

ON THE COVER

Daily Magic's new set collection game is quick yet strategic

SUMMER CONS

Everything you need to know about Gen Con 50 and Origins 2017

ABSTRACT GAMES

How a minimal theme and simple rules can offer a rewarding gameplay experience

THE COLOR OF IELLO

How a French company's passion and creativity beautified the board game world

10 MINUTE HEIST THE WIZARD'S TOWER



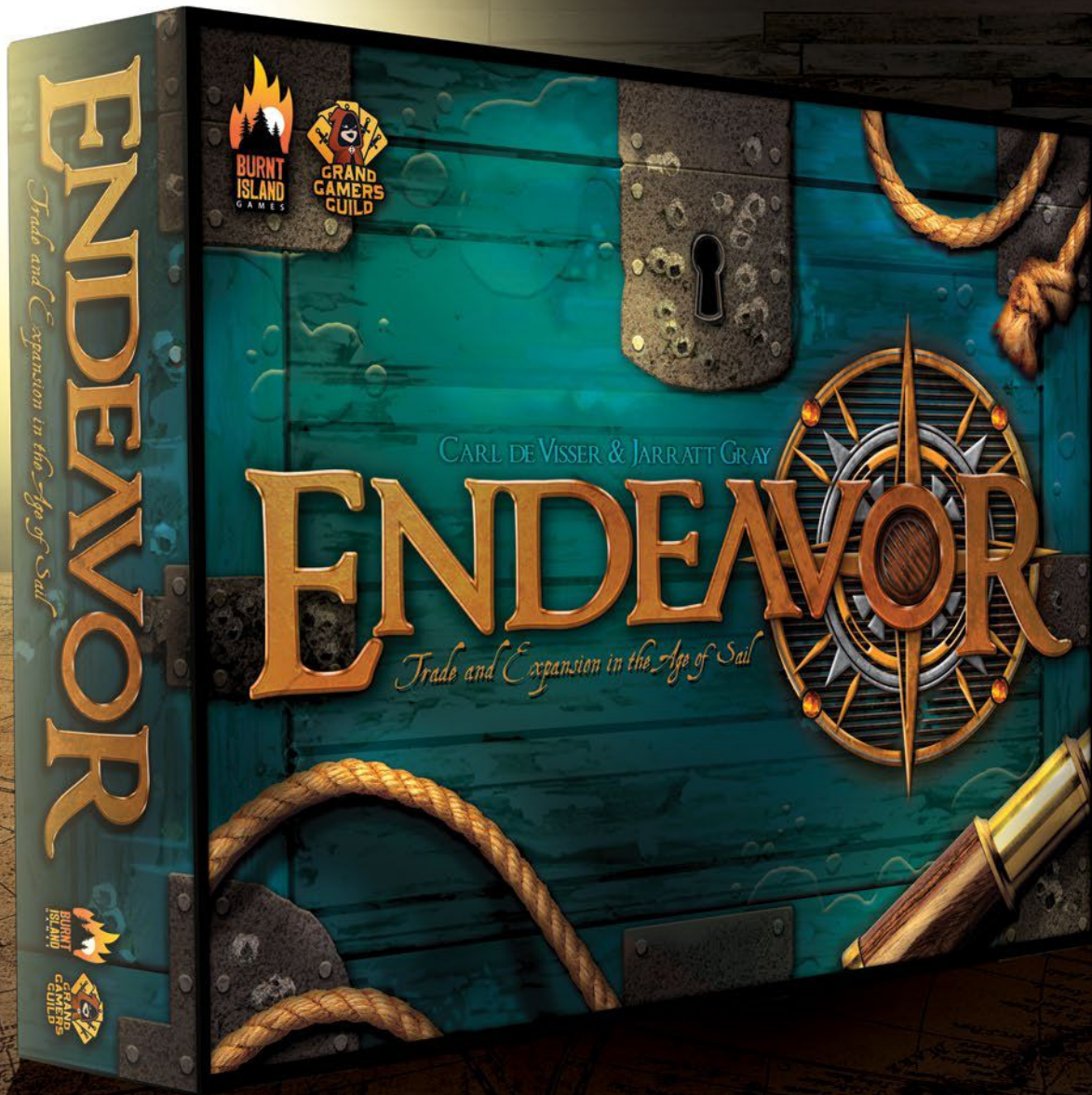
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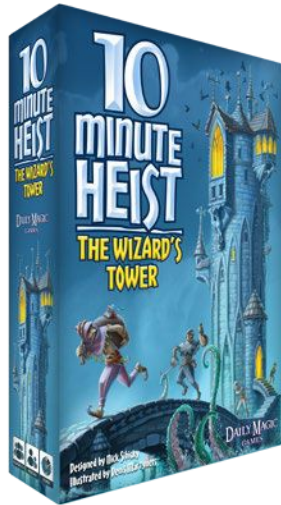
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From the creators of *The GRIMM Forest*



GUARDIAN'S CALL



THIS OCTOBER ON
KICKSTARTER



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Wandering Monster Studios is an independent publisher that focuses on games, mainly in the whimsical and fantasy vein. Of course, they've been known to wander.

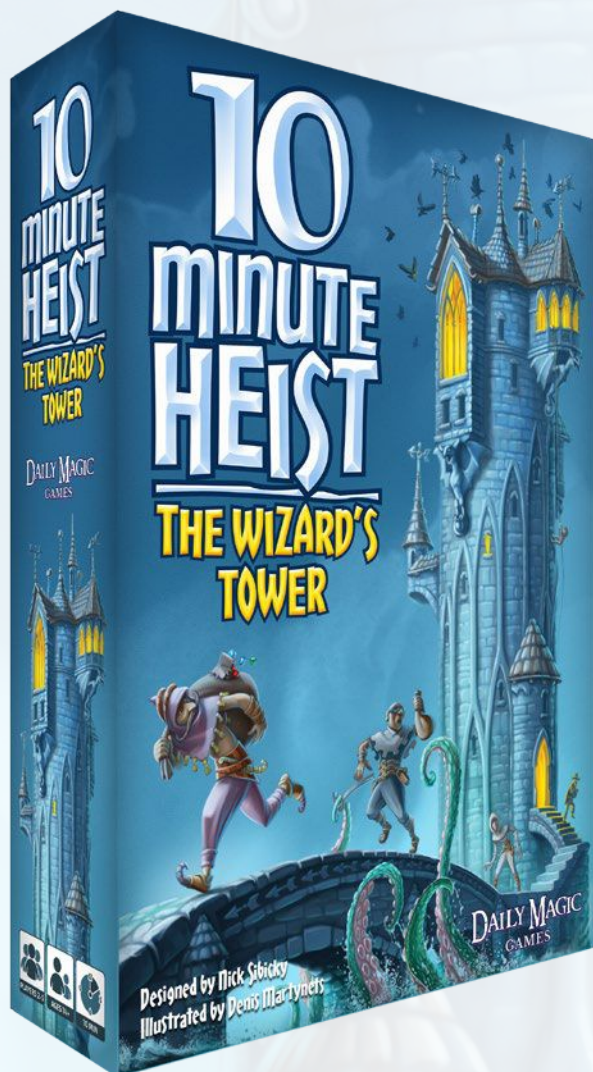
WanderingMonsterStudios.com



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

StratusGames.com





A Magical Set Collection Game

10 Minute Heist: The Wizard's Tower is an easy-to-learn set collection game that is layered with strategic depth.

Each player is a thief taking valuable treasures from the wizard's tower. Thieves enter through a window at the top of the tower and work their way down — never able to go back up the tower. As such, you must make strategic choices on when to jump ahead of your fellow thieves to set yourself up for a win.

The first thief out of the tower will get bonus points for being first. Once all the thieves are out of the tower, players compare their haul in a scoring round. Players gain scoring tiles based on who has the most of a certain type of item (potions, artifacts, fossils, gems, and tomes) and who has the most of a certain value (3, 4, and 5). If there are any ties, then no one scores!

There are several special treasures with magical abilities that will help you bend the rules of the game, but beware as these treasures are also cursed. After exiting the tower, the player with the most curses will get negative points.

A Beautiful World with Thematic Gameplay

Denis Martynets has outdone himself in creating beautiful items for you to collect. Each card is illustrated with a unique item set in a world blended with hints of the Victorian era, high fantasy, and Cthulhu. The art is complimented by simple and easy-to-understand icons designed to be quickly identified from across the table.

When the game is set up, you are creating the wizard's tower itself by laying out cards in a grid. Laying all the cards out like this not only lets you see all the amazing artwork, but it also helps you strategize on which cards to take from the tower. It quickly becomes a race to get the items that will give you the best score, but the gameplay itself feels more like a supercharged game of chess as you draft to compete for the scoring tiles.

The thief pawns add a lot of flavor to the game as they move from card to card—making it feel as if your thief is moving down through the tower and picking up items. Knowing where the other thieves are located in the tower helps



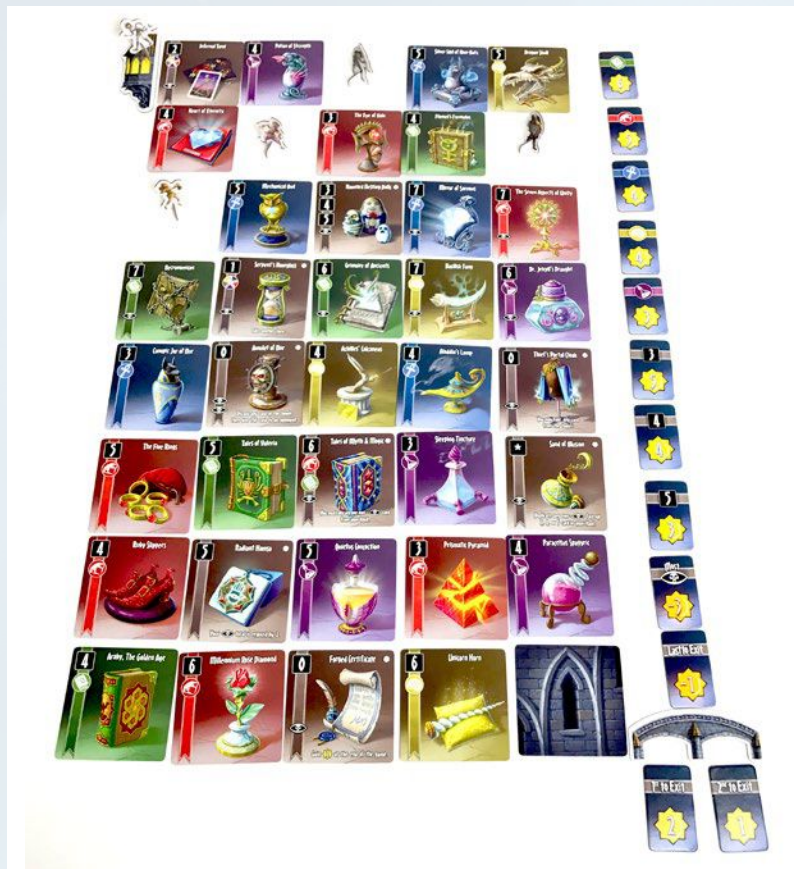
you calculate the risks and rewards of pushing further down. As you exit, your pawn stands on the bridge tile, which is surrounded by the scoring tiles — this really evokes the feeling of thieves meeting up to compare their haul.

The Perfect Filler

10 Minute Heist: The Wizard's Tower is easy to set up and teach to other players. Turns are quick and intuitive, which make this game a perfect filler.

Additionally, the game comes with two sets of special cards that can be swapped in and out to change the feel of the game. There is also a Master Thief variant that introduces a draft that gives players insight into what opponents may be hiding as their face-down card, and adds an element of bluffing to the game.

Daily Magic Games continues to release fun casual games for a broad audience and *10 Minute Heist: The Wizard's Tower* will be another gem to have in your collection. 🎲



Thieves enter through a window at the top of the tower and work their way down — never able to go back up.

