

THE TATTOO

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Company thinks outside the box

By ZACH BROKENROPE
The Tattoo

The people at Out of the Box Publishing Inc. like to play games.

In fact, it's part of the job. In 1998, a small group of acquaintances decided to form a company based around a game designed by Mark Osterhaus, now president of the company, his former wife Ellen Winter, and their son, Max Osterhaus.

That game - Bosworth - was the springboard for Out of the

Box, publisher of such award-winning and best-selling games as Apples to Apples.

It's easy to tell that Out of the Box employees enjoy their jobs.

"I love it," says Matt Mariani, the spokesman for the company. "It's a very family-oriented corporation."

The company, based in Madison, Wis., allows all 10 of its employees to work from home, and sometimes even their children get in on the act.

"The first game was designed by my ex-husband,

our son, and myself," said Winter, director of research and development for Out of the Box.

The company, which currently has more than 30 games on the market and more on the way, has yet to discontinue a game.

The average lifespan of a game is just three years, according to freelance game creator Alan R. Moon, who co-designed 10 Days in Africa for Out of the Box.

Among new games planned for release later this year is 10

Days in Europe, which is another addition to the company's 10 Days in... series.

Also expected from Out of the Box this year is a game called Cineplexity that John Kovalic, another company founder, described as a movie version of Apples to Apples.

The company receives 500 to 700 idea submissions a year, Mariani said. Of those, about 90 percent are from freelance game designers.

Osterhaus considers each game idea and narrows them down to about 30.

Out of the Box staff get together every couple months, Mariani said, and play the games that Osterhaus selects. Finally, seven or eight of the best games makes it to production.

Out of the Box generally likes to publish games that appeal to a family market and are easy for all to understand, Mariani said, which means that games with long, complicated rules and directions don't make it through the initial testing phase.

However, some games prove

to be hidden gems. For instance; the popular game Apples to Apples was originally a long and complicated game, Mariani said, but after several edits it became an easy and understandable family and party game.

The company's criteria for a new game submission is simple.

"When we play a game, we look for how fun it is," said Mariani.

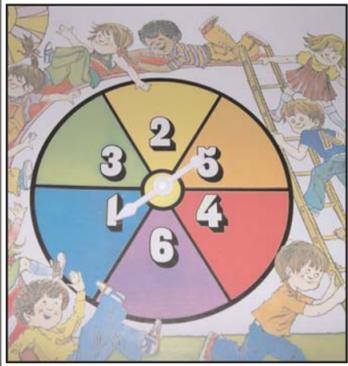
"When it comes down to it, that's what it's all about. Fun."

FUN and



Wesley David Fane / The Tattoo

In the interests of fun, fair play and getting some good games going at the next party, *The Tattoo* evaluated more than a dozen board and card games. The result is "Fun and Games," a four-part series that starts today. All the games pieces are on our website.



Teenage staff members and *Tattoo* alumni from Connecticut, Nebraska, Canada, Minnesota, Illinois and California contributed to this project. Most of them played the games together.

GAMES

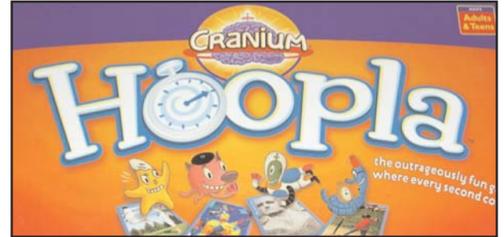
Fast, brainy Hoopla a riot

By JOSH BLACKLER
The Tattoo

Hoopla is a game that is a party for your brain. Hoopla, a new game from the makers of Cranium, is for the fans of Pictionary and Charades.

With playtime ranging from 20 to 25 minutes, and a setup that takes only a couple minutes, the game is easily started and quickly played.

The game consists of cards and a die. The cards indicate a "who," a "what," or a "where," and the die decides which activity you will do to make other players guess the phrase on the card.



