Field Guide — Board Game Developer Console (Human Edition)

Generated: 2025-08-09 20:06

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What the tool is doing (at a glance)

- Loads a cleaned BGG dataset and clusters games into market segments (unsupervised K■means).
- Builds scores and projections (ratings, owners, risk) from models or nearest neighbors.
- Measures opportunity (demand vs recent supply), synergies (mechanic pairs that correlate with better outcomes), and unit economics (price, costs, ROI).
- Lets you test a concept (wizard presets + toggles) and see where it lands, with visual comparisons and recommendations.

Core definitions you'll see everywhere

- AvgRating — BGG average user rating (0–10). "Good" starts ~7.0.
- GameWeight — BGG complexity (1–5). Higher = more rules/decisions.
- Owned Users — proxy for audience size / market reach.
- Success Rate — share of games with AvgRating $\geq$ 7.5 (in synergy tables) or $\geq$ 7.0 (in overview).
- Success Score (per game) — quick demand proxy used in tables: $(\text{AvgRating} - 6) \times \text{Owned Users} / 1000$.
- Opportunity Score (per segment) — composite (0–100) that rewards high quality and low recent saturation:
- 30% recent growth in releases
- 25% average rating (scaled 0–10)
- 20% median owners (capped)
- 15% (1 − recent saturation)
- 10% success rate

Translation: where quality and demand exist but recent supply is thin.
- Confidence (for predictions) — tighter neighbor spread $\Rightarrow$ higher confidence (scaled 40–95).
- Elasticity — how owners react to price: owners $\approx$ (price / anchor)^elasticity (elasticity is negative).

Market Overview (top row cards)

What you see

- Total Games — count after your current filters.
- Market Segments — number of clusters in the filtered view.
- Median Rating — center of quality right now.
- Median Owners — median audience size.
- Avg Complexity — median weight.
- Success Rate ($\geq$7.0) — % of titles that clear the basic quality bar.

How to use
- If Total Games is tiny, your filters are too tight (or your niche is very narrow).
- Market Segments > ~10 means the view mixes multiple buyer logics; expect mixed signals.
- Rising Median Rating with steady Owners = quality improving without shrinking audience — good place to design.
- Success Rate under ~25% => crowded and unforgiving; be sharper or pivot.

Market Intelligence — Top Market Opportunities

What it shows

- Grouped bars per segment: Opportunity (%) beside Avg Rating (0–10, scaled). Auto labels summarize complexity, rating, themes, mechanics.

How to read
- Tall green bar + solid rating = under■served AND well■liked.
- Tall green bar + so■so rating = demand exists but quality is inconsistent; a cleaner design can win.
- Short green bar + high rating = beloved but saturated; avoid copycat entries.

What to do
- Pick top 1–2 segments, open Segment Explorer, and verify: (a) median play time, (b) core mechanics >30%, (c) recent release slope.
- If your concept is near a top segment, tune to the segment's time/weight lane.

Market Evolution Timeline (3 stacked charts)

What it shows

- Releases per year; average rating vs complexity; median owners vs play time.

How to read
- Complexity drifting up while play time is flat = better craft (depth without bloat).
- Owners dipping while releases spike = oversupply; differentiate or avoid.

What to do
- Sit near last 3–5 years' norms unless you have a strong reason not to (and make that reason obvious on the box).

Insights panels (Growth Sectors & Sweet Spots)

How computed

- Growth ≈ recent 3■year releases/year vs an earlier 3■year baseline.
- Sweet Spots: medians of top games (≥7.5) for GameWeight, Play Time, and typical Max Players.
- Kickstarter advantage: average rating difference for Kickstarted vs not (descriptive, not causal).

How to use
- Treat these as design targets: weight, minutes, player counts where the best games cluster.
- If you're off■lane, you need a stronger hook (synergy, runtime tension, or component promise).

Success Factor Analysis (scatter + zones)

What it shows

- Complexity vs Rating and Play Time vs Rating with three color zones (<6.5, 6.5–7.5, >7.5) and a dotted quadratic trend.

How to read
- Short & complex that still rate high are rare — that's a moat.
- Long & simple with low ratings signals padding; cut turns or add tension.

Design Wizard — Presets & Predictions

Presets (archetypes)

- Nine starting profiles with market■aligned defaults (players, time, weight) and a "why" insight.
- Toggle Solo/Co■op; select mechanics/themes via grids (Any vs All match).

Under the hood
- We locate your spec's nearest market segment (standardized features → K■means), pull nearest neighbors, and estimate:
• Predicted Rating (models or neighbor mean)
• Expected Owners (models or neighbor median)
• Confidence (neighbor tightness; 40–95)
• Percentile (vs filtered market)

How to read the prediction cards
- Predicted Rating: don't chase 0.1 deltas; ±0.3 is noise.
- Expected Owners: order■of■magnitude cue (niche <5k, mid 5k–50k, mass >50k).
- Success Probability: risk temperature for iteration size (small changes for high■conf; bigger swings for low■conf).