10 MINUTE HEIST THE WIZARD'S TOWER

DAILY MAGIC GAMES™





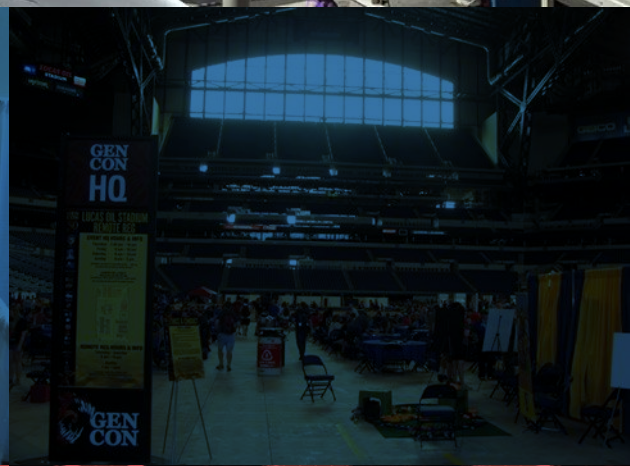
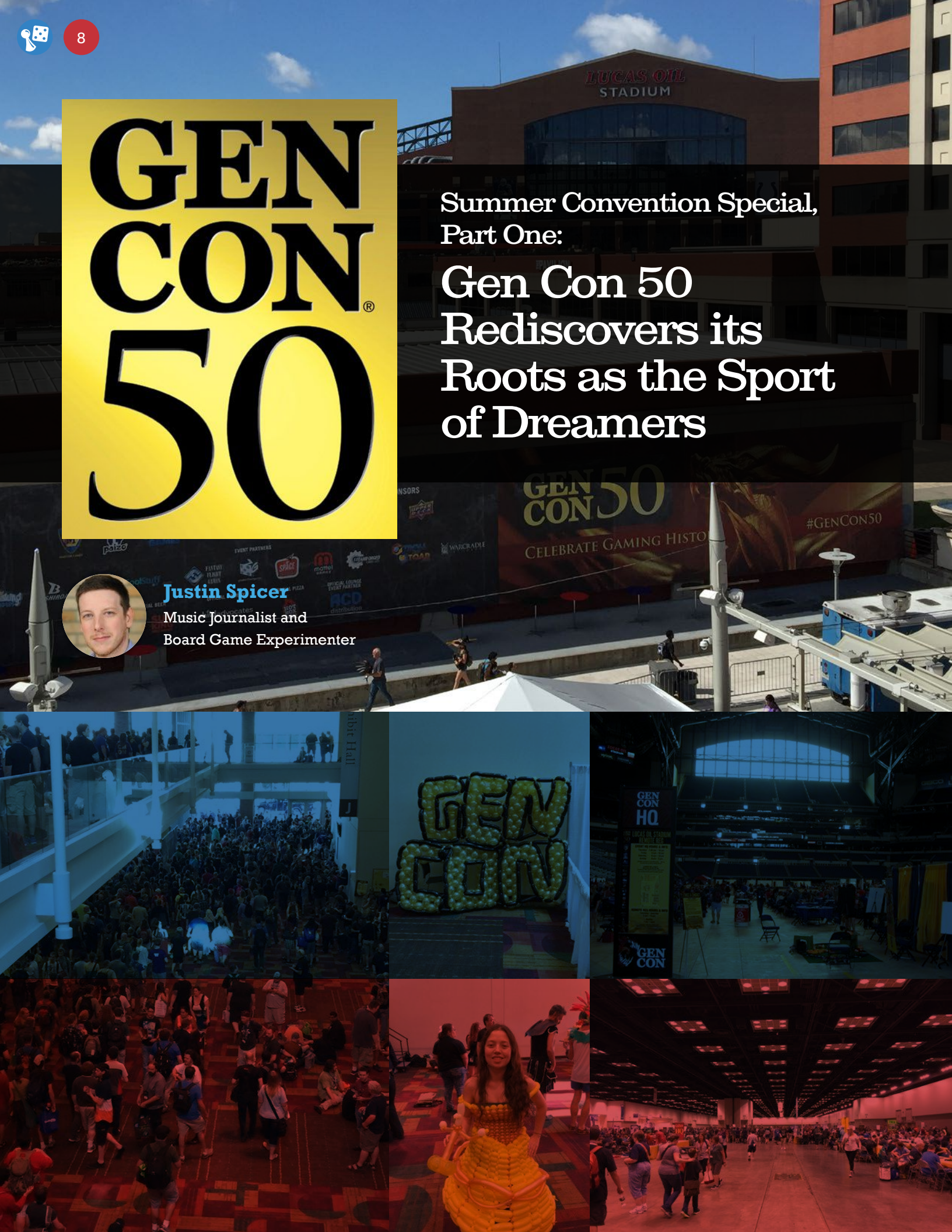
GEN CON 50

Summer Convention Special,
Part One:

Gen Con 50 Rediscovered its Roots as the Sport of Dreamers



Justin Spicer
Music Journalist and
Board Game Experimenter





The tiny approximation of Lake Geneva, Wisconsin's Horticultural Center, which hosted what was the first Gen Con, stood lonely in the epic openness of Lucas Oil Stadium, anathema to the spectacle which usually occurs on the football field. The smash-mouth action reserved for Sundays transferred itself across the street, where 75,000 strong packed a sold-out Indianapolis Convention Center for the 50th anniversary of Gen Con.

However, that solitary makeshift museum tucked inside a modern monument to sport lent more to this year's convention than a mere history lesson. The same RPG excitement that brought nearly 100 fans together in 1967 was to be found in accessible RPG fare across the venue; the masses brought to the imaginative sport by the likes of Twitch streams, sensationalized novels, and smartphones. Where Gary Gygax and his merry band of adventurers found clever means to spread a message that has helped launch gaming into higher stratospheres over the course of five decades, the same is true for those helming North America's biggest convention devoted to RPG and board gaming. Whether it's still the tactile pieces, dice, and players around a table, or the growth of online RPG groups and board gaming simulators, Gen Con 50 stands as a testament to the blurring lines of entertainment segmentation.

Most heartening is that the retailers and publishers that inhabit Gen Con for four glorious days are beginning to recognize this as well, springing forth imaginative titles blending RPG and board game mechanics along with mixed media and new technology, wisely taking the time to demonstrate their strengths for a frothy crowd. It amounts to a marvelous blend of organized chaos, and

considering the high stakes for Indianapolis and Gen Con on its golden anniversary, both city and convention delivered with tighter security, better structure, and continued expansion across the many hotels and venues linked by tunnels and skyways.

Of course, the same rowdiness that fills the atmosphere of every Gen Con was on full display this year. The sold-out crowd, which resembled the hoard of a Saturday by mid-day Thursday (and strangely, Saturday's crowd seemed smaller than the first two days), devoured the buzzworthy titles in no time. If a title was a hot commodity before the beginning of Gen Con, it was gone by the end of Thursday. Rumors spread about publishers being forced by Gen Con heavies to stop selling specific titles because they were causing hysteria and hazard, but it was the surprise titles that ended up flying off shelves and tables just as quickly that will be the last mark of Gen Con 50.

Though the convention has become more about moving units to create positive PR and profit, its heart is still true to those few in 1967 who moved units across mats and tables for the love of games. No matter how big Gen Con and board gaming become, that loudly beating heart was hard to ignore even in the crowded halls and open field that can barely contain everything Gen Con has to offer. Fifty years of growth has not diminished the spark of being together with those who share the same intimate love of gaming as you; not all that different than those padded gladiators on artificial turf whose space Gen Con now calls its own.



Gen Con is all about buzz, and that buzz often drives thousands to press up against each other to burst into the convention's exhibit hall every morning at 10 A.M. to grab their share of limited prizes and treasured board games. However, those who are picky and take the time to sample the wares often find that surprises pop up all the time. This year, I was lucky enough to find my top five games populated by a bit of everything: the latest from the hot, new designer, a mega publisher finding itself with a surprising sell out, a game with beautiful art and an interesting take on gameplay, to a new publisher bringing back the old with a new pizzazz.

Century: Spice Road

Plan B Games

2 to 5 players • 30 to 45 minutes

This was quietly dubbed “the *Splendor* Killer” by convention's end. What began as a quiet beginning for Plan B's darling quickly escalated to scenes where both *Spice Road* and its golem-skinned convention special were flying out the exhibit hall doors. The game is simple: collect a variety of four spices through a series of cards that allow you to swap, trade, acquire, and upgrade them. Yet the strategies to winning are many, with some choosing to build elaborate hands to upgrade and downgrade spices at will, while others wait and try to win point cards that come with gold and silver coins worth bonuses at the end of the game. A beautiful design and nearly flawless execution from Emerson Matsuuchi.



Downforce

Restoration Games

2 to 6 players • 20 to 40 minutes

Restoration Games came out with three reimagined and updated titles from popular and cult favorites from the board game vault, but the improvements on *Daytona 500*, now called *Downforce*, were staggering. The two-sided board presents a more casual gaming experience, while the flip-side is more cutthroat with more choking points. Two to six players bid for the six cars on the board, and movement of those cars is decided by playing cards. At the halfway point, players then bet on which car will win. There is no need to have your car place first if you bet correctly. But it's hard to get too frustrated looking at a board so simple and yet so polished and striking.



Weave

Monocle Society • 2+ players
Variable game length

A prime example of technology helping to bridge the gap in bringing new players into RPG gaming, *Weave* was at the top of a list of games at Gen Con that acted as a gateway for shy, new gamers to experience the core of roleplaying without too much worry or nervousness. Using an iOS or Android app as a companion, *Weave* uses cards that are scanned into the app to help create characters that players can then flesh out in a variety of whimsical stories. Though the physical game is not yet out, the app is available to play in beta form.

Dice Forge

Asmodee

2 to 4 players • 40 minutes

When friends first reported that they enjoyed a game titled *Dice Forge*, I imagined a game heavy on black, gray, and silver nodes. Yet the Asmodee title is bright and colorful. In fact, *Dice Forge* is a name that is quite literal. Incorporating the fun aspects of games such as *Machi Koro*, effects allow players to literally change the faces of their die. As gameplay advances, your die become sculpted to your needs and the effects that best benefit you. A game that has a low barrier to entry but a lot of strategy and replay value.



Seikatsu

IDW Games

1 to 4 players • 15-30 minutes



A beautifully designed game set in a fantastical garden where you and your opponents are placing tiles full of birds and flowers, the game's real fun is in its unique scoring mechanism where rows of flowers are scored only at the end of the game by how they are positioned to your vantage of the board. You must decide between immediate gratification or seeing the long view. A few gems from this year's Gen Con toyed with this idea to great effect, but the calming visuals and optimal player count (three) for *Seikatsu* set it apart and lend it a surprising depth in an otherwise simple game.



Summer Convention Special, Part Two: Origins Game Fair 2017



Jon Den Houter
Freelance Writer and
Avid Gamer

The Origins Game Fair, simply known as Origins, is held every summer in Columbus, Ohio. Hosted by the Game Manufacturer Association (GAMA), this five-day convention features everything in the realm of gaming, from board games to roleplaying; collectible card games to miniature war games. Each year the vendor hall fills up with publishers demoing their latest titles, cosplayers show off their new duds for the costume competition, and the Origins Library hosts featured authors for discussions and book signings. Never heard of it before? Origins has been around since 1975 and at this year's event hosted 17,001 attendees!

Origins has grown considerably in the past couple of years to become as accessible and multifaceted



Where Gaming Begins

as other large game conventions. What's great about Origins is that it tries to find ways to stand out as a unique event worth checking out, including an annual theme that it continues to play up through promotions and events; this year's theme being "Dragons!" The Origins Film Festival also takes place at the convention, showcasing independent feature and short films of any genre related to gaming, sci-fi, or fantasy.

And if all of that weren't enough, Origins hands out annual awards covering a number of broad industry categories. Notable awards this year include *Scythe* by Stonemaier Games for Game of the Year, *Mystic Vale* by AEG for the Card Game category, and *Happy Salmon* by North Star Games for the Family Game category.

Say Cheese!

Gen Con 2017 Photos



*The perfect
Christmas gift!*



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game at a time.*

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This year's Origins featured some new and exciting titles to look forward to picking up. Below are some of the best ones we discovered at the show.

That's a Question!

Czech Games Edition

3 to 6 players • 30 minutes

Some designers of heavyweight board games are also surprisingly good at creating casual board games. Such is the case with Vlaada Chvátil, who is respected both for his heavy games like *Through the Ages* and also for his lighter titles like *Codenames*. This year, Chvátil has created a party game called *That's a Question!* Similar to *Say Anything*, in *That's a Question!* players take turns asking each other get-to-know-you type questions. The twist is the format of the questions. There are only three questions you can ask: what would you miss more if it ceases to exist, A or B; what do you consider generally worse, A or B; or what would you rather choose, A or B? The variety in the questions comes from the cards in the player's hand.

On your turn, you choose one of the three questions to ask and play two cards from your hand. For example, you might choose the question, "What would you rather choose?" and play the cards "to be the best musician in the world" and "to have magical

healing powers." The person you are asking secretly chooses their answer, and the other players secretly vote on the answer they think that person will choose. You get points if you vote correctly, but like many party games, the fun is not so much winning as it is in enjoying the process of getting to know each other. *That's a Question!* would be a great icebreaker, but thanks to the creativity of the scenarios on the cards, this game would be fun even for good friends to learn more about each other.



