Podcast #91: The 2018 Pearple’s Choice Awards!

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## Intro [00:00:00]

[Funky intro]

Matt: Hello, and welcome to the very ninety-first Shut Up & Sit Down podcast. My name is Matt Lees, joined by Quintin Smith!

Quinns: Hello, Matt Lees!

Matt: And this is a podcast all about board games, board games, and the people who love them.

Quinns: What if I like card games?

Matt: Mmm. Well, we have this a lot. People say, “Oh, board games? Like Monopoly?” And we like to think of board games being a big manger full of lots of different kinds of…

Quinns: A manger! You went very biblical there.

Matt: Yeah, I was trying to think of stable, is what I meant, but I went full-on big JJ. So, yeah, card games, board games, party games, big strategy games. We like alllll kinds of games in the game rainbow. It’s all fair game.

Quinns: It’s a broad church. I like “fair game”, was that deliberate?

Matt: Nnnnnnnno.

Quinns: Okay, well, let’s move on. Today we’re going to be talking about a few games. We’re going to be talking about Wingspan, an economic game about managing birds. Yes, you heard that right. We’re going to be talking about Chronicles of Crime, a game about being a detective, that is simultaneously cartoonish and gory as heck. We’re gonna be talking about Franchise, a game Matt wishes he’d played. [Matt laughing] And we’re gonna be talking a little bit -- very quickly -- about Assel Schlamassel, A.K.A., Woodlouse Chaos.

Matt: Ah, back on the old little card games with horrible animals on them.

Quinns: Yeah, the Drei Magier ugly animals series.

Matt: Ugly bugs isn’t it? I don’t know.

Quinns: Oh, ugly bugs is a better name.

Matt: Ugly bugs is classic. Ugly bug bowl.

Quinns: Then, finally we’re going to have a very special podcast because it is time to introduce -- and also go through -- the winners of the Pearple’s Choice Awards!

Matt: [mouth fanfare]

Quinns: I might put an actual sting in there.

Matt: It’s better than me just doing a noise from Zelda.

[Legend of Zelda you-got-a-thing! noise]

Quinns: Every year, the Shut Up & Sit Down forum users all vote. They have a little experiment with democracy and they all decide, it’s quaint but of course, we are the fascist overlords.

Matt: We’ve all had a little experiment with democracy, haven’t we?

Quinns: We have.

Matt: Spoilers: It hasn’t worked!

Quinns: We’re gonna be naming what they thought was… It’s really our Games of 2018 episode. We’re going to be talking about best game production, best game, best expansion.

Matt: And as with most websites, we’re doing our games of 2018 awards... in March!

Quinns: Yeah, don’t know what happened there, but I liked how you described this competition last year, when you said the Pearple’s Choice Awards was an opportunity for our audience to decide whether mum and dad were bad and wrong.

Matt [laughing]: Yeah, that’s accurate.

Quinns: Well, we’ve got a lot to get through this episode so let’s quickly cover some games!

Matt: Mmm!

## Wingspan [00:02:40]

Quinns: I’m going to briefly talk about Wingspan, because people have been waiting very patiently. It’s been a while since our last podcast episode, and I said, “Don’t worry everybody, I’m gonna talk about Wingspan on the next podcast.”

Matt: Mmhmm?

Quinns: A month ago…

Matt: Yeah, and people know that you love birds, as well.

Quinns: I literally cannot get enough birds.

Matt: In the same way that anything to do with eggs happens on the internet and I get lots of people forwarding it to me, you must have the same thing with birds.

Quinns: Yes. Together though, our interests form one complete lifeform.

Matt: But which interest came first?

Quinns: Ohhh. You were interested in eggs before I was interested in birds.

Matt: I don’t think that’s true.

Quinns: Okay. Well anyway! Wingspan is a game that curiously has the most in common with Race for the Galaxy, in my opinion. It’s a monstrously complicated sci-fi card game from a while back. This is a lot simpler, and first thing’s first, the production is wonderful. You open this box, you have these beautiful watercolor aviary player boards that you put out in front of you. You get a bag of eggs!

Matt: Is this game, would you say, an egg-gine builder? [snickers]

Quinns: Yeah, I actually would!

Matt: Okay.

Quinns: You’re going to be building an engine with birds, and then you’re going to be placing little plastic eggs on those birds that come in a variety of pastel colors.

Matt: I did just think of that then, I wasn’t sitting on that.

Quinns: For a month.

Matt: Like an egg.

[Quinns screams in frustrated appreciation of the joke]

Matt: Ha! And I wasn’t sitting on that either.

Quinns [squeaky voice]: That’s so good!

Matt: Thank you! I’ll let you talk about the game now.

Quinns: Thanks. There’s hundreds of birds in this game, Matthew. There’s a massive deck of cards. Literally something like 150 birds, or something?

Matt: But there aren’t even a hundred birds in the real world.

Quinns: You know what, not only are there 150 birds in this game, it’s 150 birds just exclusively from North America.

Matt: What!

Quinns: I know! Turns out, the world: Stuffed with birds. So, what you do in this game is you are trying to get points, and you get points from a variety of things. [Matt laughing] That could just describe all board games.

Matt: Any game.

