing together or competing against one another. Repetitive play of these titles helps ingrain these skills and further their development.



For example, in *My Very First Games: First Orchard* players work together to pick the fruit from the orchard before the raven makes it down the path to steal it all. The fruits are large, brightly colored wooden pieces that are easy for little hands to grasp and place into the basket based on the die roll. The basic colors of blue, green, red, and yellow are ones that most children are already familiar with or are working on learning by the age of two. Discussions during the game about how many of each fruit remain are helpful for teaching counting and quantities. Players will win or lose the game together, allowing adults to express their delight at victory or frustration in defeat for children to emulate and learn from. Once the game has been taught and played with a child, they will often continue to play the game independently, or even teach and include others in the game with them.



*My Very First Games: First Orchard* by HABA features large, tactile game pieces that are easy for kids to manipulate.

## 2 WHAT'S MY AGE AGAIN?

While toddler games aren't exactly what most gamers want to be pulling out for game night, board games designed for children of a slightly older age range can be just as enjoyable for adults and children alike. Research conducted by Mildred Parten in 1932 discovered that by the age of five, most children have developed the social skills needed to play independently, in parallel, in association, or cooperatively with both their peers and adults.

Children understand symbolic substitutes for other objects, and their gross and fine motor skills are often well developed by this age. This means that by the age of five, children are capable of learning to play most games – the restriction then becomes whether they're able to understand and process the additional rules or necessary skills required. Granted, sometimes patience is the most important skill needed to learn and play games, and players of any age can struggle with that.



Games that predominately feature manual dexterity often allow children and adults to compete equally. Stacking, building, and the physical manipulation of objects is something that we start doing as soon as we can hold things. By the age of five, most children have the skills needed to balance objects, build a tower, and understand the effects of gravity. Interestingly, adults often find themselves at a disadvantage in games of manual skill – more often than not we tend to be over-caffeinated, dehydrated, or suffering from *Jenga-PTSD* when the threat of something tumbling down exists.

Because of the nature of these games, children and adults can achieve a fulfilling experience together. Stacking games like *Rhino Hero Super Battle* and *Animal Upon Animal* provide an even playing field for players of all ages from 5 to 99, with all players benefiting from the physical problem-solving and motor skills used during the game.



Left: *Rhino Hero Super Battle* by HABA; Right: *Animal Upon Animal* stacking game (photo by Scott King Photography)

### 3 PLAYING MIND GAMES

Another type of game that children and adults can often equally compete at would be games of visual memory. The ability to memorize what we see is an important skill that children start to develop as soon as they can see. The memorization of what objects are called, what they're used for, and where they can be found is something that our brains are constantly doing. It's often said that a child's brain is a sponge for memorization, and visual memory games are important for helping develop that skill.

Adults can often struggle with memorization, however, due to the large amount of everything else on the mind. What's for dinner tonight? Did that bill get paid? Wait, where was the frog again? Playing games that flex memory muscles has been found to be beneficial for all ages and can often be seen as an even playing field for adults and children to compete.



Memory games like this one can allow adults and children to compete on an even playing field.

### 4 COLLABORATE AND LISTEN

The social implications of playing games, both cooperative and competitive, are important at any age. Negotiation and compromise are skills adults and children are constantly in need of developing and refining, and cooperative games provide a safe, risk-free environment to do so. Some might argue that competitive games can stretch those skills even more, depending on the nature of the game. In either case, playing games strengthens collaboration, communication, critical thinking, creative innovation, and the ability to try again. While some games might not be entirely anxiety-free, they provide a fun space to take chances and, you guessed it, make mistakes.

Conflict and its resolution while playing a game are important and powerful tools for players to practice a variety of social and emotional skills. These are sometimes overlooked when considering the benefits of play. In *The Power of Play*, Dr. Rachel E. White explains, "as they navigate their way through such situations, children learn how their own desires may differ from those of another child, how to advocate for their own ideas, how to deal with frustration, how to work in a group, and how to respond in socially appropriate ways."



These skills are just as important for adults and can often be seen at any game table, regardless of the age of the players. When considering and discussing the benefits of playing games, the focus is often given to the cognitive skills related to mathematics, engineering, physics, language, etc. While these benefits are significant and the gamification of learning these skills is something many schools and educators are using in their curriculum, it's important to not forget the "softer skills" grown through play.

### 5 FUN FOR ALL AGES

Whether physical, cognitive, or social, the skills that games can stretch and build are important at every age. The human brain is, after all, a muscle and requires constant use to maintain its shape. To that effect, a study in the Bordeaux area in South West France looked at the effects of games on the development of dementia in the elderly and found that regular game play can reduce cognitive decline and depression. A study in the US found similar results, observing that "engaging in mentally stimulating activities in late life was associated with a decreased risk of incident Mild Cognitive Impairment." Playing games is often used as a fun way to maintain mental stimulation in elderly patients of nursing homes and is recommended as a light physical activity for adults over 70.

Play is important for the development and maintenance of our minds. Games allow us to operate together within the confined rules of a world of our choosing, and encourages exploration, experimentation, and creativity in problem-solving at any age. So play on. 🎲



