



Nerdverse Unshuffled

Show Notes

Episode 10: Weight

29 July 2024

Episode summary and chapter markers

In this episode, Jacques and Fayaad address the complex and controversial topic of board game weight — a tricky term board gamers use to explain how difficult a game is to learn and to play. They go into the different kinds of complexity that are included, discuss various examples across the complexity spectrum, and introduce (very briefly) the great resource site for board gamers, BoardGameGeek. As always, the focus is on helping you as a consumer figure out which board games are suitable for your table and your interests. And they finally get some listener feedback from actual listeners! They were very excited.

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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/>
- ⊕ Weight <https://www.nerdverse.co.za/everything/board-game-jargon-primer-part-9/#weight>

Games

- ⊕ *Dixit* (2008) <https://boardgamegeek.com/boardgame/39856/dixit>
- ⊕ *Gloomhaven* (2017) <https://boardgamegeek.com/boardgame/174430/gloomhaven>

- ⊕ *Europa Universalis: The Price of Power* (2023) <https://boardgamegeek.com/boardgame/254127/europa-universalis-the-price-of-power>
- ⊕ *Mage Knight Board Game* (2011) <https://boardgamegeek.com/boardgame/96848/mage-knight-board-game>
- ⊕ *The Gallerist* (2015) <https://boardgamegeek.com/boardgame/125153/the-gallerist>
- ⊕ *Ark Nova* (2021) <https://boardgamegeek.com/boardgame/342942/ark-nova>
- ⊕ *Forbidden Island* (2010) <https://boardgamegeek.com/boardgame/65244/forbidden-island>
- ⊕ *Ticket to Ride* (2004) <https://boardgamegeek.com/boardgame/9209/ticket-to-ride>
- ⊕ *Arkham Horror* (2005) <https://boardgamegeek.com/boardgame/15987/arkham-horror>
- ⊕ *Lisboa* (2017) <https://boardgamegeek.com/boardgame/161533/lisboa>
- ⊕ *Kluster* (2018) <https://boardgamegeek.com/boardgame/277458/kluster>
- ⊕ *Win, Lose, or Banana* (2009) <https://boardgamegeek.com/boardgame/47082/win-lose-or-banana>
- ⊕ *Happy Salmon* (2016) <https://boardgamegeek.com/boardgame/194626/happy-salmon>
- ⊕ *Monopoly* (1935) <https://boardgamegeek.com/boardgame/1406/monopoly>
- ⊕ *Terra Mystica* (2012) <https://boardgamegeek.com/boardgame/120677/terra-mystica>
- ⊕ *Power Grid* (2004) <https://boardgamegeek.com/boardgame/2651/power-grid>
- ⊕ *Pandemic* (2008) <https://boardgamegeek.com/boardgame/30549/pandemic>
- ⊕ *Roll for the Galaxy* (2014) <https://boardgamegeek.com/boardgame/132531/roll-for-the-galaxy>
- ⊕ *Cascadia* (2021) <https://boardgamegeek.com/boardgame/295947/cascadia>

Episode link & contact info

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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

00:00:07 Jacques: 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.

Listeners corner

00:00:21 Fayyaad: So before we get stuck into discussing today's topic, we've got some listener feedback after the last episodes.

00:00:28 Jacques: Yes indeed. In the Theme episode we asked listeners how important theme was for them and whether a bad theme would ever stop them from enjoying the game. And we actually got one response from Ethné; she says, "It can make a game more enjoyable when it's closely linked to the mechanics of a game. Like Jacques, I would find it disappointing if the box makes it seem like one thing, but then the actual gameplay doesn't match up to that."

This obviously proves that I am correct about everything. And no, I will not be taking questions.

00:00:58 Fayyaad: Actually, that quote does go on, as well you know. "I enjoyed going to that themes as well," she says. "For example, *Dixit* is one of my favourites due to the simpler mechanics, interesting art and psychology involved."

00:01:11 Jacques: Okay, so it's not really like a deal breaker, but it's a disappointment when it does happen. Meanwhile, we also had a lot of questions and input from Joe. Thanks very much for that, by the way. I really appreciate it. A few of those we're going to be saving for our season finale, because then we can spend more time on each of them.

