The Game of Games

The Unilever concern commissioned a survey to research customer attitudes during the present state of the economy. The test subjects provided information about their wishes, fears and strategies regarding shopping. The results, presented last November: shopping as therapy.[1] Almost the same expression, "Retail Therapy," was the title of a game idea that Richard Breese was nurturing. Didn't really sound like an exciting theme. The idea became more attractive when a friend suggested concentrating on one specific product of a store assortment: board games. And since the 10th anniversary of BoardGameGeek[2] was just approaching, it seemed natural to dedicate a game about board games to the world's biggest website for board gamers. What followed was a mountain of work ...

On June 8th, 2009 Richard Breese announced his project to the BGG community and invited them to participate. Everyone was to get the chance to leave his mark on the game. All he had to do was to leave a short congratulations message on BGG. The text was to be printed in the box insert, the well-wisher's avatar on the side areas of the bottom of the box. The response was overwhelming – resulting in more than 1,000 avatars romping about the box and just as many congratula-

manageable if Richard Breese had limited himself to companies whose games are traded as goods. In fact, however, he needed hundreds more in order to design the game board; they fill the shop windows of game stores on the Boardgame Road. Some characters act as sales staff. And many, many small portraits fill the score track around the edges. This looks like a search-and-find picture, and it takes a lot of time to find out what games the numerous details come

LO, YG, ZM, d: ROS, g: FRZ, 2008." Of course, we need another overview to decode who or what is hidden in the abbreviations. Putting this together seems a job for somebody who has too much time.

Let's at last tear ourselves away from the unquestionably fascinating materials and get to the essentials. Each of us takes on a double role in the BOARDGAMEGEEK GAME. First, you are a publisher who wants to sell his products in the stores as profitably as possible. Second, you let your players' group shop in these stores in order to have the most attractive collection in the end.

Just a number or actually a value?

The companies involved are, in alphabetical order: eggertspiele, Hans im Glück, Queen Games, R&D Games, Treefrog and Ystari – at least three German companies represented and not a single American one in a British game dedicated to an American website. Each publisher is present with six titles from his current product line, numbered from 1 to 6. As we will see, the ordinal number also includes a valuation. The instructions, however, avoid this term; with good reason – otherwise we might argue for hours why an AUTOMOBILE should have the same value as SHERWOOD FOREST. Each participant owns his own company. Each company has its six games, each of which exists in three copies in the form of cardboard tiles. This assortment is shuffled unseen. Each player then puts the topmost tiles of his pile face up behind his screen, so that only he knows what he can bring to the shops in the current round.

The stores are lined up at both sides of a small street, three on each side. Each store has a shop window where the games on offer are placed., and each store caters only to one specific price segment;. That means it accepts only games of a specific value, with a tolerance of +/− 1. The sales prices are graduated accordingly. In turn, we now place our games on an unoccupied space in the shop windows – face down,

tory texts in small print, carefully checked for duplicates, filling the inlay.

The detailed work had in fact started earlier, even before BGG came on board. For a game about games, you need (of course) – games. More precisely, you need the okay of the companies whose products are supposed to be and allowed to be part of the game. That would have been

from. Fortunately, the back of the game board provides the solution.

For the sake of accuracy, all games used are listed in the instruction booklet, not only with title and publisher, but also designer, artist, and year of publication.

To save space, this is done in compact form. For instance, it reads, "Agricola, p:

because the competitors are not supposed to see yet what exactly is on offer.

Each player can decide on his own how many products he throws onto the market in the current round. Generally his decision depends on the overall supply and the attainable price. Skilled salespersons know that goods promising the most profit have to be placed where the customer's eye goes to first. That's how it works in game stores, too. Products lying on the bottom shelf of the shop window fetch the best price. Goods that haven't been sold become cheaper in the next round. If the markdown is repeated twice, the game will be completely removed from the store because it is not sellable.

After the stores have been supplied, the buyers come: geeks, represented by

simple dice. The result of the dice roll decides which store the geeks go to. Fortunately, we can change the result of the dice roll and relocate the buyers;. This debits our scoring account, however, which is indicated on the geek track.

Only when all customers have been placed do you turn over the tiles that have been lying face down in the stores. In doing so, it can turn out that one or another game box is empty, since each company has two blank tiles on offer that it needs to get rid of. When the purchases are processed, the order of players becomes important in the case of several buyers in a store fighting over the limited games on offer. The financial transaction

is only conducted one-way: the publishers collect revenue for the games they could sell, the buyers don't pay anything. Games from one's own company are not taboo, but they don't bring any revenue and also are worthless for the collection that is scored in the end.

▌ More competition is good for business

This procedure is repeated in the following rounds until the last tiles from the pile are revealed in the next to last round. In the final (sixth) round at the latest, all games must have been delivered to the stores. Then the scoring of what the geeks have bought takes place: One game from each opposing company with the same number in your collection is considered a complete set and gives you an especially high number of points. If the set is incomplete, only the printed value counts. Duplicate purchases don't score at all. The value of the collection and the revenue from previously sold games together make for the win.

Particularly if you have "cheap" games with lower numbers, collecting complete sets pays off since the point gain is really considerable in this case. The most expensive ones, however, have the same value, no matter whether the set is complete or not. In a five- or six-player game it's difficult to complete sets. Since only three copies of each tile exist, it's easy to compute that not everybody can achieve complete sets. With four players, however, sets are the rule. And with three players, the designer of the game felt obliged to manage the scoring completely differently, because otherwise all collections would have the same value in the end.

The different numbers of players affect not only the scoring. Each publisher tries to sell his products as expensively as possible, of course, but the best positions in the shop windows are not really scarce if you have only two or three competitors. As a result of this, the suspense is limited

if you are too far from the maximum number of players.

Richard Breese, as a game designer, has presented only a small but very nice body of recognizably good games so far. Above all the KEY series in which KEYDOM is considered the mother of all "worker placement" games. In comparison, the BOARDGAMEGEEK GAME is simpler. We distribute tiles in order to sell them profitably. Then we collect the other players' tiles and try to complete sets. That doesn't give much cause for profound tactical thought. And the few considerations mentioned in the instructions are obvious. People with a photographic memory may keep in mind what games the opponents still need in order to complete their sets. But they can't actively prevent these players from getting them sooner or later, because all tiles have to be delivered to the stores before the end of the game.

So the BOARDGAMEGEEK GAME is not a "must" in every player's household – if not for the theme and the really loving implementation. Everybody may decide for himself whether this is sufficient as an incentive to buy. By the way, the game can be ordered exclusively through the BoardGameGeek Store. *KMW/sbw*

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[1] Source of the Unilever survey: www.unilever.de/ourcompany/newsandmedia/pressemitteilungen/16112009.asp.

[2] An interview with the two BoardGameGeek makers, Scott Alden and Derk Solko, was published in spielbox 1/09.

Title:	The **BoardGameGeek Game**
Publisher:	**R&D Games**
Designer:	**Richard Breese**
Artist:	**R. Breese, R. Johnson**
Players:	**3–6**
Age:	**about 8 and up**
Duration:	**about 60–75 minutes**
Price:	**about $50**

Reviewer	Playing appeal
KMW*........................	6
Christwart Conrad**..........	7
Oliver Grimm	6

* With five or six players; for each player less, 1 point deduction.
** The more players the better. Rating applies to five or more participants

Available at: store.boardgamegeek.com