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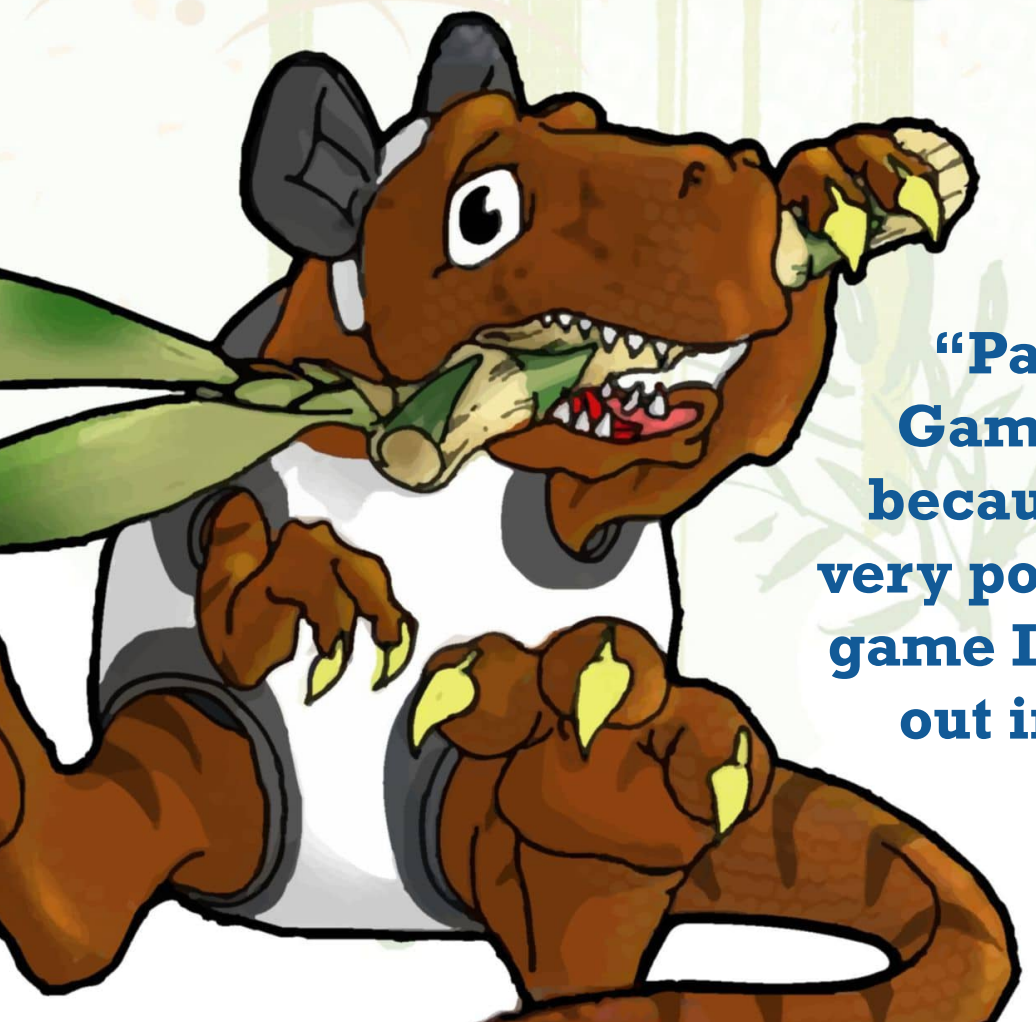


# A CUTE GIANT:

## Pandasaurus and the Rise of a Board Gaming Behemoth



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



**“Pandasaurus Games began because I had a very poorly designed game I wanted to get out into the world.”**

**A**s he explains the origin story, Pandasaurus Games co-founder Nathan McNair touches on a similar pattern among board game publishing scions. Though the details may change due to the principals and circumstances involved, there’s always a creative explosion that breathes life into a fledgling publisher. In this case, it was McNair’s desire to design and release *Roller Coaster Rush*. However, McNair’s creation never saw the light of day. **“It’s not a game that I or anyone else needs in their closet.”**

Instead, a different game helped Pandasaurus gain traction as an entity. McNair was at BGG.CON and had played the Stratamax title *Tammany Hall*, which saw a limited original print run. “On a lark, I wrote to them and asked if we could have the right to publish the title, and for reasons I don’t fully understand, they granted that to us.” A successful Kickstarter was launched in May of 2012 and Pandasaurus began to take shape beyond that initial big bang idea.



*Pandasaurus Games co-founders Molly Wardlaw and Nathan McNair*

Pandasaurus has since grown to gigantic proportions in its seven years of existence. McNair, along with co-founder Molly Wardlaw, has transformed a cute idea into a behemoth of a business. What was once a part-time passion for Wardlaw (her past life included jobs in marketing) and McNair (a former financier working within Wall Street) has become a full-time commitment and player in the industry.

### Foreign Exchange Titles

Those former day jobs helped shaped Pandasaurus in its earliest iterations. “We spent less time on it and primarily focused on bringing foreign titles to the U.S. market that were overlooked,” explains McNair. This was the catalyst for titles such as *New Amsterdam*, *Lost Valley*, and *Great Fire of London* to become accessible for the North American audience.

It was this focus on importing titles that helped define the first few years of Pandasaurus and has continued to be the locus for their forward momentum. But Wardlaw and McNair were keen to ensure that whatever they pegged as their next import fit their ethos. “For us, the question is always ‘Do I want to play this game and is it something really super special?’” explains McNair. “If the answer is yes, then we try and bring it in. You see this with *The Mind*, *Illusion*, *Passtally* – and, of course, *Machi Koro*.”



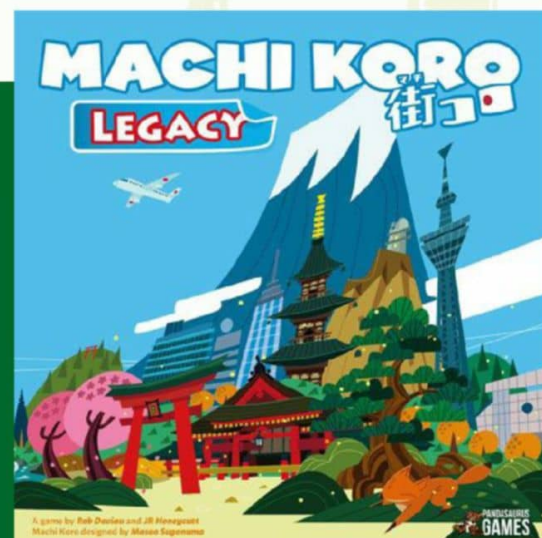
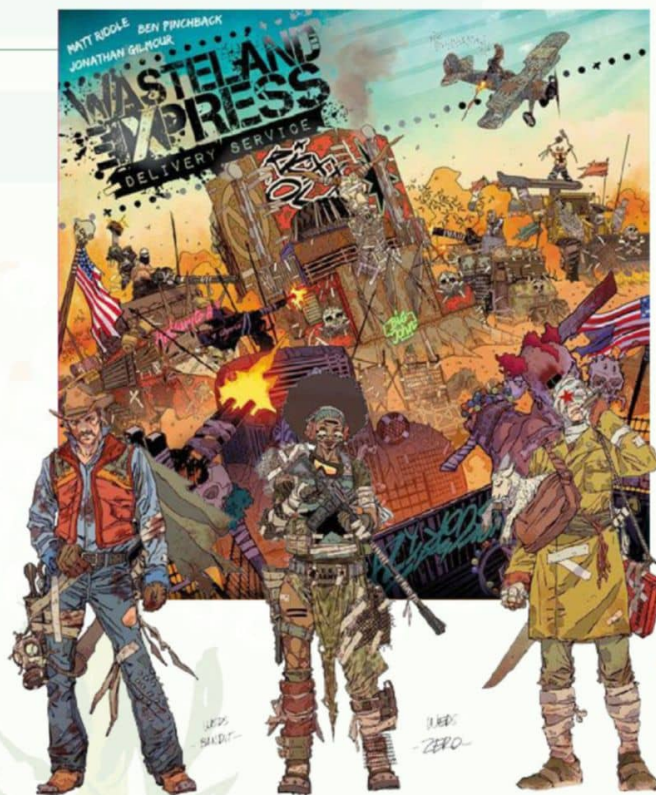
*Machi Koro* was a game-changer for Pandasaurus. McNair puts it bluntly: “Without *Machi Koro*, I am probably still working on Wall Street and Molly is still in marketing.” The popular 2012 title, originally released via Grounding and Japon Brand, was an instant hit in North America. That popularity only grew when the game found its way onto Target shelves. “That was kind of a ‘Woah, how did that happen?’ thing.”