There are four activities that you use to indicate the phrase on your card.

In "Tweener," you must give clues by saying the phrase "it's bigger than," and "it's smaller than."

'Soundstage' is an activity that involves dramatic gestures and outrageous sound effects, but no words may be used.

For the artistic types there is 'Cloodle,' which is similar to Pictionary in that you must draw to indicate the phrase.

'Tongue-Tied' is a game of alliteration. Players may only use words that start with the same letter to indicate the phrase on the card.

What is enjoyable is how easy it is to play. The game setup and learning to play took about three minutes.

Also, it's fun to keep playing and guessing even when it's not your turn, which is an advantage over games like Trivial Pursuit.

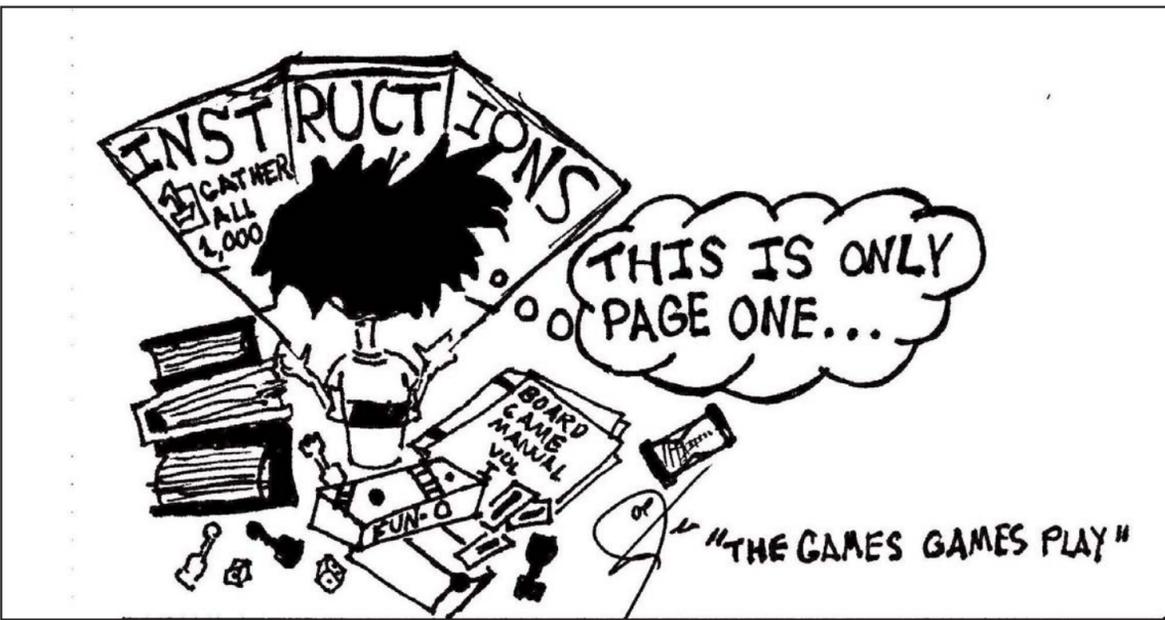
What makes this game unique is that you are not playing against your fellow players, but you are all on one team competing against the clock, which is set for 15 minutes.

I dislike the low replay value of Hoopla. It seems that once you have been exposed to all of the cards, the game loses its challenge, but it's still worth the mere \$15 it costs to purchase it.

Another problem with the game is that the box is misleading. It indicates that the game will take 15 minutes. This is preposterous. The game clock is set at 15 minutes and you pause between turns, so the game will take at least 20 minutes to play.

The draw of Hoopla over other games is that it is fast-paced, and not competitive. It is a game played with all the players on a team against the clock, making it a great choice for play among a group of friends.

Hoopla is no children's game. It is meant for teenagers and adults.



