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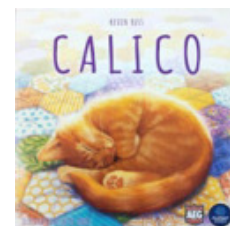
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Gate Keeper Games exists to actualize epic game ideas and treat every guest like they are a dear friend in our home. Creator of *The King's Armory*, *Halfsies Dice*, and many other popular game and dice products.

GateKeeperGaming.com



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TheOp.games



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FiresideGames.com



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KidsTableBG.com



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

CzechGames.com



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

BlueOrangeGames.com



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Imperial Publishing was established in 2018. We publish family-style board games and the Sleeve Kings' brand of card sleeves. Watch for *Bamboo Bash* and *Catapult Castles* coming in 2021!

SleeveKings.com



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

StratusGames.com



DICE: A REAL GAME CHANGER

GATE KEEPER GAMES CELEBRATES 100 UNIQUE RESIN DICE SETS



Breaking the mold is easy, but improving it is an altogether different task. That's what Gate Keeper Games exists to do, and they clearly love what they do!

After having invented the layering effect for dice color stratification in 2013, which was a real game changer in-and-of itself, Gate Keeper Games (GKG) immediately committed to making all their dice exclusively out of high-density resin. GKG dice, designed with better quality materials and meticulous mold design, can access new styles and effects while guaranteeing us end-users exactly zero air-bubbles.

better as the probabilities just became better-balanced. Now that's what we call a real **game changer!**

This is exciting, because what this means for game night is that when you pick up a set of GKG dice (they have 7-die RPG sets, 11-die RPG sets, and offer any combination of loose dice to upgrade your favorite board games with), your game play experience just got

A leader in dice innovation, to ensure maximum quality control and customer service, Gate Keeper Games only sells their own unique designs – and they just released their 100th unique resin dice set! Which one is your favorite?

“If we're gonna do this, we need to do it right.”

— John Wrot!, Creator



CELEBRATING 100 SETS



Halfsies Dice

Halfsies are the original layered dice! Featuring a unique 2-layer half & half color arrangement, a semi-translucent nature, a pearlescent swirl within each color, and a smooth blend where the two colors meet. Halfsies make you the talk of game night. With over 50 color pairings produced, finding a set that matches your favorite character just became easy.

SUPERNOVA DICE JUI LIUOVI DICE



Taking to an outer-space theme to prove there's no air in their dice, GKG blew the center out of the Halfsies design leaving behind 3-layer dice with two pearlescent colors and a thin band of perfectly transparent resin in the center. They're out of this world!





“Not only are they beautiful, but as a casual gamer I use them for keeping track of scores or health points in various games. They’re also great for enhancing/upgrading many board games.”

— Chris James, Editor-in-Chief of CGI

NEUTRON DICE

When you blow the center out of a die, you might as well harness it in its own dice. These 3-layer beauties are called Neutron Dice. They have a single band of bright pearlescent color as the center layer, nestled between two clear transparent outer layers.

As you turn it from one side to the other, the appearance changes from solid, to half-full, to three-layer split!



ECLIPSE DICE

Borrowing from their Halfsies and Supernova styles, inverting them to a Neutron-style concept they came up with (and just released!) called Eclipse Dice. These brand new designs have two ultra-thin bands of pearlescent color sandwiched at the center of the dice, while still being nestled between two clear transparent outer layers. Viewed from opposite sides, they look like two different sets!



“Gate Keeper Games dice are heavier, denser, and better balanced than what you’re used to.”

— John Wrot!, Creator

AETHER DICE



Really stepping up their game for their most recent style release, Aether Dice are multicolor-swirl resin dice! Featuring four swirled color shades per die, with varying levels of transparency by shade and multiple glitter types all in one die, Aether Dice are the fifth element of dice.



Dice aren't the only thing GKG upgraded! All dice sets ship in a Dice Keep, able to hold a standard 7-die set, an expanded 11-die set, 12d6, 36 mini d6, and even epic-scale miniatures in style.



Inventing exciting new ways to experience the oldest things, GKG's values are as timeless as the platonic solids that make up their dice: Family, Tradition, & Innovation. They “love to bring people together, to make them more enthusiastic about the things they already value, and then to find new and exciting ways to repeat that cycle!” When you play with Gate Keeper Games dice, it's clear you roll with family. 🎲



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Family Gaming:

Six Titles That Span the Age Divide



Andrew Brassleay

Journalist Searching for
Great Family Games

As The Who once sang, “The kids are alright.” However, this past year they’ve also been home a lot of the time across the world thanks to lockdowns and the COVID-19 pandemic. While it’s always nice to spend more time with the family, having young children at home more often comes with an increase of Netflix’s twitch-inducing, noise-polluting animation across various screens, and paint splashes, Play-Doh in the carpet, and Lego bricks everywhere.

How do we calm things down, including parents’ nerves, a little bit? Well, with a tabletop game or two. But there’s such a fine line between the right blend of luck, skill, and strategy: too much of the first and you’re likely to be bored out of your adult mind with a tedious, predictable roll-and-mover; too much of the latter two, and your little one’s attention will be running straight back towards the TV.



Here are some of the best games to play with young children to keep all the generations entertained.

Rhino Hero Super Battle

2-4 PLAYERS | 10-20 MINUTES | AGES 5+



First off, Rhino Hero and his anthropomorphic friends are quite possibly the least effective superheroes ever created in any form of media.

Hero, Giraffe Boy, the Batguin, and Big E the elephant are capable, despite being incredibly heavy creatures,

of building a massive, sprawling, inhabited tower – only to then see it infested with nefarious spider monkeys. The group fight each other in a battle to the top, with their collective weight causing the tower to topple, the whole thing lying in rubble.

The group's approach may be problematic when it comes to crime fighting, but it does make for one of the best – probably *the* best – dynamics for a family game around. The rules to HABA's card-building dexterity game are simple: choose from one of three starting floor cards, follow the rules for building walls on them, then roll a die to see how high your hero can climb it. If two heroes are on the same level, they battle it out to see who gets to remain there. The highest hero on the tower at the end of the game wins, unless they were the one to knock it down, in which case everyone else does.

It's an absorbing game for younger kids. Construction, rather than destruction, becomes cool. Dexterity and patience get taught as the child aims to get one over their parents, while moms and dads become equally determined not to knock the tower down with their big, flapping, grown-up fingers. The result is a brilliantly designed game in which anyone of any age can end up the winner.



If you like this, try...

Cheaper, smaller and less chaotic, Super Battle's little sibling, *Rhino Hero*, has the same tower-building dynamics, but brings its own unique problems to solve. Though bigger hands may have more issues with the smaller floor and wall tiles.

Slide Quest

1-4 PLAYERS | 15-45 MINUTES | AGES 7+

A video game masquerading as a board game, the premise of *Slide Quest* is an exciting one. The game plays straight out of the box with your team of up to four players sliding, leveraging, and shaking an intrepid knight down a trap-filled path past villains, pits, and obstacles through 20 increasingly difficult levels.

Slide Quest's cooperative nature will teach two-way teamwork and communication. Each team member will have to know when to stop moving their own lever(s) and let someone else take over. Those wishing to run the show above the greater good will soon learn that if they want to progress and get the reward of playing other levels, they'll have to trust the others.

With young children, it's going to be a difficult game to finish in one sitting. The game's saving grace is that it's perfectly possible to save your game. There's a tracker included that allows players to pick up where they left off with both the latest level and remaining lives stored.



If you like this, try...

It may be somewhat vintage, but no casual game collection should be without *Screwball Scramble*, as well as its recent sequel, *Screwball Scramble 2*, which carry a similar rocking-and-rolling gameplay of *Slide Quest*. While on its own the game can be a frustrating experience for younger children, a grown-up joining in can create a collaborative experience, with the older player taking on some of the more challenging tasks.



Fireball Island: The Curse of Vul-Kar

2-4 PLAYERS | 45-60 MINUTES | AGES 7+

Restoration Games's reimagining of Milton Bradley's 1980s island quest is not cheap at \$75. Yes, it can take an age to set up, with three molded, plastic 3D board bases, and many fiddly components and treasure pieces.

So, what makes *Fireball Island* worthy of the time of a parent who's just trying to have a casual game with their kids? *Fireball Island* has a beautiful, chaotic mess of a game board and gameplay. With its rolling hills, crooked pathways, threatening boulders, and dangerous

bridges, nowhere feels safe. And Vul-Kar is an angry, rotating, volcano with a face that spits out fireballs at the players. It may be the coolest, non-electronic component in tabletop gaming history.

The aim? Accumulate points by discovering treasure and taking photos for an evil corporation that has bought the island and wants some willing victims to do the dirty work of inspecting the place for it. All the while avoiding the island's dangers, vicious wildlife, and thieving opponents. Then head back off the island before Vul-Kar is fully enraged by your presence. Most points at the end wins.

Playing this with a young child for the first couple of goes is hazardous for the game itself. On first sight, the prospect of *Fireball Island* is too much. The remake's card-based movement dynamic is more interesting than the original roll and move, but it also makes it a more complicated game for kids, especially those who may still have trouble reading the text.

However, even though this means that *Fireball Island* doesn't really allow for a game played on equal footing, it's such a tantalizing prospect that it's one of the few games where, for kids, it really is the taking part that counts rather than the winning.



If you like this, try...

Any of Fireball Island's expansion packs. The most fun of which are *Spider Springs*, which creates an arachnid-filled peninsula, and *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Bees!*, which incorporates a pouncing feline and a swarm of bees (meaning extra marbles) into the shenanigans.



Formula D

2-10 PLAYERS | 60 MINUTES | AGES 8+

There's a lot for both adults and kids to like. The Formula 1 tracks are faithful to their real-life counterparts, but you don't need a knowledge of the sport to take part. My daughter's education in racing consists of a quick watch of a starting lap of the Monaco Grand Prix on YouTube, and then we're off.

The cars are tiny but a joy, and the dice, ranging in shapes, color, and size are visually appealing. These represent the gears, which form the calling card for *Formula D's* mechanics, preventing it from becoming a dull roll-and-move. Corners and chicanes, just like in real life, must be taken at the optimum gear and speed. Failure to do so results in damage or even the end of your race.

Younger kids will be solving problems and strategically thinking about lane positions. They're forced to go against all their instincts and start discovering the need to slow down, though they will get frustrated when they can't get the speed high enough to roll that big, blue d30.

Problems arise thanks to each racetrack coming in two separate board sections and the tiny cars being easy to lose. These mean you may have to watch out for excitable feet trampling on it and losing your positions on the board.

However, keep the race to one lap and the rules simple and all ages can have fun. This is a strategic, forward-thinking game that keeps the interest of young and old alike. And that makes it, surprisingly, one of the best family games out there.



If you like this, try...

A dexterity racing game made up of wooden tiles and little circular 'cars' to flick about, PitchCar loses points for its price tag (about \$60). But while games can be a little frustrating compared to Formula D, watching your vehicle consistently veer off track, it's still a fun little game for all the family. And kids, just like a wooden train set, can find a lot of engineering enjoyment in the setup.

KLASK

2 PLAYERS | 10 MINUTES | AGES 8+

Was the world demanding a Danish, smaller, non-electronic version of air hockey? Nope. But it's what we've got, and now it's here, it's a thing of beauty.



Score a point one of four ways: get the ball in the opponent's goal, get two of the central white, magnetic markers attached to your opponent's playing piece, get your opponent to 'step' into their own goal, or by the opponent just giving in and falling over. First to six points wins.