Pricing & Unit Economics

Anchor price (estimator)

- Base = $35 + 6 \times (\text{Complexity} - 2.5)$
- +$15 Premium components (or +$5 Good)
- +$10 Premium/Deluxe production
- +$5 if Max Players ≥ 5
- +$5 if Play Time ≥ 90
- Clamped to $15–$150

Meaning: sanity check for MSRP based on felt scope (depth, runtime, build).

Owners vs Price (elasticity)
- Owners_adjusted = Owners_base $\times$ (MSRP / Anchor)^Elasticity, clipped to ±40% (Elasticity is negative; -1.1 retail, -0.8 crowdfunding typical).

Unit math
- Net/unit = MSRP $\times$ (1 − ChannelFee)
- GrossProfit/unit = Net − (COGS + Fulfillment)
- Effective units = Owners_adjusted $\times$ (1 − Returns%)
- Total Gross Profit = GrossProfit/unit $\times$ Effective units
- Net Profit = Total GP − (Marketing + Misc fixed)
- ROI multiple = Net Profit ÷ Fixed costs
- Break■even units = Fixed costs ÷ GrossProfit/unit
- Payback months ≈ Break■even ÷ (Effective units / Sales window)

How to use
- If Gross Profit/unit < ~$10 at retail, fix COGS, fee, or MSRP.
- If Break■even > expected print run, revisit price/format/scope.
- Use the Profit vs Price curve; sanity■check against the value felt in the first 15 minutes.

Visuals that matter (in results)

- Rating vs Complexity / Rating vs Owners / Year vs Rating
• Your star marker shows where you sit vs the cluster.
• Right of cluster on complexity? Smooth early turns (front■load clarity).
• Below cluster on owners for a given rating? Value proposition or distribution issue.
- Radar — Your design vs Segment average (0–1 scales)
• If you overshoot time/price vs segment, justify with component promise or replay loop.

Segment Explorer — Deep Dive

What it shows

• Size, avg rating, median owners, median complexity, opportunity score.
• Core Mechanics (>30%), Dominant Themes (>30%).
• Rating distribution; releases & quality over time; recommendations.

How to use
- Design to median time & weight unless your hook is genuinely strong.
- Releases ↑ and Rating flat/up = healthy. Releases ↑ and Rating ↓ = noisy — be surgical.
- Study the Top■10: onboarding, tension, endgame.

Trend Analysis — Rising/Falling Mechanics, Theme Evolution, Complexi

Rising/Falling Mechanics

• Recent 2–3y usage vs early 3y baseline. Rising if >1.5× and >5% usage; falling if <0.7× and previously >5%.
• Rising + good recent ratings = explore. Falling + poor ratings = avoid unless you fix the known pain (usually upkeep/downtime).

Theme Evolution
- Annual usage % for major categories. Use for art direction & positioning, not to chase fads.

Complexity Creep
- Mean/median complexity over time, plus complexity vs rating with bubble size ~ releases.
- If complexity rises and ratings don't, prune rules.

Short■range Forecast (directional)
- Extrapolates last 3y for release count and complexity drift. Directional only.

Mechanic Synergies — Pairs that sing

How it's built

• For each mechanic pair, look at games where both = 1. Keep pairs with n ≥ 20. Report Games, Avg Rating, Success Rate (≥7.5), Median Owners.

How to read
- High success + decent n = reliable pairing.
- High success + low n = underexplored opportunity — prototype fast.

Network (relationships)
- Edge width & color ~ success rate (thicker/darker = better). Node size = total success strength for that mechanic.
- Start with the thickest edges; ask what tension makes them work.
- Pick a duet, not a chorus.

Similar Games (neighbors)

- After segmenting, we compute standardized distance inside that segment and take top■N closest.
- Use to study first 5 minutes and endgame patterns. Strong prediction + low■owners neighbors = niche; adjust price/box/teach before scope.

Recommendations engine (what drives the bullets)

- Target complexity = median weight among top■rated (≥7.5) within the selected segment.
- Optimal play time = median among ≥7.0 in segment.
- Underused but successful mechanics = 10–30% usage with with/without rating delta ≥ +0.3.
- Market gap = few recent releases vs historical average.

Data & clustering (why segments shift)

- Numeric features standardized; K■means on the filtered dataset.
- Fewer games ⇒ fewer clusters; labels are generated from percentiles (weight/time) + over■represented mechanics/themes.
- Don't memorize IDs — read labels and metrics.

Common failure modes

- Small sample: predictions swing; loosen filters or widen neighbor count.
- Rating inflation: use Median Owners and Success Rate to stabilize.
- Overfitting to charts: when metrics disagree, write two hypotheses and prototype.
- Price wishcasting: if profit peaks below your target MSRP, increase felt value or reduce scope.

Quick checklist (how to drive it)

- Pick a preset close to your concept.
- Tune players, time, weight, age, funding, production.
- Select 1–3 mechanics and 1–2 themes that match your vision.
- Analyze; read rating, owners, risk.
- Check Segment Explorer for norms and core mechanics (>30%).
- Scan Synergies for a duet that fits your lane.
- Run Pricing; move MSRP to the profit peak; sanity■check against felt value.
- Export neighbors; play/research 3–5; adjust and re■run.