

Of Dice and Meeples



Issue 2

June 2026

Colophon

Introduction

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Contributor Guidelines

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Zines should use reasonable page dimensions (if it's not roughly A4 or 8.5"×11" there should be a reason). Maximum zine length is 16 pages/10,000 words. Discussion of contemporary politics is discouraged but permitted with a maximum length for political content set at 2 pages/1,200 words. AI-generated material is not allowed. All artwork must be attributed to its creator, unless it is in the public domain.

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Contributors may submit their PDF zines via email to of-dice-and-meeples@tekeli.li

Submission deadlines and Ignorable Themes for the next several issues are as follows:

Issue #3 — 6 July: Cooperative Games

Issue #4 — 6 August: Alpha Players

Issue #5 — 6 September: Deck Construction Games

Suggestions for further Ignorable Themes are welcome!

This project is explicitly inspired by [Ever & Anon](#), the digital APA successor to *Alarums & Excursions*.

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This issue's Ignorable Theme is: Racing Games

What is This?

A Newbie's Guide to APAs

Q: What is this?

A: An APA.

Q: What's an APA?

A: An Amateur Press Association.

Q: What's that?

A: A collection of zines. It can also refer to the community of people writing the zines.

Q: What's a zine?

A: A fanzine. A small, amateur magazine usually distributed for free or at cost.

Q: So this is a collection of free fanzines written by amateurs?

A: Exactly.

Q: And each one has a separate author?

A: Right.

Q: But I see the same names appearing again and again throughout.

A: Those are comments. We comment on each others zines. When you see "RogerBW: blah-blah-blah..." if there are no quotes around the blah-blah-blah, that's probably a comment to Roger.

Q: And everyone is doing all this for free?

A: Yes. It's like a cocktail party, but all written out. Come join us, if you like. Amateur Press Associations date back to the late 1800s and started to become popular among fantasy and science fiction enthusiasts during the 1930s.¹

Q: But now there are blogs and various online forums, so why do APAs still exist?

A: Because one type of forum isn't necessarily any better or worse than the others. One advantage of the APA model is longevity. Because they have multiple contributors and don't rely on making money, APAs are more durable than individual blogs or traditional magazines. Also, because websites come and go, whatever is posted online will probably eventually vanish into the electronic ether. But whatever is put into a publication that can be downloaded and archived is more likely to survive due to the sheer fact that multiple copies will exist. And the back issues become an indelible record of what people used to think. They provide insight into a world that used to be.

¹https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Amateur_press_association



Send us a zine. Or some cover art. Or comments. Or a blurb.

Or tell us why we're wrong.

Send your thoughts to of-dice-and-meeples@tekeli.li, and provided they aren't laced with powergamer profanity (or maybe even if they are), we'll likely publish them for the enlightenment & edification of the entire APA. Please include your name, collection size, and why *Flash Point: Fire Rescue* is the best game of all time, and be sure to feed your workers.

Abbreviations & Acronyms You May Need to Know:

- APA: Amateur Press Association
- Async: a slow online game where you're called back to take your turn
- BBG: Big Bad Guy/Gal (a major villain)
- BGA: Board Game Arena, a site for playing games online
- BTW: By the way
- XdY: X Y-sided dice added together; omit the X if it's 1.
- Frex: For example
- FWIW: For what it's worth
- IgTheme: Ignorable theme
- IIRC: If I recall correctly
- IM(H)O: In my (humble) opinion
- Monopoly: we don't talk about this "game"
- Nextish/Thish/Lastish: Next, This, Last issue
- (N)PC: (Non-)Player Character
- ODaM: *Of Dice and Meeples*
- PBEM: Play-by-Email
- PBF: Play-by-Forum
- RAE(BNC): Read and enjoyed (but no comment)
- Re: Regarding
- RHCT(M): Regarding his/her comment to (me)
- RYCT(M): Regarding your comment to (me)
- RYQT(M): Regarding your question to (me)
- TTS: TableTop Simulator, a physics engine for playing virtual boardgames
- WRT: With respect to / With regard to
- YMMV: Your mileage may vary
- Zine: A writer's contribution

My board games journey

A very small zine (more of a phlet, or a chure, because why should only magazines get a cool abbreviation?) by **Alice Violet**



I think I had some help picking out those tiles.

Maybe it was inevitable that I would, one day, become a board gamer. The offspring of a pair of – shall we say – more than casual Scrabble players, who met at a Scrabble club and can tell you a couple of Scrabble-related anecdotes pertaining to the day of my birth, I spent many childhood Saturdays and Sundays in village halls, out-of-session educational facilities, and hotel conference rooms, mingling with some serious competitors and helping out with dictionary checks for pin money.

And yet, I resisted getting all that into Scrabble myself, because who wants to be like their parents?* Nor do I think I played board games – M*n*p*ly, Frustration, card games

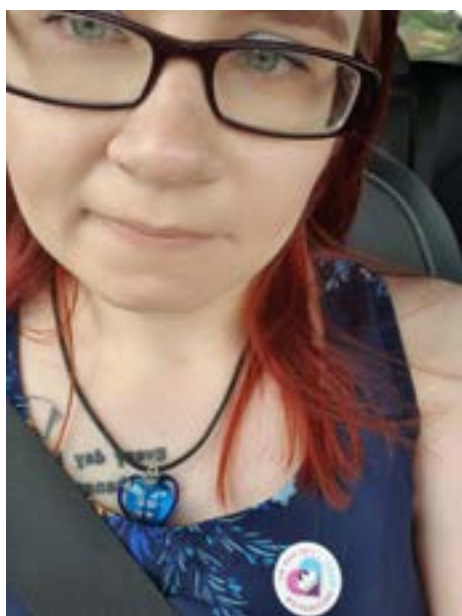
* It's not completely unknown for Scrabblers' children to follow them out onto the tiles. Or for a family of players to have the piss taken out of them on *Have I Got News For You* when a Scrabble magazine is the featured guest publication...

– more than the average child. But I nonetheless absorbed a couple of important messages: a) having a board games hobby can get you out of the house, and b) it's not unacceptable to play the same game over and over and over if you want to, and can find someone willing to play it with you.

Throughout my twenties, I was happy enough to pass the time with a game – usually dominoes, though my partner and I also dabbled in Exploding Kittens and Ticket To Ride. But it was when I was a couple of months shy of 33 that I started to make board gaming a regular, more central part of my routine.

The lockdowns of 2020-21 really did a number on me. At first, when the weather was nice and everyone thought we were only going to be staying home for a few weeks, I luxuriated in the extra time to sleep and read. However, after a few months lacking real-time, in-person validation from other people (I used to know I was making them laugh, goddammit!), and feeling like this was just how things were going to be, forever, I overthought, became extremely self-critical, and convinced myself I was too awful a being to be seen in the world.

Despite this, there remained a rock-hard popcorn kernel at my core that wanted to get my old self (or something approximating it) back and feel better, and I knew that spending more time with other people would help with this. As all my friends lived quite far away, I needed to find a way to connect with new people in my area. And in August 2021, when England had (cautiously) opened back up again, my local board games café, Dice and a Slice, set up their weekly Looking for a Game session.



It's not obvious, but I felt horribly bad when I took this selfie in June 2021.

I'm not gonna lie, I had real trouble getting myself through the door the first few times, even when I had my partner with me. I wasn't sure if/how I was going to hold myself together for three whole hours. But I found that once a game was in progress, I could lose myself in learning the rules and trying to play well, as well as the chatter around the table, which I even managed to join in sometimes. After a

few weeks, we'd established a core of people who usually came along, and exchanged numbers so we could meet up outside of the organised sessions.

What did we play? All manner of short- and mid-length board and card games, many of which I or my partner went on to buy for ourselves. I particularly remember Love Letter, Railroad Ink, Splendor, Hanabi, and Small World from our first few sessions.

But the first game we played that made me fall well and truly in love with the hobby was Wingspan. It introduced me to pretty much all the features that now attract me to a game: a nature theme, beautiful artwork, elements of collection and cultivation, and a personal board/tableau** (I don't know what that last one says about my character!). My partner now owns Wingspan and all the expansions, and we even have in-jokes about some of the birds.