KLASK will take up more shelf space than most items in a board game collection. And it does make a horrible, nerve-jarring, squeaky din as magnetized playing pieces scratch against the surface.

But if you can get past that, then it's a firm choice for a family game. If you'd like to include more players simultaneously, the four-player edition, *KLASK 4*, fits the bill nicely.

If you like this, try...

For another sport-themed dexterity game, *Mars Open* is a solid bet: a game in which cardboard 'gliders' are flicked towards a tee, with courses that can be designed as basic or as complex as required, based on a player's age and ability.



There's more than screens and devices to occupy your family when distractions are needed. Sometimes the simplest board games and a bit of family time can turn those moments into something special. 🎲

Follow Andrew on Instagram: @thegenerationsgames

BAMBOO BASH

Strip bark and leaves from the bamboo for points!



Be careful not to pull down the whole thing or you'll have to find a new one!



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2-8 Players



Age 7+



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MIND

GAMES

The Psychology of Board Games



Bayard Catron

Game Wizard, Reviewer,
and Event Organizer

What is the mind? For the ancient Greeks, the idea of the mind was synonymous with the concept of “soul.” Plato believed the psyche was immortal and became wiser and more perceptive after death. More recently, Freud and Jung refined the idea of seele (soul) as a subset of the overall psyche, that which governs thought and behavior – in short, personality. As a game designer and armchair psychologist, I am fascinated by what makes games tick. But even more, I love to discover what makes players tick. Games are products of the human mind, and the mind is the arena on which the contest is played. All the aspects of cognition – perception, thinking, judgment, language, memory, and more – play into the game experience.



Human psychology is inextricably linked with almost every type of game

The psychological connection starts from the beginning, as the game inventor determines which concept will hold a player's interest and the "psychology of fun." What is fun and, indeed, *what fun is*. As with humor, the essence of fun is slippery, subjective, unpredictable, and deeply personal.

A game designer must balance skill level as well. Players want to be challenged but also feel smart. Although a simple trivia game, *Trivial Pursuit* became a household name by sneaking in questions that often sounded tough but were easy. "What river delta in southwestern Vietnam..." This is an easy question thinly disguised as a hard question. How many Vietnamese river deltas do you know? Anyone who has seen a film set during the Vietnam war knows the answer is the Mekong, but there's still a hit of dopamine delivered to the brain when you get it right. In a time when fewer people were playing board games, the game turned something trivial into something almost essential in its day.

Recent television miniseries "The Queen's Gambit" does an excellent job of illustrating the timeless role of psychology in games. Chess is a game of perfect information. Nothing in the game state is hidden except the thoughts of the players. In an early scene, the protagonist faces off against the local champion, who arrives late in a show of confidence meant to intimidate the newcomer. When she surprises him with her aggressive play and backs him into a corner, she opines that he should concede. "I can still get out of this," he says, trying to convince himself. "Perhaps if you'd gotten here on time," she replies. Now he can think of nothing but the ticking clock.



Types of psychological experience

Let's break down some of the various game-related psychological phenomena.

Intimidation

As we saw in "The Queen's Gambit," intimidation is a powerful tool in games, one that can backfire. Much as in real-life geopolitics, a player who is perceived as powerful will be either a threat or a desirable ally and thus will be the target of attacks or ingratiation. Back in the heyday of *The Settlers of Catan*, it was possible to win without drawing a single card, but it never hurt to have a few face-down cards sitting on the table, the implication being that you could swat away the robber if another player dared to put him next to one of your cities. And how people choose where to place the robber could fill an entire article itself. One player in my weekly game became known for her threats about what she'd do if someone put the robber on her. She claimed her vengeance would last multiple times throughout the current game, and even future games! How powerful you are is not as important as how powerful you are perceived to be.



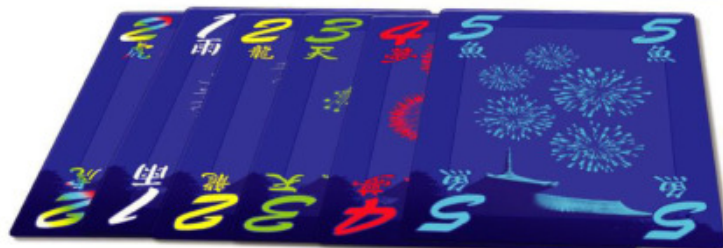


Deception

In some games, you play the game. In others, you play *the players*. Deception, specifically bluffing, is a cornerstone of games like *Poker* and *Werewolf*. In *Poker*, you can't make your own luck, but with a little psychology and some believable playacting you can make an opponent fold a strong hand when you hold nothing. This also works in reverse. Once, facing off with a skilled player who's bold and aggressive (but also very shrewd), I had to find a way to make him stay in and call me once the betting had escalated to "bet the rent money" levels and I had the best possible cards. Knowing that looking at your cards can be a sign of a weak hand – almost as though you're trying to find better cards – I swallowed once and "nervously" checked my cards. He called and I raked in a sizable pot.

The Metagame

Metagaming occurs when players utilize information from outside the game world, such as knowledge of other players or habits. Richard Garfield, creator of *Magic: The Gathering*, calls metagaming "how a game interfaces beyond itself" – that is, "what you bring to a game, what you take away from a game, what happens between games, [and] what happens during a game." Is this considered cheating? Depends on the game and the players. In *Hanabi*, metagaming is the only way to reason out the next play, since players do not see their own hand of cards. When challenged by a friend who boasted he was undefeated at *Stratego*, I asked another friend who had played him the previous day how it went. "He won, he put his flag on the lake." In my game against the champ, thinking it likely he'd repeat his winning move, I went directly to the right-hand lake and captured the flag, and the win.





The Night Cage is a cooperative, horror-themed tile placement game that traps 1-5 lost souls within an otherworldly labyrinth of eternal darkness. Equipped with nothing but dim candles, you must work together to explore the maze and escape.

To win, players must each collect a Key, find a Gate, and escape as a group.

But escape won't be easy. The weak glow of your candle sheds light on only a small area of the maze at a time. As players move, new pathways are revealed while old ones disappear forever into the darkness, creating an ever-changing play space that requires teamwork and collective strategy to navigate.

1-5 PLAYERS **14+** AGES **50** MINUTES



"It's like being in a scary movie"

-Gretchen Settle
Painting Happy
Little Meeples

"This game is fantastic!"

- Jonathan Gilmour

"Flipping tiles has never been so nerve wracking."

-Christian Hoffer
Comicbook.com



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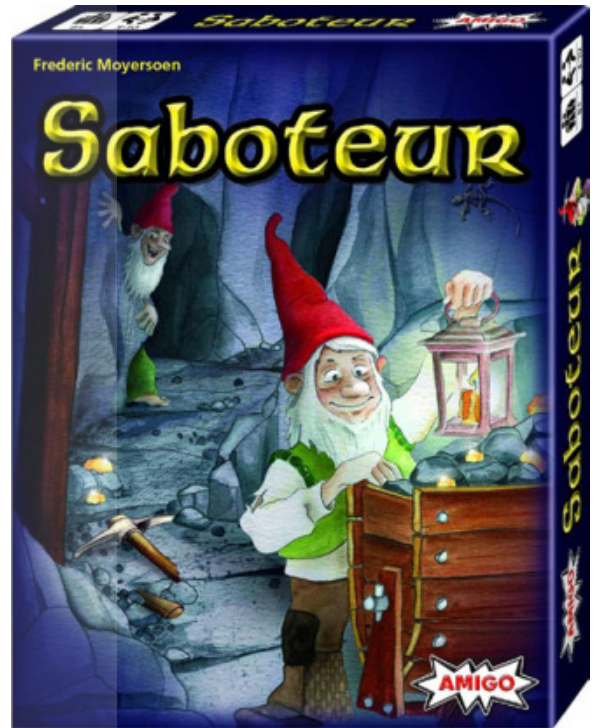
Game suggestions

Let's look at some casual games with intriguing psychological experiences.

Saboteur

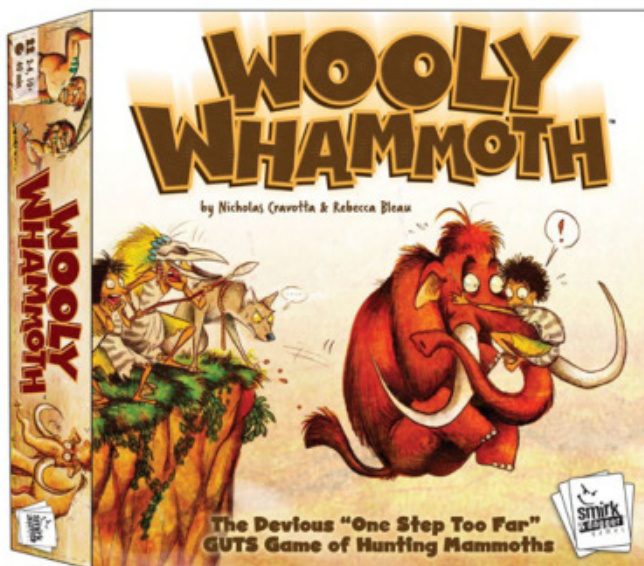
3-10 PLAYERS | 30 MINUTES | AGES 8+

Hidden Role games continue to be hugely popular, and with good reason – it's enjoyable to figure out which of your friends is the traitor – and oftentimes fun to lurk and fool everyone as the sneaky traitor yourself. But in some games, being evil can be stressful. A recent online game of *Blood on the Clocktower* (the latest in a long line of social deduction games descended from *Mafia* and *Werewolf*) was very intense for me. I was secretly the Demon and my fellow nefarious teammates were depending on me! Classic card game *Saboteur* captures all the fun of being a secret troublemaker, with none of the angst. There's just something blissfully, maniacally fun about wreaking havoc in the mine. In *Saboteur*, some players are benign "gold diggers," working together to tunnel into the mine to find gold. The saboteur(s) (there may be more than one, or rarely, none at all) are trying to foil them, in somewhat innocent ways at first, then at the perfect moment, revealing themselves with an evil cackle as they bring the tunnel to a dead end or collapse the mine at a crucial juncture. Then it's a free-for-all of broken equipment and friendships. Ah, memories!



