PERSPECTIVES
ON
GAME DESIGN

**An Inspirational, Educational Volume
To Remind Aspiring Tabletop Game Designers:
YOU ARE NOT ALONE.**

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ABOUT THIS E-BOOK

My name is Stephen B. Thomas and - among other things - I design tabletop board and card games.

I'm always attempting to improve my skills, and improve my chances at being picked up by a publisher some day. To that end, I sent out surveys to many of the fellow designers I know, many of whom have actually been published. One of the best ways to succeed at something is to learn from those who have come before you. So here's an attempt.

It's also my first e-publication, and I'm happy to share it with you.

Immense thanks goes out to the following, for whom my love for games and definitely my inspiration to share my ideas with the world might never have seen the light of day.

Randy & the Crew at Collector's Corner
Table Treasure Games
Spielbany
Games & Stuff
The Baltimore Free School
Tennessee Game Days
The Game Crafter
Board Game Designer's Forum

I hope you enjoy reading this small publication. I'm pleased with the end product, and immensely pleased that these fellow designers shared so much of their own time and thoughts to help make it happen.

Stephen B. Thomas
March 2014

1. ON BEGINNINGS

WHY have you chosen game design as a hobby or job? How did you start?

MANSEMAT @ BGDF:

'Cause I enjoy boardgames and games in general and have always aspired to create something (comics, games, screenplays, art etc). Since I'm not adept enough to program for videogames this also seemed like a good in-between.

JERRY @ BGDF:

I started designing board games when I was about 12 years old, because I didn't have access to many computer games. I just really enjoyed the creative process behind it. **To this day, I enjoy seeing other people get enjoyment out of something I create.** I hope to be published some day!

McTEDDY @ BGDF:

I programmed my first computer game when I was ten years old. I loved Nintendo and wanted to make games like that.

Went to college, worked as a game programmer for a while. Overtime took its toll on my wrists and I left game making to be a normal adult.

Turned out... game making IS who I am. Eventually, I gave up and started making games again. I spent a year studying modern board games and then got my first board game published.

CORSAIRE @ BGDF:

My dad was making games when I was a kid. I've accumulated skills to make computer games since my first computer. I really enjoy playing games. My first non-computer game design was a game called Orc Wars, a fantasy combat card game in the eighties that never went outside my college game club.

BABERAHAMLINCOLN @ BGDF:

Game design has seemed to emerge as my creative outlet. I'm a creative guy, but I've never really gotten past dabbling in any of the formal arts. My first game design started about 4-5 years ago, when I woke up following a vivid dream I'd had (about watching people play a game). After describing it to my wife when driving her to the airport that day, I returned home and spent the next 12 hours working on the design.

I've also played D&D off and on for 20 years, and in retrospect, creating characters, adventures and campaigns seem like an aspect of game design.

SCHATTENTANZ @ BGDF:

I like games and was stuck in a job that didn't challenge me at all. If I recollect right, I was searching for "free games" or something like that, when I found the Boardgamegeek [website]. There I found the designers' board the most interesting. **When the 4 tile contest was started in 2010, I was hooked.**

LARIENNA @ BGDF:

I always loved games, I first wanted to make video games but they demand a lot of time just to program and requires many other elements like music, artwork, level design. Board games are easy to prototype, play and modify. Which gives the opportunity to make much more solid game design with less time spent on coding.

It's also easier to see your game progress when there is no coding

to do. I am currently programming a video game and it looks like it's advancing like a turtle. The feedback loop is much slower than in a board game where within a week you can design, prototype, and test a game.

Before designing board games, I was playing and designing RPGs. But RPGs are much longer to play with and much more flexible. So you are not really making a game, but rather a flexible structure that can be used by the players. Board games are a tight, self-contained design where you have control on almost every variable. They are much easier to design.

Board games are also more accessible and playable out of the box. Non-gamers are more likely be willing to play a board game than a Role Playing Game or a video game. So board games in general have a wider audience.

MARKUS HAGENAUER @ BGDF:

I love playing games and I love to design things (I´m an architect).

BENAGY @ BGDF:

I have always had an interest in table top games since I was a kid. I designed a lot of my own, and would make new rules/content for games that already existed. But a year ago, I had a class in college where the final project was to launch your own business. I thought about it, and I knew I had to take my skills to the next level and take myself seriously as a game designer if I wanted to go anywhere.

MATTHEW O'MALLEY @ TABLE TREASURE GAMES:

It wasn't so much of a choice as a compulsion. I started designing games because I had a pretty long walking and metro commute, and designing games in my head was something to occupy my time. One of the things I really like about it game

design is that it encompasses so many different fields, much like directing a play or a film, but the end result is so much more interactive.

NICK FERRIS @ TABLE TREASURE GAMES:

I've always enjoyed playing games. I was heavy into Scrabble as a kid, competing in tournaments and even being nationally ranked at one point. As an adult, I was introduced to Eurogames, and I quickly found myself wanting to make my own.

