

# tabletop GAMING

BOARD GAMES | CARD GAMES | MINIATURES | RPGs

## ICONIC, EPIC FABLED

Big shakeups  
for Disney  
Lorcana  
ahead

## HOW TO BE A BETTER PLAYER

Make every gaming  
session elite by following  
these tips

## CHAOS KITTENS

Exploding Kittens  
celebrate 10 years –  
with a board game

## DICE, DRAMA, AND NEW WORLDS

Behind the scenes with  
Critical Role's Anjali Bhimani

## TERROR AT THE TABLE

FiveEvil brings fear to  
the tabletop

# FORGED IN HOPE

## BEHIND THE NEW DAGGERHEART RPG

# 22 REVIEWS

THE LATEST AND GREATEST IN GAMES, INCLUDING:

AUSTRALIS | DEEP REGRETS | LINE OF FIRE: BURNT MOON | BURROWS & BADGERS

TIC TAC TREK | DILUVIUM | AZUL DUEL | FLOWERS | SEPTIMA

METAL GEAR SOLID: THE BOARD GAME | BLYTZ | MINOS

THORGAL | STAR TREK: STAR REALMS | AVERAGE JOE | BOX ONE



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Display unit 125/07/25





Prescott, a new tin game from Bedsit Games, and a deluxe version of *A Wayfarers Tale* from Wayfarer Games. We reckon we'll be hearing more from them in future.

## CON CONS

To offer some balance, nothing is ever perfect, and we're not oblivious to the fact that 42,000 people in one space that is hugely reliant on incredible volunteers might have a few hiccups – and we've seen those bouncing around the internet. However, overwhelmingly, the event was a huge success, and one you should be marking your calendar for next year. 🍷



## UK GAMES EXPO

*If you've ever wanted a sign that the industry is growing, UK Games Expo attendance numbers are a flashing beacon of it. They had over 42,000 unique visitors, and over 72,000 attendees (across multiple days). Bear in mind that a headliner crowd at Glastonbury is between 40,000-50,000 attendees, and UK Games Expo managed it without Beyonce. With over 400 stands to see, before you even consider the staples like Bring & Buy, Open Gaming, Competitions and Scheduled Games... it could have been a week long easily. Those attendees voted on the best games of the event, and you can find those below.*



### ABOUT THE AWARDS

UK Games Expo this year adjusted their traditional awards, meaning they had a number of judges awards as normal, but just four different awards voted for by the people in attendance, with votes collected throughout the weekend. It's a good indication of the games that people are playing and enjoying. For this year, the following won:

### FAMILY AWARD: HARMONIES BY LIBELLUD

*Harmonies* was actually at last year's UK Games Expo, but it's been growing in momentum for the entire time since. We rated it a must-play game, and it was on the cover of issue 102 of this magazine, and for good reason. It's a lovely tile placement game of building beautiful habitats for animals to inhabit, and getting points for your harmonious landscape. It also looked beautiful on the Asmodee stand, with a huge art piece to show off.

### GENERAL AWARD: AUSTRALIS

*Australis* – reviewed later in this very issue – is a beautifully made competitive strategy game, focussing on the East Australian Current, an underwater superhighway brought to the public eye on this side of the world by *Finding Nemo*. Like, Turtle-y dude. Not only do turtles make an appearance in this dice rolling strategy game, but so do corals and Nemo's. I mean Clownfish.

### STRATEGY AWARD: SETI: SEARCH FOR EXTRATERRESTRIAL INTELLIGENCE

Another game we loved so much that we put on the cover of Tabletop Gaming Magazine, it's no surprise it was a show favourite. *SETI*'s rather long name does explain itself well – you're looking to traces of life beyond planet earth. It's a game of fantastic strategy, and a love letter to planetary exploration that we've all fallen in love with.

### ROLEPLAYING AWARD: THE ONE RING™ - MORIA™ – THROUGH THE DOORS OF DURIN

An expansion to the popular *The One Ring* published by Free League Publishing, you're exploring Khazad-dûm in the years prior to Balin's expedition. It's filled with new content – patrons, landmarks, foes, encounters and treasures alike, so no adventure is ever the same.