Woolly Whammoth

2-4 PLAYERS | 20-30 MINUTES | AGES 8+



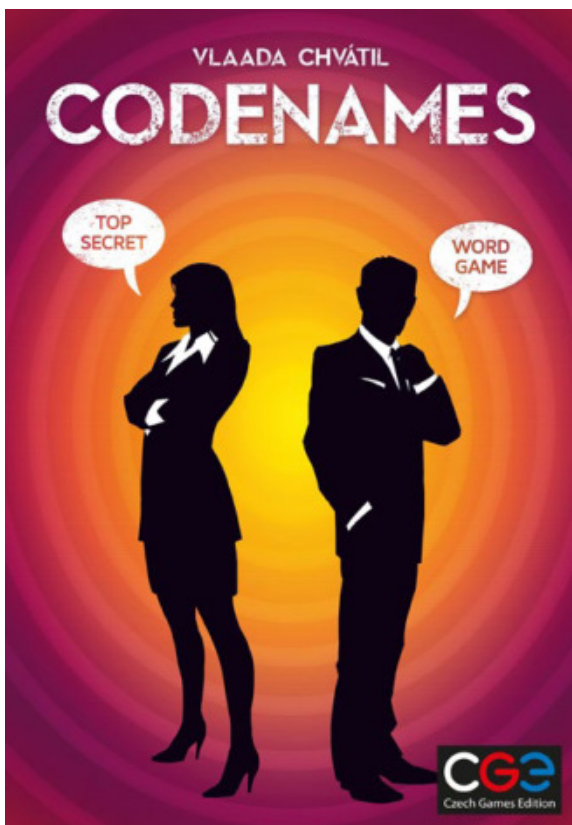
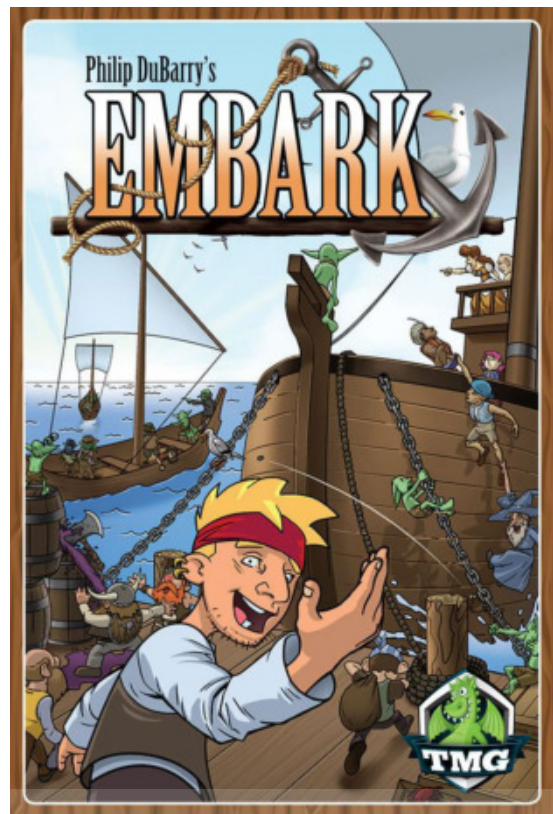
From devious and dastardly publisher Smirk and Dagger comes this hilariously cutthroat game of caveman families trying to run their competitors off the cliff, into tar pits, or under the feet of stampeding mammoths. To win, you must figure out what your fellow players are likely to do by remembering who played what cards, assessing what they have available, and therefore what they are likely to play as they do the same to you. It's a game of outmaneuvering other players. Although all players have the same cards, it's to your advantage to go your own way. If everyone plays the same way, everyone will share the same fate. But if you are a bit ahead or behind, you can play more tactically and influence the outcome. While the artwork might suggest a kid game, this game is fun for everyone.



Embark

2-5 PLAYERS | 30-60 MINUTES | AGES 14+

Like *Woolly Whammoth*, *Embark* is a simultaneous selection game where you're guessing at what your fellow players will do, but the object here is to fill up boats with your people so they can depart for distant shores and get slotted into a number of different points-generating professions. A partially-filled boat won't leave the dock, so you need to figure out what your opponents need to get done and which seats they are likely to fill. By the same token, you don't want to slate too many of your people to go to a boat you think will be popular, or they won't all fit and some will have to go to the tavern to wait until the next turn. As you try your best at reading the other players' minds, they're doing the same to you. And you each have a unique special power to help you out. Although there's a bit of 'take that,' I greatly enjoy the game.



Codenames

2-8 PLAYERS | 15 MINUTES | AGES 14+

Codenames is one of the most popular party word games of recent years. In *Codenames*, players use single-word clues to associate multiple words on a grid. You really need to get into your teammates' heads for this one. If the clue is "marine," does that mean a member of the military or a seafaring animal? How does the clue giver's mind work? Words on the grid might include leather, victory, and platypus. A platypus lives in a river, not the ocean, but is that close enough? Dr. Stephanie Richman of Baldwin Wallace University uses *Codenames* in her upper level psychology course on Social Cognition. In playing the game students learn first-hand how social information is represented using Parallel Distributive Processing (PDP), a model of memory which connects words and concepts.

When it comes to memorable, intriguing game experiences, the most important components are not the ones in the box — they are YOU and your fellow players. On a fundamental level, a game is a meeting of the minds. How a game makes you think will determine how it makes you feel. Conversely, your psychological state determines the play — where you are, who you're with, the environment — they all define the mood and the moment. What's on your mind? 🎲

PUBLISHING AMID A PANDEMIC:

*How Board Games Survived
and Thrived in
2020*



Justin Spicer

Music Journalist and
Board Game Experimenter

COVID's lasting impacts on our health and economy are still far from being understood. It will take many of us years, perhaps even a decade, to unravel what has changed in the last year.

But some patterns are emerging, at least in the board gaming hobby, that indicate many publishers were well ahead of the curve even before the threat of a pandemic affected their supply chains worldwide. As the world began locking itself down to quell the threat of COVID-19, people continued to find solace in hobbies. Soon, the business journals and magazines of the world began tracking the increase of sales across a wide swath of interests as people did anything and everything to take their minds away from the weight of a pandemic circling the globe. Turns out, everything from toys, guitars, crafts, and board games were selling well despite a deflated economy.

Report Linker's "Board Games Market - Global Outlook and Forecast 2021-2026" estimates that sales in the hobby will grow by 13 percent in the next five years, even with continued lockdowns. But what about the hobby as a whole? This article examines how 2020 affected the board gaming industry through three facets — big box stores, local board gaming cafes and stores, and the digital space — and how the pandemic has shaped them in the interim as well as moving forward. Is this projected forecast of its growth still as rosy?



Big Box Stores Offer Big Box Comfort

The first sign of life in the hobby thriving amidst the pandemic was Hasbro's staggering first quarter numbers. The company's CEO, Brian Goldner, explained that Hasbro experienced more than 20 percent growth before the 2020 holiday season alone. Ravensburger reported a spike well over 300% in sales across its line of games and puzzles. There was no denying that the giants of the board gaming industry were doing well. An article from Sarah Butler for The Guardian tracked early lockdown sales of games and toys in the United Kingdom, with stalwarts Hasbro, Mattel, and Asmodee having strong sales



numbers for classic family titles such as *Monopoly*, *Clue*, and *Uno*. Reports in North America tracked similar sales of these well-known games.

It turns out many publishers not at the size and scale of Hasbro and Ravensburger were working toward sustainability even before the pandemic, and big box stores were not a major factor in their plans to move forward. John Zinser, owner of Alderac Entertainment Group (AEG), explains that "[big box stores] have not shaped our business model. We are always hoping our games will be placed in these stores, but we do not build our business model around it."

Ted Alspach, owner of Bezier Games, expresses a similar stance of big box retailers. "They haven't had much of an impact. Some have done better than before, others not so much. That category was pretty much flat."

Cafes and Local Game Stores Struggle

The continued effect of COVID-19 forced many to stay home and in close proximity to families of varying ages and skill levels, meaning board games had the opportunity to demonstrate their ability of bringing and keeping families together and entertained despite the harrowing (and let's be honest, grim) circumstances facing a weary world.

Despite the health and growing sales of the industry, one can't help but look at the periphery establishments that rely on customers and patrons to keep business flowing. With friendly local game stores (FLGS) and gaming cafes, publishers have a chance to make more immediate connections with board gamers, as well as foster relationships

with local business owners who are just as much fans as they are hobbyists also eking out a living in the industry. Without the ability to host customers, coupled with gamers turning inward to family and their immediate bubbles, these institutions had a rough 2020.

The pandemic severely hampered the operations of many local gaming establishments. Some FLGS, such as Labyrinth Games in Washington D.C., have a sizable imprint on their local communities by hosting events,



Yet, the behemoths of the board gaming industry turned to big box stores to keep capital flowing. When speaking to Ross Thompson from The Op earlier this year, he stressed how big box stores such as Target were integral to The Op's sustainability during the pandemic. With a line that incorporates popular intellectual property (IP) such as Marvel, SpongeBob SquarePants, Harry Potter, and more (and often combines these IPs with timeless games and modern classics such as *Monopoly*, *Clue*, and *Codenames*), having an established big box presence allows The Op to thrive along with the industry's best known publishers.



tournaments, and being available to help patrons both faithful and brand new to the hobby to find the game(s) to make them continued gamers. However, Labyrinth had to adapt, and owner Kathleen Donahue turned to e-commerce options to keep her beloved store operating during the pandemic. Donahue explained to NPR podcast "Marketplace" that the transition to e-commerce took an adjustment, but that "[i]t's been great, because we're shipping all over the country now."



She noted that she has also shipped games as far away as South Africa. Donahue isn't the first FLGS owner to adjust to the demands and obstacles of the pandemic. Others turned to curbside delivery options to safely interact with their beloved customers and keep them supplied in games while also adopting e-commerce sales, either through integrated point-of-sales software or sites such as eBay and Amazon.

Yet, many game shops and gaming cafes found themselves unable to survive the lock down and restrictions on gatherings. Cafes and FLGS have experienced 35 percent less foot traffic and commerce, according to Report Linker's forecasts. While some cafes and gaming stores were able to maintain and engage with their loyal customer bases, the spate of closures these institutions underwent during 2020 will be noticeable and long felt after the restrictions from the pandemic are largely gone. Many small communities rallied around gaming cafes and game stores for companionship and camaraderie.

New Opportunities in the Digital and Online Space

The digital space has been one of the fastest-growing areas of board gaming for quite some time, with the imprint only growing through the course of the pandemic and 2020. "We accelerated our process of putting games on digital platforms this year," Alspach states. "We had already offered *Silver* as a free app, and we added *Silver Bullet* to it in the middle of the year. We've also created Tabletop Simulator (TTS) and Tabletopia versions of our latest games."

John Zinser also notes how the digital space "has transformed the way we playtest, share games with partners, and see pitches from designers. It



Photo by Momonymoproblemz on Wikimedia Commons, licensed under CC BY-SA 4.0.

These places were also vital to local economies. With no raw numbers yet available to the depth of closures across North America, it will be years before the lasting impact is determined.

Likewise, the impact on gaming conventions in the immediate term produced negative results. When Gen Con announced it had to cancel its traditional convention in lieu of a virtual alternative, they presented 2020 badge holders the option of rolling over their

badge for 2021 in hopes of helping the convention keep its staff intact and a source of needed revenue still available. Conventions operate on razor thin economic margins, and while many are hungry for the return of in-person conventions — which will also help the many host cities and communities with boosts to board gaming tourism earnings — many conventions are experiencing the same pain points as FLGS and gaming cafes until it is safer to reconvene.

will be a big part of our business moving forward."

The ability for gamers to connect and play the newest games over the internet and mobile has helped reshape the industry moving forward. While many I spoke with, including Alspach and Zinser, noted that playing online is not the same as the face-to-face interaction of being around a gaming table, it provides new and accessible alternatives that strengthen publishing and connect gamers.

These new digital presences lead to online-driven sales. Where FLGS and cafes suffered locally because many establishments were unable to serve their clientele, publishers were able to address that gap.





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According to Zinser, direct sales through AEG's website "were better in 2020 than in past years. We reacted quickly to the lockdown and pushed monthly deals and marketing to our customer base."

Other publishers, such as Bezier, found success via more notable partners. "The biggest impact was the availability of titles through online retailers, particularly Amazon," Alspach begins. "Amazon sales are way, way up over 2019." Website Datahawk also notes how Amazon provided big sales for newly-minted evergreen casual games such as *Codenames* and *Catan*.

But the biggest imprint in the digital space continues to happen courtesy of crowdfunding sites, particularly Kickstarter. Tabletop games had their best year in 2020 with over \$233 million

What's Next?