00:01:34 Fayyaad: Yeah, good idea.

00:01:36 Jacques: But I think we could answer maybe the following question. "Are you planning to do any series or episode on strategies per game type by any chance? Styles of play is something important for me. I like playing certain ways and sometimes don't know which games to buy or play as I'm not sure which to go for."

So we did cover play modes in our previous episodes, but that's not quite what Joe's asking here.

00:01:59 Fayyaad: No, no, it's not.

00:01:59 Jacques: I don't know if you had any... I mean, we are going to look at strategy later on.

00:02:06 Fayyaad: Yeah, but I don't put a game type. That's an interesting one. It's something we can keep in mind for future episodes.

00:02:14 Jacques: Mm-hmm.

00:02:15 Fayyaad: But for now, if you have any other feedback that you'd like to share with us for this or future podcast episodes, join the Nerdverse Discord where you can chat with us directly, ask questions, or suggest topics that you'd like us to cover in upcoming episodes. You can also e-mail us at podcast@nerdverse.co.za. We do look forward to hearing from you.

00:02:35 Jacques: Yeah. So you've given us some food for thought there. We're going to need to figure out how to properly answer that question, but I mean, in the meantime, I think the Themes episode might give you some way in to go for that one. There might be some information in the Play Modes episode as well. Let us know if it did answer your question to some extent. But I think also the other way is just listen to some of the examples that we do discuss in the different episodes so that... I mean, you can kind of get an idea of maybe what the designers tend to go for, but I think we will get to some of that in in this episode as well.

00:03:31 Fayyaad: Yeah, let's see.

A little light reading

00:03:34 Jacques: OK, so in this episode we tackled the thorny topic of weight. No, not the mass of a game. Although it can get astronomically high, especially for big box games. With enough expansions, *Gloomhaven* may one day develop its own gravitational field. Instead, it's a somewhat controversial term used to describe how difficult the game is to learn and to play.

00:04:00 Fayyaad: Yeah. By the end of this episode, you should be able to understand the term and how it's used, and how it can help you pick better games, or at least pick the games that suit the people you're going to be playing with. But before this intro gets as long as the game of *Gloomhaven* — the common joke nowadays is *Europa Universalis: The Price of Power*) — let's get into it.

00:04:25 Jacques: Okay, so as we do with every episode, let's start with the definition from the *Board Game Jargon Primer*. Take it away, Fayyaad.

00:04:31 Fayyaad: Thank you. Weight refers to how complex a game is, but note that the use of weight as a metric describing complexity is a controversial topic. The number isn't an absolute: it can describe many kinds of complexity. So two vastly different complex games with the same weight number can be

games with wildly different types of complexity. Unless you actually played the game or read clever reviews or watch clever review, you can never be sure of the nature of the complexity beast.

Types of complexity

00:05:02 Jacques: Indeed. Okay. So that's a much abbreviated version of the definition from the book.

00:05:07 Fayyaad: Yes, it is. I could have gone on for ages.

00:05:09 Jacques: I know! But we'll add the rest of the definition as we go and discuss different parts of it. So to start with: in the article and in the book, you explain a bit more about the different types of complexity that people should know about.

00:05:24 Fayyaad: Yeah., I do

00:05:25 Jacques: So what are the two examples that we're going to be focusing on?

00:05:25 Fayyaad: So I think the two that we mostly focus on, right, because there's about five or six different types that get classified under Weight, but the two big ones are rules complexity. And that literally describes how many different rules that you're going to need to memorize to play the game effectively. Because some games, you know, the rulebook or the rules are a single sheet of paper, and sometimes it's a full-on book and sometimes even multiple rulebooks, and the more rulebooks there are often you're going to be looking at what's called a heavier weight game.

So here's an example: *The Mage Knight Board Game*. The one I've got is *The Mage Knight Ultimate Edition*. It's got, you know, one of the most ridiculously high rules complexities I've seen. Because there's just so many types of ways that you can do something, and edge cases, but despite the fact that there's so many rules, your actual turn-by-turn play, you're only dealing with like a handful of the rules at once.

