



Nerdverse Unshuffled

Show Notes

Episode 9: Play modes

2024-06-17

Episode summary and chapter markers

Board games are competitive, right? Well, actually... they don't need to be. You have a whole spectrum of options when it comes to the number of players and what "winning" looks like. To celebrate the diversity of board gamers and what they want out of a play experience, Jacques and Fayyaad look at the concept of play modes in board games. Because why stick to the expected when you can delve into other, more exciting options? You may be surprised by how many options you have when choosing board games to play. In this episode, Jacques and Fayyaad take a whirlwind tour of the most popular play modes, discussing plenty of variations and examples along the way. By the end of the episode, you should have at least one game or play mode to check out that you've never considered before.

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Resources and links

Nerdverse.co.za articles

- ⊕ Board Game Jargon Primer <https://www.nerdverse.co.za/category/everything/boardgames/board-game-jargon-primer/>

- ⊕ "It's complicated": A play mode for everyone. <https://www.nerdverse.co.za/everything/its-complicated-play-modes-for-all-seasons/>
- ⊕ Solo Game/Solo Mode. <https://www.nerdverse.co.za/everything/board-game-jargon-primer-part-8/#solo-game-solo-mode>
- ⊕ A.I. <https://www.nerdverse.co.za/everything/board-game-jargon-primer-part-1/#a.i.>
- ⊕ 1 vs Many. <https://www.nerdverse.co.za/everything/board-game-jargon-primer-part-1/#1-vs-many>
- ⊕ Deduction Game. <https://www.nerdverse.co.za/everything/board-game-jargon-primer-part-3/#deduction-game>

Games

- ⊕ *Monopoly* (1935) <https://boardgamegeek.com/boardgame/1406/monopoly>
- ⊕ *Snakes and Ladders* (AKA *Ludo* AKA *Chutes and Ladders*) (-200) <https://boardgamegeek.com/boardgame/5432/chutes-and-ladders>
- ⊕ *Ark Nova* (2021) <https://boardgamegeek.com/boardgame/342942/ark-nova>
- ⊕ *Scout* (2019) <https://boardgamegeek.com/boardgame/291453/scout>
- ⊕ *Wingspan* (2019) <https://boardgamegeek.com/boardgame/266192/wingspan>
- ⊕ *The Gallerist* (2015) <https://boardgamegeek.com/boardgame/125153/the-gallerist>
- ⊕ *Kanban EV* (2020) <https://boardgamegeek.com/boardgame/284378/kanban-ev>
- ⊕ *Forbidden Island* (2010) <https://boardgamegeek.com/boardgame/65244/forbidden-island>
- ⊕ *Mansions of Madness: Second Edition* (2016) <https://boardgamegeek.com/boardgame/205059/mansions-of-madness-second-edition>
- ⊕ *Cthulhu: Death May Die* (2019) <https://boardgamegeek.com/boardgame/253344/cthulhu-death-may-die>
- ⊕ *Pandemic* (2008) <https://boardgamegeek.com/boardgame/30549/pandemic>
- ⊕ *Thunderbirds* (2015) <https://boardgamegeek.com/boardgame/160610/thunderbirds>
- ⊕ *Gloomhaven* (2017) <https://boardgamegeek.com/boardgame/174430/gloomhaven>
- ⊕ *Nemesis* (2018) <https://boardgamegeek.com/boardgame/167355/nemesis>
- ⊕ *Dead of Winter: A Crossroads Game* (2014) <https://boardgamegeek.com/boardgame/150376/dead-of-winter-a-crossroads-game>
- ⊕ *Feed the Kraken* (2022) <https://boardgamegeek.com/boardgame/271601/feed-the-kraken>

