

SUMMER 2021 / #36



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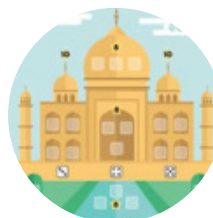
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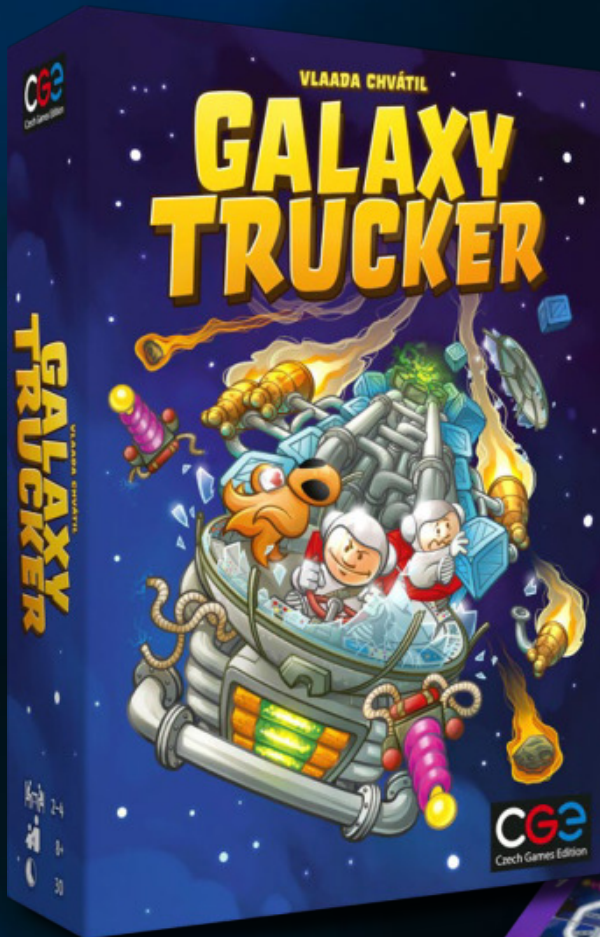


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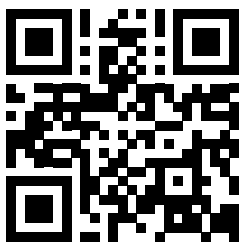
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KTBG (Kids Table Board Games) makes casual games for serious gamers and serious games for casual gamers. Burnt Island Games focuses on mid-weight games that are easy to learn and reveal surprising depth and richness.

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CzechGames.com



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**IMPERIAL
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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 has designed many original casual games like *Torpedo Dice*, *Eruption*, and *Off Your Rocker*. They are also the creative minds behind Casual Game Revolution and Casual Game Insider.

StratusGames.com



MAGLEV

MAGNETIC LEVITATION RAIL

METRO

A TRAIN GAME REVOLUTION

One look at the cover art for **Maglev Metro** and right away you know that something is different. It's dark, futuristic, and sleek — the antithesis of *Ticket to Ride*. Opening the box confirms this aesthetic: recessed game and player boards, stylistic passenger meeples, translucent metal trains, clear plastic track tiles, and impossibly thick station tiles. Even the name is strikingly different. Maglev is short for Magnetic Levitation, a technology that allows for super-fast, silent rail travel with trains literally floating on a cushion of air above the rails as they take passengers between stations.

In *Maglev Metro*, players build track between stations delivering robots (for new and enhanced abilities) and commuters (for points). One of the most unique aspects of track building is that players may build track exactly where other players have their track, without obscuring either of them. This is thanks to transparent plastic track tiles, which have colored track printed on them to allow up to four players to run track along the same path.



Track building is just one of the many actions available to players on their turn. They can also pick up and drop off passengers, build new stations, move their train, refill stations with more passengers, and — in a first for this sort of engine-building game — change their abilities. This is all managed through each player's board, a high-tech control center where robots are placed as they are delivered to stations, adding new abilities, and increasing existing technologies. Each player starts with two actions per turn, but if they wish, they can increase the number of actions available to them on a turn, up to five actions per turn.



Robots start out on the map, ready to be picked up and delivered to stations that match their color. And we mean literally picked up, as the futuristic metal train can hold up to 4 passengers, which you take from one location to another along the track you've built. When you drop them off at their destination, they go on your player board. Eventually you'll unlock the ability to carry human passengers, which are delivered for end-game victory points.



Each player also starts with a set of bonus VP cards, which have various objectives on them that can gain the player additional points. The card that provides the highest VPs is automatically scored, and players can unlock additional cards to score even more points at the end of the game.

One of the most satisfying things about finishing a game of *Maglev Metro* is that there are lines between stations, some which are parallel, and others which crisscross around the board, through other players' lines. It looks just like a real subway map!



beziergames
THE NEW CLASSICS

Maglev Metro includes two maps (Berlin and Manhattan) that play quite differently from each other thanks to a slight rule change. Bezier Games has promised that new maps are on the way, so be on the lookout for them. Until then, the existing maps will keep you busy coming up with new strategies and techniques, as every game will play out differently. Climb aboard *Maglev Metro* today! 🎲

Let the Games Begin:

How to Create Your Own Tabletop Olympics



Andrew Brassleay

Journalist Searching for
Great Family Games

Much like every other scheduled event of global importance last year, the 2020 Tokyo Olympics never took place. But, thankfully for all fans of nationalistic fever and peculiar sports that are normally only available to watch at 3 a.m. on ESPN, the Olympic Games have merely been delayed.

There will be no possibility for overseas fans to attend this year due to coronavirus restrictions, despite the delay. Instead of getting stuck in the armchair and watching it on the TV, a perfect alternative is to gather friends and family into the game room to create your own tabletop version of the Olympics.

But which games to choose for your miniaturized summer of sport as you compete for top spot on the medal table with family and friends? We speak to some of the makers of Olympic sport-based board games to find out.



On the Pitch

Soccer is a huge draw, pulling in the biggest crowds at the Rio Olympic Games in 2016, as host country Brazil finally won Gold for the first time in the men's event. Flick-and-move veteran *Subbuteo* is an obvious favorite for this category, and its host of accessories even extends to Pegasus's enormous athletics track. This large, 21-piece monstrosity that fits around the pitch was created for decorative purposes, but it's also not beyond the imagination of the average sporting gamer to gather up a few *Subbuteo* players to hold their own track meet after the soccer medals have been decided.

Rugby Sevens is a relatively new addition to the games, and it's also served with a tabletop version via *Subbuteo*, albeit in vintage sets that can be picked up online. But

Zero Point Games is aiming to bring things up to date, launching its Kickstarter for *Rugby Sevens: The Game*. Jerib Robertson of New Zealand-based Zero Point Games explains: "It's played with cards representing players that can be placed and moved across five slots in front of you. Player cards get recycled into a random

deck for re-draw later, so you need to work with what you have in front of you at any given time. Each team has mirrored slots, and players are tackles or supporting rucks depending on where players are positioned. It's like a game of Tic-Tac-Toe or Cups but pumped up!"



Photo by Footy.com Images on Flickr, licensed under CC BY 2.0.

Tennis has its own tabletop spinoff that is literally an Olympic sport in its own right (table tennis). But there are plenty of other ways to adapt, including *Set & Match*'s disk-flicking dexterity version, which awards risk-taking during the rallies — playing to the lines will give an advantage. It's easy to pick up and play and an enormous amount of fun. Taking inspiration from the sport's versatility, *Set & Match* is available in a bigger 'maxi' version, and also in clay and grass-court editions.

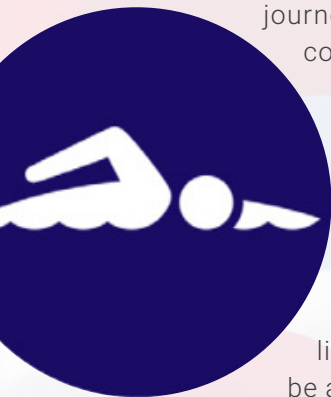
Baseball makes its return to the Olympics in 2021 after a 13-year absence. There are plenty of tabletop versions — dexterity based or otherwise — but the closest to the real deal is arguably *StrikeZone*, launched after last year's successful Kickstarter campaign. KoolBots' Bhutan Patel, the game's creator, says the game was created out of a childhood love of sports and dexterity-based toys.

"It's hard to find a tabletop game which genuinely combines the real sports experience with the board game and brings it inside your home for family and friends to enjoy together." In doing so, KoolBots has created a thing of beauty with 10-inch batters and pitchers (more toys than game components), field settings, and real-world strategy. Three-Dimensional fielders and catchers can be bought in the expansion. While it may look tricky to begin with, with a little practice it is perfectly possible to hit home runs and strike out batters. Other players are also encouraged to act as fielders around the table and attempt catches. The snags? While *StrikeZone* isn't quite as big as a ballpark, the 5-by-5 foot mat means you will need a large space to play. The \$199 base-game price tag may be off-putting, but it is an incredibly enjoyable game.



Aquatics

Save for submerging all your components into a tub of water and frenetically splashing them to the other side of it, swimming isn't an easy conversion to the tabletop arena. But it's being attempted on Kickstarter in the form of *Chlorination*. Described by creator Filip Lindlof as "a worker placement...strategy game about swimming," *Chlorination* sees players manage a swimmer's journey through training, preparation and competing in swim meets.



Sticking to the water, surfing is a new Olympic sport that has been represented in tabletop form by *Tavarua*, a round-based simulation of a surf contest. Creator Cody Miller designed the game for his father, a lifelong surfer, adding, "We're trying to be as close to the real sport as possible, crystallizing and abstracting the action's you'd take if you were actually out there surfing."

More complex is Forsage Games' *Water Polo*, a pretty convincing and faithful nod to the real sport with a densely packed rulebook to boot. The game's designer is Predrag Lazovic, who created his first game, *Football*, during the NATO bombing of Yugoslavia in 1999, "with the intention of thinking as little as possible about the horrors that were happening in my country." The game was picked up and published, leading to the release of *Water Polo*. Some knowledge of the sport is advisable before play to understand its dynamics and player positioning. The biggest challenge in designing the game to be realistic, Predrag says, "was to achieve an equivalent of a limited 30-second attack in a real water polo game (the shot must be made in five moves).

I am satisfied because I achieved that in 20-30 minutes of playing. Although it is difficult for beginners to get into a shot situation, after a few games played, it is much easier."



Tavarua and Water Polo aim to simulate their respective sports as closely as possible. (Tavarua Photo courtesy Far Off Games)



Your Sport-by-Sport Guide to Going for Gold

Create your own tabletop Olympics, composed of board games past and present, and other ideas



