

---

BOARDGAMES ARE FUN.

---

DON'T PANIC.



I suppose, all things being equal, you can totally panic now. There are a myriad of reasons to panic. My last two issues of this online concern have been a distraction from the odd here-and-now we find ourselves in.

So, for the first few months, it was *cute*. Some might call it novel. Which would be apt. But here we are, closing in on four months, and here we still sit. I am *NOT* one of those who is champing (is it champing? Chomping? I don't know) at the bit to get out of the house. But ya know what? It's safe in here. And Hamilton will be on TV next week. So I'll just stay put for now.

ABOVE: If you don't recognize the above image, you were clearly not an 11 year old boy in 1981, sitting alone in his room alone, laughing like a drooling idiot at this damn book. YOU THINK YOU'RE SO GREAT, DON'T YOU?!?!  

---

The truth is a bit more grim. Seeing as this part of the newsletter is my space to posit whatever the hell I wanna posit, and seeing as you subscribed to this garbage fire of a missive, you are a captive audience. I don't have a lot of captive audience these days, as the kids are very tired of listening to me spout off, so I will bend your ear for a moment.

I know, I know... who the hell wants to hear from me? I thought this was supposed to be about fun games I can play with my whole family, Finkel! Well. It is. You are free to scroll down, and I won't be mad at you at all. I sure as hell don't want to hear from me. But in the same regard, it also feels irresponsible to *not* say anything at all. So, allow me to preach to the converted and I'll try to keep it concise, m'kay? Or try to. Because a lot's been said, and a lot should be said, by people far smarter than this old idiot. Okay. Here goes:

When I started this thing, lo those six months ago, my design for it was a decidedly non-political safe space, where I could inform you about games I like that I hoped would fill your life with short-term joy and mental exercise. But last month, I tried really hard to write the next issue. *Really* hard. But nothing made sense. How do you write a stupid zine about board games when the world was coming to terms with its own horrible past? It was impossible. So I scrapped it. But now it feels like it's a little weird to *not* say something. So, here it is:

The events of May 25 put our already fractured planet in such new focus, one I don't think we come back from. And in many ways, I hope we never come back from. Look, I gotta be honest... I don't think I fully understood the plight of the African-American community. How could I? I barely understand my own life, let alone a life of experiences so vastly different than my own. But I will freely and willingly cop to my own shortcomings and ignorance as a human. I think it's fair to say that I never fully grasped the insidious nature of systematic racism. It's a sad part of the fabric of literally everything we touch, and the worst part is, as a white man, I have benefitted from my own ignorance. I have a decidedly different reaction to blue lights in my rear-view. I don't get odd looks that only I can detect overtime I set foot outside my front door. I don't have to consider what I wear on my head or on my back when I leave the house in the morning.

So, where do we begin to fix it? Maybe the only way to *really* begin is to start from here and go forward. Acknowledge the mistakes made, the blind spots we've all ignored and do better going forward. Apologies are quiet. Actions are loud. Black lives *do* matter, and we all need to rewire everything we know in order to understand this basic fact.

What's the point of all of this? Well, I suppose the reality is that, as I've stated so many times before, the great thing about board games is that, in theory, it allows everyone the ability to sit down, read the same set of rules and enjoy each other's company. I hope that's an allegory for 'life-as-we-know-it' going forward.

Obviously, this is a precariously tricky subject. A very wise man named Rodney and I have been talking this back and forth about this as I try to wrestle my feelings into a readable passage. He brought up an interesting point. It's easy to say: "There's a seat at my table for everyone" (which is, admittedly, where I started). I feel like we've been saying something to that effect for years, in attempt to be accepting. But what we're seeing is, while the sentiment is real, the action is a bit soft in its execution. Because, anecdotally it's kinda not true. While we've offered a seat at the table, we haven't actively sought to seat people of color at the table. More to the point, a lot of people of color have not *felt* welcome to take a seat at the table. Maybe it's not enough to merely suggest intentionality. It's time to start saying: *You* are welcome to sit at my table. Specifically, I *want* you to join me. Because you matter to me. Again, to quote Rodney, "we need their joy, friendship and perspectives at the table."

And the reality is that not *everyone* is welcome. Some people don't deserve to be welcome... people who refuse to acknowledge that systemic racism is a thing. People that refuse to move forward and change. But to those that have been marginalized for centuries, you are welcome. I want you here.

