Board Games: Crash Course Games #14

Crash Course: Games
https://youtube.com/watch?v=TVm4ckokD84
https://nerdfighteria.info/v/TVm4ckokD84

Hi, I'm Andre Meadows, and this is CrashCourse: Games. Today, we're gonna be looking at one of the biggest genres of games, the games many players associate with family and friends, games that have been making a comeback in recent years, we're talking about board games.

Now, there are tons of board games out there, but we're gonna take a slightly different approach today and look really closely at just two board games that defined their eras: the family classic *Monopoly* and the game brought Euro Games to the US: *Settlers of Catan*, and we'll try to touch on how their histories and reception had helped define the genre.

(Intro)

Life, *Risk*, *Clue*, *Sorry!*, *Hi Ho! Cherry-O*, these are some of the many games that have been the cornerstones of the family game night for decades. Though board games have existed for thousands of years, these games have seen unprecedented popularity within the last hundred or so, and now have countless variations. Many of these games, though not all, could be called American style games. Loosely, these games are defined as having pretty long play-times involving luck and often staging conflicts between players. And arguably the most popular American board game has all of these qualities, *Monopoly*.

In 2015, Hasbro's Vice President of Game Marketing, Jonathan Berkowitz stated that over a billion people have played *Monopoly* around the world. *Monopoly* is played in 114 countries and has been translated into 47 different languages. It's a global game. So why is *Monopoly* so successful? It could be due to its easy to learn game mechanics, customizable game play, and broad audience appeal. Hasbro itself claims that one of the reasons *Monopoly* has endured for generations is that it offers a classic gameplay that appeals to kids, parents, and grandparents alike. But according to *The Monopolists* author Mary Pilon, *Monopoly*'s success probably stems from the fact that it has an element of roleplay, which provides people a context to do things that we can't typically do in real life. In *Monopoly*, that means playing the role of the rich entrepreneur, owning lots of property and making lots of money fast.

But *Monopoly* isn't without scandal. A game about making money fast and owning real estate having scandal? What a shock! Let's go to the Thought Bubble. Charles Darrow claimed to have invented Monopoly in 1933, while unemployed during the Great Depression. Allegedly, he developed the gameplay on an old oil cloth to entertain his family and friends. He became incredibly rich when he sold his idea to the game company Parker Brothers. It was a classic rags to riches story. But that's not really *Monopoly*'s true origin.

The game was actually conceived by Elizabeth "Lizzie" Magie in 1903. Lizzie was an artist, inventor, and feminist that opposed the business practices of some of the biggest industry titans at the time, like Andrew Carnegie and John D. Rockefeller. To voice her opposition to the injustices of capitalism, she invented and received a patent for a game called *The Landlords Game*. It allowed players to play one of two roles, as the monopolist, attempting to acquire as much wealth as possible while destroying opponents, or as the anti-monopolist, acquiring wealth fairly to win. Lizzie hoped that people would play as the anti-monopolist and start opposing the business practices of the time, and *The Landlord's Game* was sold for a short time and became popular enough that it was shared and expanded upon by other players. An altered version of *The Landlord's Game* by the Quakers was the game that Charles Darrow copied and sold to Parker Brothers as *Monopoly* in 1935. Lizzie eventually got some compensation for her contributions to the game, when Parker Brothers purchased her patent so they could enforce it against other game publishers who released similar games. Lizzie's game would reach a huge audience, but now it doesn't deliver the anti-capitalist message she intended. Thanks, Thought Bubble.

So, scandal notwithstanding, *Monopoly* also has its critics. Users of the gaming community BoardGameGeek rank *Monopoly* among its 20 worst games. That's out of 10,000 games! And FiveThirtyEight writer Oliver Roeder mined this community's reviews and found some consistent frustrations within its gaming mechanics, such as the fact that players can be eliminated quickly, making it pretty difficult to have fun when they can't participate. *Monopoly* also frequently suffers from a runaway leader problem, where a player's early luck quickly compounds into an insurmountable lead. The average playtime, around three hours, much of which is spent waiting on other players, probably doesn't help either.