Athletics

1500m



Baseball

Baseball Highlights 2045; Game Zone Super Stadium; StrikeZone



Basketball

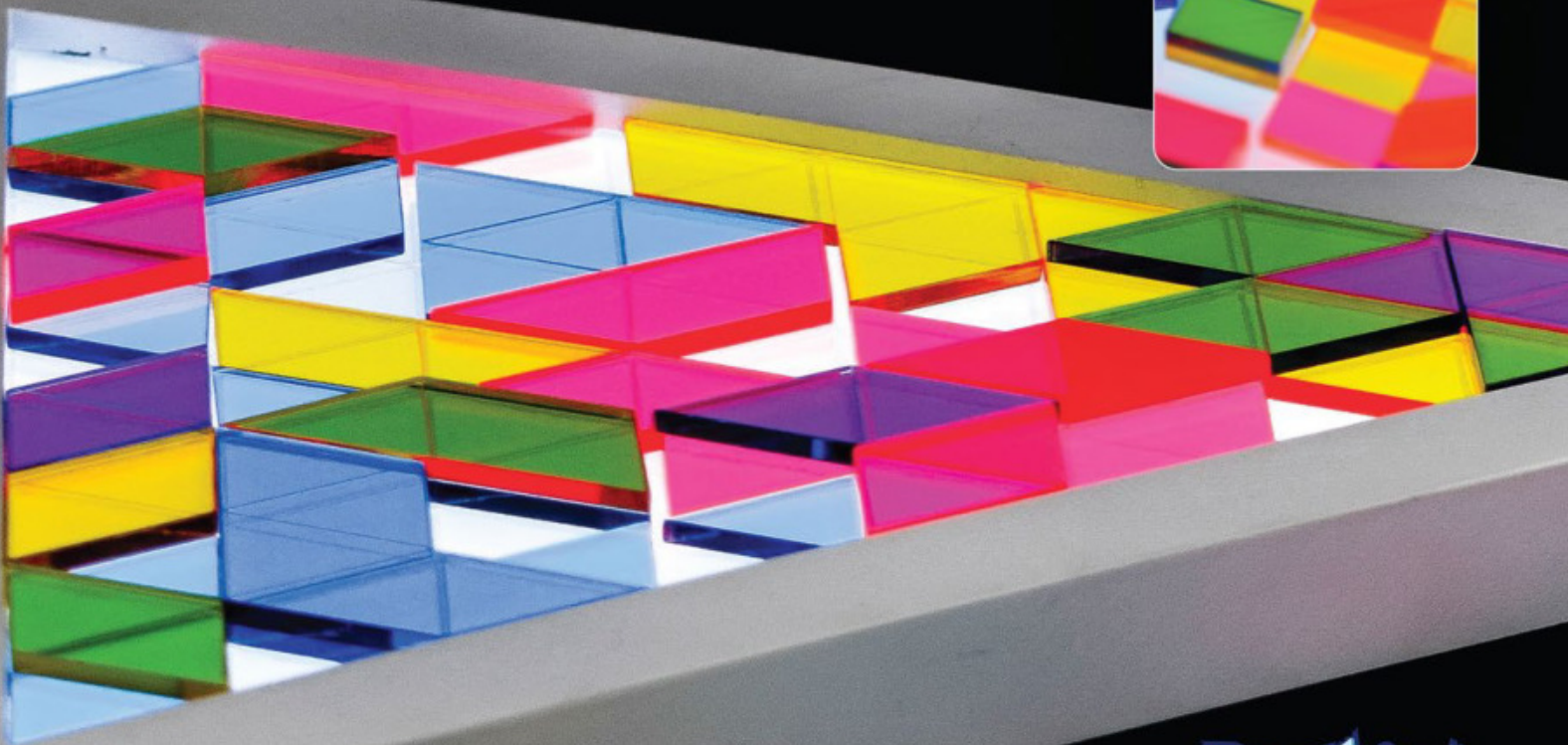
Ambassador's Electronic Arcade Basketball; Bas-ket (vintage); Matty's Toy Stop Deluxe Wooden Mini Tabletop Basketball Game; NBA All Star: Officially Licensed Board Game (vintage)

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Getting on Track

Track and Field is the centerpiece of the games, drawing in some of the biggest crowds and containing some of the most memorable moments. For example, Usain Bolt — shoelaces undone, chicken nuggets for dinner — sprinting his way to the 100m world record in 2008. Curiously, there are very few athletics-based modern tabletop games.

1500m, by Lucky Loser Games, bucks that trend. It is a racing game for 3-8 people with a free luck system and euro mechanics including stamina management. Sound too tiring? The rules also allow for a shorter 800m version.

Cycling is another Olympic sport that's well-catered for in tabletop adaptations, at least outside of the velodrome at least.

Flamme Rouge, *Leader 1*, and *Pro Cycling* handle the excitement of the road events, while *Send It!* captures mountain biking. *Send It!* came about following an accident doing the real thing. "In October of 2019 I had a bad crash on my mountain bike and ended up in the emergency room with an AC separation, a mild concussion, and lots of cuts and bruises," says *Send It!* co-creator Macky Franklin. "While recovering from the crash I played a lot of board games and spent a lot of time analyzing my crash to figure out what went wrong and how I could avoid similar crashes in the future." The result is a relatively straightforward gateway game that's rewarding for all ages, with simple game mechanics and strategies, a changeable board on which each competitor attempts to train, and compete their way to the hall of fame and the Golden Burrito prize at the bottom of the course.



Perhaps the top prize for most challenging conversion goes to AfterRace Games' *Triathlon Series*, rolling in the mechanics of swimming, cycling, and running all into one. It is "definitely not an arcade adaptation," says creator Andrei Nordea. "When they hear about it, people think first that it will be a race on water, wheels, and asphalt. But it's more a simulation of what an amateur triathlete feels. A resource management system, with some strategy and luck involved. But luck mostly comes to those [who are] well prepared. We wanted the player to feel the thrill of a future race, to play the game with friends, and talk more about real-life triathlons. And if you are new to this, to get a glimpse of the feelings that govern this wonderful sport."



Boxing

Rock 'Em Sock 'Em Robots; *Jab: Realtime Boxing* (vintage)



Cycling

Raleigh Burner BMX (vintage); *Send It!*; *Flamme Rouge*; *Bisikle* (vintage); *Leader 1* (vintage); *Cycling Party*; *Le Tour de France* (Linkeballen); *Pro Cycling*



Climbing

Extreme Rock Climbers (vintage)



Fencing

En Garde



Field Hockey

Subbuteo Hockey (vintage) — Alternatively, cheat and go to the Winter Olympics for inspiration with one of Stiga's ice hockey dexterity-based ice hockey adaptations



Golf

Mars Open; *Pitch & Plakks*

vivid

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fantastic!”

- Richard Ham



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Ready for the games?

We asked creators of sport-based games for opinions about the upcoming Olympic games.

Are you a fan of the Olympics? Will you be watching?

Vincent Chatel (Pretexte, Set & Match):

“Philippe (game co-creator) and I won’t miss a basketball game for sure, as we are both big fans of the sport. Otherwise, I personally like to let sports find me as the Olympics do have that power of invading your TVs, feeds and conversations.”



Bhupen Patel (StrikeZone):

“Yes, we love Olympics, where else can we find the best talent from so many countries getting together and competing in so many sports?”

Filip Lindlof (Chlorination):

“I’ll probably be watching randomly on all sports when I have the time and catch the highlights online.”

Are you planning on making any more tabletop adaptations of Olympic sports?

Eduardo Lopez (1500m):

“I have more sport-themed boardgames designed ready for publishing: A boxing card game (*Segundos... Fuera!*); and a tennis card game (*Tie Break*). I’m planning a volleyball, a football, a marathon and a swimming one.”

Jerib Robertson (Rugby Sevens):

“We are already working on a game that has multiple Olympic sports, played as rounds in a series of challenges. It’s going to be dynamic and fun because that’s how the Olympics feel, and that’s what we do!”



Gymnastics

Fantastic Gymnastics: Vault and Bars



Rugby Sevens

Rugby Sevens: The Game; Rugby Subbuteo (vintage)



Sailing

Race the Wind (vintage)



Shooting

Electronic Arcade Hover Shot



Skateboarding

Not a board game, but a toy: Tech Deck’s fingerboard range cover both park and street circuits – the two events contested at the Olympics. Just find a willing judge and you’ll have yourself a contest.



Soccer

Subbuteo; Total Action Football



Surfing

Tavarua



Swimming

Chlorination



Are there any other tabletop games based on Olympic sports that you've enjoyed, or want to check out?

Eduardo:

"Volleyball High from Medieval Lord Games."

Andrei Nordea (Triathlon Series):

"I'm interested in any sport-related board game, existing or not yet created. I think it is another way to remind our kids that there is something called reality: running in the wind is sometimes better than to roll dice or move a joystick." 🎮



Tennis

Set & Match; World Cup Tennis (vintage); Tennis Masters (vintage) – Or, failing any of these, there's always actual table tennis, an Olympic sport in its own right.



Triathlon

Triathlon Series



Volleyball

Volley (vintage); Volleyball High



Water Polo

Water Polo (Forsage Games)

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Winning to Play:



Tips for a Great Game Night



Bayard Catron

Game Wizard, Reviewer,
and Event Organizer

Game night is a time-honored tradition. As a kid in the 1970s, I'd look forward to Friday nights with my family when we'd gather and play games such as Perquackey, Probe, and Dungeons & Dragons. In the early 2000s I realized game night was a good catalyst for gathering friends I wasn't seeing as often as I'd like, and even for meeting new friends. I've met some of my favorite people at game night — including the love of my life.



But what's the winning strategy for game night? Avoid my mistakes and share my successes by following the easy steps I'll lay out for you here.

The Prep

Many of the tactics that make for a successful game night are the same as those that apply to any social event: advance planning is your friend. Sending your invitation with plenty of lead time is courteous and will ensure your invitees don't already have something on the calendar. Doodle.com is a useful tool for surveying your guests to find a time that works for everyone. Make sure you have an appropriate space to play and ensure it's clean and organized.

Some keys to a good event are unique to game night. One of your biggest challenges will be mastering the rules of the games, if you have not played them before. This will be easier for social party games, which are usually rules-light, but complex strategy games will require you to study the rulebook, watch videos online – or better yet, have someone familiar with the rules teach you the game.

In the digital age there are resources online for learning almost anything, including games. Not only can you watch excellent "How to Play" videos, but most new games have a digital implementation so you can play online on a virtual table. Make sure to put in the time early so you'll be good to go. Videos from Watch It Played, Gaming Rules!, Becca Scott, and Nights Around a Table are just the tip of the iceberg. All are easily found by searching YouTube or Board Game Geek (BGG).



If there's no How-to-Play video readily available, you can often get a good rundown of the rules by watching a review, such as those by Shut Up & Sit Down, To Die For Games, or The Dice Tower. I like to watch a good video at least twice and send it to my players ahead of time. Watching the video prepares their brains to receive the information when I show them the game in person.

Pro Tip: My esteemed colleague, Erik Arneson, has written the definitive book-length treatise on this subject, appropriately entitled *How to Host a Game Night*. I highly recommend it!





The Food

To be honest, I find food can be a distraction at game night. After all, it's not food night! But consuming calories is sometimes a necessity for your human players, so there will need to be a food contingency. The best options will be ordering in food or doing a potluck event. You have enough on your plate, so to speak, without having to cook for your gamer throng. Let the professionals handle this. Also, beware of messy food and drink. Nothing will spoil your game experience quicker than greasy orange Cheetos fingerprints on your game cards or a glass of red wine tipped over the game board.



The People

As my worthy associate Tim Murphy once said, "People are the point". Games are fun, but the overarching goal of game night is to bring people together. This means that, in addition to matching your games to your players, you'll want to match your players to one another. This will be harder to do if you're organizing an event open to the public, but sometimes you'll get lucky: when the women who attended my first event at a local game store were still eagerly chatting after the meetup had concluded, I knew I had a hit on my hands. As you build a network and get to know people better, you can custom-design the perfect guest list for the perfect game night.

Be mindful of the size of your guest list. Too many participants will be untenable. You can have a stellar time with just four or five willing souls. Make sure the games you have on offer are right for the number and type of players in attendance. Each game box will tell you how many players are appropriate for the game according to the publisher, and for more specific impressions, refer to the game's entry on BGG. After reviewing your options, it will be easy to choose a good selection of games. Most importantly, relax and have fun at game night. There is no need to be playing games constantly. Be sure to chat and connect with your guests. You've done a great job with your preparations, now enjoy the fruits of your labors.

The Games

The most important factors in your game night adventure are the games and the guests. You will want to match the players to the games. Some will gravitate towards brain-busting strategy contests, while others will only want to play lighthearted party games filled with laughter. Not sure what your people prefer? Ask! And make sure to let everyone know what to expect. If you have groups of friends who enjoy different things, that is merely an opportunity to have more game nights!

The following pages spotlight a few recommended social and casual games to try at your next event.



Coming out
next Summer

Try Last Message, a fast drawing & deduction game!



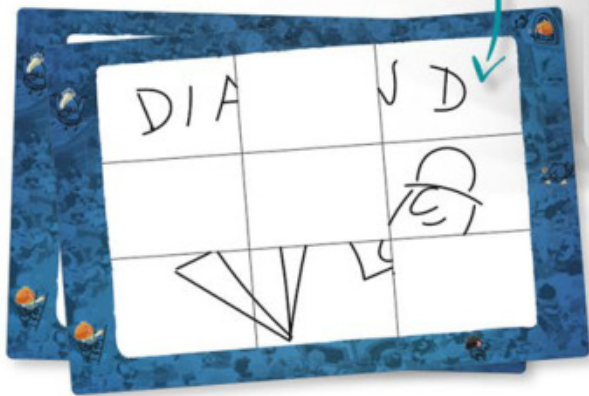
2

The victim has 30 seconds to draw or write as many clues as possible on a board with 9 different spaces.



3

The inspectors will look at this board, but first the criminal can erase some of the spaces!