*Bet you didn't expect this sort of thing from a games newsletter, didja?!!* To my new subscribers, first of all, welcome. Secondly, this section is not usually saved for personal dogmatic screeds. At least not like this. Usually it's just about stupid shit I thought of as my own personal deadline nears. But since I missed a month due to where we are right now, it felt like it bore a few words. No matter how you slice it, it's tough. I'm sure there's a billion things in what I have written here that are either wrong, grounds for argument, or rage inducing. I'm happy to engage in any and all conversation, as that is endless healthy. In the end, there's only one way to address any of this: Just move forward and fix it.

I hope that we can move to a space where we can accept that different people's experiences *are* radically different than our own. And I hope we can learn from this moment in time. Look. There's a lot of ground to cover, and centuries of wrong to right. Lots to do and even more to undo. But I promise to do my part to not let us go backward. Black lives matter.

Thanks for sticking with me (if you have stuck with me). G'head and turn the page for more, won't you?

# BREAKING NEWS (BUT NOT ALL THAT IMPORTANT)

Okay, onto a bit more news, huh? Maybe not *quite as pressing*, but maybe you'll humor me a moment more? Please? PLEASE? Okay. It's this... I've started a website to contain my madcap brand of mischief. The website is called [BOARDGAMESAREFUN.NET](http://BOARDGAMESAREFUN.NET). Go. Check it out. It's got all the past issues, and in the future, I'd like to load it with new media and other crapola. I dunno... we'll see where it goes.

What I'd love from you is this... Pass it on to a friend. There's a subscription window at the bottom of the page... it only takes a moment. I promise not to overwhelm with emails. Hell, I could barely get this one out. But if everyone gets a few friends to check this sucker out, we will really be in business.

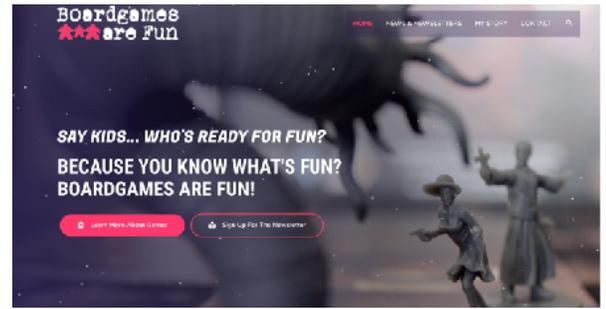
The truth is, we really need games more than ever. Things are batshit crazy, or hadn't you noticed? Games are one thing we can control. So let's sit down and play some stuff. Whaddya say? DO WE HAVE A DEAL?

Okay. Good. With that in mind, ON WITH THE FUN!

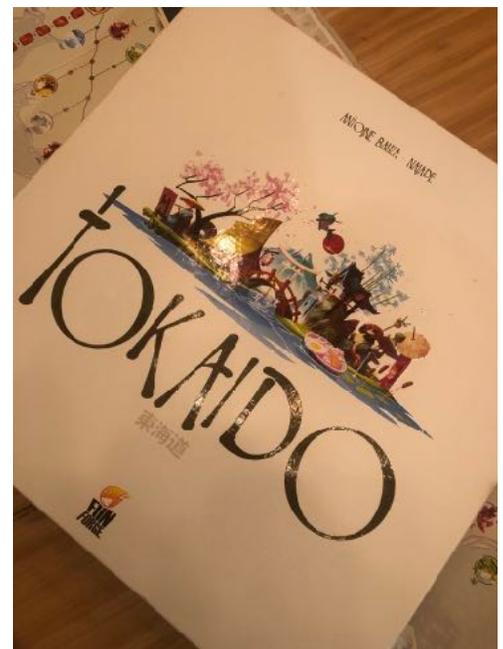
## THE GAMES...

**TOKAIDO:** (Available from Amazon for \$36.28) You are a traveller on the beautiful "Eastern Road" of Edo-era Japan. On your journey, you will meet many people, sample different foods, collect souvenirs, pray at remote temples, and learn to appreciate the glorious vistas you pass along the way. Tokaido takes a decidedly Zen approach to boardgames... the entire ethos is dedicated literally to the idea of stopping to smell the roses.

First of all, lemme say this: I'm not sure any game is quite this pretty on the table. The theme of the game is so overwhelmingly aided by its perfectly minimalistic aesthetic. And the idea is even pretty minimalist: As a traveller, your goal is, as the rules state, "to try to make this journey as rich an experience as possible". See the sites. Meet the people. Eat the food. Repeat. The goal is



Above: Look it! I've got a big boy website! That's a picture! From it! So visit it! And tell your friends! DON'T BE DUMB.



to get from one end of the Tokaido to the other, stopping along the way to really appreciate where you are, stopping at inns along the way. The rules are slightly upended here... the last person on the trail makes the next move, so you don't want to forge ahead



too far, A) because you'll not get another turn for a while, but more importantly B) because it's important to take your time and see the world spread out before you.

