



Nerdverse Unshuffled

Show Notes

Episode 11: BoardGameGeek, part one

26 August 2024

Episode summary and chapter markers

In this episode, Jacques and Fayaad introduce the encyclopedia of board games, the board gamer's bible, the wiki of all things hobby related: BoardGameGeek. This amazing website holds many secrets and surprises – so many that it's going to take your hosts two episodes to get through an overview of its best features. Bookmark this site now, because if you're going to explore the hobby at any depth, you're going to be coming back to this often, and with increasing frequency as you find more cool stuff to learn about.

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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/>

Games

- ⊕ *Raiders of the North Sea* (2015) <https://boardgamegeek.com/boardgame/170042/raiders-of-the-north-sea>

- ⊕ *Architects of the West Kingdom* (2018) <https://boardgamegeek.com/boardgame/236457/architects-of-the-west-kingdom>
- ⊕ *Arkham Horror* (2005) <https://boardgamegeek.com/boardgame/15987/arkham-horror>
- ⊕ *Brass: Birmingham* (2018) <https://boardgamegeek.com/boardgame/224517/brass-birmingham>
- ⊕ *Gloomhaven* (2017) <https://boardgamegeek.com/boardgame/174430/gloomhaven>
- ⊕ *Twilight Imperium: Fourth Edition* (2017) <https://boardgamegeek.com/boardgame/233078/twilight-imperium-fourth-edition>
- ⊕ *The Castles of Burgundy* (2011) <https://boardgamegeek.com/boardgame/84876/the-castles-of-burgundy>
- ⊕ *7 Wonders Duel* (2015) <https://boardgamegeek.com/boardgame/173346/7-wonders-duel>
- ⊕ *Wingspan* (2019) <https://boardgamegeek.com/boardgame/266192/wingspan>
- ⊕ *Food Chain Magnate* (2015) <https://boardgamegeek.com/boardgame/175914/food-chain-magnate>
- ⊕ *Ticket to Ride* (2004) <https://boardgamegeek.com/boardgame/9209/ticket-to-ride>
- ⊕ *CATAN* (1995) <https://boardgamegeek.com/boardgame/13/catan>

Sources

- ⊕ "Mihajlo Dimitrievski" (Alternative names: The Mico) (Retrieved 2024-08-22). <https://boardgamegeek.com/boardgameartist/70533/mihajlo-dimitrievski>

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

Introduction & welcome

00:00:08 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.

00:00:23 Jacques: In this episode we're talking about BoardGameGeek. Now we've mentioned the site a number of times, but it is probably one of the first things you have to learn if you're going to get into board games seriously. Just being able to find out, "What game are these people talking about? Wait, who is that again? What is that thing? Wait, can you show me what the box looks like just once?" Then this is the site for you.

00:00:51 Fayyaad: Yeah. We probably should have started with this episode then, if it's that important.

00:00:57 Jacques: Well, you know, you can get away with not reading everything. You know, it's like: the way I see this is, it's like — you don't start getting into something by reading the *Encyclopedia Britannica* from volume A to volume Z, right? It sometimes it helps if somebody can just break it down a little bit, and show you or give you a little bit of an idea of like: "This is where to start." So that's kind of the idea with the whole podcast. Like, we've tailormade this so that it's very easy to get into, and hopefully no one struggled to get on board from episode one.

But if you've ever gotten to the point where you think, "You know, I really would love to look this stuff up" — well, this is the episode for you.

A little light reading

00:01:52 Jacques: So as we do with every episode, let's start with the definition from the Board Game Jargon Primer. Take it away, Fayyaad.

00:02:02 Fayyaad: BoardGameGeek, also called BGG — boardgamegeek.com — is the most comprehensive, well-known website for board game information. It's where board gamers get information about games, they share opinions, photos, digital rulebooks, even work together to create games, make derivations of games, put their own resource together. It's a crazy big site.

And if you're into board gaming in any way bigger than owning 30 themed copies of *Monopoly*, you will know about BoardGameGeek — mostly because it's also a fantastic way to keep track of your growing collection.

00:02:39 Jacques: Yes, yes, yes, yes. And if you've ever heard somebody mention a game and you're kind of like, "Well, that sounds interesting. I want to check that out a little bit." This is the place you can go.

00:02:50 Fayyaad: Yes.

00:02:50 Jacques: I mean, would you say it's accurate to call it the equivalent of Wikipedia for board games?

00:02:57 Fayyaad: That's an interesting one. I'd say possibly yes and no, because it does more than Wikipedia does for a particular, for a single entry. And you'll often find that Wikipedia's own entries on some of the games are somewhat lacking when it comes to be compared against BGG, which has, you know not just the news and it's got images. It's got a lot of photographs of individual board games. It tells you a lot more about the game than Wikipedia ever would.