- ⊕ *Fury of Dracula (Third/Fourth Edition)* (2015) <https://boardgamegeek.com/boardgame/181279/fury-of-dracula-thirdfourth-edition>
- ⊕ *Tragedy Looper* (2011) <https://boardgamegeek.com/boardgame/148319/tragedy-looper>
- ⊕ *Pandemic: In the Lab* (2013) <https://boardgamegeek.com/boardgame/137136/pandemic-in-the-lab>
- ⊕ *Pandemic: On the Brink* (2009) <https://boardgamegeek.com/boardgame/40849/pandemic-on-the-brink>
- ⊕ *Descent: Journeys in the Dark (Second Edition)* (2012) <https://boardgamegeek.com/boardgame/104162/descent-journeys-in-the-dark-second-edition>
- ⊕ *Mansions of Madness* (2011) <https://boardgamegeek.com/boardgame/83330/mansions-of-madness>
- ⊕ *Dungeons & Dragons: Wrath of Ashardalon Board Game* (2011) <https://boardgamegeek.com/boardgame/66356/dungeons-and-dragons-wrath-of-ashardalon-board-gam>
- ⊕ *Dungeons & Dragons: Castle Ravenloft Board Game* (2010) <https://boardgamegeek.com/boardgame/59946/dungeons-and-dragons-castle-ravenloft-board-game>
- ⊕ *Dungeons & Dragons: The Legend of Drizzt Board Game* (2011) <https://boardgamegeek.com/boardgame/91872/dungeons-and-dragons-the-legend-of-drizzt-board-ga>
- ⊕ *Root: The Clockwork Expansion* (2020) <https://boardgamegeek.com/boardgame/287220/root-the-clockwork-expansion>
- ⊕ *Final Girl* (2021) <https://boardgamegeek.com/boardgame/277659/final-girl>
- ⊕ *Friday* (2011) <https://boardgamegeek.com/boardgame/43570/friday>
- ⊕ *ROVE: Results-Oriented Versatile Explorer* (2021) <https://boardgamegeek.com/boardgame/342562/rove-results-oriented-versatile-explorer>
- ⊕ *Chess* (1475) <https://boardgamegeek.com/boardgame/171/chess>
- ⊕ *Checkers* (1150) <https://boardgamegeek.com/boardgame/2083/checkers>
- ⊕ *Backgammon* (1630) <https://boardgamegeek.com/boardgame/2397/backgammon>
- ⊕ *Splendor Duel* (2022) <https://boardgamegeek.com/boardgame/364073/splendor-duel>
- ⊕ *7 Wonders Duel* (2015) <https://boardgamegeek.com/boardgame/173346/7-wonders-duel>
- ⊕ *Wingspan Asia* (2022) <https://boardgamegeek.com/boardgame/366161/wingspan-asia>

- ⊕ *Concordia* (2013) <https://boardgamegeek.com/boardgame/124361/concordia>
- ⊕ *Concordia Venus* (2018) <https://boardgamegeek.com/boardgame/256916/concordia-venus>
- ⊕ *Two Rooms and a Boom* (2013) <https://boardgamegeek.com/boardgame/134352/two-rooms-and-a-boom>
- ⊕ *Blood on the Clocktower* (2022) <https://boardgamegeek.com/boardgame/240980/blood-on-the-clocktower>
- ⊕ *Captain Sonar* (2016) <https://boardgamegeek.com/boardgame/171131/captain-sonar>
- ⊕ *Magic: The Gathering* (1993) <https://boardgamegeek.com/boardgame/463/magic-the-gathering>
- ⊕ *Scythe* (2016) <https://boardgamegeek.com/boardgame/169786/scythe>
- ⊕ *Cosmic Frog* (2020) <https://boardgamegeek.com/boardgame/295905/cosmic-frog>
- ⊕ *The Shipwreck Arcana* (2017) <https://boardgamegeek.com/boardgame/220517/the-shipwreck-arcana>
- ⊕ *Decrypto* (2018) <https://boardgamegeek.com/boardgame/225694/decrypto>

Sources

- ⊕ Vital Lacerda <https://boardgamegeek.com/boardgamedesigner/12396/vital-lacerda>
- ⊕ Matt Leacock <https://boardgamegeek.com/boardgamedesigner/378/matt-leacock>
- ⊕ Isaac Childres <https://boardgamegeek.com/boardgamedesigner/69802/isaac-childres>
- ⊕ Friedemann Friese <https://boardgamegeek.com/boardgamedesigner/141/friedemann-friese>
- ⊕ Commander <https://magic.wizards.com/en/formats/commander>

Episode link & contact info

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- ⊕ **Episode:** [Nerdverse link](#) and [Buzzsprout link](#)
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Host bios

Jacques van Heerden is a writer, editor, and tabletop enthusiast who grew up gay and nerdy in a small South African town. Today he finds nerdy things to obsess about all the time. He discovered tabletop roleplaying games in his 20s, board gaming in his 30s, and he's been hooked on both ever since.

Fayyaad Hendricks is a board gamer, former video game reviewer, writer, musician, artist, and cook. He's got a love of trivia and horrid puns. He was introduced to modern board gaming in 2010 and has discovered much to love about this hobby.

Episode transcript

Welcome and intros

00:00:09 Fayyaad: Hello and welcome to Nerdverse Unshuffled, a geeky podcast where we introduce you to the language of board games. We are your hosts, Jacques van Heerden and Fayyaad Hendricks.

[Music]

If I ask you to imagine people playing board games, what do you see? You see two or more people competing to see who wins; people working together to defeat a monster, solve a puzzle; or someone playing a board game alone. Would it surprise you to learn that there are even more possibilities?