Moving into 2021 and beyond, despite the numerous setbacks and the loss of local gaming establishments, the hobby's health does indeed appear rosy. Publishers are looking to take what they've learned and implemented in 2020 and apply it to their future. "Digital gaming and virtual conventions will be a permanent part of our future," begins Zinser. "We will do more virtual pitch sessions to find new games, we

in pledges on Kickstarter, eclipsing 2019's record-breaking total by nearly \$60 million. Hasbro began its own crowdfunding service to bring back the beloved

will not lean on shows to be one of the most important parts of marketing a new release."

Even if hobby's biggest events, such as conventions, remain largely virtual in 2021, publishers also have an optimistic view of the upward trend of people entering the hobby and its continued success. Alspach believes sales and engagement will continue

HeroQuest. Despite a dubious economy, those who were stuck at home and had the means found themselves pledging to crowdfunded games more than ever.

to strengthen "from our understanding of the changes that are a result of what has happened this year, and our ability to more successfully market our games based on our experience." Zinser has a more guarded optimism, "We had limited success converting plays to sales at digital shows [in 2020], but I think that was because we were learning...If they continue this year, I expect we will do better." 🎲



PULSE



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COURTESY OF: MARK TUCK


CGI
+PNP

Raging Bulls
Designed by Mark Tuck
Art by Mark Tuck
Bit.ly/raging-bulls




A ○○○○

1	2	3	4	5	6	1
1	2	3	4	5	6	1
2						2
3						3
4						4
5						5
6						6




B ○○○○

1	2	3	4	5	6	1
1	2	3	4	5	6	1
2						2
3						3
4						4
5						5
6						6




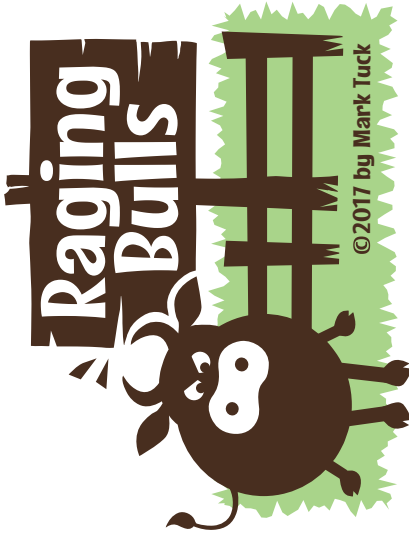
C ○○○○○

1	2	3	4	5	6	1
1	2	3	4	5	6	1
2						2
3						3
4						4
5						5
6						6



D ○○○○○○

1	2	3	4	5	6	1
1	2	3	4	5	6	1
2						2
3						3
4						4
5						5
6						6

A QUICK REMINDER OF HOW TO PLAY (see reverse side for full rules)
Position the Bulls - Roll 2 dice for each Bull's position. Draw the Bulls on the Fields as small circles.
Build Fences - Roll 3 dice for Posts. Draw a straight line between 2 Posts to make a fence (cannot go through a Bull). Bulls that are separated AND completely enclosed by Fences are 'isolated'.
Rolling a pair/triple - may use that numbered Post even if it's been used once. For a pair, use the third die for the other Post.
Pass - If unable to build a Fence (or choose not to) mark off a Mallet. If all 3 Mallets used then game ends on next Pass.
Complete the Field with ALL Bulls isolated or Leave it uncompleted.
Score the Field - for isolated Bulls (and for unused Posts ONLY if the Field is completed).
Game ends - once the last Field, D, is completed (or left). Score 3 bonus points for each Mallet remaining.




Scores

A (x 3) + =
 Isolated Bulls Unused Posts

B (x 4) + =
 Isolated Bulls Unused Posts

C (x 5) + =
 Isolated Bulls Unused Posts

D (x 6) + =
 Isolated Bulls Unused Posts

Mallets   

Mallets remaining (x 3) =

Total

Raging Bulls v.1.3



©2017
Mark
Tuck



Whoever thought it was a good idea to put a load of bulls together in one field? Well, yours is not to reason why. It is, however, your job to keep them apart and avoid brawling bulls.

To do this you'll need to isolate them from each other by building fences.

Fortunately, some fence posts have already been put up around the field perimeter. Unfortunately you only have a limited number of fence rails and mallets to work with...

Components required

Raging Bulls game page

3 different coloured dice (D6)

A pencil or other drawing instrument (such as a bull-point pen)

A straight edge (unless you can draw a nice straight line without one!)

The aim of the game

To build Fences (draw lines) across the field in order to enclose and separate the Bulls in it. The game consists of 4 fields with increasing numbers of Bulls (from 3 to 6). Start with field A (3 Bulls).

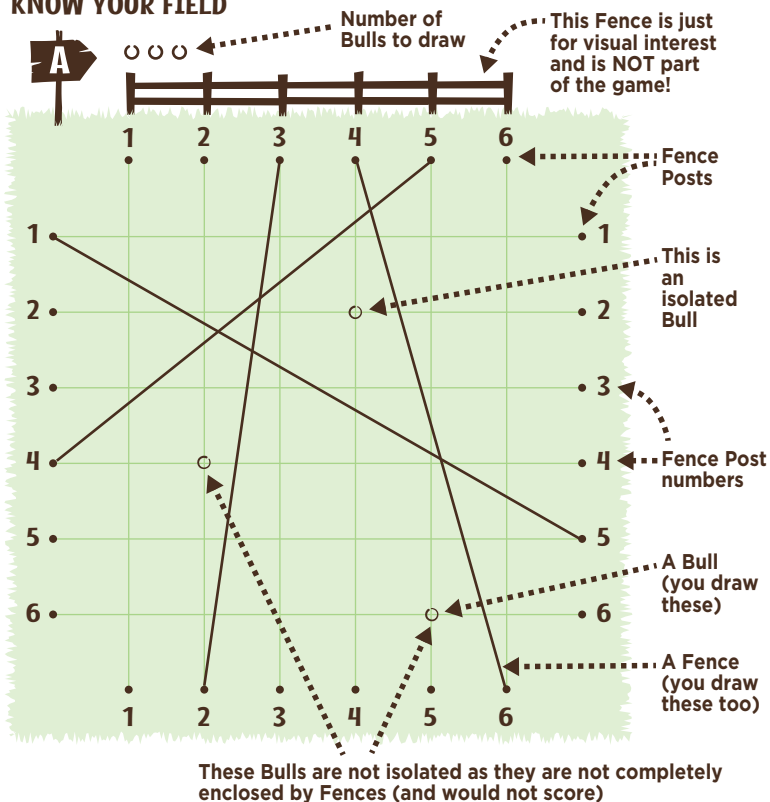
Position the Bulls

Roll 2 different coloured dice. One will indicate the column number and the other the row number on the field (decide beforehand which colour will represent columns and which rows).

Draw a Bull as a small circle (the smaller the better!) at the position where the lines of the column and row meet.

Repeat until you have drawn the number of Bulls indicated for that field (re-roll if a position is already occupied).

KNOW YOUR FIELD



Build Fences

On each turn roll 3 dice and choose 2 of the numbers rolled. These represent the numbered Fence Posts around the field's perimeter. A field starts with all sides open and without any Fences. To build a Fence, draw a **straight line**, starting from a Post represented by one of the numbers and ending on a Post represented by the other. The posts you use must be on different sides of the Field.

Note that a Fence cannot pass through a Bull!

You cannot start or finish the Fence on a Post that has already been used, unless you roll a pair or 3 of a kind (see below).

Rolling a pair

If 2 of the dice rolled are of the same number then you may use them to start or finish the Fence on a Post of that number - even if it has already been used **once**.

Note that a Post can never be used more than twice.

The third die rolled then represents the number of the other Post.

You may, of course, choose to use the 2 dice for different posts of the same number if those Posts have not been used at all.

Rolling 3 of a kind

If all 3 dice rolled are of the same number then you may **join two Posts of that number**, even if they **both** have already been used **once**.

Passing

If, following the roll of the dice, you are unable to build a Fence (or choose not to) then you **must** mark off one of the Mallet boxes. You are allowed 3 Passes during the game. If you Pass and all 3 Mallets have been used then the game ends (the uncompleted Field scores as explained below).

Completing a field

A field is considered completed when every Bull is **isolated**. Isolated Bulls are those that are **separated** from the other Bulls **AND completely enclosed** by the Fences you have drawn. You score points for each isolated Bull (multiplied by 3 to 6, depending on the Field), plus a bonus of 1 point for each unused Fence Post in the completed field.

Leaving a field uncompleted

You may, **before rolling the dice**, leave a field and move onto the next one. In this case you score points for any isolated Bulls but **NOT** for unused Posts. You may not return to a field once you've left it.

End of game

Once the last field, D, is completed (or left) then the game ends. You score 3 bonus points for each Mallet remaining. Add this to your scores for each field to arrive at your final total.

HOW WELL DID YOU DO?

< 40	Terri-bull
40 - 59	Passa-bull
60 - 79	Respecta-bull
80 - 99	Commenda-bull
100 - 119	Admira-bull
120 - 139	Incredi-bull
140 - 159	Unbelieva-bull!
160 +	Impossi-bull! (check your scoring!)

If you've enjoyed Raging Bulls why not try the game online? With new features, sound, tutorials and missions, this digital version includes cows, sheep, a prize bull, shed building, ponds and more! Visit www.happymeeples.com





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BOARD GAMES IN THE CLASSROOM



Jon Den Houter

Freelance Writer
and Avid Gamer

Gamers gather around a table to unbox a new board game or bring out an old favorite. Together, they enter into a unique experience of mental challenge, social interaction, and creative play — an experience that draws them together. But can this special experience have anything to do with learning?

John Coveyou, founder of Genius Games, insists that it does. Whenever you take a seat around a table to play a board game, “your mind can’t not begin to pick up information about the world that the game is themed around.” Without a doubt, learning is part of the experience, but is it a big enough part to justify using board games in the classroom? If so, how can board games be best used for learning?



GAME PUBLISHERS WHO HAVE EDUCATION IN MIND

Lance Hill, founder of Funhill games, designed *Kings of Israel* to teach his church youth group the geography of ancient Israel. "I had been dabbling with game design," he says, "and it popped into my head that a game could probably teach the locations pretty well."

"The game board is a map of the Northern Kingdom of Israel," he explains, "and in each round, my youth group kids got a little bit better at becoming familiar with finding the locations on the board. At the same time, I had a special Bible study that I used in between rounds that explained why each location was important in the game. That helped the teens to attach events and people to the locations on the board."

In the same way that playing any map of *Ticket to Ride* can teach players the city names and locations, by playing *Kings of Israel* a person can't help but learn the names of several important cities in ancient Israel.



For Coveyou, educational value has always been the main consideration, as well. Before he founded Genius Games, he was a middle and high school science teacher who used board games, which he designed himself, as learning activities in his classroom. "We think of a school as a place where students must stop playing so that they can start learning. But why do these pursuits have to be mutually exclusive?" he asks in a 2015 article for Middleweb.com.

Since day one, Coveyou's vision for Genius Games has been to make games that are both genuinely fun to play, and accurate in the science concepts they present. Based on comments on Board Game Geek (BGG), Coveyou has succeeded. Mike Bialecki, a biology professor for 10 years who has a Ph.D. in developmental genetics, comments about *Cytosis* (a game Coveyou designed around the theme of cellular biology): "The marriage between theme and mechanics is very strong — so much so that I can see myself using the game to teach students about the endomembrane system." Another person cheered this post, commenting, "This is one of the most extraordinary statements I've seen on this site. [*Cytosis* is] a highly-rated science-based game that is accurate enough to be used in a college course."