And you're not going to need to do every edge case that you see that the rulebook can cover. But the Ultimate edition, it's got three rulebooks. It's got a reference sheet, it's got reference guides to keep on the table, and the game absolutely and utterly sprawls all over the table. It's insanely, what they call a table hog.

00:06:59 Jacques: Yes.

00:07:01 Fayyaad: And on the other side, you've got something called technical complexity, right? As an example, you've got... My favourite example of a game is *The Gallerist* by Vital Lacerda. It's a worker placement game, right, and we've discussed this in episode 4 and there's only four worker placement spots. But each step — the second you do a spot, there's like 10 to 12 steps that you have to follow to finish that action. It's crazy just how many decision points you have in this one little game.

00:07:38 Jacques: Okay. Yeah, I mean, so that that's actually like, one of those... I have played *The Gallerist* once. I completely did not follow anything that was going on or that I was supposed to be doing. But on the subject of this, we're actually playing the *Mage Knight Board Game* on Sunday this weekend, which will be my first experience of this, so I'm very interested to see how again, with the similar level of complexity, even if maybe the type of complexity is different, like how much easier it is for me to learn and play this game now, now that I've played — maybe not games that are quite as complex, but certainly sort of closer to this level of complexity.

00:08:31 Fayyaad: Absolutely. And I'm going to be keen to see what your experience is like.

00:08:36 Jacques: Yeah, yeah. I mean, we'll get back to that *Gallerist* example in a bit. But just on the subject of this, so a game that both of us have played already, which is one of my favourite heavier games, is *Ark Nova*. And I keep mentioning this, but how would you describe the complexity in that game?

00:08:59 Fayyaad: So just pure comparison, right: *Ark Nova* is way, way simpler than both *Mage Knight* and *The Gallerist*. But you're going to find that the complexity of *Ark Nova* is more on the technical complexity, not necessarily the rules complexity — your turn-by-turn plays are simple. That's literally 5 actions. But the second you make a choice is like, right: now we've got this sprawl of things that can cascade down after you've made your choice.

00:09:32 Jacques: Yeah, I mean that's definitely true. I've played a lot of *Ark Nova*. I haven't played that much of... I have played a *Lacerda* game since we started working on this project.

00:09:44 Fayyaad: Yeah.

00:09:48 Jacques: This podcast, should I say. I mean, I think that... That obviously is a more complex game. But *Ark Nova* is definitely the one that I would play more often.

00:10:02 Fayyaad: Yeah. So that we can understand the difficulty, the complexity levels — when we talk about BoardGameGeek a bit later, then we'll get into the actual weight numbers and you can get a better understanding of what I mean by *Ark Nova* being a simpler or a lighter game.

00:10:21 Jacques: Yeah. Okay, that's a very high-level kind of overview of what we're talking about. So this is more about the type of complexity that... The reason that this term is controversial is because it includes so many different things. But apart from rules complexity and technical complexity, what are some other examples that you were thinking of?

00:10:51 Fayyaad: Here's one you should be quite familiar with — familiarity-based complexity, right? Because sometimes it takes you like 3, 4, 7 different plays of the game before it actually clicks in your head and you get it. It's like, "Oh wait, now I understand how these actions chain together and cascade together, and how the relationship is between this action and that action." And at a point where you can say, "Right. Now I can actually plan ahead. I can play efficiently. I can do what I need to do without trying to remember either the rules or without trying to remember, okay, I see how that's going to be but now I can't recall the exact steps I need to get that." Or you start an action and you're like, "Wait, I realize I can't do that because I've forgotten that I need this, this, and this in place before I can do that. So now I've got to go back a step."

So you know, when you're familiar with the game, all that kind of falls away when you're not actually having to deal with the familiarity issue.

00:11:56 Jacques: Yeah, I mean that's definitely one of the reasons I've tended to go back to *Ark Nova* as well, because of that...

00:12:05 Fayyaad: It's familiar.

00:12:07 Jacques: It's familiar, but also, you know, there is that thing of like where you realize, "Okay, you keep making the same mistake and you need to learn how to think through what you're doing. You know, you need a little bit of practice." And I think that's also where, having played a variety of games that are — that use some of the mechanic or that maybe has a similar... I suppose basically like a defining mechanic. So playing more work replacement games makes a big difference because then you kind of get to figure out, "Okay, so these are the types of considerations I need to remember. And maybe this is why my strategy isn't working or what I need to do better or..."