00:00:42 Jacques: So in this episode we discuss play modes: cooperative, competitive, and plenty of options besides and in between. Since play mode is a very high-level term that doesn't make much sense on its own, we're going to look at several examples in this episode. We'll discuss each definition in turn, and then we'll mention a very, very few select examples.

00:01:04 Fayyaad: Awesome. So we're going to cover each play mode in their own separate episodes sometime in the future, but for now we'll give an overview of all the different ways there are to play games because there are a lot more than you might expect. And by the end of the episode you should have discovered at least one new type of board game to explore. So if you're bored of always playing the same kinds of games, let's get ready to find out a host of other options from your hosts.

A little light reading

00:01:33 Jacques: So we do want to explain what we mean by play modes before we go any further. And because I contributed this entry to the book, I'll read this one myself! OK.

So traditionally, most board games are played competitively with individual players attempting to win the game by scoring more points than their opponents or winning the game in some way determined by the victory conditions specified in the game's rules. But games can also be played cooperatively, semi-cooperatively; on your own or in teams; as one versus many affairs; strictly as a duel between two players or with no more than a single player. These are referred to as play modes, a term that describes the different relations that players may have to each other and to the game's victory conditions. Each play mode has its own set of expectations that players may bring to the table, and the same game can allow several play modes either in the original base game or in the form of an expansion.

00:02:37 Fayyaad: Awesome, very well done. So why should we be including this definition? What makes it important to us to know about?

00:02:49 Jacques: So it was one of those... It was one of actually the meta terms that we introduced into the book that we hadn't really added when we talked, when we wrote the series of articles on the site itself. So the Board Game Jargon Primer contains a lot of entries, but it doesn't contain a specific one about play modes.

00:02:59 Fayyaad: Yeah.

00:03:09 Jacques: It also doesn't include a definition of competitive games, because we kind of assume people would know what that means, but once you start looking at different terms in comparison to each other, you kind of go, "As a new player, I would want more context about what we talk about when we talk about cooperative games." And then you start comparing it to other playing modes and you kind of feel like, okay, well, we're kind of assuming that you know what a play mode is. And that's kind of why also we added it to the book, and now we've got a whole separate episode on it!

Well, I mean I know we had a lot of discussion back and forth about whether we were actually going to include an entry about play modes in the book.

00:03:52 Fayyaad: Yeah, I think what prompted it more than anything else was when — because initially we were saying, yeah, we're not going to put in a competitive modes because the default for games is a competition, right? It's a competitive thing.

00:04:11 Jacques: Yeah.

00:04:12 Fayyaad: And when you say, "OK, but we need to kind of have an overview of what the others [are]", OK, that made a lot of sense to include; you're right.

Competitive mode

00:04:19 Jacques: OK, yeah. I mean, I think that covers what play modes generally are. Like I said, it doesn't really make any sense if you're not looking at specific examples. So let's look at the bog standard version of a game. So what is a competitive game?

00:04:39 Fayyaad: Right, so this is what you're going to see as the majority of the games you're going to play, right? It's that players are trying to win a game based on a certain winning criteria, but the core thing is that they're up against all the other players in the game, so they're not working together. They're

all in opposition, so there can only be one winner or, you know, or if it comes down to tiebreakers there might be, you know, tied wins. But the key is that each player is in it for themselves. It is a competition.

00:05:10 Jacques: So I mean, we don't really need to say much more about that because it is... I mean, most people understand what a competitive game is and are there so many examples we're not really going to get into very many of them.

00:05:17 Fayyaad: We've been playing them since we were six years old.

00:05:25 Jacques: Yeah, you know, *Monopoly*. *Snakes and Ladders*. *Ludo*.

00:05:29 Fayyaad: *Ludo*. Yeah.

00:05:31 Jacques: But there's also, like some of the games you mentioned in the Creators episode, so *Ark Nova*, *Scout*, *Wingspan*, *The Gallerist*.

00:05:38 Fayyaad: *The Gallerist*. Yep. *Kanban*. Yeah, well, most of what Vital Lacerda comes up with, the majority of them are competitive games. There's at least one exception to that. But the majority of the games you're going to see are going to be competitive in some way or another.

Cooperative mode

00:05:56 Jacques: OK. So on to the next one, cooperative games. So another play mode that's becoming increasingly popular is cooperative mode.

00:06:05 Fayyaad: Yeah, so you're going to find that not every single game is going to put player against player, like, you're not going to have "Me versus you, and I'm going to win all the money in *Monopoly* and you're going to be the one losing." No, in cooperative games, you've got players who are working together, right, to whatever degree it is. And there can be varied degrees. And they're going to look for some kind of end goal versus the game.

