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### GAME UPGRADES      PLAYER ELIMINATION

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The pros and cons of eliminating players (or other resources) during gameplay



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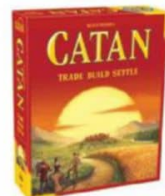
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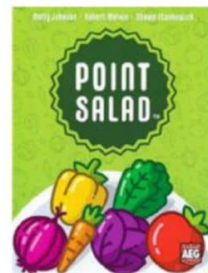


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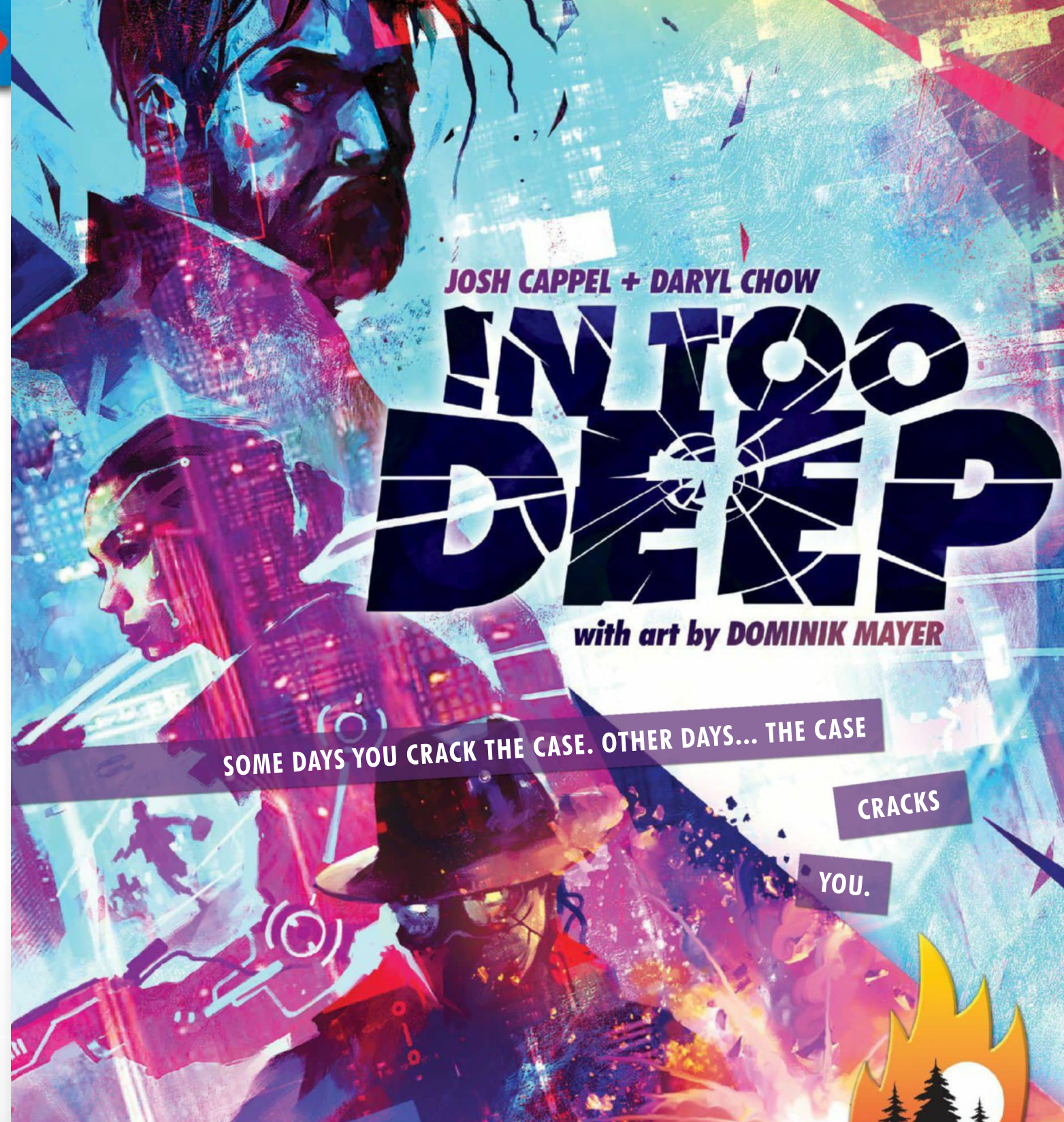
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# smartphone Inc.

In Smartphone Inc., players take charge of a smartphone manufacturing corporation at a time when smartphones are first starting to hit the global market. By making the proper business decisions such as setting prices, developing new technologies, manufacturing products, and handling logistics and sales, players will compete to become the most powerful company in the world.



The game is an economic euro-style simulation game that lasts five rounds, with each round divided into eight phases. Players win by having the most money at the end of the game.

In the first phase, players simultaneously program their plan for the year using their two pads and any improvement tiles they wish to use. This plan will have an impact on how the rest of the phases play out.

The second phase is all about setting prices. Each player starts with a base price of five at the start of the round, but can now adjust the pricing of their goods according to their plan for the round. Lower prices allow a player to act sooner and sell more goods, but higher prices help players earn more money!

The next phase is production, where players manufacture the goods. Goods are produced according to the symbols on their pads, covered cells, and unused improvement tiles. Additionally, some technologies may grant additional production.

Phase four is the development step, where players look to improve their processes. Each player in turn order receives either an improvement tile or a goods tile, depending on their plan for the round. (See how important that first phase is?)



The fifth phase is all about studying technologies. At the bottom of the board is a selection of technologies that players can research to earn patents and abilities. These are chosen at the start of the game from a pool of available tiles, adding a bit of variety with each playthrough. In turn order, players will place step tokens in the technologies they wish to research. If they meet the current requirement printed first, they receive the patent for the technology, granting additional points at the end of the game. Once a player meets the requirement — regardless of patent status — they receive the benefits of that technology.

During the logistics phase, players spend expansion points to push into new regions and open up new offices on different continents where they can sell goods.

Next, players sell their phones and technologies where they have offices. Players with lower prices sell first, potentially blocking out the competition in areas; any unsold phones are discarded at the end of the phase.



The round wraps up with the profit phase. Players receive money for any goods sold this round, and the players who sold the most phones in a region earn additional profits for controlling the accessory market.

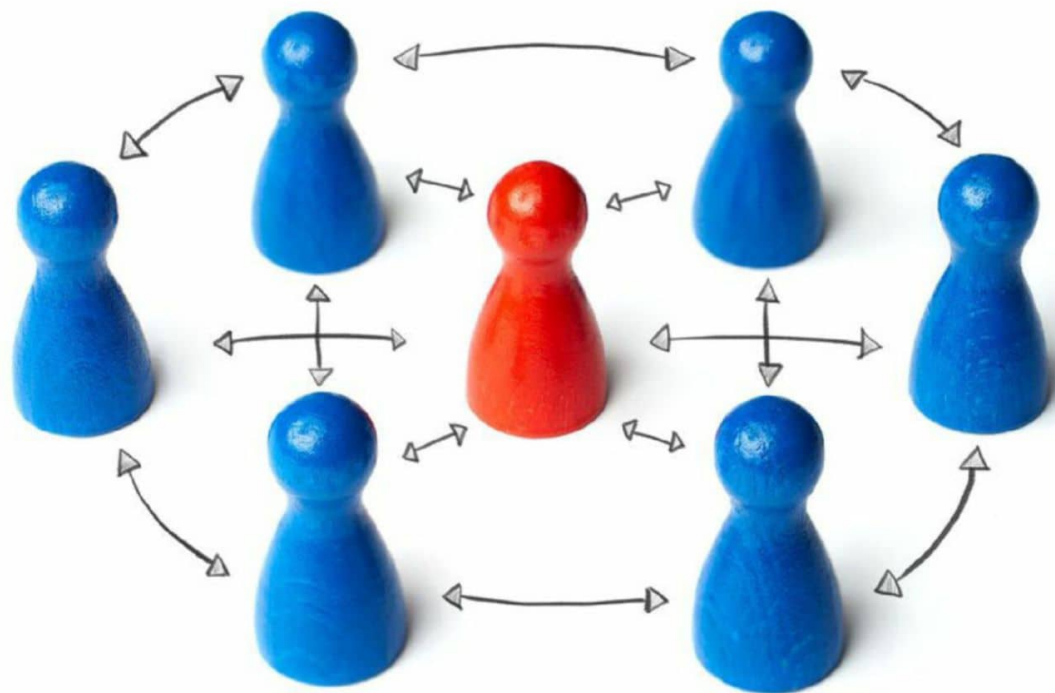
After five rounds, the player with the most profits is the winner!

**In addition to the base game coming this year, the first expansion — Update 1.1 — will be available as well. This expansion adds four new modules including a new 2-3 player board, Hardcore mode, as well as five new CEO miniatures.**



# Revisiting the Classics:

From Tried-and-true to Something New



**Dann Albright**

Freelance Journalist and  
Lifelong Board Gamer

Some games are so popular for so long that they get to be called classics.

They're almost universally beloved, they get played a lot, and they've gone through lots of printings. Sometimes they've gone through multiple editions with rules updates or expansions.

These are the games we pull out when we're not sure what we should play or when we're introducing people to the hobby.

But what if those classic games aren't the best ones out there? What if there are other games that do the same things, but better? It's something I've thought about in the past, and I recently took the opportunity to find out.

I took three classic games — *Catan*, *Carcassonne*, and *Ticket to Ride* — and played at least one game that's similar (though, as you'll see, finding games that are "similar" can be a challenge) to see if it might take the "go-to" title away from the reigning champion. [Here's what I found out.](#)

## The Settlers of Japan

*The Settlers of Catan* (now known simply as *Catan*) is a great game because it combines doing your own thing with enough on-board interaction to allow for strategic decisions. There are dice rolls that keep things exciting, you collect resources on other people's turns so everyone stays involved, and at the end, you've built up a decent little civilization.

In looking for similar games, one of the first ones recommended was *Machi Koro*, a game about building up a city of the same name. You roll dice to collect money, then purchase buildings represented by cards. Each one has a power that's triggered by a specific roll. As the game goes on, everyone gets more money and buys more cards.

*Machi Koro* doesn't have the spatial element of *Catan*. There's no jockeying for position, racing for a chokepoint, or the possibility of putting yourself in a terrible place before the game even starts. Because making the right choice about where to build every turn isn't an issue, everything feels a little faster than *Catan*.

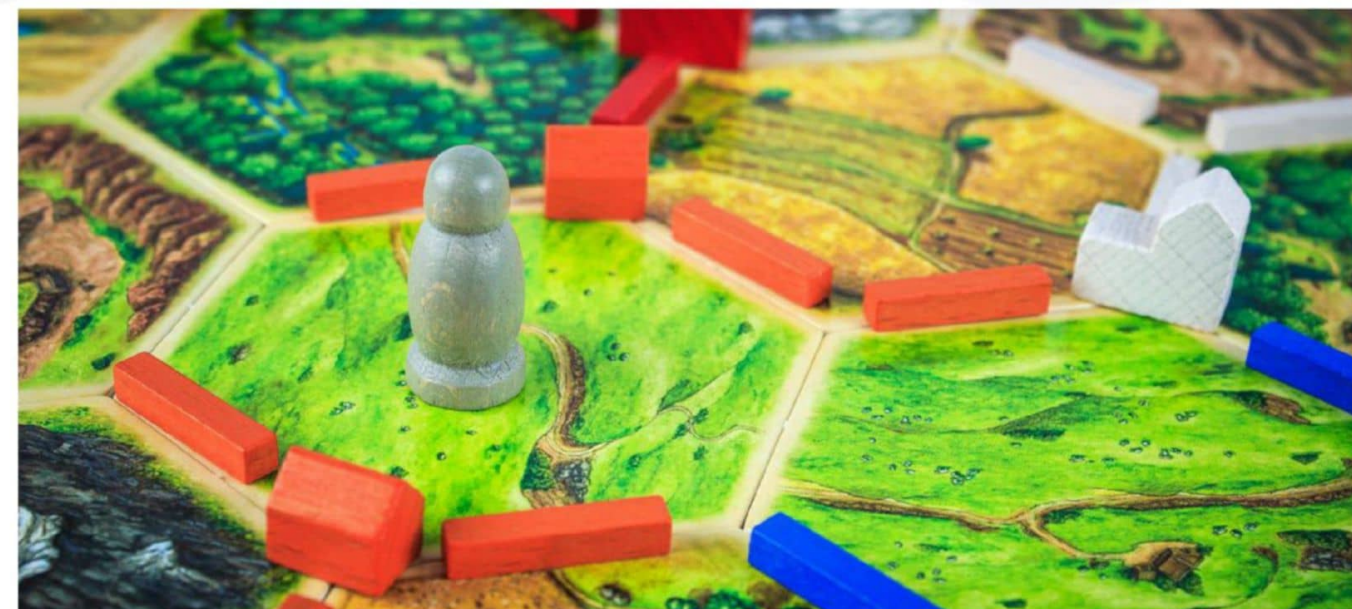
Of course, the distillation of the game to rolling and building takes away some of the direct competition. You



*Machi Koro* (above) may be a good alternative for fans of *Catan* (below). Photos by Scott King Photography.

might buy the last apple orchard card, but you can't place it in your opponent's way. So the game feels a little less interactive than *Catan*. That being said, there are cards that steal money (and even cards) from your opponents, so you'll still be interacting.

