

Casual Game™ INSIDER

BOARD GAMING MAGAZINE Winter 2017 / #18



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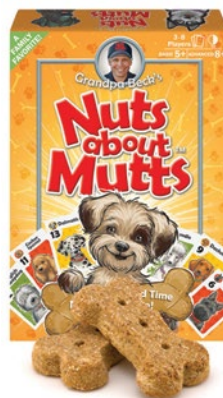
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BezierGames.com



Gamelyn Games, founded by Michael Coe and best known for their *Tiny Epic* games, delivers thought provoking, high quality, and affordable products with top-notch customer service.

GamelynGames.com



Game time is quality time! Our four award-winning games have gone from our kitchen table to homes in many countries. When you want an engaging, portable, fun game, remember Grandpa Beck's Games!

GrandpaBecksGames.com



Mayday focuses on light, family-friendly games like *Get Bit!*, *Walk the Plank*, *Click Clack Lumberjack*, and *Coconuts*, plus some strategy games like *Bootleggers* and *Viceroy*. We also manufacture an extensive line of card sleeves and accessories.

MaydayGames.com



Cheapass Games is a small but mighty tabletop game publisher. They've been designing quirky, inexpensive games for 20 years. Look for deluxe games, cheap games, and free games at their double-secret website Cheapass.com.

Cheapass.com



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

StratusGames.com



Green Couch Games, founded by game designer Jason Kotarski, makes great little games that make great big connections; specializing in easy-to-learn card games for families, gamers, and families of gamers.

GreenCouchGames.com





Daily Magic Games is a designer-friendly and customer-focused publisher specializing in casual tabletop games that are easy to learn and play, yet layered with strategy and depth.

DailyMagicGames.com



Calliope Games publishes family-friendly tabletop games, including *Tsuro* and *Roll For It!*. Calliope games are carefully crafted so kids and adults can play on equal footing – fun and affordable for folks of all ages!

CalliopeGames.com



Founded in 2010, Cryptozoic Entertainment, Inc. is a premier developer and publisher of original and licensed board games, card games, collectibles, comics, and trading cards.

Cryptozoic.com



Ultra PRO International is a leading manufacturer of tabletop games & accessories based in California. Ultra PRO's Entertainment Division publishes a variety of strategy and deck building card games under the brands Jolly Roger Games and Stone Blade Entertainment.

UltraPRO.com



Looney Labs was founded in 1996 by Kristin and Andrew Looney. Our mission is to create fun! We publish *Fluxx*, *Just Deserts*, *Loonacy*, and games for *Looney Pyramids*.

LooneyLabs.com



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

BlueOrangeGames.com



Thank you! *Casual Game Insider* wouldn't be possible without our generous readers. Everything we do, we do it for you.

We have lots of great content in store for you in this and future issues. We hope you enjoy it!





EXPAND › EXPLORE › EXPLOIT › EXTERMINATE!



Engaging gameplay, accessible rules, fascinating strategy, and attractive artwork have long been trademark characteristics of games designed by Scott Almes and published by Gamelyn Games. Now we can add one more superlative to that list – outstanding miniatures!

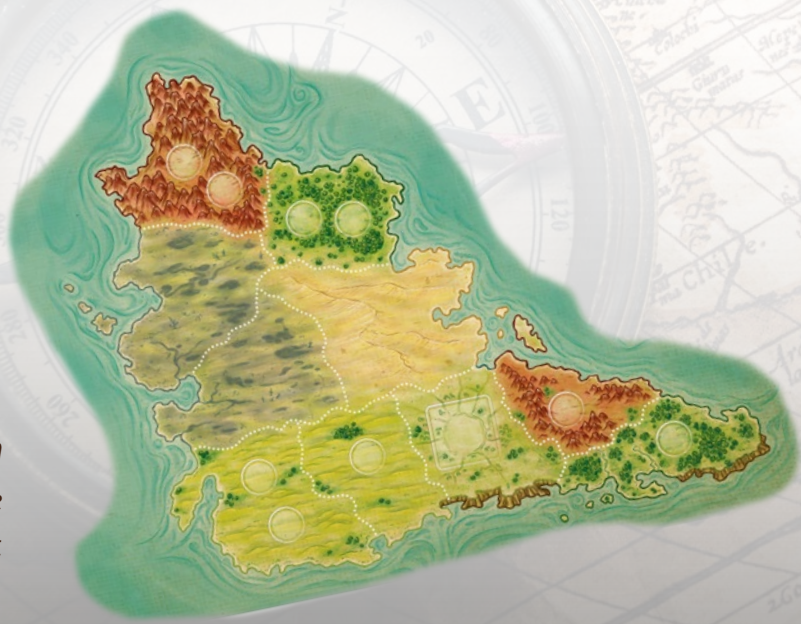
You may already know Gamelyn Games from their hit *Tiny Epic* series (*Tiny Epic Kingdoms*, *Tiny Epic Galaxies*, *Tiny Epic Quest*). Some are calling *Heroes of Land, Air & Sea* the truly epic version of *Tiny Epic Kingdoms* as it seems this time Gamelyn Games has set aside TINY to deliver just EPIC!

Heroes of Land, Air & Sea takes 2-4 players (6 with added factions) on a magical journey through a fantasy world filled with bravery, conquest, and triumph. In the game you are leading a faction from its humble beginnings to a majestic empire. At your disposal, you have a capital city which consists of buildings and action spaces that can be used to train new heroes, research spells, collect resources, and expand the reach of your kingdom. By making careful use of the resources, peons, warriors, and heroes; controlling key locations by moving your armies via land, air, and sea; and building towers, you may claim victory!

The game incorporates high-quality components, stunning artwork, and exceptional miniatures guaranteed to immerse you into the rich story and enticing gameplay contained in Heroes of Land, Air & Sea.



With asymmetrical faction abilities, exploration, conquest, and the ability to level up your capital city and your heroes – this game is certain to offer an experience you will want to return to over and over again! And at a two hour play time, it never outstays its welcome.





You can reserve your copy of this spectacular game – today! Starting January 26th, Gamelyn Games will be seeking funding via Kickstarter to help raise the funds necessary to produce and publish *Heroes of Land, Air & Sea*. Your pledge will help add even more content to this already fantastic game!

If the game reaches all its stretch goals, it will boast 80 miniatures! Additionally, there are plans to make four additional factions available, which would increase the number of miniatures to 160 and the number of players from 2-4 to 2-6! The game will come packed with components, giving you and your friends many memorable gaming experiences over the years to come.

All the miniatures in the game are detailed and carefully sculpted by Chad Hoverter (Mice and Mystics, Tail Feathers) to capture the striking artwork and fantastical feel of each faction.



EVOLVE YOUR KINGDOM!

Pledge for your copy of *Heroes of Land, Air & Sea*!

<http://www.gamelyngames.com/games/heroes-land-air-sea/>





Celestia

Some games are a joy to look at as well as to play, and *Celestia* is one such game – from the breathtaking artwork that takes you to another world to the 3D airship that transports you there.



Naomi Laeuchli

*Game Reviewer and
Casual Game Groupie*

MSRP: \$30
Designer: Aaron Weissblum
Publisher: Quick Simple Fun Games
2-6 players, ages 8+, 30 mins.

Nine tiles are laid down on the table, each one belonging to a different fantastical city. Each city has a deck of treasure cards associated with it. At the start of the game, every player is dealt a hand of equipment cards. One player takes on the role of captain and players put their pawns on the airship. The airship is then placed on the first city tile, and the game begins.

The captain rolls the number of dice indicated on the next city tile in order to travel. Each die has various symbols showing obstacles which occur on the journey. The captain must play equipment cards whose symbols match those on the dice in order to successfully reach the next location, otherwise the airship crashes and no one on board collects a treasure. Any player except the captain may choose to abandon ship before the journey, getting out at the current city and collecting a treasure card from its deck. The players remaining on the airship will attempt to travel to the next city with the captain.

Once the airship reaches a new city, or it crashes, the next player on board is made captain. The farther you go in your travels, the more valuable the treasure. Some treasure decks also include useful items you can use, but this is not quite as common as it should be.

After the ship crashes or everyone disembarks, the airship goes back to the first city and the journey begins again. The game continues until a player has acquired fifty points worth of treasure.

There's a unique combination of collaboration and competitiveness in this game, as players are all working

together to move the airship forward, yet trying to abandon ship at the perfect moment to leave the other players high and dry. Not only do you need to carefully consider whether a player can successfully captain the ship to the next city, but also if your hand could get you through another round as captain. All players are allies for only as long as it suits them. Hand management is incredibly important and there's a fun mix of press-your-luck and strategy involved in every decision you make.

Celestia does most everything right and feels unique and fresh. Between gameplay and components, it is immersive, fantastical, and a delight to play.





FUSE

Cooperate, communicate, and calculate your chances in this real-time cooperative dice game that mixes luck with a healthy dose of strategic risk-taking.

In *FUSE*, players must race to defuse a certain number of bomb cards in ten minutes. Each player starts the game with two bomb cards in front of them, five are placed face up in the center of the table, and the rest form the deck. On your turn you pull a certain number of dice from the bag and roll them. Players then confer about which dice to place on which of the bomb cards in front of them. Each bomb card needs a certain set of dice to be played on it. Some cards require specific dice values, while others indicate sets of colors. Some are easy to defuse while others have very specific requirements, such as a stack of dice in a particular order. Any dice you've rolled that can't be placed on any of the bomb cards must be rerolled and each player must discard one die from their bomb cards that matches either the number or color.

After a player has successfully met all the requirements of a bomb's card, it is set aside and the player draws one of the cards from the center of the table,

which in turn is replaced by a card from the deck. If a fuse card is drawn, each player has to discard a die from one of their bomb cards. If any bomb cards remain in the center of the table after ten minutes, everyone loses the game.

There is a press-your-luck element to *FUSE*, as you juggle the need to defuse the more complex bombs with the penalty for not managing to play all your dice each turn. But you have to think strategically about it, discussing which dice to assign where, all while working against the clock. You really start to feel the pressure around the five minute mark, decisions become more reckless, and communication becomes more frenzied.

If you like a little chaos on your game night, you can't go wrong with *FUSE*. And it only takes ten minutes to play!

MSRP: \$30

Designer: Kane Klenko

Publisher: Renegade Game Studios

1-5 players, ages 10+, 10 mins.



Wolf & Hound

It isn't always easy to find a team-based board game, especially one for casual gamers. When one comes around that's not only fun, offers varying levels of depth, and combines this with beautiful components and adorable artwork, you end up with a winner like *Wolf & Hound*.

The goal of the game is to save your team's sheep and chase off your opponents'. The board has four sides. You and your teammate sit across from each other. On your turn you can play either a wolf card or a hound card. This will cause one of these animals to move along the spaces of the board according to the number shown on the card. If at the start of a player's turn the wolf is in front of her, one of her sheep is chased away. If the hound is in front of her, one of her sheep is brought back to its paddock. Once a player has no sheep left, their team loses the game.