At whatever point I "officially" became a board gamer, I'd certainly passed it by last Christmas (2025). While Looking for a Game eventually got superseded, as things do, I'm in the café or a pub playing games with people I met there pretty much every weekend, and am on Christmas present terms with them. Dice always go down well (I don't even need extra dice for anything – TTRPGs make me sleepy – I just like looking at them!)

** Think Parks, Harmonies, Everdell, Earth, Forest Shuffle, Ark Nova, Kavango, all the 'spans...

but last year some of us went a bit mad on the keyrings. I received a really lovely Wingspan keyring, and gave everyone an 'Official Cryptid Research Team' one in honour of the fun we had playing, er, Cryptid. On top of that, I gave another friend the dice game version of Catan, and my partner Boop and the Worms board game, at his request.



You can certainly hear us lot coming!

Right now, I have *coughing fit* board game Kickstarters due to be fulfilled over the next eight months or so, and am in a bunch of Board Game Arena tournaments. Some might say I'm being profligate or constantly diverting my attention from where it should be, but considering that at this time five years ago, committing to anything more than a few days ahead brought

me out in a panic and I barely spent any money on myself because I felt like I didn't deserve nice things, I'm taking it as a win (no pun intended).

To be clear, board games weren't the only thing that brought me back to the land of living in late 2021/early 2022: the kindness of old friends, a reunion with some former colleagues, reconvening with my monthly writing group in person, a change of medication, and some pretty intense therapy all played their parts. But my towering collection of games, and my decorative jar of dice, meeples, and glass counters serve as great visual reminders of how far I've come.

About the author

Alice Violet (she/her) is a web editor, book blogger, and erstwhile historian from Colchester, UK. As well as reading and playing board games, she writes short stories, which she sometimes performs at *Emotional Madness with Mary-Ann and Mates* at Colchester Arts Centre. You can find out more about many of these things at <https://www.draliceviolet.com/all-the-links/>

JUNE 2026

ROLL THE ZINE
#4



FIRST PAST THE
CHECKERED LINE

Gamers, start your engines!

Welcome to the races! This month's Roll the Zine waxes skis, greases bike chains, assembles robots and feeds the camels. Following the theme of Of Dice and Meeples, this month's zine is all about racing games.

On a surface level, racing as theme can seem one-dimensional but as this zine explores, the only commonality is that the winner is whoever is first past the checkered line.

As a kid, one of my earliest memories of board games was Nestori (pg. 3), a cross-country skiing game that I would play all over again just by myself. Over the years, I've found more games with more polished and interesting mechanics.

Racing games are a challenging genre to design for.

A simple "roll dice and move pieces" doesn't get you very far but adding too many mechanics can feel gimmicky and make the game lose the charm and excitement of a race.

I love them but I often find that finding a group to play them with can be challenging. If the idea of a race doesn't excite you, it's really difficult to keep you engaged for a duration of a longer gaming session.

Some games have succeeded in that and in this zine, I'm exploring the racing games that have defined my childhood, teenage years, university and the more recent board game enthusiasm years.

Finish line icon on cover: Delapouite under CC BY 3.0 (game-icons.net)



Nestori

2-4 players

BGG: 451207

Let's get one thing out of the way right away: this is not a game recommendation. In 2026, **Nestori** offers nothing for a board gamer. It does however hold a very special place in my heart as one of the first board games I can remember from my childhood.

As a kid, I played the game over and over again — mostly alone. My imagination filled in the gaps: I wasn't rolling a die and moving plastic meeples on a card board. No no, I was spectating a fierce race between the biggest cross-country skiing heroes of the 90s.

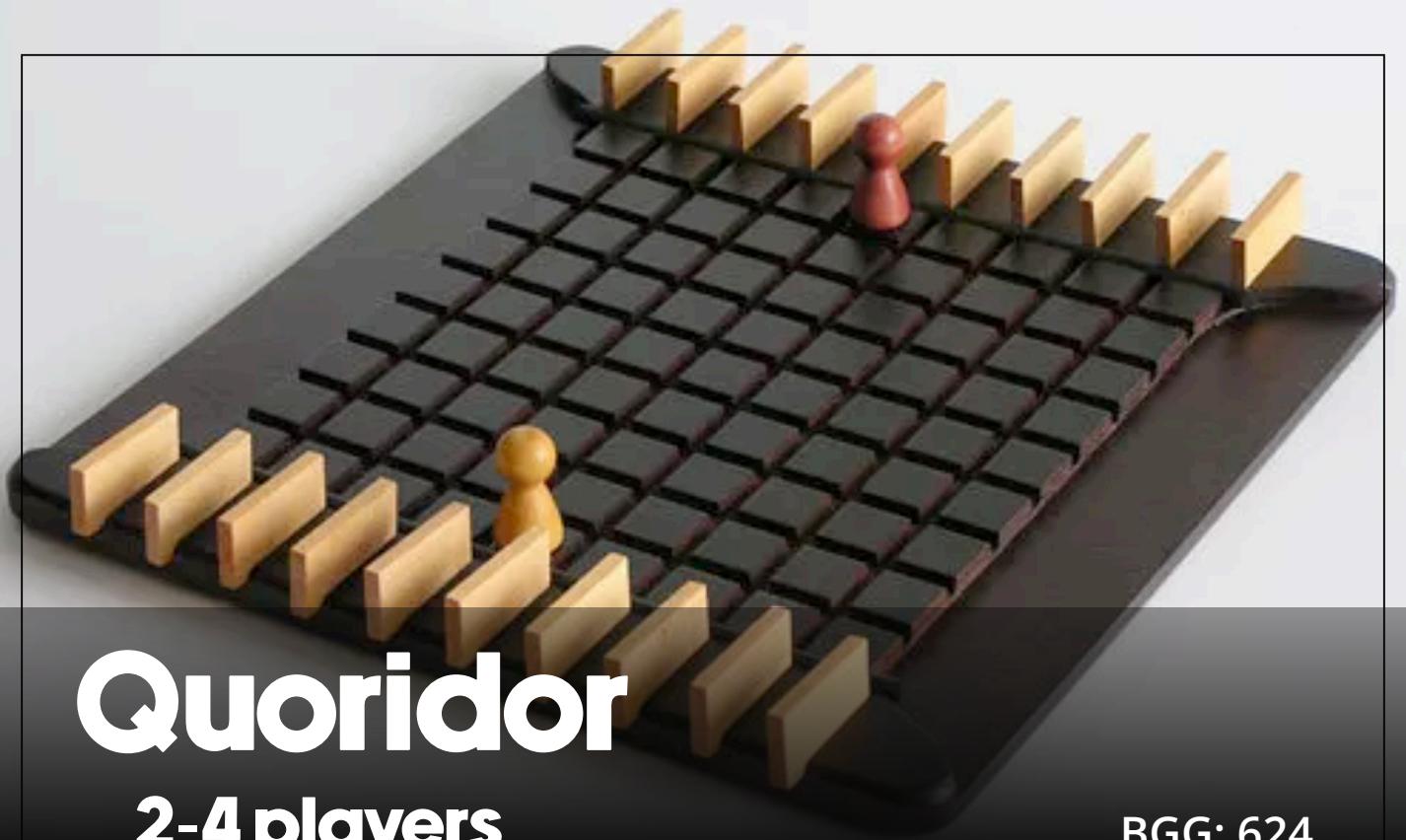
Nestori was published in 1989 for FIS Nordic World Ski Championships in Lahti, Finland. Its strongest asset is its lovely art style.

As a board game, it's a very simple roll and move game with zero agency. There are some spots marked with red numbers and landing on those will lead to special events.

Many of them are quite brutal: skip a turn, skip two turns or start over (!?!) while others provide benefits like extra turns or extra movement.

For a lot of people, especially of my generation, this is what they think of when they think of board games. Rolling dice and moving. While Nestori has had a significant impact on my childhood, I'm very glad modern games offer way more.

Let's continue our race to find out what!



Quoridor

2-4 players

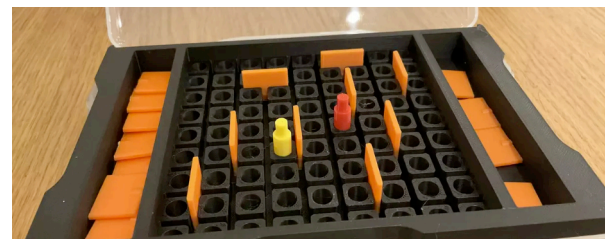
BGG: 624

Quoridor is a direct head-to-head competition where the obstacle course is built as the game goes on.