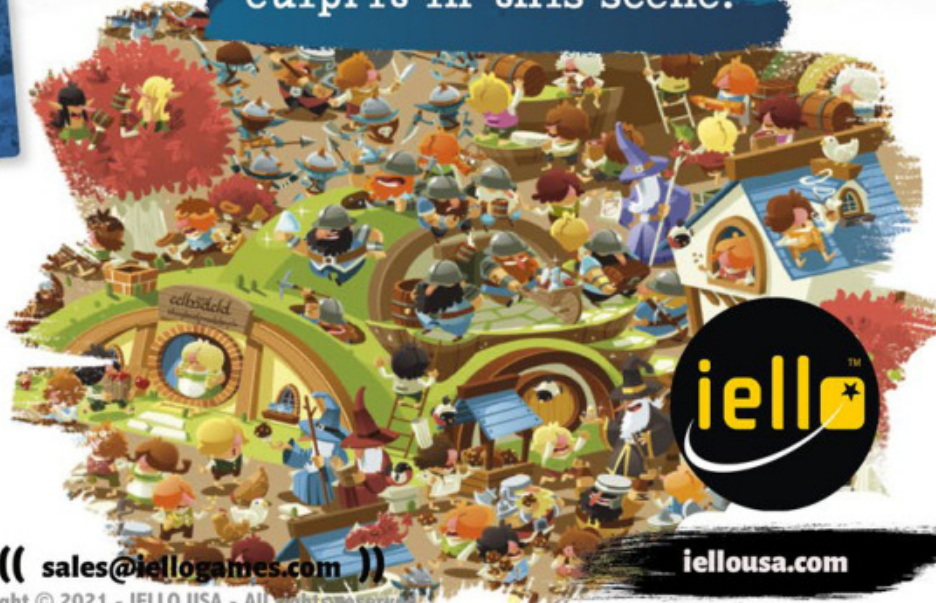


1

The criminal shows the victim who they are in the chosen crime scene.



Can you find the culprit in this scene?



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Social/Interactive Party Games

Party games are a great way to break the ice and get to know people.



America

Similar to *Wits & Wagers*, this trivia game doesn't require exact answers, so you don't need a brain crammed full of useless information – being “close” counts! Answer questions about the USA and get in the neighborhood of the correct answer about date, state, and number. Go with your own guess or place your marker near the guess of a player you think knows about the topic.



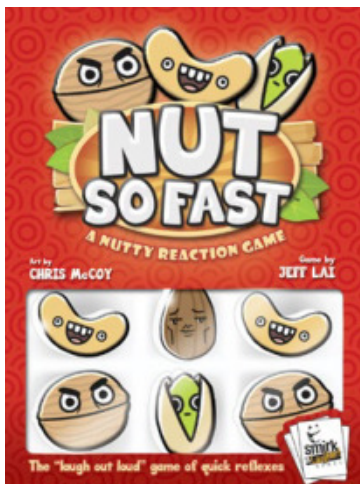
Red Flags or Billionaire Banshee

These are good games for a mix of friends with decks of ridiculous “deal breakers” that challenge you to create hilarious nightmare dates.



Rhino Hero Super Battle

A “house of cards” game on steroids. Build an absurd, flimsy structure then put the hero figurine on it without bringing it crashing down. Great for all ages.



Nut So Fast

A “grab it first” game similar to *Spoons* or *Jungle Speed*, this nutty game will have you racing to collect the right nuts. As with all games of this type, mind your fingernails and heavy rings.



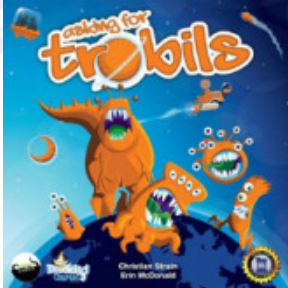
Time's Up

The classic game of celebrity charades. Get your team to guess the famous person over three rounds, with less information each time. Fantastic, funny game.



Casual Strategy Games

The following can be taught in under ten minutes and played in under an hour. This means you can play more games in a single game night or spend some time relaxing and chatting for part of the night.



Asking for Trobils

An introductory “worker placement” style game. Gather resources and capture space pests. Has many enjoyable references to classic sci-fi franchises.



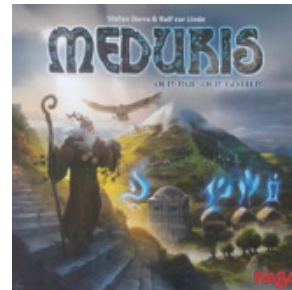
Medici

Brilliant game of bidding from prolific designer Reiner Knizia. Simple to learn, quick to play, but very hard to master.



Niagara

This charming game has a striking table presence, with a pretty waterfall incorporated into the board. Easy to learn and play.



Meduris

Pleasant and family-friendly game of building and resource management for those who may have grown tired of the classic *Settlers of Catan*.



Letter Tycoon

A modern alternative to *Scrabble*. Instead of making the game all about placement on the board, you purchase letter “patents” to give you special powers (with rare letters) or income (with more common letters).



Spike

Genuinely interesting pick-up-and-deliver train game in the early days of rail. Build your route and customize your train as you work towards your goals. A good pick for those who may be done with the classic *Ticket to Ride*.



As the pandemic finally comes to an end, we can all take great pleasure in returning to in-person game nights. It doesn't matter whether you win or lose at the games you play — just hosting a game night is a big win! 🎲



Gerry Brook

Co-host of Back of the Shelf Podcast

Additional Tips From a . . . Renowned Board Gamer

Be it a lively wingding or jovial jamboree, every social gathering requires the proper planning, attention, and skill to see it reach the lofty heights of social triumph — none more so than the board game evening! Lest you be mocked and scorned for your lack of hosting etiquette, here are 3 handy hints to see your board game evenings become the talk of the town.

1. Refreshments

A board game evening would not be complete without tasty refreshments to accompany the main event. Some people would suggest it be pertinent to ask your guests whether they have any specific dietary requirements. These people are incorrect, as the only acceptable refreshment that should be served during a board game evening is a glass of water.

Remember, it is vital your guests drink their one glass of water away from your beloved board games! I would recommend the bathroom or outside as suitable areas. If your guests insist on nursing their refreshment, provide a space on the floor where they may place their glass. Again, this should be in one of the designated spaces for such tomfoolery.

2. The Board Game

Perhaps the most crucial consideration when organizing a board game gathering: which board game to play? With a veritable smorgasbord of mechanics and themes to pick from, there exists a board game for every personality and any situation. Be it a lightweight party game that could help mix unfamiliar groups by breaking the ice or perhaps a heavier euro game to test the mental faculties!

Of course, the right answer is to choose whichever game you are best at. In doing so, you can assure victory and mercilessly crush your opponents into submission to

reassert your dominance over your fellow beings. It may be that the game you choose is unfamiliar to your guests. Good. This will provide you with an even greater advantage. Do not waste precious gaming time providing an overview of the rules. This will only lessen your invaluable position. To negate claims of unfairness, I would advise you to send links to the relevant, online tutorial videos before the gathering. This not only saves time but also removes personal liability when your guests inevitably lose the game. They will only have themselves to blame.

3. Conversation

During the session, your guests may attempt the insufferable endeavour of conversation. It is vital that you cut off any such attempts since this could distract from the gameplay, or worse, allow your guests to realize you know very little about life beyond board gaming. A way to prevent such a situation from arising is to beat them to the punch! Start the conversation yourself. Some useful discussion starters are:

"I wouldn't have done that if I were you. Here's what you should have done..."

"That's an obvious mistake. I can tell you don't know much about board gaming. Let me teach you."

And there you have it! By following these swift and simple suggestions, you will soon be recognized as the exceptional board gaming host you always knew you were! 🎲

"I love horror genres and **The Night Cage** nails it! It has that spooky vibe mixed with great art and puzzle solving."

-Natasha aka Cannondoll X

"Flipping tiles has never been so nerve wracking."

-Christian Hoffer
Comicbook.com

This game is fantastic!

-Jonathan Gilmour



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



SND 1007
\$39.99

1-5 PLAYERS 14+ AGES 50 MINUTES



THE
NIGHT
CAGE





Finding a New Game to Play

When the Options
Are Limitless



Dann Albright

Freelance Journalist and
Lifelong Board Gamer

The world of board games continues to expand every day. There are literally more than 100,000 board games, expansions, and accessories in the current market. Add to this the proliferation of online board games as well as crowdfunding and the list continues to grow, even as you are reading this.

You have an essentially infinite list of new board games to try.

There's just one problem: figuring out which ones you should try. You won't like a lot of those games. Others are out of print, too long, require too many people, or are prohibitively expensive.



After playing board games for almost 10 years, I've spent a lot of time looking for new games to play. Here are the strategies that I've found most useful:



1 Visit Board Game Geek

Board Game Geek (BGG), an online board game database, has over 125,000 entries (including expansions, promo cards, and more) at the time of this writing. It's easy to get overwhelmed when you look at the list of entries, but you'll find some useful tools to narrow down the list.

One of my go-to methods is to head to the listing for a game I like and check out the "Fans Also Like" section. For example, on the *7 Wonders: Duel* page, suggestions include games like *Azul*, *Welcome To...*, *Res Arcana*, *Dice Forge*, *Takenoko*, *Jaipur*, and *Patchwork*.

(Pro Tip: If you start to lose track of what you find, add games to your collection under "Want to Play.")



**BOARD
GAME
GEEK**

While I already own several of the games listed, quite a few are new to me. I can click on any of them to get an idea of how the game works, see ratings, find out about player counts, and browse listings of used copies.

If you use this method, be prepared to go down a rabbit hole of dozens of games you'd like to play. "Fans Also Like," forums, and lists will get you more recommendations than you could play in a year.



Read Board Gaming Magazines

You've already made strides toward finding the perfect game for you or your group by reading this magazine. *Casual Game Insider* (CGI) reviews new games every quarter and our editorial articles often include recommendations for fans of casual games. And it's just the tip of a board gaming magazine iceberg. Magazines from across the globe offer different insight in the hobby because of the depth of games available.

You'll find an online presence for many of these magazines as well, be it digital subscriptions, forums, or other resources. For example, at CGI's website, one of the best resources is the "Recommended Games" page, which you can filter by game type, player count, publisher, year, and more. Check it out at CasualGameRevolution.com/games.

Let's say you want to play a dice game with five players that costs less than \$40. Use the filters and you'll see four

recommended titles: *Tower of Madness*, *Dicey Peaks*, *Spoils of War*, and *Fuse*.

You'll also find plenty of game reviews on the "Reviewed Games" page and lots of casual gamers to ask for recommendations on the forums and the Casual Board Games group on Facebook.

**CASUAL GAME
I · N · S · I · D · E · R**





Ask Reddit



Reddit is a love-it-or-hate-it kind of place, but the r/boardgames subreddit is a great place for gamers to hang out. In addition to discussion about game strategy, trivia, stories, and reviews, there's also a daily thread for game recommendations.

Before you ask for a recommendation, though, it's a good idea to search the subreddit to see if anyone has asked for what you're looking for in the past. There's a good chance that the answer is already available. If it's not, ask away! You'll get all kinds of recommendations to research. Other gamers often provide lots of detail for their recommendations, too, which is a great way to get an idea if you'll like the suggested games.

A user recently asked for cooperative two-player games that play in less than 30 minutes. They also said that they don't like games such as *Pandemic* or *Forbidden Island*. One knowledgeable Redditor suggested a host of games, including *5 Minute Mystery*, *Mysterium*, *Magic Maze*, *Escape: The Curse of the Temple*, and *The Mind*.

The nice part about using r/boardgames to ask for recommendations is that you can provide additional information. Tell people what you like about your favorite games instead of simply stating that you like them. Talk about the games you have so they don't get suggested. Include other criteria, like color-blind friendliness, and you'll get lots of useful feedback.



Check Your Favorite Retailer



If you have a Friendly Local Game Store (FLGS) nearby, asking the staff for game recommendations is a great way to learn about games you might enjoy. You might even be able to try out a demo copy to see if you like a game before you drop your hard-earned money on it.

If you prefer online shopping, you may not get the same personalized experience, but there are still several ways to discover new games. Whether you usually buy your games at Target, on Craigslist, or at a specialty retailer like Cool Stuff Inc. or Miniature Market, you can look through their sales or new listings to find some options for your next game.