All of Genius Games' board games come with a "Science Behind" document, written by Ph.D. scientists, doctors, and educators, which explains the science used in the game. This document can be used by itself as a supplement to classroom instruction or in combination with the students playing the game.

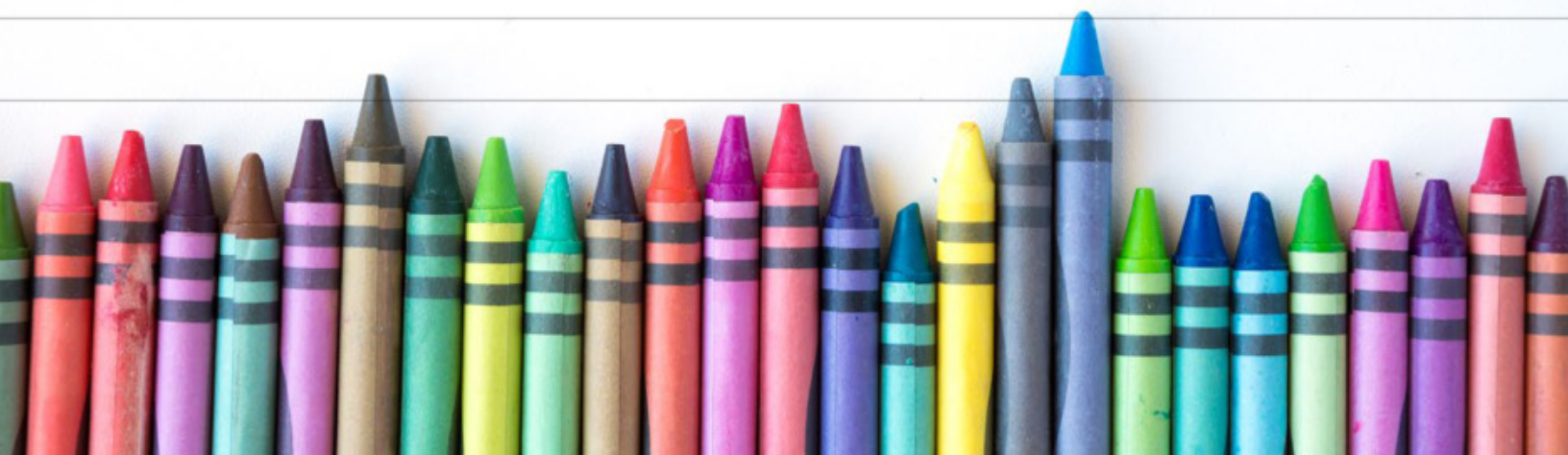
I asked Coveyou which of his company's games he would recommend teachers start with. He said for teachers who are familiar with hobby board games, *Periodic* makes a genuinely good game out of the periodic table. For teachers who aren't gamers, *Ion* is an excellent place to start. "It's like *Sushi Go*, with you building neutral compounds." Not only can students learn how neutral compounds are formed by playing the game, but also teachers can use the cards as a standalone teaching aid. Coveyou further suggested that teachers could have a copy of *Ion* available for students who finish their work early to give them something engaging to do that still fulfills learning objectives.

HABA also designs board games with learning in mind. T. Caires from HABA USA told me that HABA games "are great at [teaching] a variety of skills, and that's on purpose! We have children's psychologists on staff to help us develop games that work on different development skills. [Our games teach] things as simple as colors, shapes, numbers, and quantities at the younger level, and [concepts] like probability, economic planning, and strategy at the older level. Also, of course, our dexterity games teach fine and gross motor skills." Asked how teachers might use HABA games in their classrooms, Caires remarked that some teachers have dedicated one of their classroom stations to board games. For classrooms of younger students, teachers often recruit a parent volunteer to help students at that station play the games.

Board games are great at creating engagement, which itself enhances student learning, but I still wasn't convinced that board games are as good for teaching as other, more



"rigorous" teaching methods. To this latter point, Caires said that many teachers who use HABA games in their classroom just "like the side effect of what the students learn as they play." This comment reminded me what Hill had said about teaching a Bible Study in between rounds of *Kings of Israel*. It was clear to me that right out of the box, board games can be used in the classroom to create engagement and produce a learning *side effect*. However, when teachers creatively and thoughtfully implement board games into their classroom, supplementing them as necessary with additional instruction and activities, board games can also produce learning as the *main effect*.



Castle Panic

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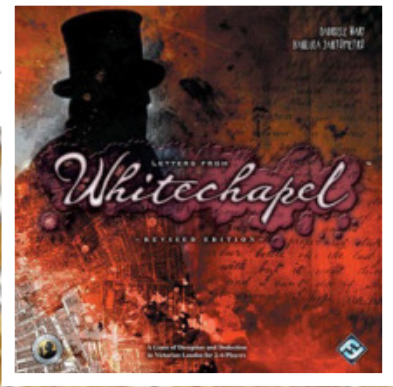
My First Castle Panic



A Cooperative Game for Kids!

"It is still out on the dining room table because the daughter wants to play it nearly every day."
—Rebekah M.





Games such as *Letters from Whitechapel* can be used for teaching skills such as deduction, teamwork, and communication. Photo by Chris Norwood (*kilroy_locke* on BGG), licensed under CC BY 3.0.

PRACTICAL TIPS FOR USING BOARD GAMES IN THE CLASSROOM

Many teachers are already used to making test review games for their students. Board games are at least as good, if not better, for class review games. Martin Knight, a history teacher at William Carey Christian School in Australia, makes class review games using *Wits and Wagers* and *Timeline*. "I have my own questions [for *Wits and Wagers*] and have created *Timeline* cards for all my units of work. For my seniors I keep a set of cards in the library and encourage them to play against each other when they don't actually want to study." Many other board games lend themselves to the review game format, such as *Terra*, *Concept*, and *Times Up*.

Other types of games, such as *Deception: Murder in Hong Kong* and *Letters from Whitechapel*, can be used for teaching skills such as deduction, teamwork, and communication. Jon Cassie, Director of Innovation at TVT Community Day School in Irvine, California and creator of the Game Level Learn Podcast, uses *Letters from Whitechapel* with his high school business students as a fishbowl activity. (A fishbowl is a learning protocol in which students form an inner circle and an outer circle; students in the inner circle take part in a discussion while their partners in the outer circle take notes on how well they contribute the discussion.) Cassie plays as Jack the Ripper while students in the

inner circle play as the police, working together to catch him. The students' partners in the outer circle take notes on how well each student in the inner circle communicates as they try to catch Jack. After the game is over, the students reflect together on why they were (or weren't) able to catch Jack, discussing possible communication breakdowns and how those affected the game result. Not only is this activity excellent





for teaching collaboration and communication skills, Cassie admits it is also one of the students' favorite activities of the year!

In addition to board games themselves, board game mechanics can be creatively implemented in the classroom to foster student learning. For example, the drafting mechanic from games like *7 Wonders* can be used in small group activities, and the auction mechanic from games like *For Sale* can be used to auction off to

students first choice of topic. For teachers who want to implement board games and board game mechanics in their classroom, the key is to play a wide variety of games. Cassie compares this to research. "When teachers are reading about a new approach to pedagogy, they read lots of articles to build up their bibliography." In the same way, teachers who want to use board games and board game mechanics in their classroom play lots of games to "build up their ludography."

WORTH THE RISK

For many teachers, using board games in their teaching seems too fraught with risk. For one thing, many people see playing board games as a light learning activity that does not belong in classrooms focused on excellence. Yet learning activities creatively designed around board games can be just as rigorous as traditional learning methods, not to mention that board games create engagement, which increases student learning.

Another risk teachers face when seeking to use board games is having to change their teaching style, which can be difficult for teachers who have honed their teaching methods over many years. In the case of board games, the rewards are well worth the risk. "If a teacher takes a swing and it doesn't work," Cassie says, "the students are going to be like, 'Thank you so much for taking a risk!'" Teachers want to impress upon their students the necessity of taking risks in learning and in life, and what better way to do that than to lead by example?



Many teachers have already taken the risk to use board games in their classroom and are seeing the rewards. Martin Knight even encourages educators to make up their own games to teach curriculum to students. "Don't be afraid to make up your own games," he says. "A failed lesson using board games is still a fun lesson, and therefore successful." 🎲





Gaming By Degrees:

The Philosophical Journey of Dr. Finn's Games



Skip Maloney

Writer, Actor, Director, and
Long-time Game Enthusiast



Early in his career as a self-publishing game designer, Dr. Stephen Finn earned a reputation as a designer of filler games. In fact, Richard Ham, host of the well-known board gaming video series and podcast “Rahdo Runs Through,” has called Finn the “undisputed King of the Filler.” It was a title that Finn embraced.

“There was a time,” notes Finn, “when ‘filler’ wasn’t a pejorative term, but I think it’s now becoming one. I was always proud to call myself the King of the Fillers, because I was thinking of ‘filler’ as just a quick thing.”

“However, over time, I began to realize that it may be to my detriment and now, I try to avoid it.” Not completely. Finn continues to promote the phrase on his company’s website because “being King of anything is still a good thing.”

“I was thinking maybe it would become something bigger.”



A funny thing happened to Stephen Finn on his way to becoming a well-respected game designer and eponymous publisher (Dr. Finn's Games). Born in 1967, Finn's early pursuit of higher education began with an interest in physics. This was followed by a brief interest in psychology, and eventually led to the pursuit of multiple degrees in philosophy that culminated with his acquisition of a Ph.D. and a full-time job as a college philosophy professor.

"I had a position as an adjunct professor at Seattle University. While I was finishing my Ph.D. work I re-discovered *Risk* briefly," he says. "I happened to be walking by a game store during this time and I came across this Michael Schacht game called *Web of Power*, an area control game like *Risk* but quicker. I played that game a ton and I started buying and playing a lot of games."

Eventually, Finn got the idea of making his own games. But in one of those "life is what happens to you while you're busy making other plans" moments, he got sidetracked. He came to the realization that one couldn't buy a custom deck of playing cards anywhere, so he decided to learn how to make a deck of cards at a reasonable price. He made arrangements with a local print shop where he used a high-end digital printer, found really good card stock, and bought



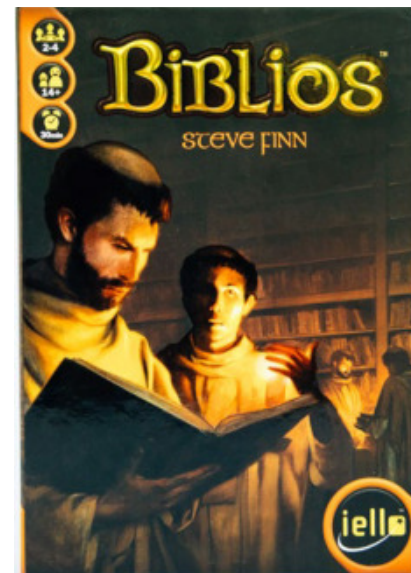
a Kluge letter press, which he used as a die-cutter to cut the pieces of large cardstock that he was having printed.

"I created a little company to make customized playing cards. I made almost no money from it, so it was almost a hobby," he recalls. "I was thinking maybe it would become something bigger. So, I'd developed this game and got sidetracked for a couple of years, making playing cards in small runs."