The goal of a player is to reach the other end of the board before their opponent achieves the same goal.

On each turn, player can either move their pawn one square forward, backward or sideways or place one of the walls into the field between squares.

Quoridor shines in its simplicity of rules and mechanics but offers a lot of depth in strategy and decision making.



I have a tiny 3D printed version of it where everything fits into a photo case and I can close it mid-game and continue later.

It is a wonderful travel companion. Playing a game (or two) on a long train ride makes time fly and there's no worry of dropping or losing pieces.

3D printing has truly revolutionised my small game collection.

Hero image by Ola Bażyńska / Board Game Geek. Article image by me.



Formula D

2-10 players

BGG: 37904

While Nestori was my first foray into the racing games in the early 1990s, **Formula D** was when I truly understood the magic of the genre. I was introduced to the game on a summer camp where we gathered together in a cottage and ran our cars around the Monaco track long into the night.

After that, simple roll and move racing games weren't that interesting anymore. In the core of Formula D is your gear box: at the start of your turn you can switch gears either one up or down and the gear you are in defines which die you can roll. The higher the gear, the bigger upside of a die.

To avoid everyone going up once every turn, the track has corners where you must stop minimum given

times. You can push your luck by staying in a higher gear and hoping for a small roll. But if you don't hit it, your car will overshoot and take damage or even spin out.

That's where one of the biggest downsides of this game comes in. If you push too hard, you can be completely eliminated from the race. As a single race can take an hour to finish, being eliminated from play is rough.

In general, I don't prefer games that completely eliminate a player unless a single session finishes in a relatively short time and they can come back for the next one.

Hero image by Craig A / BGG



Flamme Rouge

2-4 players (base) / 1-12 (with expansions)

BGG: 199478

If I were to name one racing game that best captures the essence of racing while also being a great modern board game, I'd choose **Flamme Rouge** by Asger Aleksandrov Granerud.

In Flamme Rouge, you're controlling a team of two cyclists racing against other competitors in various tracks. Each turn, all players simultaneously choose a card for each of their cyclists. These cards are then simultaneously revealed and cyclists move along the track.

It's such a simple mechanic and yet, they've managed to design such interesting choices, mind games and bit of luck into it that no two games are ever the same.

Each of the cyclists have slightly different decks but they are same across the board. Every player starts with the same opportunities and it's down to individual choices,

positioning in the track and luck of the draw that turns the games quickly into everything but same for everyone.

If you finish a turn without anyone directly in front of you, you gain exhaustion — a card with a value of measly 2. But if you finish a turn with just a single space between you and another cyclist, you slipstream and catch up that empty space.

Uphills limit your speed and downhill offer an opportunity to get rid of your exhaustion cards without losing momentum.

Flamme Rouge holds a very special place in my game shelf in that it's a racing game that almost everyone wants to return to. Many others I can only dream of playing often enough but Flamme Rouge gets repeatedly requested and I'm more than happy to oblige.



Controlling two cyclists in your team offers the ability to strategise without relying on other players. But those pesky other cyclists are also in the streets and they more often than not spoil your plans.

A track (most of the time) has two slots side-by-side and if you'd land on a spot where both slots are full, you have to stop behind them, effectively losing one — sometimes even two or three — movement from the card you played.

You don't ever get your played cards back during a race so spending your high movement cards in the right time becomes crucial. You often want to keep some of your best cards for the last few turns but if you let your competitors skip too far ahead early, it might be too late.

The decision to use an ever diminishing deck of cards instead of rolling dice is such a brilliant one.

Each turn you have two decisions to make and for each decision, you have four options randomly drawn from your deck. It reduces the problem space per turn which makes the game run smoother.

Flamme Rouge also has a good selection of expansions that all provide something new to the game: **Peloton** brings in new track tiles and expands the player count all the way to 12. **Meteo** adds random weather conditions to different parts of a track, increasing the replayability factor even further. **Grand Tour** brings in an official ruleset for running multirace tours.

While I normally enjoy my games in small packages, Flamme Rouge is one of the big box games that I'm always happy to bring with me to a game night.

Hero image by Oliver Schawrz / BGG



Heat: Pedal to the Metal

1-6 players

BGG: 366013

Heat: Pedal to the Metal is a formula style racing game by the designer of *Flamme Rouge* (pg 7-8). It combines the best parts of *Formula D* (pg 5) and *Flamme Rouge* and becomes more than the sum of its parts.

This time, the gear you're on doesn't give you a different die but determines how many cards you can play. It reduces the luck factor of a die roll by giving you more choice and agency but it doesn't make decisions any easier.

Heat uses the same formula as *Flamme Rouge* where decisions are made simultaneously by all players and then resolved one at a time.

Where *Flamme Rouge* uses exhaust cards as a tool to force you

into more balanced strategies, Heat hones the mechanic further with heat cards that give you bonuses when played initially but clog up your hand on later turns and requires you to cooldown to get rid of extra heat.

If you've tried *Formula D* and/or *Flamme Rouge* and want something similar, *Heat: Pedal to the Metal* is not gonna leave you unsatisfied. I personally prefer the cycling theme more than race cars but if you strip out the theme and focus on the mechanics and rules, Heat does improve on *Flamme Rouge* in a nice way.

Hero image by Mathias N / BGG

A photograph of the Camel Up board game components. In the foreground, an orange camel token is prominently displayed. Behind it, a stack of three tokens (green, white, and yellow) is visible. In the background, a wooden pyramid and a white pyramid are partially visible on a wooden board with a race track. The background is softly blurred.

Camel Up

2-8 players

BGG: 153938

Often in racing games, the goal is for your piece to reach the goal line first. In **Camel Up**, we move from the race tracks to the betting booths and let the camels do all the hard work.

In Camel Up, five colourful camels race on a track around a pyramid and two crazy camels (black and white) run around in the opposite direction. The goal of the players is to bet at who will do well.

Each turn, plays can either make bets or move a randomly selected camel along the track. My favourite mechanic is that the camels stack up. If one camel ends up in a space already occupied by a fellow camel, it climbs on top and they form a stack.

Whenever a camel in a stack would move, it moves itself and everything

on top of it and a camel in the highest position is considered to be leading.

Camel Up is a whimsical take on race betting with its colourful pieces and quirkly mechanics. You are constantly making different types of bets hoping they will profit you but there's so much randomness that you can never be sure you have the winning ticket.

Hero image by MC Games / Board Game Geek



Robo Rally

2-6 players

BGG: 381327

Another way to add interesting mechanics to a racing game is to make outcomes of decisions unpredictable. That's the secret fun sauce of **Robo Rally**.

Robo Rally does that by making players program their robots and then unleashing them to the same battlefield. You need to make all your decisions up front and then see the havoc unfold as your well-crafted plans turn upside down.

Robots can be programmed to move and turn on the battlefield and shoot and push each other. The field itself is full of conveyor belts and pits that can accelerate the chaos — or put you into even more advantageous position.

The goal of the game is to visit each checkpoint in the field in order before everyone else does. Equally important is to try to prevent your opponents from achieving the same.

Over the course of the game, you get to upgrade your robot with new parts like new weapons and movement improvements. Picking up the right upgrades at the right times can turn the game into your favour.

The best way to enjoy Robo Rally is to play with as many people as you can and to embrace the chaos. The least fun sessions are those when everything goes according to your plans.

Hero image by Thomas Haver / Board Game Geek.

SUOMI-RALLY

Finland-rallyt



Suomi-Rally

2-6 players

BGG: 129349

When I was starting to write this zine, I was visiting my childhood home. I asked my father if Nestori (pg 3) was still in the board game cabinet so I could take some pictures for the zine.

I wasn't expecting that to turn into a bonding moment for me and my father around this zine. Excitedly, he rummaged through crowded shelves and proudly pulled out a worn out box of **Suomi-Rally**.

It's a racing game from 1960 and one that my father told stories of him playing it as a child. That's why it deserves a spot in this zine.

In Suomi-Rally, players race to drive from Helsinki to Rovaniemi and back. Each player will start with a

random route they must follow and midway, they'll pick up new cards that add to their route.

Already in the '60s, the game used a gear system similar to Formula D (pg 5) and Heat (pg 8) where higher gear gives you extra speed.