There are so many clever details to this game, many of them really so lovely to experience that I sorta kinda don't want to spoil it for you. But really... this has become quite the classic with many expansions on the market to enhance the experience even further. Not the most brain burning game out there, but then again, that is sorta the point. Truly a game about accepting where you are in the universe and learning to appreciate the here and now. ([Here's Rodney](#) teaching Tokaido. This is a ways back. His show has changed a bunch since then. And these kids are all like 15 feet tall now. Weird.)

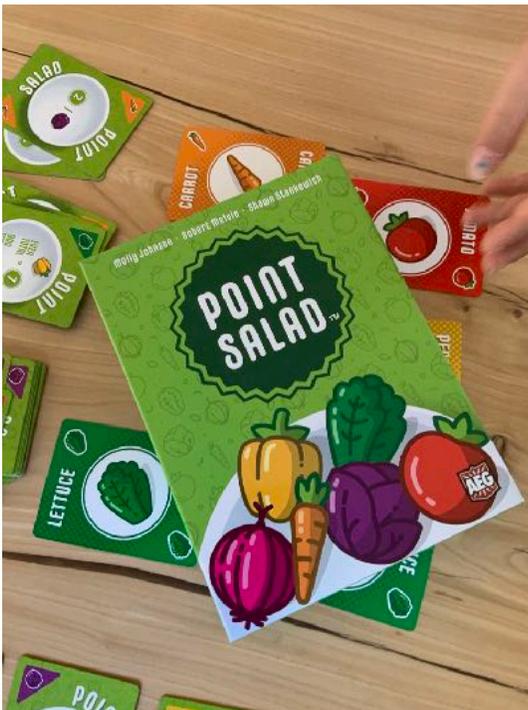
**SETUP TIME:** 10 MINUTES

**AGES:** 8+.

**PLAY TIME:** 45 minutes (or more. Take your time)

**COMPLEXITY:** 3 (OUT OF 10)

**POINT SALAD:** (It's on Amazon for like \$15.75. What are you waiting for?). In the



board gaming hobby, when a game has a wide variety of ways players can score points, some call it a game that is sort of "a point salad". Well. I don't. But I'm really interesting, fun to be around with an irresistibly kicky fashion sense. But someone took that gem of a trope and made a game out of it. And ya know what? It's a darn good game. Fun, too. (Those are the two criteria of a game: Is it fun? Is it good? This one checks *both* boxes. Wheeee!).

This game? All cards. No problem. Here's the thing: Each card has two sides. HOLD THE PHONE, you're saying. THIS IS MADNESS. TWO SIDES? SOUNDS LIKE WITCHCRAFT TO ME! Well. It's not witchcraft. It's just a game. WELL, WITH YOUR FANCY TWO SIDED CARDS, IT SOUNDED LIKE— Can you please stop? It's not witchcraft. It's actually far from witchcraft. If I had to put a theme on it, it's probably... vegetables?

Farmers Market? Something like that. Sound better? YES. Good. No eat your sandwich whilst I talk. As I was saying— Where was I? Ah. Yeah. So, one side of the card shows a veggie: Carrots, lettuces, onions... you know. Your vanilla vegetables. They form a sort of random market on the table. The other side of the card shows a series of equations that



will score you points at the end of the game. For example, one card might say something like “Collect a combo of carrots, lettuces and onions and score such and such points” or “have the most tomatoes by the end of the game”. The trick here is to figure out the balance of how many of these scoring cards to keep in your tableau to maximize your scoring: Too many cards can leave you with less combinations at the end of the game. Not enough cards will limit the amount of scoring you can achieve.

You need to be aware of all your combos before you to maximize point potential. Probably also good to be aware of what your competitors are looking for... they may be pretty similar. So if you think you need *that* card, you should probably take that card, as it will likely be gone

next time around. Ah, but what if there’s *another* card that whets your fancy (is that a term)? Well, pal... you can only take two market cards at a time. So figure it out. I’m not the boss of you.