Trying to read your partner and play off of him or her is critical to maneuvering the wolf and hound to ideal locations, and as you grow more familiar with the game you begin to understand better how to best read different plays and card choices. This helps you to understand your partner as well as

your opponents, and all played cards are left face up so you are in possession of a lot of information.

There is also a lot of adjustability to the game. Don't have four players? The game offers rule variants for two to three players (though the three player variant may not be quite as enjoyable for the player without a teammate). You can even adjust the difficulty of the game. The basic wolf and hound simply move around the board as you play your cards. But the game also comes with many variations for the wolf and hound, each with unique abilities and special rules, so that you can increase the complexity and strategy involved in the game. The downside to all of these variants is a rather thick and daunting rulebook.

But with a quick playtime and a surprising amount of strategy, *Wolf & Hound* gives you so many reasons to play it 'one more time.' If you're looking for a great casual team game, this is the perfect title to fill the opening.



MSRP: \$35

Designer: Fukutarou

Publisher: Ninja Star Games

2-4 players, ages 10+, 10-20 mins.



Apotheca

Apotheca takes you to a dark and secretive world of brewing mystical, magical potions, with equal parts ambiance, theme, and clever gameplay.

The board is made up of a 4 by 4 grid. At the start of the game, each player is given one apothecary card and six potion tiles are laid down on the grid, four face-up and two facedown. Each potion tile is one of three colors.

On your turn you may carry out two actions. Actions include flipping over a facedown potion tile and gaining a gem matching its color, exchanging a certain number of gems for a new apothecary card, using the power of an apothecary card, or restocking the board with up to three facedown potion cards.

Every apothecary card has unique and beautiful artwork and each gives a player the ability to move potions around the board in a unique way. The goal of the game is to line up three or more potions of a single color. Once you do, you discard them from the board and remove one of your apothecaries from play. The first player to create three matching sets wins the game.

The rules are quick and simple to teach and you quickly get sucked into the gameplay, but there's plenty of strategy to master. It feels like a puzzle, manipulating the tiles around the board, trying to figure out how to put your apothecaries' powers to the best uses, all while trying to foil the plans of your opponents.

MSRP: \$40
Designer: Andrew Federspiel
Publishers: Knapsack Games, Renegade Game Studios
1-4 players, ages 13+, 30 mins.

From the game board to the gems, everything about this game is a treat for the eye, and various apothecary powers range from fun to challenging. Lining up the perfect move is tricky, and sometimes it can go spectacularly wrong. Choosing which apothecary to say goodbye to when you make a match can also be a tricky decision. For the casual game lover who enjoys some thoughtful strategy mixed with a fun fantasy theme, *Apotheca* is ideal.



Good Cop Bad Cop

The local police precinct is rife with corruption. An agent has been sent to rally the honest cops, root out the bad eggs, and find the kingpin.

Good Cop Bad Cop is a social deduction game for casual players, with a quick playtime and a lot of information collected on which you can base your guesses.

Each player is dealt three facedown integrity cards which they may look at. These cards determine whether you are a corrupt cop or an honest one. Whichever one you have a majority of determines which team you are on, with two exceptions: if you have the agent card, you are automatically good, and if you have the kingpin card, you are automatically corrupt.

On your turn you may peek at one of another player's integrity cards, draw an equipment card (which gives you a helpful bonus), pick up one of the gun tiles from the center of the table, or use a gun tile you already have to 'shoot' another player. Drawing a card and picking up a gun both require you to reveal one of your integrity cards.

When a player is shot, he must turn over all his integrity cards. If he is the agent or kingpin, he takes a wounded token. If he is shot again, he and his team lose the game. If he is not the agent or kingpin, he is eliminated from the game after taking the first bullet.

MSRP: \$20

Designers: Brian Henk, Clayton Skancke

Publisher: Overworld Games

4-8 players, ages 12+, 10-20 mins.

You may only shoot a player you are aiming a gun at, and may only switch your aim at the end of your turn.

Not all the equipment cards are equal, and it would be nice if there were more variation in the artwork of the integrity cards, but it's a lot of fun to try to piece together all the information you have and try to guess who is on your team. There's a lot of variation on how the integrity cards will be distributed each game between the players, and many different ways to try to trick other players or form new strategies. *Good Cop Bad Cop* does an excellent job of keeping everyone involved and paying attention, and the short playtime makes it more accessible than other social deduction games.





Deadfall

Deadfall shares the same deck configuration as Cheapass Games' *Pairs* (one card with the value of one, two cards with the value of two, and so on all the way up to ten).

Pairs alone supports more than 20 different games, yet *Deadfall* adds another option. The goal is simple: don't play the last card of a particular rank — or at least don't get caught.

Each player starts with a set of tokens (pennies, poker chips, or even written on paper) and is dealt a starting hand. Each round, a player enters one token into the pot. In order to determine the starting player, players each choose and play a card simultaneously, and the lowest card goes first. On your turn you may either play a card or call out an opponent, making the claim that their most recently played card does not match a card in any other player's hand. As soon as a player is called, the round is over. If the caller was correct, he wins the pot and the player he called must pay him a penalty equal to the card's rank. Otherwise, the caller has to pay the penalty.

MSRP: \$10

Designer: James Ernest

Publisher: Cheapass Games

2-6 players, ages 12+, 15 mins.

Deadfall is quick, light, easy to pick up, and a great blend of bluffing, press-your-luck, and card counting. The artwork is also gorgeous. The length of the game is up to the players, so you can tailor it to your group's specific needs. Given its tiny size and the huge variety of games the deck supports, it's a great option for when you're on the go. ☺



★ RECOMMENDED GAMES ★

For a complete list, visit CasualGameRevolution.com/games

Casual Games

Apotheca*

Backstab
Bang! The Duel
Best Treehouse Ever
Bomb Squad
Bullfrogs
Camel Up
Can't Stop
Carcassonne
Castle Panic
Celestia*
Cube Quest
Deadfall*
Dimension

Dragonwood
Dungeon Roll
Eruption
Evolution
Fastrack
Feed the Shoggoth
Fidelitas
Flip City
For Sale
Forbidden Island
Fuse*
Get Bit!
Get Lucky
Good Cop Bad Cop*

Gravwell
Hanabi
Imhotep
Jolly Roger
Just Desserts
Juxtabo
King of Tokyo
La Boca
Lanterns
Love Letter
Nevermore
Nyet!
Pyramid
Qwixx

Rattlebones
Relic Expedition
Sheriff of Nottingham
Splendor
Stuff & Nonsense
Sushi Go!
Tak•Tak
Takenoko
The Hare & the Tortoise
Ticket to Ride
Timeline
Tsuru
Walk the Plank
Wolf and Hound*

*Newly added

Party Games

Anaxi
20 Express
Apples to Apples
AttrAction
Bellz!
Choose One!
Coconuts
Codenames

Concept
Last Word
Loonacy
Off Your Rocker
Pickles to Penguins
Pluckin' Pairs
RANDOMonium
Sketch it!

Skōsh
Spot It! Party
Snake Oil
Stinker
Taboo
Watch Ya' Mouth*
Wits and Wagers
Word on the Street

Publishers: would you like to see your games reviewed or added to this list? Visit our website for details:

CasualGameRevolution.com/games/review-info



THE SPIEL ABOUT SPIEL 2016

This year's Internationale Spieltage ("SPIEL") in Essen, Germany, was once again the largest on record. With 174,000 turnstyle visitors from 50 countries playing and shopping at 1,021 exhibitor booths spread across seven exhibit halls, SPIEL is officially the largest board game convention in the world. Don't let those numbers overwhelm you, though – it is still one of the most open and friendly conventions I've ever attended. It is my favorite tabletop and board game convention, and the people attending the event are just as responsible for this as the number of amazing new board games that debut. There's something about it that just makes me wish it was year-round. Like your favorite carnival that never travels, SPIEL is, to many board gamers, the highlight of their year.



Tiffany Caires

Tabletop Gamer and Video Maker

Below: the packed halls of SPIEL 2016 in Essen.





MAKING AN ENTRANCE

Walking into either of the main entrances at SPIEL this year presented attendees with wide aisles flanked by welcoming exhibitors of all kinds. Whether attendees were looking for deals on this year's hottest games, racing for the titles released that morning, or just browsing for something new to them in board gaming, comics, or geek-culture accessories, many publishers were there to deliver in each of its seven halls.

Most attendees of the show are there to play and explore the games offered rather than blindly buy what looks to be the latest and greatest in cardboard. Unlike Gen Con and other major American board game conventions, at SPIEL there is an expectation of trying a game completely before purchasing it. Zoch Verlag, one of the largest German board game publishers, embraces this focus on play with a board game rental library of their newest titles. Their massive booth consisted mostly of empty tables, where attendees could gather and play any of the titles they wished to borrow from the rental booth. Players were welcome to learn the games themselves, or they could flag down one of the many multilingual volunteers to teach them the game instead.

Many volunteers at SPIEL spoke a variety of languages. I noticed this year a trend among booth staff to wear flags on their name tags denoting which languages they spoke. While English, German, and French are the most common languages there, I had the joy of playing with gamers that spoke Italian, Portuguese, Spanish, Polish, Dutch, Chinese, Japanese, and Taiwanese. The language barrier was very low for English speakers, however, and even lower if you're comfortable picking up a few German niceties to help you along. Many gamers that you might sit down to play with are likely familiar with gaming mechanics and terminology in their own language, and are just as excited to play as you are.



Above: a few of the many eye-catching games on display at the show.





HOW TO WIN GAMES AND INFLUENCE MEEPLE

Probably my most memorable experience of SPIEL this year was playing *Dreams* by Olivier Grégoire with an Italian couple that spoke very little English. We taught them the game through pantomime and after every round they shared in our excitement and joy over working together to accomplish the round's goal. Or, in one memorable instance, we completely failed at accomplishing our goal and let the traitor player totally dupe us.

On another day, I sat in on a game of *HOP!* by Marie Cardouat and Ludovic Maublanc with a delightful German family of four. Under the cardboard clouds hanging in the rafters above us, we tossed a rainbow ring back and forth while planking on our chairs or sitting on the table, laughing all the while. I didn't need to understand German and they didn't need to understand English for us to enjoy the game together. This is the culture and experience

all throughout SPIEL, no matter if you're playing for fun or for glory in one of the several World Championships hosted at the convention.

Playing games with strangers from all over the world is one of the most exciting parts of the show for me. I often forgot that I was in an old mining town in northern Germany playing pieces of cardboard on top of other pieces of cardboard colored to look like a multitude of worlds. You hear laughter, cheering, and banter at every table, from within the mega booths of Asmodee to the tiny stalls of publishers like StrataMax Games.

Play is universal and celebrated, both for sale and for show all throughout the halls. This year featured some great games — here are a few of the casual titles worth checking out.

Did someone order a hot cup of bluff?



The **super sneaky** game of deception and trickery, **NEW** from Blue Orange Games!