I found this game's rules and mechanics to be way ahead of its time. It doesn't quite hold up against the other modern games in this zine but at least it tried to do more than just roll and move.

The game also encourages making your own routes! If Board Game Geek were around in the 60s, they would have had a field day with this one.

Hero image by me.

Roll the Zine is a board and card game focused zine and a love letter to creativity, gaming and DIY culture. It's an exploration of media, imperfection and putting something out there.

In this issue, we rev up the engines and start the races. I look at 8 different racing games from different eras and with varying mechanics.

Welcome along the journey. You can find all Roll the Zine issues from zine.hamatti.org. You can subscribe via RSS to get new issues fresh to your reader.

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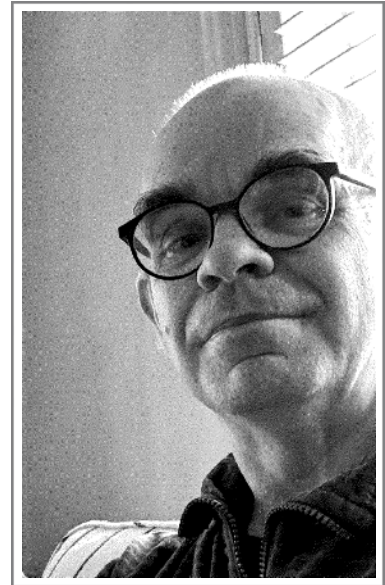
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by Juhis <<hamatti.org>>

Race for what exactly?

An abbreviated look at a few of my favourite racing games.

Christopher Taylor-Davies
@ctd@mastodon.social



Not a definition

Race games come in many flavours, themes, and styles. There is no recognised definition, which gives me considerable latitude in determining what to write about.

However, I think it is wise to draw a distinction between games that feature a race to complete certain victory conditions, as that snares a huge number of games. Including ones with Race in the title, such as Race for the Galaxy. My selected 5 have a race as the central theme, either explicitly in the case of car or bicycle racing, or otherwise navigating a course in direct competition with your opponents. Perhaps you haven't encountered some of these, and this may send you on a voyage of discovery...



Get the gold

One mainstay over the last decade has been the **Quest for El Dorado**. Reiner Knizia's idiosyncratic take on deck building is always engaging, and has not yet worn out its welcome. Despite its numerous expansions, I still feel comfortable including most of them in a session, without feeling that it has become cumbersome or confusing. There is an elegance to the way that Knizia manages to add features, always a light touch, yet always adding interest and depth to your choices.

It follows the classic deck building pattern of improving and trimming your deck. The race part comes in that your deck is in service of moving your explorer(s) across a hexagonal geomorphic map. The map is made up from a library of double sided tiles that are assembled into a challenging sequence of hazards and differing terrain types. Your map parsing skills are needed to determine which cards you want to invest in. Our meta game has evolved over time, but there are a few cards that almost always get claimed early.

One minor gripe is that it would be nice to have a unified rule book, and some extra "authorised" maps to play. Speaking of maps, it can take a while to setup a session, especially if hazards are in play. These are minor compared to the enjoyment the overall package brings. Heartily recommended, especially the revised editions with art by Vincent Dutrait.



Honourable Mentions



I want to like **Cubitos**, a bag building dice game by John D. Clair. It has some neat mechanisms and the same tension as El Dorado as to when you switch from buying more abilities to actually moving as fast as possible to the end. Unfortunately the family didn't really get on with it, so it sits on the shelf, hopeful of an outing now and then.



Pedal to the Metal



Thematically I greatly enjoy **Flamme Rouge** and **Heat: Pedal to the Metal**. Both are card driven, using hand management mechanics coupled with excellent thematic choices about how you use your cards. It always feels that you are making choices you would be making if you were actually an elite cyclist or racing car driver. Do you sit in the Peloton and hope you can have enough energy to sprint when it matters? Can you manage hill climbs efficiently? Or manage your approach to corners in your car. These feel in character and coupled with relatively quick turns, means the races don't drag. Who wants a racing game that takes forever or is susceptible to AP.



Eat your vegetables

My final mention is that old classic, **Hare and Tortoise**, which is a sedate, brain melting, race game about managing your progress around a track while ensuring you eat enough lettuce and arrive without a great hand full of carrots. We all need to eat the right amount of lettuce. This is known.



It would be remiss of me to close without mentioning possibly my most unsatisfactory racing game experience. It was at a gaming event, with a hugely tricked out version of Circus Imperium. At least I think that is what it was. It was a chariot racing game anyway, and the custom miniatures and track were amazing. There was a quick rules read and then we were off. On the first turn I was asked, “Will you whip your horses?”. Looking at the empty straight in front of me this seemed the right choice. I rolled the dice.

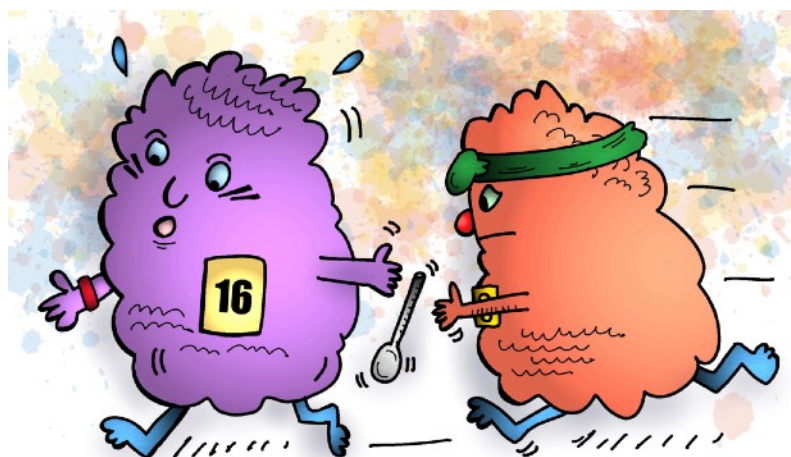


Go for a scrape

Catastrophically as it happened, as I was flung from my chariot. I then spent the rest of the game making no choices, merely rolling the dice in the hope that my driver, being taken for an extended scrape around the track behind the chariot, would manage to clamber back in. I never managed this. The famous definition of a game is “a series of consequential choices”, with the quality of the game dictated by the frequency and weight of those decisions.



Friends, I made just one decision in that game. I will leave you to judge my overall impression, however thematic it may have been.



@CTD #28 1 TEASPOON FLUP

“WE CHOOSE TO DO THE OTHER THINGS”

You’ve all heard some variation of “it may be slow, but it still has umpteen times the power of the Apollo Guidance Computer”. Whether it be used to illustrate the advancements in phones, calculators, watches, and I suppose even fridges and toasters these days, every instance of the phrase should remind you of the staggering achievements hundreds of thousands of folks pulled off for a handful of humans to walk on the Moon.

Annoyingly, such achievements were then made both somewhat routine and soon rather unnecessary, coming to a complete stop well before my birth, such that I got to experience none of it first hand. No, I’m not bitter...

We piddly little human beings pointed up to the Moon and said “Yeah, I reckon we can go there. Who’s up for it?”, and eventually we were technologically capable of it, and so we did. Multiple times. That’s actually insane, right?

Obviously there was much, much more to it than that, but as soon as one bloke seriously thought about actually going for it, it was inevitable that another bloke would race them to the glory. It’s human nature, innit?

It’s also human nature to splurge on Kick-Starters without fully justifying just *why* you have to back/purchase another board game - or at least it was back in 2020 or so, when I came across *Space Race*, a card driven game of something or other to do with the space race. The details didn’t matter at the time, it just sounded like something that had “You’ll like this” written all over it.



You play as one of 5 space agencies attempting to make as much technological progress as possible over 7 chunky rounds, and in a neat thematic touch that means everyone starting with 1950 points, or ‘in 1950’, ideally finishing somewhere much closer to the ‘2050’ end of the score track.

There are several ways to make progress/score points of course, some blindingly obvious, others involving some prolonged effort over time, and others still rather obfuscated until you’ve got a game or two under your belt, and all of them are driven by a tableau-building, card comboing, hand management affair.

Matt Elliott represented his island in an Inter-Insular School Athletics competition, where he failed to clear any High Jump bar height. His father represented his island in the Commonwealth Games, race walking for two and a half hours straight in the Australian sun, and can be found as a red link on Wikipedia. Thus, it must be reasonable to assume that an interest in Athletics is not genetic, but their weird walking gait probably is.