Bärenpark

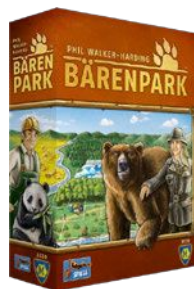
Mayfair Games

2 to 4 players • 30 to 45 minutes

Bärenpark is a tile placement game in the same vein as *Cottage Garden* and *Patchwork*. On a turn, players lay a tetris-shaped tile on their four-by-four player board (a grid of 16 squares) that represents their zoo. The tiles are beautifully illustrated, and feature panda houses, Gobi bear enclosures, and koala "bear" enclosures, for example. These tiles also include other areas needed at any good bear park, like restrooms and street villages where zoogoers can buy food. Depending on where you place your tile, you will cover up certain icons that allow you to grab another tile from the supply or to add an additional four-by-four player board to your zoo.

It is fun to race the other players for the best tiles from the common supply pile, and it's satisfying to see your zoo come to life as you add various kinds of bear exhibits. The game continues until one player covers up four player boards. You get points

for each player board you finished and for each bear house or enclosure in your zoo. *Bärenpark* offers a suitable challenge to serious gamers, as you vie for the best tiles to cover up needed icons and fully cover each player board, and it's light and quick enough that children and casual gamers will enjoy building their own bear park.



Gen Con 2017 Photos, Continued



Origins 2017 Photos



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numbered from 1 to 10, into four different piles that alternate in sequence either one up or one down (like the card game *Spit*). These piles represent the tires the pit crew needs to change. The car must also be refueled, which pit crews achieve by playing cards down that total up to the car's racing number. In later rounds, the car's engine must also be repaired, which requires pit crews to play either a pair or two pairs of cards.

In each of the three rounds, as soon as a pit crew finishes laying down all their cards, they grab one of the available dice (there is always one less die than the number of pit crews) and starts frantically rolling for sixes. Each six moves their car forward one space on the racetrack. Once the last pit crew finishes laying down cards, they shout "Stop!" (since there are no more dice available to roll) and then each pit crew checks their tires, fuel, and engine piles. For every two discards and for every mistake in the cards they laid, that pit crew receives a penalty, and the other cars move forward one space. And whenever one of their piles consist of all the same "suit" of cards (there are two suits in the game, black and white), that pit crew's car receives a turbo bonus and moves ahead two spaces. There is a catchup mechanic whereby teams in last place at the end of a round have first choice of a "monkey wrench" card, which gives special abilities like an extra movement space for each turbo bonus. At the end of three rounds, the pit crew whose car is in the lead is the winner. Frantically working together to lay down cards in the right piles is the heart of the game and makes *Pit Crew* a blast to play. 🎲

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ABSTRACT GAMES

BEAUTY IN THE DEPTHS



Dann Albright

Freelance Journalist and
Lifelong Board Gamer

Some games are like your neighborhood pool: they're fun, refreshing, and there's a bit of variety. The surface is calm, and the water doesn't fight you. But when it comes down to it, there's not much depth.

Other games are more like the open sea. The surface is choppy, your first several attempts to swim result in a mouthful of saltwater, and there's a vast amount of space in which to get lost (or, in worse cases, go under). But there's an amazing variety of wonders to be found.

Abstract games are that open sea. They can be intimidating—but there's a depth there that's difficult to replicate. And once you start exploring the possibilities, it's difficult to go back to shallower waters.



What, Exactly, Is an Abstract Game?

A truly abstract game contains no randomness and no hidden information. Think of *chess* or *checkers* — there are no dice, no drawing cards, no hidden objectives or hands. Traditional abstract games also have no theme, and don't tell any sort of story. Many traditional games, like *mancala*, *Nine Men's Morris*, and *Reversi*, are true abstracts.

Despite relatively simple mechanics, abstract games have a depth of strategy that's deceiving. With no hidden objectives or the luck of the draw determining the resources you have available, you might think the games would play out similarly each time. But well-designed abstracts have a wealth of variety and interesting strategic decisions.

You might be thinking of *chess* — and while that's a great example of an abstract game, it also turns a lot of people off. Traditional abstracts that don't provide any randomness or hidden information often don't appeal to modern gamers.

Fortunately, there's a whole slew of modern abstract games that bend the rules a bit and provide a better play experience that will help you start exploring the world of abstracts.



Chess is a great example of an abstract game, but it also can be intimidating.

For example, the latest version of *Santorini* includes cards that give you special powers. Drawing those cards introduces some randomness, but the game is largely abstract, and requires that you outmaneuver your opponent on a small board. *Tash-Kalar* is considered abstract-ish, but includes many cards that give both players hidden information. It also has a rather strong theme.

A looser definition of abstract games might be that they are built on simple mechanisms and limit luck and hidden information. They're also commonly played by two players.

Some modern games like *YINSH* and *Patchwork* do conform to stricter definitions of abstract games. But they're more accessible than traditional games because of their faster play time, interesting visual presentation, and new mechanics.

As you can see, it can be difficult to define exactly what constitutes an abstract game. But that doesn't mean they're difficult to play. In fact, simple mechanics and rules are one of the hallmarks of abstracts.



Santorini introduces some randomness using cards that give players special powers; otherwise, the game is largely abstract.

Simplicity that Belies Depth

When you think of simple games, you probably don't think of depth. *Sushi Go!* is a popular simple game – but it lacks depth. There's nothing hiding under the surface, no level of familiarity with the game that makes the experience more strategically significant. It's the shallow end of your neighborhood pool.

Abstract games, on the other hand, usually have simple mechanics, but can be *very* deep. Nick Bentley, a designer and long-time aficionado of abstract games, describes it as having a “legacy” aspect. “Instead of tearing up cards or opening envelopes with new rules, it's your mind that changes....When your perception expands, when you can see things you didn't see before, when you can view the world in a new way, it's exhilarating.”

As you spend time playing a particular abstract game, you see new elements in the strategy, new

ways to interact with other players, and new ways of appreciating the game.

They may not seem as interesting or exciting as thematic games at first, but after a handful of plays, new levels of understanding and appreciation start opening up – and that's an awesome experience.

It's important to note that many abstract games don't make a whole lot of sense in the first few plays. “I'm always hesitant to recommend abstract games because to really feel their beauty requires, for many people, a reorientation of the spirit in which they play games,” says Bentley. “Many modern gamers play games as a sort of tourism. They poke around each game, see what's there, and then play something else. It's hard to feel an abstract game's beauty when playing that way.”

The Appeal of Modern Abstracts

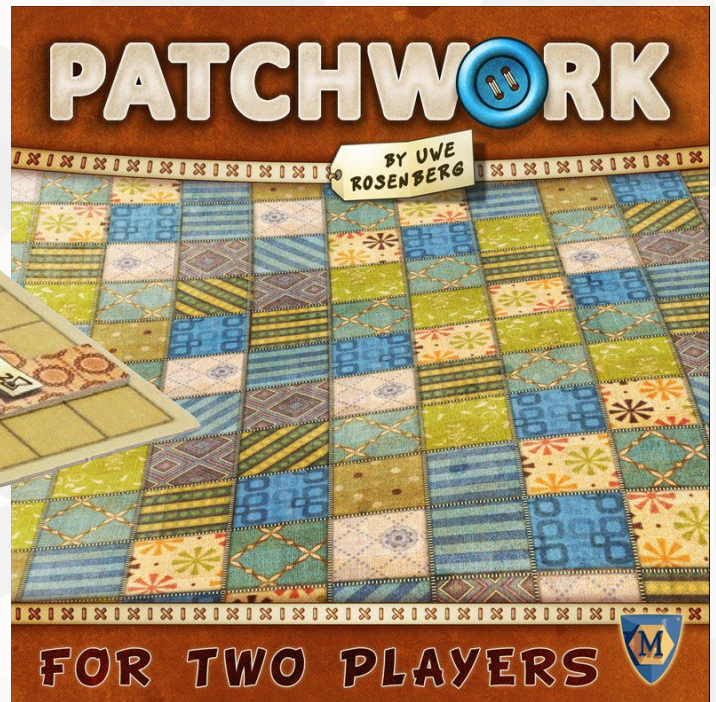
This “gaming tourism” isn't a bad thing – it just doesn't lend itself to an appreciation of deep abstract games. Many casual (and even not-so-casual) gamers find it difficult to commit to a specific game for weeks or months on end.

But modern abstract games have solved this problem with fast play times, easy setup, and – in some cases – very small boxes. *Hive* is a popular abstract game

that consists of 22 small tiles. It doesn't even have a board. And it can be played in 20 minutes, making it easy to play after a heftier title on game night. (See issue #3 of *Casual Game Insider* for our *Hive* beginner's strategy guide.)

Patchwork, Uwe Rosenberg's abstract strategy game with a quilting theme, is relatively small and can be played in as little as 15 minutes. *Onitama* is





highly portable and can be finished in 10 minutes by experienced players.

But modern abstracts don't just appeal to people who want to squeeze in a quick game before calling it a night. There are some really phenomenal games that bend the strict definitions of "abstract" to create masterpieces that have a bit of luck or hidden information, but maintain the depth that makes abstracts so rewarding.

My own favorite example is Reiner Knizia's *Tigris & Euphrates*, a classic game of kingdom building. The rules are quite simple, and the game rewards good abstract strategic thinking. But there's a bit of randomness as well — players have to draw tiles before they can play any on their turn. The outcome, however, is strictly player-driven.

How to Test the Waters

As Bentley mentions, to get the most out of abstract games requires that you spend time getting to know them and the intricacies of strategy. That might not appeal to everyone. But I recommend trying out a few abstracts with your game group or partner anyway.

Before the past few months, I didn't have a whole lot of experience with abstracts. But after spending a lot of time playing *Tigris & Euphrates*, as well

Another Knizia game, *Samurai*, also channels the feeling of traditional abstract strategy games, but bends the rules with tile drawing.

Fans of abstract games are no longer limited to titles like *Go*, *Reversi*, *Nine Men's Morris*, and *chess*. Instead, there are hundreds of options that range from simple (and quick) to rather complex. There are abstracts that conform strictly to the "no randomness, no hidden information" rules, and others that manage to bend that rule while still channeling what's great about abstract games.

It's a great time to be a fan of abstracts.

as familiarizing myself with *YINSH* (a member of the fantastic GIPF line), I've come to appreciate the simplicity and depth of these games.

I'm usually a fan of games that tell stories — I love the alternate 1920s in *Scythe*, for example, and the destruction of Ragnarok in *Blood Rage* — but there's something difficult to capture about the appeal of abstract games.



It's something you can only experience by trying it out. And with the great selection of modern abstracts, you don't need to commit chess-master-like amounts of time to appreciate it.

So I strongly encourage you to spend some time with abstract games. Head down to your nearest board game café or grab a copy for yourself (*Hive*, *Onitama*, and *Tsuro* typically sell for \$20–25 at your local game store). You can even play quite a few of these games in digital versions.

No matter how you decide to wade into the astoundingly deep waters of abstract strategy, commit some time to it. You may flounder a bit at first, but you'll soon learn to swim, and the beauty that you'll find under the seemingly chaotic surface is absolutely worth the journey. 🎲



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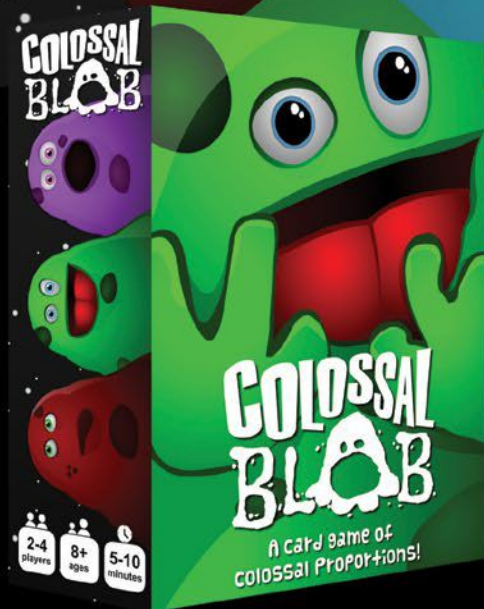
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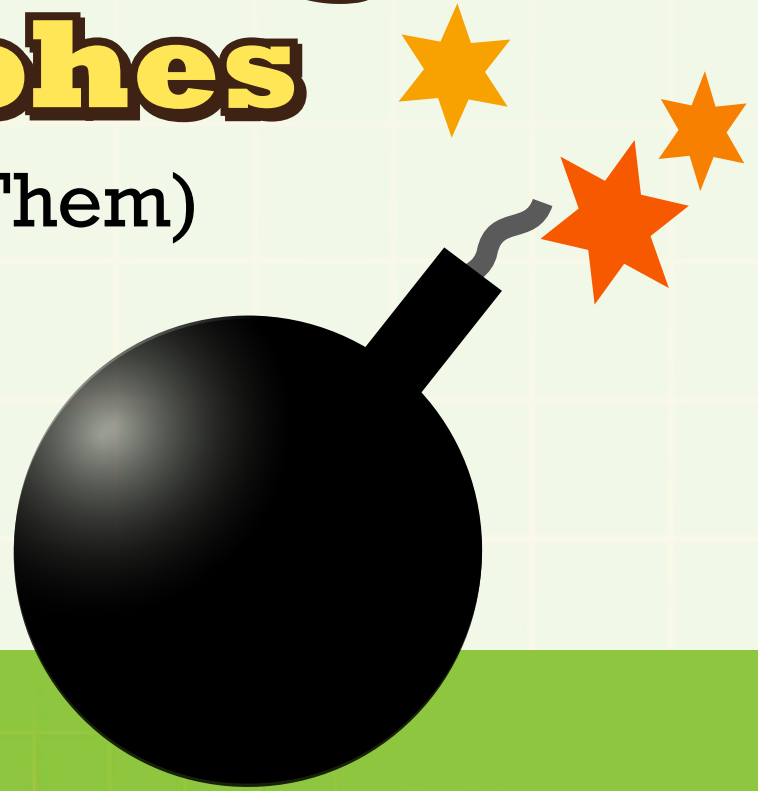
Crowdfunding Catastrophes