DREAMS

Zoch Verlag • 3 to 6 players • Ages 10+ • 30 minutes

Players take on the role of gods in this cooperative game by Olivier Grégoire, working together to build constellations based on gorgeous artwork featured on the game's tarot-sized cards. The twist is that one player isn't actually a god, and doesn't know which of the four displayed cards the constellation is to be based on.

Each round, players are secretly assigned which constellation they're trying to build or assigned the task of being the human. Then they take turns placing gemstones of varying size and color on the center star map, trying to recreate the image on the card with these stars. Players want to make sure that if they know the constellation, they convey this fact to the other players in the know, while also not making it so obvious that the human player can deduce which card they're attempting to recreate. The human has to place gemstones as well, hoping to do so in such a way that the other players won't suspect that he or she actually has no idea which card is being drawn with stars.

Once all stars are placed, players vote on either who they think the human is, or in the human's case, which card is being drawn. Points are then distributed based on the results of this vote. It's a beautiful game with a unique theme on the classic hidden traitor mechanic that will have everyone wanting to play again and again.

Roll for it!

The Roll it! Match it!
Score it! Game



Calliope Games

*Creating memories one
game at a time.*

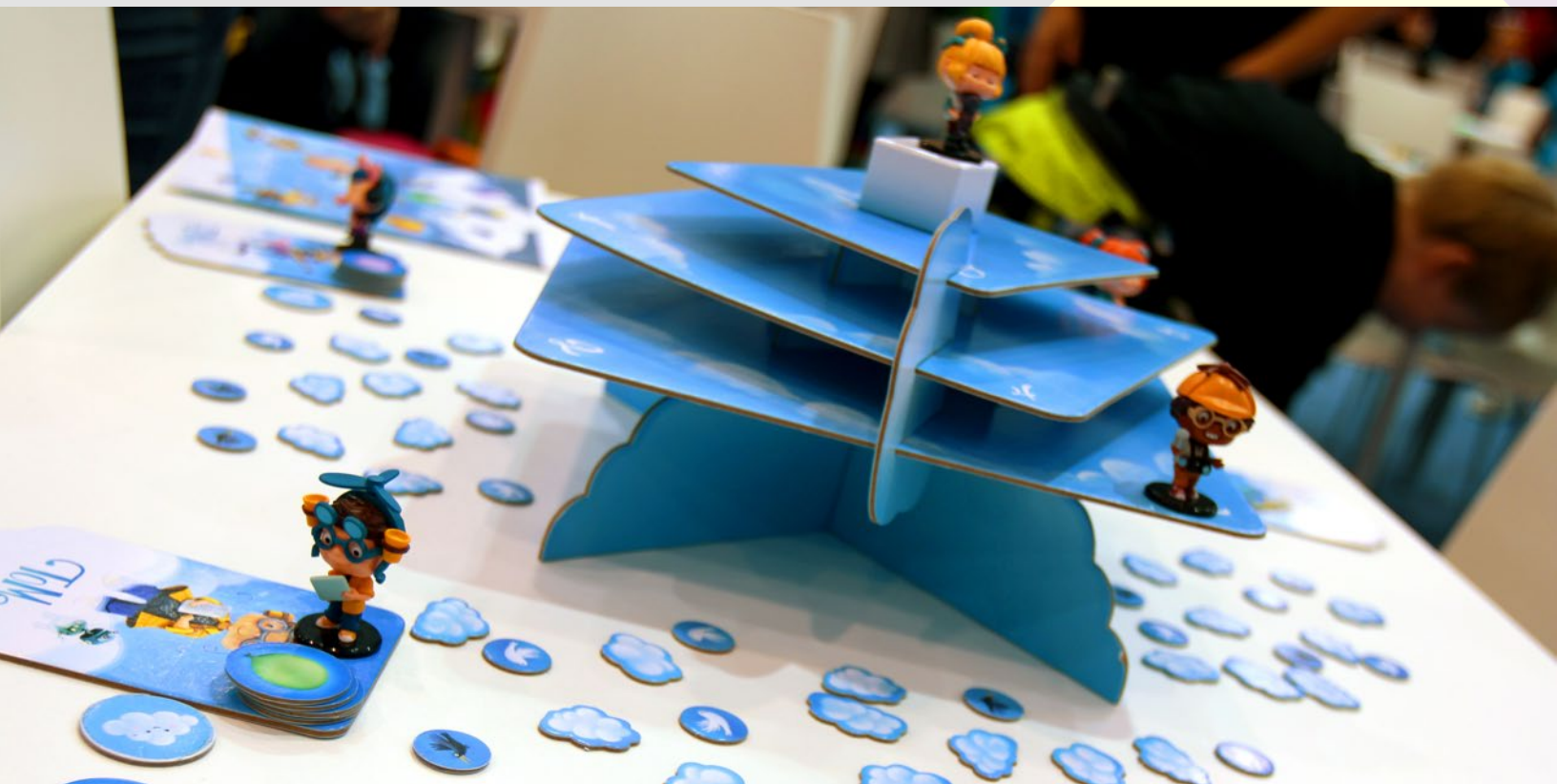
www.CalliopeGames.com

HOP!

Funforge • 3 to 6 players • Ages 6+ • 30 minutes

Sometimes you just need to be a little silly in your gaming. *HOP!* is a dexterity game where players attempt to toss a rainbow ring onto the finger of an opponent across the table. Every turn, the active player gets to pick who they would like to team up with for their ring toss. The catcher must point their finger towards the sky and place their elbow on the table, which they must keep there throughout the toss. The active player then tries to toss the ring onto the catcher's finger to earn the right to hop higher into the clouds.

But there's a catch! Before the player can throw the ring, they must first draw and carry out whatever the drawn card says to do. This card could have them throwing the ring while their forehead is 'glued' to the table; it could have them standing on their chair or planking on the table; the catcher might be slowly circling their finger, or who knows what else! The other players not involved in the toss can place bets on whether or not this tossing team will succeed, which earns the gamblers the chance to hop higher, or lose one of the balloons keeping them in the air. Overall this game is just a bit silly to watch and to play, which is exactly why it's so fun.





KINGDOMINO

Blue Orange Games • 2 to 4 players • Ages 8+ • 15 to 20 minutes

This fast-paced tile placement game by Bruno Cathala was a surprise hit for many folks at this year's SPIEL. In the game, players take turns selecting domino-like kingdom tiles to place in their kingdoms.

Tiles must be placed with at least one side touching another of the same color, which is ideal for scoring points. Some kingdom tiles feature crown icons in the corner that will grant one point per crown per square of matching color connected to that crown tile. Multiple crowns in a color block simply multiply the points earned,

making a player's kingdom more likely to have the most points, earning them the win. Games of *Kingdomino* can be played as quickly as 15 minutes, but still provide a nice taste of strategy and player interaction, as players can deduce which tiles opponents are more likely to take for themselves. Light, airy, and adorable to boot, *Kingdomino* is sure to be a hit at your next game night.



Tsuro
The game of the Path.

Calliope Games

Creating memories one game at a time.

www.CalliopeGames.com

COTTAGE GARDEN

Spielwiese • 1 to 4 players • Ages 8+ • 45 to 60 minutes

Fans of classic spatial video games like *Tetris* will absolutely love the tile-placing game *Cottage Garden*. A successor to Uwe Rosenberg's two-player game *Patchwork*, *Cottage Garden* has players take on the role of gardeners trying to cover all the dirt on their plots of land with tetris-like flower tiles. Each of a player's two garden plots features clay pots and glass plant covers that players need to surround with flower tiles, but not cover, as those pots and plant covers are what earn them points. A strategic use of cats can help you get the flower tiles you need, or fill in any gaps in your gardens, but those adorable kitten tokens aren't easy to come by.

The game is strategic more than luck-based, as players can always see what tiles will be available for them to pick on their turn. It's a great family game that works well with a variety of gaming groups, even with the gardening theme. The solo variant is also a fantastic option for the gamer without a gaming group. 🎲



Tiffany produces videos of her convention experiences at shows such as Essen SPIEL and Gen Con on her YouTube channel (<http://youtube.com/TheOneTAR>). These day-in-the-life videos give a glimpse of what it's like to attend some of the largest conventions in gaming. She also produces reviews and streams game playthroughs, all of which can be found on her channel.



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BY THE NUMBERS: TABLETOP TRENDS ON KICKSTARTER



Chris James
Editor-in-Chief and Award-Winning Game Designer



Jesse Tannous
Writer, Gamer, Editor, and Professional Nerd

Most tabletop gaming enthusiasts have an opinion about Kickstarter and the games that are released through the crowdfunding platform. For better or worse, few can argue against the statement that Kickstarter has certainly made an impact in the tabletop gaming environment.

Entire development studios have been established thanks to the funding of excited backers, and there have also been plenty of flops along the way. Whether it is love or contempt, the fact that Kickstarter has become such a common talking point amongst the gaming population in the seven short years since it launched goes to show just how much the existence of this option has shaken things up. We crunched the numbers and even spoke to some veteran developers to assemble an analysis on the current landscape for tabletop games on Kickstarter.

TABLETOP CROWDFUNDING AT-A-GLANCE (2014-2016):



How does being a Staff Pick correlate with a game's crowdfunding success?

The average non Staff Pick receives **388 backers** with a total pledge level of **\$25,168**.



The average Staff Pick receives **1,722 backers** for a total pledge level of **\$129,708**.



34% of projects are chosen as Staff Picks. They raise



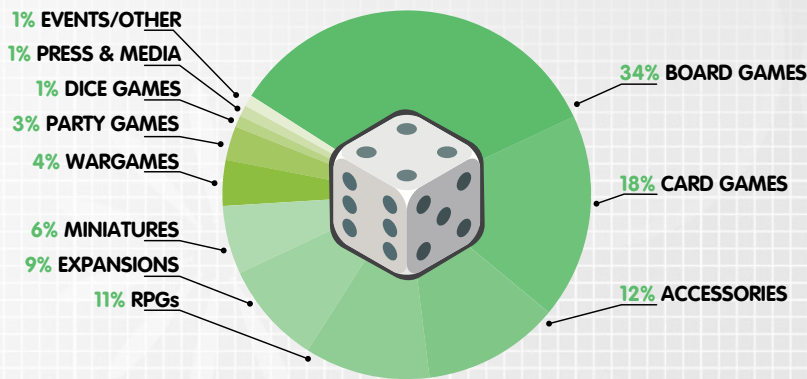
64% of the total funding.

THE SUCCESS OF STAFF PICKS

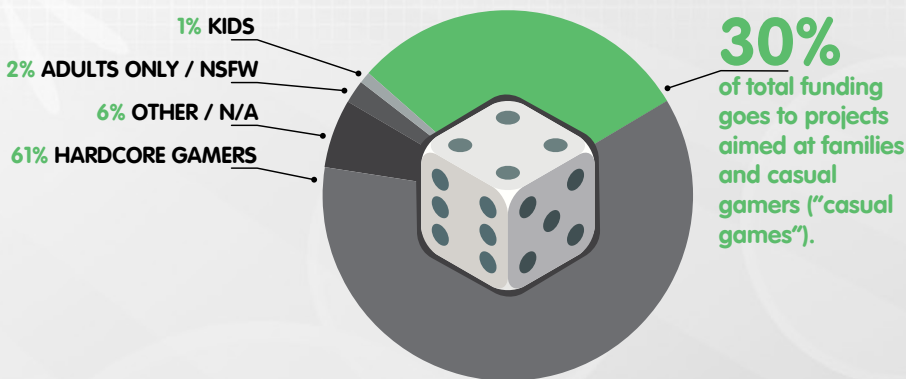
There is a clear correlation between very successful projects and the designation as a Staff Pick. While Staff Picks receive some extra exposure on the site, this does not necessarily *cause* their success. Instead, the Kickstarter editors choose to feature projects that are unique, have a large following, or are already seeing unusual success on their own.