The basic flow of the game is to play a card into your agency and then, ideally, use it to fire off a load of previously played cards for another chance to do all kinds of engine building, point scoring effects.

You might end up being able to place an astronaut meeple out onto various places of the board, perhaps to work towards building this or that part of a rocket, or to control such and such area of space. You might instead be stuffing your laboratory with cards you don't care about to score separately later.

Sometimes you'll even want to work with your opponents just a little to ensure you complete a project and actually score it. Building a part of a rocket has a little push your luck thing going on where you could give yourself more work to do to score more points, but if it sits unfinished then it's all for nothing. Tempt another player into chipping in some astronauts to plug the gaps and you'll both be happy.

But actually, you might not be as happy as you could have been, for *Space Race* isn't as simple as 'Play a card, do some things'. While everyone has a hand of cards, in order to do anything with them you generally have to offer them up to the Universe - effectively seeding the one and only card market with cards from your hand.

It feels a bit wrong, doesn't it, to have a card in hand but be forced to offer it up to the rest of the table before being able to use it, but that's how *Space Race* does things, so you better not depend on a single card for your engine to get going, or you're probably not going to get too far in this particular space race...

These cards absolutely *pop* by the way. Bright colours, bold line work, they're really stylish. Often covered in unintelligible symbols that'll see you constantly referring to the player aid, but really stylish nonetheless.

However, some cards are, in the far future of 2026, a little tainted, perhaps.

I certainly can't fault *Space Race* for not knowing how the future would unfold, but I must say that it is a product of its time.

You see, one of the agencies sitting alongside your NASA's and your ESA's is the Private Sector, represented by a SpaceX Falcon rocket. That's not too terrible - at least that one doesn't crash every time they launch it - but it's not the only reminder of the *second* space race in this game.

Did you know there's a second space race? It's also known as the Billionaire space race, and the likes of Elon Musk, Jeff Bezos, and Richard Branson appear on cards with the same weight of importance to this story as Yuri Gagarin, Neil Armstrong, and space dog Laika.

It is worth pointing out here that Werner von Braun was (also) a Nazi, so it's not like you can ever fully escape the dark corners of history when it comes to the first space race, but there you go, you've been warned.

Pleasingly, most of the cards birthed into the Universe are chosen by the players, but if an untold horror does make an appearance (for the Universe must always birth *something* each round), you can always decide to leave it there, floating helplessly for all eternity...

At the end of the day, and in an ideal world, you'll all have worked efficiently to construct an agency that has made loads of technological progress in whatever fashion you could manage, where one player has done so just a little more efficiently than everyone else, and thus becoming the winner.

But we don't live in an ideal world, and so *Space Race* is best described as a game full of possibility and wonder, where you're not quite sure whether anything you do was the right thing to do, and just as you get some sort of sense about what's going on it comes to an unsatisfying and abrupt end.

I HAVE 1 CAR D AND I MUST CAREEN

I'm a big fan of *Rallyman*, if you didn't know, but I'm not the only one. While *Rallyman DIRT* was in KickStarter Distribution Hell (I'm not sure what circle that is), folks still playing the original version of *Dirt* from 2011 were doing what they've always done to keep the game alive and thriving: making stuff.

One such player, Mateo Giaccone, reimagined the game to fit into a much smaller footprint as part of 'Project SHRINKO!', a challenge which is exactly what it sounds like: take a game and make it smaller. The result was inevitably titled *Rallyboy* and I absolutely got around to crafting it and playing it myself.

But Mateo has made a whole bunch of small games, original designs for the most part, with many based on some form of motorsport including the subject of this article, *1 CAR D: Stock Racing Car Game*. A bit of a mouthful perhaps, but it does what it says on the tin: A solo NASCAR-style racer on a single playing card (along with a lot of dice and small cubes).

Over the course of 200 laps, crushed into 20 turns, all you've got to do is choose whether to change lanes and/or speed before rolling a bunch of d6 to represent all of your opponents, and see what they get up to based on your chosen speed.

I have a tendency to put my foot to the floor without thinking, so if I choose to increase my speed to the max, 5, then it'll cost me 1 point of fuel and cause 1 point of wear to my engine, but it'll mean that every opposition car that rolls lower than my speed will move backwards relative to their current position, if possible.

I'm sure you can work out what happens if I slow down, then: anyone rolling higher drives further away from me, unless I manage to draft them for a cheeky space of movement of my own. So how do I find the balance? Do I just sit in a middle gear for the entire race?



Printed on the track are arrows which, if an opponent lands on them, will see cars change lanes and - more often than not - cause a bit of chaos. Cars get bumped aside, into the track walls or back into other cars, and it's not unusual to see 'The Big One' cause whatever hopes you had for the round to get completely scuppered, in a similar fashion to your *RoboRally* planning going askew when you least want it to.

Your opponents don't track damage, but you getting bumped into the walls may well mean picking up enough tyre wear to decide that reading and then making use of the pit stop rules is worthwhile - if you can afford the loss of a turn to make it back to the front of the pack before the checkered flag flutters.

As you can see I'm all for making games stand out, even if I can't paint 8mm cubes without a few splodgy headlights and wonky wheels. You can tell they're all cars though, can't you? In addition you'll need a separately coloured d6 for each car, which I mostly managed, but they're not as photogenic.

I'm the black cube, currently in 4th, and I barely improved on that by the time the finish line appeared. I needed to pit for fuel shortly after this photo (as that middle die tracks), and with just a few turns to go I was boxed into the outer wall and muscled out of a top two finish.

Ah well. It's not like this game takes long to set up - not unless you drop a cube on the floor.

WHAT JAMAICAN ME QUEST FOR THIS TIME?

If we follow the BoardGameGeek definition of a 'Racing game' but *don't* then distil it into motorsports, horse racing, skiing and so on, then it seems the most popular racing games we own are *The Quest for El Dorado* and *Jamaica*.

We've had *Jamaica* the longest, but the 2007 release doesn't seem to show its age. Juggling your pirate ships' holds on your journey around Jamaica as best you can, whilst also racing to be the first across the finish line at Port Royal just doesn't seem to get old.

It gets even better with *The Crew* expansion, if only for the fact that the characters you can recruit during your race also take up a space in your cargo hold, and can therefore be thrown overboard and replaced with a pile of fruit, barrels of gunpowder, or masses of golden booty - preferably the latter, but you'll make use of them all over time.

We can't talk about *Jamaica* without talking about that ridiculous rule book which unfolds into a huge treasure map-like monstrosity 'just because'. It's easily replaced, and probably has to be to remind everyone how day and night works, but at least the rules are simple enough for this to be a game with which you can introduce folks to the hobby.

It's been to the local library meetup on a number of occasions without incident, though on the last outing I completely forgot to use the updated 'shortage' rules, despite customising my die with a Sharpie to add the relevant icons - an excuse to bring it to the table once again, clearly.

I'd like to say the same for *The Quest for El Dorado*, which I refuse to believe was released a full decade later, and for the most part it is an introductory game, but for some reason the concept of someone having their own deck to build and cycle through can come across as completely alien and utterly baffling.



"On your turn you play cards to move, and can play cards to buy a new card. Ok, so you put all those cards we've just used and bought in your discard pile. I put it over here, look, face up so that I know it's not my draw deck, because now we're going to refill our hand, see, and the discards over there will eventually end up over here."