(And How to Avoid Them)

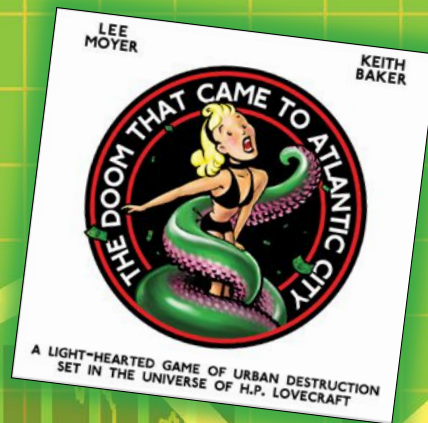


Paul Brian

Freelance Journalist and
Big Fan of the Classics



KICKSTARTER



INDIEGOGO





When you put money into an upcoming game, your hopes are high. It's going to be epic, ground-breaking—a ton of fun. Sometimes your optimism is rewarded and it really comes through. But what about those times when you help crowdfund a game all the way into a developer's bottomless pocket or into a disappointing, anticlimactic final product? What about when Kickstarter kicks you in the caboose and hands you an empty shelf or a terrible game, instead of a dazzling new tabletop adventure? What if the game is fun but it's six months late arriving?

It's a question worth asking, as the tabletop gaming market experiences an ongoing renaissance, buoyed to no small degree by crowdfunding sites like Indiegogo and Kickstarter. In 2015 alone, the “hobby game” market (board and card games sold for gamers instead of just as toys) was worth around \$1.2 billion in the US and Canada, according to the website ICv2. That's big money that has only grown since then, and it goes to show that people love to play. They also love to attend board game fairs like the UK Games Expo in Britain, Essen Spiel in Germany, or Gen Con and Origins in the U.S., to name just a few.

The public is hungry for new games and they always like having the chance to play them through or fund them online. What they don't like is to get enthused about a game and then have it fall through.



Many people are breaking the bank on new games, with over \$1.2 billion spent every year in North America in the hobby industry alone.

The Good, The Bad, and the Liability

The upsides of crowdfunding are numerous: as a backer giving even modest amounts, you get the chance to fund someone's vivid vision and potentially be part of something big from the start. In the spring of 2015, tabletop games really took off in a big way on Kickstarter. Massive success stories like *Kingdom Death: Monster 1.5*, *Conan*, and *Zombicide: Black Plague* spring to mind. So do projects like the upcoming, much-anticipated romantic comedy game *Fog of Love*, which didn't get the support from traditional publishers it deserved, but found huge, well-deserved success on Kickstarter. Crowdfunding can help great games get made that otherwise wouldn't see the light of day.

The downsides of crowdfunding, however, can also be enormous, including games that don't live up to expectation or games that don't ever get made. The system of “perks” available to you as a backer based on you

giving a certain contribution means you expect something for that contribution. Unfortunately, some big screw-ups and let-downs do occur now and then in the world of crowdfunded tabletop gaming. Although Kickstarter's terms of use do require that projects be completed or resolved to backers' satisfaction, Kickstarter itself is wholly free of liability for any fallout that occurs, noting in their terms of use that they are “not liable for any damages or loss incurred related to rewards or any other use of the Service” and are “under no obligation to become involved in disputes between any Users, or between Users and any third party.”

Indiegogo's Help Center states that: “The reality is that many startups and new ideas — and even some established business[es] — fail. This is why it's important for each contributor to assess the risks of the



project to determine if they are willing to accept them before supporting a campaign.” If you fund a project that goes off the rails, Indiegogo urges you to contact the campaigner to find “a mutually agreeable alternative” (to the actual product itself). “This may include a full or partial refund from the campaign owner, alternative perks, or discounts on a similar product. The best course of action if a project does not succeed is to work out an alternative with the campaign owner and potentially other contributors.”

If things get really bad or you’ve lost more than you are willing to walk away from or settle about? You can file a lawsuit against the campaign owner through Indiegogo’s Terms of Use, in which case: get a lawyer.

Translation: if a venture doesn’t go your way on these platforms, you’re on your own.

“The reality is that many startups and new ideas — and even some established business[es] — fail.”

What Are the Numbers on Tabletop Game Crowdfunding?

Indiegogo declined to provide numbers, noting that “as a private company” it doesn’t disclose this “specific information.” Massive tabletop game flops don’t come to mind, but Indiegogo does have cases where there have been major delays in the fulfillment of a game and poor communication, such as with *Vanuatu*.

Kickstarter provided recent statistics of 2,937 board game projects, of which 1,710 were successfully funded (58.2%). The campaigns raised a total of \$115,321,828 and included contributions from 584,568 individual backers (the most ever in a year thus far). With all of these game projects seeking funding at an increasing rate, you might hear horror stories about rare Kickstarter flops.



Case Study: The Doom That Came To Atlantic City

More like *The Doom That Came to Thousands of People’s Bank Accounts*. The game was touted as a “lighthearted Lovecraftian game of urban destruction,” and developer Erik Chevalier promised that any backer who put in more than \$75 would get limited-edition figurines, along with the game itself. Hype started building after the announcement in the spring of 2012. The game raised way more than its original funding target (more than three times as much, in fact).

Chevalier dashed expectations, however, when he pulled out in July 2013, admitting that “every possible mistake was made.” This left backers scratching their heads and shaking their fists.

Eventually Chevalier was ordered to pay back \$111,793.71 in funding by the US Federal Trade Commission (FTC). The FTC investigation found that Chevalier, who promised in his cancellation post that he “never set out to con anyone or to perpetuate

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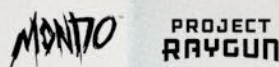
Phantom City Creative is a Toronto based independent studio that focuses on entertainment design for film, television and music and has been featured in numerous publications across the globe.



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a fraud,” had in fact used most of the backer money on himself, including to move to Portland, Oregon, start a new business, and buy personal equipment. Chevalier is now bankrupt and thus unable to pay back the \$111,793.71 the FTC ordered him to pay. Cryptozoic Entertainment eventually stepped in to fix the situation, releasing the game in February 2014 and shipping it to backers at the company’s own expense. Nonetheless, *The Doom That Came to Atlantic City* certainly ruffled a lot of people’s feathers the wrong way. Kickstarter, for its part, wrote that “creators who abuse our system and backers’ trust expose themselves to legal action.”

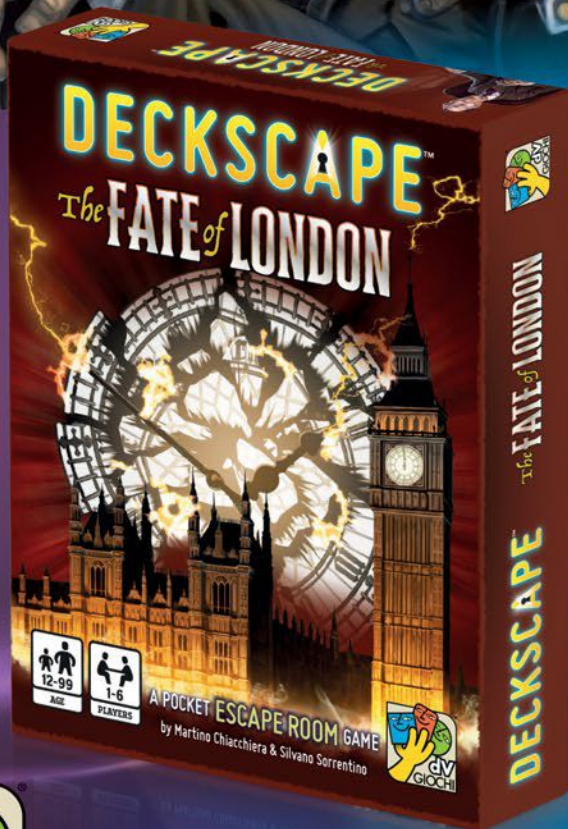
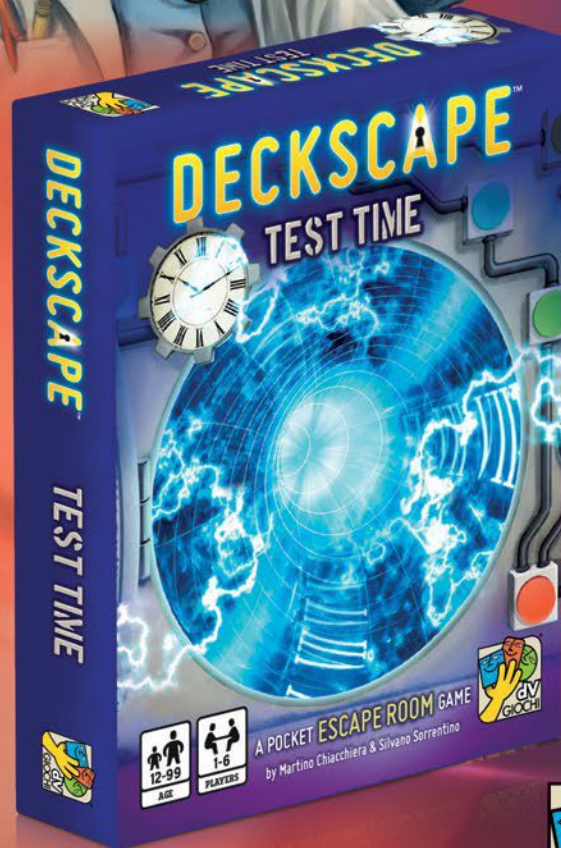
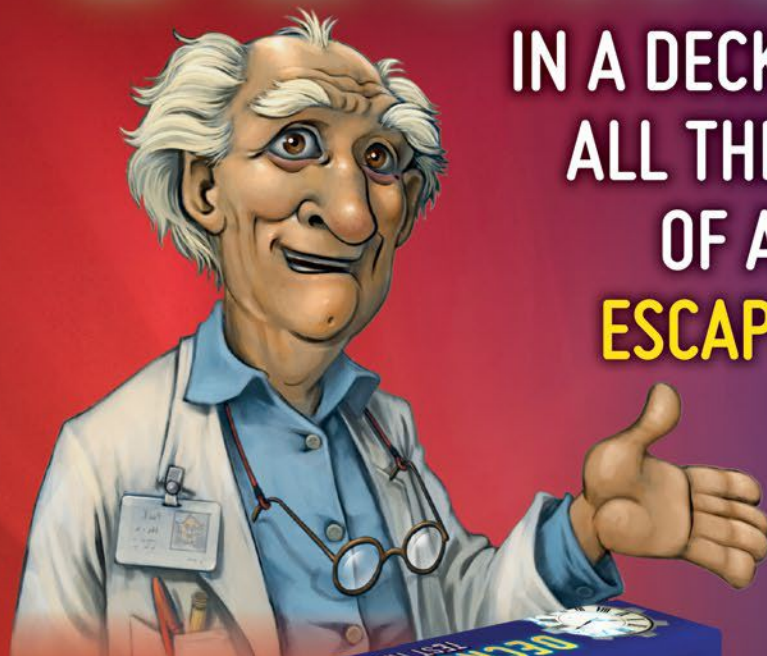
Advice on How to Avoid Crowdfunding Pitfalls

The first rule of avoiding a disappointment is to be careful. It’s fine to get excited about a game, but read about it more and look into who is behind the project. At what stage of development is it? Does the creator have a previous track record of success or are they unknown?

If a pledge amount is under \$30 or so you can maybe afford to go out on a limb a little bit, but if you’re getting up past three figures it’s a good idea to knuckle down and really investigate who is behind the project, what their timeline is and what their past record looks like. Pay attention to how complex the game is — does it have a ton of moving parts but a very low pledge amount? It could be too good to be true, or at least it might under-deliver.