00:12:46 Fayyaad: Absolutely.

00:13:01 Jacques: You know what to expect. I think it changes the type of frustration that you end up having.

00:13:10 Fayyaad: Yes, it does.

00:13:11 Jacques: Like, the frustration of, "Oh damn, I forgot to do this thing" is much different from, "I don't know what I'm doing and I don't know how to fix it." I mean those are very different things.

00:13:22 Fayyaad: Yes.

00:13:23 Jacques: So yeah.

00:13:24 Fayyaad: So just as a by-the-way, you know when we're talking about... You know, off-topic, when gamers want to talk about the physical mass of the game — you were mentioning *Gloomhaven* earlier — they talk about, they use the term "heft" to describe the physical mass of a game. And *Gloomhaven* it is... It's an aptly... It is 10 kilograms worth of game.

00:13:49 Jacques: A hefty game.

00:13:51 Fayyaad: It is crazy how heavy the box is. It is hefty.

00:13:54 Jacques: Yep, indeed.

00:13:56 Fayyaad: So you know, just to contrast what we mean when we talk about weight.

Examples of lighter games

00:14:00 Fayyaad: Maybe it will be useful to give some examples of lighter games that are not on the really difficult side of things, but are far towards the easier side of things. And what do you think.

00:14:14 Jacques: Yeah, sure. I suppose *Forbidden Island* comes to mind as a light game. It's a very welcoming, easy to learn, easy to teach, collaborative game. Yeah, so everyone's working together and you can talk through strategy. And you're working together to accomplish a goal as a team. But also, I think it's a sneaky way of teaching someone very basic elements of a cooperative game. So basically you're limited to a certain number of actions per round. In this case, you've got three actions out of a possible four. But you're allowed to take the same action multiple times in a row.

Each person has a different role that they play and each role breaks the rules in a very specific, limited way, so you... it's almost like a superpower. You can... Your character gets to ignore this rule that says you can't do this, and that is a very happy feeling. I think that contributes to why it's so easy to learn. But it's definitely also...

00:15:34 Fayyaad: Yeah.

00:15:36 Jacques: You know, there aren't that many rules that anybody has to keep in mind. So I mean, I think that all of that adds to why it is possibly one of the closest things we have to a modern classic.

00:15:47 Fayyaad: Oh yeah, I absolutely agree with you there. It is definitely one of those games that I think all people who are new to board gaming absolutely have to play.

Okay, for my example I think *Ticket to Ride*. It's also another really, really elegant way to introduce people to modern board games because once again it's so simple, right? It's, you know: on your turn you're either taking these train cards from the board or you're putting down plastic trains. And you're going to want to put down trains to score points. Taking the cards don't score points. And you can only do one of those things, either taking or putting down. You can't do both, and you often want to do both.

And I think with both games, the reason why they call them gateway games, right, is that they are an easy, a gentle introduction to modern board games and a lot of the conventions we use in modern games, right?

00:16:41 Jacques: Hmm. Yeah, yeah. Okay, I mean we could go on about examples. I mean we definitely do go on about examples. We do love, love lots of board games.

00:16:54 Fayyaad: (*Inaudible*)

Finding out the weight of a game (and more examples)

00:16:56 Jacques: But just coming back to: how do you as a person know whether a game is going to be too difficult for you or too complicated? I don't imagine that any board game publisher is including a sign on the box that says, "Warning! This game is supremely complicated and all your friends will hate you forever for trying to teach it to them." *Arkham Horror*, second edition would definitely start giving some of my friends palpitations, just if I bring out the box. It's like, "No, no. No, no, no. We have to go."

00:17:37 Fayyaad: When you talk about *Root*...

00:17:39 Jacques: Me? No, I would never talk about *Root*. (Laughs) So where can our listeners actually go to find out how weighty a game is?