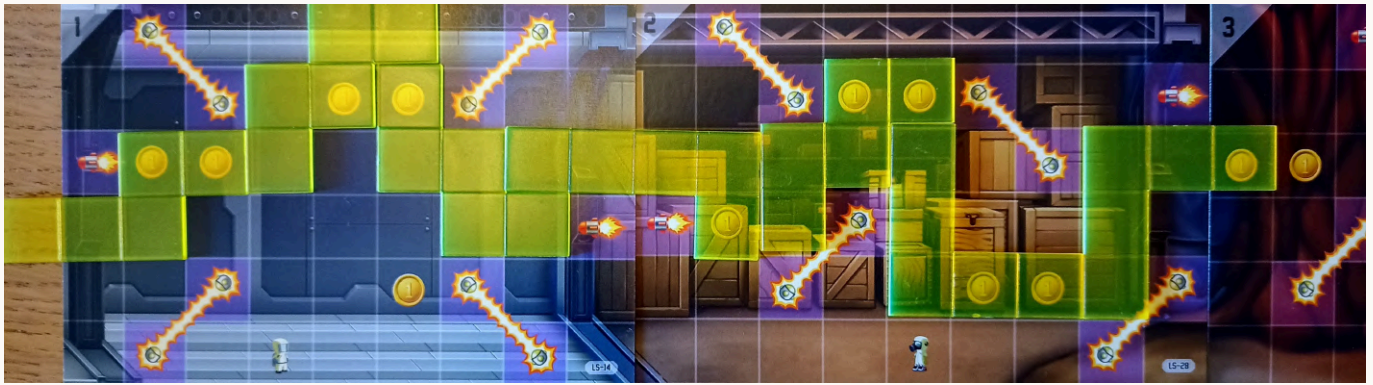
Cut to players having two discard piles, one face up, one face down, they've no idea where their hand is any more...

As a deck building fan it's nice to have one that isn't about fighting monsters, bashing your opponent about, colonising space or any number of other themes and difficult concepts that mean I don't get to bring them to local library meetups, but I'm sure there are better deck building racers out there. I've only dabbled with *Automobiles* on BGA though, so my general knowledge of the state of play here falls short.

It is, however, a decent enough game to get to the table once in a while. I've not got any expansions, surprisingly, because there's plenty of room left in the box to stuff it full of more content, though these days I wouldn't know where best to source them for whatever old version I own. But you probably don't need them. Modular boards to make a race of any length you like ought to be enough.

Oh, by the way, have I ever told you that the modern versions of *Rallyman* use modular boards? Well, actually, so does the old version, which I finally got my hands on from

a well timed eBay listing - are you still reading this? I'm only doing this for a visual joke. I'll talk about it some other time. Probably. How are you, you well?



TAKING A JETPACK FOR A JOYRIDE

Mobile gaming was once pretty good. Yes, companies would try to get you to purchase as many micro-transactions as possible, often to skip the grind or for a pointless character skin, but in a great many games it was all optional.

Jetpack Joyride was one such game that started out with a bang - literally, as Barry burst through the wall, stole a Machine Gun Jetpack, and flew it as far as he (meaning "you") could before smacking into a rocket, or a laser, or something.

Over time however it got worse and worse. The gameplay was always there (and it was *staggeringly* addictive, for me at least) but soon too were the adverts jumping in and demanding to be seen - for an in-game reward, of course. Do you want to skip them? You can if you want. It'll just cost you a few pieces of in-game currency...

These days I have three options for playing *Jetpack Joyride*: An advert-ridden, micro-transaction stuffed and generally bloated mobile app; an old version downloaded to an iPod Touch that can't connect to the Internet, pre-bullsh!t but still a little awkward to use; and the board game incarnation which is really rather good you know, for what it is.

For those who don't know, *Jetpack Joyride* is an endless runner where you tap the screen to fire the jetpack, dodging around as many obstacles as you can before the inevitable happens.

Then, depending on which version you're able to play, you get to go again or get to watch an advert and then go again. And go again you will, because another goal has popped up, and goals mean prizes, and prizes mean more strange things to buy from the shop, and strange things are often fun things, and if they're not they can be replaced when we finish this run, unlock another goal, and buy something else.

Did I say it was addictive?

In the board game it thankfully isn't endless, because it is instead a race to pick up and place a bunch of semi-transparent tetromino-shaped bits of plastic before your opponents manage to flee the lab before you, hopefully after having met at least some of the goals and having hoovered up a load of coins along the way.

It is, for fans of the mobile game like me, full of what you found there, but in a condensed, advert free, multiplayer experience. Three rounds of laser dodging jetpack flying and you're done, the player with the most points wins.

Sprinkle in some silly gadgets and silly goals (coin magnets and rubbing your head against the ceiling, for example), as well as the inclusion of bonus vehicles inspired by properties such as *Terminator 2* and *Flappy Bird*, and you've got yourself a silly little game that doesn't outstay its welcome.

Yeah, it's lightweight and won't knock your socks off, but with a puzzly solo-mode backed by memories of a time long gone, *Jetpack Joyride* will stay in the collection for a while to come, even if it doesn't hit the table often.



A GAMUT OF GAMES

There I was, sandwich in hand, ready to read the first issue of *ODaM* when - barely a paragraph into Christopher Taylor-Davies' zine - I was nearly spitting bits of lettuce out, about to comment "It's a small world, eh?" upon learning of his St Helier origins, for you see, when I were a lad and it were a clear day, I'd be able to look out across the sea and spot the island of Jersey, whose capital is St Helier.

But no, CTD was talking of somewhere out in Auckland that just happened to be named after the St Helier I was aware of, so Wikipedia tells me. But if you've got really, *really* good eyes, you could look out to sea from Auckland and spot Brisbane, where my old man walked for 30km as fast as could for his island in the Commonwealth Games, which is recorded on Wikipedia *and you see, it's a small world and we're all connected somehow aren't we?*

Ahem. Excuse me. I was supposed to be talking about your *ODaM* contribution, where I was delighted to find so many similarities, despite our differences in age, backgrounds, and interest levels of cricket.

I, too, desire to seamlessly fill in all the gaps in our sprawling games of *Carcassone*, but my problem is wanting to do that in a live game, against a ruthless opponent in the form of my partner, who is someone who insists that the Farmers aren't that difficult a concept to teach newcomers to the board gaming hobby, let alone newcomers to *Carcassone* - much to my disappointment because it's always me who has to do that teach in the first place...

There's something magical about a deck of cards, no matter what it is you end up doing with them, so if your project ever sees the light of day, there's probably a good chance I'll have a look - even if it is about cricket.

HERD MENTALITY

The 'Misconceptions' chapter of the Wikipedia entry for "Lemming" is a treat:

"In 1532, the geographer Jacob Ziegler of Bavaria proposed the theory that the creatures fell out of the sky during stormy weather and then died suddenly when the grass grew in spring. This description was contradicted by natural historian Ole Worm, who accepted that lemmings could fall out of the sky, but"...

It's hard to top that, and according to my partner (on any occasion where she remembers its existence), it's hard to top *Lemminge*, which she has wanted a copy of ever since we played it with Roger BW at Tabletop Scotland (only you will know who won that game), even to the point of making our own copy if needed, so news of an online version is very much welcome.

It doesn't take a genius to work out our paths first crossed somewhere in the realm of *Rallyman*, seeing as we keep banging on about it, but I can't claim to match those numbers - besides, you've got a decent head start from the original, which I only got hold of a few weeks back at time of writing.

Red 7 is still in our collection, and we also don't touch the advanced rules at any point, but *Letter Tycoon* ended up getting sold, though we still play it from time to time on BGA (and I have no desires to reach that high up the leaderboard, that's for sure).

Where we differ most is probably on the co-op front. While I'm open to that aspect of gaming, my partner generally isn't, so our collection is thin on the ground when it comes to those kinds of titles. If she was playing *Flash Point*, I would give considerable thought to sacrificing her to appease the fire deity of your choice, otherwise life *will* be made more difficult than it needs to be.

Little Wooden People

Number 2: by Roger BW

- Blog: <https://blog.firedrake.org/>
- Gaming stuff: <https://tekeli.li/>
- Rulebooks: <https://tekeli.li/rogers-rules/>
- Mastodon: <https://discordian.social/@RogerBW>
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Recent Games and Expo

I haven't been playing as much as usual thanks to a holiday trip, but I have been to UK Games Expo! It's very obvious that selling is the primary driver for the show (hiring the NEC isn't cheap), unlike the Airecons which are very much play first and retail later, but I go mostly to play with friends (and demo for Wotan Games).