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Read the Risks and Challenges section on Kickstarter projects to get an idea of the game's development status and what potential upsides and downsides a creator foresees as it rolls out. Pay attention to the funding deadline for Kickstarter's "all or nothing" funding system. If you fund a game that's way below target and approaching its due date you won't be charged – but you also won't get your game.

Final Roll of the Dice

At the end of the day, crowdfunding does have some risks. So far, the track record is pretty good on most platforms when it comes to tabletop gaming, so there's no need to be highly paranoid. But that doesn't mean you should expect everything a developer promises, even with the best of intentions. Keep your wits about you and always remember to look into the details of a game before you go all in. May the dice (and the projects you fund) always roll in your favor. 🎲



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Building a Kingdom:



An Interview with Bruno Cathala,
Designer of

Kingdomino



Kathryn Hill

Marketing and PR Associate
at Blue Orange Games

Interviewer's note: Quotes were translated from Cathala's native French and edited for the sake of clarity and length. All quotes were evaluated by Cathala for accuracy and meaning.



Bruno Cathala: passionate gamer, celebrated game designer, and as of recent, Spiel des Jahres 2017 recipient. For a designer like Cathala, whose ludography includes popular games like *Five Tribes*, *7 Wonders Duel*, and *Abyss*, this award is a long time coming.

With the announcement of its win on July 17th, 2017, *Kingdomino* instantly joined the ranks of popular past award winners like *The Settlers of Catan*, *Ticket to Ride*, and *Codenames*. According to the Spiel jury, *Kingdomino* was chosen because it “lifts the time-honored principle of dominoes to a new level – without losing any of the sleek elegance of its predecessor. On the contrary: the dual mechanics of planning the far-reaching lands surrounding the castle and the clever method of selecting tiles fit together extraordinarily well, they are expertly reduced to their essential components.”

In the game, players take turns selecting and then adding a new domino to their existing kingdom, making sure at least one of its sides connects to a matching terrain type already in play. The game mechanics for obtaining the domino tiles is what makes it so clever. The order of tile selection depends on the order in which tiles were previously chosen; this forces players to evaluate how important certain tiles are to their strategy, weighing this against the fact that more valuable tiles

mean less of a choice in the next round. The game ends when each player has completed a five-by-five grid, and then points are counted based on the number of connecting tiles and crowns.



While the finished product has impressed the public since its debut at Essen 2016, the story behind how a humble game of dominos turned into a crown jewel shows that much like building an entire kingdom, the creation of a board game is no easy feat. Cathala himself admitted that after his initial idea there was “six months of work and dozens of tests to validate a final distribution that met my satisfaction.” However, although the development process for *Kingdomino* was long, the game itself was actually based on another game he had previously created.

When asked about his inspiration, Cathala was quick to point to the original version of *Kingdomino* – *K'dominoz*. It was a game he invented for a ski resort, as part of his side-gig creating games for companies to use as communication, training, or marketing tools. “I had already created tile, dice,



Kingdomino by Bruno Cathala, the winner of the 2017 Spiel des Jahres (game of the year) award

What is the Spiel des Jahres?



Spiel des Jahres, German for “Game of the Year,” is an annual award given to outstanding board games in the industry since 1979. Nominees typically include family-friendly and casual titles, shying away from hobbyist or highly competitive games and instead featuring games that are accessible to everyone. That doesn’t necessarily mean the games are for children – the panel also awards a Children’s Game of the Year as well as the Connoisseur-Enthusiast Game of the Year.

The Spiel des Jahres is awarded by a panel of established and independent board game critics from a number of German-speaking countries (Germany, Austria, and Switzerland). It is an in-depth process to determine the winner, with several rounds of voting and set criteria that each winner must meet. Games that receive the award present an exciting experience for everyone, engaging players with unique mechanics or providing a fresh take on existing elements that create something entirely new.

Spiel des Jahres winners don’t receive anything outside of the recognition by the panel and the promotional use of the award. That said, Spiel nominations can typically increase sales by 3,000 to 10,000 copies; winners can usually expect to sell anywhere from 300,000 to 500,000 copies. Congrats to Bruno Cathala and the publishing team behind this year’s winner: *Kingdomino!*

and card games for this ski resort to give to people who bought week-long family passes,” said Cathala, “and so when 2015 arrived I wanted another playful object that I could possibly use, and twist, to make a very simple game. Almost right away I thought of dominoes. This is what led me to *K’dominoz!*”

K’dominoz is a small color-based game where each player only has eight dominos, however Cathala decided to expand upon it, saying “I had so much pleasure in playing and playing again, that I told myself it would be a shame to not try to enrich it a bit and give it a chance in the board game world.”

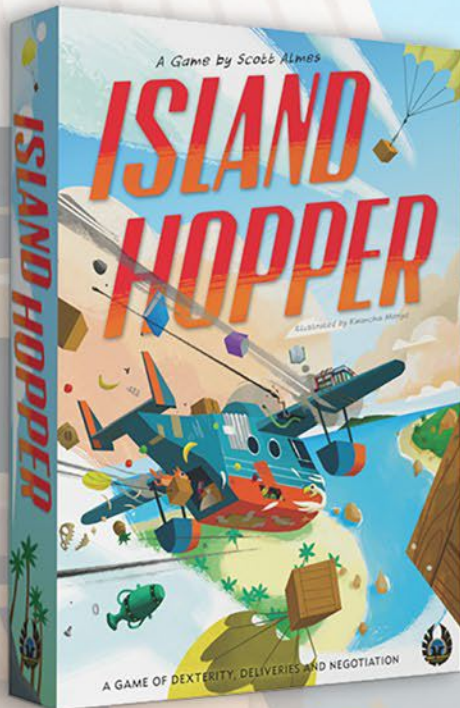
In order to take it from a humble promotional prize to a production-worthy game, Cathala had to do a major overhaul. He increased the number of tiles, changed the faces from colors to different landscapes, and added the numbering system that makes tile selection so clever because he wanted “to bring an interesting dilemma for savvy players.”

Interestingly enough, he had a hard time deciding on a theme and hesitated “a long time between the building of a kingdom as you know it, or some kind of farm with fields containing different animals in place of crowns.” Following the addition of the different variations, the two player seven-by-seven being Cathala’s personal favorite, the game was ready for production. After signing with Blue Orange Edition (the development company that creates games for Blue Orange Europe and Blue Orange USA) an illustrator was hired to bring his prototype to life.

Right before production Cathala had doubts about the sample and said, “at the end, to my biggest disappointment, the final result was difficult to play and the aesthetic was questionable and not very attractive. The work was completely done, the illustrator had been paid, and the game was ready for production.” Cathala continued, “however, I shared my doubts and sadness with Blue Orange and they were incredibly responsive to my disappointment. They changed the illustrator and paid for the cost of the re-done illustrations.”



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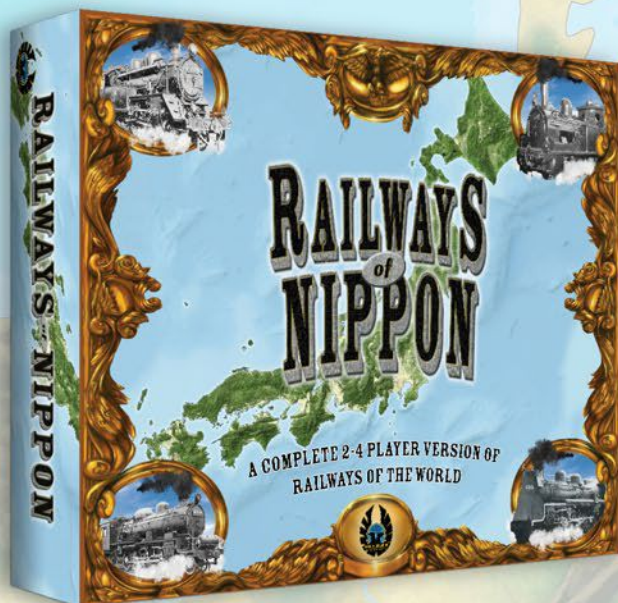
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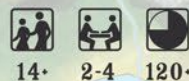


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For Cathala, this was important as he believes that “one essential element to the success of this operation is the artistic direction. With good artistic direction, a complex game can seem easy, and a simple game can seem complicated.”

This is the point at which Cyril Bouquet entered the picture, completely re-drawing the illustrations so that the buildings and landscapes were seen from the side, not the top like in the first attempt. He also added the crowns that allow players to score points, which were in Cathala’s original prototype, and were represented by buildings in the first production sample. Cathala assured, “Today I am entirely satisfied with the final result. I am sure that without this last minute change, *Kingdomino* wouldn’t know the success it is having today. I want to thank my editor for making this decision; I do not know too many people able to say ‘I was wrong’ and double the costs to correct a problem.”

Although re-doing an entire game is not entirely uncommon, Cathala’s long history with Blue Orange (originally called Jactalea when he began working with them) might have influenced the decision to re-do the illustrations. The relationship all started with Cathala’s love for a game called *Gyges*, which was produced one-at-a-time by its author Claude Leroy. “In 2002 I discovered that Claude Leroy, whom I admired, lived a few miles from my parents in the South of France. I took advantage of a Christmas visit to my parents, contacted

Claude Leroy to simply tell him all the good I thought about his work, and he invited me to his home.”

At this meeting, Cathala had the pleasure of being introduced to Leroy’s son, Timothee. Years later, that very same Timothee would go on to start a publishing company to help promote his father’s games, as well as games of the ilk. “In brief, we had met before and we have a common passion for abstract games and Claude Leroy’s work,” Cathala said. “Naturally, I immediately connected to Jactalea, and a year or two later I offered them a two-player game, *Kamon*. It was then our partnership was born.” This partnership continued even after Jactalea merged with Blue Orange Games, and has resulted in the publishing of games such as *Niya/Okiya*, *Longhorn*, *Dragon Run*, and now *Kingdomino*.

When the Spiel, Kinderspiel, and Kennerspiel des Jahres nominees were announced in May, Cathala was excited, but also surprised. “In our little world of board games, I think it is the equivalent to winning an Oscar,” said Cathala. “Being part of the three finalists is just huge, especially because it is my first nomination, after 15 years of designing games, and maybe my last.”

After the Spiel announcement, Cathala was kind enough to offer his commentary on the day-of festivities. After the initial shock wore off he said, “I sat there speechless, while everybody was jumping and crying around me, shaking me in all directions.”

Bruno Cathala accepting his first ever Spiel des Jahres award after 15 years of designing board games





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For Cathala this award represents the culmination of an entire career of playing, creating and designing games. He said he feels extremely honored, “because it is the greatest recognition that exists for a game author. The holy grail. An Everest. It is an absolutely fantastic reward, and the biggest gift the game world could offer me.”

When asked about advice he would give to budding game designers, Cathala offered this: “First I would say that having a game idea doesn’t make you a game designer. Having an idea is just the beginning, the visible part of the iceberg. Transforming this part to a real game will need a lot of work.” He continued: “To become a game designer first thing you have to learn is patience. You will need to build your prototype. To playtest it, modify it, playtest it, modify it again, again and... again. With a lot of different people (not your family or friends who always think that what you do is incredible). You will feel excited, disappointed, excited, and disappointed, again and again...and at the end, you will have to really work a lot to write an understandable and clear rule booklet. Only then it will be time to try to contact a publisher.”

In his 15 year career as a designer, there is no doubt that Cathala has felt a roller-coaster of emotions about his games, but is safe to say that for now he is riding a wave of excitement off of *Kingdomino*’s success.

According to Cathala, *Kingdomino* fans can look forward to the development and expansion of the entire *Kingdomino* concept and universe. Additionally, Cathala mentioned, “a cool game that can be played solo, or one on one, it’s a common project with Ludovic Maublanc and I believe in it.” 🎲



Kingdomino



Game of the Year

WINNER!

“The planning of the extensive landscapes around the castle and the clever mechanism in the tiles selection are harmoniously interlinked and masterfully reduced to their essentials.”

—The Spiel des Jahres jury.