BEN ROSSET @ TABLE TREASURE GAMES:

Put simply, because I love it! I guess it helps that I'm halfway decent at it, but really I just have fun doing it! It suits my personality and lifestyle, plays to my strengths, and stretches my brain in the ways it needs to be stretched (all reasons I love it, I suppose).

JOSH TEMPKIN @ TABLE TREASURE GAMES:

Game design is a hobby for me, and it always will be. I have a day job that I like and no illusions about my ability to make a living as a designer. (That, and my kids will be in college soon...) My grand hope is that someday I will break even with what I spend designing games and what I make selling them.

I grew up playing board games with my family. My dad taught me chess, checkers, backgammon, hearts, and … Diplomacy! I remember playing many games of UR Royal Game of Sumer with my mom. And my brother and I would get up at the crack of dawn every Saturday and play Monopoly for hours while watching cartoons. Eventually, I picked up D&D (though I don't now recall

how I found out about it). I enjoyed that a lot, and I spent many hours simply rolling up characters. I was able to spend some weekends playing D&D with friends. I bought many of those early AD&D books and actually read them.

Later on, I bought other RPGs, like Top Secret and Traveller. I loved creating new planets in Traveller! At some point, I found the Star Trek space ship game from FASA and the early BattleTech board game, and I thought those games were cool. They were big and complicated, but I had loved the Star Wars and Star Trek movies, and getting to act those out with such detail seemed way cooler than playing with my action figures. I don't remember getting to play these games very often with actual opponents, but I had found worlds to explore within the mechanics and I was having a blast.

I had a computer as a kid in the 1980s, and I subscribed to a magazine called "Ahoy!" for Commodore computers. (I actually even got a program published in one of their monthly challenges!) I remember that Orson Scott Card, the now-famous science fiction writer, wrote a series of articles on computer games. Here was a guy describing how to make games, and I guess I got the point that I could actually make my own games. I started dabbling in programming computer games.

Eventually, I started making board games and RPGs, too. With the RPGs, I didn't do much, just created look-up charts for die rolls. Most of my early board games were based on the coin-op arcade games that I played at the time. In particular, I tried to make a version of Star Castle. It wasn't very good. None of that stuff was.

I went to college and got a degree in math. Then I went to grad school and got a Ph.D. in math. In grad school, my fiancé's sister introduced me to Magic:The Gathering. I loved it! Here was a game that I could play, and I could change the composition of my deck to optimize my plays. It was like building the rules for the game that I was going to play. I was hooked, much to the dismay of my future wife.

When I finished grad school and got a job, I met folks that played Magic at work during lunches. From them, I learned other games, and I once again took off exploring all sorts of different worlds in CCGs. It was like that early experience with the RPGs all over again! At one point, I was playing 6 different CCGs at once, and I bought as many two-player starter sets from other games as I could find.

At some point, I decided to try to make a card game of my own, and I found a friend or two at work who liked to talk about games. We talked about this stuff regularly, and occasionally I would invite friends over to try new games, including some of my design. A couple of years later, I wanted to playtest more often than the occasional game night, so we formed a game design group (Table Treasure Games) so that we could test and improve each other's games. That group exploded in popularity and we steadily grew the size of the group. We've been meeting monthly for 10 years now, I think, and I couldn't ask for a better group to work with through all of the stages of playtesting.

As an endeavor, game design really speaks to me. I love seeing what I can create with a set of rules. (Maybe that's the mathematician in me.) I'm really interested in the stories that evolve through the players' interactions with each other and the game. As a designer, I think it's my job to imagine all of the different ways a game could play out and make sure that all of them will be satisfying to the players. I enjoy game design as a creative outlet, and the constant problem-solving keeps me on my toes. In the end, the overall process of game design is iterative – it's just the scientific method in a fun disguise! – so it comes naturally to me with my background as a scientist.

2. ON PREFERENCES

WHAT do you like the most about your favourite games (either yours or someone else's)? Why would you consider them your favourites?

MANSEMAT @ BGDF:

The place they bring me into, the story unfolding behind it and the general ideas in them. It's a different feeling than playing a video game and boardgames seem to have more deep and special subjects than other games.

JERRY @ BGDF:

Carcassonne is currently my favourite game. I love the random tile placement and jousting for land and cities as well as tons of replayability. All of which are my favourite things.

McTEDDY @ BGDF:

Mega Man 2, purely personal reasons.

As for board games, I mostly dabble. I would hesitate to call anything a "Favorite".

CORSAIRE @ BGDF:

Favorite games:
Advanced Civilization by Avalon Hill: it has light conflict, trading, development, a little diplomacy, and it rewards resiliency based strategies.

Stratego: It's a pure meeting of the minds and has some great "moments" of play.
Magic the Gathering: **It's a game of mini-game design.**
Le Havre: Always strategic, plays fairly fresh each game.
...hmm... some running themes are I like games that play differently each time and allow for a wide range of optimal and sub-optimal strategies.