They changed the name to *Biblios*

Eventually, Finn worked his way back to designing and producing his own games. He'd buy plastic cases used for VHS tapes wholesale and use them to package his games, producing small runs — 25, 50, or 100 at a time — and try to sell those. He describes them as "highly amateur" — certainly nothing close to the quality of games he publishes today. In search of a broader audience in the early 2000s and having recently discovered Board Game Geek (which launched in 2000), he took one of his games, *Scriptorium*, and offered it for free to anyone willing to write a review. He sent out about 25 copies of the game.

"Somehow," he says, "one of these games made it to France — I don't know how — and ended up in the hands of IELLO. They were not a game company yet, but they wanted to go into game publishing and picked this game to be their first."



Originally published by IELLO in 2007, the now rebranded *Biblios* has gone on to garner 15,000 ratings on BGG with an average rating (on the 1-10 scale) of 7.2. Now, fourteen years later, *Biblios* is still Dr. Finn's most well-known game. It's sold over 40,000 copies and been translated into multiple languages.



I am a very, very, very small company

As the reach and reputation of his games grow, further reach and growth is being inhibited by Dr. Finn's own decision to maintain control of his own company. He now runs Dr. Finn's Games out of his home in Westchester County, New York, where he lives with his wife and two sons. He has discovered and continues to utilize Kickstarter to finance the production of his designs but has developed ongoing relationships with a few publishers like Arcane Wonders, TGG Games, and Pencil First Games. However, he does not foresee giving up his hands-on approach to game design and publication. "I am a very, very, very small company," he admits. "It's me. I don't have the marketing, or the reach of these larger companies and I don't really go to conventions."

"It's amazing to me that that I can make 1,000 games and sell out of them. I don't have the distribution that I can make 5,000 copies at a time," he adds. "I have a really strong following, but it's not a huge following. If I had to make my company huge, I would have to stop working and make this my thing, but I like this grass roots, independent, entrepreneurial spirit. And

I'm reluctant to give up control to a lot of people, actually to my detriment."

And, it would seem, Dr. Finn's Games will likely continue to produce filler games, primarily because they're the sort of games that Finn himself likes to play. "If I have an hour to spend," he states, "I'd rather play two games than one." Finn is a chess player, but not without a clock. It's an indication of how, as a designer, he combines brevity with depth in unique ways.

"No one's going to tell me that a five-minute chess game is easy," he said. "Quick chess is not a filler game."

Like Finn, Richard Ham is a gamer who enjoys shorter fare. "They're incredibly smart games," Ham mentions. "Just because they're lighter, doesn't mean they don't have interesting depth and intricacies. Another thing that's pretty consistent is that with his games, you're always very engaged with what your opponent is doing, so there's no multiplayer solitaire to it."

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I always have games in the hopper

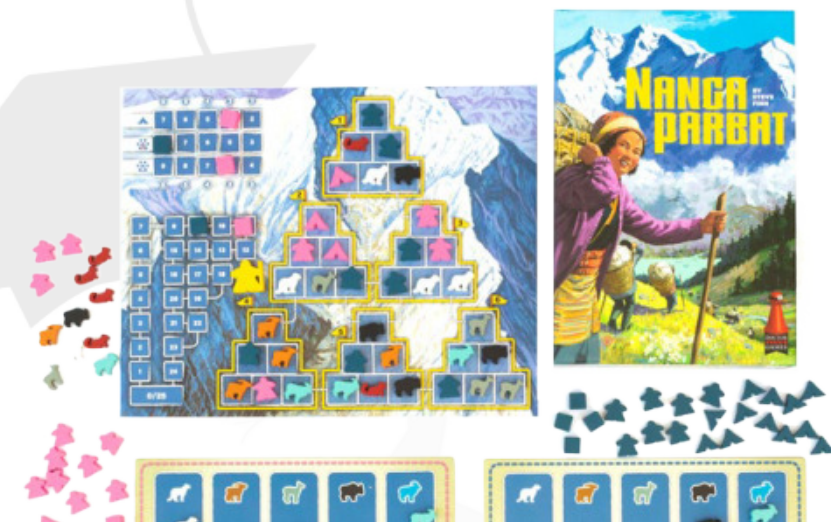
Though fraught with a sort of built-in disappointment that many of his games are out of print, and with no immediate plans for reprints, Dr. Finn does offer his growing legions of fans some consolation. In comments related to his game *Waters of Nereus* on Board Game Geek, Finn explained that the game was

“essentially out of print, [with no plans] for a second edition any time soon, if at all.”



“This is sad news, Steve,” wrote fan, Jonathan Franklin. **“Do you have any other new games in the hopper?”**

“I always have games in the hopper,” Finn wrote back. Those games include *Biblios: Quill and Parchment* (a roll and write version of *Biblios*), *Mining Colony* (previously *Cosmic Run: Mining Colony*), *Nanga Parbat* (a completely new two-player game), and a new version of *Butterfly Garden* called *Butterfly Gardens*.

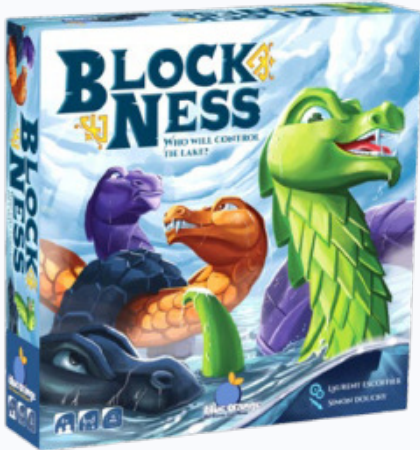




"In addition," Finn added, "Pencil First Games will Kickstart *The Whatnot Cabinet*, of which I was the primary game designer." And a Kickstarter campaign for a Finn design called *Mob: The Big Apple* is to be published by TGG Games. Hardly sounds like the work of a small operation. 🎲



Coming soon!



WHOSE MONSTER WILL CONTROL THE LAKE?





Winner of CGI's Best Casual Game of 2020 award, *Calico* is filled with adorable cats and versatility in its tile laying, giving it a combination of challenging gameplay and soothing delightful theme.



Naomi Laeuchli
Game Reviewer and
Casual Game Groupie

Each player has a quilt board on which they will be laying the hexagonal quilt tiles. Each tile is one of six different colors and has one of six different patterns. You start with three design goal tiles placed near the center of your board. These will score points if you make certain designs around them (such as three pairs or all different tiles) either based on tile color or pattern. If you make the design in both color and pattern, it's worth extra points.

On your turn you place one of the two tiles in your hand onto an empty space on your board and then take one of the three tiles from the display (a new tile is drawn from the bag to

replace it). If you've created a set of three matching colors you place a corresponding button on one of the tiles in the set. If you ever have at least one button of each color, you earn a bonus rainbow button. Each button is worth three points. You also check if you've attracted a cat. There are three cats each game, worth a different number of points. Each cat has two tile patterns it likes that are randomized each game, and wants either a certain number of one of those patterns grouped together or forming a certain shape. If you meet the cat's requirements, you get to place one of its tokens on your board. Sets can also include the quilt tiles that are printed around the edge of your player board. When earning buttons or cats, new tile sets cannot be touching sets that already have the same cat or button on it. Once each player has filled their board, the game ends. The person with the highest score is the master quilter!

Calico

Designed by Kevin Russ

1-4 PLAYERS	30-45 MINS	AGES 14+	\$40 MSRP
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LUCK	STRATEGY
INTERACTIVE	INDEPENDENT

Calico's scoring system isn't too complicated, but it offers variety from game to game as there are several different design goals and cats to play with. Since you can only work with the tiles you have, the game prevents you from overthinking — but you still have room to pull off some clever combinations, and you do need to think ahead for creating sets.

The puzzle of the game is just tricky enough to keep you engaged, while still allowing you to enjoy the relaxed nature of the theme. There's little player interaction outside of drafting tiles away from each other, but the game is pleasant and thoroughly cozy.



Attending a mysterious funfair, you start to have psychic visions. Can you catch a killer before the evening is through?



One player is the ghost and everyone else plays as psychics. During phase one, nine character cards are placed on the board in a three-by-three grid. The ghost draws a random plot card, which shows three blank spaces on the board, a character for each psychic, and a witness spot. The ghost also draws a hand of seven vision cards. Each vision card shows fantastical, elaborate drawings. The ghost is trying to get each psychic to guess their respective characters. Each round the ghost gives one or more vision cards to each player, selecting ones whose images can be interpreted as clues, pointing towards a player's character card on the board.

Once a psychic has received their vision cards, all the psychics can discuss them. At the end of the round, every player must guess which character they believe is theirs. If anyone guesses the witness, the ghost announces it and everyone who did so must move their token to another character. The ghost then reveals who correctly found their character. If everyone has found their character, they move onto phase two. Otherwise, there is another round in which the remaining players receive more cards and guess their characters. Phase two is the same, only with locations instead of characters, and the ghost draws a new plot card. If the players manage to complete both phases in six rounds, they move onto phase three, otherwise they lose.

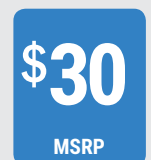
During phase three, the ghost takes the character and location cards that were on the blank spaces of rounds one and two, and places them on the board so that there is one character and one location in each column. They draw another plot card that shows which column is the

correct set. The ghost selects two vision cards and gives them to the psychics. If the psychics can guess the right set of cards, everyone wins the game.

Mysterium Park takes a great game (*Mysterium*) and improves upon it in a way that casual gamers can appreciate. It cuts down playtime without losing any of the meat of the gameplay and does away with some of the more complicated rules which made learning *Mysterium* take longer. The setup, run by the plot cards, is also much smoother, and makes the game more compact and portable. The game keeps everything that made *Mysterium* such an enjoyable experience, while also streamlining it with an aesthetically appealing theme. The result is a smoother and more enjoyable game that easily replaces the original for us.

Mysterium Park

Designed by Oleksandr Nevskiy, Oleg Sidorenko



LUCK

STRATEGY



INTERACTIVE

INDEPENDENT





Live the sugary dream in *Candy Lab*, as you fulfill orders of candy bars and compete for the title of master confectioner!



There are 27 plastic bars (nine in three different colors). You mix these up and place them in a line. The order cards are shuffled and five are dealt to each player (six in a two player game). The rest of the deck is then set on the table and three cards are drawn to make the display. An order card has a point value and one to three bars shown with colors displayed.

On your turn you may play an order card, in which case you place it face-up on top of your score pile and take the bars indicated from the line. The bars must be the correct colors in the same order as shown on the card; however, the card can be flipped upside down to be read in either direction when finding the pattern in the line. Each bar shows a point value from one to three, and many also show a symbol. Each symbol on a bar triggers an action you must perform when taking it.

There are five possible actions: draw a card from the draw pile or take one from the display, discard a card from another player's hand, take a bar from another player and place it back in the line, discard the last card a player scored, or exchange your hand with another player. Alternatively on your turn, you can return up to three of your bars to the line. You then add the values of the returned bars and draw that number of cards from the display and/or draw pile. If you cannot play a card and have no bars to return, you simply draw a card and end your turn.

The game ends once the last bar is taken from the line (the player who takes it earns three bonus points) or the last card is taken from the draw pile. Players add up the points on their scored cards and their bars and the player with the most points wins.

Gameplay in *Candy Lab* is fast and there is plenty of action. Since almost every bar you take triggers an action, cards and bars are continually moving around the table. You have to consider how each choice will resolve, and even which bars to put back can be a tough decision, as that means their actions are now available for other players to claim. The tactile experience of the bars is great and the game is bright and colorful. It's got clever mechanics, plenty of player interaction, and engaging choices every turn.