Truly a fun, fast game for pretty much all ages (but let’s be honest... smaller kids *stink* at games. It’s ridiculous. It’s like they just don’t get it), but whenever that little green box comes out, get ready for a few replays... it just doesn’t seem to get old. (Here’s America’s pithy sweetheart [Becca Scott](#) from Geek & Sundry to teach it all quick-like...)

**SETUP TIME:** *Maybe 2* MINUTES

**AGES:** 8+ (the box says 14+, but nahhhh...)

**PLAY TIME:** 10 minutes (expect many replays)

**COMPLEXITY:** 3 (OUT OF 10)

**UNMATCHED:** (base game available through Restoration Games for \$40, expansion prices vary) Ever wonder what it would be like to see King Arthur duke it out with Bruce Lee? What about Alice (of Wonderland. Not Mel’s Diner. Although...) take on Bigfoot? What about Robin Hood and his Merry Men vs. the Raptors from Jurassic Park? If these have been long simmering desires for you, well, finally a game has come along to sate your every weirdo whim.



Unmatched comes from Restoration Games, who have taken on the incredible task of bringing re-imagined versions of long dead titles to market. Titles like “Stop Thief!”, “Fireball Island” and coming soon “Return to Dark Tower” (remember the [commercials?](#) Man, I loved this ad. Orson Welles and Fantasy board games? Shiiiiit. But more to the point... I *LOVED THIS GAME.*) Well, in the early oughts, there was a game called “Star Wars: Epic Battles” that pitted characters from the Star Wars universe against each other for head-to-head combat. This is a further re-imagining of that, but with endless bizarre combinations.

Before you is a board. Each player has their own unique deck and miniatures. Some characters come with aides-de-camp. Or minions. Helpers. Whatever. Robin Hood has his Merry Men. Bigfoot has the Jackalope. Bruce Lee has... well... nothing. He’s Bruce frikkin’ Lee. Bruce Lee needs no help from no man. The object is what you might expect: knock out your opponent. Use cards to maneuver around the board or spar with your enemy. But think it through, Quickdraw... are you positioned in the best possible way to garner maximum damage? Or should you lie in wait? Bruce is the deadliest man alive. But can he withstand the heat of... *The Jackalope?*

This is a truly fun, insanely hilarious, but pretty tactical game. The base game comes with Sinbad (NOT the star of “Jingle All the Way”, sadly. But maybe? In the future?), King Arthur, Alice and Medusa. Other sets sold separately, with new figures on the horizon. A silly, tactical, excellent game. Can’t recommend it enough. (Here’s Canada’s sweetest sweetheart [Rodney](#) to tell you alllllll about it...)

**SETUP TIME:** 5 MINUTES

**AGES:** 8+

**PLAY TIME:** 20+ minutes

**COMPLEXITY:** 4 (OUT OF 10)

Okay... I’ve got one more for you, and this one is a bit off the beaten path, but, please... go with me. It’s totally worth it. It’s called [The Quiet Year](#), (**available through [buriedwithoutceremony.com](#) as a downloadable PDF for \$7.33. I mean... come on. A bargain at twice the price**) The Quiet Year is technically an RPG, which stands for Role Playing Game (D&D is also an RPG, but this is decidedly not that. Just relax and stay with me). In reality, this is more of a map-building game, or a community building game. No matter what kind of game, in the end, this is an *incredibly* thoughtful game. Whereas in

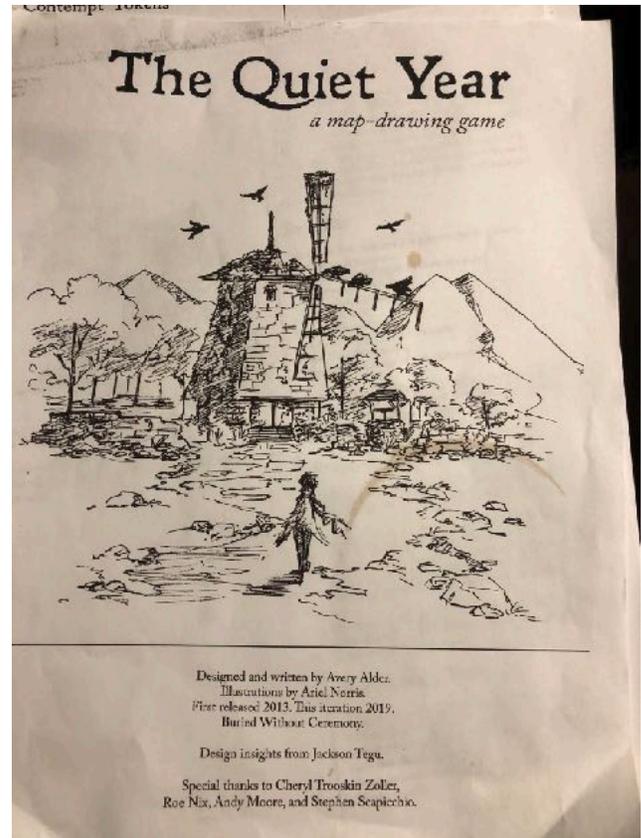
something like D&D, you're playing one character, fighting monsters and gathering treasure, in *The Quiet Year*, the group plays as one single community of about 60-80 members, trying to carve out a bit of civilization for themselves, figuring out how to keep the community afloat, group-thinking projects, fixing what's broken and warding off the inevitable arrival of The Frost Shepards, which signals the end of the year (and the end of the game).

