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# FAMILY GAMES

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## THE 100 BEST

*Edited by James Lowder*

*Foreword by Mike Gray*

*Afterword by Wil Wheaton*



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Green Ronin Publishing  
3815 South Othello Street  
Suite 100, #304  
Seattle, WA 98118

Visit us online at [greenronin.com](http://greenronin.com).

Electronic Stock number GRR4002e, October 2012.

ISBN 10: 1-934547-21-2

ISBN 13: 978-1-934547-21-2

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Sample file

# FOREWORD

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by Mike Gray

“TOGETHERNESS IN A BOX.” That’s my description of a board game. The term *board game* might seem a bit old fashioned in this age of computers and mobile phones. You can’t carry a board game in your pocket. You have to set it up and put it away. For the price you pay, though, you can’t beat a board game for face-to-face fun. If you take good care of it, it’ll last a lifetime.

Board games, card games, dice games, and roleplaying games bring us hours, days, and years of replayable social enjoyment. From titles like *Candy Land* that we played as kids to the latest addictive MMORPG, our lives have been filled with games and gaming experiences. When I was young, I spent many hours playing *Uncle Wiggily*. The game board’s numbered path is burned into my memory. It starts at the home of Uncle Wiggily (70 years, the bunny rabbit gentleman, who (I’ve never forgotten) lives with Niece Jane Fuzzy Wuzzy, his muskrat lady housekeeper. There were two decks of cards in the game: a big yellow deck and a smaller red deck. Each card was different, and each told a little story, often in rhyme. You needed to get Uncle Wiggily from his house 151 numbered spaces down to #151 Green Moss Avenue, where you’d meet the kindly Dr. Possum. You never knew whom you might meet on the way to Doc Possum’s place. I still wonder if that numbered path gave me some cognitive advantage in math in school.

Games were always my favorite birthday or Christmas gift. My first Avalon Hill game was *D-Day*. I sent my first game concept to Avalon Hill when I was 11. My fondest childhood memories center on playing chess, *Battleship*, *Stratego*, and *Risk* with the guys and playing *Mille Bornes*, *Pit*, *Waterworks*, and *Careers* with the girls back in Toledo, Ohio. I went on to become the captain of the chess team in high school, and I played bridge and go in college.

It was all about togetherness — being with friends and bonding. I learned about history when playing the American Heritage series games (*Broadside*, *Dogfight*, *Hit the Beach*, *Battle-Cry*, and *Skirmish*), imagining I was blasting a ship with my cannons, doing a barrel roll and firing a burst, or taking out a pillbox on a Pacific island. I’ll never forget playing bridge for 10 cents a point at



Carleton College in Northfield, Minnesota, or playing mahjong with the neighbors in Westfield, Massachusetts.

Who would have guessed that I would get job at Milton Bradley at age 27, and spend the rest of my career in the games business? I started as a designer, and over the span of a dozen years I created such titles as *Shogun* and *The Omega Virus*. For another 14 years I managed the Hasbro family and adult games development team. I'm currently senior director of product acquisition for Hasbro. I meet with inventors of toys and games around the world and bring back the very best.

So I guess I know about games as a business. But I also own several thousand of them. The traditional definition of a “family” game is a game for kids aged eight and up that parents will enjoy, too. Family games usually take longer to play and involve more strategic choices than the typical children’s games. The most famous family game brands are *Monopoly*, *The Game of Life*, and *Clue*. Card games such as *Pit*, *Flinch*, *Mille Bornes*, and *Rook* have been around for a long time, too.

The most frequent question I get asked is, “What’s your favorite game?” Over time the answer has progressed from *Chess* to *Acquire* to bridge to *Cosmic Encounter* to *D&D* to *Ultima IV* to *Civilization* to *Magic: The Gathering* to, most recently, *World of Warcraft*. Even with that somewhat narrowed list in mind, I can’t give an easy “one game” answer. It depends on whom I am playing with and how many other people are going to gather at the table. Playing with kids or neighbors, my answer would be different from the one I would give if I were playing with fellow designers.

For card games, the choices are easy: for two players, Mike Fitzgerald’s *Mystery Rummy: Jack the Ripper*, Reiner Knizia’s *Battle Line*, or Richard Garfield’s *Magic: The Gathering*; for three, David Parlett’s brilliant *Ninety-Nine*; for four, Wolfgang Kramer’s *6 Nimmt* (aka *Category 5*), hearts, euchre, or spades. And I cannot forget *Pit*. Two, two, TWO!

For board games, I find it very hard even to narrow the field. There are so many good titles. And, as an industry professional, I know that there’s always something new and fresh coming out, particularly from Europe. So, my best advice would be to read about the favorites discussed in the pages beyond and then watch the wonderful website BoardGameGeek.com for the latest and greatest.

Still, editor James Lowder asked me to include some of my personal favorite board games, so here goes. . . .

Sid Sackson’s *Acquire* is a classic and still my favorite money-based board

game. It is so simple, yet every game is different. I also like *Cartel*, a financial game by Phil Orbanes (best for three people, in my opinion), and Jean Vanaise's *Shark*, a clever stock market game. I enjoy the competitiveness of Wolfgang Kramer's *Niki Lauda's Formel 1* racing game and the variety and negotiation of *Cosmic Encounter*. Reiner Knizia's *Ingenious* is ingenious. You can play it with anyone. It's like a color dominoes game with a devious twist. I also play Klaus-Jürgen Wrede's *Carcassonne* and Franz-Benno Delonge's *TransAmerica* frequently with my family.