I don't think *Machi Koro* will be replacing *Catan* anytime soon. But if you're looking for a game that's a little friendlier or a little easier to teach, then *Machi Koro* is worth picking up.



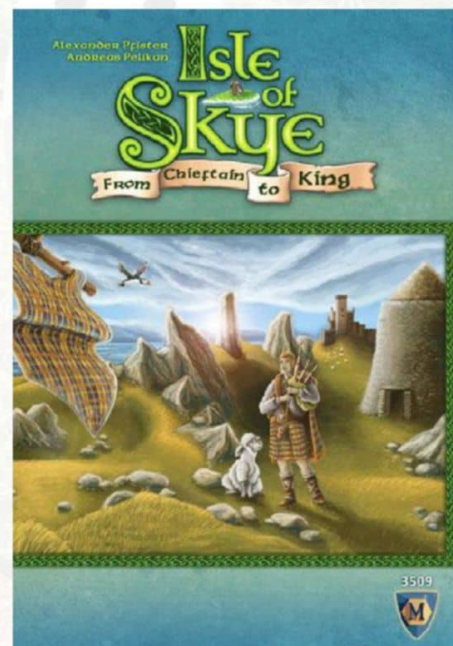
## From France to Scotland

*Carcassonne* seems like an idyllic game; you're building up the countryside with cities, farm fields, monasteries, and other features of regular medieval life. There's no combat, the setting is peaceful, and there's no money involved at all.

But that mild exterior hides a game that can be surprisingly cutthroat. Blocking meeples into unfinishable cities means opponents never get them back. Competition for fields is fierce. Players sneak into each other's cities and capitalize on everyone else's hard work. In a sense, the game almost captures the not-so-pleasant aspects of medieval life as well.

The intense interaction combined with field scoring that's rather hard to explain made me wonder if there was another game out there with friendlier rules. *Isle of Skye* immediately piqued my interest.

Instead of creating a single board where players can block each other, each player in *Isle of Skye* creates their own clan territory (map of tiles). But instead of drawing a single tile to place in it, you draw three. You decide to put one back in the bag, and you set a price for the other two (*Isle of Skye* has currency, unlike *Carcassonne*). If someone is willing to pay the price, they get the tile and you get the money. If no one wants to pay your price, you get the tile and lose your money.



This price-setting mechanism makes *Isle of Skye* feel very different from *Carcassonne* in some ways. You end up having to think about the overall value you're going to get from a tile before you set the price. Set the price too high, and you end up paying for it. And with lots of players, you have a lot of options for what to buy.

If you're not a fan of the vicious underlying nature of *Carcassonne*, or you want a game that introduces some new elements (variable scoring, price-setting, individual boards), *Isle of Skye* is definitely worth a look.

Again, though, I don't see it taking *Carcassonne's* place in the pantheon of classic entry-level hobby board games. Both games are solid, but *Carcassonne* feels — at least after only a few plays of *Skye* — like it has more under the hood.



Carcassonne photo by Scott King Photography

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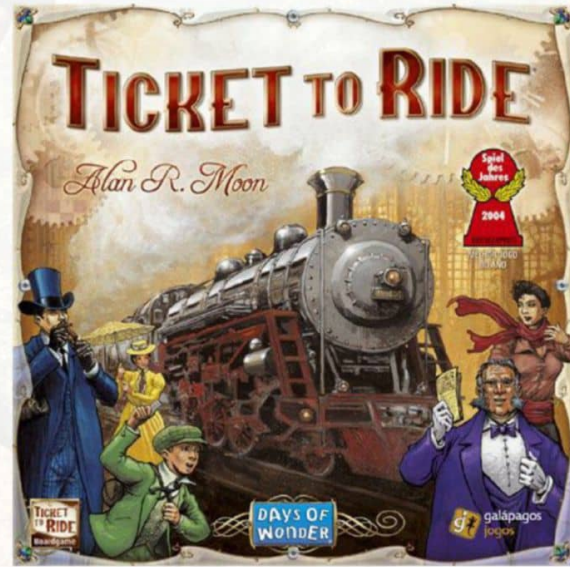
## Ticket to Ride: Panda

*Ticket to Ride* is a fantastic game. It's straightforward, interactive, and the objective cards change things up. But once you've played a few times, it feels like you're doing much the same thing as last time. You spend a lot of time drawing cards waiting for the right combination to appear.

*Takenoko* helps with some of these issues — though instead of building a train network, you're cultivating a bamboo garden and feeding a giant panda. You'll still be looking for sets of things because that's what gets you points. You'll be doing some route-building to efficiently irrigate your garden. And you can still get in your opponents' way by causing the panda to eat their bamboo.

This game feels a bit "smaller" than *Ticket to Ride*, but in a good way. The board is tight, especially at first. You're competing over limited resources. But you'll be going for things based on the cards in your hand, just like *TTR*. In short, *Takenoko* checks almost all of the same boxes.

It might feel a little more complicated than *Ticket to Ride* at first, but once you've played a couple of times, everything starts to click into place. There's a lot to



think about here, even when it boils down to route-building and set collection.

This is one game that I think stands above its classic predecessor. It feels more *interesting* than *TTR*. You won't spend as much time repeatedly drawing cards waiting for the right combination to come up. You have other options for what to do with your turns.

(It's also worth pointing out that later versions of *Ticket to Ride*, such as *Europe*, *Asia*, and *Switzerland*, improve upon the original game, too — so if you want something a little different but still familiar, they're great choices.)



Takenoko photo by Scott King Photography

## Expanding Your Mind (and Game Shelf)

Just because *Machi Koro*, *Isle of Skye*, and *Takenoko* are solid alternatives to their forebears doesn't mean that *Catan*, *Carcassonne*, and *Ticket to Ride* are going anywhere. They're classics for a reason.

These games are pretty easy to teach, can be played in an hour or less, and introduce new players to mechanics they might not be familiar with. Those are very compelling reasons to keep them on the table and in the stores. Not to mention that they're also really fun games.

But if you've been playing *Catan* for 15 years, it might be time to try something new. If you love *Ticket to Ride*, try branching out into similar games to see if you can get a better handle on what it is you like about *TTR*.

Stepping away from your favorites can be a great opportunity not just to try a new game, but to learn more about your own taste in games, too. For example, I find that I struggle with price-setting. It just hasn't clicked yet, so *Isle of Skye* is a tough one for me. But I love the engine-building nature of *Machi Koro* — much more than I like trading in *Catan*.

These preferences would have been hard to figure out without playing new games outside of the classics. I strongly encourage you to break out from whatever gaming patterns you've been in lately. Spend some time thinking about what it is you do or don't like about any particular game and explore some of the modern alternatives.

**You might be surprised by what you learn!** 🎲



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# Elimination: Does it Belong in a Game?



**Teale Fristoe**  
Designer of *Corporate America*,  
*Birds of a Feather*, and *Trellis*

**T**hese days, “elimination” is almost a bad word for gamers. That’s largely because player elimination, once close to a default inclusion in any game, has fallen out of favor in a big way. But player elimination is only one form of elimination, and even it has its uses.

In a sense, all games feature elimination since they all come to an end, making turns a dwindling resource. But the more common use of the term, where players lose resources over the course of the game (including the ability to participate at all), is not universal. Still, it’s featured in enough games, especially classic games, that I consider it a core game element. As a player, it’s good to understand why elimination may or may not be included in a game; as a designer, it’s essential to understand when elimination would enhance or detract from your game.

## PLAYER ELIMINATION

Let’s begin with the elephant in the room: player elimination. In a game with player elimination, certain players can leave the game before others (often at the hand of their opponents). It’s worth noting that player elimination only makes sense in a game with three or more players. “Eliminating” a player in a two-player game is really just ending the game. A player is only really eliminated if the game continues without them.

Player elimination used to be common in many classic games, from *Monopoly* to *Risk* to *Poker*. It makes sense: eliminating all opponents is a natural ending, especially for a war-themed game. But player elimination has fallen out of favor for its many weaknesses:

### PLAYERS WANT TO PLAY

The most obvious problem with player elimination is that some players continue to play while others are forced to check their phones – a mortal sin at many game tables. Most people start a game because they want to play. By knocking players out, a game with player elimination is forcing players to stop doing what they’re there to do.

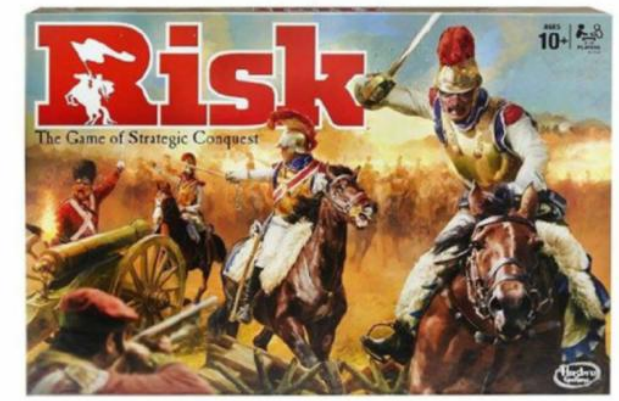
### ERRATIC GAME TIME

If you’ve designed a game or two, you know that managing a game’s playtime is one of the designer’s most important jobs. But in games with player elimination, game length can vary greatly. Often this is because players have some control over when other players are eliminated and frequently avoid it. Erratic game time is not just bad for fitting a game into a busy schedule; it makes things worse for those knocked out of the game early. They don’t even know how long they have to wait before their friends are ready to play something else.

### FORCED CRUELTY

It doesn’t just feel bad to get knocked out of a game. For many people\*, knocking your friends out of a game feels just as bad. And in games where a player’s goal is to eliminate the opposition, players are often forced to attack each other, leaving everyone feeling bad.

\*Definitely not everyone. You know who you are.



Games like *Risk* that prominently feature player elimination can leave everyone feeling bad.

## MODERN REVIVAL

Despite these problems, player elimination has actually seen a resurgence in recent years. Very popular games like *King of Tokyo*, *Coup*, and *Love Letter* all feature player elimination at their core. How do these games get away with it?

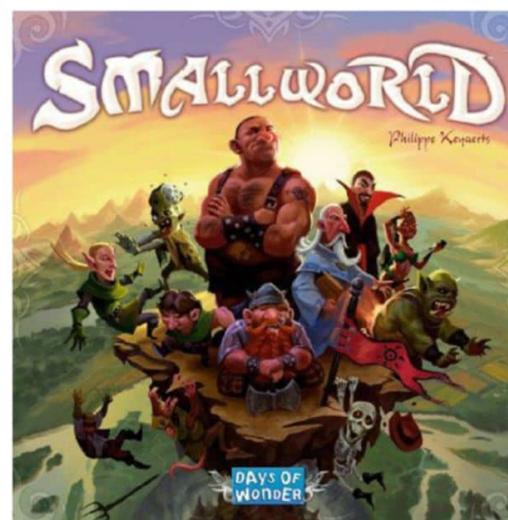
First, these games tend to be short. When a game is quick, missing half of it is still missing less playtime than when you're waiting for other players' turns in longer games. And in games like *Love Letter*, players are eliminated from quick rounds rather than from the overall game, so they can look forward to playing again before long.

Another trick is making attacks untargeted or uncertain. In *King of Tokyo*, players don't decide who they attack, they just decide whether to attack or not. In *Love Letter* and *Coup*, players often attack without having a very good chance of succeeding. This can make players feel less responsible for killing their friends.