# AUSTRALIS

Is this a turtley awesome family game you should shell out for?

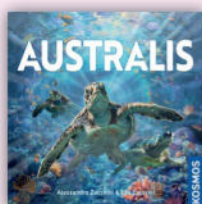
Designer: Alessandro Zucchini and Leo Colovini | Publisher: Kosmos



As kids grow up, it can sometimes be a little tricky to judge what new games to start throwing at them - not literally of course, because something like *Twilight Imperium* would end up in a hospital visit. I mean, that once they've got to grips with *Ticket to Ride: First Journey*, do you immediately start moving on to the likes of more in-depth games, such as *Agricola* or *Castles of Burgundy*? Well, if you don't fancy taking that leap straight away, *Australis* attempts to blend simple rules with slightly more complex scoring mechanics.

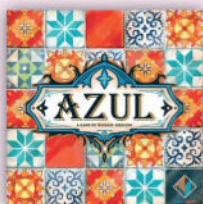
In the game, you are possibly a turtle swimming in the East Australian Current (EAC)... or maybe you're the actual current. It's not quite clear. Anyway, no matter what you're actually playing as, your job is simple: score the most victory points by balancing various ways of scoring. The main ways of scoring are: how far your turtle is along the EAC, if you have the most coral in a particular area and how many fish you have in your shoal. Each of these are scored at the end of the round. Before we go on to the mechanics, it's worth saying that *Australis* is immediately a lovely game to look at. From the little wooden turtles to the beautifully illustrated board and the wooden forests of coral that grow as the game progresses, *Australis* is an absolute charmer.

In order to score some sweet,



## WHAT'S IN THE BOX?

- ▶ Gameboard
- ▶ 45 Advantage cards
- ▶ 10 Competition tiles
- ▶ 4 Sea boards
- ▶ 21 Food cubes
- ▶ 64 Corals
- ▶ 4 Sea turtle counters
- ▶ 4 Point discs
- ▶ 17 Special dice
- ▶ 1 First player token
- ▶ 58 Fish



sweet points, you'll be choosing different dice. Each round starts with you rolling five different types of dice: white dice (let you choose advantage cards), yellow dice (give you fish), blue dice (move your turtle), purple dice (place coral in different zones) and the red die (take the starting tile for the following round). Each die will have a value on it, depending on what you've rolled. A yellow die could generate five fish for your shoal or two fish and an immediate victory point. White dice, on the other hand, allow you to pick differing numbers of advantage cards from the 'market' that give you bonuses in future rounds depending on the dice you select.

On paper it sounds rather confusing but once you start playing, *Australis* has a very natural flow that's very easy to pick up, even for younger players. Another highlight is that although it combines different types of gameplay (coral: area control, fish: set collection, card collecting and turtles: roll and move), it never feels overly daunting and the different elements work well together.

An unusual addition to this dice mechanic though is that at the end

of each round you have a battle. It's not clear what is battling... perhaps the turtles? Cowabunga, dude! Players take any blue dice, purple dice and the big red die, then roll-off and lowest dice are eliminated. Eventually, one person is crowned the winner and they get a bunch of bonus points, while the runner-up gets slightly fewer bonus points. Although it's undeniably an exciting end to each



round that youngsters will enjoy, it can make the scoring rather swingy based on a few dice rolls, particularly at just two players.

In fact, the dice are *Australis*' strongest point and its potential weakness. Kids are going to love rolling all these cool, multi-coloured dice and there's something charmingly tactile about placing them on your gameboard before triggering the various actions. However, some may find it frustrating that it can be hard to plan ahead because you're at the mercy of dice rolls, so you need to change tactics on the fly or - a little like the EAC itself - just go with the flow. 🐢

**ROB BURMAN**

## PLAY IT? YES

*Australis* is a fun family title that introduces younger audiences to a variety of gameplay styles, plus the components and art are particularly delightful. It's an enjoyable stepping stone into more complex experiences that's easy to learn and doesn't outstay its welcome.

## TRY THIS IF YOU LIKED...AZUL

It's tough to pick a game like *Australis* because it combines so many different elements! That said, consider taking a look if you like the tile picking and colourful presentation of *Azul*.