00:06:32 Jacques: Yeah. So again, we've spoken about some cooperative games before. We've spoken about *Forbidden Island*. There's an extent to which *Mansions of Madness* is cooperative. Well, second edition is cooperative.

00:06:47 Fayyaad: *Cthulhu: Death May Die*.

00:06:49 Jacques: Yeah, *Cthulhu: Death May Die*; that's fully cooperative. And it is one of my favorite modes of playing board games...

00:06:58 Fayyaad: Yeah.

00:07:02 Jacques: But so, I mean, are there any other sort of examples that we want to mention of straightforward co-op games?

00:07:06 Fayyaad: I mean, look, **Matt Leacock** is famous for, you know, developing co-op games. So yeah, *Pandemic* is the big one. And he also developed the *Thunderbirds* game, which is a tribute to the TV show *Thunderbirds*, featuring those puppets. And that's fantastic. It was really great fun. Yeah, I'm not sure what others you want to definitely mention, but they.... *Gloomhaven*.

00:07:35 Jacques: Yep. *Gloomhaven* is a good one. We've spoken about that one as well.

00:07:40 Fayyaad: Yeah, by Isaac Childres.

Semi-cooperative mode

00:07:40 Jacques: So yeah, so the definition for cooperative games does get more complicated.

00:07:48 Fayyaad: It does.

00:07:48 Jacques: We'll have a separate episode, like we've mentioned, on co-op games. But one kind of variation that you do get is semi co-op games.

00:07:57 Fayyaad: Hmm. Yeah. So you get the games where someone can be like a traitor, right? So you're ostensibly working together and sometimes there's one person that you do not know if they're with you or against you. And sometimes you get games that are purely semi-cooperative on the basis of everyone, you're all working towards the same goal, right? But you're all also... you also have your own individual goal that is at odds with everyone else's goals and may be at odds with the common goal.

00:08:33 Jacques: Yeah.

00:08:33 Fayyaad: I cannot think of an example right now. I know that they are; they do exist.

00:08:37 Jacques: So the example that I would use there is *Nemesis*, which everybody gets two personal objectives at the beginning of the game.

00:08:50 Fayyaad: Yeah.

00:08:53 Jacques: One is sort of... OK, well, it's not necessarily working against the interests of the rest of the group and one of them definitely **is** working against the interest of the group. And at a certain point, you can choose which one of those you're going to follow.

00:09:04 Fayyaad: Yeah.

00:09:06 Jacques: And everybody knows that there's that chance that not everybody on your team is working with you, but you don't know.

00:09:13 Fayyaad: That uncertainty, I think, is what makes the game fun.

00:09:17 Jacques: Yeah, and *Dead of Winter*.

00:09:20 Fayyaad: There's *Feed the Kraken* as well.

00:09:24 Jacques: *Feed the Kraken* and the *Dead of Winter* does that as well, so you... everybody has a personal goal and it may be a traitor. It may not, but yeah. So I mean, there's a bunch of games that we've mentioned here.

00:09:39 Fayyaad: That feature traitors and we've spoken about them before.

00:09:43 Jacques: Yeah. So. Again, that's, I mean, I'm not... We'll get into semi-cooperative more when we get to the Cooperative Games episode.

One versus many

00:09:55 Jacques: So I think there's a couple of extra ones that we did want to mention as well; a couple of extra play modes that are somewhere in between these things. So for example, one versus many games.

00:10:11 Fayyaad: Yeah, that's quite a big one.

00:10:13 Jacques: Yeah.

00:10:15 Fayyaad: So one versus many — let's get into the definition of that, right. It's that one player is an outright adversary. So unlike a semi-cooperative where you know one player could be a hidden traitor type thing — you've got no idea whether there's a traitor or not — one versus many, you **know**: one person is playing as the antagonist and the other players are playing together as protagonists, if that's the way you want to put it. But it just means that, you know, one player is working on a completely different set of rules to everyone else, and the win conditions are completely different. So I mean, some good examples, right. There's *Fury of Dracula*, which we love I think...

00:10:54 Jacques: Yes!

00:10:58 Fayyaad: ...where one player is Dracula, right, and plays quite a thoroughly different set of rules to all the others that are, you know, Mina and Doctor Van Helsing, and all of them, they're trying to stop Dracula.

00:11:13 Jacques: Yep! And don't forget Lord Godalming.

00:11:17 Fayyaad: Yeah, Lord Arthur Holmwood. Yeah, one I want to mention that we haven't played yet, but I'd love to get around to it, is called *Tragedy Looper*.