But this one, coming at the end of slightly more than a week of very hot days, was rougher than many. Of course some of it is that I'm not really in the market for new games unless they truly impress me (the only thing I bought for myself was a copy of *Gibberers* with the English cards), but I felt that the mood in the halls was just a little *off*. Stands tended to be one of:

- we are a huge gaming company, here is our demo area, sit down and we will teach you a game, but there is no risk of your actually interacting with a designer or a publisher because they're all doing business meetings, and our staff have to commit to working the whole show so they are probably professional demonstrators rather than enthusiasts.
- we are a small gaming company, here is our quirky game, oh no you can't buy it now, back our crowdfunder.
- we are a foreign game publisher, we have a game which is the gem of the show and sold

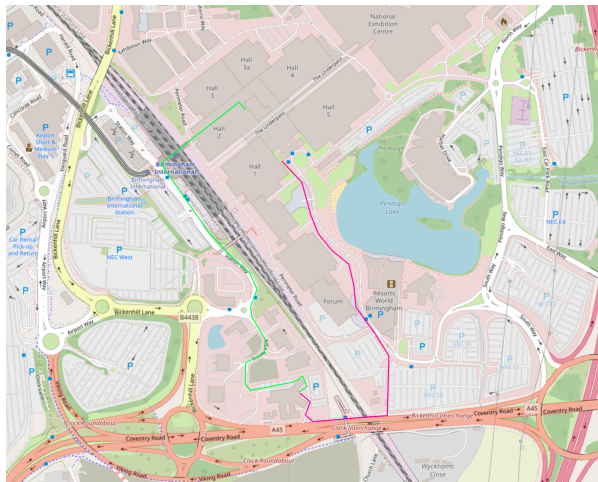
out in the first hours, and we have eighteen other games any of which *might* be another gem, but nobody here speaks English very well and it's hard to find out.

- we are a boxshifter, we have the same games every other boxshifter has at about the same price. What's that, you can look up the game on boardgameprices.co.uk and work out exactly how much extra you'll have to pay to get it right now rather than delivered next week? Sounds dangerously subversive.
- we are a tiny role-playing publisher, we are barely visible behind our stock of books, most of which seem to involve going into people's homes and taking their stuff.
- we are selling role-playing accessories. Dice sets if you're lucky, but more likely scented candles, or colour-changing "potions" in bottles, or d20s made into earrings, or something like that. (I didn't see anyone selling boardgame bling this year.)
- we are a (Chinese, Korean, Polish) games manufacturer and have no interaction with retail customers, we really ought to be at a trade show rather than a retail show but we'll make some contacts here.

I am more of the "here is our quirky game, you can play it now, and if you like it you both can and should buy it, because you'll certainly never see it on a shop shelf" school. Back in 2019 I walked round the halls with a friend who

suggested that every time someone stopped us and said “would you like to try a game” we’d say “yes”—and among others I found *Riffforce* that way (which at that point was in prototype, even pre-crowdfund). Hardly anyone did that this year.

Combine that with an air conditioning “failure” on Saturday (it’s the NEC, the Expo is probably one of their least profitable shows because at least some gamers are still born cheapskates like me, and they clearly have contempt for mere customers) and by Saturday evening I was feeling very negative about the whole business. Especially since one of the two routes between the Arden, where I was staying, and the Hilton, where most of the gaming was happening, had been closed off since last year, so the only practical way was via multiple lifts and the crowds of the NEC.



Background imagery from OpenStreetMap

But after some good gaming on the Saturday night (back in the Arden with a couple of friends) and a cooler Sunday I’m still inclined to go back next year.

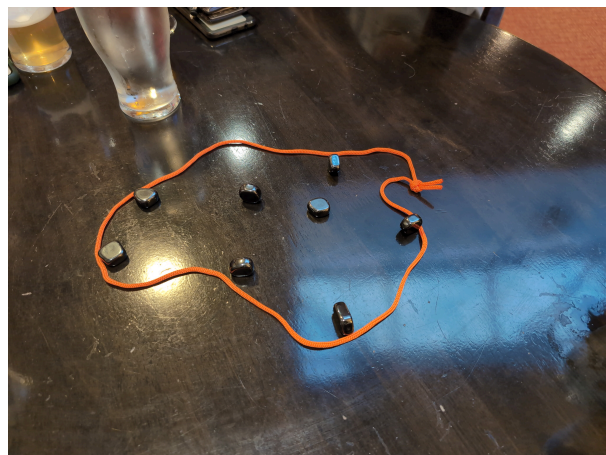
All right, when I first went (I think in 2009; it was still in the Clarendon Suites) most of the vendors were trying to appeal to hobby gamers like me rather than to the modern mass market of people who’ve heard of modern boardgames but don’t really know what it’s all about. I can’t

blame them for that, since it’s clearly where the money is.

Anyway. Since last time I have played, and found noteworthy:



[Switch & Signal](#), briefly a hotness in 2020. And I rather liked it; it’s a multiplayer game only by courtesy, but the three of us who visit Thirsty Meeples in Oxford once a month or so all had a good time trying to sort out the puzzle, and *almost* succeeding. (Which for me is the perfect outcome for the first play of a cooperative puzzly game: it doesn’t feel too easy or too hard.) I’m tempted to pick up a copy; there ought to be second-hand ones out there.



[Kluster](#) is one of those games that I never buy because someone else always seems to have it when I’m in the mood. Apparently there are people to whom placing the stones on edge is new and daring.

[DNUP](#) is a new climbing game that feels to me very like *Scout*, complete with reversible cards, but I found I enjoyed it rather more. I'd definitely like to try this again, and it's on BGA.



[Petiquette](#) is new from Oink and fell a bit flat for me: I like the core idea of trying to work out what fits best in a spot in the sequence generated by a random set of cards, but having only limited cards with which to make that guess felt like a very artificial constraint.



[Sky Team](#) is spoiled for me by the abstraction gap: I know quite a lot about the process of landing a plane, and the decisions here just didn't feel as though they had anything to do with that. (Though we both enjoyed using the laser to shoot down the other planes in our path. I mean the radio. The radio.) Probably a great game for people who aren't me!

[Piepmatz](#) is one I haven't played much lately, and like many of my favourite games when I get

it out I wonder why I haven't played it more often. Can be a bit of a brain-burner (if I play this card here, it'll trigger a fight and I'll get that card, but then it'll trigger another fight and I'll have that one I don't want)...



[Sea Salt & Paper](#) is one I first played on BGA, and since I enjoyed it there (even without really working out what was going on) I promptly bought a copy. The expansions definitely make it better, though I might play without "Extra Pepper" for a first game. This was also one of my favourite mini rulebooks to write, as I was able to use the symbology from the official rulebook PDF.



[Rafter Five](#) is a strange Oink dexterity game with a theme that makes no sense. But you're adding wonky strips of card to a precarious raft, pinning them down with meeples, and balancing chests on the end. That'll do!

Racing Games

What *is* a racing game? I've heard it argued that anything involving being the first to achieve a set score is a racing game, but I'm going to take a thematic approach instead: a racing game is a game that's *about a race*, i.e. about a contest in which participants start at one point and the goal is to get to another point first.¹

I'm not a great fan of head to head conflict in games (as in most wargames and classic "Ameritrash" designs), but at the same time I don't want a game in which my only interaction with the other players is that we sometimes contend over the same limited pile of resources. Racing games occupy a middle ground for me: I'm still competing and interacting, but the majority (or all) of what I do is about making my own position better, not the "take that" of making someone else's worse. Perhaps I'll get into that chicane before the other player and thus have an advantage coming out of it, but I'm not going to machine-gun off their tyres (in most games anyway). Is that any different from grabbing the biggest pile of gold before the other player? Perhaps not, but it *feels* like it.

Leaving Earth, one of my "guilty secrets" since I have far more enthusiasm for it than most people I know, is not to my mind a racing game: you're trying to score more objectives than the other players, and once someone's scored an objective nobody else can have it, but while choosing what you're going to do in what order is important there's also a lot of mission design and risk management which feel to me like the real "meat" of the game. (The same mission plan will take the same time no matter who's doing it; you don't get bonus thrust for having a really clever astronaut.)

¹And already I need to specify a minor exception: a road rally is clearly a race, but it's not a simultaneous start, it's about having the lowest overall time.



Similarly with *Firefly: the Game*, there's always a contest to achieve the goals first, but what matters is the strategy you take to get good enough and how much risk you're willing to accept. Indeed, you may get stuck at a "gate" while other people are catching up, and while I'm sure there may be races that work this way, it doesn't fit my mental model.

Flamme Rouge sometimes feels like a "race to the top score" game, but with tricky scoring rules to stop it being a straightforward proposition. This continues to be one of my favourites, though alas I haven't played it much lately. (In fact, one could regard it as a better version of *Snakes & Ladders*, much as *Captain Sonar* is a better version of *Battleship* and *Mysterium* is a better version of *Cluedo/Clue*.)