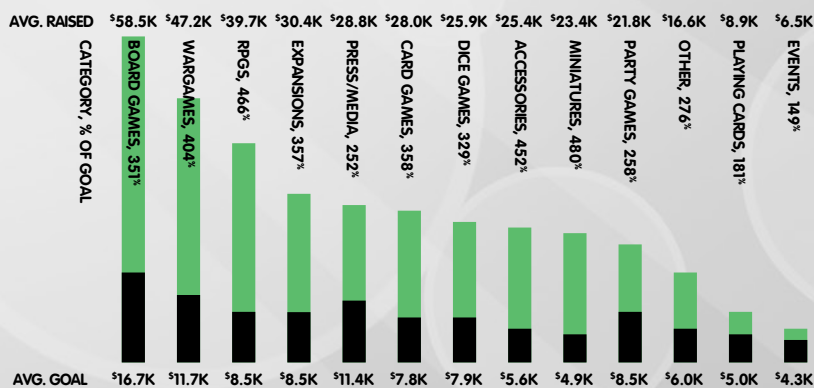
TOTAL FUNDING BY CATEGORY:



TOTAL FUNDING BY TARGET AUDIENCE:



AVERAGE FUNDING BY CATEGORY:



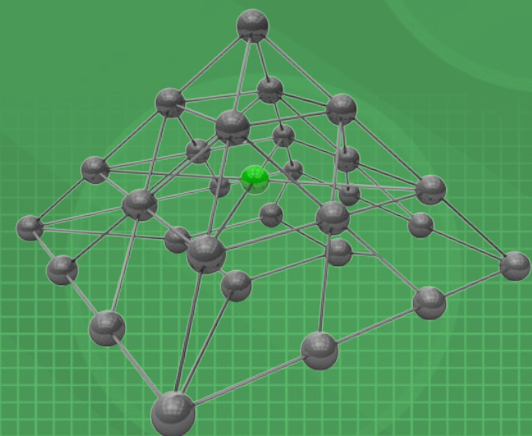
COMPLEXITY DOES NOT SPELL DISASTER

Do casual, family-friendly games receive more support on Kickstarter? Looking over the numbers for both Total Funding by Category and Target Audience, it becomes abundantly clear that despite the significant numbers for casual games, hardcore board games are still dominating the field. While Kickstarter campaigns for simple games like the incredibly successful

ABOUT OUR DATA

To help contextualize what our findings really mean please keep the following information in mind:

- Data was gathered on all **successful** projects from May 11, 2014 to May 11, 2016. Since unsuccessful projects are not available for browsing on Kickstarter, they were not included.
- All prices were gathered in U.S. dollars based on the conversion rates at the time of campaign completion.
- Projects were assigned a game category and target audience by our research team. While this is largely a subjective process, we strived to maintain as much accuracy as possible.
- **Outliers were removed** from all target audience and category statistics in order to normalize results. These outliers consisted of the top 1% and bottom 1% of projects based on total funding.





Exploding Kittens by Elan Lee (which raised \$8.8 million) may often be highlighted more frequently from various news organizations, it hasn't stopped backers from funding more complex projects. In fact, the exact opposite seems to be the case, with both RPG's and Wargames taking a lead over Party and Dice games in terms of both total and average funding metrics.

The discrepancy between total funding acquired and the perception that Kickstarter projects produce a majority of simple casual games can be explained by looking at the Average Pledge Statistics by Category. Wargames, miniatures, and RPG's all exceed the dollar amounts for average pledge when compared to both dice games and card games. However, the latter average has significantly more backers. This increase in the number of backers across hundreds of projects over the last couple of years may have contributed to this perception.

ROLE-PLAYING GAMES ARE THRIVING

Ask a group of ten gaming fans to name the title of a role-playing game (RPG) and most will probably be able to recall *Dungeons and Dragons*. Ask them to name a second one, and you'll likely start to separate the hardcore RPG fans from the casuals. Despite this, it may come as a shock to many that RPGs represent 11% of the total funding raised in the last two years for tabletop

gaming projects. That's nearly \$16 million that backers have raised to bring these games to life, and practically every RPG that is encountered is going to be specifically targeting the hardcore gaming audience.

What this really tells us is that gamers are still very much interested in playing with their imaginations. The technological age along with the immediate gratification people seek on an hourly basis has not killed their creative spirit. Fantasy worlds beautifully crafted on the page through the power of words still inspire plenty of gamers to part with their hard-earned dollars.

AVG. PLEDGES BY PROJECT CATEGORY

AVG. PLEDGE AMOUNT / AVG. BACKER COUNT

Events	\$101	93
Wargames	\$99	411
Miniatures	\$97	198
Accessories	\$70	361
Board Games	\$70	868
RPGs	\$56	585
Expansions	\$52	530
Party Games	\$49	512
Card Games	\$44	681
Dice Games	\$41	658
Press / Media	\$40	679

AVG. PLEDGES BY TARGET AUDIENCE

AVG. PLEDGE AMOUNT / AVG. BACKER COUNT

Hardcore Gamers	\$76	501
Kids	\$58	281
Other / N/A	\$58	380
Adults Only / NSFV	\$53	530
Families / Casual Gamers	\$45	741

KEYS TO SUCCESS ON KICKSTARTER

Any project, no matter how well advertised, polished, or conceptualized, is ultimately at the mercy of the consumer. That being said, looking at our data paints a picture of how a developer can try to increase their likelihood of seeing a campaign successfully funded. Looking at the average pledge statistics for both Category and Target Audience can provide some clues.

For instance, board games achieve a significantly higher backer count, on average, than other categories of tabletop games (868) — thus it might be a good category to focus on. However, the average pledge amount for board games (\$70) approaches the average for games targeted at hardcore gamers (\$76). This suggests that board games, being more expensive to produce, might perform better if targeted at hardcore gamers who are willing to spend more money on their games.

On the other hand, games targeted at families and casual gamers also tend to achieve a high average backer count (741). But the lower average pledge amount (\$45) suggests that backers in this audience are not willing to spend as much money. Card or dice games, being less expensive to produce, may be a better bet for this audience.

VETERAN ANALYSIS

What else drives success on Kickstarter? To dig further, we held conversations with industry veterans Ted Alspach of Bezier Games and Michael Coe of Gamelyn Games. Both individuals are very experienced with managing successful Kickstarter campaigns, having accumulated a combined total of over \$3 million in funding for their respective projects.

Preparation seems to be key for both designers. When asked about the amount of work that goes into an upcoming Kickstarter announcement, Coe explained, “From the time I receive the first prototype to the time we launch the Kickstarter is averaging around one year for us.” Alspach lends some detailed insight into what that time could be filled with when he described his own company’s process.

“It’s dozens of hours of work to put together the Kickstarter project. The process starts with determining what the primary message of the campaign is. Next, there’s a giant spreadsheet that I use to determine what the reward levels are, including what the cost is to us, what the shipping cost will be to backers in the US, Canada, and other countries, and what the appropriate pledge amount will be for those reward levels. Knowing your costs down to the cents for each item in each level, as well as your shipping costs (including shipping packaging and time per



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unit) is really important. Then there's the stretch goal contents and schedule. Finally, there's the advertising and promotion schedule (yet another spreadsheet). This is a blueprint for all the promotional activities that will take place prior to and during the campaign, and the costs of each (as well as the perceived increase in backer support for each of those activities)."

While the prep time is indeed important, both creators weighed in on what designers can do to elevate the effectiveness of any campaign. Alspach explained, "There has to be some indication that the gameplay is compelling," and continued, "Almost as important is good artwork/graphic design. If your game looks too amateurish, most potential backers won't commit to it. Spending a little bit of money on key pieces of artwork is critical."

Coe focused his advice on what should be done once a game has reached a certain quality level and suggested, "Exposure and preparation are the two most important factors to campaign success. That includes public reviews of the game, public appearances at conventions, appearing on trending hotlists, and the team behind the game demonstrating competency through a well-constructed Kickstarter page displaying a seemingly well put-together product."

Both creators have established a strong reputation since they initially started on Kickstarter, which helps enable their projects to repeatedly rake in hundreds of thousands of dollars in backer support — but they didn't start out that way. When asked whether or not they

believe Kickstarter is still a suitable resource for creators who lack the experience, marketing budgets, or massive following of their well-established contemporaries they remained positive.

Discussing the advantage independent creators can expect from Kickstarter, Coe reassured, "Kickstarter is still very much alive for the indie person. This is because the community is accessible. It's commonly said that Kickstarter is great because the creators are accessible, but for the indie creator, it's great because the community is accessible."



Alspach also seemed optimistic and stated, "If you have a great game, and you're able to communicate that the game is great in your campaign, your campaign is likely to be at least moderately successful, even if you don't have a great deal of money for advertising or if you have a limited social media network. The latter two help quite a bit, but a good game, well represented on a Kickstarter page, will often sell itself."

THE IMPORTANCE OF QUALITY

Obviously, there is much involved in finding success through Kickstarter. Another point that our experts agreed upon is that things have changed in the last five years when it comes to backer expectations from Kickstarter projects. People want quality and many are growing tired of being burned by poorly designed

or produced games. This shouldn't discourage experimentation for indie developers, but rather provide some useful insight to encourage them to unveil that creative project that's been sitting on the sidelines, and bring it into the spotlight. ☑

Murder Most Fun!



Board Game
2-8 Players
30 Minutes
\$40

Card Game
2-6 Players
20 Minutes
\$17



Killing Doctor Lucky has never been more fun, with two shiny new editions from Cheapass Games. Learn all about them at cheapass.com/games



For Love of the Game: Gaming for Couples

Tom, an avid gamer in Grand Rapids, Michigan, recalls when he brought home *Potion Explosion* hoping to play it with his wife Melissa. “When I asked her if she’d like to play, she said that would be ‘fine.’ What she meant, I knew, is that she would play it with me for me, not because she expected to enjoy it. But what I really want is to play a game with her we’ll both enjoy.”

“I love spending quality time with my husband,” Melissa adds, “so I often will play games with him when he asks me. But I definitely don’t enjoy board games as much as he does.”

This is a perennial problem with many couples: one person in the relationship wants to play board games more (sometimes a lot more) than the other person. Do you wish you could play board games more often with your significant other? Here are some tips and casual games you will both enjoy.