BABERAHAMLINCOLN @ BGDF:

I like games that provide the opportunity to play the way you want to, or at least support a wide range of strategies and game play. Games with emergent play, sandbox, or open styles of play are my favorite (TES, Fallout, MtG, Civ, tabletop roleplaying games).

SCHATTENTANZ @ BGDF:

One keyword:
Customization.
I like games that play differently each time you play them.
In my games, customization always plays a role, whether you customize your "playing piece" (such as a hero you're playing) or the board (such as a track you are racing on).
Games always putting you into the same situation feel kind of dull for me.

SHOE @ BGDF:

I think truly GOOD cooperative games are one of my favorite things. I also LOVE cards, drawing cards, shuffling cards...Games that allow you to express your idea by crafting a unique strategy are something I love. Games that feel like a micro-game designing experience are super fun!

MARKUS HAGENAUER @ BGDF:

I don´t really have a favorite game. It very much depends on the situation and the group I want to play with.
Regarding the best of my own games I like that the games are

quite innovatve, not just a variation of Catan or Chess etc. or a mixture of [two or more published games]...

BENAGY @ BGDF:

Magic: The Gathering is one of the most inventive games out there. It was a brilliant concept, and they keep it fresh, by practically reinventing the game mechanics around the core rules every year or so. Choices is a big factor for me in games. That's where strategy comes from. And Magic has a lot of choices, from what cards to build a deck with to what card to play on turn 6.

MATTHEW O'MALLEY @ TABLE TREASURE GAMES:

My favorite games right now: are relatively quick to play so that they fit into my schedule; are fun; have meaningful decisions; and have plenty of interaction.

BEN ROSSET @ TABLE TREASURE GAMES:

A couple reasons. First is flow. When I'm playing a game I really love, I just feel like I'm in flow. I get totally immersed in it and lose track of everything else, and just become absorbed in the experience. Second is the personal challenge of seeing if I can "beat" the system, find the most optimal path. Third, I love how great games can present you with interesting decisons, where you don't really know what the best path is---you just have to go for it! I guess, in a way, that models life itself!

NICK FERRIS @ TABLE TREASURE GAMES

My favorite games are those that tend to have a deep, immersive experience while still being easy to jump into. I like a game that makes me feel like I have intelligent choices to make and that is distinctive enough that the experience sticks out in my head for some time afterward.


LARIENNA @ BGDF

I don't really have a favorite game because there are so many different style of board games. I could have a favorite in each category of game or a small group of my best games. Now one of my "problems" is that I hate most board games, my average rating is currently 4.73/10. So I am very difficult.

In order for a game to be my favorite, first it must have an interesting theme that I like. Second it must have a set of mechanics that relatively make sense with the theme. Third, it must not contain annoying mechanics which are either brain burning or on my black list (first auctions, worker placement is in second place so far). Fourth, it must be developed to its maximum capacity. Like Reiner Knizia said, most games are 80% finished, and that is a problem of many board games out there (especially kick starter ones), they are unfinished, not tested enough, or good ideas badly implemented. More work needs to be done to make it an awesome game. But most importantly, fifth it must be "Elegant".

Elegance is something that I am still trying to define, which is missing it at least 95% of board games. It is a property that makes the game feel that the mechanics looks like they were designed to fit with each other. **Game design is like a puzzle where any pieces can be attached to each other.** In the end, you are going to end up with a picture, but it might not be the most "Beautiful" one. What I am looking for are "Beautiful" game in a figurative conotation that I called "Elegant".

When all of the above is there, now I could say that the game is a masterpiece and it could enter my list of favorites. I still have a threshhold which allow almost "elegant" games to be included. They are really few pure elegant games, there is always something I want to change in most games.
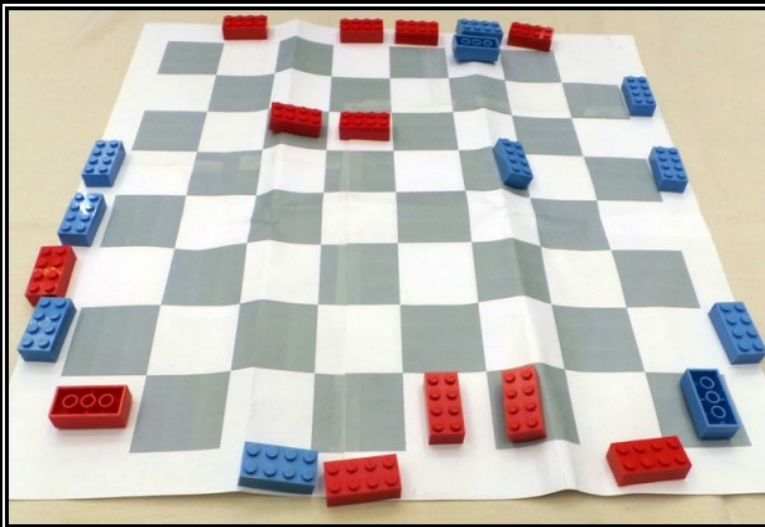
GAME DESIGN

If you don't make mistakes, you're doing it wrong.
If you don't correct those mistakes, you're doing it really wrong.
If you can't accept that you're mistaken, you're not doing it all.