Depending on what you're looking for, the number of

choices can be overwhelming. With so many games out there, retailers are bound to offer more listings than you can possibly look through. Go in with a strategy. I always check the sales sections first, to see if I can nab anything that grabs my attention.

You can also go to the entries for your favorite games and look at the "customers also bought" section (or whatever the nearest equivalent is on the site you're using). That will help give you a good idea of what other people who like the same games that you do are playing.

For example, the Cool Stuff Inc. page for *Cryptid* shows that people who bought the game also bought *Lost Ruins of Arnak*, *Tidal Blades*, *Fairy Tale Inn*, *Betrayal Legacy*, and several escape room board games. There are several games here that I've never heard of, giving me options for exploring new titles.

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Inc**

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OF
CRIME
THE MILLENNIUM SERIES

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5

Find a Reviewer You Like

There are lots of board game reviewers and critics out there. Two of the most popular are Shut Up & Sit Down and The Dice Tower; other options to check out are What's Eric Playing?, No Pun Included, and Our Family Plays Games. There are dozens of YouTube channels, podcasts, Twitter feeds, and blogs where people play games and provide insight into their experiences.

This isn't always useful. To get the most out of it, you'll want to find a reviewer or two that has similar tastes in games to you.

For example, Dan Thurot (a.k.a. "Space-Biff!") often likes games that I like and isn't so hot on games that I'm not a fan of. Our preferences line up nicely. When I'm looking for a new game, I'll head to his site and



see what he's enjoyed lately. In this way, I've learned about games like *Radlands*, *Cobble & Fog*, *The Grand Carnival*, and *Santa Monica*.

Do our tastes always align? No. Sometimes Dan dislikes a game that I think is pretty good or loves a title that I decide isn't for me. But by reading his reviews regularly, I've gotten a good idea of the signals that indicate I might like a game.



Use A Search Engine

This might seem too obvious, but it can actually be a shortcut to many of the strategies above.

For example, a quick search for "games like *Azul*" brought up a wide variety of sites that have written about this topic. You'll often find both BGG and Reddit in the top results, which can help you navigate those somewhat treacherous waters.

Of course, your results with this method will be hit or miss.

Sometimes you'll get great recommendations and sometimes you'll get a list of games you already have. But if you don't know where to start, this is a good jumping-off point.

For example, one of the sites that appeared after I



searched for "games like *Azul*" recommends *Patchwork*, *Sagrada*, and a few *Azul* expansions — I know that these are solid recommendations.

But I have no idea if *The Isle of Cats*, *Tsuro*, or *Celestia* have anything in common with *Azul*. I'll have to head to BGG or find a reviewer to get a feel for how these games might be similar to one of my current favorites.

If you can, include additional information to narrow your search. "Games like *Azul*" came up with a ton of results, but "2-player board games 60 minutes" might get me better results for what I'm looking for. Finding board game recommendations on Google is an art.



FALL OF THE MOUNTAIN KING



BY ADAM DAULTON • ART BY FAHED ALRAJIL & XAVIER CUENCA

The hotly-anticipated prequel to the award-winning *In the Hall of the Mountain King*; Wage the legendary doomed war against the avalanche of enemies devastating your mountain home, and become the one to lead the Trolls into exile!

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7

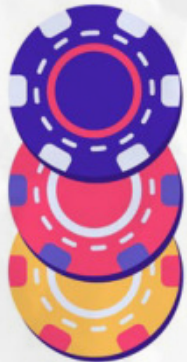
Become Part of the Community

The board gaming community is one of the best groups of people that I've been a part of. People are excited about games, want to introduce people to their favorites, and enjoy making new friends at the game table. The more you become part of this community, the more games you'll become familiar with, and the easier it will be to find the right ones for you.

Spend some time on Reddit and the BGG forums. Recommend games to people who ask for suggestions. Leave comments on reviewers' websites and YouTube

videos. Keep reading *Casual Game Insider*, *Spielbox*, *Tabletop Magazine*, and more!

These are the things that not only help you find new games that you'll like, but also continue building our great community. Share your own experiences and what you've learned with others by being a positive force in these communities, and welcoming new people to the hobby in the same way you were welcomed. ☺



A COMPLETE GAME FOR YOU TO PLAY & ENJOY!
COURTESY OF: CHRIS KINGSNORTH

CGI
+PNP

Artisans of the Taj Mahal

Art & Design by Chris Kingsnorth
Instagram: [tabletopapprentice](#)
[Bit.ly/taj-mahal-cgi](#)



Arborist



The two values must total exactly 6

Waterway Engineer



All three values must be either even or odd

Stonemason



Each value in the column (minaret) must be lower than the value beneath it

Facade Sculptor



All four of the values must be identical

Calligrapher



The bottom value must be the sum of the two values above it

Dome Builder



The middle value must be lower than the two values either side

Gardener



Lose 1 point for every symbol not filled in at the end of the game

plus

plus

plus

plus

plus

plus

plus

minus

=

ARTISANS OF THE TAJ MAHAL

Final score



6

6

10

10

8

8

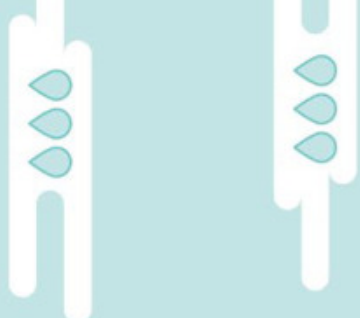
GARDENS + REFLECTING POOL



6

8

6



The spectacular marble-clad mausoleum of the Taj Mahal in Agra, India, is instantly recognisable. Construction began in 1632 and lasted 17 years, with an astounding 20,000-strong workforce involved in its fabrication. Tragically, only a handful of the craftspeople involved are known by name today. You can find out more about this incredible feat of engineering and the people that inspired this game on page 2.

AIM OF THE GAME

Recruit craftspeople, construct the iconic mausoleum and maintain the monument's beautiful gardens. Erect towering domes, intricate minarets and enormous archways to earn the most points and be declared *Master Architect!*

SETTING UP






Each player will need a printed player sheet and a pen or pencil. You will also need 2 six-sided dice that can be seen by all of the players (if you are playing via video call, you can share your screen and use a pair of virtual dice like [these](#))

PLAYING THE GAME

In *Artisans of the Taj Mahal*, all players take their turns at the same time. On every turn, one player rolls both of the dice once (any player can do this) and then every player must:




1. Use one dice result to **select a feature**, and then
2. Use the other dice result to **add a value** to the selected feature.

In addition, players can **alter dice results** and should be mindful of **watering the garden's fruit trees**.

Selecting a feature: The Taj Mahal and its grounds comprise multiple features divided into 6 groups. Each of these 'feature groups' corresponds to a dice value, shown towards the bottom of the player sheet (see below). Feature group  covers the *Gardens and Canals*, whereas feature groups  to  cover features of the mausoleum. Feature groups  and  contain more than one feature.





Players use one of the dice results rolled to select a feature group that they will add to in the next step.


For example,  +  are rolled. A player uses the  result to select the mausoleum's central feature group containing the Archway and Dome (A):









Adding a value to a feature: Players use the remaining dice result to write the corresponding value into any empty box available in the feature group selected earlier (don't forget to consider the scoring conditions!)



For example, the same player uses the remaining  to write '6' into a blank box on the Dome feature (B). Instead, they could have chosen to add to the Archway feature below as it is also part of the  feature group.






If players are unable (or unwilling) to add a value, they must mark off one raindrop () but do not receive its benefit (see 'Altering dice results' below for more about raindrops).


Altering dice results: A refreshing downpour offers some welcome relief from the heat of the day. Players may alter dice results by marking off the raindrops () found in clouds on the player sheet. For each  marked off, they may add or subtract 1 from a dice result. Alterations only affect them.

For example, the player above could have chosen to mark off one  to alter the  result to a  (+1) or  (-1).


Players may mark off multiple  in the same turn and may alter the result of both dice so long as they mark  for each individual alteration made. A result can only be altered to a value that exists on the dice (i.e. 1 to 6). A maximum of 15 alterations can be made per game, but raindrops are also required to water the garden's fruit trees, so be careful!

Watering fruit trees: Whenever a player adds a value to a feature in the  (*Gardens and Canals*) group, they may also mark off 1  to water a fruit tree, filling in the  symbol below the tree to signify that it has been watered. Neglected fruit trees will lead to lost points at the end of the game, so look after them!

END OF THE GAME

The game ends when any player fills the final empty box on their player sheet or uses the last of their . All other players finish their turn and then scoring takes place.

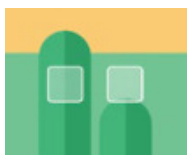
SCORING

Players earn points equal to the  value of every completed feature fulfilling the conditions shown at the top of the player sheet. They lose 1 point for every unwatered fruit tree. The player with the highest score is declared *Master Architect!* In a tie, the player with the most unused raindrops wins. If the tie persists, the youngest player wins.

SCORING CONDITIONS AND ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Below you will find additional details about each feature's **scoring conditions** (also found at the top of the player sheet). You will also find information about each of the features and some of the craftspeople involved in the construction of the Taj Mahal. References can be found at the foot of the page.

i A feature with any empty boxes at the end of the game does not score any points.



Arborist  6 ; 2 available

The two values must total exactly 6.

The Cypress trees lining the canals in front of the Taj Mahal represent death, and by extension, eternal life. They were originally planted much more thickly than the sparse planting seen today.¹



Waterway Engineer  8

All three of the values in this feature must be either even or odd (i.e. no mixing of even and odd numbers)

Ropes and buckets were used to draw water from the Yamuna river; from there, it was transferred between enormous storage tanks until it reached pipes that entered the Taj Mahal enclosure below ground.²





Stonemason  6 ; 2 available

Each value in the minaret (column) must be lower than the value beneath it (i.e. values must get smaller from the bottom of the column to the top). Values cannot be equal.

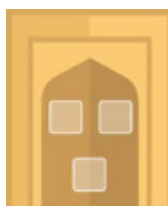
The mausoleum is clad in white marble (Sang-i-Rukham) transported 400km from Makrana, southwest of Jaipur. Stonemasons rented trolleys to transfer these huge stones to the site.³



Facade Sculptor  10 ; 2 available

Each value in this feature must be identical (e.g. 4 x  , 4 x  etc).

In 2011, 671 names were found on a wall surrounding the mausoleum. It is thought that this list was carved by craftspeople attempting to preserve their memory down the centuries.⁴

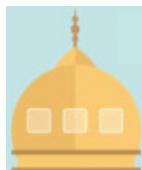


Calligrapher  8




The bottom value in this feature must be the sum of the two values above it, e.g:



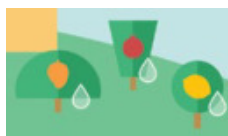
Calligraphic inscriptions are found inside and outside the mausoleum. Abd-ul-Haqq, a talented Persian calligrapher, was bestowed the name Amanat Khan ('like an heirloom') for his intricate work on the Taj Mahal.⁵




Dome Builder  8

The middle value in this feature must be lower than the two values either side (e.g.   )

The largest dome of the mausoleum is actually comprised of two domes. The dome visible from the exterior houses another, smaller dome which can only be seen from the inside of the mausoleum. This preserves the architectural proportions of the interior space.⁶



Gardener

At the end of the game, players lose 1 point for each fruit tree with an unfilled  symbol.

The gardens of the Taj Mahal are filled with an abundance of trees, flowers and plants; a representation of Paradise. Fruit trees, symbolising life, were once more numerous and included mango, pomegranate and lemon-bearing varieties.¹

ARTISANS OF THE TAJ MAHAL

Designed for the December 2020 7-Day Roll and Write Game Design Contest hosted by indiaboardgames.net

Artwork adapted from a vector courtesy of www.freepik.com.

With thanks to Rohith Dabbiru whose encouragement, proofreading and cultural sensitivity guidance were greatly appreciated during this game's development.