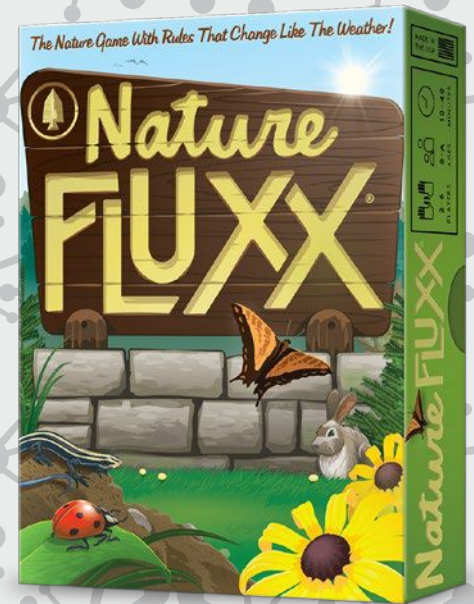
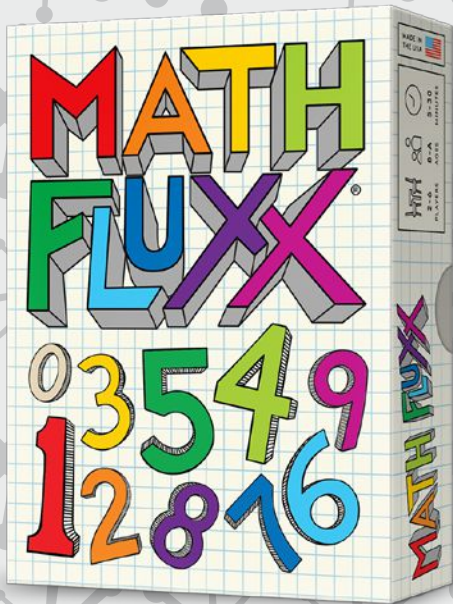
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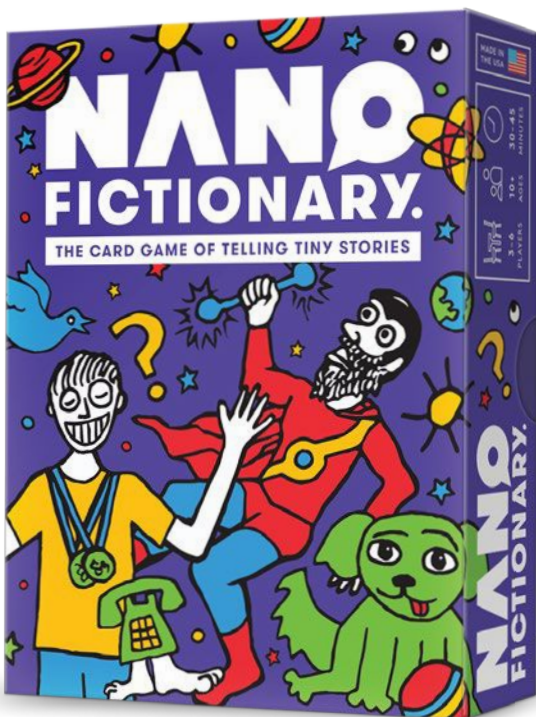
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THE COLOR OF



How a French Company's Passion and Creativity
Beautified the Board Game World



John L. Carkeet IV

Producer, LimpingFrog Productions and
Public Affairs Specialist, U.S. Army Reserve



When looking at corporate overviews, investment portfolios and quarterly earnings reports, numbers tend to leave broad, black and white strokes on a digital canvas. But the numbers often fail to portray the full picture of what a company actually brings to the table and to the community. It's when you start speaking with some of the creative minds directing the organization that color is added, painting a vibrant portrait of its products and people. Stephan Brissaud, Chief Operating Officer of IELLO USA, illustrates the bold tale of IELLO (pronounced "yellow"), a 13-year old board game publisher headquartered in Nancy, France.

THE CONCEPT ART OF IELLO

IELLO's humble beginning starts with a pair of passionate *Magic: The Gathering* (MTG) players: Cédric Barbé and Patrice Boulet.

"The two met at a game store in Northeast France near the German border," recalled Brissaud. "Their love for *Magic: The Gathering* kindled their close friendship, and it was this friendship that fueled their inspiration to start a business together."

Barbé and Boulet founded their company in 2004. Thanks to Boulet's web design skills, the pair could sell *Magic: The Gathering* cards and packs directly to players online.

Business boomed.

"Demand was so high they couldn't get their hands on enough cards," said Brissaud. "Cédric and Patrice soon approached Wizards of the Coast's French distributor. The distributor agreed to sell cards to the company, and soon retailers throughout France flocked to [Cédric and Patrice's] website to purchase *Magic* products by the bundle."

Barbé and Boulet's partnership with Wizards of the Coast was the first of scores of ventures that would blossom in the coming years. Never ones to rest on their laurels, the pair pursued opportunities to expand the business beyond the realm of MTG. Just months after founding the



QUICK FACTS: IELLO

- 20 LANGUAGES
- 30 GAME COLLABORATORS
- 30,000 FACEBOOK FOLLOWERS
- 7.5 MILLION EUROS (8.8 MILLION U.S. DOLLARS) IN ANNUAL REVENUE
- POPULAR TITLES: KING OF TOKYO, DUNGEON FIGHTER, PINGO PINGO

company, they hired a communications firm to renovate the enterprise, ultimately naming it IELLO. Within five years, the company had solidified several lucrative partnerships with large distributors, enticing local retailers to submit orders for a variety of games that fell far beyond the realm of *Magic*.

"Most people I know would have been content with being one of the most popular game distributors in France," said Brissaud. "However, Cédric and Patrice wanted to do something that no other organization in their region was doing: publish games."

IELLO's first foray into game publishing literally landed a license of biblical proportions. After acquiring a demo copy of *Scripts and Scribes*, a light card game where players compete with one another to construct the most prestigious library in Medieval Europe, IELLO's founders contacted Steve Finn, the game's designer.

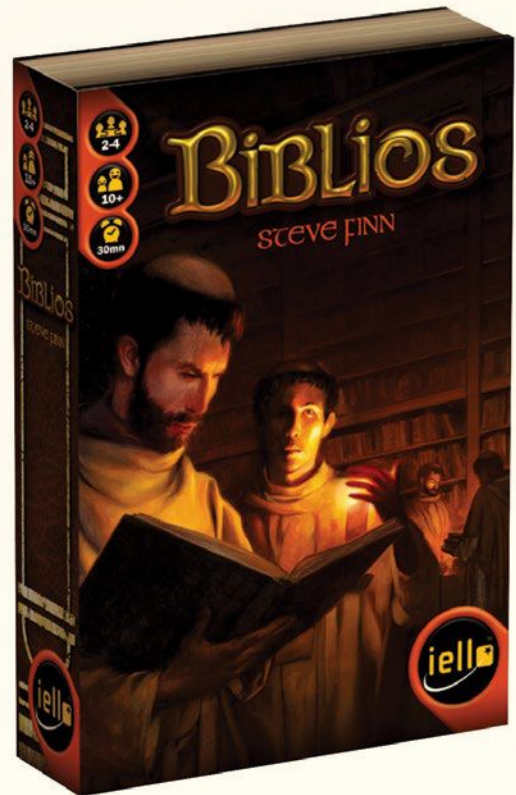


IELLO founders Patrice Broulet and Cédric Barbé proudly display their best-selling game, *King of Tokyo*.

“I never had to pitch the game to anyone,” wrote Finn, a prolific game designer and philosophy professor who founded Doctor Finn’s Games. “They offered me a deal, which I accepted after making some changes to the contract, and they started selling the game.”

Changes to the contract included renaming Finn’s masterpiece to *Biblios*. Released in 2007, the game became Finn’s best seller among the ten titles he subsequently created. The critical and commercial success of *Biblios* inspired Barbé and Boulet to take the next step.

Biblios, a light card game where players compete to construct the most prestigious library in Medieval Europe



FROM MAGIC TO MONSTERS

“Cédric and Patrice venerated Richard Garfield, the creator of *Magic: The Gathering*,” said Brissaud. “Neither of them had met Richard, much less spoken to the man who invented the world’s first modern collectible card game, but that didn’t stop Cédric from calling this living legend.”

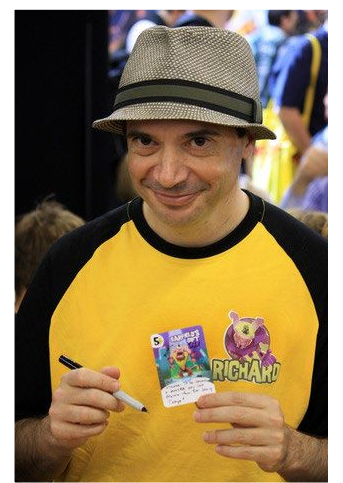
According to Brissaud, Garfield had “hit a dry spell.” Although far from facing financial ruin, Garfield sought opportunities to collaborate with a publisher just as eagerly as IELLO’s founders sought to secure a license from their idol. Their enthusiastic conversations unveiled Garfield’s idea for a game that would transform IELLO from a regional distributor to a global publisher.

“I originally wanted to make a game like *Yahtzee* but more interactive,” Garfield recalled during a March 2011 podcast episode of *Games with Garfield*. “By combining the press your

luck mechanic in *Yahtzee* with a ‘king of the hill’ component, I felt we had a really good game.”

The integration of a classic mechanic with an interactive component produced a playful theme that gave Garfield a name for his game: *King of Tokyo* (KoT).

“Mechanics suggested the flavor, and the flavor suggested the theme for the game,” Garfield explained to his *Games with Garfield* co-hosts. “I felt monsters attacking Tokyo captured the ‘king of the hill’ mechanic.”





RICHARD GARFIELD KING OF TOKYO

Months before Garfield knew of IELLO's existence, Garfield had pitched KoT to every major publisher in North America.

"And all of them rejected it," Brissaud quipped. Only after Barbé cold called Garfield and asked if he would like to publish a game under the IELLO banner did *King of Tokyo* re-emerge from the dark depths of discarded ideas. Through Barbé's brilliant artistic direction, IELLO molded KoT into a colorful collection of over-the-top B-movie creatures supported by comical cards, custom dice and crafty components.

"IELLO saw what [*King of Tokyo*] could be and made it feel like a monster game," Garfield added. "[IELLO's designers] produced great comic characters and clever components that added to the game... I've never worked with a publisher that has done a better job."

KoT became an instant hit upon its release in Europe in 2011, selling hundreds of thousands of copies and earning more than a dozen awards and nominations within a year. The game's smashing



Major publishers in North America rejected King of Tokyo prior to being picked up by IELLO.

sales and roaring reviews gave IELLO the revenue and renown to publish more titles and expand their brand in an international community clamoring for casual-yet-clever games. It was then that IELLO set their sights on an unsuspecting audience across the Atlantic.

THE "KING" COMES TO AMERICA

Before Barbé and Boulet unleashed their monsters on America, they commenced a recruiting campaign for an individual with the passion, skills and experience to add a splash of IELLO to the red, white, and blue.

Oh, and speaking fluent French and English wouldn't hurt, either.

Enter Stephan Brissaud, a seasoned marketing and sales manager whose previous positions included leadership roles with Nintendo, Asmodee, and Wizards of the Coast. Despite his extensive knowledge of the American and European board game markets and personal friendship with Garfield, Brissaud was unaware of IELLO's existence, much less KoT's immense popularity.

"Although Richard and I are friends, we had not yet engaged each other on a professional level. It wasn't until a mutual friend of ours working at IELLO contacted me did I learn how Richard's pet project evolved into a playful, money-making monster," Brissaud admitted.

When his friend explained IELLO's ambitions to astound the American market with the support of an American subsidiary, Brissaud accepted the challenge.

"After learning about IELLO and *King of Tokyo*, I knew I could integrate modern technology with lessons learned from working in the gaming industry for more than 20 years to replicate IELLO's success in Europe [across the USA]."

That vision culminated in the creation of IELLO USA in October 2012. Brissaud, now IELLO USA's COO, flew to Essen to shake hands with Barbé and Boulet for the first time and draw out a strategy. Two years later, IELLO USA generated as much volume as IELLO France.

"The IELLO brand is very well established in the USA," Brissaud claimed. "I feel safe to say that every game store in America carries at least one IELLO product."



A WORK OF ART

One of the many elements on which IELLO prides itself is its focus on the aesthetic, and the presentation of a game once it's on a table. That pride, according to Brissaud, is fueled by IELLO's founders.

"Cédric and Patrice love beautiful products, and they want to put these products on the market so customers may enjoy admiring them on their shelves as much as they enjoy playing them on the table."

Barbé and Boulet's obsession with beauty has heightened expectations among IELLO's loyal fan base. Instead of simply making a game's box art eye-catching, the quality of artwork carries over to every aspect of a title, from game tokens to even instruction booklets. Although making every game gorgeous is no easy feat, the location of the company's headquarters gives IELLO's subsidiaries a competitive edge.

"In France, we have the luxury to have a large pool of very talented artists," Brissaud stated. "The country has several famous schools that transform aspiring artists into professional illustrators, designers, painters, animators, and even game creators."

Thanks in part to IELLO's early successes, graduates from prestigious art academies clamor for a chance to illustrate the next *Kanagawa*, *Oceanos*, or *Heroes of Normandie*. Consequently, many of the world's most popular board game designers such as Richard Garfield, Masato Uesugi, and Stefan Dorra flock to IELLO with hopes of transforming their unpolished prototypes into magnificent masterpieces.