3. ON "THE SPARK"

From where do you find the inspiration and ideas for your game designs?

MANSEMAT @ BGDF

From things I see and do and am interested in. From comics, games, movies, series to everyday happenings.

JERRY @ BGDF

Historical eras, for the most part. I enjoy creating a setting based on historical facts, but purely fictional. I also take Ideas from popular recent themes, such as zombies, or space sci-fi.

McTEDDY @ BGDF

The better question is where DOESN'T it come from.

Sometimes it's a movie or a video game... and sometimes it's general curiousity of "what if?"

CORSAIRE @ BGDF

I like to think towards a small set of constraints. Lately, "things that my son would enjoy playing" is a highly significant constraint.

BABERAHAMLINCOLN @ BGDF

I get inspiration from everything. Real life systems (politics, climate, economics), social encounters, dreams, books, history, wikipedia, movies, comics...

SCHATTENTANZ @ BGDF

I read game rules for breakfast.
And the 'geek and - since lately - the bgdf, too.
Reading other designers' ideas often sparks own ideas.

LARIENNA @ BGDF

First, from other games. Many times some of my designs are blocked because I am lacking a piece of puzzle to make it work. But when looking at other games, sometimes I discover a mechanic or a piece of mechanic that I can reuse in my game.

Second, video games are also a good source of inspiration for theme and mechanics. A few of my designs are actually simplifications of video games as board games.

Third, Life in general. **Various situations in real life can lead to inspiration, especially game theme.** It's important to look elsewhere than games when designing games.

SHOE @ BGDF

Everywhere...I find theme ideas from commercials, daily life, stuff I wish were a thing, but isn't.
I mostly get mechanical inspiration by finding mechanics in other games people hate and trying to make them fun.

MARKUS HAGENAUER @ BGDF

Most of my games are inspired by "geometrical relationships", but the first idea can come from everywhere.

BENAGY @ BGDF

Inspiration comes from everywhere. You can watch a television show, go to the park, read a book, or just talk with people, and you'll be surrounded by ideas for new games. The trick is finding them and using them effectively. But the best way to find inspiration is by playing and evaluating other games, and it's a skill that every game designer needs to cultivate.

MATTHEW O'MALLEY
@ TABLE TREASURE GAMES

Anywhere, but generally not from other games. Not that other games don't inspire me - I find playing other games absolutely necessary, and I love doing it - but the inspiration to create a new game generally comes from something in life not game-related.
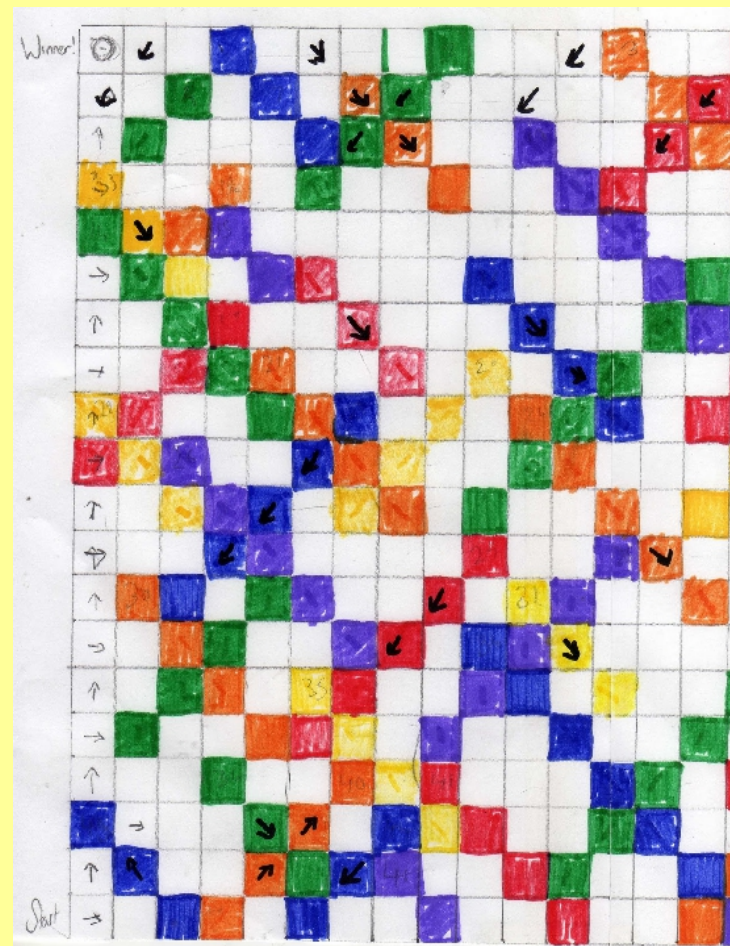
BEN ROSSET
@ TABLE TREASURE GAMES:

These days, I get inspired to make a game about a certain theme. Usually its either a subject I'm interested in (like the British Royal Navy), or its something that happens to me or something that I witness in the course of my daily life and I say "hey, a game about that could be interesting."