Love Letter photo by Henk Rolleman

Even though player elimination has its place in modern board gaming, I'd generally recommend staying away from it. If you are looking to design your own board game, consider if there's some alternative that will naturally fit in your game, and only fall back on player elimination if it's crucial.



*Small World* does an excellent job of avoiding player elimination in a genre where it seems impossible. Similar to *Risk*, in *Small World* players fight for control over territory, killing the other player's fighters in the process. But when a player becomes weak enough, instead of leaving the game, the player gets a fresh start with a new team of fighters, turning something that would normally feel bad into something exciting.



*In Small World, losing your fighters can actually be an exciting turn of events.*

The Gates of Thy'an

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## OTHER ELIMINATION

Players are just one of the things that can be eliminated over the course of a game. Many games feature resources and other aspects that become eliminated. For example, in *Hearts*, players start with a whole hand of cards, but use one card each turn and end with none left. And in *Chess*, players begin with a quarter of the board filled with their pieces, but lose them as the battle rages on.

So how does including elimination in a game affect it? Elimination can have a huge impact on the gameplay experience, and the impact is often both positive and negative. Here are a few thoughts on how elimination might impact your game.

### ELIMINATION CREATES A NATURAL ENDING

Many traditional games feature player elimination as an end game state, but other types of elimination can work just as well. Running out the clock, burning through a deck of cards, or defeating all of the enemies all give a tangible, understandable end game condition. If you're not sure how to end your game, consider introducing elimination as a countdown timer. Who knows, you might already have something that's being eliminated over the course of the game you can repurpose as a countdown timer!

### ELIMINATION STILL FEELS BAD

It may not feel as bad as being fully eliminated from a game, but losing resources or units still feels bad. This is especially true when other players are doing the elimination. When players have to work hard to acquire something, really question whether it should even be possible to lose that thing.

### ELIMINATION CREATES MEANINGFUL DECISIONS

Losing something is a significant consequence. If players eliminate options with every choice, every choice will feel important and tense, which can be a great boon for a game.

### ELIMINATION FOSTERS STRATEGY

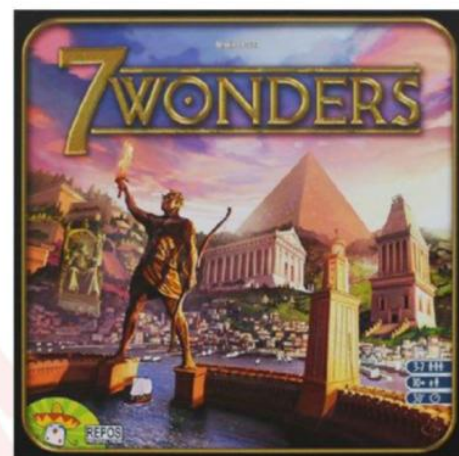
Games like *Hearts* achieve much of their strategy through elimination. Players know what their options are at the beginning of the game, and must plan how they will use those options to maximize what they're dealt. Each option used is an option lost, so players must carefully evaluate the relative value of each option at different points throughout the game, creating interesting choices with long term consequences.

### ELIMINATION CAN OVERWHELM NEW PLAYERS

When players begin the game with all the resources they'll ever have and lose them over the course of the game, as they do in *Chess* and *7 Wonders*, early decisions can be the most difficult and the most significant. Generally, this is the opposite of what you want in a game: you want a game to start simple and become more complex as players become more familiar with their objectives and options.

### ELIMINATION CAN TURN THE END GAME INTO A SLOG

Just as elimination can create an overwhelming early game, it can make the end game anti-climactic. Fewer options generally mean simpler, less meaningful decisions, and fewer resources mean players feel weaker than they did at the beginning of the game. Again, this is generally not the experience players are looking for in a game.



*In games like 7 Wonders, a player's first choice often has too many options, potentially overwhelming new players.*

Elimination can both help and hurt a game. These days, games are generally designed to make players feel more powerful over the course of the game, so elimination tends to take a back seat to acquisition. Still, it has an important place in many games and is certainly worth your consideration during the design process. Used strategically, elimination can add a lot of meaning to a game without taking too much away from the play experience. [🔗](#)

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# EUTHIA

## TORMENT OF RESURRECTION



COMING TO KICKSTARTER  
ON MAY 5<sup>TH</sup> 2020

**Euthia: Torment of Resurrection** is a competitive strategic role-playing board game set in a fantasy world played on a modular board. Every player chooses from a pool of five characters and strives to become a hero and a savior of Euthia - the land recently ruled by the terror from the three dragons. The game is meant for 2-4 players and there is also a solo variant. It lasts from 60 to 120 minutes per player.

It is inspired by RPG video games we used to play between 1998 and 2012, e.g. Heroes of Might and Magic, Baldur's Gate, Diablo, Planescape Torment.



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### About the Game

During gameplay, you will face the threat of three mighty dragons born from the dark magic called 'Faer'. Your journey will be fraught with danger as you deal with dangerous monsters and creatures that are spreading through the land. You will search for legendary artifacts and will face off against the raw power of nature in its elemental form as you struggle to fulfill quests to help the people of Euthia.



For every game, you will choose one of three scenarios representing attempts to kill or repel one of the mighty dragons. Success in this quest provides the hero with a reputation which is also true for most of the actions the player will do throughout the game. The hero with the most reputation points at the end of the game is the winner.



On your side, you will have plenty of strategic options to aid you in your quest. You will have access to a wide range of armor, weapons, spells, and magic-filled jewelry. Every hero has an open playstyle with a branching chain of skills. For example, playing as the warrior Dral, you could choose to be a skilled weapons master, a furious fighter, a skilled prospector, a knowledgeable traveler, or perhaps you might choose to have a collection of skills from each. The choice is yours.



# Crafty Collectors

## UPSCALING YOUR BOARD GAMES ON A BUDGET



**Eric J. Francis**  
A Freelance Journalist Who Specializes in Nerdy Topics (Squirrelhenge on BGG)

Let's say that you're a huge fan of board games and J.R.R. Tolkien's Middle Earth, and you're looking to bring the best of both worlds to the tabletop. You don't want simple plastic tokens to represent larger-than-life characters, or flimsy cardboard representing the rolling hills of Rohan. When you sit down to play, you want that immersive experience with top-quality components that will truly bring those stories to life. Does such a game even exist?

That would be the Collector's Edition of *War of the Ring*, of course! And since it's out of print, you'll just need to slide on over to Amazon and pick up a used copy for...the same amount you'd need to purchase a decent used car!

Okay, relax, take some deep breaths. The truth is, while the board game hobby can be extremely hard on your bank account, there's still plenty that you can do to make your board games special on a budget. So what are some ways that board games have been upgraded before, and where would you even begin if you wanted to upgrade your own collection?

People upgrading the quality of their board games instead of buying the deluxe or collector's editions isn't a new concept. In fact, you can find a growing online community for those looking to upscale their collection. There's even a term for it: micro-pimping. (Like Pimp My Ride but smaller and geekier.) You can find plenty of online resources like GeekLists on Board Game Geek that share small ways others have improved their play without busting their budgets.

Some of these changes are extremely simple, such as taking a marker and inking the sides of cardboard chits to make them look just a little more substantial. Others simply take advantage of stuff they have lying around the house: A lazy Susan turntable underneath *Can't Stop*, or empty Gerber baby food containers to hold bits. Several users suggested bullet casings as life counters for *Bang!*. And a few ideas require just a smidgen of creativity, such as user SimonH's glitter-filled mini Tabasco bottle for the card game *Bottle Imp*.



### ROLL MODELS

But if you're feeling really crafty, you might turn to Sam Phillips Beckerman (BGG handle Sam Houston) and have a gander at her creations.

"I have an art studio and at one time I owned 900 games, so you can imagine that these two things found themselves in the same area frequently," said Beckerman, who lives in Texas.

Her creations were actually a result of undergoing surgery on her right shoulder, which meant her right arm was stuck in a sling for two months. And she's right-handed.

"Using my left hand and my fingers sticking out of my sling, I could only work on little things," said Beckerman. "About that time the game *Word on the Street* came out and I was in love with that game. As I was making these little assemblages, I started putting a little letter on them. *Word on the Street* has almost all the letters and they move back and forth on the board. It may be the first one I did serious pimping for."

Her next big project was crafting robber pawns for *Catan*, of which she made dozens to sell and give away as secret Santa gifts. A *Catan* fan in Israel even bought one and paid to have it shipped over, which is when she noticed that through all the different versions of the game with their varied components, the robber always remained the same uninspiring pawn.



Above: letter upgrades for *Word on the Street*; Below: upgraded *Catan* robbers (Sam Phillips Beckerman)



"He could do a lot of damage," explained Beckerman. "And I didn't think that tiny, pale gray piece of wood really represented his personality." So she looked around her studio and started pulling together disparate elements to create robbers that looked more the part.

"They were wire and metal and broken glass and shotgun shells, and I had just a whole lot of fun [making them]," said Beckerman.

She also made upgraded fuel tokens for *Power Grid*. For instance, to make the coal she took plastic gems, spray-painted them, then dabbed on texture using a sea sponge; for the uranium canisters, she noticed that some old hearing aid batteries she had fit perfectly and looked like a lid; then she painted them with sparkly nail polish to give them a glowing appearance. And she made a first-player token for *Terraforming Mars* from an old vacuum tube, giving it the look of a 1950s-era sci-fi spaceship.

But the game she has done the most to trick out was, she said with a chuckle, a "revenge pimp."

"I had bought that game — *Pergamon* — to give to a boyfriend, and he broke up with me before Christmas," said Beckerman. "I pimped the hell out of that game and posted photos of it all over BGG."



So, does Beckerman invest a lot of planning into her projects?

"A plan?" she laughed. "Oh, no, I never have a plan. My creativity is spurred by the materials available."

## IT'S ALL IN THE DETAILS

Sometimes micro-pimps are the result of serendipity. Ron Robinson (zombiegod on BGG), who lives in West Yorkshire in England, came upon an idea after acquiring a copy of *Stronghold* in a math trade.

"When I inventoried the components," he said in an email, "I discovered that almost everything had been separated into several microscope slide boxes."

After condensing all the *Stronghold* components into a Plano box, he simply stored the slide boxes away "in the hope that eventually I'd stumble upon a game or two needing a suitable box for storing components in."

Then one day, *Automobiles* hit the table. He'd been keeping the brown wear cubes in baggies but decided to toss them into one of the slide boxes. He soon realized he could simply keep them in the box by the table during play, and then...



"If I rotated the base 90 degrees, and angled it in its own lid, it aided access and removal of the cubes," said Robinson. "When placed in the center of the track, it almost instantly took on the appearance of a grandstand."

A friend suggested painting faces on the cubes to represent spectators, but "I wasn't going to attempt that," he noted. However, another idea came to mind.



"Adding some suitably themed advertising banners would add to the overall feel, and it was much more thematic than advertising microscope slides," said Robinson.

So he found some logos for racing-related products, resized them in Photoshop, printed them out and stuck them to the sides with glue. Now the boxes truly took on a grandstand quality.

"I'm always on the lookout for ideas to pimp out my games, be it replacing a wooden token with a more thematic object, or affixing cardboard chips and counters onto wooden discs to give them a more tactile feel," said Robinson. "It just seemed like the obvious thing to do. It simply adds a unique and often thematic finishing touch."

## CHANGING THE GAME

So, what if you're not particularly crafty? Well, Rhode Island resident Jack Francisco (senorcoo on BGG) found a way to add some flair and a touch of realism to his games by including actual coins from the countries the games are set in.

The first game he set out to buy real coins for was *Macao* — and, as it turned out, those were also some of the more expensive coins to acquire, relatively speaking.



"The only Macao coins I could find were sold by some guy in Thailand and were two bucks apiece, and there are 36 coins in the game," said Francisco. "I'm pretty sure the coins were worth 72 cents, but I paid \$72 and I've played my copy about 60 times, so that's about a buck a play."

For Francisco, the enjoyment doesn't come primarily from the verisimilitude of having coins from Macao in a game about Macao but from the tactile experience.

"It's almost like the way poker players like to bridge their chips," he said, letting some of the coins slide around in his hand. "And who doesn't like hearing the clink of the coins when you're making a pile of them? It just feels better."