Download additional player sheets from tabletopapprentice.itch.io/artisans-of-the-taj-mahal

(1) Death, Poetry and Dynastic Identity: Reimagining the Gardens at the Taj Mahal. Available at <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/224771139.pdf> (2) <https://www.tajmahal.org.uk/water-devices.html> (3) <https://www.wonders-of-the-world.net/Taj-Mahal/Construction-of-the-Taj-Mahal.php> (4) <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/asia/craftsmen-who-built-taj-mahal-preserved-their-names-stone-552330.html> (5) <https://www.livehistoryindia.com/history-daily/2019/07/10/sarai-amanat-khan-legacy-of-the-taj-calligrapher> (6) <https://www.wonders-of-the-world.net/Taj-Mahal/Dome-of-the-Taj-Mahal>

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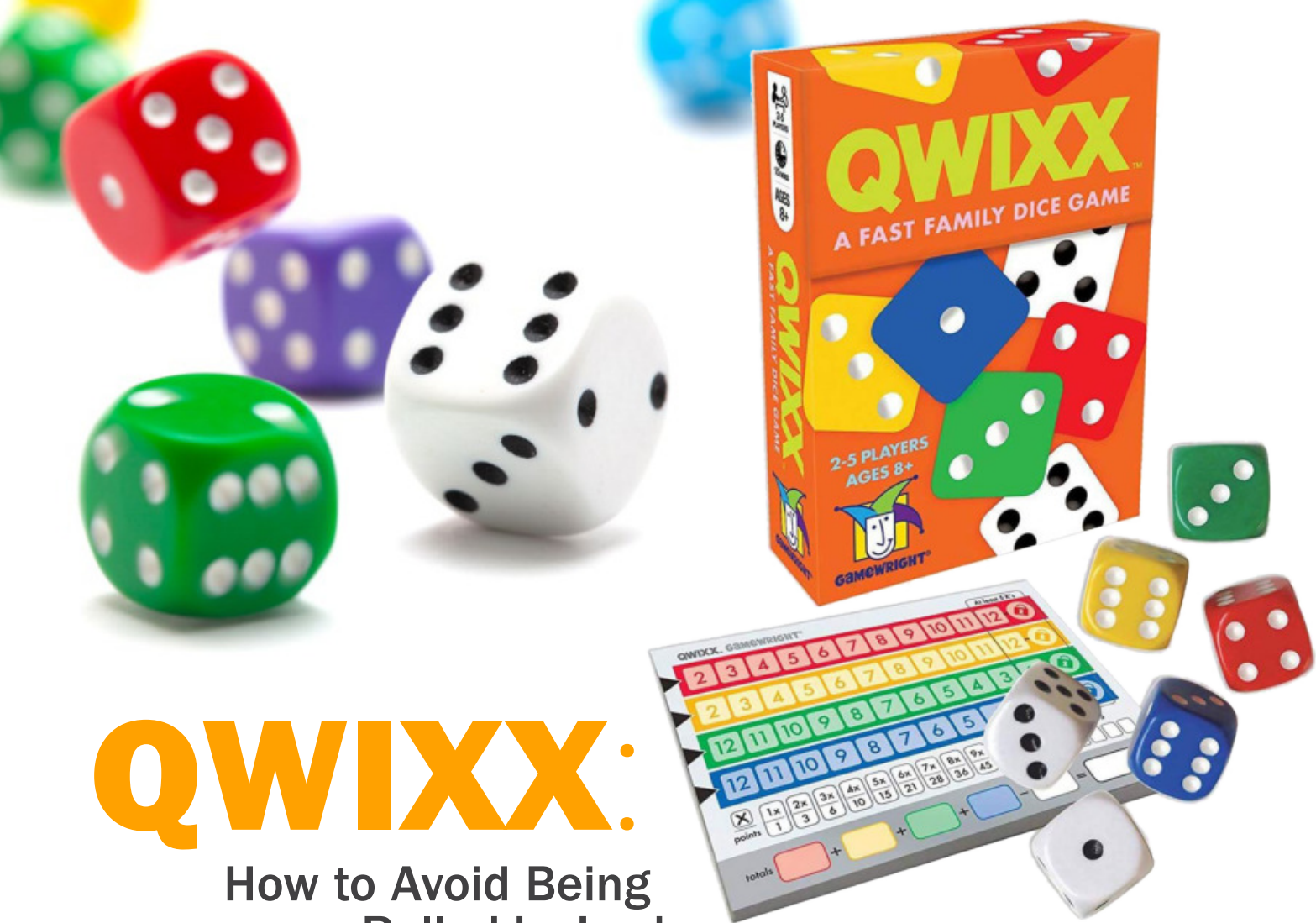
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QWIXX:

How to Avoid Being Rolled by Luck



Pete Mesling

Fiction Writer and
Tabletop Game Nut

Maybe you've played Gamewright's popular dice game *QWIXX*, but have you considered that you may not be maximizing your chances of victory? Whether you're playing the dice or card version, understanding your options to maximize your point output can be the difference between a sizeable defeat or a close victory. Below you'll find some tips to help you turn the luck of *QWIXX* in your favor. But first, a refresher on (or introduction to) the basic rules of the game...

Let's focus on the rules for the dice game for now, since the differences between it and the card version are slight and I touch on them later. It all begins with six dice and a score sheet. In fact, that's it, as far as equipment is concerned. The active player rolls the dice (two white, one red, one yellow, one green, and one blue) and announces the sum of the white dice. All players can then cross out that sum in any one of four colored rows on their score sheet, but only if there are no cross-outs to the right of the sum in the row they choose. (Two of the colored rows range from 2 to 12 in ascending order, and the other two range from 12 to 2 in descending order.)



At this point, the non-active players are done, but the active player can still decide if there's a sum worth playing by adding one of the white dice to one of the colored dice. In this case, the colored die determines the color of the row that the sum can be played in. If neither the sum of the white dice nor the sum of one white die and one colored die is played, the active player must use one of four penalty boxes, each of which results in a subtraction of 5 points from the final score. Only the active player is at risk of needing to use a penalty box.

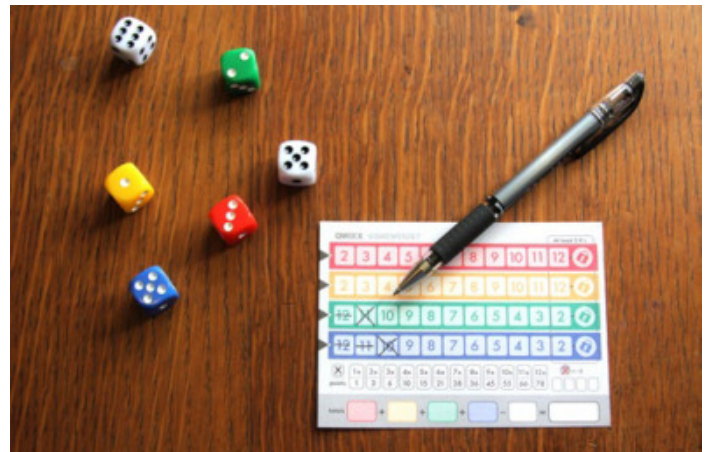
Once at least 5 numbers are crossed out in a single row on a player's scoresheet, that player can lock the row by filling in the last space (either 12 or 2) and also crossing out the lock icon. A locked row cannot be used by any player for the rest of the game.

Know the End Goals

When it comes to strategizing with most tabletop games, you want to focus on the objective — what ends the game. In the case of *QWIXX*, that can be one of two things: two color rows are locked, or a player crosses out all four penalty boxes.

Logic dictates that you'd want to lock a row as soon as you can, but you can no longer cross off numbers in a locked row, so that's worth factoring in. You must already have at least five numbers crossed off in that row or you wouldn't be able to lock it. If you lock the row, an additional two squares will count in your favor, worth a potential 28 points. That's just beyond the halfway mark on the scoring table. You can still win without being the player who locks the game-ending row if you just avoid those penalty boxes.

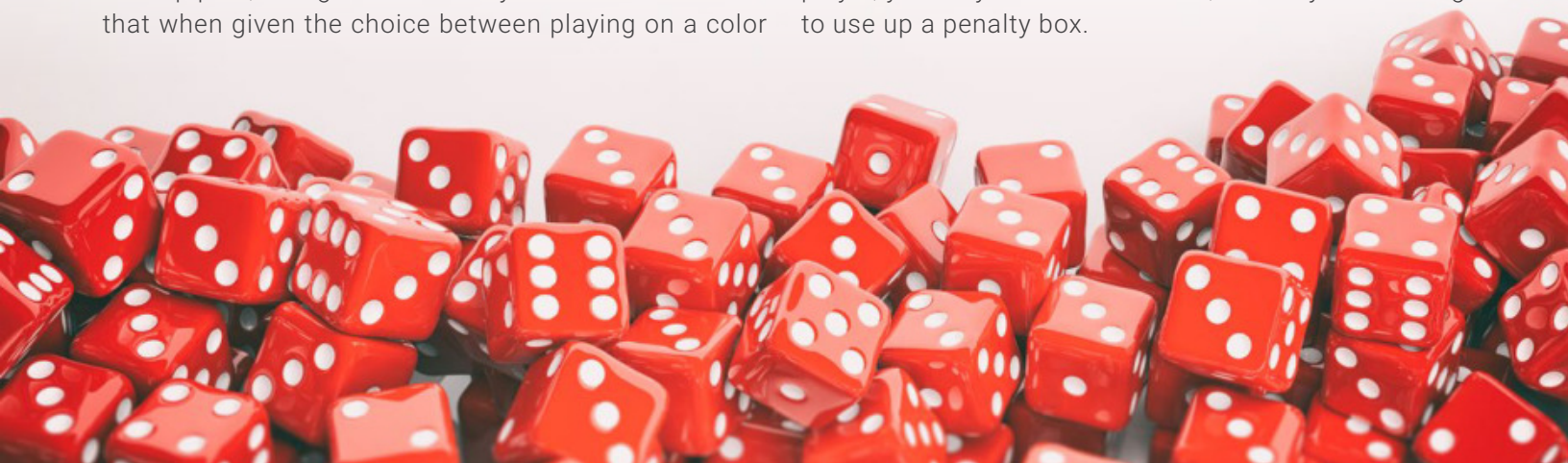
Crossing off numbers in a row that's close to being locked may give you a slight point advantage, but your move may depend on how the game is going for you. If the dice or cards seem to be handing you a lot of plays across all four color rows, that's worth paying attention to. Getting to five cross-outs in two color rows is a priority, but once you reach that goal, any strategy involving those rows drops off in importance. Adding cross-outs beyond the five required for a lock is a great backup plan, though. Another way to think about this is that when given the choice between playing on a color



Active player makes two moves in one turn!
(Photo by Christine Howard)

row with six cross-outs and playing on one with two, go for the one with six, because once it's locked, you're out of luck.

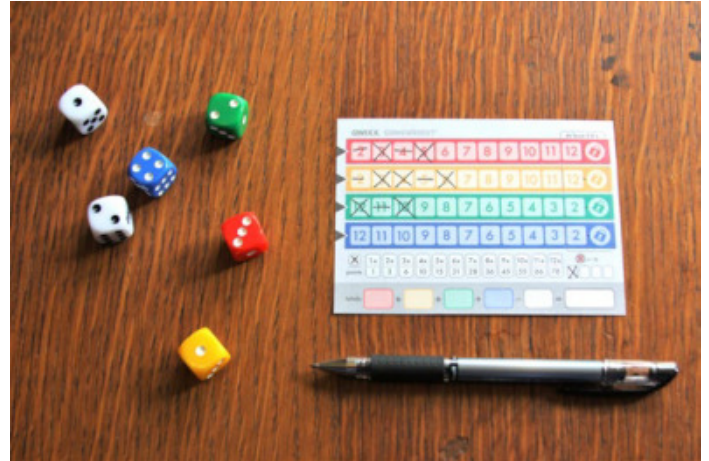
On a related note, you want to be careful not to skip too many numbers, which can put you on a quick path to penalty city as you run out of playable numbers. These things can be a matter of degree. Maybe you can justify a gap that's one or two spaces wider than that of another player, but it gets harder to justify — and overcome — as you widen the gap. Unfortunately, if you're the active player, you may not have a choice, unless you're willing to use up a penalty box.



Analyzing the Consequences

Penalty boxes and scoring are the same for both versions of the game. A penalty box costs roughly two-and-a-half cross-outs (two cross-outs are worth 3 points, and three cross-outs are worth 6 points). This justifies choosing a gap of 1 or 2 spaces over a penalty box, which costs 5 points. You might allow a wider gap if you're able to cross out the fifth number in a row by doing so – or if you can lock the row, of course. But taking the penalty when your only alternative is to create a gap of three or more spaces is a useful rule of thumb, depending on how many penalty boxes you already have checked.