People often ask me whether video games are hurting the traditional board games business. Total game sales, which include console, digital, and Internet games, have risen dramatically in recent years, while board games sales just show slight increases. So I'd say board games are losing ground as game-based entertainment has expanded. The world is changing. People expect a lot more from a "game" these days. Movement, sound, and multiple levels of entertainment are hard for a board or card game to offer, and even classic games are slowly adapting to fit today's faster pace. *Monopoly* now has an additional "speed die" to make the game play faster. *Risk* has a new set of objectives, so you don't have to play the long "conquer the world" version. The new *Stratego* plays just as well with 30 pieces per side instead of 40. Even *Trivial Pursuit* is getting a major facelift to make it shorter and full of new choices.

As I get older, I find that winning is less important to me than it used to be. (It still happens a lot, though!) I used to remember every card in play in a game and keep mental track of what other players were doing. Now, it is far more important to me that everyone is having a good time. It's that "togetherness" thing again. I find that it is usually better to play two or three different games in an evening than to play one long one. Someone is usually losing for the last hour of a long game and that person is probably not thinking, "I can't wait to play this game again!" Lots of shorter games create more winners. That "feel-good aura" makes us want to come together again.

You'll find lots of great suggestions for games your own family can gather around in the pages beyond. Read a bit, then head for the game closet!



MIKE GRAY has been designing games since he was 11 years old. He started with Milton Bradley in 1978, spent two years at TSR, then returned to

Hasbro. He worked his way up through the ranks from designer to manager to director. He currently holds the position senior director of global games product acquisition. Mike has designed dozens of board and card games, most notably *Fortress America* and *Shogun*, both of which won the Charles S. Roberts Award. Mike has created *AD&D* modules and branching adventure books as well as such early electronic board games as *Mall Madness* and *The Omega Virus*. He travels with his DSi, loves Eurogames, and is an avid *World of Warcraft* player.

Sample file

# INTRODUCTION

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by James Lowder

FIGURING OUT WHAT TO title a book is a tricky business, even for something as outwardly uncomplicated as a collection of essays about great games. The title should capture the work's essence or at least avoid presenting the book as something it's not. An inspired title can draw in readers. A bad one — well, Raymond Chandler surely considered himself fortunate that his classic Philip Marlowe crime novel ended up being called *Farewell, My Lovely* and not *Sweet Bells Jangle* or *Zounds, He Dies*, both of which had been floated as possibilities before publication. As a title, *Trimalchio in West Egg* offers an erudite nod to *The Satyricon*, the sort of reference guaranteed to inspire countless term papers, but it lacks the simple, direct power of *The Great Gatsby*.

So, how does *Family Games: The 100 Best* rate as a title?

I should note that we were constrained a bit in the naming process by the fact that this is a companion volume to *Hobby Games: The 100 Best*. The title, like the cover design, needs to indicate a clear connection to the earlier volume. After all, we're proud of *Hobby Games*. We hope the similarities in title and design will inspire readers who enjoyed the first collection to add this one to their libraries. For those of you starting here, perhaps you'll seek out the first book, even though either one can be read on its own.

Before I get too far into the title discussion, I should also mention Mike Selinker. Mike inspired the focus on family games this time around. Shortly after the publication of *Hobby Games: The 100 Best*, it became clear to me and to the good folks at Green Ronin that another book might be in order. Mike's timely suggestion set us on the right track, prompting us to expand the project's scope so that we could include many of the classic games that had fallen outside the purview of the first volume. Mike joined Dale Donovan in providing invaluable support throughout the very long editing process, too.

Okay, I seem to be evading my own question here. Better, I suppose, just to address it head on.

As a precise encapsulation of the book's essence, the title *Family Games: The 100 Best* suffers from a few . . . issues.

First off, you may find our definition of the word *family* broad. The traditional definition for a family game is one that can be played by anyone eight or older. When we refer to a family game, we mean one that's accessible to more than dedicated hobbyists. It's a game that doesn't require you to pour over novel-length rulebooks, like some of the most popular roleplaying games, or to invest weeks or months to complete one scenario, like the most complex historical simulation board games. We're not just talking about games for kids, though. To be certain, some of the titles we cover are kid-friendly. You'll find essays here on such all-ages classics as *Candy Land*, as well as more recent gems, such as *Loopin' Louie* and *Go Away Monster!* But not all the games we discuss are intended for all ages.

To help you decide, even at a glance, whether or not a particular game might be appropriate for the younger people at your table, each essay header includes a suggested age range. These should be considered rough guides. Many kids are capable of playing *Twixt* well before the suggested minimum age of 12, while those same kids might find *1960: The Making of the President*, which has the same suggested target age, too long or complex. Your mileage may vary, as the familiar caveat goes, and parents should read reviews, talk to other gaming families, and perhaps even road test a game for suitability before purchase. Conventions such as Gen Con and Origins are great places to try out new titles, and many of the best hobby shops host demo nights where you can play the latest big releases or older classics about which you're curious.

For purposes of tallying our title's accuracy, then, the use of *family* is something of a push. It's a fair cop to say we've strayed from the typical definition, at least as far as game publishers and designers are concerned. But this should make the book useful to all kinds of families, those with kids and those without. You'll find things covered here that will entertain many of the non-hobby gamers in your life, whether that's a pre-teen who has never seen a wargame, or an uncle who wouldn't know a *Pokémon* card from an *Authors* card.

You'd think the use of *game* in the title would be something of a given, but even there we run into problems. We included a wide variety of game types: board games, card games, miniatures games, and even roleplaying games. Several of our 100 best straddle those categories rather precariously, just as they run afoul of the demarcations typically used to distinguish a game from a puzzle from a toy. Some critics outside these pages argue, for example, that *Ricochet Robots* isn't so much a game as it is a puzzle people solve in tandem, since players don't really interact