Many of these criticisms stem from the American style of genre *Monopoly* helped define, but players' options would expand with the introduction of Eurogames in the United States. Eurogames are different from traditional American style board games in a number of ways. They generally have shorter play times, indirect player interaction, usually revolve around economic themes and emphasize strategy over luck and conflict. Sometimes these games are called German style games, as many of them are produced in Germany, which just so happens to publish more board games than any other country per capita. In 1995, *The Settlers of Catan* paved the way for the genre in the United States and outside Europe. It wasn't the first German game outside of Germany, but it was the first to see this kind of success. *Settlers of Catan* was created by the legendary German game designer and four-time German Game Of The Year winner, Klaus Teuber. Players act as Settlers on the island of Catan, hence the game's name. Players try to build settlements, manage the resources of wool, grain, ore, brick, and lumber, avoid the robber, and try to obtain ten victory points to win the game, and each game is different, since the board is made of multiple adjustable tiles that are placed randomly on the main board at the beginning of the game.

Writer and game designer Richard Dansky says that *Catan* is "A resource management game, defined by position and strategizing, a social game defined by horse trading of resource cards, a game of chance ruled by dice rolls and card draw, a hardcore game and a light social pastime and everything in between". *Settlers of Catan* has sold over 22 million copies and has been translated into 30 languages. *The Washington Post* called *Catan*, "the board game of our time", while *Wired* Magazine called it, "the *Monopoly* killer," since it has become one of the most popular board games of all time, rivaling both *Risk* and *Monopoly*.

Settlers of Catan has even gone on to spawn the Catan Championships, and in 2015 at the SPIEL in Essen in Germany, 1,040 people played it simultaneously, setting a world record. As part of a new and growing wave of analog board games are continuing to take hold of the public.

And board games aren't just a big deal within their genres. For example, *ICv2* states that sales of hobby games were up 20% from 2013, and were double those from 2008. The site also claims that American and Canadian citizens spent nearly $700 million on analog hobby games, of which $75 million were board games sales. 2015 data suggests that these overall hobby game sales are up nearly 26% since 2013. Now, these numbers pale in comparison to video games, but they definitely demonstrate an upward trend of tabletop and board game sales.

And with Kickstarter, an increased number of games are being made and supported by the gaming community. As of May 2016, there are 227 tabletop game projects on Kickstarter, with about a third of them being fully funded. So it seems like many people are buying games, and the way people gather around these games is

changing, too. With the introduction of the internet, more and more people are finding others like themselves to play these board games. In Germany, the city of Essen annually holds one of the largest tabletop and board gaming festivals in the world, known as the Internationale Spieltage, a.k.a the SPIEL. Last year, they had around 160,000 attendees and 900 exhibitors just for tabletop and board games, and people like to do more than just play board games and attend game-related events. They're interested in watching other people play board games, too.

On *TableTop*, a popular YouTube series, a different board game is reviewed each episode as it's being played. The hosts have reviewed everything from *Pandemic*, where players play as medics eradicating several highly infectious diseases from the world, to *Eldritch Horror*, where players combat Lovecraftian monsters while exploring the Earth. I was on an episode of *TableTop* once. #humblebrag

Tabletop gaming has become such a popular part of social life that board game cafés have popped up around the world, and can be found in London, New York, there's one in Toronto that's aptly named Snakes & Lattes, but Shanghai, China is currently the one in the lead, with an estimated 1,000 board game cafes.

So as you can see, board games are an important genre of gaming. Classic family games have infiltrated many people's lives, and the introduction and proliferation of Eurogames suggests that they will have an ever-increasing role, and we haven't even talked about the most popular board game in the world, but we'll get to that next week when we talk about gaming's role in education. Thanks for watching, see you next time.

Stan: CrashCourse: Games is filmed in the Chad and Stacey Emigholz studio in Indianapolis, Indiana, and it's made with the help of all these nice people. If you'd like to keep Crash Course free for everyone forever, you can support the series at Patreon, a crowdfunding platform that allows you to support the content you love. Speaking of Patreon, we'd like to thank all our patrons in general, and we'd like to specifically thank our High Chancellor of Knowledge, Morgan Lizop, and our Vice Principal, Michael Hunt. Thank you for your support.