00:17:50 Fayyaad: So, if... Most people who are already into board gaming as a hobby will know about the BoardGameGeek website. But if you don't — and I imagine there are quite a few people who have no idea of boardgamegeek.com — it lists a weight underneath the title of each board game and it's got an almost comprehensive list of every single board game out there. I think there's something like, ah, I'm not even going to guess how many different games.

00:18:19 Jacques: No, too many to count.

00:18:22 Fayyaad: It's too many. It's — you know, I'm going to say a low estimate of like 16,000 and I think that's a low guess... But what BoardGameGeek is useful, amongst other things, is that it's got the title of the game, it's got the player count, it's got the playing time, it's got the suggested number of players, and it's got (on the far right side) the weight of the game. And the weight number ranges from 1:00 — the easiest game ever. And I think that there are possibly one or two games that rate 1. I don't

reckon there are a lot of them. I've actually got one, which is... it's 1.06, I think, on the easy rating. And we've got all that up to 5 on the most difficult game, and I don't think I've ever seen a game hit 5. There are games in the high 4s, but I don't think any game is warranted a 5, just purely out of how complex it is.

00:19:25 Jacques: Yeah, no.

00:19:26 Fayyaad: But once again, it's important to know that this number is not an absolute; it's a guide, right? And it's going to be subjective according to how easy or how difficult your takes to grok information. So I was talking about, you know, the relative numbers early on.

So let's actually get into that, right. So *Mage Knight* has a weight of 4.63 — that is, now, as of the recording of this episode. And that's a crazy heavy game, and it shows, right? Three rulebooks, reference sheets, sprawling game, over 300 odd cards — I think it's over 600 cards actually — it's just a crazy, crazy, weighty game. It's a lot to absorb. It's a lot of rules overhead. It's a lot to think about when you're getting to the rules, but when you're actually playing, it's like, OK, I need to remember these rules. But I don't need to remember all of them now. I just need to refer to these ones that I do need. *The Gallerist*: it's a fair bit lighter, but it's rated 4.27, so anything with 4 or over is considered advanced level gaming.

00:20:37 Jacques: Hmm.

00:20:38 Fayyaad: Right. And then *Ark Nova*, let's get back to that. That's rated 3.76 that's approaching that for expert level, but it's not quite there yet and it's a whole — almost a whole weight number lower than *Mage Knight* in terms of complexity, you know, so 4.63 versus 3.7.

00:20:54 Jacques: Yeah.

00:20:58 Fayyaad: The difference is quite stark, and when you play *Mage Knight*, you'll see what I mean.

00:21:03 Jacques: Yeah. Oh, and just as an aside: *Lisboa*, which is another Lacerda game that we will get back to later on — that rates is 4.58.

Yeah, so the light games that we mentioned earlier: *Forbidden Island* is 1.74. So you can see it's on...

00:21:22 Fayyaad: The easy side, right?

00:21:23 Jacques: And *Ticket to Ride* is 1.83, so approaching intermediate but still easy. So you're mentioning you weren't sure which games would get like a one. So I found one that's 1.01, which is *Kluster*.

00:21:38 Fayyaad: Oh.

00:21:39 Jacques: I mean, that's... I can basically tell you what the game is in five seconds.

00:21:51 Fayyaad: All right.

00:21:53 Jacques: It's a string and a set of magnets, and the game is: you go around in a circle and everybody puts a magnet down inside the circle, which is sort of formed by the string and the goal is to put down all of your magnets before anybody else. But the thing is that if two of the magnets connect to each other, even if it jumps, you have to pick up all the magnets that have bumped into each other. And that's the game, so yeah.

00:22:19 Fayyaad: Yeah, that's a delight. The other one, the one that I mentioned earlier that's like 1.06 is called *Win, Lose, [or] Banana*.

00:22:30 Jacques: Oh my God.

00:22:31 Fayyaad: It's literally (laughs)... The game is literally three cards, right. Once says Win, one says Lose, and one says Banana.

00:22:37 Jacques: No, man.

00:22:38 Fayyaad: Right, the game is very simple.

00:22:39 Jacques: (Groans)

00:22:41 Fayyaad: You are offered these three cards. The person has to, you know, the person who takes the winning card automatically wins, right?

00:22:50 Jacques: Yes.