A COLORFUL COLLECTION

From a purely financial perspective, KoT is unquestionably IELLO's crowning achievement with more than five million copies sold worldwide in just five years. As the game rampaged up the sales charts, it paved the way for scores of IELLO titles to capture the hearts and minds of millions.

Card players can enjoy the rich design of *Friday the 13th*, *Nyet!*, and *Ghoost!* Families can gather around the dinner table for a round of *Fun Farm*, *Master Fox*, and *Pingo Pingo*. Party gamers can get rowdy with *Dungeon Fighter* and *Rumble in the House*, while strategy gurus can test their tactics in *Kenjin*, *Steam Torpedo*, and *Titanium Wars*.



Artwork from Kanagawa, illustrated by Jade Mosch

"All famous game designers shop around for the best game publishers," said Brissaud. "We have to be picky with our artwork, otherwise we will turn away these designers and, consequently, disappoint our customers."

The company's insistence on quality has even carried over to Brissaud and his team, creating unique marketing strategies specific to each game's target audience. For example, prior to the worldwide release of *The Legend of the Wendigo*, a hidden identity game that challenges players to save a Junior Chipmunk Scout troop from an evil spirit, IELLO USA sent advanced copies to boy and girl scout troops for their feedback and create buzz for a title tailored to families with young children.

IELLO's eclectic collection also includes a line of mini games whose relatively simple rules and quick play conveniently fills the gap between exhausting yet exhilarating rounds of epic, thematic titles such as *Guardians' Chronicles* or *Shadows Over Normandie*.

"These games come in small, white boxes. The \$15 price tag and 15-30 minute play





3-5



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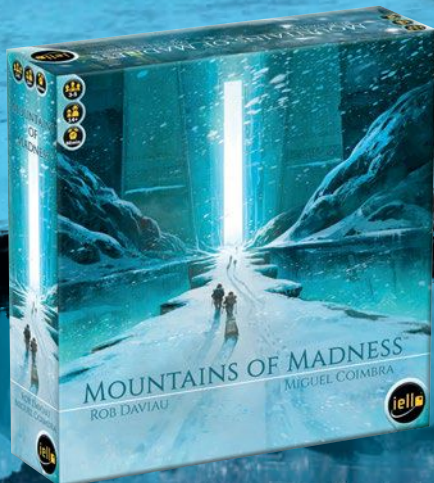


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time makes them very accessible for casual gamers,” explained Brissaud.

Welcome to the Dungeon and *Welcome Back to the Dungeon* jockey for position as the most popular of IELLO’s mini game line.

“In fact, we sold more copies of *Welcome to the Dungeon* than *King of Tokyo* in 2016,” Brissaud exclaimed. “This trend coincides with the newest generation of board gamers who tend not to spend two hours reading a rulebook to play a three-hour game.”

The recent shift in player preferences has persuaded IELLO to experiment with novel definitions of what makes a tabletop game. In response to the proliferation of smartphones, IELLO partnered with French technology firm Volumique to publish *World of Yo Ho*, a fantasy adventure set on the high seas. *World of Yo Ho* combines traditional board game components with cutting edge technology by transforming a player’s smart phone into a pirate ship.

“The downloadable app and players’ smart phones are essential components to the game. This is rare among most augmented reality games as their digital characteristics are often impractical or unreliable,” Brissaud observed.

As *World of Yo Ho* sails along the blurred edges between digital and tangible gaming, IELLO prepares to launch its latest titles that use traditional components to capture players’ imaginations. *Sticky Chameleons* will have players wielding sticky, plastic “tongues” to



Cover art for *Oceanos* and *The Big Book of Madness*; character designs for *The Big Book of Madness*

capture toy insects. *Bunny Kingdom* is the new title from Richard Garfield, focusing on area control and resource allocation to appease the Bunny King. With the latest edition of *King of Tokyo*, updates to subsequent releases will be released as well for KoT fans out there, including an update of the Halloween release. Finally, *Mountains of Madness* will be a cooperative game that immerses players in the natural terrors of polar expeditions and otherworldly horrors of H.P. Lovecraft.

THE GOLD STANDARD OF IELLO

By assembling a team of veteran designers, a classically trained creative team, and the support of Brissaud and IELLO USA, Barbé and Boulet have created a picture-perfect example of a successful publisher. It’s tempting to chalk IELLO’s stellar success up to good timing. Some evidence suggests clever marketing made IELLO’s competitors green with envy. Then again, IELLO’s incredible fortune could reside in its founders’ pursuit for artistic perfection.

Brissaud believes IELLO’s prosperity stems from the very people that permit every IELLO employee to do what they love: the players.

“We love our fans. We appreciate their support and feedback, and we will do everything possible to provide a great gaming experience.”

So far, IELLO has done just that. 🎲



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- TOM VASEL, THE DICE TOWER



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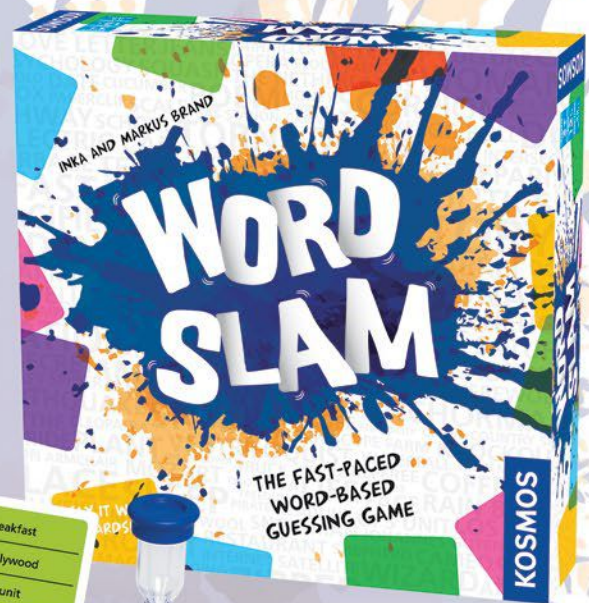
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Build the most prosperous kingdom in *Kingdomino*, a game that not only packs countless interesting strategic choices into fifteen minutes, but was also the winner of this year's Spiel des Jahres award.



Naomi Laeuchli

Game Reviewer and
Casual Game Groupie

Each player takes a king meeple and a castle that is placed on their starting tile. For each meeple in the game, you draw a domino from the box. Each domino has a number on its back – dominoes are placed face up in a line, in ascending order. Players take turns placing their king meeple on one of the dominos. Another set of dominos is then drawn from the box and set up alongside the previous line, and the game begins.

The player whose king is on the top domino goes first. They pick up their king, take the domino it was standing on, and then choose which domino in the new line to place their king on. This will not only determine which domino they will get next turn, but also where they will be in turn order. They then place their new domino in their kingdom. After all players have taken their turn, a new set of dominoes is placed alongside the others. The game continues until all the dominos have been used.

Every domino depicts one or two different types of landscape. In order to place a domino, it must either connect

to your starting tile or one of its landscapes must connect to a matching landscape on another domino. Your entire kingdom must fit in a five-by-five grid. If at any point you cannot legally place a domino, you must discard it.

A group of matching, connected landscape tiles forms a single property. Some tiles contain one or more crowns, which are needed for scoring. At the end of the game, points are scored for the number of squares within each property, multiplied by the number of crowns it contains – if there are no crowns within a property, it scores zero points!

Kingdomino has a charming simplicity to it. You learn it quickly and it plays fast, but you soon realize that the choices you're met with aren't always easy. You need to balance the needs of your kingdom with the need to prevent an opponent from gaining a valuable tile – and sometimes you have to sacrifice going first for grabbing that tile you really want. In addition, keeping everything in that five-by-five grid soon proves more challenging than you'd expect. Add in beautiful artwork, and there are many good reasons to check out *Kingdomino*.

MSRP: \$18
Designer: Bruno Cathala
Publisher: Blue Orange Games
2-4 players, ages 8+, 15 mins.



See page 32 for the story behind this award-winning game.



One of this year's Mensa Select winners, *Amalgam* is both nicely strategic and extremely easy to learn.

In the center of the table there is a grid of six-by-six cards that are laid out face up. Corner cards make up each of the four corners, while the remaining cards come from the deck of ingredient and spell cards. Each player chooses a color and places their cauldron card in front of themselves and their pawn at one of the four corners.

On your turn you move your pawn clockwise a certain number of spaces. If you land on a corner space, your turn ends; anywhere else, and you select a card from the row your pawn lands next to. If it is an ingredient card, you place it on top of your cauldron. Every ingredient card has a number ranging from one to four on it – on your turn, you always move the number of spaces shown on the top ingredient card on your cauldron. There are also spell cards, which will allow you to do things such as move past corners or peek at all the cards in your cauldron.

Each time a player takes a card from the grid, it is replaced by a new card from the deck. Once the deck runs out and one of the rows runs out of cards, the

game ends. Players score points for having the most of each ingredient. If you only have one copy of an ingredient, you will lose points – so it's important to keep track not only of what you're collecting, but also what your opponents are collecting. Some ingredients also match your pawn's color, and collecting those will earn you double points (or lose double if you're not careful).

The game also comes with a deck of recipe cards that you can choose to play with. These give each player a special goal to try to complete in order to earn extra points at the end of the game.

Amalgam is colorful, bright, and cheery. The rules are quite straightforward, but you soon find yourself in tricky situations, forced to choose between the ingredient you want and not ending at a corner next turn. You will often find yourself adjusting your plans based on your opponent's moves, and the spells always offer the chance for you to gain the upper hand. *Amalgam* mixes up a nice potion of fun.

MSRP: \$32

Designer: Günter Burkhardt

Publisher: SimplyFun

2-4 players, ages 10+, 30 mins.





This lovely little card game has a beautiful, relaxing atmosphere and is a joy to play, even if you are competing to be the most talented gardener.

In *Herbaceous*, each player has their own garden and four pots. There is also a space in the center of the table set aside as the communal garden. On your turn, you choose whether or not to pot herbs, and then you draw an herb card. You must decide to either place it in your garden or in the communal garden. You then draw a second card and place it in whichever garden you did not place the first herb. It then becomes the next player's turn. When potting herbs, players can take as many cards from both their own garden and/or the communal garden as they like, which means you have to be careful not to put the exact herb another player is waiting for in the communal garden. You also might be forced to pot herbs before you want to, rather than risk an opponent using a communal herb you have your eye on.

Each pot has different requirements in order to plant herbs in them. The large pot only accepts identical herbs, the wooden planter only allows for different

herbs, the small pot requires different pairs of herbs, while you can put any three herbs in the glass jar (which also earns bonus points for special types of herbs). Each pot can only be used once, and the more herbs in them, the more points you'll score for them at the end of the game.

The game continues until the herb deck runs out and players can no longer pot any more plants. At the end of the game you tally up all the points in your pots, adding an additional point for each herb still in your personal garden, and the player with the highest score wins.

What makes *Herbaceous* so delightful is the cozy atmosphere of the game. There are good, solid rules, and you are faced with interesting choices as well as a clever scoring system, but the whole thing is couched in relaxing artwork and theme. If you want something to wrap up a game night or a game to end a long day, *Herbaceous* is the perfect choice.

MSRP: \$25

**Designers: Eduardo Baraf,
Steve Finn, Keith Matejka**

**Publishers: Dr. Finn's Games,
Pencil First Games**

1-4 players, ages 8+, 20 mins.



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Button Men is a classic dice game from James Ernest and Cheapass Games. It returns this fall in an all-new package, with a set of 48 fighter cards. Learn rules, strategies, and details at beatpeopleup.com.



CASTLES OF CALADALE

All the castles of the kingdom have fallen down, and you must put them back together, mixing and matching styles to create a new castle grander than ever.

In *Castles of Caladale* each player starts with a strip of grass that serves as the base of their castle and a gate tile which features either one or two of the castle styles, depending on the number of players. Nine tiles are laid out on the supply board and the remaining tiles are placed facedown in three even stacks.

On your turn, you draw a tile from either the supply board or from one of the stacks. If you take it from the supply board, you replenish it from one of the three stacks. You then decide to either set it aside facedown to score you one bonus point at the end of the game, or add it to your castle. During the game you can always rearrange any tiles that are part of your castle, even when it isn't your turn. After you've used your tile, your turn is over and it's the next player's turn.

There are three different castle styles, and each tile will have either one or two styles on it. In order to legally place a tile in your castle, all touching tile edges must be of a matching style (each player also has a wild tile that can be placed anywhere). Some tile edges will show a blue sky. If you have sky all around the outside of

your castle at the end of the game, you have a complete castle. Some tiles also show flags, which are worth bonus points. Tiles must also be properly supported, and only four can fit along the castle base.

At the end of the game, players score points for all the tiles in their castle, for having a complete castle, for flags in their castle, and for each tile that has been flipped facedown. They will lose points for any edges around the castle without sky and for using their wild tile.