So for example it's going to tell you know how many players it can accommodate, what the rating is, how long is it going to take to play if you know the game well, how complicated the game is, who designed it, who the artists are, who the publishers are. What sort of categories of, genres of mechanics you're going to be working with when you look at this game. There's a lot of information and that's not even digging into the forums.

00:04:06 Jacques: Yes. Okay. So it's... I suppose what I was getting at is in terms of finding information about board games.

00:04:15 Fayyaad: Yeah, yeah, absolutely.

00:04:17 Jacques: It is the go-to site to go find some information. It's nice to be able to go to a game and say, "Hey, okay, well, I like what this designer does. Let's go click and see what else this person has designed."

00:04:30 Fayyaad: Absolutely, yes, absolutely.

00:04:31 Jacques: Or, "Oh, I really love the art on this," to go check it out.

00:04:36 Fayyaad: That happens a lot.

00:04:36 Jacques: Yeah. But it is also a bit like Reddit.

00:04:42 Fayyaad: You could also say, "no, I don't like that artist. Let me go find out what else he's done so I don't pick up anything else..."

00:04:50 Jacques: Harsh. Harsh, but fair.

00:04:55 Fayyaad: I know that there are some people, for example, who do not like The Mico's artwork as it appears in games such as *Architects of the West Kingdom* or *Raiders of the North Sea*, and so on. Some people just don't like them because art style. I love it, but it's not for everyone and if you want to go, "Oh well, what can I do to avoid seeing the artwork?" The BoardGameGeek website is the way to go.

00:05:21 Jacques: Well, I suppose if something's going to put you off, it's also a good way to find out. "Hey, is this game that I'm thinking of getting going to include this thing?"

00:05:32 Fayyaad: Hmm. Absolutely, yeah.

00:05:32 Jacques: Okay, yeah. So it's a bit like Wikipedia. It's a bit like Reddit. Like, there are a lot of people with lots of opinions. Like the forums are very interesting and very intriguing.

00:05:37 Fayyaad: It is. Well, yeah. I mean the site has been around since what, 2000? And it's still going very, very, very strong today. It is literally almost like the one-stop shop for board gaming and more so recently than it has in the past just because of all the extra functionality that they put in.

But a lot of people have also said, you know, bear in mind that the site is still held together by spit and duct tape. Which is fair; there's a lot that could be done with it. But there's also a lot that it already does. I think that's the important part. It does do a lot.

A tour of BGG

00:06:22 Jacques: Cool. So I think let's take a quick look at what's on the actual site.

The homepage: Explore, search, and your personal dashboard

00:06:27 Fayyaad: Let's start on the tour of the homepage. So on the homepage, what you're going to see mostly is either an explore [tab] or your own dashboard. And if you're on the Explore tab, you're going to see mostly like news, you're going to see what they call "the hotness" — so it's the games that are trending, being talked about a lot. Then there's stuff like crowdfunding, there's videos, there's discussions and just, you know, they dig into more lists and so on that people have put together if that is what you want to explore.

If you go to your own personal dashboard, there's a lot more detailed information that's very specific to what you'd want to see, including, you know, news items that are specific to what you want to look at, videos and so on that [if you want to, you can take a look at. And there are bars on the side that give you a rundown of what you've looked at recently. And then you can customise pretty much everything on there. And then there's a whole bunch of other menus along the top to show you can browse, you can get to the forums, you can go to the lists...

00:07:44 Jacques: Yeah.

00:07:45 Fayyaad: It's got a shopping section. You can look at the community. And of course there is your search on the top as well.

00:07:55 Jacques: Yeah. So basically I think that's how a lot of people are going to be using the site, at least to start off with. Just using the search bar. Like, "Oh someone mentioned this game. Let me go see what it is."

00:08:09 Fayyaad: Absolutely.

00:08:10 Jacques: What's nice about the site as well as it'll tell you if there are different versions of the same game or if different games have the same name.

One of my favourite things about the search results is the — and the pages for the games themselves — is all the user-generated photos, so the game, what it looks like on the table, what some of the components look like, actual people playing it. And one of the first things, in fact, that I saw that kind of got me sucked into the site, you know, in a major way, was just the fan-made, handcrafted special containers and boxes and things for *Arkham Horror*, and they were...

00:09:04 Fayyaad: Oh, yeah.

00:09:06 Jacques: There are amazing things that people have done. Just like all out... Just beautifully, beautifully done.

00:09:15 Fayyaad: Hmm. But people do go quite some depths to get, to bling up their games. They do a lot.