The success of *Machi Koro* has even led to its latest iteration as a legacy-style game. Despite being a beloved game, there were hurdles to clear in making *Machi Koro Legacy* make sense to its designers, partners, and consumers. “We had to convince Rob it made sense. We had to convince Japon Brand/Grounding that it would work. We had to make sure that [Masao] Suganuma liked all the design decisions that Rob Daviau and J.R. Honeycutt had made, and we had to find time in Nobura Hotta’s schedule to get the amazing artwork done.”

## Homegrown Heroes

However, as Pandasaurus has continued to find the right games to bring stateside, it’s their commitment to original designs that recently brought them success. In 2017, Pandasaurus found themselves with two big hits on their hands with *Wasteland Express Delivery Service* and *Dinosaur Island*. These two games have come to define Pandasaurus’s design philosophy as the publisher has leaned into creating more in-house games. “*Wasteland Express Delivery Service* and *Dinosaur Island* are both labors of love for us and two games we are extremely proud of from a design perspective,” describes McNair. “[The designers] were a dream to work with, and these games are such great designs.”

“Then we went a bit overboard with the components and the artwork, and I think that got the eyeballs on them that were needed for gamers to fall in love with the gameplay itself.”



## Machi Koro Legacy

Not often do you find a game’s expansion or latest iteration replacing the original, but *Machi Koro Legacy* aims to do just that. The core concept is still the same: roll some dice, earn some currency, and grow your city. But the legacy aspect adds branching story options that mark the next chapter of your city as it grows. New buildings and unexpected twists await your (no business being as cute as it is) city.

This falls in line with McNair’s description of Pandasaurus as a “very art-forward company.” With each subsequent release, Pandasaurus has treated the visual design with the same amount of care and attention as the core mechanics. This was especially true when working on 2018’s *Nyctophobia*, which had uniqueness both in premise

and presentation. “I first saw [*Nyctophobia*] at Unpub and thought it was the best concept for a game I had ever seen,” begins McNair. “There was a great elevator pitch for certain, but the backstory behind the game and the unique mechanisms were something really, truly special.”

## A Casual and Strategic Approach

As Pandasaurus has continued to grow, so has the scope of the publisher’s projects. This has led to Pandasaurus branching out to include more casual games into its catalog. This has played out even more with the company embracing Kickstarter as a place to explore this delineation. “We tend to focus on core strategy games on Kickstarter,” explains McNair. “They tend to do the best on that platform as more casual games tend to do better directly at retail.”

Which explains why Pandasaurus’s latest, *Godspeed*, has found its way (and success) to the crowdfunding platform. The game details an alternate 1960s in which Russia and Japan win the space race, but a new race toward colonization and space exploration is afoot. The art style and game’s core ideas are radical and experimental, not dissimilar to *Nyctophobia*. Kickstarter is a place that allows Pandasaurus room to try out new ideas and designs for its dedicated fans and curious gamers. Meanwhile, *Wayfinders* is readymade for streamlined retail with its playful art style and mechanics that harken to mainstream breakthroughs such as *Five Tribes* and *Machi Koro*.

“Today, we are mostly developing original titles and we’ve definitely gotten more into the family-weight games than we started,” explains McNair, “but obviously with *Godspeed*, we’re definitely still making strategy titles.”



## Nyctophobia

Have you ever tried to play a board game where the lighting was almost too dark to see the board? *Nyctophobia*—which means “fear of the dark”—takes it one step further by making players wear blackout glasses. One player takes on the role of a maniac that hunts the rest of the players as they seek to escape the pitch-black forest by feel alone. With a variety of player options at hand, this game can be a frighteningly good time.





*New Amsterdam (photo by Henk Rolleman), Wayfinders, and Lost Valley (photos by Pandasaurus Games)*

As Pandasaurus continues to expand its purview, it has not lost touch with its humble beginnings. The company has not shied away from Kickstarter to find an audience for its more adventurous titles, nor has it stopped finding great international designers, properties, and ideas to import or launch. All this success has allowed Pandasaurus to not only grow its reputation but its staff.

McNair summarizes the past few years positively: "Right now, I think this is a great time for our company. We've grown our team from two to six people in the last 12 months and continue to have success with both our existing and our new titles."

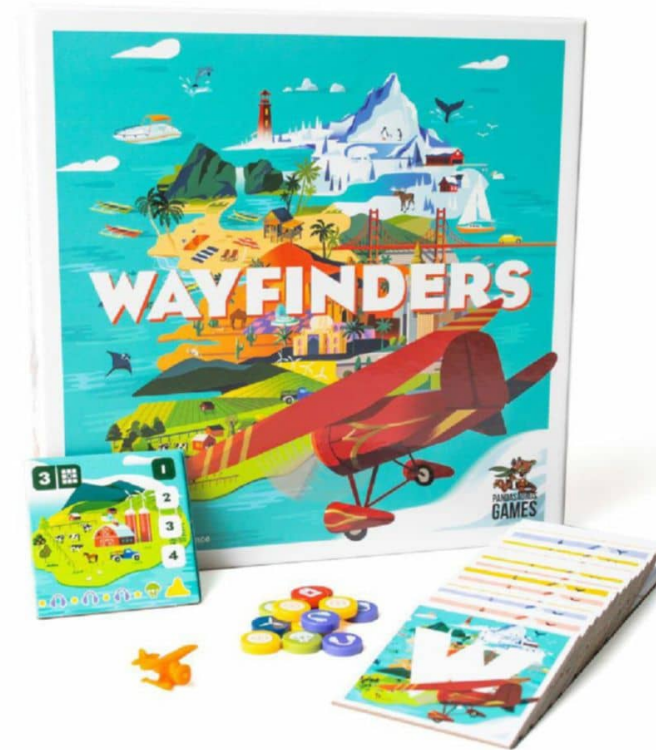
But what does the future hold for Pandasaurus? McNair cannot give away every piece of news, but he does hint that not only is the immediate future promising, but the near future is also streaking like a meteor.