There's not much player interaction in the game, but the fact that you are always working on your castle and rearranging it ensures that there's never downtime during the already short turns. The castles are a lot of fun to build, with the three styles blending together nicely. The finished buildings are a treat to look at. With interesting choices, a bit of risk, and a puzzle element as you work to figure out the best way to fit it all together, this is tile-laying at its best.

MSRP: \$30
Designer: David Wilkinson
Publisher: Renegade Game Studios
1-4 players, ages 8+, 30 mins.





The most recent addition to IELLO's Tales and Games line, *Aladdin and the Magic Lamp* has each player taking on the role of a thief, searching through a cave for treasures, and maybe even finding a genie in the process.

There are three decks of chest cards: bronze, silver, and gold. Each player takes one die and a board which shows each of the three chests. The genie's lamp cards are set out on the center of the table, everyone is dealt a starting treasure card, and the game begins.

Each round, players simultaneously place their die on their board, choosing which of the three chests to put it on and what number to set their die at. Everyone then reveals their choice. Each chest can only be looted once each round, so if more than one player attempted to loot the same chest, only the player with the lower number on their die gets to do so. When looting a chest, you can draw up to as many cards as the number on your die. Some cards have scorpions on them, and if the number of scorpions drawn matches or exceeds the number on your die, you immediately stop drawing and discard all cards you drew this round.

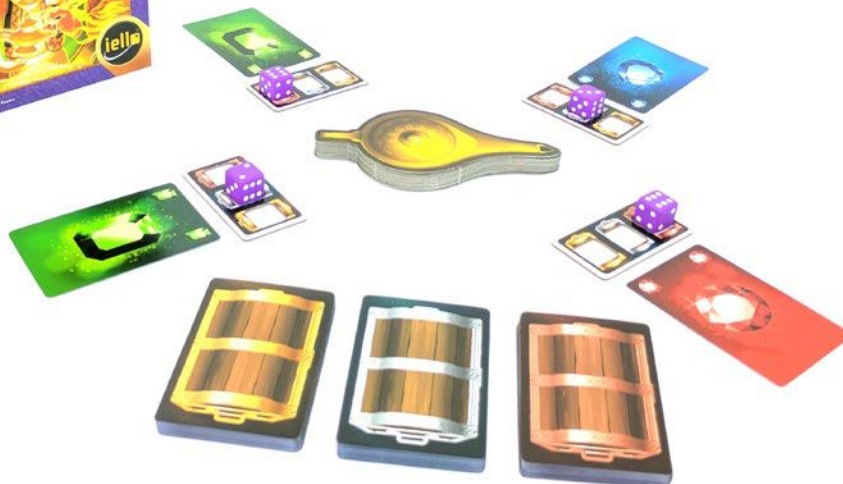
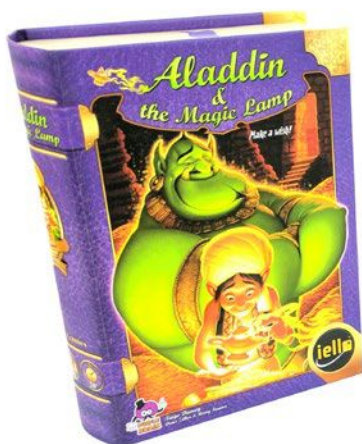
If more than one player is showing the same number on their die, regardless of which chest they are trying

to loot, the players with the matching numbers race to be the first to touch the deck of genie cards to summon the genie. The player who gets there first draws the top card, and can either use the ability shown on it, or choose to place it at the bottom of the deck and draw a second one. You can do this a second time, but must use the third card, and the genie can sometimes be harmful to you.

Near the bottom of each treasure deck is a card which ends the game. Players earn points for each treasure card they have, as well as having sets of jewelry and the most of each type of treasure.

Aladdin and the Magic Lamp blends several different mechanics together, and does so admirably. The push-your-luck aspect is nicely balanced with underbidding your opponents, while the race for the genie lamp means you have to pay close attention while players are revealing their dice.

The game is best with more players since that's when the player interaction comes into play more often, but even with three it's a solid game, with a nice theme, good game length, and a magic genie. What more could you wish for?



MSRP: \$25

Designer: Tiago Damey

Publishers: IELLO, Purple Brain Games

2-5 players, ages 8+, 20 mins.

Element is a highly strategic game about using the four elements to capture your opponent's Sage, while making sure that yours remains free. If playing with three or more players, you only gain victory by capturing the Sage of the player on your right. Capture the wrong Sage and another player claims the victory.

Each player puts their Sage piece on the board. These pieces are hefty and richly detailed and a great feature of the game. All the element tokens are then placed in a bag. On your turn you may draw four elements from the bag and move your Sage one space in any direction. Or, you can choose to draw fewer stones and move your Sage farther. In order to capture an opponent's Sage, you must leave their Sage with no valid move.

Every element can be replaced by one other element type and each element also has a unique ability. When fire is placed next to a line of one or more fire element tokens, you place an additional fire at the other end of the line, as fire tends to grow. When a water token is placed next to a line of one or more water tokens, you move the entire line of water tokens a number of spaces equal to the number of tokens in the line, as water tends to flow. When one earth token is placed on top of a second one, it becomes a mountain, and any earth tokens adjacent to it become part of

MSRP: \$35

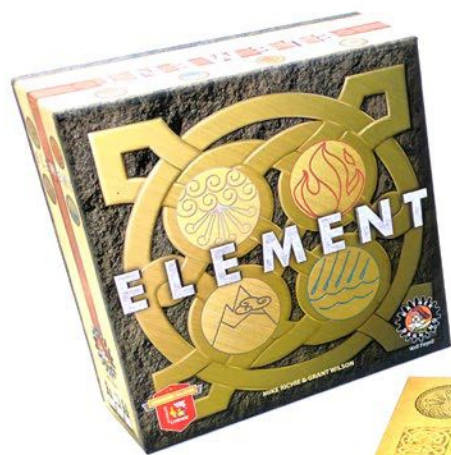
Designer: Mike Richie

Publisher: Rather Dashing Games

2-4 players, ages 14+, 30 mins.

the mountain range — mountain ranges are impassable to regular Sage movement. The final element, wind, allows a Sage to jump over it without spending a movement point. These can even be used to jump over mountain ranges. Wind tokens can be stacked on top of each other, and the number of tokens the Sage is jumping over is how many spaces the Sage will go.

There are a lot of bits and pieces to the rules you have to remember, and with no player guides you'll find yourself looking back at the rules a good bit to remember how each element works. But once you start to have it down, *Element* packs a great strategic punch, while the randomness of which elements you draw means you always have to be ready to think on your feet. It's tightly paced and well-balanced, and the last few turns will leave you on tenterhooks. It's anyone's game until the very end.



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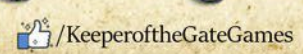
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Imagine consists of a stack of transparent cards, each of which depict an image or design.

There is also a deck of enigma cards which are shuffled and set to the side. Each turn, a player draws an enigma card and chooses one of the eight enigmas for the other players to guess. Enigmas can be places, people, books, movies, phrases, or even expressions. Each enigma also comes with a clue that the player will read aloud. The clue-giver will then use as many of the transparent cards as he wants, in order to get the other players to guess the enigma.

The transparent cards can be placed on top of one another, they can be moved about, parts can be hidden with your hand, and they can be stood up. You can do practically anything with the cards as long as you remain silent. If a player guesses your enigma, you and that player earn a point. The player to your left draws a new enigma card and a new round begins.

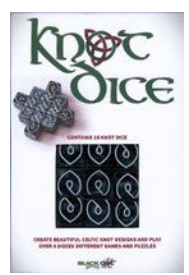
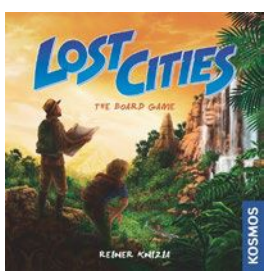
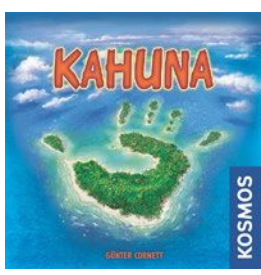
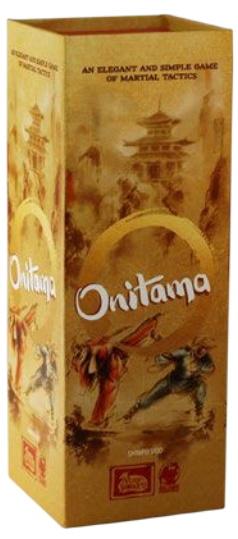
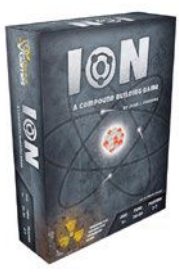
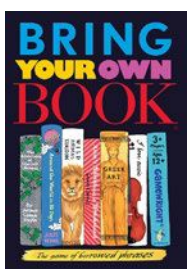
Some of the transparent cards can be hard to see if played on the wrong colored surface, but they're sturdy and it's just plain fun to create images with them – it's also fun to be a guesser. It's a party game that calls for outside-of-the-box creative thinking and is a hoot to play, with or without scoring. 🎲

MSRP: \$15
Designer: Shotaro Nakashima
Publisher: Gamewright
3-8 players, ages 12+, 20 mins.



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DEAD MAN'S DOUBLOONS

Prepare for an adventure of high piracy!

Assume control of a unique pirate captain, their ship, and a rapacious crew. Your first task is to gather treasure map fragments scattered in the waters surrounding a mysterious island.

Follow one of several possible paths leading to the buried treasure, discovering additional riches and perilous obstacles along the way.

In the final battle. Defeated vessels become ghost ships with cursed treasure, though with careful planning they may still emerge victorious.



Game Components

- 1 double-sided game board
- 48 doubloons
- 20 jewels
- 60 action cards
- 18 map tiles
- 12 water tiles
- 35 landmark tiles
- 12 pillage tokens
- 6 color pirate ships
- 6 transparent pirate ships
- 6 pirate ship placemats
- 6 captain meeples
- 42 marker discs
- 24 relic tokens
- 2 protection orb tokens
- 6 player reference cards
- 1 attack die
- 1 initiative token
- 1 rulebook



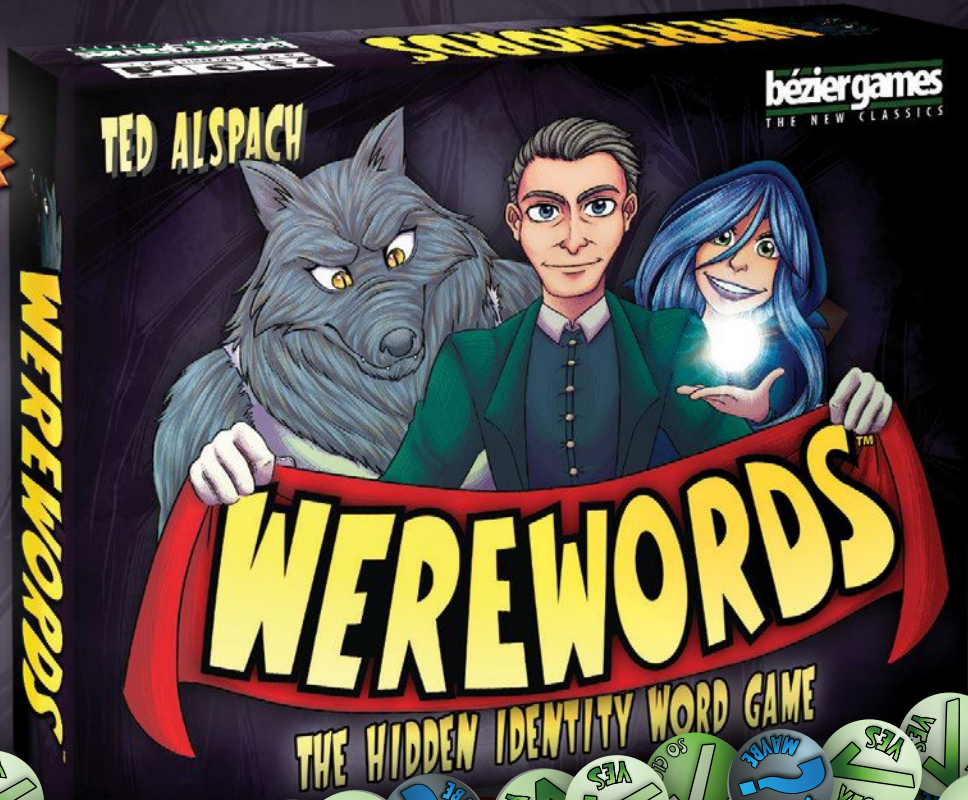
Special transparent ghost ships included!



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