For whatever reason, *Heat* (by the same designer, Asger Aleksandrov Granerud, with frequent collaborator Daniel Skjold Pedersen)

doesn't grab me the same way that *Flamme Rouge* did. I'm entirely ready to believe that this is something odd about my taste rather than that Heat is a Bad Game² but I felt surprisingly disappointed; it feels too random, and the concepts don't flow for me as they do in the earlier game. (You store heat in your engine, but when it all comes out of your engine and into your deck that's when your engine is overheated?)

Of course as Matt knows my favourite racing game is the *Rallyman* series (*GT* and *Dirt* which are sufficiently compatible that one can have a single integrated rules document for them, though any given race will use only some of the rules). I've played quite a bit of original *Rallyman* too, but this is the one that became "my game". It's not really a simulation except in the very broad sense but it does feel like a race, and it works well asynchronously (e.g. on BGA).

I missed *Formula D* when it was the Big Thing but I've been playing a little on BGA recently. It's the second game I've met that really makes the wear on the car an important tactical element. (My frequent experience coming back to a game: oh, I've gained a place since last turn! Oh, never mind, someone ahead of me has just exploded so I count as having overtaken them.) Doubt I'll ever buy it, but I am enjoying it.

Rush 'n' Crush was the *first* tactical-wear game I played, and it was an entirely unexpected joy: apparently it's loosely linked by its publisher to a miniatures combat game, so the setting is all dark warry corrupt future. And there are machine guns and flamethrowers. So I didn't expect much, but a friend enthused about it and I'll generally play anything once; and I was happy to find that there's also the most realistic simulation of an internal combustion engine

and gearbox I've ever seen in a game (you trade off revs and gears to get acceleration and speed, all in a very simple system of moving a pawn across a car board). The track is a hexagonal grid (well, offset rectangles in a stretcher bond brick pattern, but topologically it's the same) with racing along the grain, so a lane change effectively moves you half a space forward and one lane sideways. You don't need to slow down for corners (though the inside lanes use fewer spaces), but you do have to change lanes to avoid the plentiful obstacles on the track; and the faster you go, the fewer lane changes you have available.



Over the course of the race you gradually use up your allotment of emergency steering and braking points, not to mention structure points and heat capacity, and it's entirely possible for your vehicle to fail right before the finish line. The machine guns and flamethrowers are almost irrelevant in the face of That [grawlix] Single Lane Bridge or The Cheesegrater (unofficial names). Fair warning, this was one of the games that inspired my rules rewrite project; the rulebook is not as clear as it could be. I've bought extra dice for my copy so that every player can have a full set, but I'm still looking for some more distinctive car models...

²If I've learned one thing from writing the nearly two thousand book reviews on my blog, it's that "I love/hate it" and "this is very good/bad" are not the same.

We Also Heard From

Comments on OdaM number 1

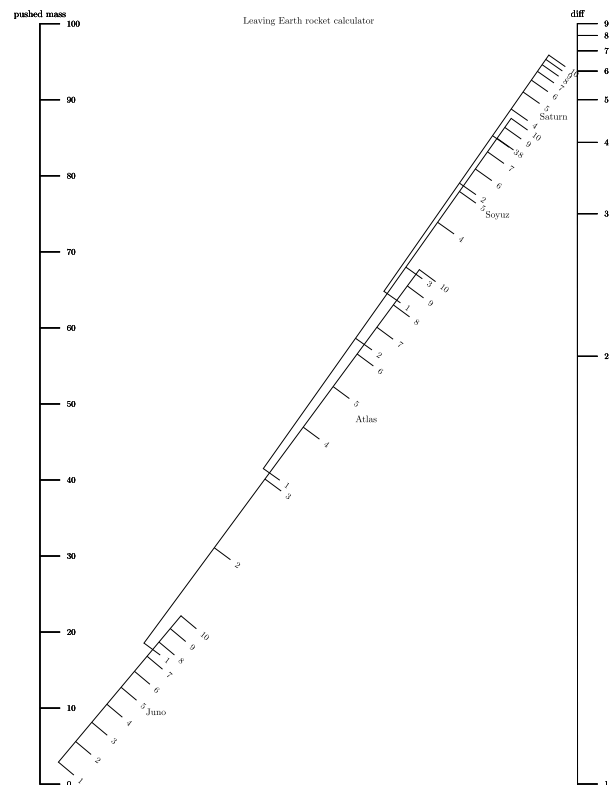
CTD: Sid Sackson's games aren't always to my taste but my goodness he's³ a master of achieving an effect with an absolutely minimal complexity of rules. I played *Acquire* recently as I mentioned lastish, and while the components clearly wouldn't pass muster in a modern production there was nothing dated-feeling about the gameplay.

I am not a follower of any sort of sport⁴ but I look at the idea of a cricket simulation with trepidation. There is so *much* that seems to go into determining how one combination of bowler, batsman and fielders will score on a particular occasion; and if one wants to appeal to cricket fans, one surely can't simplify it too much or the enjoyment of having a simulation would be lost? I've played and enjoyed *Baseball Highlights 2045* but I have no feel for how actual baseball works—I had to reverse-engineer it in order to work out how to play the game—so I don't know what might be missing, though I suspect that using entirely fictional teams and players makes things easier.

I love programming and computer-furkling generally, but I've found that I don't want to rely on a computer *at the table*: it feels as though it drifts too easily into playing a computer game. (No objection at all to using the computer to produce play aids that encode complex rules into something that can be used quickly, of course. Not that this nomogram for *Leaving Earth* is actually *useful*, but it does technically work to answer the eternal question, "how many rockets of what type do I need to push this mass through that difficulty of manoeuvre".)

³"He was," I suppose, but I still meet games of his that I haven't played before.

⁴I seem to lack any ability to feel enthusiasm for a team that I'm not actually part of.



Your polyhedral dice are clearly of higher quality than the ones in my Moldvay/Cook Basic and Expert *D&D* boxes of about the same vintage, or at least they've lasted rather better.

Matt Elliott: I can't remember how I first found the 1 Player Guild on BGG, and I always feel like something of a fraud there: I do play and enjoy solo games, but mostly I'd rather play in company. During 2020 it became clear that what I enjoy most about board games is the chat over the table and the physical bits: either alone can keep me interested, but having neither, as in most BGA games, can make playing feel like work.

Thinking of a game that feels as though it plays itself reminds me of a revelation I had about *BattleTech* (I think while playing the unofficial computer implementation *MegaMek*). You choose which weapons to fire at which foes, but then you have no influence on the result: it's all a lot of dice rolling, which the computer can do in an eyeblink. But when you allow it to do that, much of the tension vanishes from the game...



Very much agreed on *Rallyman* (in its Holy Grail Games and now Synapses Games incarnation) freeing one with its use of track tiles. I remember seeing all the racetrack expansion boxes for *Formula D* (and similarly *Ticket to Ride* maps later) and thinking, well, it's a nice job if you can get it; while one may need to compromise on some details with the *Rallyman* tile set one still has a box of nearly infinite tracks. I've been playing on BGA with a group that runs each season as a tour of the various British tracks, and they definitely have their distinctive flavours. (Of course, actually laying out a track can take a while even if the tiles are carefully stored in order, while a track board can just be unfolded.)

When I think about sandboxes and racing, I think about the sort of rally that has multiple route choices—for example the classic Paris-Dakar,⁵ in which accurate navigation is a major consideration in itself. I don't see this working well with the essentially high resolution, one bend or other hazard at a time, *Rallyman* mechanics, though I believe Jean-Christophe Bouvier has experimented in that direction. If there is a game of that sort of rallying, I haven't met it.

Typst has definitely unblocked a host of writing projects for me, meaning that I have to find other excuses for not doing them now that I

can't say “but I need a better tool than LibreOffice for producing PDFs”. I'm very much of the “write the code in a text editor, then switch over to a terminal window and compile” school, so it suits my way of working even if it's stretching the definition of “code”, and I particularly like its handling of images, a simple call-out to a file name, no messing about with embedding it in the source text.

(OpenSCAD for 3D design works in a similar way, in that you write a program in its own functional language which, when run, defines an object. Which is similarly great for accurate geometry rather than “make it roughly that big”.)



⁵ and I apologise for the unavoidable implied pun.



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