Joe Keo / The Tattoo

It's like Scrabble with math, but fun

By KATIE JORDAN
The Tattoo

If you've ever found yourself playing Scrabble and thinking, "Gee, if only this game were more complicated and required more math skills!" then BuyWord is the board game for you.

Of course, if you've found yourself in the above scenario, you probably have more serious problems than an armful of Monopoly-type money can help you with.

However, even relatively normal human beings can have fun playing this game. I should know - I enjoyed it, and as any of my friends will tell you, I am relatively normal. Well, most of my friends, anyway.

The object of the game is simple: make money - of the multi-colored, utterly useless, fake variety. A given amount of this colorful cash is doled out to each player at the start of the game.

The means to the end are somewhat more complex.

First of all, there are the Scrabble-esque wooden tiles. At the start of the game, these are placed face down so that the letters printed on each aren't visible to the players. Unlike Scrabble, though, each wooden tile also has a number of dots printed on it.

Then there's a single large die, which also has dots on it, but just in the usual way. A player rolls the die, and whatever number it shows is the number of tiles each player takes on that turn.

Here's where it starts to get a little confusing: Once you have your letters, plus the wild tile that each player automatically received at the

beginning of the game, you must decide whether or not to buy your letters. You can't buy them individually, folks - it's all or nothing, so choose wisely.

The cost for any set of letters is equal to the sum of the dots on all the letters times itself - that is, the dot-sum squared. Got that?

The cost for any set of letters is equal to the sum of the dots on all the letters times itself - that is, the dot-sum squared. Got that?

Okay, assuming that you've bought your letters, and assuming you have a basic grasp of the English language, you can now use those letters to make a word. Then you can sell this word back to the banker to get back some of the green... and yellow, and pink, and blue... you originally spent.

The pay you receive for your word is equal to the square of the sum of the dots on the tiles of the letters that make up that word. Chances are, it will be less than you paid for the letters originally, so the only guy making money will be the banker. Chances are, this will strike you as a rip-

off and you'll wonder whose idea it was to play this game in the first place. (Chances are, it was the banker's.)

If you're an overly-competitive Scrabble player like I am, you'll most likely want to use up all the letters you can. That's often a good strategy in Scrabble, after all. And it seems like a good plan here, since selling fewer letters than you bought would cause you to lose more money.

But there's a catch. Whatever leftover letters you have after selling back your word on the first round, you don't have to pay for later. That means that, as the game progresses, you can store up these extra letters from each turn to make bigger words - and, hopefully, a profit.

You don't have to buy every round of letters you pick, and you don't always have to sell a word, either. But you do have to weigh your options and take a few risks - you have to spend money to make money, after all.

This game isn't for the faint-of-heart or the wishy-washy. It demands strategy, quick decision-making, a good vocabulary, and spelling skills. Math skills aren't necessarily required - in fact, they're included in the box: There's a list of times-tables to help those of us lacking in the math department with the calculations. The squaring, at least - I'm pretty sure you're on your own with the addition.

Of course, if you meet the game's age requirement but you can't add up the dots, then you probably have more serious problems than an armful of Monopoly-type play-money can help you with.

Fierce competitors and people who like to

flaunt both their incredible math and verbal skills at the same time will love BuyWord - most likely because they'll win at it.

The rest of you will probably like it, too, once you get the hang of it. And if your math and verbal skills are in need of improvement, you may even get some benefit out of playing it. Either that or just a record of humiliating defeats... but like I said, with this game you have to be willing to take a risk or two.

All in all, BuyWord is a pretty good game. The directions sound quite complicated at first, but they're not hard to get the hang of once you're involved in the game. It doesn't have a 10-page list of instructions for you to get bored with and ignore, different kinds of cards for you to confuse, or obnoxious buzzers for you to want to smash.

Nope - it's just you, your letters, your money, and your brain. Hopefully, that will be enough for you to dominate and amass a fortune in play-money.

And if it's not... well, at least there's that helpful times-tables card.