### Godspeed

"The Space Race was a lie" frames the concept of *Godspeed*, as the true space race is the colonization of a new exo-planet found by the Japanese and Russians set in an alternate history of the 1960s. The board game features worker placement, resource collection, exploration, defense and more. Balance the needs of your nation's colony with that of the other colonies—this is a one-way ticket, after all.

"Our biggest news right now is the release of *Silver and Gold* and *Wayfinders*...and the game we're doing with Elizabeth Hargrave (designer of *Wingspan*), which is super exciting. 2020 is going to be a really special year for us!"



## Warhammer and Munchkin fans unite!



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## Hack-and-slash Video Games Get a Cardboard Port

A horde of demons surrounds you. Their swords gleam and their claws extend. Will this be the end of your adventure? Or can you fight your way out, and take their weapons as your own?

Anyone who's played a hack-and-slash RPG video game knows that feeling. Endless waves of enemies can mean either easy XP and lots of loot — or death. The difference is in how strong your character already is.

The new strategy board game *Sanctum*, out February 2020 in North America, captures this dynamic in cardboard and plastic.



It's a competitive game for 2 to 4 players. Each player controls a unique character. You kill demons. You get skill upgrades and loot. You use your skills and loot to fight more and tougher demons. Repeat until you reach the boss fight...or until you miscalculate how strong you've grown and get overwhelmed by your enemies.

Basically, if you like hack-and-slash video games, you'll like *Sanctum*. And in fact, translating those digital experiences to the tabletop was designer Filip Neduk's goal.

That makes this Neduk's second foray into "exporting" — as he called it — a beloved video game genre to the tabletop

form. *Adrenaline*, which came out in 2017, is ranked in the top 4 percent of all games by Board Game Geek (the most prominent online game database and community). That game's inspiration came from arena first-person shooters.

"It's really interesting to me to convert one medium into the other," Neduk said. "Both video games and board games have in their core the same principles, but the medium is different. The thing I find interesting is trying to figure out the 'secret sauce' in the video game. What makes those games fun and how will it translate if you change the medium? Will it be fun in the same way, and what needs to be done to capture the same type of fun? That's where the challenge is."

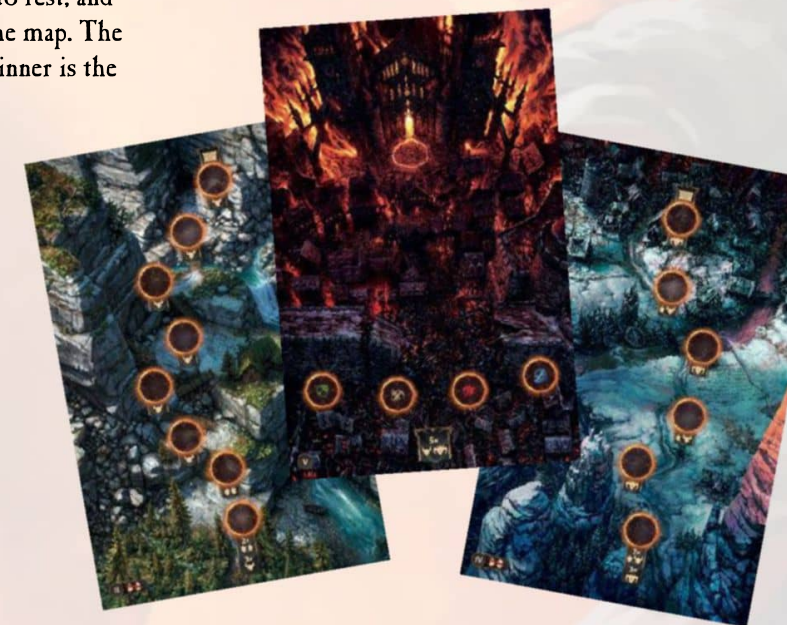
That's why the gameplay in *Sanctum*, Neduk said, is about building up your character. The basic idea of fighting, gaining items and skills, and then fighting again—this time more efficiently—struck him as something that could work on the tabletop, too. "These were the core design pillars we wanted to take from the video game genre."



Decision making centers around a push-and-pull of what skills to upgrade, what loot to equip, when to choose to fight, when to choose to rest, and when to choose to try to move ahead of your opponents on the map. The game culminates in a big battle against a Demon Lord. The winner is the player with the most health after the fight.



*Sanctum* is published by Czech Games Edition, which is known in part for *Codenames*, *Through the Ages*, and *Galaxy Trucker*.



Designing *Sanctum* was at times "a monster," Neduk said. But now it's time for players to slay the monsters. Pick it up starting in February at a game store near you or at the Czech Games Edition Amazon store. 🎲

A fabulous atmospheric party game, *Paranormal Detectives* blends mystery and deduction with multiple forms of clue giving.



**Naomi Laeuchli**  
Game Reviewer and  
Casual Game Groupie

One player is the ghost attempting to lead the detective players to figure out how he or she died. The ghost draws a story card that contains a secret description of what occurred and lists several keywords for the main questions: who, why, where, how, and what weapon. Following a diagram on the card, the ghost places wound tokens on the board to show where they were injured at the time of death and also gives a brief description of what they were wearing. A few of the stories in the game have a parental advisory warning, but these are limited and easily removed from the game if desired. More stories are also available through an app.

On a detective's turn, they must ask the ghost any open-ended question, after which they may choose to guess the story. When asking a question, the detective plays an interaction card that determines the method the ghost uses to answer. There are

nine different methods, including drawing on the player's back, arranging tarot cards, silently mouthing a word, miming for up to three seconds, using sliders on the ghost meter to describe the answer, etc.