Sounds heavy, right? What's magical about this game is how easily it scales based on who's at the table. I've played with kids as young as 8 and as old as time itself (me). And it works on literally every level. It can get as fantastical as the group allows, or as literal as you like. It's all up to you.

The other amazing thing about the game is how portable it is. Here's what you need: the printed out pages (there are 9 in total), one blank piece of paper, a regular old deck of cards, a few dice, some pens and pencils and some coins or chits of some sort (up to you what to use). **THAT IS IT.**

To give you a quick sense of gameplay, the idea is this: The community has just defeated something called "The Jackals" and know they have one year before the Frost Shepards arrive, so they have to do what they can to keep things moving: building food stores, uncovering mysteries, exploring, etc. At the beginning of the game, the group decides what the terrain looks like: Do they live on an island? A valley among the mountains? A dystopian city? Once this is decided, everyone takes a turn drawing one feature on the map: Don't be too artful... it's meant to be quick and map-like, no longer than 30 seconds per drawing. No one is allowed to say yay or nay about decisions made at this point: Is there an abundant forest? A rusted train track? A mysterious silo? All ideas go into creating the group narrative.

Next, the everyone in the group names one thing that this community has: plentiful food? Fresh water? Ample fishing? Make a good list, then the group decides: One thing on this list will be in abundance. The rest will be scarce.





Above: This is our map. Note the disused, overgrown amusement park in the center and the attacking giant moth. A lot happened in our year. And none of it was quiet.

The deck of cards will be set in order: hearts first (summer), diamonds (spring), clubs (fall) and spades (winter). Get it? 52 cards in a deck? 52 weeks in a year? CLEVER AF. As the group goes around the table, players draw the top card and look to the corresponding question on the enclosed table, answering the question. They and only they can decide the outcome. Each turn represents a week in the life of the community, and each decision must somehow be recorded on the map. Projects will be started. Group think will have to be addressed.

The life of the community is at stake. The lifeblood of this game is that each player's decision is theirs alone, but must take into account the overall nature of the community. Disagreements are dealt with quickly and there are no wrong answers.

At some point, the King of Spades will be drawn: The Frost Shepards have arrived and the game is over. What are the Frost Shepards? That's for the group to discuss at



the conclusion of the game. What is so amazing about this game is how thoughtful it is. Some cards will illicit bad things for the community... how will you brook it? Like in real life, there are no assurances... what seems like a good idea now, could very well be a horrible idea a few weeks or months down the road.



In the end, a broad map that tells the story of a culture will be constructed. Lives will be lost. Triumphs will be had. Discoveries will be made. I can't stress it enough. The Quiet Year is an incredibly special game. Please give it a try. ([Here's a playthrough](#) of the game, but I find it insanely boring. Seriously... the rules take about 15 minutes to read and about 10 minutes to teach... I suggest downloading, reading and diving in.)

**SETUP TIME:** 5 minutes

**AGES:** 8+

**PLAY TIME:** 4 Hours / full version, 2 hours / easier version

**COMPLEXITY:** ?? (OUT OF 10)

**Welly welly well... that's it for this month.** As usual, please contact me if you need any help, or have questions or thoughts. And I'd love to know if you've purchased any of the games I've talked about and what you think! IT'S VERY LONELY HERE. I'm just sittin' and god knows I've got the time. Also, if you like what you're reading and think you know of anyone who might like to receive these emails, please have them visit **[boardgamesarefun.net](http://boardgamesarefun.net)** and subscribe. You can also email me from the website if you have anything you gotta get off your chest.

Be well. Stay safe. Wear your mask. And for God's sake, play some games.