00:11:31 Jacques: OK.

00:11:31 Fayyaad: You've got one player who is the mastermind and he's trying to create this tragedy. You know, someone's going to die, someone's going to get killed. It doesn't matter. There's a tragedy happening. Right. And the other players are time travelers, and they've got to watch the events unfolding and try to stop the events happening within a certain number of time loops.

00:11:59 Jacques: OK.

00:12:00 Fayyaad: It's a fascinating piece of game, just because you've got the mastermind who's now also trying to outwit the other players, even though he knows what's going on.

00:12:10 Jacques: Yes.

00:12:12 Fayyaad: And if the others figure it out too easily, then the mastermind might also have a difficult time.

I did want to also mention *Pandemic*: there's the — I believe it's the **In the Lab** expansion, we might have to just do a bit of research and check if it's *In the Lab* or if it's the other one.

I can't recall which expansion is, but it adds the bioterrorist, right. So suddenly a game that was a fully cooperative game now becomes one-versus-many with the expansion where the bioterrorist doesn't have a pawn he moves on the board; he tracks his moves on a sheet of paper afterwards. But he's trying

to basically, you know, spread a fifth disease to cause more trouble for the rest of the players; as if the game wasn't hard enough.

00:12:58 Jacques: Yeah, yeah, it's *On the Brink*, I think.

00:13:04 Fayyaad: *On the Brink* expansion, right? Yeah, so we can edit it back in later on. So Pandemic with its *On the Brink* expansion adds the bioterrorist.

00:13:12 Jacques: OK, cool. Yeah. And I did also just want to mention the classic examples of one-versus-many, which is something like a campaign game.

00:13:22 Fayyaad: Yeah.

00:13:23 Jacques: Like *Descent: Journeys in the Dark*, second edition works like this. *Mansions of Madness*, the first edition worked like this and then they changed it; they replaced the antagonist player with an app.

00:13:39 Fayyaad: Yeah, that becomes an antagonist. I mean it, technically speaking, *Descent* is really just like a glorified, more restrictive *Dungeons and Dragons*, isn't it? In fact, the *Wrath of Ashardalon* and the *Ravenloft* that do look like that as well, right?

00:13:55 Jacques: Yep, *Wrath of Ashardalon*, *Castle Ravenloft*. There's *The Legend of Drizzt*.

00:14:04 Fayyaad: Yeah. So they all do the same thing, because like there is like a DM, a kind of a game master running the game with other players having the fun.

[Laughs]

00:14:19 Jacques: Yeah. OK. So I mean, those are just a couple of examples.

00:14:23 Fayyaad: Yeah.

Solo mode

00:14:24 Jacques: My other favorite play mode of course, is next, and that is solo mode. I love solo mode.

00:14:31 Fayyaad: Oh, I love solo games. Yeah. So these became really big during the pandemic for very obvious reasons, right. But a solo mode is a game that allows a player to enjoy the game without needing any other player around them. They can literally haul out the game — and that's what I do quite often — I haul out the game, set it up on the table and I play by myself. I'm not going to say, play with myself because that's different.

00:14:59 Jacques: Phrasing is very important. Phrasing is very important in this one, but actually it's... It's something that a lot of very serious gamers do get into eventually because, you know, it's hard getting people in a room at a certain time to play a game for a certain length of time, especially if everybody has different tastes. So I don't really like this kind of game or you don't like this kind of game, and I can't get you to play this game if I paid you. You could not get me to play a couple of games again under any circumstances, and that's just... That's just the facts of modern life. And it's all fine. And we love our friends, even if they don't love our favorite game. Ahem.

00:15:50 Fayyaad: Yes.

00:15:51 Jacques: But then in the book, you — because we did have an entry about solo mode in the Board Game Jargon Primer. Which is getting... which is eventually getting a book. We are working... I was supposed to be working on the book this evening, but we don't talk about that. But in that entry you describe solo mode as a gameplay variant. What do you mean by that?

00:16:20 Fayyaad: Yeah. So quite a lot of modern; well, newer games and more now since the pandemic than before. The game is, by and large, cooperative or competitive — mostly competitive, right. And just for the sake of people who want to, you know — who love the games but don't always have the ability to haul out friends from the closet, you know, handy somewhere, the game play includes what they call a solo variant. It's not the recommended way to play, but it is a variation on the standard rules.

And there's two large groups of this, right; the first one is "beat your own score". So the game — it's usually games that are like multiplayer solitaire, where everyone's doing their own thing on the table, and they're not really interacting much. You can play the game by yourself without the interaction of the others, and you're basically just trying to beat your own high score. Some games include a rubric at the end; they tell you, "Oh, if you score this much, you've done really well." Or let's say, "If you haven't beaten this score, you haven't beaten this mode."