NICK FERRIS
@ TABLE TREASURE GAMES

Everyday life. Random things people say. Sometimes I walk around a craft store and see some interesting bits and think, "Hey, those should be in a game!" and then that inspires a mechanic that eventually turns into a game.

JOSH TEMPKIN
@ TABLE TREASURE GAMES

As I've grown as a game designer, my perception of the world has changed. I often see everyday choices as though they were game choices. Every now and then, I come across a particularly interesting choice to make, and I imagine embedding that in a game. I've also sometimes seen an image that strikes me as particularly interesting, and I'll think to myself "there's a game in there somewhere."

For my game Throne Dice, the original inspiration for the board was a design I saw set in the stone outside of St. Paul's Cathedral in London. The game itself came from a mix of other ideas, but it was the game board itself that started the process.

4. ON PROCESS

If there's one thing you could share with a new game designer about the game-making process, what would it be?

MANSEMAT @ BGDF

Don't worry that you're not being unique or that others have more resources, get more attention or seem to be more professional/better. Just do it.

JERRY @ BGDF

Don't be afraid to accept your game may be bad, or that people don't like it. You can't get offended or discouraged by this, because it will be part of your experience. Move on to the next idea, or modify!

McTEDDY @ BGDF

WATCH MY CHANNEL! http://youtube.com/mcteddygames

But seriously... the two things I'd share:

"Get ready to work your *** off"

My favorite quote regarding the game industry is:
- "It's not all fun and games... mostly just games."

Making games is A LOT of hard work with very little payoff. It's not something for everyone... but if you really want to make games... you better be ready to work.

"You are not an artist... you are an entertainer".
The player experience is the MOST important thing!

There are times when you'll find that players want a different experience than you wanted. Bad designers will stick with their own vision regardless of feedback.

Good designers will always consider what their audience wants. They won't ALWAYS do it... but they will always listen and consider it.

CORSAIRE @ BGDF

Try to walk the game in the head of a player, optimize their experience, look for the exciting story they can tell about the experience, then validate your assumptions.

BABERAHAMLINCOLN @ BGDF

Some things work, some don't. Don't get too caught up on one aspect or idea. Keep working and rolling with new ideas. Once you've seen a lot of stuff and have designed a lot of games, you'll have a better idea about what is good and what works.

SCHATTENTANZ @ BGDF

For each enthusiastic feedback you receive, there will be one guy who wrote it. For each not so enthusiastic feedback you receive, there will be at least one hundred folks who didn't even care writing.

LARIENNA @ BGDF

[This is] very hard to determine when you have a whole website with guidelines for game designers. There are so many essential things that must be said, myths that need to be broken, that it's hard to define the most important thing.

I think the most important thing to say is to break the greatest

delusion that you will make money out of your game design. You have more chance to make money by winning the lottery than designing a board game.

SHOE @ BGDF

NO COW IS SACRED. If something is shitty you have to be willing to scrap it.

MARKUS HAGENAUER @ BGDF

Never trust the praise of your friends. ;-)

BENAGY @ BGDF

Get your game out there! The difference between successful, published game designers and those that are all talk, is moving forward. you need to take an idea in your head and put it on paper. Then you must take that paper and make a prototype. Then take that prototype and playtest it, and put it in front of others. And do that quickly! Fail fast, or else you'll be wasting your time.

Too many early game designers take months or even years before they get their idea to "work" and be "perfect." And often, by then, they find out that their idea doesn't actually work, except inside their heads. **You should preferably be able to make your idea**

a reality the same day you have the idea, even if it's the worst balanced and aesthetically faulty piece of garbage you've ever seen. Refine it, but get it out there fast to see if it can work.

MATTHEW O'MALLEY
@ TABLE TREASURE GAMES

Focus on the following three things for every player's turn: meaningful decisions, interaction (h/t Eric Lang), and core engagement:

http://kevingnunn.com/2014/01/14/009-finding-and-serving-your-core-engagement-part-1/

If you can get the players to always be connected to those three things, the game will be successful at what it's trying to do. It doesn't mean the game will be a best-seller, because it might not connect with a lot of players for one reason or another. But it does mean that the game will achieve your design goals.

BEN ROSSET
@ TABLE TREASURE GAMES:

Test, test, test. Don't sit in front of your computer for a month working on a design, wondering if it will be any good. Just print it out and play it. See what works and what doesn't. Revise and repeat.