Jon Den Houter

*Freelance Writer and
Avid Gamer*



Cooperative Games

Some of the best games for couples are cooperative games (sometimes called co-ops for short). In cooperative games players work together to beat the game, either winning or losing as a team, so the emphasis shifts from beating your opponent to working together. Co-ops are especially good for couples who don't enjoy competing against each other.

Spencer and Lara Williams, co-hosts of the Married with Board Games podcast highly recommends that couples play cooperative games. "When I used to play against Spencer in non-co-op games," the competitive Lara admits, "I would get in a bit of a foul mood when I lost." She has since learned to enjoy playing her husband head-to-head, even if she loses. But she mostly enjoys playing co-ops with him.

Spencer agrees with his wife. "Cooperative games build on the natural sense of teamwork couples share as a byproduct of being in a relationship." Their favorite co-op currently is *Eldritch Horror*, which, as a two-player game, they have yet to win. Why do they enjoy playing a game they always lose? According to Spencer, there is one simple reason: "We enjoy working together. Even though we fail, we always end up having a great time!"

Besides *Eldritch Horror*, other cooperative titles that Spencer and Lara recommend are *Forbidden Island*, *Forbidden Desert*, *Flash Point: Fire Rescue*, *Pandemic*, *Elder Sign*, and *Harry Potter: Hogwarts Battle*. This author would also add *Sherlock Holmes Consulting Detective* to the list.

Easy-to-Learn Games with Strategic Depth

In addition to not wanting to compete against each other, the difficulty level of some board games can prevent couples from playing together. The solution: casual games which are easy to learn but have a good amount of strategic depth. Board game reviewer Dan King describes them this way: "[board games that] are challenging enough for gamers, have enough strategy...but at the same time it's easy for [casual gamers] to learn."

In his video series called "Gamer Tested, Spouse Approved," Dan King and his wife Denise review board games that fit these two criteria. They've reviewed at least a dozen games, including *Unusual Suspects*, *Karuba*, *Lanterns*, *Amphipolis*, *Lost Cities*, *Jaipur*, *Tally Ho!*, and *Love Letter*. Dan likes *Love Letter* because it has the depth to be played on different levels. A casual gamer can play the game relying more on luck, whereas a serious gamer can try to deduce which two of the sixteen cards his or her opponent



Love Letter by AEG is a great choice for Valentine's Day (heart photo courtesy Henk Rolleman)



is likely holding. Denise likes *Love Letter* because it's easy to learn, takes only fifteen or twenty minutes to play, and has a very compelling theme — amid a royal court, players compete to get their love letter

into the hands of the princess. This theme, incidentally, makes *Love Letter* an especially good choice for couples to play on Valentine's Day.

Enriching Your Relationship

Every couple's relationship consists of two personalities, two sets of likes and dislikes, and two sets of hobbies and interests. It is not a surprise, therefore, that many passionate gamers have a significant other who is less excited about board games than they are. The premise of this article then isn't how to convince your significant other to enjoy board games as much as you, but rather that all couples can find games they can enjoy playing together.

For the gamer in the relationship, Spencer offers some sound advice. "The quickest way to turn someone off from one of your passions, especially your spouse or significant other, is to push the issue." Constantly nagging your spouse to play a game with you will almost certainly backfire. On the other hand, if you give your significant other the freedom not to play games with you, he or she will almost certainly make the effort to play a game because of their love for you.

But games don't have to require effort, even for significant others who don't typically enjoy games. The board game hobby is exploding, with thousands of new titles coming out every year. With some research and a little patience, any couple can find a board game or two that they both will love.

Spencer brought his wife Lara into the board gaming hobby. Together they have discovered many games they enjoy playing together. "I love that playing board games gives us a way to spend time together that isn't watching movies or TV," Lara says. "[Playing board games] is time spent learning about each other's strengths, weaknesses, passions, and just plain having fun."

When Tom brought home *Potion Explosion* to play with his wife, she said that would be "fine." So he elaborated. "The game reminds me of *Bejeweled*, which





you play all the time on your phone. The game board consists of five columns of different colored marbles. On your turn, you remove one, trying to combine marbles of the same color.”

“That sounds fun,” Melissa says. “Let’s give it a try.”

“I really think you’ll like it,” Tom says.

And Melissa does like it, quite a bit. “We’ll have to play that again sometime,” she tells Tom when they’ve finished. “But now, let’s go get ice cream.”

“A wonderful ending,” Tom says, “to a great date!” 🎲



Tips for Competitive Couples

“Smash Up is a pretty good two player game, as long as someone’s willing to sleep on the couch if things go South.”

— Girlfriend

Maybe you just picked up a new game that you want to try out, but it pits you against an opponent. Or maybe you both really enjoy a game that has you face off against each other. Competitive games can fully be enjoyed by couples, but sometimes setting down a few ground rules ahead of time can help. Here are some quick tips for those head-to-head titles.

- Sometimes verbally agreeing ahead of time to not get upset if you end up... “not winning” can be a helpful reminder that you’re playing to have a good time.
- Keep the excessive bragging to a minimum. Everyone enjoys winning. No one likes losing, let alone having someone point that out.
- If the game is really not going well for the other person, be willing to start a different game or take a break.
- The winner can offer a consolation prize such as doing the dishes, buying dinner, etc.



10 Steps to Bring Your Game to Market, Part 2:

PLAYING IN THE BIG LEAGUES



Steve Shields

Professional Project Manager, Game Designer and Publisher
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In the previous issue of this magazine, London-based designer and publisher Steve Shields shared a case study in game creation based on his experience designing *Planet 23*. Now, he shares insights on taking a new game concept the rest of the way.



STEP 6 | ARE YOU TESTING ME?

Part 1 of this feature concluded by exploring the process of finalizing your game design. In this step, we will ensure that you really *have* finalized your game design. Moving from design to manufacturing and marketing is a huge step, and it isn't one to take lightly. Here are some tips to help more accurately define your definition of 'done.'

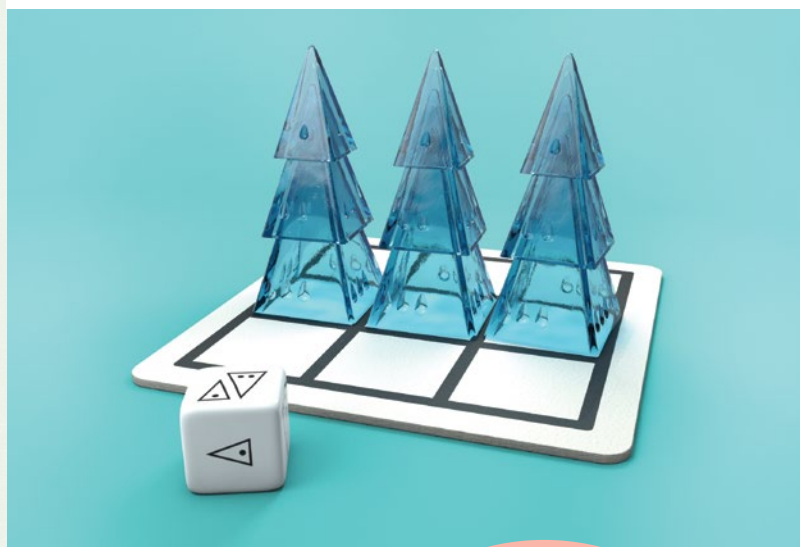
There are three important questions to ask yourself before manufacturing finished copies of your game:

- How thoroughly has the game been tested?
- How positive was the feedback?
- How impartial were the people who tested it?

This last question is of vital importance because, no matter how objective a friend or relative attempts to be when providing feedback, psychologically they are hard-wired to offer views skewed towards the positive.

All feedback is good feedback, even the seemingly negative. Friends and family may help confirm that you are roughly on the right track, and could provide valuable suggestions for improvement. Nothing, however, compares to completely impartial feedback as you near the 'do or die' marketing and manufacturing phase.

For my own first game, a space exploration, combat, and resource management board game called *Planet 23*, my test plan included game nights after work with willing colleagues tempted along by the offer of free beer and pizza. I also joined local groups of board game players and enthusiasts, who I found agreeably willing to playtest for me at no expense (Meetup is an excellent resource for this). This impartial feedback has been hugely valuable, and pivotal to my decision to publish.



Hijinks

Be the first to get 3 of the same size pieces.



PYRAMID
ARCADE



The target market of your game can determine which methods you employ to gather impartial feedback. Be creative! Seek out venues that help you reach your audience, wherever they may be: schools, libraries, conventions, community events, gaming clubs, etc. Get feedback from other game designers at Unpub events. Share a print-and-play copy remotely on Board Game Geek or the Board Game Designers Forum. Be willing to give feedback to other designers, as well.

By whichever means you secure feedback from people or groups who are unfamiliar with you or your game, it is not a process you can avoid or shirk on – at least not without risking a lot of time, effort, and money. It's better to get critical feedback now than to have it publicly announced by a popular game reviewer later on.

STEP 7 | THE SUM OF ALL PARTS

Whether you're self-publishing your game or submitting it to an established publisher, it is important to make considerations for manufacturing. Publishers need to understand early on how many playing pieces are involved, of which type and material, the number of cards required, their dimensions, etc.

Usually, a retail price will reflect the number and quality of the items contained in the box – not to mention the box itself. The more items there are in a game, and the higher their quality and complexity, the higher the retail price required to make it profitable.



The author's first published game, Planet 23.

The most expensive items to include in your game are probably custom playing pieces. Injection molding techniques can rapidly produce thousands of components at a small cost per item, but the 'tooling' costs of producing molds for these parts can run into the tens of thousands, and is an unavoidable expense. Avoid these components if you're on a tight budget or you're aiming for a lower retail price.

An alternate option is to source pre-manufactured playing pieces, from dice and plastic figures to dials, card racks, and more. If you are sourcing these types of items, consider the price (individually and in bulk), shipping costs, quality, and quantity available. Boards, boxes, card decks, and other printed components can be challenging to source as there are more factors to consider, but there are also many suppliers available who offer these services.

Rather than sourcing materials from different vendors, working with a single manufacturer or supplier proves to be more expensive but can reduce a lot of headaches. The convenience of having all of the parts produced, assembled, and dispatched as individually wrapped packages should not be underestimated. In the end, you might earn less profit, but your spare bedroom, attic, hallways, and garage will definitely benefit – as will your social life!



I find that using a simple spreadsheet is helpful for calculating costs and for testing the commercial effects of adding, removing, or altering components. This includes per-game costs, as well as price adjustments for bulk quantities. Other costs which might be associated with the production of your game fall under the 'one-off' or 'up-front' category, and usually include artwork, graphic design, tooling, shipping, and marketing fees. Bearing these costs increases your risk, so if you are paying more than a small amount for them, it is good practice to calculate their return on investment (ROI) before committing resources.

In purely commercial terms, it's a tough business. The higher the markup you put on the cost of making and distributing your game (your profit) the lower the number of sales you are likely to achieve. It's a simple fact. Some people believe it is better to gain a little from a lot than it is to gain a lot from a little – as with all other aspects of this process, it's up to you to decide what you're aiming for.