Each detective may attempt to guess the story twice. They are aiming to name one of the keywords in each of the categories. If they succeed, the player and the ghost win the game. If they're wrong, the ghost informs them secretly how many keywords were right (but not which ones) and the ghost then gives an additional clue to the players, using one of their ghost cards to determine the method. If no player completely guesses the story before the end, the detective who guessed the most keywords correctly (and earliest during the game) wins. The game can also be played cooperatively, in which case the detectives only have two guesses as a team and must guess the whole story to win along with the ghost.

*Paranormal Detectives* really pushes players to get creative, both in how the ghost provides clues with restrictive methods and the detectives in how to ask useful questions. This can lead to a bit of a learning curve, but also some really fun "aha" moments. It's extremely satisfying when you figure out a part of the mystery or decipher a ghost's clue.

There are a lot of unique aspects to the game, with many different mini-games that come together as a great whole.

## Paranormal Detectives

By Szymon Maliński, Adrian Orzechowski, Marcin Łączyński

- 2-6 PLAYERS
- 45 MINS
- AGES 12+
- \$40 MSRP

INTERACTIVE INDEPENDENT

*Mystic Market* is a game of set collection, market manipulation, and card drafting — with a little magic thrown in.



Five ingredient cards are placed face-up on the table next to the ingredient deck to form the ingredient market. Above it, five potion cards are also dealt to form the potion market. Also included is a tray with six vials, with each vial representing one of the possible ingredient types. A vial's position in the tray represents both how much it costs to buy that ingredient (one to three coins) and how much a full set sells for (five to fifteen coins).

On a player's turn, they can choose one of three actions: buy, swap, or sell. Additionally, they may also craft potions. Buying lets players purchase one or two ingredient cards. The price of the face-up ingredients is dictated by the tray. Players also have the option of buying a card blindly from the draw deck for a flat fee of two coins. When swapping, the player swaps one or two ingredients from their hand with any ingredients from the market.

When selling, a player may sell sets of ingredients as many times as they want. Each ingredient type requires a different number of cards in order to form a set. When a set is sold, the player earns the number of coins dictated by the ingredient's current position on the tracker, which then shifts the ingredient's vial to the top of the tray (it is now worth the least amount of money). This causes all the ingredients that were previously above it to shift down one space and increase in value. A player can also sell a single card; they will not earn any money but it will still cause the ingredient's vial to move to the top of the tray. Some cards in the ingredient deck will also cause ingredients to shift in value when they are drawn.

Potion cards cost ingredients to purchase. They have one-time special abilities and earn the player a certain number of coins when used. The game ends once the ingredient deck is depleted and every player has a final chance to sell. The player with the most money at the end of the game wins.

*Mystic Market* has great player interaction. You're constantly trying to manipulate the values of the ingredients, and every sale affects your plans — negatively or positively — so you're engaged and watching even on opponents' turns. The components are absolutely gorgeous, from the artwork to the vials. The potions throw in a few extra options and the result is a fast-paced game with a surprising amount of depth, but is still easy to learn.

## Mystic Market

Designed by Ken Gruhl

- 2-4 PLAYERS
- 30 MINS
- AGES 10+
- \$18 MSRP

LUCK STRATEGY INTERACTIVE INDEPENDENT

Dinosaurs are having high tea. (Of course they are! Don't you know a T-Rex loves his cucumber sandwiches?) But you've forgotten the names of the other guests. It's up to you to ask tactical questions and try to place the right name to the right guest.



Twenty oversized cards are placed face-up on the table, each one showing a dinosaur and its name, and lists the various features about them. These features include the color of the room that they're in; whether they're spotted or striped; if they're eating or drinking anything; what accessories they're wearing; if they have a pet; or if they're showing spikes, tail, or teeth. Three quirk tokens are placed on three random dinosaurs: "always says no," "always lies," and "always alternates between yes and no."

Each player is dealt an identity card. This tells them which of the twenty dinosaurs they are. During a player's turn, they may either guess another player's dinosaur name or ask them a yes-or-no question. They

can ask questions about the various possible features, such as "are you in a purple room?" The player being asked must answer the question truthfully, unless they have one of the dinosaurs with a quirk token, then they answer according to the quirk. Tokens are used to represent what information has already been learned about each player's dinosaur. If the answer is 'yes,' the active player may take another turn. If they received a 'no' answer, the turn is over and play proceeds to the next player. If a player guesses another player's name, they earn a sugar cube and the other player draws a new identity card. The first player to earn three sugar cubes wins the game.

**Dinosaur Tea Party** is a fun logic and deduction game that is accessible and clever. Its game length perfectly matches its depth. It's simple but engaging. The quirk tokens add variety and it's always a fun surprise when you realize someone has been following one of them.

The game has incredible, eye-catching artwork. The dinosaurs are varied and colorful and each has its own unique character. The game is at its best when everyone is really having fun with the theme: bringing out their best (or worst) accents, asking every question in character, and generally hamming it up. How much fun you have with the game will be in direct proportion to how much you enjoy these roleplaying aspects.

## Dinosaur Tea Party

By Rob Daviau, JR Honeycutt, Justin D. Jacobson

# ELEMENT

The award winning and fan favorite Element is now available better than ever with the included Silver advanced play options.

Take your Element game to the next level by adding silver stones to the mix representing a fifth element of Lightning, Wood, or Metal. Each version requires unique strategies and tactics to achieve victory and each can be played two to four players.

Upgraded materials and color blind friendly components make this a must for your game collection!



## ALDR THE HIGH SAGE



RATHERDASHINGGAMES.COM

ALDR is a strategic card game set in the Element universe.

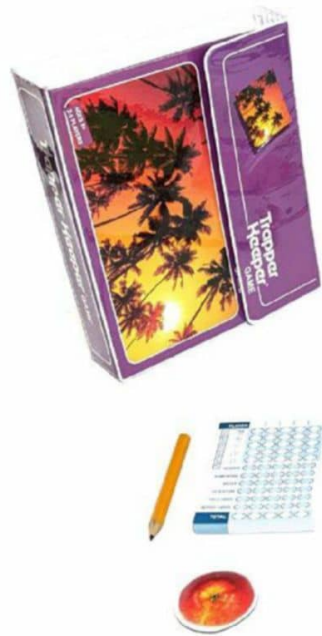
Tactically place drafted cards to build four Elemental Patterns before your opponents can. Place your Sages and move ALDR to obstruct the options of other players, gaining the advantage in this unique card game of area control fans old and new to Element will enjoy!

Rules are included to use ALDR as a micro expansion to Element as well!

Available February, 2020







Time to head back to school in this set-collection game with a refreshingly unique theme and some really neat components.