NICK FERRIS
@ TABLE TREASURE GAMES

Work on several projects at once. Don't spend all your effort focused on one game design, or else you'll risk losing perspective and not being able to recognize the things you're doing wrong. **If you jump between projects, it gives your mind a chance to keep rewiring itself,** and something you learn while designing

one game can help you improve a previous one when you come back to it.

JOSH TEMPKIN
@ TABLE TREASURE GAMES

DO NOT WAIT to show your designs to other people. I know folks who wait until it's "really ready." And then I never see their stuff. If you don't show people what you're working on, it's as if you're not working.

I meet regularly with my group and I put my stuff in front of them and they help me find the problems. Then I go back and address the issues and bring out a new draft of the game. Lather, rinse, repeat.

If I could share TWO things, the second would be to come up with ways to make decent looking prototypes quickly. You'll need to make changes frequently, so you want to have a smooth system in place so that there's no resistance to the idea of making new pieces.

For example, over time, I developed a way to print cards for my games. I use a particular weight of card stock so that it goes right in the card sleeve without having to fuss with a backing card. (I also buy sleeves in bulk, so that I always have extras to sleeve up anything on a whim.) I made a custom card template in MS Word (perfectly sized for my card sleeves), so I can make a new deck of cards very quickly and easily.

All of that evolved over time, but the end result is that I can create new cards in minutes and keep my focus on the design work.

5.   ON PLAYTESTING

What is the most important thing to pay attention to when you are in the playtesting stage with your game design?

MANSEMAT @ BGDF

That the game is fun and that you don't arrive at a point where you say "ok uhm this is kinda...idk" and then keep it in just cause of ego or laziness.

JERRY @ BGDF

Listen to feedback! Don't be so set on your ideas that you stick to them no matter what. If your playtesters tell you it's not fun, they're on to something. Ask them what they'd change, remove, etc.

McTEDDY @ BGDF

Don't just playtest with one group. Playtest with friends... strangers... other friends etc.

The more opinions you get, the more useful the feedback.

Also, in playtests keep your mouth shut. Players in the real world won't have a designer to help them. Sit back... watch and learn how real people are experiencing it. If you need to help them... make a note of it. You'll need to fix it in the rules after the tests.

BABERAHAMLINCOLN @ BGDF

Pay attention to the players. Are they having fun, or at least engaged? Is the game evoking the response that you intended? And listen to everything they have to say.

SCHATTENTANZ @ BGDF

Aim for proper targets. Miniature wargamers probably won't be able to discuss a childrens' game while 6 year olds won't understand the concept of your highly detailed wargame.

LARIENNA @ BGDF

Again [this is] very hard to determine because there are so many aspects to verify. I think the flow of the game is important. If the game slows down or blocks in a certain area, then it means there is a problem. Each element of a game needs a certain level of depth, expressed at it's simplest form and integrated with the rest of the game. That is somehow the key to making a flawless game.

SHOE @ BGDF

Fun. If players are bored, the game sucks.

MARKUS HAGENAUER @ BGDF

If the game does not work well, don´t change too much in one step but do the improvement step by step.

BENAGY @ BGDF

Is everyone having fun? And no, I don't mean your brother and your grandma telling you it's fun. Seriously pay attention to if people are having fun. A game can be perfectly balanced, but if it's too balanced, and no one wants to play it again, you've failed. What makes a game successful is when people are smiling, laughing, interacting, and genuinely having a great time. A great line I heard that you should look for from playtesters is : "Can we play again?" You hear that, and you've got it.

MATTHEW O'MALLEY @ TABLE TREASURE GAMES

Listen to what people are saying. **Don't defend your decisions.** You don't have to agree with what they're saying, but listen to them. If you argue with them, you'll end up with no playtesters left, and you won't get any meaningful responses from anyone in the group. Then take that information and do whatever needs to be done with it. Sometimes, a player wants to play a different kind of game, so you disregard that comment. But often you'll learn Something about the game by what they said.

I would also suggest watching the players' faces while they play. Are they confused at a moment where the move should be obvious? Are they frustrated by something? Are they thinking long and hard at a point where they should be?

NICK FERRIS @ TABLE TREASURE GAMES:

When you go into a playtest, if nothing else, bring along a checklist of what you had hoped to accomplish with your game. Check off the things your playtest proves the game accomplished, but add more items at the bottom when you recognize things you need to work on improving.

BEN ROSSET @ TABLE TREASURE GAMES:

When and how often the players are making interesting decisions. If your game lasts 60 minutes but the players really only make 2 or 3 truly interesting decisions during that time, then the game probably isn't going anywhere.

JOSH TEMPKIN @ TABLE TREASURE GAMES

I believe that depends on your goal for the game (and it's important to note that the goal can vary from game to game). For my designs, I am typically looking to give the player difficult decisions throughout the game.

If I find that a particular aspect of the game is either always or never used, then there isn't a decision there, so I need to make a change. For example, when trying to balance costs on abilities, I watch how often players use an ability. If it is very commonly used, then the players have probably found a good deal, so I increase the cost. If the ability is almost never used, then it's generally too high a cost for the benefit it bestows. Time to either increase the benefit or reduce the cost.