STEP 8 | GETTING IT OUT THERE

So, you've done it. You've created your game, planned out the costs and believe you're on to a winner. You now have five main options to get the ball rolling:

- Submit your game to a publisher
- Invest your own money into it
- Seek funding from an investor
- Publish online via a print-on-demand service
- Run a crowdfunding campaign

Submitting your game to a commercial publisher has several advantages, as mentioned in Part 1 of this article. But you will almost certainly have to relinquish the copyright and compromise on the artwork, title, rules, game mechanics, etc. Many large game houses won't even accept submissions, relying instead on their own in-house expertise and ideas. Companies that do welcome submissions will be, and can afford to be, extremely picky. And very, very slow. On the plus side, if your game is accepted you can be fairly confident that you will earn a return.



Homeworlds

A strategy-based intergalactic space battle.



PYRAMID
ARCADE

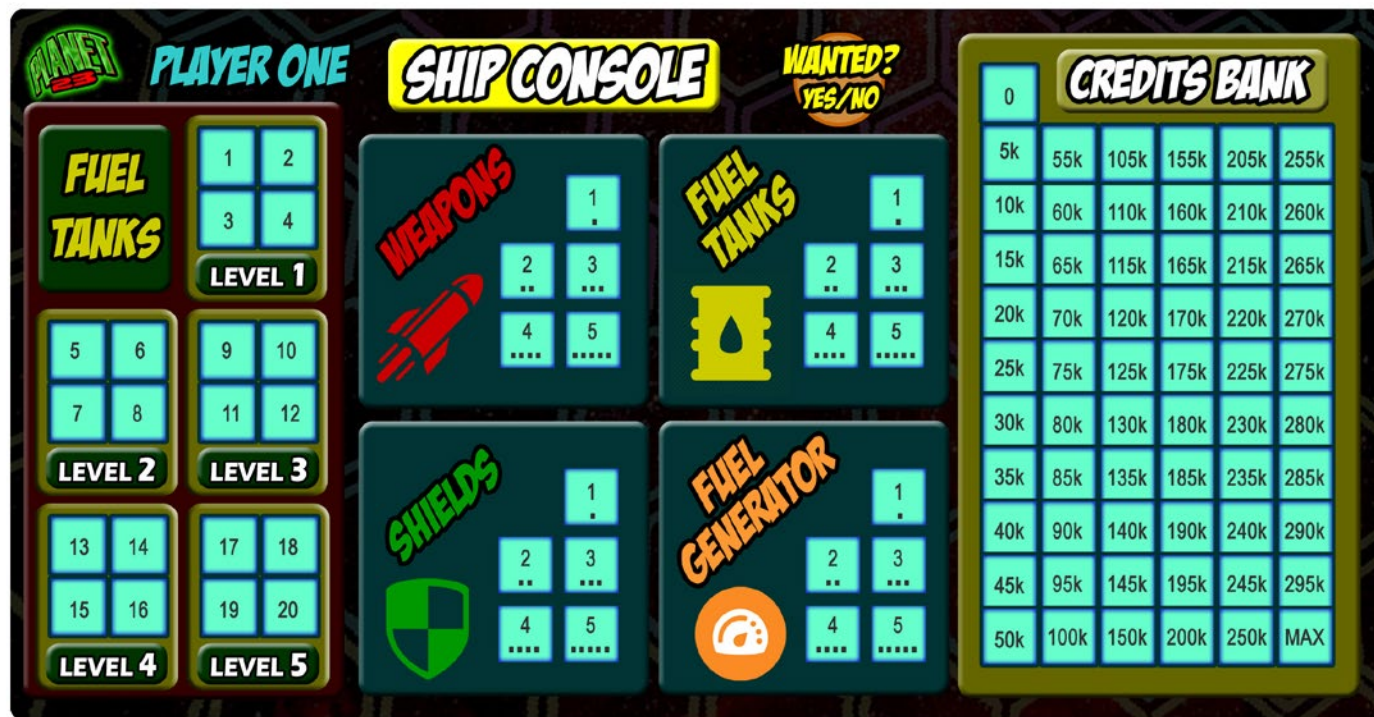


Petal Battle

Insects use flower petals as a battlefield.



PYRAMID
ARCADE



Investing your own money is highly risky and, in the vast majority of cases, ill advised. This option should be considered in cases where a game has already proven popular and generated a good number of sales, as it can be used to reduce manufacturing costs, increase marketing activity, and help build a sustainable business by building on previous successes.

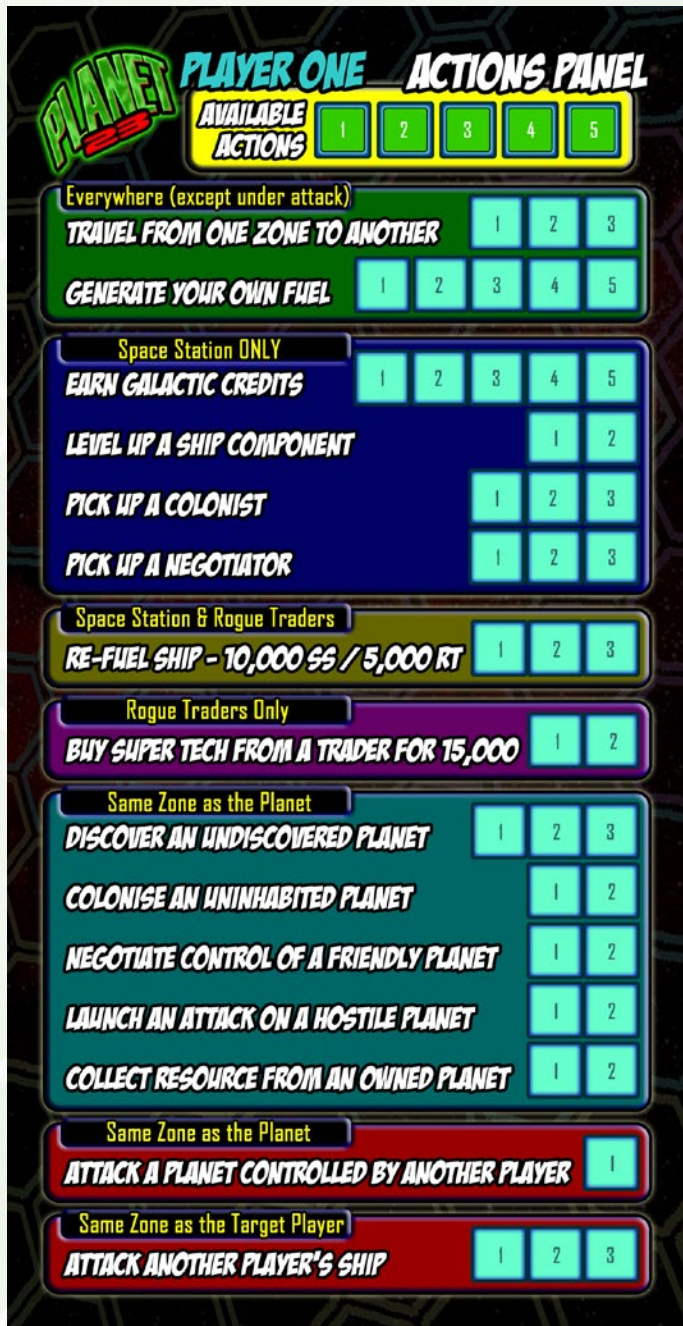
Seeking funding from a traditional investor or group of investors (as opposed to online fundraising) is not always a straightforward business. The risk and return ratio on an untried board game will be off the charts for most successful investment companies, so your chances of unlocking a dragon's den worth of capital are slim. Again, this option is best suited to those who have made inroads to the market already, and have demonstrable figures indicating a healthy ROI.

Print-on-demand services like The Game Crafter are by far the easiest way to have your game published, and they provide many logistical benefits (order processing, shipping, online presence, etc.). Many designers use these services for prototype creation and/or testing the market, but they are not ideal for a final product. Component options are limited, retail prices are often too high, profit margins can be very slim, and the ease of publishing results in

many low-quality games. Also, because of the low barriers, reviewers are less likely to take print-on-demand games seriously.

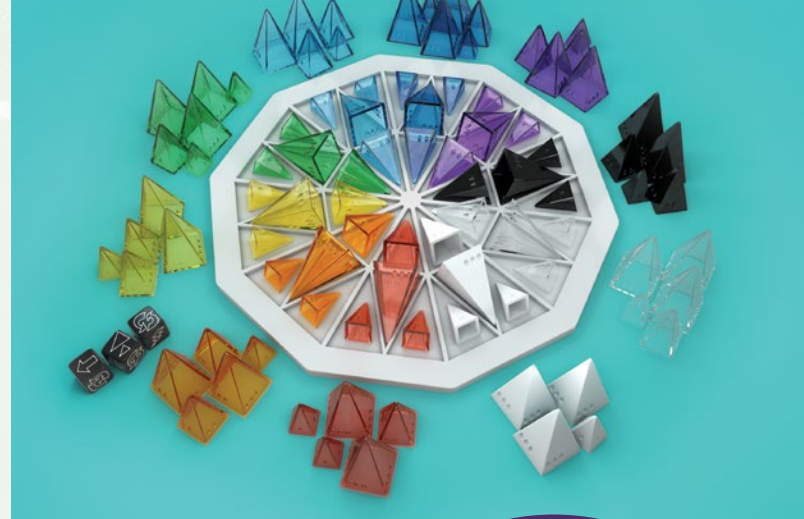
Crowdfunding on sites like Kickstarter is cheap, easy, and can be hugely successful. Many excellent games have been, and are being, brought to market purely through the collective purchasing power of enthusiastic gamers. A quick search for 'board games' on most crowdfunding sites will reveal an inspiring range of projects, making this option perhaps the one best suited to the first-time publisher.





STEP 9 | ON THE CAMPAIGN TRAIN

If you intend to profit from your game and you chose the self-publishing route, then the marketing and promotion of your product can be the most risky of all stages. Tread carefully before committing funds to any marketing campaigns, and take care to calculate the amount you can afford to spend per unit while retaining enough ROI to make a profit. Then test each marketing channel with small spends before increasing the amount if the little you invest results in revenues that exceed the amount spent.



Petri Dish

Dominate the dish by eliminating the other germs.

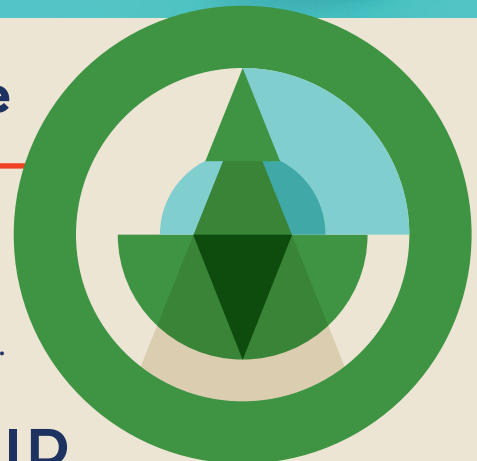


PYRAMID
ARCADE



Treehouse

Arrange your pieces to match the example trio.