And the other variant is an AI, or what they call an automa. Right? And it's... We use the term AI loosely in this case; not the one like ChatGPT. But it's a deck of cards — most often a deck of cards — that simulate a decision space for other players, so makes it feel like you're up against live opponents. And we're going to get more into this in a future episode, you know; the history of it and how it works and all that, but that's the basic of it.

00:18:13 Jacques: OK, so automa and AI are both big enough topics that then they'll probably get their own episodes. But basically, just like the short version is, it simulates a human opponent. But it also, like... when we get to that episode we'll talk about that, but I would want to talk about *Wingspan's* solo mode in that sense because it does something very different.

00:18:41 Fayyaad: The one I want to talk about in that episode when we get to it is *Root's Clockwork* expansion.

00:18:46 Jacques: Alright. Oh yes, you love *Root*!

00:18:50 Fayyaad: An entire expansion to simulate opponents and it does it so well and it's fantastic. I love it. You were saying about solo-only games, sorry?

00:19:03 Jacques: Yeah, so solo-only games one example that kind of springs to mind is *Final Girl*.

00:19:12 Fayyaad: Oh yeah; it's so thematic; it is so good and it's also an unusual... How do you put it? It's an unusual release mechanism with the game, as in you don't... The game comes with what they call the Core Box, right? But the Core Box just contains the rules, it contains the pieces — most of the pieces. And that's it, right? The rest of the game is released as what they call its themed boxes. It's each its own little adventure that styled after a horror movie and it's unusual, but it does allow a surprising amount of flexibility without having to release those core components over and over and over again. You just get the box with the new stuff. It's really cool.

00:20:00 Jacques: Yeah. And then some other solo... some other better known solo-only games are *Friday* by Friedemann Friese.

00:20:14 Fayyaad: Yeah. The other one I have to mention is *ROVE*. I'm not sure who that's by, but it's a gorgeous solo-only game and you are trying to get a rover across the planet. I must show it to you one day when you are over. It's really cute.

Two-player games

00:20:31 Jacques: OK. Then the other sort of popular play mode that involves a specific number of players is 2-player only games. Now these are often called duel, duet, or versus games, but the point is essentially the same: there are always two players and only two players. So we're not talking about games that go from 2 to 5; we're specifically talking here about games that are just for two people.

00:21:02 Fayyaad: Correct. In fact, mostly, most of them don't even go from 1 to 2; it's just two. So I mean, we're familiar with this one. This is I think one of the ones that we should be most familiar with in the form of *Chess* or *Checkers* or *Backgammon*. We played a lot of these when we were kids as well, right. And look: a lot of games — but when we're talking about specifically duet games, or versus games — quite often they are a branch off a bigger game that plays at like 3, 4, 5, 7 players. And it works fantastically at those high counts, but it doesn't always work so well at two players. And what so the designers do is say, "Oh, let's rejig the entire game and make it work for exactly two players."

So some examples — like one that's been making a big splash lately is *Splendor Duel*. There's *7 Wonders Duel*. Yeah. I mean, the game is usually different enough in its overhaul that you can't play it with other players, right? It's literally just the two players. And the mechanics are often different as well, because if they weren't, why not release... just give people the original game, right?

00:22:24 Jacques: Yes. And then there are sort of exceptional examples, like *Wingspan Asia*, which you can either add it to the base game or you can play it as a standalone between two players, is that correct?

00:22:39 Fayyaad: Yeah. So it's weird because it goes from one to two players as its own thing. So it's what they call "expand-alone".

00:22:48 Jacques: OK.

00:22:49 Fayyaad: That's the term they give it, right? So it goes... The *Wingspan Asia* box has enough components for one to two players. You can play it solo; you can play as two players; but if you add it to the base game, it pumps up the player count from 5 to 7. And nobody in our group wants to play it at the full seven.

00:23:12 Jacques: Well, I don't know. We might actually, depending on if we have enough people. But then again, we also might have some people just drop out that night. "No, I'm washing my hair." [Laughs]

Team-based mode

00:23:27 Jacques: OK. So then the final one we wanted to talk about as a separate thing is team-based games.

00:23:35 Fayyaad: Yeah. So that's literally exactly what it says, right: is that players are split up into teams and they play against other teams of players. And so when you win or lose, you're not winning or losing as an individual, you're winning or losing as a team. Some games, they're defined as team games from the start, right? So this game you can only play in teams. And some games only split up into teams and higher player counts to control for time, to control for complexity. So I'll give you an example of that; it is *Concordia*, right, which ostensibly goes up to six players with the *Venus* expansion, but they say if you're playing it at six players, you play two teams of three. You do not play it as individuals.