Since that first acquisition, Francisco has introduced real coins to a number of other games he owns: French francs for use in *Bruxelles 1893* and *Troyes*; pesos for *Pax Porfiriana*; Turkish lira for *Istanbul*. And he doesn't mind if it takes a little effort to track down the harder-to-find coinage, like the lira or the rupees for *Pax Pamir*, so long as the cost isn't outrageous.

"Generally, I'm not going to go insane — I'm not going to spend a thousand dollars [on] my game," he said. "But I'm going to try and find a reasonable substitute for some of the more difficult currencies that are out of circulation. I'm pretty good at scouring eBay for them."

One pointer he offered is that many sellers will have more coins than the listing shows. If he needs 30 and only sees a few, he'll reach out to the seller directly. And, he notes, the coin's condition isn't a high priority for him — scuffs and scratches just give them character, which might incentivize the seller.

"They're getting rid of their garbage!" he added with a laugh. "Seriously, they're getting rid of their junk."

Francisco has only added real coins to a fairly small portion of his collection, but he notes they "tend to be the games I know I'm not getting rid of." And most of them are not as costly as the Macao coins; his guideline is not to spend more on coins than it would cost to replace the game, though again he considers how multiple plays spread out the value.

While real coins are the main way he spruces up his favorite games, Francisco has other techniques, as well. For instance, in *Grand Austria Hotel* he replaced the cubes with dollhouse miniatures: coffee cups, wine bottles, pastries, pieces of cake. It doesn't add anything to the gameplay, he admits, but it's a lot nicer to look at.

And when people play his games, they definitely notice these touches.

"I like it when I can make people a little happy," said Francisco. "We're already going to have a good time when we're sitting down to play, anyway — if I can make it a little better, it just makes me feel better." 🎲



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## Banned Books

A Solo Card Game by Jason Tagmire  
Art by Jonathan Fisher  
[www.ButtonShyGames.com](http://www.ButtonShyGames.com)



banned  
books  
by Jason Tagmire

Once an action is taken, move that card to the far right of the action card line and flip it to its backside.

**MOVEMENTS**  
If you have movement points, each may be used to: move a card to any space to the right of its location, flipping it to its backside -OR- flip any card over to its opposite side.

After you take your actions and movements, the turn ends. Shift all of the actions down so that they are in the correct placement again of slot 1,2,3 followed by 4 and 5.

**POWERS-THAT-BE**  
The Powers will now take their action. Roll a die to see if the Powers advance. For each of your action cards that are facedown, subtract 1 from the die roll. (Note: these subtractions can bring the die down to 1, but not below a 1.)

Compare the die roll to the number in the center of each of the 3 Powers. If the die is rolled in their range, their token is moved up the track one space.

If the powers have progressed: Check to see if they also hit your stamina. Each action card has a specific type of violation on it (violence, language, etc). Each character has a specific type or types that they offend with. If your type is face-up and the powers advanced, you will lose one stamina. If the powers didn't progress this turn, you cannot lose stamina. If a power cannot progress because it is at the last space (on the center of the card), you will lose one point of stamina instead.

**END OF GAME**  
The game ends at the end of a turn (after you and the powers both go) when one of the following occurs:

**POWERS WIN** Two of the powers are at the end of their track, or if you end your turn with no Stamina.  
**YOU WIN** Two of your progress tokens are at the end of their track.

**Character Stamina Icons**  
Some characters have icons in their stamina meter. Each icon will give an effect if the character has that exact number of stamina.

+ each turn, you will add 1 to the Powers roll

↻ each turn, you may re-roll the Powers roll once

**Quick Reference Turn Sequence**

- 1) Use up to 3 action points (place cards at end facedown) if any points remain, you may use them for Movement.
- 2) Shift the actions to the left
- 3) Roll for the Powers (1 for facedown cards) if they progress, check to see if they hit your stamina.

Design: Jason Tagmire  
Art: Jonathan Fisher  
2018 Button Shy Games  
Rules FAQ: [buttonshygames.com](http://buttonshygames.com)



**TOM** @\*! 🗨️

1 PAROLE - Restart your turn.  
2 VITALITY - Place a stall token on your Stamina. At any point, you can move it to a Power.

1 2 3

**ALICE** 📞

1 EXPRESS - Reorder the action cards as you would like.  
2 ESCAPE - Eliminate a Power card from the game. (once per game)

1 2 3

**CELIE** 🖊️

1 INDEPENDENCE - Move any Power token back 1 space.  
2 REBIRTH - If at only 1 Stamina, reset to starting Stamina. (\*).

1 2 3

**BERNARD** ♂

1 RISE - Move a Power Token and Progress Token each forward 2 spaces.  
2 FALL - Move a Progress Token back 2 spaces and another forward 2 spaces.

1 2 3

**POWERS** ♂

1 2 3

### 1 PLAYER - AGES 12+

As the subject of a banned book, you must take it to your own hands and fight the evil powers-that-be. You know your story better than anyone else, because it's YOUR STORY. Use the very actions that put you on the ban list to help reverse the banning of your book.

#### COMPONENTS

3 Powers-That-Be cards  
5 Action cards  
4 Character cards

Provide your own: 1 six sided die, 11 tokens or coins for tracking.

(3 Powers Tokens, 3 Progress Tokens, 3 Stall Tokens, 1 Stamina Token, 1 Ability Token)

#### GOAL

Overturn two of the Powers-That-Be before it's too late.

#### SETUP

Place the three Powers-That-Be cards in the center of the table in a row from left to right in order (Lane 1, Lane 2, and Lane 3). You can use either face of each card. The higher the die range in the center of the card, the harder the game will be.

Choose one character to play as. Place the character card to the left of the playing area.

Shuffle the 5 action cards and place them in a face up row from left to right below the Powers-That-Be cards. Place one in each lane, and place the last two action cards to the right as shown below.



Place a Powers token (for the Powers) and a Progress Token (for you) on the start of each Powers card track.

Place a token on your character's starting stamina, noted by the Star icon.

Place a token next to the character to be used for their special abilities. Note: This is off to the side until the character starts charging their special ability.

You are now ready to play.

#### TURN

On your turn you will use up to 3 action points to use your actions. Actions cost 1 point for each slot that they are located in from left to right. The first slot costs 1 action point, the second costs 2, the third costs 3. The 4th and 5th are not accessible during a current turn, as you only have 3 action points to work with.

If you use less than 3 points, for each point that you don't use you get a Movement (see below).

#### ACTIONS

##### PROGRESS

Move any one of your Progress tokens forward one space OR move the above Progress token forward a number of spaces equal to its slot number.

##### STALL

Take any power token and place a stall token on top of it. The next time that it would advance, remove the stall token instead of advancing.

##### ABILITY

Charge your special ability up by 1 (it starts at 0 off of the character). OR use a special ability by spending earned points on your ability track.

##### HEAL

Move your stamina up 1 point.

##### FLIP

Flip all face-down cards to their opposite side.

stanoq  
peuruq

stanoq  
peuruq

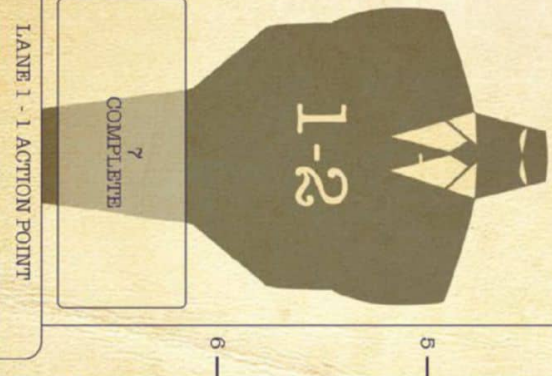
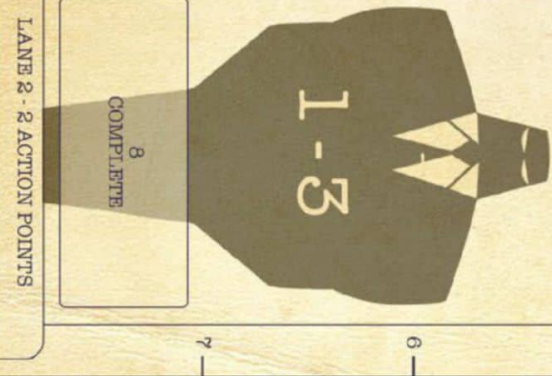
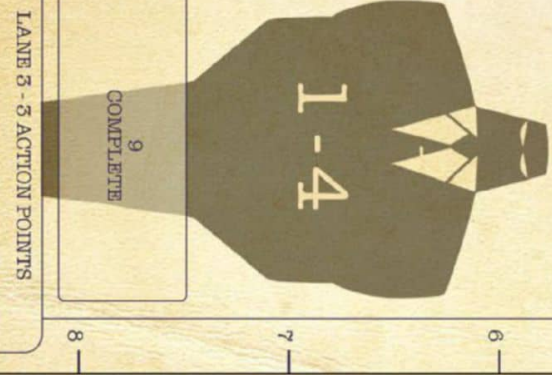
stanoq  
peuruq

stanoq  
peuruq



Advance your Ability Track one space.  
-OR-  
Use one of your abilities

## Ability



Flip all face-down Action Cards back to face-up.

## Flip



Place a Stall Token on top of a Power Token.

## Stall



Advance the Progress Token in this lane a number of spaces equal to its lane #.  
-OR-  
Advance any Progress Token one space.

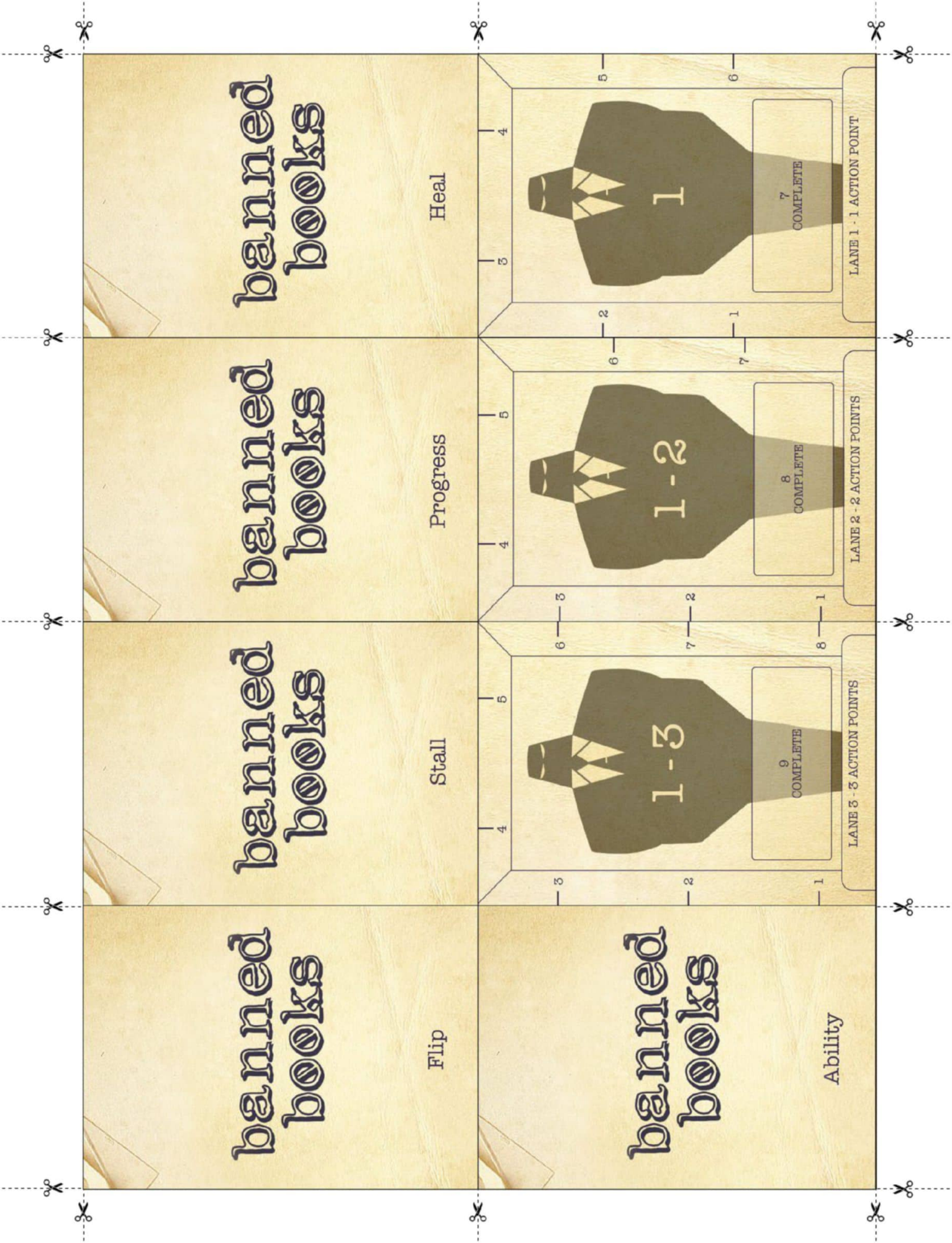
## Progress



Advance your Stamina Track one space.