00:22:50 Fayyaad: And they're entitled to a banana. So you hand out these three cards; the person with the Win holds up the winning card and says, "I've won." Right? "I'm entitled to a banana." And now the other two players have to convince the winner that they're the banana!

00:23:06 Jacques: No.

00:23:08 Fayyaad: Yes. (Laughs)

00:23:09 Jacques: No, just no. No. Wait, now I have to check what *Happy Salmon* is.

00:23:16 Fayyaad: You know, it's one of those games that's delightful if you're drunk or high on a lack of sleep.

00:23:27 Jacques: *Happy Salmon* is 1.07.

00:23:31 Fayyaad: Yeah. OK. So look, *Happy Salmon* is also quite light.

00:23:37 Jacques: (Clears throat.) We will, we will, we will... We will not speak of this again. (Laughs) So our other favourite benchmark, *Monopoly*, runs in at 1.62. So it's not far-fetched for a group of 8-year-olds to roll out *Forbidden Island*. And they do!

00:23:56 Fayyaad: Look, when both my kids were eight years old, but having had an 8 year old at one point — at two points, actually — and one of them loved *Forbidden Island*. So I can testify to the fact that, you know, 8 year olds, absolutely adore *Forbidden Island*, and it's just as great for young players as it is for older ones.

00:24:14 Jacques: Hmm. And I think that's where we're going to take a short little break!

00:24:18 Fayyaad: Yeah. Catch you after the break.

00:24:30 Fayyaad: And we're back.

How does this terminology help us?

00:24:31 Jacques: And we're back. So how does this terminology help us? Or better yet, how does a game's complexity affect whether you want to play it?

00:24:42 Fayyaad: So this is an easy one, right? Because if you are, (A) new to board games, you're going to want to not be hauling out *Terra Mystica* or *Mage Knight* as your first game. And especially if you're hauling out games for completely new players, for a bunch of friends — you're excited, you want to show them what all the fun's about. But your shining example should not be *Gloomhaven* as something to introduce people to modern board games. It is... There are a lot of rules to *Gloomhaven*, for example, and you're just going to overwhelm people.

00:25:23 Jacques: Yeah.

00:25:24 Fayyaad: But if you've been in the hobby for a while, and you find that your brain kind of grows onto the complexity and you can handle more and more as time goes by — then by all means, look for the heavier stuff. But once again, what you roll out on any given game night or game day, it's up to what your friends want to play.

Opt for... Err on the side of fun, and not just because complexity for complexity's sake... Like I should, you know, I should learn this lesson myself.

00:25:54 Jacques: (Laughs) Yeah. Yeah, I mean, look, we do know — we play board games with someone who basically taught themselves modern board gaming by basically buying a whole bunch of games that were really highly rated, which ended up being quite complex, so it is possible. It is possible. We just don't... I don't think we would recommend it as the best way to go about it but like.

00:26:24 Fayyaad: No.

00:26:26 Jacques: Like everybody is everybody is different. But I can definitely attest to the idea that you can, like... Trying a game that is more complex than you're really ready for — it can be kind of off-putting, and maybe...

00:26:45 Fayyaad: Absolutely.

00:26:46 Jacques: And may take some effort to get over that experience...

00:26:49 Fayyaad: My excitement for board games did override, you know, the fun that games got... We got you there eventually, but it probably wasn't the best way to do it.

00:26:58 Jacques: Yeah. Well, I mean, you know. It's one of those things as well. So I mean, I think this is kind of leads into the next question I wanted to ask, which is about specific conditions that affect the kind — the kind or the level of complexity you enjoy. And I'm thinking here mostly about cognitive overhead. And maybe just some idea of like, OK, well maybe your day has been a particular way.

00:27:39 Fayyaad: We've had those Friday nights, right, where it's like, everyone is tired after the week; it's just been a week from hell. And we have in the chat beforehand, we'll say, "Look, it's been a bit of a week. Can we roll out a bunch of simpler games that we're playing for the fun of it and not because we want the cerebral challenge?" And then some nights where we're like, "You know what? Yeah, we can take on *Power Grid*. Let's go for it."

00:28:08 Jacques: Yeah.