If you're the active player and you have more than one potential number that can be crossed out using the sum of the white dice, be sure to check and see if one of those numbers is equal to the sum of a white die and a colored die. This can be the difference between crossing out one square during your turn and crossing out two – especially if your opponents



No dice! Active player takes a penalty. (Photo by Christine Howard)

frown upon changes made after a cross-out (the card version of the game emphasizes the order of moves more stringently). As the active player, you have the advantage of potentially being able to cross out two numbers during a turn. My advice is to give that some weight.



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Cards vs. Dice

The card version of *QWIXX* is very similar to the dice game, so the learning curve is small. The better news is that it manages to feel like a different game without sacrificing any of the recognizable basics. One of the differences is that you're locked into the order in which you do things. This can make strategizing trickier, but also more crucial. Honestly, the card game has led me to favor a stricter interpretation of the rules for the dice game. It makes it feel like more is at stake (I still pause to do a little math before making a move in the dice game, though).

The dice version of *QWIXX* is a little fuzzy about the order of play. Should the non-active players wait for the active player before crossing anything out? (There's a slight advantage to being able to see what your opponents are up to, after all.) Can the active player calculate a combination move (the sum of one white die and one colored die) before deciding whether to use the sum of both white dice? Ultimately, the game moves faster and is more fun if you don't worry too much about what your opponents are doing, though an occasional glance to see what rows they're close to locking is hard to resist.

There is a joker variant for the card version of *QWIXX* as well, but it has minimal impact on strategy. One of the differences between the card game and the dice game is that all players see the numbers of the cards being played because they are printed on the backs; however, you only see the *color* of your own cards. I will see that my opponent has drawn a 2 from the tableau, but only they will see that it's a *yellow* 2. Adding in the eleven joker cards means that an active player can apply any color to the number appearing on a given joker card.

One thing worth keeping in mind with the card game is that 12s and 2s are worth collecting, even though you don't know what color they are until you've selected



Game over! Two rows locked. (Photo by Christine Howard)

them and turned them over. These two numbers will either get you started in a row or allow you to lock one eventually. They may not be worth holding onto if you're having a bad game, though, since you may want to replace as many cards as possible during a turn.

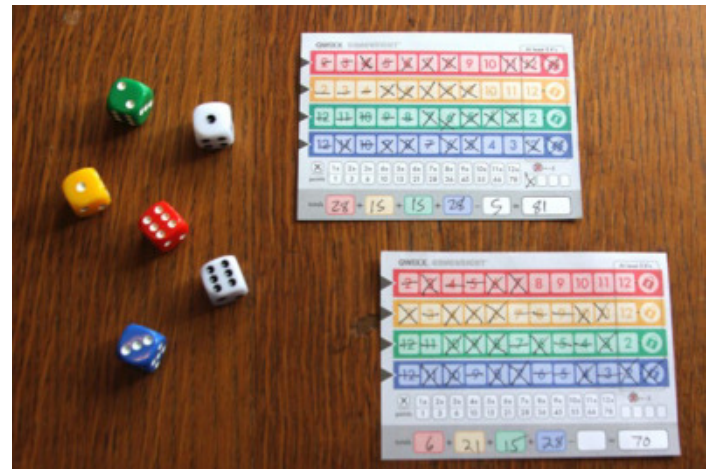
If you're able to use the card on top of the draw pile when you're the active player, it can free you up to discard unusable cards without playing any of them, since, as with the dice game, you're only required to make one of two moves to avoid using a penalty box.





Final Tips & Tricks

QWIXX in both forms is very easy to learn and fun to play. If you're familiar with the game and are here solely to brush up on your strategy, you already know that. For those who are coming to the game for the first time, I'll leave you with this cheat sheet of strategic pointers to consider as you dive in:



The spoils of victory! (Photo by Christine Howard)

- 1 Don't forget to make a hash mark in any skipped number squares so you don't accidentally cross out a closed square later. Also, make sure the mark can't easily be mistaken for an actual cross-out or you might give yourself points you didn't earn.
- 2 Don't mistake higher numbers for a better score. In the end, it's about how many squares you've crossed off, not what numbers they contain. The game plays with your head a little in this regard, since the red and yellow rows go up chronologically, while the green and blue rows go down.
- 3 When you're the active player in the dice version, it pays to do the math on all combinations of white and colored dice before acting on the sum of the two white dice. The temperament of other players may determine how much time you're allowed to take, so brush up on your simple math skills.
- 4 Factor in the crossed-out penalty boxes of your opponents, as well as how many numbers they've crossed out, when it comes to assessing risk. If other players are circling the drain, increase the risk of your own moves. If they're going gangbusters, try to capture some points in any rows they're close to locking.
- 5 Scores for each color row run into the double digits and are tallied horizontally on the scorecard. If you're not exactly a whiz at doing addition in your head, you might want to have your calculator app handy.
- 6 If you have a choice between locking one row over another, locking the row with the most cross-outs is a better choice mathematically. This is true for both the dice and card versions of the game.
- 7 Blow on those dice (or cards)! Beginner's luck is a thing. 🎲



All Eyes:

How Big Potato Games Became a Hot Publisher



Justin Spicer

Music Journalist and
Board Game Experimenter



For a publisher heavily focused on party games, it's important for Big Potato to understand the ever-changing face of the gaming public. Trends shift, preferences evolve, and the industry continually innovates itself into new, exciting directions. People focus on the hotness every year, yet Big Potato has turned this vast board gaming world into a tuberous brand that grows along with the hobby.

"We're never going to lose our party game roots, but it's great that retailers are now open to trying new types of games, and giving smaller publishers a shot," begins Dean Tempest, one of the co-founders of Big Potato (along with Ben Drummond and Tristan Hyatt-Williams), in describing how the company has morphed in its eight years of existence. "I love that light strategy and euro games are now staples in big retailers — that just wasn't the case when we started."

Tempest is excited because Big Potato is preparing to launch its first light-strategy game into a crowded market, though he promises, "Don't worry, they are still easy to learn and quick to play!"

When Big Potato began with its first quiz-style game *Linkee* in 2014, it was born out of the trio's love of board games, and in particular party games. "We thought we'd make it and see what happened, then go back to our old jobs," explains Tempest. "But it went down so well we thought we'd stick around and publish some more games. We saw



The founders of Big Potato Games (left to right): Dean Tempest, Ben Drummond, Tristan Hyatt-Williams

a niche for ourselves in the game industry making simple party games that are easy to learn, quick to play, and look good on the shelf. So we went all in."

This is the ethos of Big Potato: making games that are fair-minded and have mass appeal. But it was a lot to handle in the beginning. "With the success of *Linkee* under

our belts, doors started to open. In fact, more doors than we could handle!" Tempest was handling over 40 retail accounts even as partners Drummond and Hyatt-Williams were still working their advertising day jobs. "We needed a new company that could house all our new game ideas and Big Potato was born. That was eight years ago now and we've grown from three to 35 people!"

“We thought it would be like Willy Wonka’s Chocolate Factory.”

Before Big Potato officially went for it, Tempest and his partners decided to do due diligence. “I remember going to our first ever industry trade show back in 2012. We thought it would be like Willy Wonka’s Chocolate Factory, with kids running around, everyone playing games and having a good time. But it was the opposite: all very serious with lots of middle-aged men walking around with wheelee suitcases and frowns,” describes Tempest. “With our advertising heads on we knew we could stand out in this environment and get noticed.”

And noticed they were. The success of *Linkee* led to the quick expansion and rise of Big Potato Games. “[W]e were like a band whose first single is a hit. You learn loads from it, are filled with confidence, but also



nervous about whether you can repeat the feat. We didn’t want to be one-hit wonders so we stuck to what we felt we could do best: party games.”

“Nobody else had thought to go there.”

The beauty of the perfect party game is that it works for as large of an audience as possible, and Big Potato has been able to find that sweet spot again and again. “*Herd Mentality* is a real standout for me,” Tempest states. “It launched last year in the U.K., and will launch this year in the U.S. We can’t print the game quick enough in the U.K.”

But it’s the familiar party game favorite *The Chameleon* that helped Big Potato make its biggest mark. “[W]e fell in love with the gameplay straight away and licensed

it from Ricki Tahta. It was a great game but needed better packaging and a new name. This is something we’re pretty good at, finding or inventing really strong games, then adding personality, design and humor.”

It’s that penchant for whimsy and design that led them to *Blockbuster*, which leverages the nostalgic video rental store for a movie trivia game. “It was a bit left-field. Everyone is looking for the next great license, and we’re all looking under the same rocks, but that one was cool because nobody else had thought to go there.”



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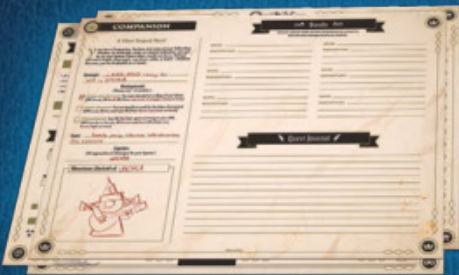


A guided role playing-style game inspired by the Disney and Pixar film, Onward. The game is designed to introduce players to a new genre of gaming, as well as provide RPG fans with an immersive experience. Taking the lore from Quests of Yore featured in Onward, this game leads hobby game enthusiasts and Pixar fans of all ages through an unfolding campaign of adventures and quests.

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“I feel like we’ve been partnering and collaborating from day one”

From that fateful trip to the NEC (National Exhibition Centre) in Birmingham in 2012 through the present, Big Potato has always been about working with other designers and publishers on helping to launch a game to the next level. But it comes from a work ethic where showing up can make all the difference. “Whether it’s Essen, Nuremberg, Hong Kong, Gen Con, or the U.K. Games Expo, we always tag along. Mainly because we really enjoy it, but also because we meet loads of great people and good things happen,” explains Tempest.

Not only has this led to the myriad games and success Big Potato has had, but it also has helped them craft a deeper strategy in how they design, market, advertise, and publish these titles. “What we’ve gotten better at over the years is making the right games for the right markets. What customers like in America is not always the same as the U.K., France, or Germany.”

“It might be as simple as a name change or different box, but now we’re smarter in different markets,” continued Tempest. “We realized early on that a good game is not enough. You can have the best game in

the world, but if it doesn’t look good, sound good and isn’t priced competitively, it’s going to be really hard to get it on a shelf.”

This strategy has paid off. Not only does Big Potato boast over 40 games in 30 countries, they are planning on opening a new office in Germany sometime in 2021.



“We try to make our customers feel like they are part of our potato family.”

“We never ignore a message from a customer, good or bad, and our customer service team are the best in the business,” Tempest assures.

This is where Tempest believes Big Potato stands strongest. Despite the company’s many partnerships and collaborations, its intuitive eyes for searching and developing strong party games, and being unafraid to push themselves into new areas, being consumer-centric and putting them first is what sets Big Potato apart. “We try to make our customers feel like they are part of our potato family. This starts with the promise

that any game they buy is genuinely good fun, well made and ethically produced.”

It’s this last part that is guiding Big Potato toward new changes as the company begins to assess its part in the climate change discussion and how it can become more sustainable. “By the end of 2021, 64 percent of our games will be 100 percent plastic-free, and we’ll keep going until we’re perfect. We’re constantly pushing our manufacturing partners to come up with innovative solutions.”