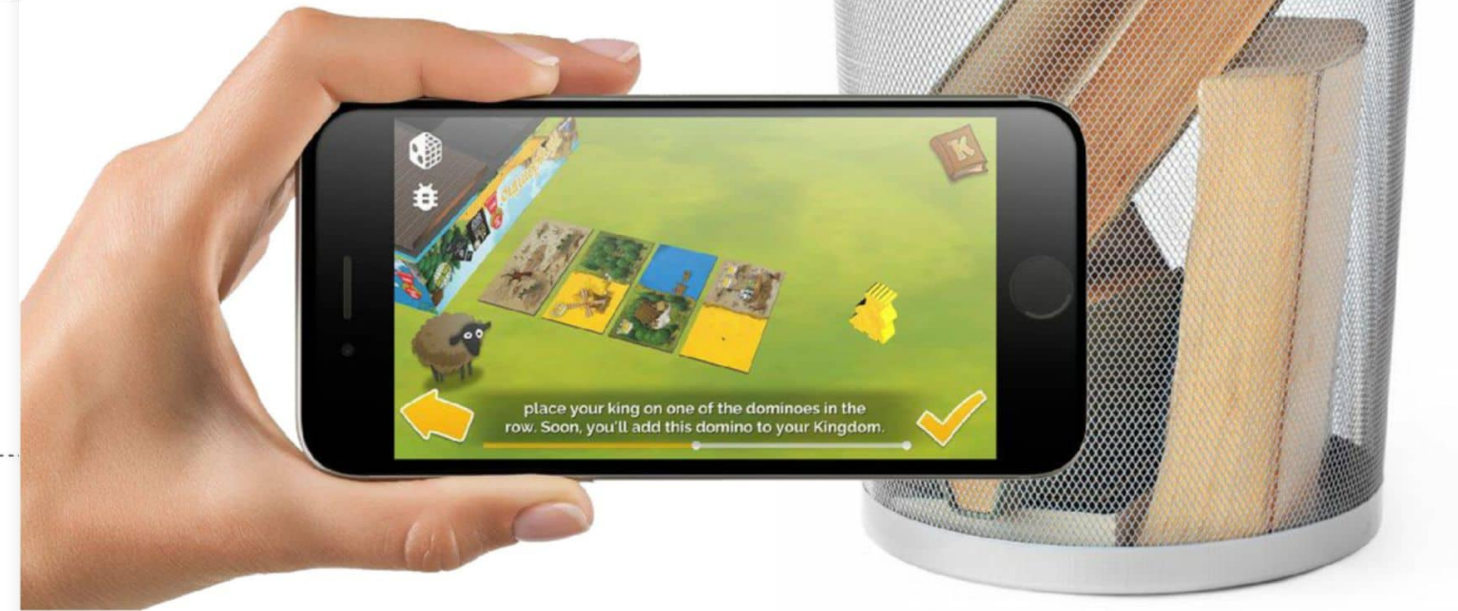
## Heal





# Ditching the Rulebook:

## The Dized Approach of Learning How to Play



**David Wiley**

Wordsmith, Fledgling Designer,  
Reviewer



In the hobby of modern board games, there are often two reasons why games sit for so long on a person’s “shelf of shame.” The first reason is not finding enough willing players to try out a new game. (Which, as we can all attest, is not as easy to accomplish as it sounds sometimes.) The second barrier is the rules overhead – the investment needed from everyone involved to learn the rules of a new game well enough to competently play and enjoy the game. While it cannot help you with finding willing players, the Dized app has been in development since 2018 with the aim of helping players remove that second barrier.

What Dized intends to accomplish is to remove the need for designating someone to quickly learn all the rules for the game, and then have them front-load that information to the rest of the players in a quick-and-easy fashion. The app's tutorials avoid the overload of rules at the start by teaching players the game as they play it by explaining rules and answering questions as they pop up. Rather than poring over a rulebook, the app enables you to focus on having fun with the people around the table as you learn a new game together.

While still in early access, the app currently offers two ways to help players: rules and tutorials. As of January 2020, there are over 60 games with rules uploaded into the early access of the app and three tutorials. The rules feature colorful, easy-to-navigate menus

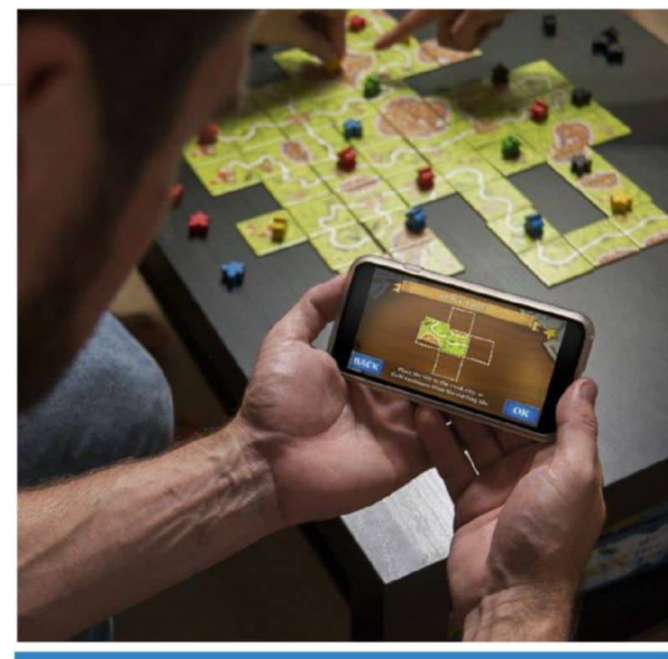
to enable players to click on an aspect of the game they want to learn more about, or to simply brush up on the overall rules. The rules are broken into small, manageable chunks of information that often come with nice visuals and examples to help demonstrate those concepts in the context of the game. While this part of the app doesn't replace the rulebook itself, it does offer a user-friendly way to learn a new game or to have key aspects of the game readily available for reference during gameplay. The tutorials, on the other hand, provide a way for players to dive right into the gameplay without having to read the entire rulebook or explain the rules to everyone else at the table. Instead, it provides a way to learn the game's rules, outcomes, and objectives within the context of the game as those things become relevant for the first time.

## The Founding of Dized

The inspiration for the app came about in 2016, with the centerpiece being the idea for interactive tutorials that solve the rulebook problem among game groups. As the team developed a prototype and shared the idea, the reaction was incredibly positive. However, any great idea isn't without its obstacles. First, the team needed to figure out what players would need from the app beyond an introductory tutorial; players will still encounter scenarios needing assistance beyond that first playthrough, and they wanted the app to be there for more than just first-game assistance.

Second, they needed to find a way to make this a viable business model for years to come. After getting funding and moving forward, the Dized team realized things were going to take longer than anticipated because they were essentially creating three new things from scratch: bringing manuals from the physical realm into the digital realm, introducing interactive tutorials for physical products, and creating tools to allow publishers and content creators to generate and publish their content onto the app.

Of those three things, the one which might seem the least important is actually critical. Because there are, on average, ten new games published daily in the board game industry, there is no way a single team could be responsible for generating and uploading everything required to the entire library of games, much less cover the backlog of games already released. The creation tools



*The Carcassonne tutorial demonstrates tile placement rules (photo provided by Dized).*

are such a critical innovation because they allow others to be able to utilize a user-friendly template to format the rules and even create tutorials.

The process to take this product from an idea to something usable has been a long one, but one that should be rewarding to players regardless of experience in the hobby. With the impending release of the app beyond its early access appearance, let's take a look at some of what the app is going to offer to players.

## Tutorials: The Heart of Innovation within Dized

The core of the Dized app will be the Tutorial system, as this is where the app provides the strongest innovation to players. The underlying approach toward building a successful tutorial is to consider how much information a player needs to understand in order to take their first action of the game. From that point, things can cascade into a natural flow of information that is revealed as players encounter situations where more rules or information become relevant. Some of the inspiration for this approach stems from modern video game design, where players often learn skills and techniques early in the game in situations where they first become necessary, rather than forcing a player to learn a complete set of controls or commands before they can even begin playing.

This same approach can function well in an analog environment as well via board games, as oftentimes rules associated with certain actions — or even scoring mechanisms — are unclear until a player actually encounters a time where that information is put into

practice. Many of us can likely think of recent examples of games, or even just certain aspects of a game, where no matter how many times we read or heard the rules, it simply didn't click until we saw it happen.

While this is the biggest feature that the Dized app will provide, it also is the part that will take the longest to create. The team at Dized has been working hard on developing a Tutorial Toolset within the app, and this will allow publishers and content creators to help generate compatible tutorials for Dized. According to the folks at Dized, this is currently being tested internally and then will be opened soon to a select number of publishers and content creators in a limited access format. By the summer of 2020, they anticipate this Tutorial Toolset being ready for industry-wide release. This means that the second half of 2020 is likely to see a solid increase in the output of Tutorials within the Dized app, as more and more makers will get their hands on the ability to make said Tutorials.

*Dized intends to bring the power of technology to the table to introduce game rules and concepts gradually.*



## The Rule Lookup Tool

As alluded to earlier, one of the features of the app is a database of rules for games. This is collectively known as the Rule Lookup Tool, and every game uploaded on the app will follow a similar and familiar layout to allow ease of navigation from menu to menu. While this in itself is a great feature to have — no more fighting amongst players as to who controls the rulebook — there are some additional benefits that the Dized team is hoping to offer to players.

The intent is not just to have rules for games incorporated into the app, but that those rules would exist as a living document. This means that any errata, rules clarifications, and more can easily be integrated into the app. This helps players because they will be able to access the most updated, accurate information available on the game they are playing, addressing issues that might be missing from the rulebook that comes with the game. This also helps publishers because it can assist in reducing rules questions, confusion amidst playing, and other stumbling blocks that could hamper the overall game experience as it was originally intended.

With their innovative Rule Lookup Tool (RLT), the Dized team presents an easy-to-navigate, up-to-date place to find rules for your games. Searching for something specific inside a rulebook? It has user-friendly searching capabilities that assist you in finding what you need even if you use the wrong terminology. Inside certain sections of the rules, there may also be cross-reference links to similar or related concepts to help users find the information they need faster. Beyond all of this, the app also tracks user searches — so if a lot of users end up trying to find the same information, that common search can be conveyed to the publisher so they can identify areas to clarify.



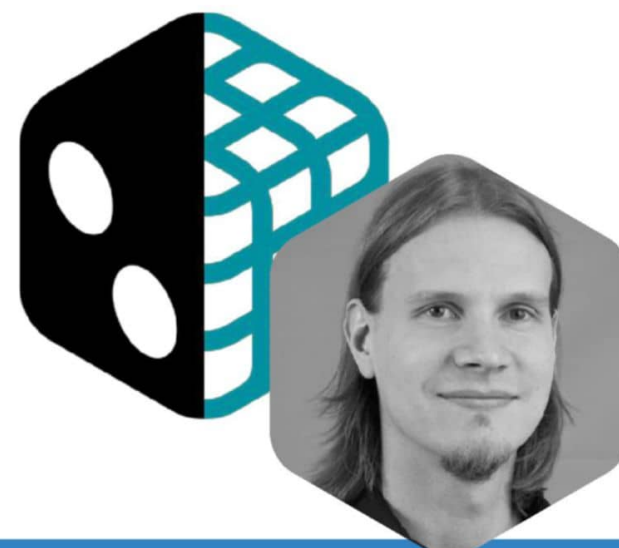
The team at Playmore Games, the company who is developing the Dized app (photo by Playmore Games).