I have to say, though, that one of the interesting things is that the search functionality is a little unintuitive. Because if you click the **Search** button, the search box, a little drop-down comes up that says "board games", right? And there's advanced search. But then you don't necessarily know that you can click the board games drop-down and search via artists. You can search for designers. You can search for famous games, you can search the forums and so you can get through a lot without, you know, even touching the advanced search. And you can even the podcast episodes and you'll find us as well. If you happen to all podcast episodes.

00:10:04 Jacques: You will! I was very proud of the day we added it to the BGG podcast list. I was also surprised by how many board game podcasts there are, but nothing quite like this one.

00:10:17 Fayyaad: They are a lot. They have a lot.

00:10:21 Jacques: Nothing quite like this one, I'm happy to say.

00:10:23 Fayyaad: No. We are fairly unique in that regard.

00:10:28 Fayyaad: But that's a search of the podcast. You know, that's not necessarily going to give you a list of the podcasts. For that you need to go elsewhere.

00:10:37 Jacques: Yeah. On the homepage, if you just sort of as a normal person going there for the first time and you don't have a profile... Obviously you'll have a dashboard if you've got a BoardGameGeek user profile. It's free! it's great. It's really worth doing, but basically, if you just go to the normal homepage, you'll see there's a whole podcast section with a link to the latest episode of the official BoardGameGeek Podcast.

00:11:11 Fayyaad: Yeah.

00:11:11 Jacques: There is what they call the Hotness, which is a list of the top currently trending games. There's a crowdfunding section — which if you love your wallet and enjoy budgeting, you would want to

avoid because that gives you a link to a whole bunch of board games that are currently on Kickstarter and other crowdfunding platforms.

There's a featured video section. There's a news section with articles to board games and events...

00:11:38 Fayyaad: It's a lot! It's a big site, it's a very big site.

00:11:40 Jacques: ... new releases, other stories from BGG and other sites. There's a link to the trending conversations on BoardGameGeek. There's a contest section which I think is mostly US-only or I don't know...

00:11:56 Fayyaad: No! I've actually entered a lot of those contests. And I've won absolutely zero.

00:11:59 Jacques: Oh really? Aww.

00:12:00 Fayyaad: Although, one of the other guys who plays with us quite often, he has won stuff from the content section, so that's alright. So we can attest that the contest section does work. You do win things, but you're up against you know, thousands of others.

GeekLists

00:12:19 Jacques: Yeah, yeah. So then there are also links to reviews. There's a user-generated list of board games around any subject you can imagine.

00:12:32 Fayyaad: Oh my word. GeekLists, I think, possibly deserve their own episode at some point in the future. Just because there's so many weird ones.

00:12:43 Jacques: Yes, there are some very peculiar ones.

00:12:46 Fayyaad: There are lists of games, for example, if you look at GeekLists — a GeekList is a way of compiling a list of games around whatever particular theme or subject you decide you want to do. And so there's one for example, a GeekList of games that are designed by people in Africa. Fantastic. There's a GeekList of games featuring XYZ as its main mechanic. Or there are some weird ones. There is one that I subscribe to that... the list of games by popularity. So has it moved up or down? Which are the fastest movers in popularity?

00:13:30 Jacques: Yeah. So this week there's one about bingo caller games.

00:13:40 Fayyaad: Yeah.

00:13:40 Jacques: I mean, there isn't a specific mechanism tied to this type of game, but it's a useful way of going, "Okay, I like bingo. Well, I like this aspect of bingo. Which other games do this thing?" And there are all kinds of games listed on there. And I would never have thought to even look at that.

00:14:07 Fayyaad: You know, it's such a bizarre corner of the website, but it's there and I mean, it's really cool, where people discuss these themes, right?

00:14:18 Jacques: Yeah, yeah, it's a great way of finding similar games to games that you've enjoyed.

00:14:27 Fayyaad: Yeah.

00:14:27 Jacques: And maybe get an idea of, "OK, well, how could you do this differently?" They won't all be the same game, just as a word of wording, right? Just because you like one game on that list, don't buy all of them!

But yes, I was actually chatting to another friend of ours who plays in our group and he reminded me that no, he did in fact, when he started playing board games, go to the list of the hotness — like, the top-rated board games on BGG — and just bought a whole bunch of them. And he doesn't have most of those games anymore.

The top 100

00:15:07 Fayyaad: So you can get by going to **Browse** or **Board games**, and you will see the list of the top X-amount of board games, however many you decide. I think by default it shows you the top 100 board games? Yeah, it's the top 100.

And it's not the best way to start your collection. Because I think the one thing that nobody tells you about BoardGameGeek — you kind of intuit this on your own eventually over time — is that the majority of the people who are playing board games on BoardGameGeek and writing about it and you know rating things... These are people who are deep in the hobby. They are really, really, really hardcore fans of board games.

00:15:53 Jacques: Yes.