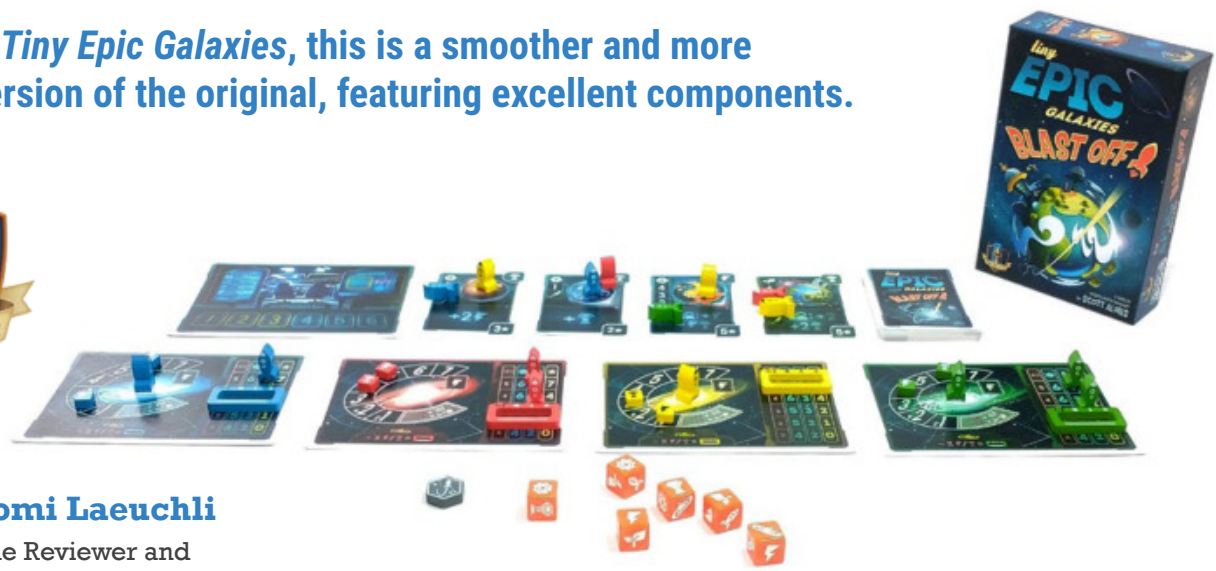
This emphasis on doing its best and taking chances is the fibrous, starchy matter that keeps Big Potato strong. Not only is the company always listening to consumers, but they are also gaining confidence to sprout in other areas of the hobby. On top of the launch of its first light-strategy game, Big Potato will also be launching a series of puzzles. They also have a game that has been more than two years in the making, called *What Next?* "It's like a *Choose Your Own Adventure* game meets the *Crystal Maze*. We're boldly describing it as the world's first action-adventure board game," announced Tempest.

But in the true tradition of a party-game-first publisher, Big Potato is preparing the fall launch of *Snakessss*, "which is a really cool blend of social deduction and trivia," explains Tempest. "We worked with (Sushi Go designer) Phil Walker Harding on this one. Our designers did an incredible job on the box, too."

As for the future of Big Potato Games, this is one spud you are going to want to keep your eyes on. 🍷



A new take on *Tiny Epic Galaxies*, this is a smoother and more streamlined version of the original, featuring excellent components.



Naomi Laeuchli
Game Reviewer and
Casual Game Groupie

Each player is given a galaxy map on which they track their culture and energy points, their galaxy level, and any ships when not in use. The planet deck is shuffled and a set number of cards, based on player count, is dealt face-up to the table. On your turn you roll dice, with the number of dice determined by your galaxy's level. You activate the dice one at a time. You can spend one energy to reroll all unused dice at any point, and as often as you have energy to do so.

There are several possible actions you can perform when activating dice. First, you can move one of your ships to a planet, either landing or orbiting. When landing, you immediately perform the planet's action, such as gaining resources. When orbiting, you place the ship on the start of the planet's track — when you activate a life or tech action, you may advance a ship by one space on a matching track on one of the planets you are orbiting. When you reach the top of

a track, you colonize the planet and move it in front of you to score points (a new planet is drawn to replace it). When you activate an energy or culture action, you acquire one of that resource for each ship on a planet card showing the same resource. Ships on your galaxy map can also earn you energy.

Finally, the 'utilize galaxy' action allows you to either use the ability of one of your colonized planets, or upgrade your galaxy by spending the necessary number of points in either energy or culture. A higher-level galaxy will give you additional dice and ships and is worth more points. On your turn you can also discard a die and spend an energy or culture to convert an unused die to anything you wish.

On another player's turn, just after they activate each of the first three dice or convert a die, you may spend a culture point to copy the same action. This ability to follow another player's action keeps everyone at the table continually engaged. It also forces you to carefully choose the order of actions on your turn to minimize what benefits your opponents can receive during your turn.

The endgame is triggered once a player has twenty-one points. After everyone has taken an equal number of turns, the player with the most points wins.

Tiny Epic Galaxies BLAST OFF! distills the rules of the original game into something easier to play but no less nuanced in the choices it offers players. It is still quite strategic, yet accessible to a wider audience, and makes for a great *Tiny Epic* experience.

Tiny Epic Galaxies BLAST OFF!

Designed by Scott Almes

LUCK		STRATEGY	
INTERACTIVE		INDEPENDENT	



***Umbra Via* is an abstract silent auction, tile-laying, and area control game; an unusual blend that results in a challenging strategy game.**



At the start, each player sets aside eleven soul flowers on top of their player soul tile. Each round, four path tiles are drawn. Players secretly draw three flowers from their bags and choose which tiles to bid on with their flowers. Energy flowers are worth one, while soul flowers are worth two. All players then reveal their initial bids. You then go a second round, drawing three more flowers and again bidding in secret before revealing your choices. The player who bid the most flowers on a tile wins it. All soul flowers that were bid are then returned to the box, while energy flowers remain on the tiles. Next, tiles are placed on the board, with all energy flowers still on them. Tiles containing the fewest flowers are placed first, and so on, until all tiles have been placed.

Every path tile shows a section of path with at least two openings. When placing a tile it must stay in the same orientation in which it was drawn from the tile deck. A tile must also be placed next to an already placed tile. When tile openings connect with each other they form a path. When all the openings of a path are blocked off, the path is considered closed. A tile placement can close multiple paths at a time. A path can also be a single tile that has had all openings closed.

When a path is closed it is immediately resolved. You count the flowers on all tiles in the path; the player with the most flowers on the path then moves soul flowers from their soul tile into their flower bag. The number of soul flowers moved is equal to the number of tiles in the path. Working

down through the flower rankings, each other player takes soul flowers equal to half the number awarded to the previous player (rounded down). All energy flowers are then returned to their respective bags, and the tiles are discarded. Once all tiles have been placed and resolved, a new round begins. The first player to claim all of their soul flowers wins.

Umbra Via is visually beautiful and mentally challenging. There are so many levels to each choice. The two-step bidding allows a peek at what people are thinking and often leaves you second-guessing yourself. You have to consider tile placement order, where tiles will go, and who controls which paths. There's so much going on, with rules that remain easy to learn, in a tight game that plays in under an hour.

Umbra Via

Designed by Connor Wake

2-4 PLAYERS

30-45 MINS

AGES 9+

\$40
MSRP



LUCK

STRATEGY



INTERACTIVE

INDEPENDENT





Will you be a Sherlock Holmes, Doctor Watson, or Inspector Lestrade? Tackle each case and see how clever a detective you really are.



Each entry in *The Sherlock Files* series consists of three cases, with each case contained in a deck of cards. Players select a case, place the first card in the center of the table, and read the story. The rest of the cards are shuffled and each player is dealt two-to-three cards (based on player count). A card might show a suspect, a photograph of evidence, or a report. On your turn you choose a card in your hand and either play it face-up or discard it face-down. You then draw a new card. Your goal is to play cards that are relevant to solving the mystery and discard those that are not. Any irrelevant cards played face-up are worth negative points at the end.

Once you have worked through the entire deck and all cards in hand, players discuss the case and try to deduce what happened. While playing cards you cannot talk about the ones you've discarded or your hand, but during the final phase you can attempt to remember any discarded cards and talk about them. Once you think you have solved the case, you open the case's booklet and attempt to answer each question posed there. You then read the solution, which presents the entire case, matching card numbers with each element of the story. You earn points for correct answers, lose points for face-up irrelevant cards, and then check the scoreboard to see how well you did.

The Sherlock Files is a great deduction game system, and it feels quite satisfying when you crack the case. Each mystery still requires players to make deductions and piece together the evidence in order to reach the solution, rather than giving the answers away — even if you have kept all the right cards. There's also the memory element of trying to remember what you've discarded, which is challenging in its own right. This doesn't take away from the tension of trying to decide which cards to discard, but it does act as a backup in case you make a bad call.

Depending on the players, some mysteries may be more satisfying than others, but it's always fun to discuss the case together at the end and piece together what happened. While you can only play each case through once, it's extremely easy to reset and pass the game on. The rules are also quite simple, making this one of the most accessible mystery games out there.

The Sherlock Files

Francisco Gallego Arredondo, Martí Lucas Feliu, Josep Izquierdo Sánchez

1-8 PLAYERS

60 MINS

AGES 14+

\$25
MSRP



LUCK

STRATEGY



INTERACTIVE

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Dungeon Academy offers a unique twist on the roll-and-write genre, adding a real-time racing element to the gameplay.



At the start of the game, each player is dealt a hero. Different heroes have different amounts of health and mana, and each hero has a unique ability. Each round, you roll the dice in the covered tray, then start the timer and remove the cover. The dice lie in a four-by-four grid, with every die representing a room in the dungeon. Each player has a sheet which shows an identical grid. While the timer runs, players must plot a path through the dice, drawing the path on their sheet. You must start in one of the rooms at the edge of the grid, and cannot enter the same room twice. Rooms are connected horizontally and vertically, and you do not have to enter every room. Once you have finished drawing your path, you take an exit card. Once all the exit cards are taken or the timer ends, each player's path is resolved.

Dice can roll small monsters that require one health or mana to defeat, big monsters that require two, or potions which can restore one health or mana. You earn one glory point for each monster you defeat, and lose the appropriate amount of health and/or mana. You then choose a quest to complete, deciding whether to score a point for each little, big, health, or mana monster you defeated this round. You may only choose each quest once during the game. Finally, a loot card is drawn for each player in the game, and each player chooses one in the order in which they exited the dungeon.

If you go below zero on either health or mana, drew an illegal path, or did not exit the dungeon before the timer ended, you earn no points for the round but do heal up to full for the next round (players typically do not heal between rounds unless an ability allows it). Players who failed the round do not get a loot card. Some loot cards are worth points at the end of the game, while others can heal you or help you to defeat monsters. The players with the most glory points at the end of four rounds wins.

Dungeon Academy

Designed by Julian Allain

1-6 PLAYERS

20 MINS

AGES 10+

\$30 MSRP



LUCK

STRATEGY



INTERACTIVE

INDEPENDENT



Dungeon Academy feels different and more chaotic than your typical roll-and-write. You have less than a minute to plot your course, and the puzzle grows more complicated as special dice are swapped in between rounds. There is also an excellent push-your-luck element to how many rooms you try to reach and how quickly you make your escape. This is a standout in its genre.



Crossed Words is a party word game about coming up with unusual connections as quickly as possible.



A three-by-three grid is placed in the center of the table and each player takes nine discs of their chosen color, as well as a dry erase marker. Each round you draw a start card and place it along the edge of the top row. This card also shows what category of card to place along the edge of each space at the top of the grid and along the left-hand side. Players then start writing words on their discs and placing them face-down in spaces of the grid.

The goal is to write a word or phrase that fits both cards for the row and column of that space. There is a lot of wiggle room for correct answers – for example, if it's a phrase, the whole phrase might only meet the requirements of one of the two cards while only a portion of the phrase fits the second card. The same applies for words. For example 'Fred' would fit both a color ('red') and a boy's name. The amount of flexibility allowed really encourages a great deal of creativity and allows players to think outside the box.

Players may place more than one disc in the same grid space. Once someone has placed all nine of their discs, they give a countdown and then the round ends. Each grid space is then checked by taking out all the discs from a space and reading each one. Any answers that do not fit both cards are discarded, as are any duplicate answers. Each player who then has at least one valid disc still in play for that space, places a

single disc in the scoring pile. After each space has been checked, the player with the most discs in the score pile earns three points, the second most earns two points, and the third most earns one point. The discs are returned to each player and erased, all the cards are discarded and new ones drawn, and a new round begins. The game ends if anyone has at least seven points at the end of a round and the player with the most points wins.

The strength of **Crossed Words** lies in how flexible answers can be, while the card categories ensure that there will be a challenge – some of the card combinations are extremely tricky. The way the cards are dealt ensures tons of variety from game to game, and the wordplay element of the puzzle is both fascinating and unusual.

Crossed Words

Designed by Nick Little, Evan Davis



3-6 PLAYERS



30 MINS



AGES 14+

\$25

MSRP



INTERACTIVE

INDEPENDENT





Bravo! is an abstract roll-and-write game featuring multiple ways to score, bonuses to earn, and many paths to victory.