## Launching in 2020



At the time of writing, the app is on track for a full-fledged release in the first quarter of 2020, barring any major hiccups that arise. Before the release, downloading the free early access version of the app will provide a relatively clear idea of what you will see upon launch, at least in terms of rules content. According to Tomi Vainikka, one of the founders of Playmore Games (the company behind Dized), the app will include new tutorial content created exclusively through the designed Tutorial Toolset. As that Toolset gets opened up to waiting publishers and content creators, they anticipate the Tutorial section of the app filling out nicely over the course of 2020. So bear in mind that the Dized model is more of a living body of work rather than a finished product when it releases. New content will appear at varying intervals, but that content will certainly come along to help break down the rules barrier to gaming one game at a time.



Tomi Vainikka, one of the founders of Playmore Games

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# FIRESIDE CHAT

## A Decade of Castle Panic and Industry Growth



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

The flickers of board game creation are often caused by a change or a revelation. A moment happens in a developer's or publisher's life, tied directly to an emotional and visceral connection to tabletop gaming, that feeds the flames. For Justin and Anne-Marie DeWitt, this happened on two fronts: a hobby becoming a passion and a mess of fun designs leading to a massive creative spark.

"For years, Anne-Marie and I had wanted to run our own business and had talked about a lot of ideas for what kind of business that might eventually be," explains Justin, before clarifying, "becoming board game publishers wasn't even on that list until my weekend and evening hobby started showing some promise."



# fireside games

That promise was a bonfire of ideas. Justin was finding himself creating game designs to play with friends and family while also working as a Production Artist for Steve Jackson Games. "We started seeing some authentic interest in those games that made us start considering our options. It wasn't until I developed *Castle Panic* that we started to get serious about getting these games published."

After an unsuccessful search for a publisher to deliver his games to a wider market, Anne-Marie and Justin decided to stoke the flames and delve into their passion. "That's when we decided to take our savings and form our own company and take a shot at getting *Castle Panic* out into the world."



### PANIC! AT THE GAME STORE

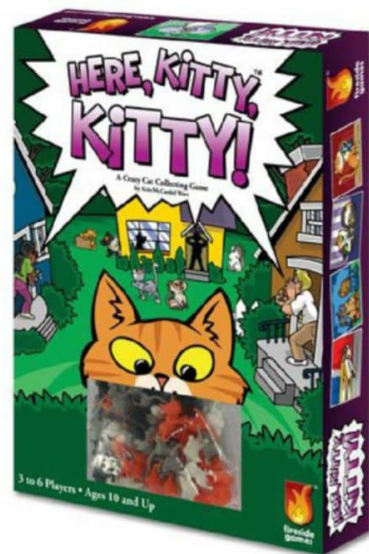
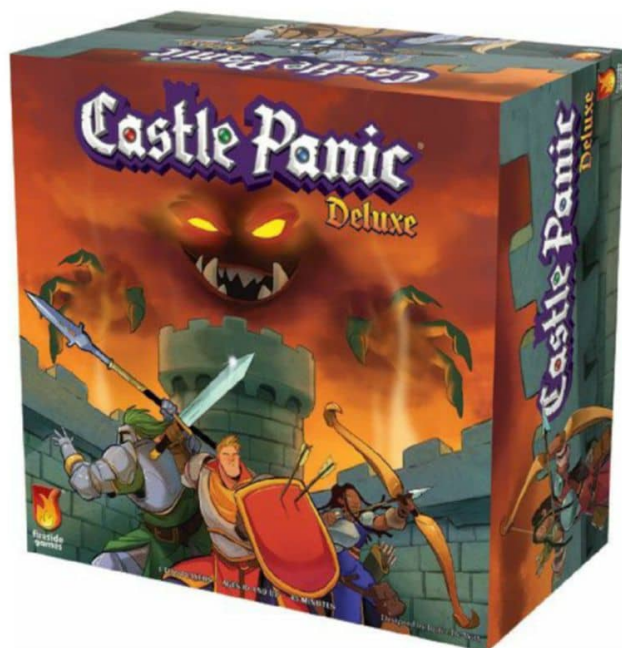
The landscape of board gaming was far different when Fireside launched in earnest in 2007. Very few games were being produced that fit what is now known as gateway games. However, Anne-Marie and Justin knew that *Castle Panic* was special, offering up something new and different that could appeal to not only passionate hobby gamers but potentially new, inexperienced gamers who "have never played anything more complex than *Monopoly* or maybe *Risk*," explains Justin.

"When we launched the game in 2009, cooperative games were extremely rare. *Pandemic* had just come out, but there really wasn't much else out there that was trying to do what we were. We felt like we were on the cutting edge in that way, and it was great because what we had created was truly unique."

*Castle Panic* recently celebrated its tenth anniversary with the release of a big box to collect all the expansions, promos, and paraphernalia associated with the landmark game. Through multiple iterations, partnerships, and international editions, it has become the vestige of Fireside Games.

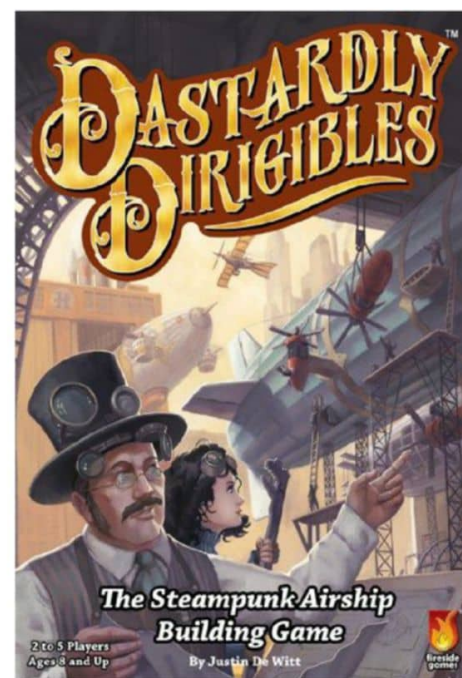
While the game has always been a favorite, Justin and Anne-Marie were cautious at first despite feeling the game was groundbreaking. "While we were confident in having made a great game, we were an unknown publisher and I was an unknown designer," begins Justin. "We actually reduced our first print run based on feedback from our fulfillment partner that made us go a little more conservative. When the 3,500 copies hit the warehouse, we estimated we probably had at least a year's worth of inventory on our hands. Turns out, people were hungry for something like *Castle Panic* and we sold out in 10 weeks."

Justin and Anne-Marie found themselves spending much of the following year ordering reprints, surprising them both as the game “quickly found its audience.” Even ten years into the game’s existence, Justin notes “[i]t’s still our best-selling game by far and we have to keep a close watch on inventory to make sure the game stays in stock.”



## FANNING THE FIRE

But Fireside is more than just the *Castle Panic* publisher, as the DeWitts have humbly found out during the course of 12 years in the industry. “Most gamers can identify games much easier than they can recognize a specific publisher. We are constantly running into gamers that will connect the dots once they see us with one of our other games. They’ll spot *Hotshots*, *Dastardly Dirigibles*, *Bears!*, or *Here, Kitty, Kitty!* and tell us ‘Oh, I didn’t know that was Fireside? I love that game!’ We have a pretty stable fanbase that comes to us looking for a certain type of game, and they keep coming back for our new releases.”



Fireside has also had to keep up with the changing direction of the industry. “When we started, there were maybe a dozen serious game publishers and a few hundred releases a year. Now there are hundreds of publishers and several thousand games are launched each year,” explains Justin. “It’s a lot harder for a game to succeed than it’s ever been, and new games only have a few weeks to prove if they have staying power.”

However, Fireside’s ethos has remained true to the vision the DeWitts followed when they began the publisher journey over a decade ago. “It’s always been our goal to create fun, innovative, and accessible board games that

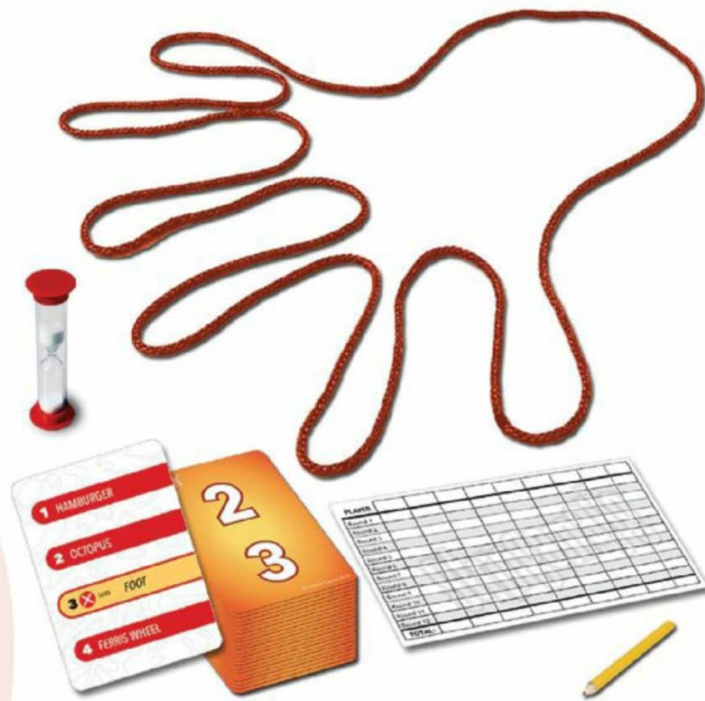
everyone can enjoy. We emphasize the fun by keeping direct competition to a minimum and focusing on the emotional experience our games provide. We pursue innovation by making our games as original as possible. We never want to make ‘our version’ of another game, or chase after the latest trend.”

This is not to say that Fireside has not adapted. The rise of Kickstarter as a board gaming mainstay has also caused Fireside to join the fray this year. “We’ll be doing our first Kickstarter soon, and I doubt it will be our last,” acknowledges Justin. “This will be for *Deluxe Castle Panic*. The fans have been asking for a fancy

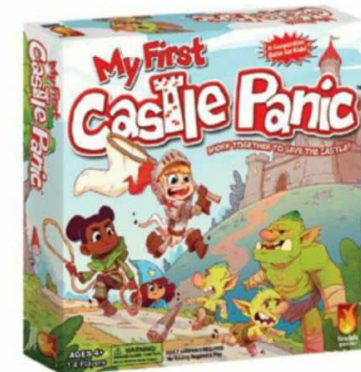


version of the original game with miniatures, plastic castle walls, towers and such for years and we're finally ready to give it to them."

The DeWitts understand *Castle Panic*'s place as an "evergreen game" — a game that continues to sell well through the years — as their combustible engine. The gaming industry has a few notable titles, with more and more coming from smaller publishers year after year. Despite having success with mainstays such as *Hotshots* and preparing the release of its first party game ("It's called *Stringamajig* and it's a mix between a drawing game and charades with a string"), Fireside seems happy to return to *Castle Panic* to keep producing new and innovative content, because at the end of the day their audience demands it. "The *Panic* line will always be a priority for us. Based on the emails I get, I could probably release an expansion every month and it wouldn't be enough for some of our fans!"



It's this connection with fans of Fireside Games, and specifically *Castle Panic*, that keeps the DeWitts following a muse that ensures no one feels burned by their games. "No one's quite done what we have by keeping this game so accessible and new-gamer friendly. I can't even count the number of times gamers have told us that *Castle Panic* was the first game they ever played that got them into the hobby. I have a folder full of emails from families thanking us for making a game they could all play together that they all like and doesn't leave any sore losers."



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The winner of our third annual Best Casual Game of the Year award, *Point Salad* is deceptively simple – but with over a hundred possible ways to score, mastering the game is trickier than you may think at first glance.



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

Each card in the deck has two sides: a point side and a veggie side. Shuffle the deck and divide it into three roughly-equal draw piles and place them in the center of the table in a row, point-side up. From each pile, draw two cards and place them in a column below their respective draw piles, veggie-side up. There are six different varieties of vegetables in the game.



During a player's turn, they may either select two veggie cards or take one scoring card from any of the three draw piles. When a veggie card is drafted, it is replaced by a card from the draw pile in the same column. When a point card is drafted, it dictates how veggies will score for that player at the end of the game. For example, you might draft a card that says carrots will be worth three points each but onions are worth negative two points, or a card that says you will score ten points if you have the most veggie cards at the end. Each point card also has an icon that says what veggie type is on its flip side. As a bonus action on your turn, you may also flip one of your scoring cards and turn it into a veggie; however, veggies can never be turned into point cards.