00:24:23 Jacques: OK. So yeah, so then victory and loss, I suppose, goes to a team instead of individual players.

00:24:30 Fayyaad: Hmm, yeah. So often to keep things interesting, right, the games, like *Concordia* — the games limit how much and to what extent team members can share components, right? You're playing in a team but you can't, you know... your stash of goodies is only yours. And sometimes they say, oh, you've got a shared pile of stuff that's, you know, go nuts.

Some games you have no idea who your teammates are, especially with like, social deduction games — like, no idea who your actual teammates are. I'll give you an example: *Two Rooms and a Boom*. You've got to figure out who your teammates are.

00:25:11 Jacques: Yeah. And the other one, the other example is *Blood on the Clocktower*, which I've played, but you haven't.

00:25:17 Fayyaad: I'm dying to play that one. I'd love to play it.

00:25:18 Jacques: And basically the purpose of that game, the thing that you're trying to do is you're trying to figure out who is in your team, who is on your side, and you have very limited information at hand to be able to figure that out. So again, it's like a team-based thing, but then there's sort of like a hidden... it might, it's like a semi co-op thing because it's like well. It's a very unusual example again.

00:25:49 Fayyaad: Yeah. The other one I want to mention is *Captain Sonar*, right. Which is unusual for a team-based game. The game literally plays best at the full player count of eight.

00:25:53 Jacques: Yeah.

00:26:00 Fayyaad: So you've got four team members on either side and you're playing as two submarines, but everyone on your team has a very defined role. You've got the captain, you've got the navigator, you've got the weapons guy. You're shouting instructions back and forth, and you listen to instructions at the side and you're trying to figure out where everyone is based on the instructions that's happening. Apparently it's glorious chaos.

00:26:26 Jacques: Yeah, yeah. I still want to play that. I still want to play that, and I recently found out that they've got a board game group at my company and somebody has a copy of *Captain Sonar*. I am going to... I will go to the office on a Friday evening to play *Captain Sonar*, which tells you how much how keen I am to try this out.

00:26:52 Fayyaad: Yes, I'm very keen to try out *Captain Sonar* myself.

00:26:54 Jacques: I mean, the appeal of team-based games is the chaos and then also the social aspect. So you're trying to like, you're working with people and you're trying to solve problems or, you know, overcome some sort of a communal challenge, but you're trying to do it faster than somebody else, or better than somebody else or, you know, more effectively or whatever.

00:27:15 Fayyaad: And some games, some games added team-based modes well after the creation of the game. Look at *Magic: The Gathering*, right; that's now got I think the team-based mode is the most popular nowadays.

00:27:23 Jacques: Yeah, I can imagine.

00:27:33 Fayyaad: What's it called, Commander?

00:27:35 Jacques: I haven't played *Magic: The Gathering* very much.

00:27:39 Fayyaad: Yeah. When I was a young one, we used to have a team-based mode called 3-headed monster and you played in two teams of three, right, but you can only directly attack the enemies, the foes to the direct side of you, the exposed side.

00:28:02 Jacques: OK.

00:28:03 Fayyaad: And that was called 3-headed monster. It was a fantastic mode, and I've played it a couple of times when I was young, but I've lost... I've got out of magic. It's too much of a money sink. He said as if board games aren't!

00:28:19 Jacques: Yeah. Yeah, well, you know. We have... we might have a separate episode or bonus episode on that, but...

How does this jargon help us?

00:28:27 Jacques: OK. So that was a lot. I think we were both surprised... Once we started looking at all the different play modes and like the complexity within each one, I think we were both surprised by the number of different play modes that there are, or the variations that there are.

00:28:44 Fayyaad: Just the sheer number of them.

00:28:46 Jacques: Yeah. But then obviously, like we always do, the main question we want to answer in this episode is: how does this jargon help us?

00:28:58 Fayyaad: So what you're going to find is that a lot of people actually prefer certain play modes to others, and it defines your level of comfort with how you want to interact with other people. So like, you are more comfortable with cooperative games; I'm you know happy with everything, but I tend to throw a lot of chaos into the mix.

00:29:20 Jacques: Yes, you do. [Laughs]

00:29:21 Fayyaad: So yeah. But you know, it also does, you know — knowing the play mode of a game really tells you the kinds of interactions you're going to have in this game. And I mean, you're going to find some players don't... you know, some groups don't enjoy hidden roles, don't enjoy traitors. Some players don't enjoy deduction games. And so they're just not going to...