Each player is given a sheet with a grid of colored squares. On a player's turn they roll the seven dice. Three dice show a color, three a number, and one is the special die. Players take turns passing, choosing one color and one numbered die, or selecting the special. After the first three turns, the other players cannot choose the same dice the active player chose.

When you choose a number and color, you must cross off that number of boxes in that color on your sheet. The boxes must either start in the middle column of your grid or be adjacent to a box you have previously marked off. All the boxes you mark off in a turn must be grouped together, and you must mark off the exact number indicated by the die. Sometimes the color or number dice will roll wilds, allowing you to choose any

color or any number up to five. When you use a wild you must mark off one of the wilds on your sheet.

In order to use the special die, you must have at least one special die circled on your sheet, which you then mark off. You start the game with one circled and earn more by marking off certain squares or completing rows. The special die will allow you actions such as marking off two boxes that have stars or a large set of squares. One side also allows you to circle a heart. When you complete a column you earn bonus points, and you will earn extra bonus points based on how many hearts you have circled. Players also earn points for filling out all the squares of a single color, or being the first to complete a row. The game ends once any player has filled in all the squares of two colors. Players add up the points for their completed rows, columns, and colors, as well as points for any unused jokers and special dice still on their sheets, and finally lose two points for each square with a star that's not marked off. The highest score wins.

Each choice you make can have multiple repercussions, as different elements often combine to score in different ways. Players also score extra for being the first to complete a row or column, so you have to consider your opponent's choices as well as your own when selecting dice. Purely abstract, the gameplay itself is what draws you in. With zero downtime, **Bravo!** is both engaging and challenging, and balances well across its player counts.

Bravo!

Designed by Inka Brand, Markus Brand

1-6 PLAYERS

30 MINS

AGES 8+

\$25 MSRP



LUCK

STRATEGY



INTERACTIVE

INDEPENDENT





Smart 10 is a neat little trivia party game that enables all players to participate in every round.

The game consists of a trivia device filled with cards. The top card shows a trivia question in the center and ten items that (generally) relate to that question. Markers are inserted next to each item, covering the answer. Each round the active player reads the question aloud and picks a marker to remove. Some questions will simply have true or false answers, and you want to only find the items that fit the question. For others, you need to guess a number or date aloud before removing the marker, or you might need to guess the order of the items listed, or a word related to the item the answer marker is connected to. If your answer is correct, you place the drawn marker in front of yourself. You then pass the box to the next player. Players take turns choosing to answer or to pass. If one of your answers is incorrect, you are out of the round and lose all your previous markers. If you pass or all markers have been revealed, you earn one point for each marker you earned. At the end of the round, all markers are put back in the device and a new card is put on top. The first player or team to reach thirty points wins the game.

Smart 10's questions come in a large variety of categories and question types. There's a push-your-luck aspect to the game, and the game device is cleverly designed – it can even track each player's points using the built-in scoring wheels. The portability of the device also makes it a great option to take along on a trip or an outing with friends. 🎲



martinex®

Smart 10

Designed by Christoph Reiser, Arno Steinwender

2-8 PLAYERS

15 MINS

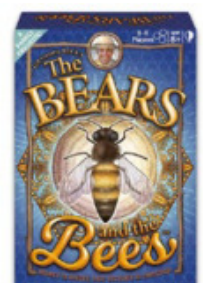
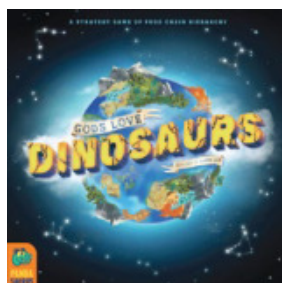
AGES 10+

\$20
MSRP

INTERACTIVE INDEPENDENT

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Cloud City is Major Fun!



The Concept

You are an architect creating a layout for a network of interconnected skyscrapers. Up and up, higher, and higher, the city rises! The City Council will select only

one architect's plan — the most ambitious expansion will gather the most votes and become a blueprint for your very own city in the clouds!

The Components

Houses have curb appeal. Games have table presence. *Cloud City's* 3-D elements are fun and engaging and will draw attention whenever it is played.

There are 96 plastic buildings split evenly between three different colors: green, blue, and sandy brown. All buildings of a single color represent different heights: sandy buildings are the tallest, green buildings are medium, and blue are the shortest.

Each color building has a set of 31 matching walkways. The walkways come in five different lengths. Forty-eight square city tiles depict different configurations of colored buildings rising above the clouds. Each tile is split into four grid squares and each tile has a mix of two open cloud spaces and two spaces with a green, blue, or sand colored building. There are some special request cards that add more scoring options.

To play, each player takes a starting tile and places matching colored buildings on the corresponding

spaces shown on the tile. The remaining city tiles are shuffled, and each player receives a hand of three tiles. Three tiles are also flipped face-up for all to see. Give yourself enough room on the table to build around since your city is about to expand!





The Mechanics

Cloud City is a game about building bridges. The more – and longer – bridges you can construct to connect buildings of similar height, the more votes you will secure from the City Council. The most votes wins the game.

The game is played over eight turns with four players or 11 turns with 2-3 players. At the end of a four-player game, your city will be a square; a 3-by-3 grid of 9 city tiles with buildings rising from each tile, some connected by bridges.

At the end of a 2-3 player game, your city will be a rectangle: either a 3-by-4 or a 4-by-3 grid of city tiles, again with buildings and connecting bridges.

Each turn in the game you will do two things and have an option for a third: you will pick one tile from your hand and add it to your city. You will place matching colored 3-D buildings on the corresponding colored spaces on the tile. Last but not least, you now have the option to build bridges between buildings.

The bridges come in five different sizes spanning one, two, three, five, or eight spaces. The top of each building is made in such a way that the point of each bridge will nestle down snugly into the roof.

There are a few restrictions to keep in mind when building each bridge. A bridge can only connect buildings of the same color/height (always a flat walkway – never any ramps), it cannot pass over an open area without a city tile under it, cross over a building of the same color/height, lay across another bridge of the same color/height, and each building may only have two bridges connected to it. You are welcome to build as many bridges as you like on a given turn, provided you follow these restrictions.

That said, you are never obligated to build a bridge. You always have the option to wait and build on a later turn.

After playing a tile, placing buildings, and deciding whether to build bridges, you draw a new city tile into your hand either from the face-up row of city tiles or the top face-down tile from the draw pile. Play continues until each player's city is complete.

Scoring is simple. Each bridge has a number of points listed on it. Add up all the points on the bridges you have built. This is the number of votes you receive. The most votes wins the game.



What Sets This Game Apart?

Each choice allows your city to expand; every new tile offers new buildings and possible connections. But each choice also begins to set the boundaries for your city, giving shape and limits to what you will be able to build in just a few short turns. This means you have to pay attention to how your city expands and contracts with every choice you make.

You have to consider how to line up like-colored buildings in order to build bridges. Small connections are easier to line up, but they yield fewer points. In order to leave large gaps open for longer bridges to be built, you will most likely have to focus on one specific level and not try to optimize every possible path. The pressure of building in such a small area makes every choice in the game meaningful, challenging, and fun.

Something as simple as the layout of the colored buildings on each tile in your hand becomes extremely important when considering how to keep each level on your city open for longer bridges and higher scores.

This makes the choice of what tile to take at the end of each turn significant. If you don't think ahead to your needs beyond the current bridge, your city will fill up and leave you with buildings in the way, preventing longer bridges.

What tile to place is important, but when to place bridges is just as critical. Early on, you can bank points by connecting smaller, obvious paths, but risk is involved. Because each building can only have two bridge connections, you might close off larger scoring potentials. Wait too long, though, and another building might go up, blocking your path.

Even when things don't go according to plan, the game goes so quickly, you will be left wanting to try again and make better choices next time. *Cloud City* condenses the quiet,

contemplative fun of a much longer and more involved game into a brief encounter, a short story instead of a novel. No less moving or interesting for its brevity, but certainly more accessible.

Final Thoughts

Cloud City is Major Fun because it is condensed and refined. Play a tile, place buildings, build bridges — rules easy enough for players from mid-elementary age to retirement to grok the basics and learn by doing.

It is also hard to overstate the powerful draw of creating a 3-D map of your own to marvel at when the game is done. Your choices make something to be admired and studied whether you win or lose.

Cloud City earns our Spiel of Approval because it offers an even deeper level of strategy and gameplay through the addition of special request cards. These cards provide additional ways to score. The rules and flow of the game remain completely unchanged — but the goals these cards push you to strive for make the game completely new and different.

No matter what level of strategy you enjoy, there's a simple, beautiful elegance to the dance your mind does when you play *Cloud City*. There are so few turns in each game, each one matters in surprising and fun ways. We don't need to build this game up. *Cloud City*, for all its headiness, has set down deep roots in Major Fun. ☺

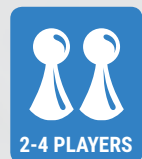
Stephen Conway is the director of The Spiel Foundation, a non-profit organization dedicated to making the world a more playful place. He also oversees two internationally recognized game award programs, The Major Fun Award and The Spiel of Approval.

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



Cloud City

Designer: Phil Walker-Harding, Artist: Fabrice ROS



2-4 PLAYERS



30-60 MINS



AGES 10+



\$35

MSRP

Time to Teach/Learn: 3 minutes



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Your Turn!

A Spotlight on the
Gaming Community



What is the most
addicting game
you've ever played?

“*Splendor*. Easy to learn, colorful, and I kept telling my family all about it until I got my own copy in the mail and offered any family members money if they played it with me. They liked playing *Splendor* so much I no longer need to resort to bribery to play!”

— Debbie C.



“Probably *For Sale*. I don't know what it was about it, but we would play it half a dozen times a night, trying to get everybody a win in that game. Fun times!”

— Max O.

“*Blokus*. Learned it on a whim and was immediately entranced by the puzzle. Every turn is challenging and rewarding.”

— Michael B.

“Bubblee Pop, short and quick, makes you want to play again.”

— Michael T.

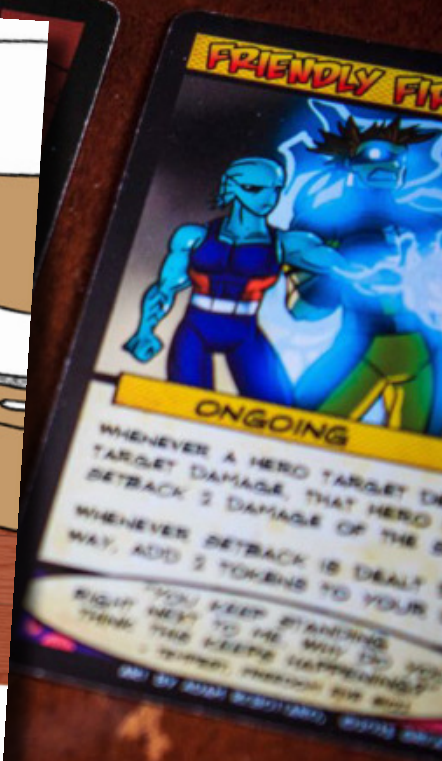


“Sentinels of the Multiverse. After each game, I want to form a new team of heroes and battle another villain.”

— Mike R.



“They’ve been playing that same game for days without eating or showering. Do you still have the number to the board game addiction hotline?”





“Kokoro: Avenue of the Kodama. At the end of the game, you almost always have a master plan that you just barely miss because you don’t get the piece you need. This makes me want to play it again and again in an attempt to complete a huge road.”

— Christian M.

“It would have to be Space Base. It’s like a trip to a sci-fi engine-building casino.”

— Doug Taylor

“Thieves by Calliope Games. We are constantly playing it at lunch years after I bought it.”

— Jonathan C.

“Sagrada. I love the puzzle of the game and the various ways you can tweak the dice to work for your game board.”

— Nichole B.



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“7 Wonders. Such a great game that plays different every time. Military or science or civic — you can win with so many different strategies. Win, lose, or draw, I would play this anytime I’m asked.”
 — Jeffrey Y.



“Exploding Kittens. Not my favorite game, but it’s a hit with the group and fun to play over and over again.”
 — Joseph S.

“Knowing that we love dice games, some friends gifted us with Quarriors. We immediately played it 10 times in a row and couldn’t get enough of it.”
 — Renee S.

“I am addicted to *Silver and Gold*. It’s easy to teach/learn. It’s short, sweet, and simple.”
 — Lauren B.





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