Play continues until there are no veggie or point cards left to be drafted. Players then calculate their score based on their point cards. A single veggie can score points from multiple point cards. The player with the most points wins the game.

*Point Salad* is taught in two minutes, tops. It's incredibly easy to get started, but as you play, you start to appreciate the elegance of that simplicity. Setup is also fast, so it's easy to play multiple times. Each point card is unique; with an impressive variety, the key to victory is finding the point cards that combo well off of each other. Players don't interact much, but you can keep an eye on what other players are doing to draft cards away from your opponents.

The cards could be a little thicker, but the game itself hangs together nicely. It's streamlined, full of clever choices as you balance point cards and veggies, and blends intriguing strategy with gameplay simple enough to teach players of all experience levels.



## Point Salad

By Molly Johnson, Robert Melvin, Shawn Stankewich

2-6 PLAYERS | 15-30 MINS | AGES 14+ | \$20 MSRP

LUCK | STRATEGY | INTERACTIVE | INDEPENDENT

From the designers of *Monikers* and *The Mind* comes a party game that asks very simply: are you and your teammates on the same wavelength?



*Wavelength* features an adjustable dial over an open semicircle (think speedometer) with a screen that can be opened and closed to hide the rotating wheel underneath. Players divide into two teams, which alternate taking turns. On your team's turn, a teammate is chosen to be the psychic. The psychic draws a card that will have two opposites on it, such as "hot vs. cold" or "short vs. tall." Each card is double-sided and the psychic chooses which side to use this round. The psychic closes the screen, rotates the wheel randomly, and opens the screen to see where the target range is. They then close the screen again and give a clue. The clue must be related to the two extremes shown on the card and indicates where on the spectrum the target is. The clue cannot be synonyms or numbers and must be a single concept.

The active team debates the clue and moves the dial to where they believe the target range lies on the semicircle. After they have made their final decision, the other team guesses whether the center of the target is to the left or the right of where the dial is. The psychic then opens the screen to reveal the target. The active team earns points based on how close (if at all) they got the dial to the center of the target, while the opposing team earns one point if their left/right guess was correct. The first team to ten points wins.

*Wavelength* is a fun party game that encourages a lot of discussion, creative thinking, and reading other players. The cards have a huge range of subjects, not all of which

will fit every game group, but since they're double-sided you can ignore the topics that don't work well.

The components are well made, and the dial device is extremely sturdy and well put together. It doesn't feel at all flimsy or likely to break, yet nothing is difficult to turn or adjust.

*Wavelength* manages to feel like a truly fresh and unique party game that's still easy to learn and has simple, uncomplicated rules. Even the rules governing clue giving are really suggestions based on what the designers have found to work for the game, and they encourage you to adapt them for your group. Creative and clever, *Wavelength* is also a great conversation starter.

## Wavelength

By Alex Hague, Justin Vickers, Wolfgang Warsch

2-12 PLAYERS | 30-45 MINS | AGES 14+ | \$40 MSRP

INTERACTIVE | INDEPENDENT

Players must work together to hunt down an elusive creature, but be careful not to give too much information away, as only one of you will have the glory of the find.



To start a game of *Cryptid*, players draw a card. On one side, the card shows you how to set up the game board, which is made up of six tiles divided into hexagons. Hexagons can be one of five different terrain types and can have one of two different structure types of four different colors. Some also have markings that indicate if it is bear or cougar territory. The other side of the card says which clue book is given to each player and which numbered clue in the book is their clue for the game. A clue could be something like "on desert or water" or "within two spaces of a blue structure."

In *Cryptid*, a cube indicates that the creature cannot be there according to a clue, while a disc indicates that it

could be. On your turn, you may question or search. When you question, you indicate a space on the board and ask another player "could the creature be here?" That player then places a cube or a disc based on the information their clue gives. If they placed a cube, you must also place a cube on a space based on your clue. When searching, you place a disc on a space the creature could be on according to your clue. Players then take turns placing a disc or a cube on that space. If everyone places a disc, you have found the creature and won the game! If a player places a cube, nobody else will place a token — however, you must now place a cube on a space you know the creature cannot be on.

*Cryptid* is a game of pure deduction and puzzles. Where you're searching also hints at what your clue could be; depending on the results you're given, you need to tread lightly and not expose too much. Your clue is valuable and you want to guard it as long as possible. The artwork is stark and simple but works well with the design. The cards and the clue books are cleverly done and offer a variety of creature hunts, but there is an app if you want to streamline the process a bit.

There are so many great ah-ha moments in *Cryptid*: when you figure out a piece of the puzzle, when you find the creature, or even just when all clues are revealed at the end. It's tough, it's tense, and it's unique.

## Cryptid

Designed by Hal Duncan, Ruth Veevers

3-5 PLAYERS

30-50 MINS

AGES 10+

\$35 MSRP

LUCK

STRATEGY

INTERACTIVE

INDEPENDENT

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You are wizards trapped in a magical library with only a grimoire to guide you out. But be cautious – there's a traitor in your midst!



In *Obscurio*, one player is the grimoire and takes the grimoire board. Each round, there will be six cards featuring various images placed around the library board. One of these images is an exit, and only the grimoire player knows which. They will draw two clue cards and place them on their grimoire board. They also have two magnetic tokens that they can place anywhere on one or both cards to indicate clues as to which image is the correct exit. However, one player is the traitor working against everyone else. After the clue cards with their markers are shown to the players, but before any cards are placed on the game board, all wizards close their eyes, and the grimoire player shows the traitor the eight cards contained in the grimoire board. The traitor may choose up to two of these to be included among the six that will be on the library board, in an attempt to mislead the wizards.

Additionally, there is always at least one trap drawn each round (more if the wizards took too long in the previous round while choosing an exit). Traps do things such as force the grimoire player to lay various filters over the clue cards or allow the traitor to see the correct exit before he chooses his misleading cards.

The cards are then placed next to the library board, the wizards open their eyes, the timer is started, and players must guess which one they believe is the correct exit. If at least one player is correct, the whole team moves forward in the library. If players were in the final room of the library, their team wins the game. Each player who guesses wrong takes a cohesion token. If the supply ever runs out of cohesion tokens, the traitor wins the game. If no one has won yet, a new round begins.

If you enjoy *Mysterium* or *Dixit*, you will love *Obscurio*. The artwork on the cards is gorgeous, varied, and totally imaginative. The traps throw in additional challenges and keep the game going, as the wizards need to make their choices quickly or more traps will be drawn next round. The specific traps themselves are also clever, and it's fun for the grimoire player to work around the restrictions they can impose.

The uncertainty of the traitor casts doubt on whose opinion to trust during the decision phase, adding an extra element of tension as you race against the timer. All the roles are fun to play, and the result is a great game that moves fast and is highly entertaining.

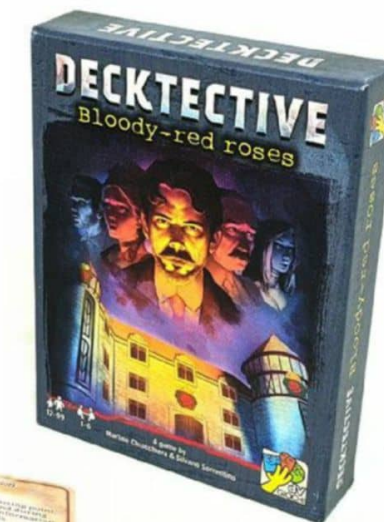
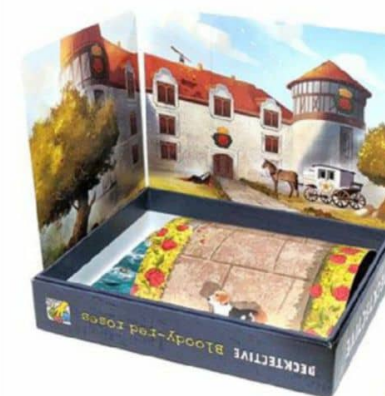
## Obscurio

Designed by L'Atelier

2-8 PLAYERS
 45 MINS
 AGES 10+
 \$40 MSRP

LUCK
 STRATEGY
 INTERACTIVE
 INDEPENDENT

There's been a murder! Ferdinand Tudor has been killed, and it is up to you to solve the case.



*Decktective: Bloody-Red Roses* is a mystery game set in the 1800s, where players must work together to figure out the answer to a series of questions. You begin by reading the story and then creating the 3D murder scene with cards and the game box. Each player draws a number of clue cards based on player count. The deck is not shuffled and the cards are numbered so that they're drawn in a specific order. You may only read the title of the cards in your hand aloud; you may not say anything else about them.

On a player's turn, they may either discard one card face-down into the archive, or play a card face-up onto the table. Each card has a value, one to ten; you may only play a card if its value is equal or less than the number of cards in the archive. The goal is to discard clues that you think are irrelevant in order to play ones with important information. At the end of your turn, you draw a new card. Occasionally, plot twists will be drawn from the deck, which are immediately read aloud and introduce new clues or pieces of information to the story. Once the end of the deck is reached, players are confronted with a series of questions about the case that they must attempt to answer. Players may attempt to remember and discuss the cards they've discarded at this point, but cannot look at them. Players earn points and determine their score based on the number of correct answers.

*Decktective* is a lovely little mystery with a unique design, packed into a compact box. The hidden information aspect is a great mechanism that gives each player only a portion of the clues, preventing any one person from taking over the game and encouraging cooperation and deduction. The mystery itself is not overly difficult, but it is an enjoyable and great introduction to the *Decktective* game system.

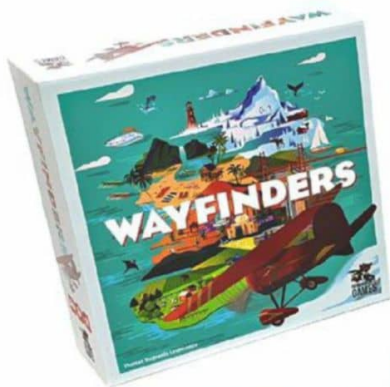
There are some inaccuracies in the writing (incorrectly calling a British earl a count for example), but the 3D aspect strengthens the theme and gives you a sense of place, while also providing clues. It's also family-friendly. It can only be played once, but since everything is contained in a deck of cards, it's very easy to share or pass on. For lovers of mysteries or puzzles, *Decktective: Bloody-Red Roses* is fresh, cleverly designed, and offers an evening well spent.

## Decktective: Bloody-Red Roses

Designed by Martino Chiacchiera, Silvano Sorrentino

1-6 PLAYERS
 60 MINS
 AGES 12+
 \$15 MSRP

INTERACTIVE
 INDEPENDENT



Step into the role of explorers in *Wayfinders*, where you take to the skies and connect far-flung islands through flight and airports.



A grid of five-by-five tiles is placed on the table, with the tiles randomized each game. Everyone starts the game with one airport and an airplane on the center home tile. The hangar board is also set up with three resources on each hangar.

During a player's turn, they may either place a worker on a hangar (in which case their turn ends immediately) or bring all of their workers home. If they do the latter, they collect each of their workers from the hangar board and then take a resource from each hangar for each worker that was placed there, starting with the top-most resource. They can then choose to fly their plane and/or build an airport on any tile their plane is on or travels through that turn. Each tile represents an island of five possible terrain types, which dictates what resource a player must discard to move onto it.

The player may move as many spaces as they can with the resources they have, but may only move to tiles adjacent to their current one. If any player has an airport on an island, they may move onto it for free. Each tile also says what it costs to build an airport on it. To build an airport, discard the resources into the resource bag — unless another player already has an airport on the tile, in which case the resources are paid to whomever built an airport there first. You then discard down to three resources and refill the hangar board with new resources.

Tiles on which you have an airport score points at the end of the game. Some are worth a flat value, while others might score points based on factors such as the number you have of a matching terrain or the number of tiles in that row that you have airports on. This can lead to some really fun scoring combos, as the tiles play off of each other. Other tiles also grant bonuses during the game, such as allowing you to move onto certain islands for free or making some resource types wild.

Turns are quick in *Wayfinders*, and while the player interaction never allows you to block each other directly, players' choices play off of one another, such as choosing when to call workers home or paying each other resources. With airports providing free movement, traveling around the board becomes steadily cheaper, speeding up the game as you go. A clever-but-light strategy game, *Wayfinders* is also lovely to look at with a pleasant and relaxing atmosphere.