For a party game, on the other hand, the goal is generally about having fun without too many rules. **You should probably be looking to see if players are having fun. Anything that gets in the way of that should be fixed.** For example, look for fiddly bits that interrupt the flow of the game and then find a way to make it smoother.

6. ON PUBLISHERS

What's the most useful suggestion you could give to someone who wants to approach a publisher with their game design?

MANSEMAT @ BGDF:

Can't comment on this cause I have no idea either. I'd personally say: "believe in what you have made" but the cynic in me (and my experience) often refutes this (but it seems to work just fine for others!)

McTEDDY @ BGDF:

I actually happened to just do a video on that topic.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_oGYehDQKqc

BABERAHAMLINCOLN @ BGDF:

I haven't actually done this, but my advice would be to read about it. There's a lot of helpful information out and about on the internet.

SCHATTENTANZ @ BGDF:

In our society, the only thing of interest is money. The publisher does not need to understand the rules of your game. Instead he needs to understand, why your game will grant him profit.

LARIENNA @ BGDF:

I did not shop publishers a lot. One thing for sure, research your publishers and only submit those that would be interested in publishing the type of game you are making. Else you'll waste energy.

SHOE @ BGDF:

No idea, I'm terrible at this part. I guess be prepared for a ho-jillion rejections.

BENAGY @ BGDF:

Know the publisher. For example, Hasbro mostly deals with family games. If you're creating a game that's too "adult" for them, or that they're already producing. They won't care to see another idea from you. Now you can't always predict what they have in development that you don't know about. But if you bring them a solid idea and they are already doing something similar, they'll let you know, and want to see what else you have, so always bring a portfolio of a few ideas.

MATTHEW O'MALLEY @ TABLE TREASURE GAMES:

Be respectful at all times. Publishers are just like you, and they all talk to one another. If you are rude to one publisher, it will be much harder to get published by anyone. And since they are just like you, they have very limited time.

Most game publishers do it as a second job (like most game designers), and they may not be able to get back to you for quite a while. It doesn't mean they're ignoring you, or being rude, but they have to take care of their current designers and customers and games first.

NICK FERRIS
@ TABLE TREASURE GAMES:

It might take a publisher a while to recognize that they want to publish your game, **but they can decide that they definitely want to have nothing to do with your game in just 10 seconds.** Make those first 10 seconds interesting and it'll buy you an extra minute. Make that next minute interesting and you might be able to keep them enticed long enough to learn what your game is really about.

BEN ROSSET
@ TABLE TREASURE GAMES:

Research the publisher first. Don't try pitching a Euro game to a company that only makes war games. You're wasting your time. Also, blind test your rules at least twice before giving them to a publisher.

JOSH TEMPKIN
@ TABLE TREASURE GAMES:

When I have a good one of my own, I'll pass it on. Advice that I've heard going around (and that sounds good to me) include:

Look at what the publisher prints to see the kinds of games they are interested in. For example, Fantasy Flight Games and Out-of-the-Box Games and Playwright Games have dramatically different catalogs from one another.

Another is: Have a vision for your game and what it could be. A publisher may balk if they perceive that you don't have a clue what the final product might look like. That would probably mean extra work for them and probably butting heads when something "doesn't quite look right" to the designer. (In my personal opinion, it suggests that the game isn't even close to finished.) It's okay for your vision to evolve over time and during the process of working with the publisher. But have something in mind.

MARKUS HAGENAUER @ BGDF:

Do not take them too seriously.

7. APPENDIX:
ANNOTATED RESOURCES

I've collected a handful of worthwhile websites for you to visit. These are listed (and linked) here. In my opinion, these are all well worth your time and energy (and in some cases, hard-earned cash). It's not an exhaustive list, but it'll keep you busy for quite a while.

FOR STARTERS...

Board Game Designer's Forum

www.bgdf.com

This is my go-to spot for discussion and feedback requests on my own games, and to offer critique on the designs of others. Very friendly and supportive site. I picked up the bulk of my submissions for this e-book from BGDF.

Board Game Geek

www.boardgamegeek.com

The one place you need to go for anything related to board games. Seriously. There's a lively designer's community here, and from what I hear the competitions are lively, well-populated, and supportive of even brand new designers.

The Noun Project

http://thenounproject.com

[H/T to Matthew O'Malley] Literally hundreds of icons are available. Purchase them or make screen captures to develop iconography for your cards, rulebooks, dice faces, info chits, and other game assets. An impressive, expansive collection.

Game Icons dot Net

http://game-icons.net/

[H/T to Matthew O'Malley] Oh, so you need more icons? And you're too cheap to pay for ANY of them? **ME TOO!** Fortunately there's a growing collection of over 1200 icons available for folks like you and me.