00:29:42 Jacques: Yeah.

00:29:47 Fayyaad: Our group, we tend to be a fairly non-confrontational group. So the games that are in your face and really aggressive, are not going to be popular with my bunch to them as much as I love them.

00:30:02 Jacques: Yeah, I mean there are exceptions, but those are rare. And it's such a surprise when that happens. It's like most of the time, even when we're playing a very competitive game like *Scythe*, you know: There's no combat! No one's going out fighting. Why? Because it's a waste of resources. Why would I go out and fight someone thinking....

00:30:24 Fayyaad: But even a game that encourages fighting, and is all about the fighting like *Cosmic Frog*. You know, it turned out to be — when you're not doing the fighting, it's a very droll game. The fun is actually in causing the chaos, but we're not going to get that.

And look, there's literally a play mode for just like every group. And even if it's just you and no group, there's a play mode for that as well.

00:30:49 Jacques: Yeah, I mean, I think one of the things I'm really happy about in terms of like this, this particular term is just that variation and the diversity of the options that you have. So if you come up with a thing of like, "OK, well, I'm trying to find a game for my kid, and they're not at the age yet where they deal well with losing," you know, look for a co-op game. If maybe one of your friends is very opposed to hidden role social deduction games and don't enjoy it — I could mention names but, you know — pick a different type of game on the nights when that person is there, and then if they can't come, you know, then you can always haul out the semi co-op game or the one-versus-many and you know do something different.

But there's no reason to force anybody to play in any particular mode.

00:32:01 Fayyaad: Exactly.

00:32:03 Jacques: Like if you don't like co-op games? Don't play coop games.

00:32:07 Fayyaad: Yeah. There was one deduction game I wanted to mention and it's a co-op, purely co-op deduction game, which is unusual, and that was *The Shipwreck Arcana*. Do you remember that, where you put two numbers in front of you and you're trying to basically beat the clock?

00:32:22 Jacques: Oh right. Yes.

00:32:26 Fayyaad: And you can try to guess what the numbers are in front of other people based on what numbers they're putting back, and it's such a... I mean, I enjoyed it quite a lot. You enjoyed it as well, as I recall. And our other friend that night did not. He does not like deduction games at all.

00:32:39 Jacques: No! No, he does not.

00:32:48 Fayyaad: But it's an interesting mechanic watching co-op and deduction happening at the same time.

00:32:56 Jacques: Yeah. Yeah. And I mean then there's... I suppose *Decrypto* is just a plain team-based game.

00:33:05 Fayyaad: That's plain team-based, yeah.

00:33:07 Jacques: Yeah. So, I mean there is an amount of deduction going on there, but it's not social deduction, it's mostly just like trying to guess. But yeah, so I mean I think that's pretty much the reason we wanted to cover play modes as a separate episode. It's just because it does open up a whole vista of options for you as a gamer and as a consumer.

00:33:38 Fayyaad: Yeah.

00:33:39 Jacques: And it might actually just be worth trying out some of these different play modes, or maybe trying to convince your group to say, "Hey, like, let's try something different." But then also, you know just understand that each of these is such a wide variety of examples, that you could choose one or two of these and just keep playing and you'd still find variations and diversity within that one play mode.

00:34:08 Fayyaad: Yeah. Correct.

00:34:09 Jacques: If you do have a favorite playing mode that you think we haven't covered, let us know. We'll either add it to the book...

00:34:19 Fayyaad: Yeah, absolutely.

00:34:23 Jacques: ...or add it to the podcast episode list. And I mean, I've been... I'm fascinated by play modes.

00:34:33 Fayyaad: Yeah, no, they interact... the different ways to interact with people in a game and it is something to think about, that there are so many ways to interact in, so many ways to just play with other people, it's really cool.

00:34:49 Jacques: Yeah. And we'll cover multiplayer solitaire as well at some point, but that's not really a play mode.

00:34:57 Fayyaad: No, that's a whole term on its own.

00:34:59 Jacques: That's... Yeah, that's a whole other thing.

00:35:06 Jacques: Hey, so if you want to check out more about play modes and all the different versions and varieties that you can get, you can go over to nerdverse.co.za and look for a board game article called, "It's complicated: A play mode for everyone." Looking forward to hearing what you think!

Conclusion

00:35:29 Jacques: Thank you for listening! You can follow us on various platforms and join the conversation on Discord. Links in the episode description, wherever you found this podcast. You can find articles and discussions about the terms used in this podcast over at nerdverse.co.za. You can also find articles on a host of other subjects, including tabletop roleplaying games, interviews, events, and how-tos.

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