## Wayfinders

Designed by Thomas Dagenais-Lespérance

Charades meets social deduction in this compact little card game about hunting the pretender among you.



There are cards in thirty-six different categories. Players choose a category and take as many cards for that category as there are players, making sure to include the pretender card. These are then shuffled and one is dealt to each player. All the cards (except the pretender card) will have the same numbered list of things that relate to that category. The first player to shout out a number from the list picks that thing to be the word this round, and must also go first. Taking turns, each player does a mini-charade for the word, trying not to be too obvious or else the pretender will guess it. The pretender has to play along as best he can.

After each player has done a mini-charade, players can discuss who they believe is the pretender and then vote. The pretender wins if he does not get the most votes. If he does, the other players win unless the pretender is able to guess what the word was.

*The Pretender* is a great twist on charades, adding elements of bluffing and deduction. It plays fast,

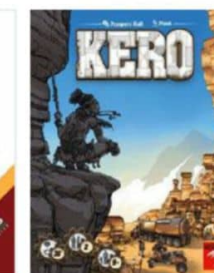
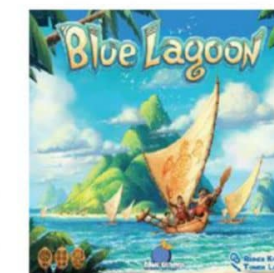
everyone is involved, and both roles have their challenges. It's also really compact and portable, easy to set up and teach, and doesn't require any table space, so it's playable anywhere. Game length is flexible, as you can choose to play one round or track scores over multiple rounds, and it's an addictive game: you just want to keep playing one more round!

## The Pretender

Designed by Hazel Reynolds

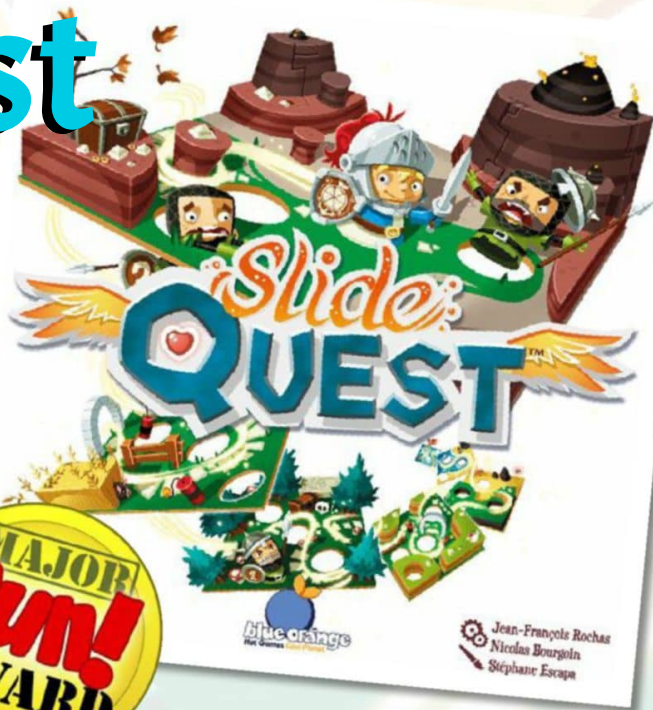
## OTHER RECOMMENDED GAMES

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# Slide Quest 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](http://MajorFun.com).



## The Concept

Your kingdom has problems. From the coast to the mountains, to the castle at the center of the realm, villains have taken over! It's up to you and your team to guide one brave knight along a perilous path to reclaim the land for your king!

*Slide Quest* is a cooperative dexterity game that draws equal parts inspiration from video games and a toy from a bygone era.

## The Components

*Slide Quest* uses the game box in a fun way — as a point of balance for four plastic lever arms. You place one arm in a notch along each edge, sort of like a teeter-totter. The arms that extend into the box are used to hold up the maps representing different areas of the kingdom: the coast, the mountains, the castle grounds and the castle itself.

When each lever is depressed, the map will float, suspended above the box. This is the game board!

Each of the twenty map boards shows a path for the knight and a variety of obstacles: holes, stones, arches, fences, even sticks of dynamite. These obstacles are represented by 3D tokens you'll place on the map. There are even guard and villain tokens you'll have to defeat! Our hero in *Slide Quest* is a big blue knight figure with a ball bearing instead of feet, so he will roll around the board. There's also a life level meter with a marker that sets the difficulty and tracks your successes or failures on each map.

## The Mechanics

The goal in *Slide Quest* is to guide the knight across each map along a path, avoiding obstacles and defeating enemies along the way.

You choose a realm (five map boards in total) and the game will end if you manage to maneuver the knight through all five boards. You do this as a team. You play together, each person controlling one of the lever arms along the side of the

box. This causes the map board to tilt to and fro, making the knight slide around the board.

It takes coordination and communication between everyone to keep the knight on the path. And each level presents a new set of challenges. Sometimes the game is about finesse, sliding through arches or carefully avoiding sticks of dynamite. Other times, it's a game of combat, pushing enemies into pits. The game can go from tense and delicate to loud and frenetic, all after one wrong flick of the wrist!

Pits, explosions, enemies, even just falling over can cost you lives. Run out of lives and you'll have to start all over.



## What Sets This Game Apart?

*Slide Quest* is a creative union of low- and high-tech game elements.

On the low-tech side, *Slide Quest* is a modern cousin to a classic wooden maze toy from the 1940s: *Labyrinth*. *Labyrinth* is a solitaire dexterity puzzle where one player uses rotating knobs to tilt a wooden maze in order to guide a metal ball to the finish line. It's engaging and can be peaceful and frustrating in equal measure!

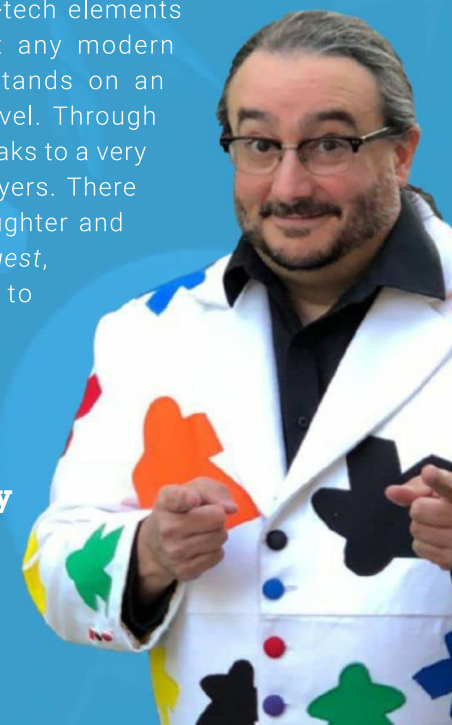
*Slide Quest* captures the essence of the original. By making it a cooperative experience, the game changes its focus from the ball to the players around the box. It's this collective sense of accomplishment or abject failure that makes the game so fun!

On the high-tech side, *Slide Quest* is built around a video game framework. There are five levels to beat.

The levels build in difficulty and end with a boss battle. You lose lives when you fail and if you lose too many, you start over from the beginning. You can even play the game in campaign mode, trying to defeat all twenty in one go!

## Final Thoughts

These low- and high-tech elements are a language that any modern game player understands on an almost instinctual level. Through them, *Slide Quest* speaks to a very wide audience of players. There are no barriers to laughter and teamwork in *Slide Quest*, only more bridges to Major Fun. ☑

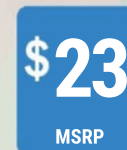
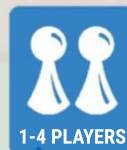


### Stephen Conway

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

## Slide Quest

Designed by Jean-François Rochas, Nicolas Bourgoin



# Your Turn!

A Spotlight on the Gaming Community



Tell us your ideas for a themed game night!

*“How about a racing night? Camel Up, Downforce, Formula D, and Snow Tails. Stick some checkered flag toothpicks into cheese cubes for a great snack that fits the theme.”*

— Daniel R.



Photo by Scott King Photography

*“You can’t go wrong with western-themed games like Bang: The Dice Game, Most Wanted, and Flick ‘em Up. And don’t forget to put on your cowboy hat and boots.”*

— Lake L.





*“My favorites so far were the food night (Throw Throw Burrito, Sushi Roll, Go Nuts for Donuts, and Rival Restaurants) and our Marvel night (Sinister Six, Wakanda Forever, and Thanos Rising).”*

— Danielle R.



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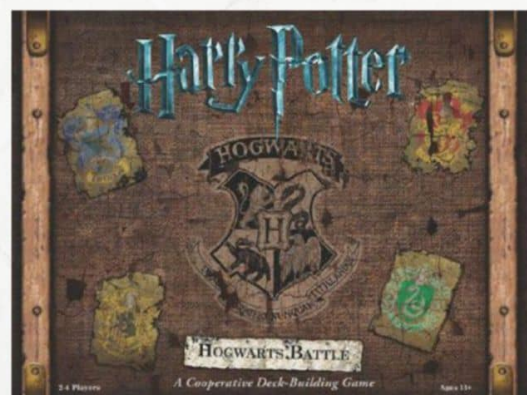
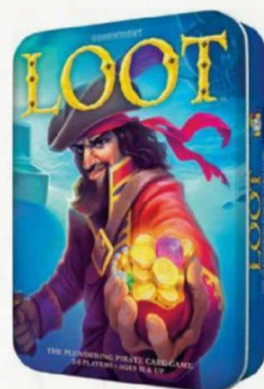
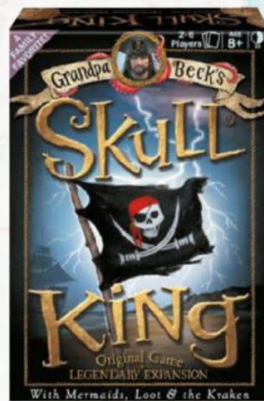
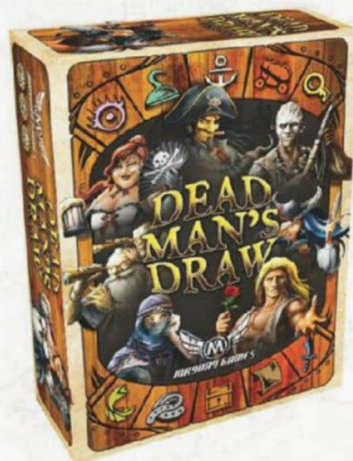
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Changing the way you play!

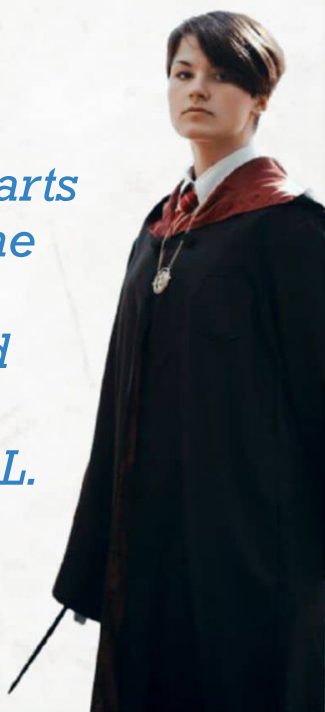
“Pirate-themed game nights are always a blast. *Loot*, *Walk the Plank*, *Dead Man’s Draw*, *Skull King*, and *Treasure Island* are all great options. Pirate costumes and accents add extra flare for a swashbuckling good time.”

— Chris J.



“Play *Harry Potter: Hogwarts Battle* and everyone come dressed as their favorite character. Serve flavored jelly beans.”

— Greg L.



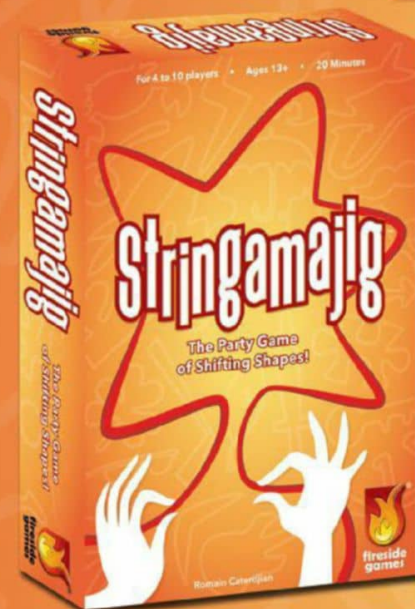
Next Issue: What are your tips for convention-goers?

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

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