00:28:09 Fayyaad: Yeah, look, not everyone's going to enjoy doing accounting and math on their board game nights. I mean, I certainly do, but it's not for everyone.

00:28:20 Jacques: Yeah, yeah. I mean, for me it's like I was saying: for me, it's about cognitive overhead, like how intensely have I had to think over the course of a week. And now you're asking me to first of all learn a new board game or in the second example, just play a game that I need to kind of maybe reread the rules a bit, watch the video again, go over, maybe make some notes, you know, whatever. (Laughs) But it's also what time, which day you're playing it on. Have you been working?

00:29:03 Fayyaad: Yeah.

00:29:04 Jacques: Like, are you playing it after work hours? Are you playing it on a Saturday or are you playing on a Sunday afternoon? I mean those things all like definitely in my experience make a difference to the level of complexity that I am going to be enjoying.

00:29:19 Fayyaad: Everyone's going to have, you know, those days when you feel like you can take on *Mage Knight Ultimate* and there are going to be days when all you can be up to is *Win Lose Banana*. (Laughs)

00:29:31 Jacques: (Laughs) *Win Lose Banana*.

00:29:36 Jacques: OK. So I mean one of the designers that we've mentioned several times now, in previous episodes and in this episode, is Vital Lacerda. So when you tried to teach me *The Gallerist*, that was a while ago, and I think it was back in 2019.

00:29:56 Fayyaad: Yeah.

00:29:57 Jacques: I mean, I've spoken about what that experience was like for me, but how was that experience like for you? I mean, what else did you learn from that, apart from exactly how grumpy I can get when I don't know what's going on in a game?

00:30:09 Fayyaad: I mean, I think what it pointed out to me is just how important — not important, but how different people's brains can absorb different things in different ways.

00:30:21 Jacques: Hmm.

00:30:26 Fayyaad: *The Gallerist*, I found for example my own experience was that I thought it was, "This is intuitive. I can see the links between doing this action and getting that and I can see exactly how to..."

00:30:37 Jacques: Hmm.

00:30:38 Fayyaad: But you clearly didn't get the same linkages in terms of... You didn't find it as intuitive as I did. And I think that's important, you know; we do have to take it into consideration. OK. Just because I find something intuitive doesn't mean that someone else is going to.

00:30:59 Jacques: Yeah.

00:31:00 Jacques: Yeah, I mean that's... I think that's definitely true. And there's also the question of some people find particular activities easier than others. So I mean, we've definitely got friends who avoid...

00:31:13 Fayyaad: *Root*.

00:31:18 Jacques: ... a particular style of game. (Laughs) *Root*. But also just avoiding a certain style of game because their brain doesn't work that way.

00:31:28 Fayyaad: Yeah.

00:31:29 Jacques: They don't enjoy the experience of doing this particular activity.

00:31:35 Fayyaad: So look, we've got one friend of ours who absolutely does not do deduction games because it just... He doesn't get it and that's fine.

00:31:46 Jacques: Yes!

00:31:48 Fayyaad: You know, we haul those games are now and again and mostly without him and that's fine.

00:31:54 Jacques: Yeah, I mean... That game is maybe complex or difficult *for him* for a very different reason than *The Gallerist* was for me. And I think maybe... Just getting back to Joe's question from earlier: I think one of the things to keep in mind when you're deciding what kind of a game to play is what you're actually going to be doing when you're playing it. Just because you're playing a board game doesn't mean that every board game involves the same activities, right?

00:32:30 Fayyaad: Yeah.

00:32:31 Jacques: So we talked about, we talked about *Power Grid* at some point, and that's a lot of maths. Like you're doing a lot of calculations in your head — like the whole game is calculations. So that's very different from a game like, well, any kind of deduction game where you're trying to guess what people are doing and figure out if they're bluffing or telling the truth, or what's going on.

00:32:59 Fayyaad: And that's different to something like *Forbidden Island* where you are working together and you can actually chat it out or like *Pandemic* as well, which is also another cooperative game where you can talk out your strategies and say, "Okay, this is what I think I want to do. Does that, you know... What do you guys think?"

00:33:19 Jacques: Mmm.