Candy Lab

Designed by Thomas Danede

2-4 PLAYERS	15 MINS	AGES 8+	\$20 MSRP
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LUCK	STRATEGY
INTERACTIVE	INDEPENDENT

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20-30 min
PLAYTIME

2 or 4 players
PLAYERS

14+
AGE



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Jubako is a stacking spatial puzzle game named after boxes used to display food in Japan.



Each player takes two tiles and a board that shows a five-by-five grid. Eight spaces on each board show eight different delicacies. There are twelve types of delicacies in the game. Each game tile is divided in half like a domino and shows two delicacies. The game requires you to balance high scoring moves with ensuring you don't cut yourself off for future turns.

bonus points). After placing your tile, you choose one of the two delicacies shown on the placed tile and score one point for each copy of that delicacy that is visible on your board. If on your turn you cannot place any of your tiles, you must discard a tile and lose one point. After all game tiles are placed or discarded, the game ends and the player with the most points wins.

On your turn you either draw a tile from the face-down pile or select one of the four in the display. You then place one of your tiles on your board. A tile covers two spaces. You may place it on any empty spaces or place it so that one of the tile's delicacies covers one of the printed delicacies on the board if they match. You may also place a tile on top of one or two tiles if at least one delicacy on the tile you are placing matches the delicacy it is covering (if both match, you score five

Jubako has a number of variants to increase difficulty or add layers to the scoring; however, the core game is intriguing enough in its own right. The tile placement is easy at first but you soon realize that it pays to plan ahead or you might find yourself with fewer and fewer worthwhile options in the later rounds if you create too many empty spaces you can't layer.

Aesthetically, the game is colorful. The tiles are a little awkward to shuffle and stack, but they provide a nice tactile experience. There isn't much direct player interaction, but it is a game in which you can keep an eye on your opponent and draft tiles away from them effectively without hurting yourself too much in the process.

The puzzle is challenging, with a nice escalation of difficulty, while the gameplay itself remains simple to learn. Since you have three tiles in hand each round, there's plenty of opportunities to plan out high scoring moves and it's quite satisfying when you manage to pull one off.

Jubako

Designed by Michael Kiesling, Wolfgang Kramer

 2-4 PLAYERS	 20-30 MINS	 AGES 8+	 \$30 MSRP
 LUCK	 STRATEGY		
 INTERACTIVE	 INDEPENDENT		



Shift the tiles to complete the patterns on your cards; but you must choose wisely which cards you score and which you use to move the tiles.



The game has nine tiles that are laid out in the center of the table in a three-by-three grid. Each tile has a different color on either side. The deck of pattern cards is then shuffled and four are dealt to each player. Each card shows a pattern you can replicate with the tiles, showing a number of tiles, their colors, and placement in relation to each other. Some specify where in the grid the tiles have to appear. On your turn you can use as many of your cards as you wish. You can discard a card to swap two adjacent tiles or flip a tile over to its opposite side. If you create a pattern as it appears on one of your cards you can score it, placing it in front of you. Cards have a point value of one to five. At the end of your turn, you draw up to a hand of four. Alternatively, you may pass your turn in order to draw up to a hand of six.

Once a player has scored a set number of cards and everyone has taken an equal number of turns, the game ends. Players then count up the points as shown on each of their scored cards. The player who scored the most cards worth a value of one earns a three point bonus. Whoever has the most points wins.

There is certainly some luck involved in *Shifting Stones*. Sometimes you draw a pattern card that requires minimal shifting of the tiles and other times everything in your hand requires a lot of movement. But it's still fascinating to see the ways the tiles rapidly shift position, as each

player manipulates the board towards their separate ends. You want to keep an eye on what your opponents appear to be trying to accomplish. The multipurpose cards can also lead to tough choices. Should you hold onto this five point card, in hopes the tiles move in that direction and you might be able to score it later, or spend it now for a smaller but more immediate score?

Shifting Stones is delightful in its simplicity. It can take a little while to memorize which colors share a tile, but the reference cards ensure this doesn't slow down initial gameplay too much. It's a nice blend of luck and strategy, and it feels great when you complete a complex pattern.

Shifting Stones

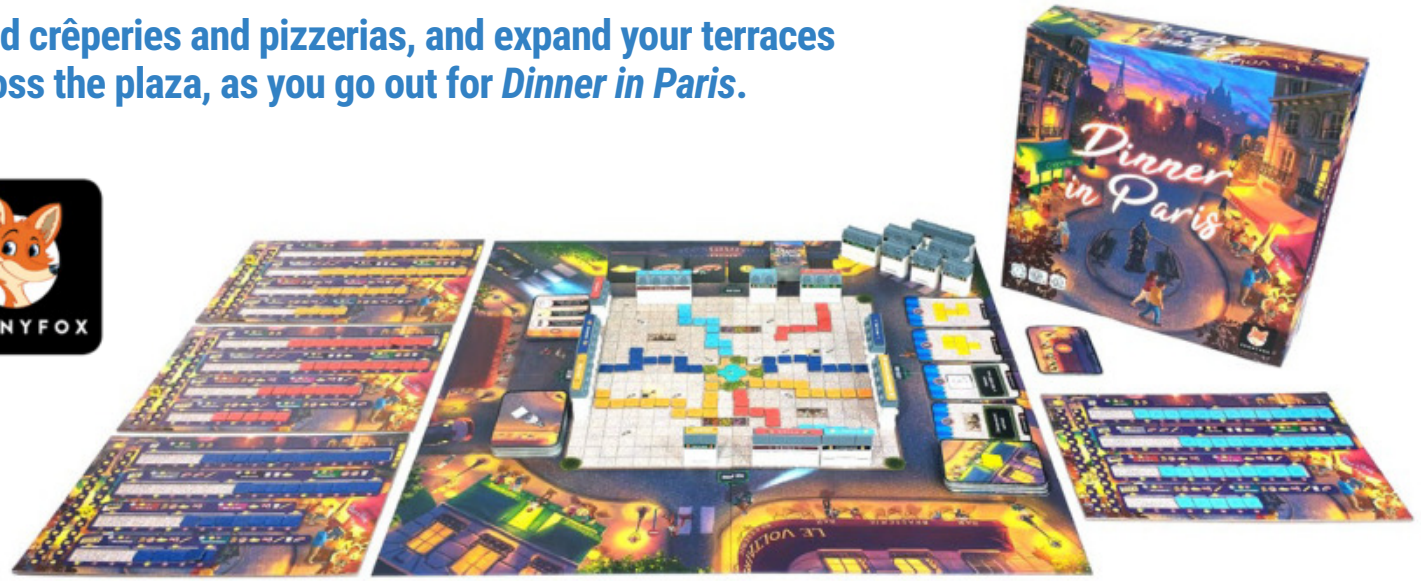
Designed by J. Evan Raitt

2-5 PLAYERS	20 MINS	AGES 8+	\$15 MSRP
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LUCK	STRATEGY
INTERACTIVE	INDEPENDENT



Build crêperies and pizzerias, and expand your terraces across the plaza, as you go out for *Dinner in Paris*.



Each turn you take an ingredient card either from the top of the deck or choosing from the display. You then take two actions. Actions include taking an ingredients card, opening a restaurant, building terraces, or completing an objective. There are five different sizes of restaurants and eight different restaurant types. Each type requires a different set of ingredients in order to build it. A built restaurant is placed on the board along the edge of the plaza. Different restaurants are worth a certain amount of points and increase your income by different amounts. There are only a few of each restaurant, so players must compete against each other for these limited buildings, which adds an interesting angle to the player interaction.

Players have a certain number of terrace tiles available for each size of restaurant. The more you build for each size, the more expensive they become. You can also earn income and points for building them. If you take the terrace

action you may build as many as you wish and can afford (money does not carry over between turns). When placing a tile it must be adjacent to a restaurant or its terrace. It cannot be placed adjacent to another restaurant's terrace. If you place a tile on a space showing a pigeon, you draw a pigeon card which gives you a one-time bonus.

Each player has a private objective with public objectives available on the table. These will often require you to lay terraces in particular shapes, for example. Completed objectives are worth a set number of points at the end of the game, while uncompleted private objectives will lose points. After you complete a private objective you draw another and choose whether to keep it private or to make it public. Do you want to keep it private and risk losing points if you fail to complete it?

The game ends once a certain number of restaurants or terraces are built. Players earn additional points for having the majority of certain elements (such as money or pigeon cards) as determined by a card drawn at the start of the game.

Initial setup is a bit onerous as you put together the buildings and attach the sometimes finicky stickers, but this only applies the first time. *Dinner in Paris* is accessible and gameplay easy to learn, but it has heft in its strategy, tile placement, and scoring options, while still keeping the play time to forty minutes. It's a game that can easily take center stage at game night.

Dinner in Paris

Designed by Les Trolls Associés

2-4 PLAYERS

40 MINS

AGES 10+

MSRP \$40



LUCK

STRATEGY



INTERACTIVE

INDEPENDENT



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SUPER-SKILL PINBALL: 4-CADE



Super-Skill Pinball: 4-Cade is a roll-and-write game that takes you to the pinball table.



Everyone takes a matching pinball board and places a ball on the start location. Each turn, two dice are rolled, and each player chooses one of the two numbers, moves their ball to a space on their board that shows that number, and then marks it off. Boards are divided into zones and you may only move your ball to a spot in its current zone or a lower zone. There are two flippers, a red and a yellow, at the bottom of the boards. When your ball hits one, next turn the ball can only go to a feature marked in white or whose color matches that of the flipper you hit.

Arrows between certain features mean you can move your ball between them, often earning points as you hit them. Some features, once you hit a set of them, unlock special abilities such as increasing the points you earn or giving you two balls to move each turn. When a space is marked

off you cannot hit it again. Some marks are erased once you have completed the set or when you start a new round.

You may nudge the table three times, changing one die result for yourself. However, if on the next roll the difference between the two dice is less than the amount you changed the die, then you automatically end the round. If you ever have no legal moves for your ball, you also end the round. Players can be on different rounds during the game. The player with the most points after everyone has played all three rounds is the winner.

There are four different themes of pinball boards included in the game. Each has slightly different rules or abilities you can unlock, but share many of the basic rules. There are a number of rules spread out across all the boards, but *Super-Skill Pinball* doesn't force you to other tables until you're ready to do so. Even the simplest table has a lot of replay value.

The components are nice quality with creatively designed boards, although you want to be careful not to smear your marks when moving your ball across them. There are plenty of options on your turn, as you choose between the two dice and weigh your options and sometimes push your luck. The dice rolls become steadily more suspenseful each turn. It's a clever game with an excellent blend of mechanics and theme, and does a good job of evoking its pinball theme.

Super Skill Pinball: 4-Cade

Designed by Geoff Engelstein

1-4 PLAYERS

30 MINS

AGES 12+

\$25 MSRP



LUCK STRATEGY



INTERACTIVE INDEPENDENT





Stay Cool is a party game all about multitasking under pressure over the course of three rounds.



On your turn, you take a set of lettered dice. One player will ask you questions from a card requiring verbal answers and one player will ask you questions requiring written answers, which you make by turning the dice around to form them. Occasionally, rather than a question, there may be a small action you have to perform. The two question askers cannot talk over each other, but are supposed to keep asking the questions if the active player stops listening to one or both of them. If the active player gets a question wrong, the same question is asked again. The active player may skip one question each round.