BOARD GAME BITS - WEB RESOURCES

For those of you who haven't done this for yourselves yet, here's an excellent starter list of places to go to find quality game components for your prototypes.

The Game Crafter

www.thegamecrafter.com

This website has blown up over the past few years. I've developed a number of prototypes, uploaded my artwork, and had everything I needed for a complete demo-ready game for a publisher through TGC. Highly recommended.

Superior POD (Print On Demand)

www.superiorpod.com

Although I've not used them myself, their name comes up frequently as a possible outlet for prototype resources. Their quad-fold game boards are more affordable than The Game Crafter right now. They also host a storefront for your games. Definitely worth a look.

Drive-Thru Cards

www.drivethrucards.com

Although they don't appear to have blank cards available, Drive-Thru is a trusted platform for selling your card games. Browse their website and learn of the different options available for their POD offerings, including "freeware" card games available.

Print & Play Productions

www.printplaygames.com

If you're on the search for blank cards, boxes, sticker sheets, and other media of various sizes, this seems to be a superb resource. Boards seem to be a bit more expensive here, but blank cards are very affordable (though they lack a shiny clay coating, making these best for sleeves). There's currently a $15.00 minimum purchase to place an order.

eBay - Board Game Parts

www.ebay.com/bhp/board-game-parts

This is the search page for documented sales and auctions on eBay. If you're looking for replacement parts for a game you already have or want to make a spin-off or variant or something, you could do worse than looking here.

Meeple Source

www.meeplesource.com

If you're looking for wooden meeples (of course), wooden chips, wooden resource tokens, or polymer clay figures and resources, then have a look here. Obviously, their specialty seems to be wooden and plastic parts - not cards, mats, or boards.

Board Game Geek - Gaming Bits Suppliers

http://boardgamegeek.com/wiki/page/Gaming_Bits_Suppliers

I strongly suspect this list hasn't been updated as much as I'd like. But here's the go-to parts supplier list on BGG. Your mileage may vary... Be prepared to find broken links here or there.

Board Game Design dot Com

www.boardgamedesign.com

If you need a large-scale supplier for board game components, have a look here. Their website boasts, "Low Pricing - Low Minimums - High Quality." they also offer Game Designer's Kits for sale, with a host of game components in the same box and ready to use...Great for someone who is just waiting for an idea to jump up and slap them in the face.

Tom Jolly - Design Resources

http://beach.silcom.com/~tomjolly/design2.htm

A game designer and publisher has taken it upon himself to list part manufacturers, publishers, distributors, artists, and "other useful sources of information" all on the same web page. Well worth the look, and a great way to support a fellow designer. The page is updated every few months, so it's rare to find dead links.

Hand 2 Mind

www.hand2mind.com

This is actually an educational games and classroom activity supplier. However, if you look in their Outlet section of their website, chances are you'll find something useful and VERY affordable for the quality presented. Coloured cubes and figures frequently show up here, as well as a number of more obscure items useful as components. Plus, the other stuff they sell is VERY COOL!

EAI Education

www.eaieducation.com

I learned about this company's website through a forum post, and 20 minutes later I had dropped $100 on potential game bits like it ain't no thang (for those of you curious, for a guy who has worked in small-time non-profit organizations for the past 7 years, a hundred bucks definitely is a thang...But it's my addiction and I'm powerless to resist). Be sure to check out their Sale section.

THINKERS AND DO-ERS

Lew Pulsipher – Pulsipher Games

www.pulsiphergames.com
http://pulsiphergamedesign.blogspot.com/

I posted links to both of his main sites. I discovered him maybe a month or two ago, when I started visiting BGDF more frequently, and I'm happy I did. This guy knows what he is talking about. He designed Britannia back in the 80's. He has taught game design at

colleges and universities. He has online courses on game design and has released a number of the video lectures for no cost on YouTube. His thoughts on game trends and the big events I've never had a chance to attend like GenCon or PrezCon or WBC are all astute and well-composed, with great takeaways. Jump-start your design career by absorbing anything by this fellow.

Kevin G. Nunn – Mechanisms & Machinations

http://kevingnunn.com/
Hat-tip to Matthew O'Malley here. Nunn's multi-part assessment of the concept of "core engagement" was truly an eye-opener. Apart from that, Nunn is constantly updating his blog with more and more content, all valuable to the new and seasoned designer. Game design theory and practice are well-represented here. Have a look.

BONUS RESOURCES!

I'd created some game design courses a while back, and here are two of the handouts we used to deliver some key game design concepts.

Common Game Design Problems

http://www.let-off.com/bgames/game-problems.pdf
There are some common issues to beginner game designer mistakes. Have a look at this list, and avoid a couple of the more blatant ones.

Luck Versus Skill: Decision-Making

http://www.let-off.com/bgames/decision-making.pdf
Do you want the dice to do all the work, or do you want to make the players agonize over some meaningful choices? Have a look at this list and see what works best for your designs.

And here it comes...

`//END OF DOCUMENT`

"thank you for play!"