00:33:20 Fayyaad: I mean, that does open itself to another problem that we'll talk about in a future episode, but yeah. Each person's brain is going to be different and it's going to have a different threshold of what they are able to deal with.

00:33:35 Jacques: Yeah. Okay. And then getting back to I think this idea of familiarity-based complexity that you mentioned earlier. Again, I mentioned *Lisboa* earlier, which is also by Vital Lacerda, and it's rated as slightly more complex than *The Gallerist*.

00:33:54 Fayyaad: Yes, it is.

00:33:55 Jacques: To be fair, it's only difference of .31 on that BGG scale.

00:33:59 Fayyaad: Yeah.

00:34:00 Jacques: And yet, when I played it recently I found it so much easier to learn.

00:34:09 Fayyaad: Why do you think that is?

00:34:09 Jacques: Like, you would not believe how much simpler that was than trying to teach me *The Gallerist*. And I thought about this for this episode and I think I've discovered a couple of factors that influence the difference.

So first of all, it's the familiarity with similar games, especially games of a — maybe not of a similar weight, but sort of approaching that level of complexity.

00:34:37 Fayyaad: In that weight range, yeah.

00:34:41 Jacques: Yeah. Also just being more familiar with the types of mechanics that are in that game that kind of fit together. So you know when you're learning the rules, it makes better sense because you've had more — I've had more experience with the separate mechanics that make up this game.

00:35:05 Fayyaad: Yeah.

00:35:07 Jacques: So then the other thing was that for me it had a really solid theme. So it really helped me make sense of the rules and what I should be doing.

00:35:18 Fayyaad: And also, don't roll out a really complicated game at the end of an evening, which is what I'm guilty of doing often.

00:35:23 Jacques: Oh yeah. (*Clears throat.*) Well, I mean, you do... You did give us a... When we played *Root*, that was all we played and I still had no idea what I was doing, so... But every so—

00:35:38 Fayyaad: There was *Roll for the Galaxy*.

00:35:38 Jacques: Yeah, *Roll for the Galaxy*, I think... If I've played two games that I'm playing for the first time, don't try and teach me a third game, it's not going to work.

And I need to remember this for myself when I go back to my friends that I used to play board games with very often. But now I need to try and apply all these rules and all these lessons, you know, when I go back and actually teach them. It's like, "Hey, there's this, like... I love *Cascadia*. *Cascadia* is great. It's really simple to learn if you know a little bit about this stuff.

00:36:20 Fayyaad: So right. Like it seemed like the psychology back there is something I think I've mentioned before; it's called the curse of knowledge. It's that we forget what it's like to not know something. I'm just as guilty of it. It is a terrible curse.

00:36:37 Jacques: Yeah, I mean again. It gets us back to why we started this podcast in the first place, right?

00:36:42 Fayyaad: Yeah, exactly.

00:36:44 Jacques: Because board gamers are often the worst thing. The worst way to be introduced to board games is: ask a board gamer about board games and they will talk your ear off and you will not understand a single thing that they're talking about.

So hopefully, *hopefully* this has made this whole issue of weight and, you know, picking games and which games you play, where do you start? Where do you end? Hopefully that's made this a little bit easier. Let us know if it has or if it hasn't, or if you've got any particular questions that you specifically want to ask.

00:37:25 Fayyaad: Yeah, we'd love to hear from you.

00:37:26 Jacques: Yeah, I think that's kind of what we wanted to cover. I don't know if there was anything that you wanted to bring up.

00:37:34 Fayyaad: This is getting heavy. Let's put it down.

(Laughs)

00:37:38 Jacques: Hmm. Yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. But thanks very much for listening, everyone.

00:37:45 Fayyaad: Thank you very much.

00:37:45 Jacques: And keep sending us your questions and comments, please. We really do appreciate the interaction.

00:37:53 Fayyaad: Yeah. And as always, happy gaming.

Conclusion

(Music)

00:38:00 Fayyaad: 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.

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Your hosts were Jacques van Heerden and Fayyaad Hendricks. Music, editing, producer: Fayyaad Hendricks. Executive producer: Jacques van Heerden. Unshuffled is a Nerdverse Productions podcast.

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