To set up *Trapper Keeper Game*, the school paper cards are shuffled and dealt into nine stacks arranged in a three-by-three grid, and the top card on each stack is flipped face-up. Each player takes a folder (with a pocket on the left and right) and the game begins. Every round, a bell card is flipped, which typically shows a pattern of three cards on the grid. During a player's turn, they may either take all the cards from the top of each stack in any row or column, or from the stacks shown on the bell card. Some of the cards collected may be face down when they're taken, depending on which cards previous players have claimed. Once a player has collected their cards, they may choose to place all of them either on the left or right side of their folder. If there are three or fewer face-up cards in the grid, all top cards are flipped face-up. After each player has taken

cards, the round ends and a new bell card is drawn. After six rounds the game ends and players calculate their scores.

First, players calculate their doodle scores. The school paper cards can have five different doodles on them in either red or blue ink. Being placed in the left or right side of the folder determines whether the red doodles or blue doodles on the page will count. Players score points for having the most or second-most of each doodle type.

Players then score the type of school paper cards collected. There are seven different types of papers, each of which scores differently. Points are earned for having the most homework cards, and for having sets of notes from four different classmates. Each detention slip card is worth two points, while the player with the most detention slips earns zero points (being edgy is good, but don't be the most edgy). Signature cards must be paired with a field trip card for them to score. Finally, if report cards are paired with a signature card, the player scores one point per homework card they've collected. The player with the most points wins.

The Trapper Keeper box and artwork are a clever throwback to the 80s and 90s, and building your collections feels like creating a mini-story of your time in school. The different ways to score mean that you have a number of strategies open to you, while drawing face-down cards means that you have to stay flexible and that you'll never know exactly where each player stands until the end.

## Trapper Keeper Game

Designed By Prospero Hall



Letter Jam is a cooperative word game in which players give clues to help each other figure out their secret words.



A stack of letter cards is given to each player. After looking through the stack, the player chooses five that create a word, shuffle these, and place them face-down in front of the player on their right. Everyone puts their first card in a stand without looking at it. A player will never see their own cards, only the other players' cards. There will always be six cards displayed — if there are fewer than six players, additional cards are placed in non-player stands.

Players only have a certain number of clues available to them, and if they run out they lose the game. However, they can choose to stop giving clues to try to arrange their letters into a word without looking at them. They can swap a card out with the wild or a bonus card if they are unsure what letter it is. If every player creates a valid five-letter word, which can be the same or different than the original word in their hand, they win the game.

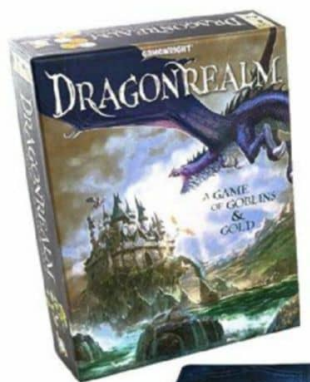
Each round, players look at the cards visible to them on the table and try to think of a word that could be made using some or all of these letters. A wild card representing any letter can also be used once each round. Players then discuss their words — nothing specific can be stated, only descriptions such as how many letters are used and how many players it will help (but not who). Players then decide on who will be the clue giver for the round.

*Letter Jam* is very much a word game, and will appeal mainly to players who enjoy this genre. However, the difficulty can be adjusted based on the size of the words used, and it has a unique focus on cooperation, deduction, and clues. It feels as much like a party game as anything else. At its best with more players, it's fun, challenging and creative.

The clue giver places number tokens in front of the letters in the word, showing their placement in the word. Players then secretly make notes on their player sheet, with a question mark representing their own hidden letter. Once a player believes they know their letter, they may choose to move on, placing it down on the table and moving on to the next. If a player goes through all five letters, they will begin drawing new ones from the deck. When one of these is used in a clue, they get to guess what the letter is; if the guess was right it goes into the center as a bonus letter that can be used one time in a clue or at the end; if they're wrong, the player draws a new one. Once a non-player card has been used in a clue, it is also replaced.

## Letter Jam

Designed by Ondra Skoupy



The sequel to Gamewright's *Dragonwood*, *Dragonrealm* takes you beyond the forest to new locations and challenges.



A dragon location card is chosen at random and placed at the bottom of a stack of six random location cards, to form the location deck. Each player takes eight meeples and three cards. Cards can be one of five colors, numbered one through twelve. Three locations are drawn from the location deck and placed in the center of the table.

then they place their meeple there. They then discard the cards played and draw a new card. If their action failed, they take their cards back and move a meeple to the adventurer's academy. Later, the player can reclaim an adventurer from the academy after a failed dice roll to increase the result by one.

During a player's turn, they can either rest by drawing two cards either from the two face-up cards on the table and/or from the deck, or they can attempt to explore a location. Players who choose the explore action can either sneak (play cards of consecutive numbers), search (play cards of matching numbers), or storm (play cards of matching colors). The player then takes one die for each card played and rolls them. If the number rolled is equal to or higher than the number written on the location,

When a location is filled, it awards points to the player with the most and second-most meeples on it, the winning player takes the location (which are worth Dragonstones at the end of the game), and a new location is drawn. There are also enchantment cards that can be played for special abilities; each player starts with one, while the reverse side of the adventurer's academy allows players to purchase more with cards or points when they have a meeple there. Once the dragon location has been drawn and completed, the game ends. The player with the most Dragonstones earns bonus points and the player with the most points overall wins.

*Dragonrealm* is a delightful follow-up to its predecessor. The artwork and world are still lovely and fantastical. There are some of the same concepts blending in with new mechanics so that everything is new, yet familiar — and just as accessible for newcomers to the series. The area control is implemented well and provides lots of choices and chances to block each other or push your luck. Turns are fast with minimal downtime. Strategic, competitive, and balanced, *Dragonrealm* is a thoroughly well-designed and enjoyable experience.