PYRAMID
ARCADE



It is important to create a strong marketing presence both online and offline. Consider putting together a simple website to promote your game or line of games, in addition to offering sales via popular marketplaces like Amazon and eBay. Contact board game distributors and negotiate supply agreements to get more of your games in circulation, then promote your game at conventions (both big and small) to help drive consumer sales. Direct sales to customers will earn more profit, but bulk sales to distributors and retailers can help establish long-term success.

Other marketing options available include traditional print media (advertising in a magazine like this one) and reviews obtained by submitting copies of your finished game to as many game reviewers and media outlets

that you can reach. The more buzz you create in a wide variety of places, the better.

Last but not least, gather a list of email addresses of potential customers wherever you go. Whether via Kickstarter backer surveys, conventions, printed game inserts, or online sales, allowing customers to opt in to an email newsletter will greatly assist in audience building for this and any future games.



STEP 10 | JOLLY GOOD COMPANY

The final step along the road to mega success is to start your own business. Why the final step? Well, it's a sad but unavoidable fact that the vast majority of board game projects wither on the vine, failing to make the intended impression or otherwise underperforming to such an extent that no business is required to manage the accounts and build an empire.

Should your first game manage to exceed your ROI goals and generate a profit, you will have done exceptionally well and can be justifiably proud of your achievement. And if your first game is a success, your second could be even more popular, so you'll be keen to press on.

Seek some basic financial and corporate advice before applying to set up a company of your own. There are a number of different types of small businesses that you can start up, and these differ greatly depending on your local laws. However, it's a lot easier and less expensive than you might think, and can save a lot of trouble and costs in the long run. If the amount of revenue that you are generating justifies it, retain the services of an accountant who will advise you on how best to balance the books, manage your taxes, and remain compliant with the prevailing regulations in your area.

If you have arrived at this point in the journey you are clearly no slouch, so trust that gut instinct, press on, and prosper. 🍀

GOOD LUCK, AND HAPPY GAMING!

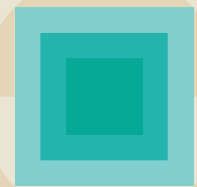
The author may be contacted via email at mail@steveshields.info

To find out more about Steve's first game, *Planet 23*, visit: www.planet23game.com



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PYRAMID ARCADE

PYRAMID ARCADE

ABOUT THE GAME

Pyramid Arcade is a complete game library in one box. Inside you'll find everything you need to play 22 different tabletop games, each of which uses the pyramid gaming pieces in a different way. The games in this arcade range from easy to complex, from mostly-luck to pure skill, and from time-killer to brain-burner.





From Pilot to Publisher:

Grandpa Beck's Story

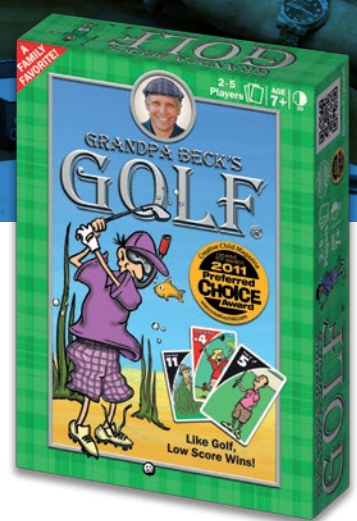
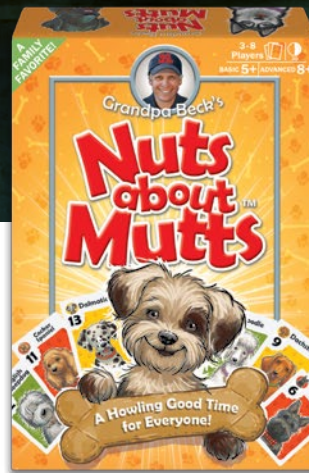
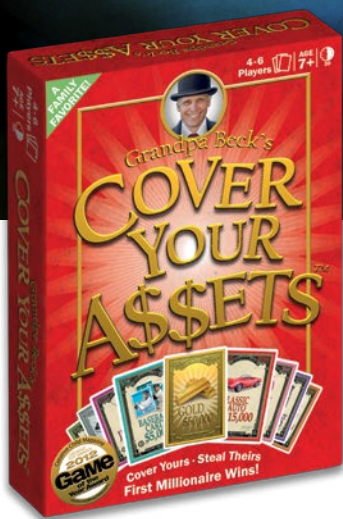
The routes into game design all start with a passion for the hobby, and thereafter they are many and varied. But Brent Beck of Grandpa Beck's Games took one of the most unlikely paths it's ever been my pleasure to discover. He started out as an airline pilot but, fed up with unsure pension provisions in the industry, decided to seek another source of income. Of all the things he could have chosen, he picked the house rules for a favorite family game.

"We had developed our own rules for the classic card game *Golf*," he explained. "We thought, 'hey, our friends like playing this game, especially with illustrations, I bet we could sell it.'" Unlikely as it may sound, it turned out he was right. But he had no idea how long or how difficult the journey would turn out to be.



Matt Thrower

Freelance Board and
Video Games Journalist



Back in My Day...

Beck and his wife Tauni are both long-time game players. “I actually proposed with a rigged game of Scrabble,” Beck revealed with a grin. “When we were a young married couple with a limited budget, one of our main ways we would socialize would be to have a game night,” he continued. “We’d let the young kids watch a movie and the adults would enjoy playing a game together. As the kids got older we started to involve them in our game night as well.”

Unsurprisingly, Beck is a big advocate of the value of gaming to family life. “Life is really all about relationships,” he told me. “Game time is such a great way to interact and build those relationships. We bonded together as a family by playing games and



doing other activities together. Now, even though our children are all adults, they remain close friends. I give a lot of the credit for that to the time we spent around our kitchen table.”

These are sentiments that will be familiar to any gamer with a family. But the Beck family spent enough time playing to develop and test variants and house

Teeing Off

When Beck chose to start out with *Golf*, he had little idea of what lay ahead. “We counted ourselves as fortunate that we had a connection to a designer,” Beck said. “He’d had success designing, selling, and distributing his own game. We approached him about developing our game, feeling like we had access to an amazing shortcut. It was going to be easy, so we thought.”

Beck picks up the story. “First, he ran into complications with his business partners and we lost his connection to distribute the game. That was stressful, but we figured with a good product, we could find someone to sell it.” With the help of this designer, they decided to commission a print run from China. “It was a total bust,” Beck lamented. “The quality was abysmal, with muted colors, poor quality materials,

rules of their staples. “We had four card games that had been our family favorites for many years,” Brent explained. “Our current line of four games is the culmination of taking those ideas, optimizing the ratios and rules and adding a fun theme. Then working with our dear friend, and stay at home mom, Apryl Stott, to create the artwork.”

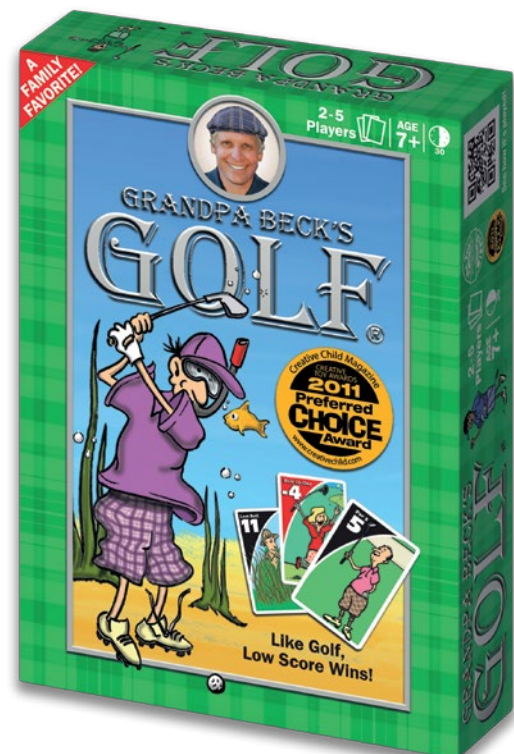
and splotches on many of the cards. The packaging, though eye-catching, was very impractical. It was too bulky to pack efficiently, and couldn’t stand up on end without falling over.”

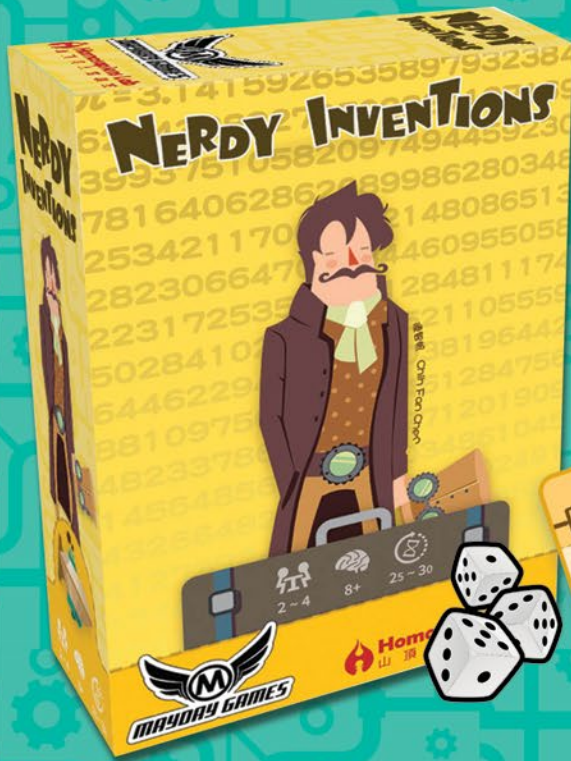
Following this catalogue of disasters, Beck was understandably distressed. “After all the time, money, and effort that went into that first run, it was very discouraging,” he revealed. “We almost gave up at that point. Our finances were taxed, our marriage strained, and our egos bruised.” He still seems unsure of exactly what pulled them through the problems. “I’m not sure if it was stubbornness, determination, or stupidity that made us do it,” he pondered. “But while we had nothing to show for our first years of work, we did maintain the confidence that our games would be loved if we could bring them to market.”

What’s in a Name?

But this wasn’t the only problem Beck faced. You might think that finding a name for a game would be easy, but you’d be reckoning without the byzantine machinations of trademark law. “Originally Grandpa Beck’s Golf was going to get called *Flip Nine*,” Beck revealed. “I didn’t use a trademark attorney. I searched the TESS trademark site and didn’t see any conflicts. Unfortunately, the trademark office thought a game called *Flip Four* was too similar, so they rejected the application.”