00:15:53 Fayyaad: And so it's also people who have been playing for a long time, and therefore the games tend to skew towards the heavier side, towards the more difficult end of things.

00:16:02 Jacques: Yeah.

00:16:02 Fayyaad: And if you look at the top game, *Brass: Birmingham*, right, which if you'd looked at this list last year, *Brass: Birmingham* was not the top game. It was *Gloomhaven*, and *Gloomhaven* had been sitting on the top of the list for five years. But if you take a look at the difficulty of *Brass: Birmingham*, that sits at a weight — and you can refer to our Weight episode from last month — as a 3.88. That's a ridiculously heavy game sitting at the top of BoardGameGeek.

00:16:41 Jacques: Yeah.

00:16:41 Fayyaad: And you know, not denying it is an absolutely fantastic game because it is an absolutely fantastic game. But it's also, you know...

00:16:52 Jacques: Not for everybody, no.

00:16:41 Fayyaad: ... not something to start your collection with. No, it is not a starting point for you. But *Twilight Imperium* sits at 5th place and that is also nowhere to sign the collection.

00:17:03 Jacques: I've never played it. And I will probably avoid playing it for as long as I live.

00:17:11 Fayyaad: In fact, of all the games in the top, you know, I wouldn't start with anything in the top ten actually.

00:17:19 Jacques: No.

00:17:19 Fayyaad: If I go to the top 20, maybe, then I can start seeing, yeah, these are games that you can that you can start a collection with. So you look at number 16, that's *Castles of Burgundy*. Yes, you absolutely should have a copy of *Burgundy* in your collection. It is so good.

00:17:36 Jacques: Fun game.

00:17:36 Fayyaad: *7 Wonders Duel*? Yes! *Wingspan*. It has started so many collections just by being such an accessible game.

00:17:49 Jacques: And it's got a whole tutorial game that you play and it teaches you literally how to play the game and you can play it with people that haven't played the game before, and then they know how to play the game as well as you do, it's just great.

00:18:05 Fayyaad: And then you get to like a number 39, *Food Chain Magnate*. That is the epitome of punishing. If you make a bad decision at the start of the game, you will never recover. You do not want to be introducing your friends fresh off *Monopoly* to *Food Chain Magnate*. It is not, you know a game that you can trust your decisions unless you know what you're doing.

00:18:33 Jacques: No. In fact, even if you even.

00:18:35 Jacques: No. In fact, even if you've played like a modern classic like *Ticket to Ride* or *CATAN* or whatever, and you go from that to *Food Chain Magnate*, you'll also go like, "Now what the hell is this? What is this? Why are you making me play this game? Why do you hate me?"

00:18:49 Fayyaad: But the point, though, the point that I'm making... Long story short right, is that by and large, a lot of these games that skew towards the heavier side of things, are an acquired taste. And you should not, absolutely not, be using the top 100 list as a shoppers' guide....

00:19:09 Jacques: No.

00:19:09 Fayyaad: ... like I did at one point.

00:19:11 Jacques: So it gives you useful consumer information, but it's not a shopping list.

00:19:21 Fayyaad: Yeah, it isn't. Absolutely. You cannot treat it as a shopping list, yeah.

00:19:24 Jacques: But if you've ever wanted to explore anything or find out that hey, so I like board games, well, maybe there's other stuff I will like that's similar to this or what has this person done or... You know, you'll be able to find other things that are that are like it.

00:19:43 Fayyaad: Absolutely.

End of part one

00:19:46 Jacques: And that's the end of this episode. But wait, you may say! "Jacques, you have not described anything about how this helps us." Well, that's because we, yeah, this is another one of those episodes that's just a little bit too long for one episode and just a little bit... We just wanted to cover too much in the one thing, so we've decided to split it up into two. This will be the season finale two-parter. Come back next episode for the explanation of how exactly this can help you and a little bit more about how the site actually works.

We'll also be delving deeper into the functionality of the site, using one of Fayyaad's favourite board games, *Brass: Birmingham*. We're going to be looking a little bit at how the site allows you to find more information about the game, figure out what it is, how it works, how to play it, discover some of the tips and tricks you can use to find ways to make your gaming experience even better. And then we will, as promised, get to the section where we explain exactly how the site can help you learn more about board games and make board gaming more enjoyable for yourself and your friends.

So looking forward to seeing you! Please join us again for the next episode and we will have more information about the actual proper season finale, which might actually happen at the beginning of season 2, but we'll have to let you know. We haven't quite decided that yet.

Closing & credits

00:21:16 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.

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.

Credits

Hosts: Jacques van Heerden and Fayyaad Hendricks

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Editing: Fayyaad Hendricks

Producer: Fayyaad Hendricks

Executive Producer: Jacques van Heerden