## Dragonrealm

Designed by Darren Kisingenn

2-4 PLAYERS | 30 MINS | AGES 10+ | MSRP \$25

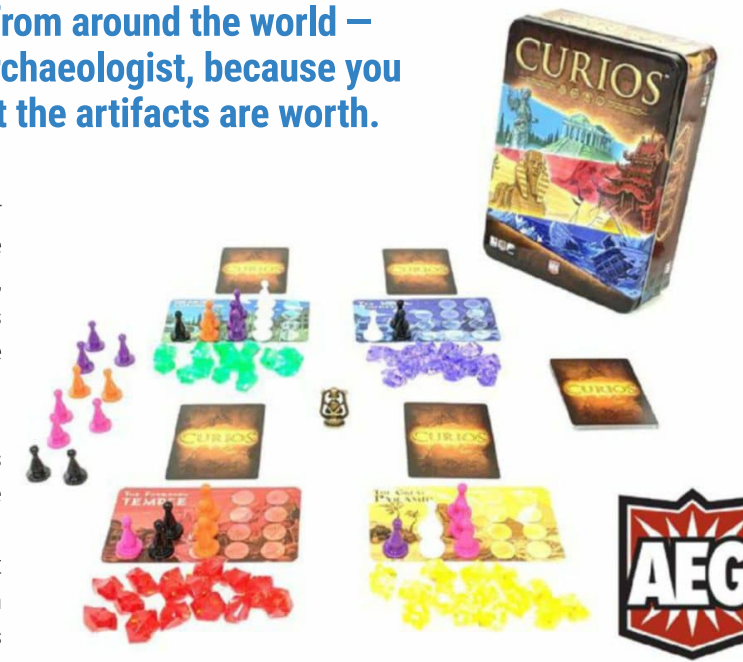
LUCK | STRATEGY | INTERACTIVE | INDEPENDENT

Visit far-off locations to gather artifacts from around the world — but choose wisely where you send your archaeologist, because you won't know until the end of the game what the artifacts are worth.

In *Curios*, there are four locations, and each has four cards associated with it: one, three, five, and seven. One of these cards is placed face-down at each location, while the remaining are dealt out. The face-down cards determine the point values of the artifacts that are collected during the game.

Each player starts with five pawns. Each location has several columns of spaces. On your turn, you place pawns on the leftmost empty column of any one location. These columns start out requiring only one pawn, but increase as they go. When you fill a column you claim an artifact from that location. Players continue to take turns until no one can place any more pawns, and then the round ends. On each location, the player with the most pawns present earns a bonus artifact. Between rounds, you may reveal one of your cards to earn an extra pawn.

At the end of the game, artifacts are worth points based on the card played at their locations. Therefore, players must guess, based on their hands and the cards revealed between rounds, which artifacts are most likely worth the most points. The game requires plenty of watching what other players do, attempting to bluff, and a bit of deduction. There's strategy in the cards you reveal and those you hold back. Some of the components could be fancier, but overall the game is perfect in its simplicity. It's uncomplicated but satisfying, with great player interaction and fast gameplay.



## Curios

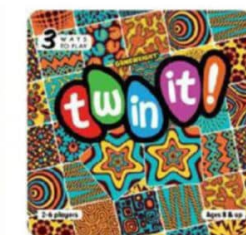
Designer uncredited

2-5 PLAYERS | 15 MINS | AGES 14+ | MSRP \$25

LUCK | STRATEGY | INTERACTIVE | INDEPENDENT

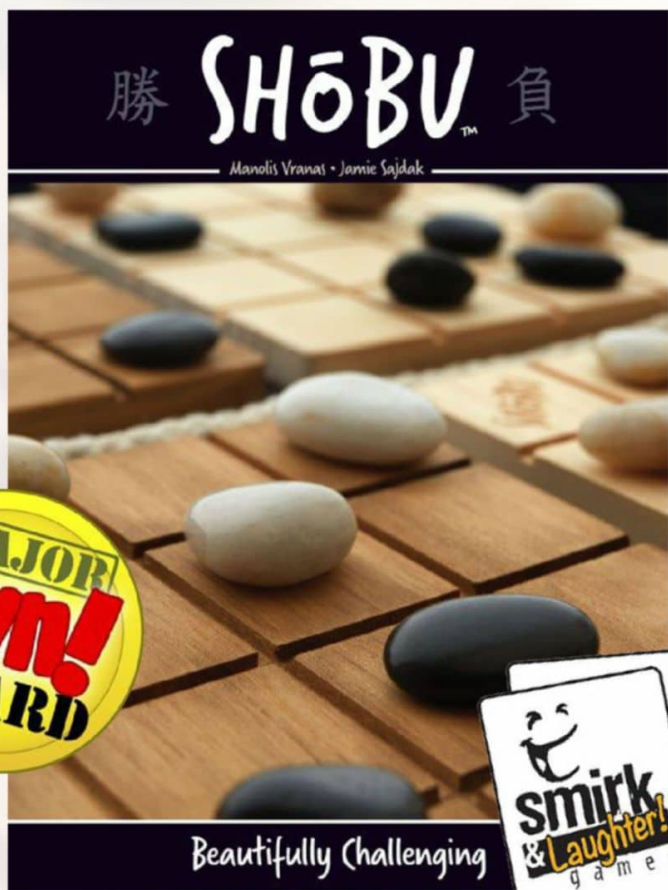
## OTHER RECOMMENDED GAMES

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



# Shōbu is Major Fun!

The Major Fun Award was developed by noted philosopher of play Bernie DeKoven nearly 20 years ago. This internationally recognized award celebrates games that are innovative, easy to learn, fast to play, and fun for players of all ages. Out of hundreds of submissions each year, only 12–15 games earn this honor. You can delve into hundreds of great games for kids, families, and friends at MajorFun.com.



## The Concept

Light and dark. Connection and separation. Peace and aggression. *Shōbu* is a game of balance...until it isn't. Using a series of mirrored moves, your goal is to push four of your opponent's stones off a single game board.

## The Components

*Shōbu* is a beautiful game and most certainly evokes a sense of the classic board game *Go*.

There are four lovely wooden boards: two dark and two light. Each board has a raised four-by-four grid.

Each player selects a set of 16 stones: light or dark. These look like smooth river rocks.

Boards are arranged in a square with dark on the left and light on the right. A small piece of cotton rope is placed between the boards to delineate the home area for each player (the two closest boards).

Place stones on the bottom row of each board so they are facing each other and you're ready to play *Shōbu*!

## The Mechanics

A turn in *Shōbu* has two parts: a passive move and an aggressive move.

Your first move is passive and must be on one of your two home boards (the ones closest to you). Pick a stone and move it. This stone could move one or two spaces in any direction.

### BUT...

Because this move is passive, it cannot interact with any other pieces on the board. No pushing; no jumping. The passive move, in other words, must be unobstructed from start to finish.