The next name suggestion was *Grampy’s Golf*. This received conditional approval and got put up for public comment. Beck thought they’d found a name. “Unfortunately, a short time later I got a terse letter from a law firm in Connecticut advising me to cease using the name,” he went on. “A





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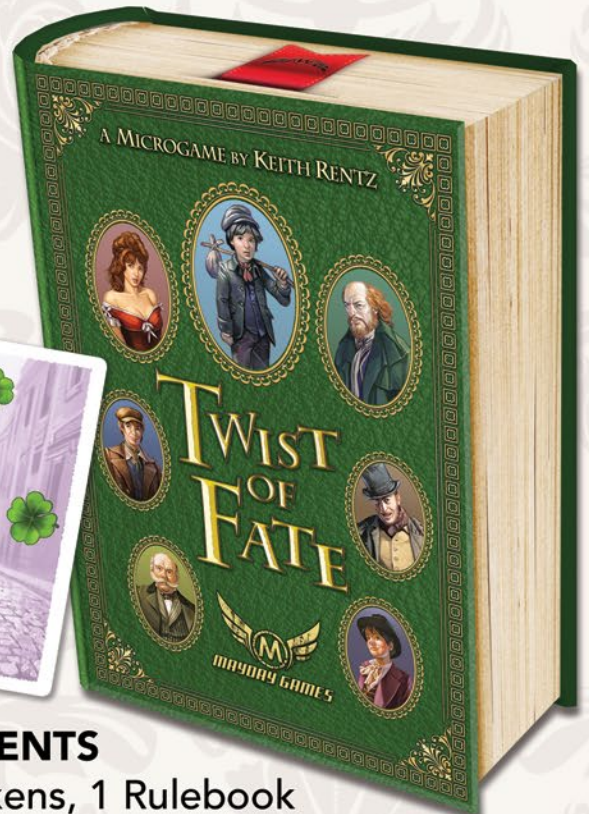
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2-4



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person they represented had an annual Grampy's Golf Tournament in Florida." Beck engaged an attorney who explained that personalization was a good way to make a trademark more defensible. "I never could have trademarked the name *Golf* as it is too generic," he explained. "But by calling it *Grandpa Beck's Golf* we could trademark it."

After another print run with better components and a sturdier box that cost as much as the cards themselves, Beck finally had a sellable game – at which point in the story, he made an astonishing revelation. "We officially launched our brand at Toy Fair in New York in the winter of 2012," he told me, "with a new game, *Cover Your Assets*, ready to introduce." That's right. In spite of all the troubles getting their first game to market, they'd already created a second one.



In Grandpa Beck's bestselling game, *Cover Your Assets*, players stack matching pairs of assets (shown on the cards above) while trying to capture the top sets from other players' stacks.

Kitchen Table Design

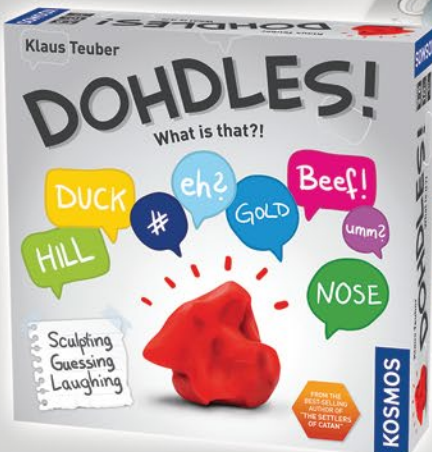
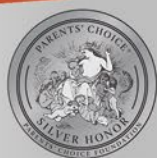
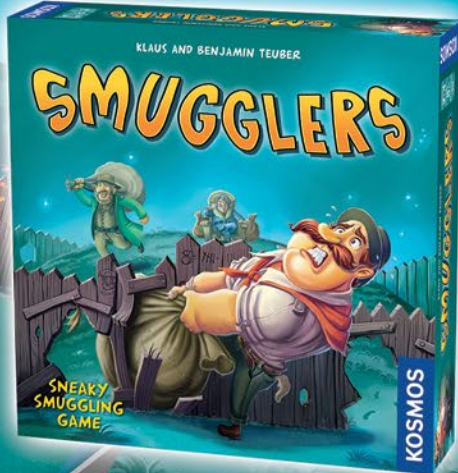
Part of the reason for this drive and success is that the whole family got involved in the process. I asked Beck how his kids put up with the tiresome repetition of playtesting. "The beginning stages of testing can be a bit dull and stressful," he agreed. "However, once we figure out the right rules and ratios to make a game work, the process becomes fun and exciting. There is a real sense of satisfaction for our kids when one of their ideas or rules gets incorporated into the final product."

With family play so integral to Beck's philosophy, it's perhaps not surprising that his games are light by hobby standards. He's happy with that assessment. "Our games are meant to be quick to learn and easy to play," he said. "Like the old favorites we played with the kids over the years such as *Phase 10*, *Pit*,





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KOSMOS



Getting in the game. Brent and Tauni Beck, friends, and family do their best pirate impressions during a game of *Skull King* — a fun trick-taking game where players bid on the number of tricks they think they will win.

Rook, and *Uno*. Our games have a little more depth and strategy than these games, but we very much wanted to evoke the same charm and simplicity of the classics.”

That said, he’s certain there’s more to some of his games than it might appear. “I have played *Skull King* hundreds of times, but it is still always an interesting

challenge,” he told me. “It is not hard to learn, but it is very challenging to win consistently.” And he’s got evidence to back up his opinion. “*Skull King* is one of six games that you can enter into state, regional, and a national championship through the Double Exposure company.” A game capable of withstanding the examination of tournament play is unlikely to be lightweight in the traditional sense.

True Family Gaming

What might not go down well with hobbyists has, however, proved popular with families. “We can also see trends in our Amazon sales that indicate that others are sharing our games,” Brent revealed. “We frequently, especially during the holiday season, see orders for multiple copies of our games. That indicates gift shopping. This kind of ‘word of mouth’ advocacy of our games is what has helped double our sales year after year.”

Beck’s games generate enough enthusiasm that many of his customers offer positive feedback. “We have been told by dozens of our customers that our games are their new favorite games for their families,” he told me. “Many people refer to *Cover Your Assets* as the ‘gateway game’. It’s bringing countless people into the idea of tabletop game play as a beneficial way to spend time with family and friends. We are pleased to be a vital part of the resurgence of game play and advocates of the counter-culture to the isolation of just electronic game play.”

UP

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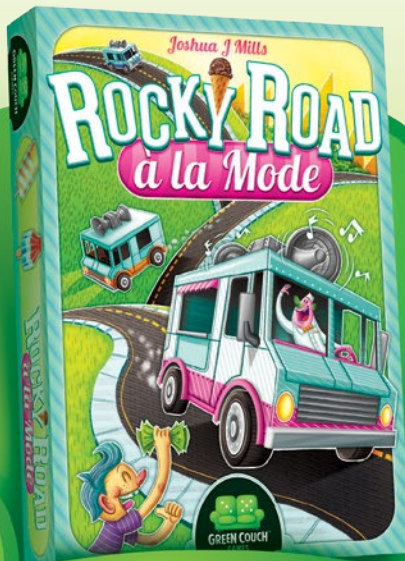
For all of their success, Beck learned what many have found before: board games are not enormously profitable. “This project began as an expensive hobby,” he said. “Later it got to break even, and it has taken us years to get to the point of showing a profit.” But he’s also learned another well-worn truth: that often, the journey is as important as the destination. “We had a vision of building a brand, not just making some side money on one game. So we went for it,” Beck enthused. “We enjoy the experience of meeting people, sharing our games, and sharing our vision: that games can be a powerful tool in building positive relationships.” 🎲



Grandpa Beck

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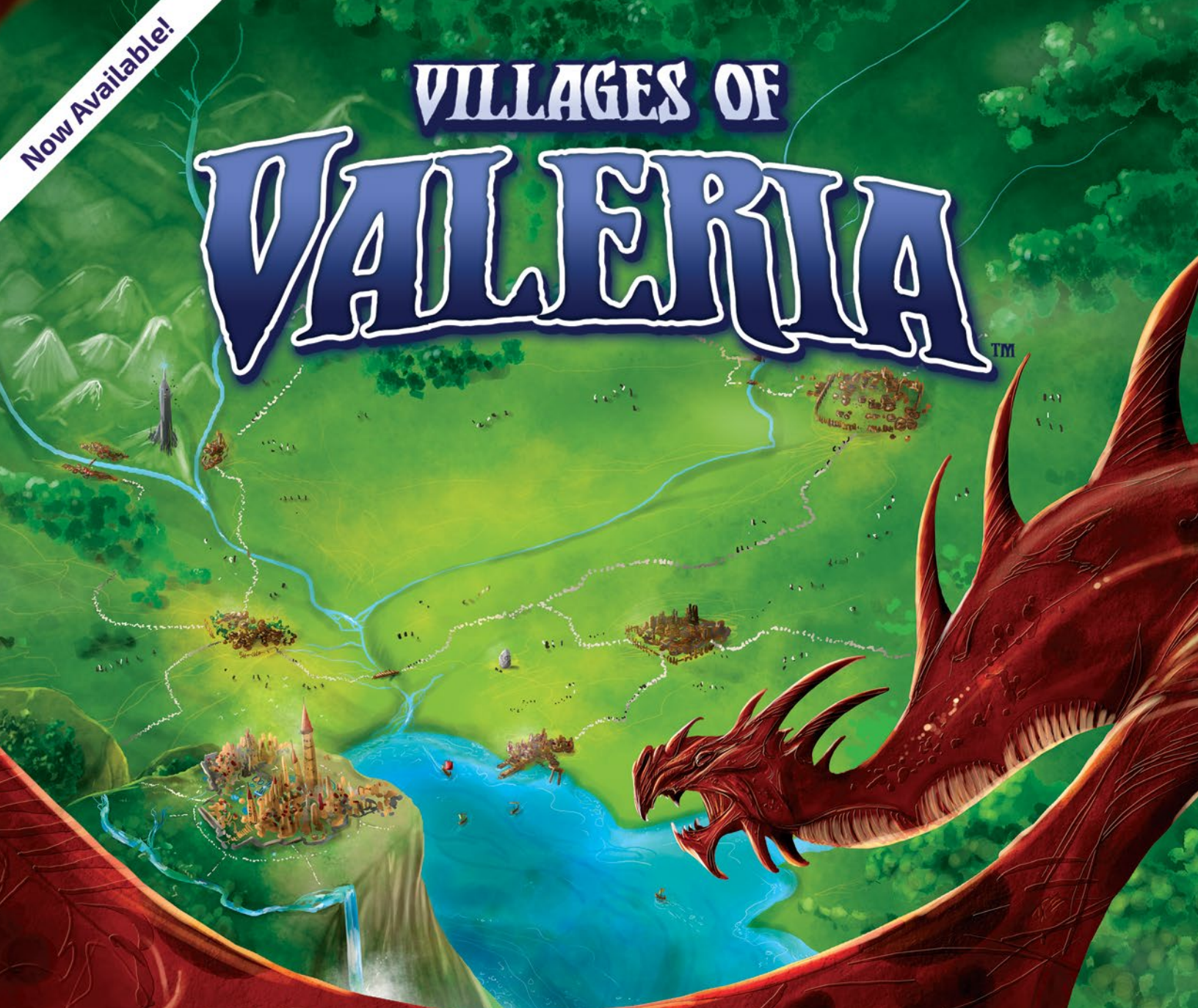
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