Each round a sand timer is running. Your turn lasts for four flips of the timer. During the first round, an opponent flips it whenever it runs out. During the second round, the active player must watch the timer and ask for it to be flipped before it runs out, or their turn ends early. This continues the same way during the third round, except the timer is hidden from view, forcing the active player to guess as to how much time is left. Each round

you earn points equal to the number of correct verbal answers multiplied by the number of your correct written answers.

Stay Cool is an enjoyable combination of stressful and fun. It's challenging to answer questions as you're bombarded by them, but it feels good when you manage it and it's entertaining to watch other players take their turns. 🧠

Stay Cool

Designed by Julien Sentis

3-7 PLAYERS

25 MINS

AGES 12+

\$25
MSRP



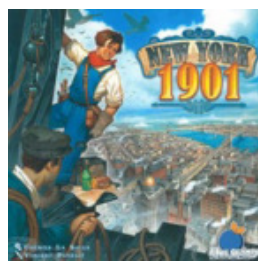
INTERACTIVE

INDEPENDENT



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Cupcake Academy is Major Fun!

The Concept

Seven minutes separate you and your team of pastry chefs from enrolling at the world-famous Cupcake Academy. How many assignments can you complete, exchanging and stacking colored cups on plates, readying them for the kitchen? Be quick but be careful. The judges are very picky, so each order must be just right for everyone to move on. Complete all the assignments before time is up and you'll enjoy the sweet taste of victory!

The Components

The components in *Cupcake Academy* are colorful and charming and help set the mood. There are 20 hard-plastic cupcake cups in five different sizes and bright colors. The cups nest nicely into each other whether right side up or upside down.

Each player has a set of three personal plate tiles. This is where you'll stack your cups. The team also shares one large plate tile. This is where you'll swap cups. A deck of 60 assignment cards will define your challenges each game.

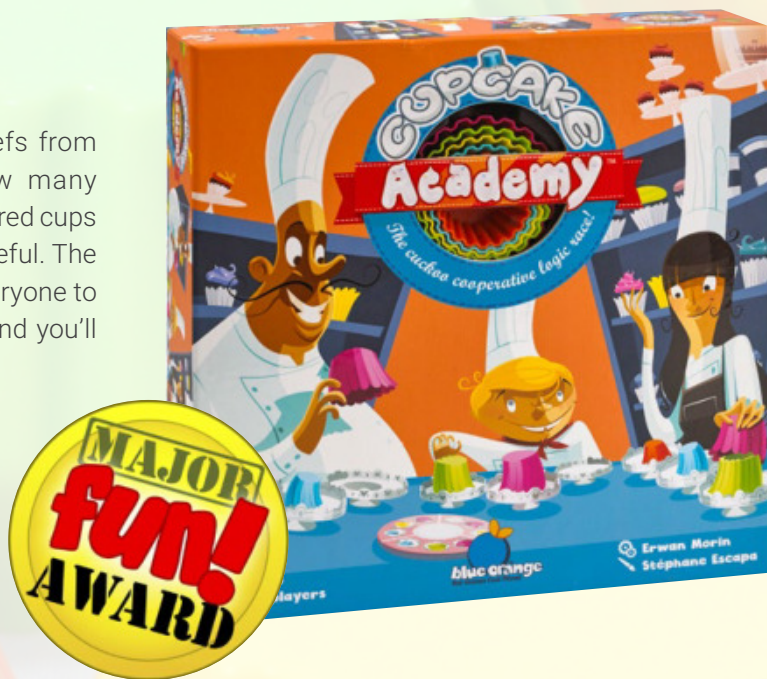
The Mechanics

Cupcake Academy is a cooperative stacking and pattern-matching game driven by logic. The goal is to complete all the assignment cards within the allotted time.

To play, shuffle and create a stack of assignment cards based on the number of players. Each player arranges their cups in a single stack on their personal center plate. Place the shared plate within reach of everyone. When the team is ready, flip the timer, the first assignment card, and the game begins!

An assignment card shows a specific arrangement of cups for each player. The color and size of the cups shown is important. The position of the cups on the plates, though, doesn't matter. So, if I need to have my big green cup on a plate, it doesn't matter which one of my plates it is on.

In order to complete an assignment, every player must create a layout with the right number and color of cups to match the goal.



The assignment cards are color coded for two, three, or four players. A seven-minute sand timer drives *Cupcake Academy* and keeps players on their toes.



The shared plate must also be empty. When complete, flip the next assignment and continue until you complete the stack of assignment cards or run out of time. If you finish all the cards, huzzah! Your group becomes the next class of students at the Cupcake Academy. If you run out of time, not to worry, there's always next semester (or the next game).



What Sets This Game Apart?

On the surface, the goal to be accomplished seems so simple. What could be hard about placing the right color and size cup on a plate? First, remember each player has five cups to begin the round, nested like Russian dolls, with the large pink cup covering the rest. Using only one hand for the whole game, you'll be unstacking and restacking your cups to try and match the pattern.

If the assignment shown asks for you to have a blue cup and an orange cup showing on your plates, the remainder of your cups are going to have to go somewhere else. This means you are going to have to hide the others by nesting them OR sending your cups along to another player.

But here's the thing: The chefs running the Academy are a tricky bunch. You cannot simply give or take cups from another player's plate. You must use the shared plate to transfer cups and, to make matters worse, there can only be one cup on the shared plate at a time.

The challenge and fun of *Cupcake Academy* comes from learning when and how to unstack and restack your cups so that you can keep the ones you need, hide others underneath, and send the rest on to your teammates.

You need to understand your own needs, but the game forces you to look at the whole assignment and factor in the needs of your teammates too.



Cupcake Academy

Designed by Erwan Moran, Art by Stéphane Escapa



2-4 PLAYERS



10 MINS



AGES 8+



\$22

MSRP

Time to Teach/Learn: 2-3 minutes

Together, you must puzzle out how to pass cups in the right order via the shared plate so that everyone can create the right combination.

Communication is key to success and will almost certainly create hilarious moments of failure. It's almost inevitable that at some point your team will have to scramble to undo an entire chain of swapped cups in order to fix a problem in the pattern.

Final Thoughts

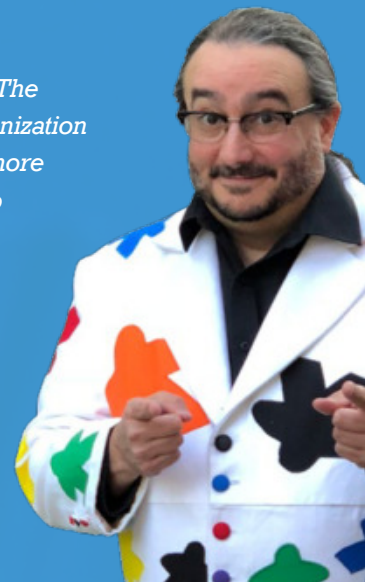
Cupcake Academy is a series of interconnected puzzles that blossom into a fun and challenging game. Time, pressure, and teamwork create a sometimes thoughtful, and sometimes frantic, experience that requires focus and contributions from everyone. The better you communicate, the more you'll accomplish.

Cupcake Academy is a surprising and wonderful blend. It manages to evoke the old-world charm of a slide puzzle (shift pieces, make a pattern) while drawing inspiration from video game culture. What was once a solitaire experience is now gamified; a layered puzzle with multiplayer co-op mode unlocked. It even comes with a checklist of achievements you can unlock as you ramp up the difficulty of the game.

Cupcake Academy can span generations. It's a mash-up of thinky and dexterity elements that feels fresh and different. It is clever enough to engage the brain but hectic enough to unlock the simple magic of Major Fun. 🎲

Stephen Conway is the director of The Spiel Foundation, a non-profit organization dedicated to making the world a more playful place. He also oversees two internationally recognized game award programs, The Major Fun Award and The Spiel of Approval.

For more information visit:
thespielfoundation.com,
thespiel.net, and majorfun.com





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A Spotlight on the
Gaming Community



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— Jack

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— Nikki C.



“Pass the Pigs, it is travel sized and easy for everyone to play.”

— Don W.

“Loot. It’s small, quick to teach, and since most of my travel includes scuba diving, the pirate theme shines.”

— Jeff G.

“I like bringing Munchkin or Exploding Kittens with me due to the quick setup.”

— Dylan G.

“Solo games! I do a lot of traveling to client sites — evenings are boring in the hotel room so I play games!”

— Jonathan B.





“I’ll always brings *Sushi Go* and *UNO*, because they’re quick and portable but always fun.”

— Taylor S.



“When traveling, I usually just bring small card based games like Sushi Go! to be able to have fun, but not take up a lot of room in my bags.”

— Bill W.

“Sushi Go or Geek Battle because they are convenient and small.”

— Timothy H.





TANTRUM HOUSE
FAMILY GAME OF THE YEAR 2020



BOARD GAME SPOTLIGHT
TOP 10 GOLD WINNER 2020

Explore the unique 3D gameboard; unearth incredible dinosaur fossils as your paleontologist rivals shift the terrain around you!



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BOARD GAME SPOTLIGHT
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THE DICE TOWER
TOP 100 OF ALL TIME

Territory denial. Cascading production. Magic & muscle. An innovative game for 2-5 trolls that is easy to learn but hides rich depths!



IN THE HALL OF THE MOUNTAIN KING

JAY CORMIER & GRAEME JAHNS • ART BY KWANCHAI MORIYA



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“Any version of *Fluxx*, *Play Nine*, *Sushi Go!*, *Go Nuts For Donuts*, *Just Desserts*, *Farkle*, *Rook*, *Cribbage*, and at least one deck of cards. Fun, easy to teach, and easy to transport (especially if flying).”

— Matt G.



“*Redneck Life* and several *Fluxx* card games. We can include family members of all ages to play, and we love the games.”

— Hope S.

“A deck of regular playing cards comes with me wherever I go. Aside from that, there’s often a version of *Fluxx* and something from the *Tiny Epic* series.”

— Chuck S.

“When I travel, I always have at least one *Tiny Epic* game with me. They’re small, so they don’t take up much space, and their gameplay is fantastic! I love all of the games in the *Tiny Epic* line, and the *Ultra-Tiny Epic* games (*Galaxies* and *Kingdoms*) make it even easier to bring those games along.”

— Benjamin K.



Next Issue: What is the most addicting game you’ve ever played?

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

UNDER FALLING SKIES

TAKE CHARGE OF DEFENDING CITIES OF EARTH FROM AN ALIEN INVASION!

Under Falling Skies is a solo game with a multi-mission campaign where all your actions are powered by an innovative dice placement mechanic. Expand your underground base, shoot down enemy ships, research their weaknesses, and complete your mission before your base is destroyed!

You will get your money's worth. You're gonna play a lot of it!
Zee Garcia of The Dice Tower



cge.as/ufsi



LOST RUINS OF ARNAK

EXPLORE JUNGLES, FIND ARTIFACTS, AND DISCOVER THE LOST RUINS OF ARNAK!

Players lead rival expeditions to a newly discovered island. Through a unique combination of worker placement and deckbuilding, each expedition attempts to uncover the lost island's secrets.



cge.as/ari



This game's fantastic. It is a breath of fresh air in both worker placement and resource management... and deckbuilding and card draft – it's everything really cool!

Dan King of Game Boy Geek



From the designer of *Suburbia* & *Castles of Mad King Ludwig*

MAGLEV MAGNETIC LEVITATION RAIL METRO

TED ALSPACH



THE FUTURE of TRAIN GAMES