The second move is aggressive and is inextricably tied to the first. Your aggressive move must be on the opposite color board (if your passive move was on the dark board, your aggressive move must be on a light board — including your opponent's). Pick a stone and move it.

### BUT...

This move must mirror the direction and number of spaces of your passive move. And because this move is aggressive, your stone is allowed to push a single stone of your opponent. Two stones block pushing. And you can never push your own.

## What Sets This Game Apart?

Connection and backward thinking set *Shōbu* apart. No piece in the game exists in isolation. Each of your stones is tethered to every other one of your stones with an invisible thread. The better you can visualize this web of connections, the more clearly you will see opportunities and dangers on each board.

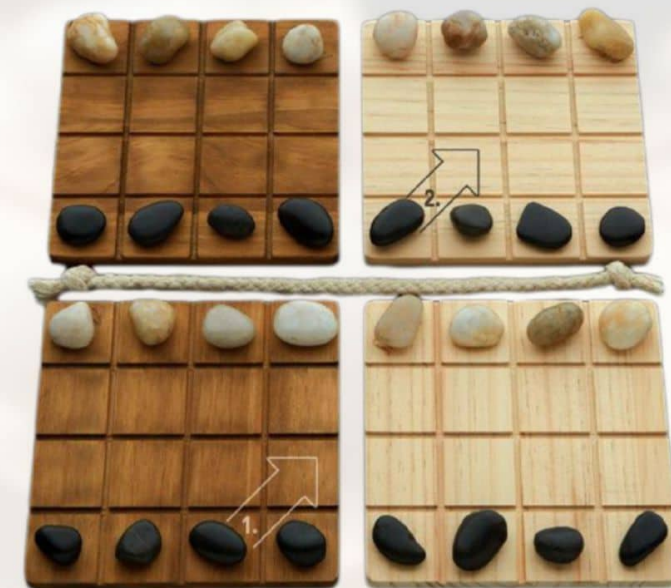
Because of these connections, *Shōbu* asks you to think backward on every turn. In order to know the effect you want to create on the board, you start by planning your aggressive move — your last move — first.

Look for a place where you might have the advantage. Find a place where you can push an opponent's stone off the board. Once found, can you find its passive mirror move on the opposite color home board?

Moments of joy in *Shōbu* come from winding backward from your aggressive end goal to find a passive stone with a clear path.

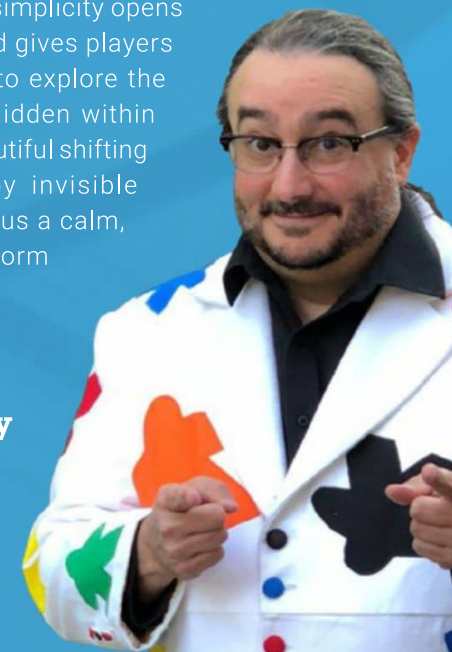
But be careful! Joy can quickly turn to sorrow if you don't take the time to also think backward through your opponent's next move. A careless passive move might leave you open to being pushed around on your opponent's turn.

That's it. Start with a passive move each turn on one board. Then mirror that move with an aggressive move on the opposite color board as you attempt to push four of your opponent's stones from a single board.



## Final Thoughts

There are many flavors of fun. Some are obvious, wild, and boisterous. Others are more subtle but no less meaningful. *Shōbu* shows us play can be an act of serenity. Its simplicity opens a door to so many and gives players the space they need to explore the richness and depth hidden within the game. With its beautiful shifting stones connected by invisible tethers, *Shōbu* offers us a calm, thoughtful engaging form of Major Fun. 🎮

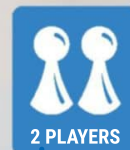


### Stephen Conway

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

## Shōbu

Designed by Manolis Vranas, Jamie Sajdak



# Your Turn!

A Spotlight on the Gaming Community



What is the best game you ever backed on Kickstarter?



*“Too Many Poops; because it allows all my kids to join in.”*

— Christian O.



*“QE. Totally novel concept, easy to teach and play, but also good decision-making with the opportunity for bluffing.”*

— Dan L.

*“Escape Room in a Box. Well done components, fun to play, and able to reset so someone else can enjoy.”*

— Peter S.

*“I would definitely say Throw Throw Burrito, since it’s a kind of card game meets dodgeball, that can get all people engaged, focused and amused! Excellent game.”* — Claudio S.



*“Villagers. It oozes quality, from the card design down to the dividers for the included expansions/optional cards—and it’s a thoroughly enjoyable game to play, too.”* — Chas



*“Escape the Dark Castle. It was unique and found its way to the table over and over again.”*

— Michael C.

*“Edible Games by Jenn Sandercock, because you can eat your games, and play with your food!”*

— Michael M.

“The *Shipwreck Arcana*. It is a simple cooperative game that can easily bring in any player and doesn’t lend itself to being quarterbacked too much, as it encourages healthy discussion between all players of what actions to take. The tarot card artwork is also really impressive and adds some nice immersion into the game.”

— Karsten K.



Photo by Erik Yurko (kalchio on BGG), licensed under CC BY-NC-SA 3.0.

“*On Tour*. We play it regularly and can’t get enough of it—so much so, that even though we just moved away from some dear friends, we have found a way to stay in touch with them by playing this game over webcam. *On Tour* just went on tour.”

— Jeffrey J.



# SILVER™

TED ALSPACH



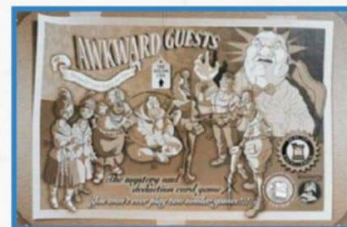


Photo by Henk Rolleman

*“Escape: The Curse of the Temple. Love the quick (10 minute) play time so we can get 2 or 3 sessions in and it generally creates havoc around the table.”*

— Judah W.

### Honorable Mentions:



Next Issue: Tell us your ideas for a themed game night!

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

# DELUXE Castle Panic

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