Quinns: Yup. So, more practically, you have this aviary board in front of you, and you have a hand of bird cards. Then on your turn, you’re going to do one of several things. You can draw additional birds, you can acquire food, which are a number of big chunky custom dice that you roll to see, “Oh, this turn the world is full of caterpillars,” or you roll them and it’s like, “Oh, this turn it’s acorns.” So you can acquire food, you can draw new birds, or you can play birds, you can lay eggs on birds, which are like victory points. But here’s the catch: When you play a bird- Let’s say, Matthew, I don’t know, you’ve got something crap-

Matt: Sweet little finch!

Quinns: Ohhh, I like where you’re going with this! Let’s say you’ve got a goldfinch, and you want to play that goldfinch. You’re going to put it into your aviary. You play it out of your hand. You spend some food. The finch was given a caterpillar and now it lives with you forever. But, when you play a bird, you decide which row to play it in. So let’s say you played the finch in the -- and different birds can be played in different slots -- but let’s say you played that sweet, sweet little finch, and that’s gone in your food section. T-he food row. That means that whenever you spend your turn collecting food, the finch’s power is going to trigger.

Matt: Mmhm.

Quinns: Okay, now let’s say it’s late game, and you spend your turn collecting food, you trigger all the birds you ever played in that row for the whole game. So suddenly, POW! The finch triggers which means you a draw a random bird! And then the vulture triggers, which means you lay an egg. And then the goose triggers, which means you get an additional food. And so you’re kind of building up combos, basically, and you’re trying to balance the best row of birds, which is just the birds that lay eggs and get you victory points, with actually needing the birds that help you develop your engine, which is the birds that help you draw birds and the birds that help you get food. And, as I usually do -- and this is my worst trait as a board game critic -- I’ve saved the best for last: Every bird card, in addition to a lovely illustration, has a fact about that bird.

Matt: Bird facts.

Quinns: I know. It’s… alright.

Matt: So effectively you’re just trying to build together a sequence of things which are going to pop off in a pleasingly elongated combo system. It’s… Starling Realms?

Quinns [not really agreeing but trying to yes-and]: Uhhh yeaahh?

Matt: It’s not, I just wanted to say that. Because it’s not drafting… Not drafting… I’m just wrong, I just wanted to say, “Starling Realms.”

Quinns: That’s fine.

Matt: I considered Stork Realms?

Quinns: Well, tell you what, it’s closer to Race for the Galaxy, so do you want to come up with -- as I’m talking about my next thing -- a bird pun to do with Race for the Galaxy?

Matt: Roc for the Galaxy?

Quinns: Roc is a mythical bird. If they wanted to do an expansion for this that was mythical birds, that would be interesting. So, I’ll cut to the chase, because we do have the Pearple’s Choice coming up. I think it’s alright. The production is gorgeous. This is so fussy, but the box has this linen -- I think it’s linen -- finish, which means the box itself is kind of textured. You can run your fingers over it, and there’s texture there but it’s so fine that you couldn’t identify whether it’s lined or hatching or whatever.

Matt: Like you’re exploring an alien artifact.

Quinns [not really agreeing but trying to yes-and, squeaky voice edition]: Uhh, yeah. [normal voice] Well, you know linen-finished playing cards that you rub them and they’re not completely smooth.

Matt: I know them very well.

Quinns: Oh yeah, you do. The fact that the box itself of Wingspan is so nice is indicative of just how much TLC they’ve put into everything inside.

Matt: Well, the little eggs look really good.

Quinns: There’s little eggs. And this maybe is a metaphor for the game. You don’t just roll the big chunky -- and they’re enormous beautiful wooden food dice in Wingspan -- you put them into the back of a dice tower that looks like a birdhouse.

Matt [picturing the satisfying image]: Aww!

Quinns: They rattle around the birdhouse and they fall out the base like little birds, but it’s food.

Matt: That’s very sweet. Just for the record, I’ve stopped spending cycles on trying to think of a bird pun for Race for the Galaxy.

Quinns: Oh, okay.

Matt: It’s distracting me and it’s hard. So if you can do that, then do pop a comment on the website-

Quinns [laughing]: On shutupandsitdown.com.

Matt: -for an acceptable one, and we’ll pick the best one and feature it as the comment.

Quinns: Oh, yeah, that’s good!

Matt: Yeah, so good luck with that.

Quinns: So, everything is beautiful, the cards are lovely, you’ve got the dice tower, you’ve got wooden dice, you’ve got eggs.

Matt: But what’s the problem, Quinns?

Quinns [strained]: Eurgh, the game’s alright.

Matt: Right. Sure.

Quinns: What people should know is, if people said to me, “Quinns, do you want to play Wingspan?” I would say, “Sure.” Which, if people have listened to even *some* episodes of this podcast, they will know Matt and I have played coming close to thousands of board games at this point. If we say we’d play a board game, that’s like high praise.

Matt: Yeah.

Quinns: And if people want to get Wingspan, they definitely could, it’s lovely. But the design itself didn’t excite me, it didn’t enormously impress me. It’s quite relaxing, it’s quite interesting.

Matt: As a big fan of birds, though, as well! I kind of feel, usually in the way same whenever we review board games where like, “Eh, it’s okay, but if you love Star Wars, great.” You love birds!

Quinns: And I... don’t think it’s that… [Matt: And you don’t love it, so.] good, yeah. Yeah. If any board game was going to corrupt me and give a good review to something that’s not that great, it would be Wingspan.

Matt: I mean the production quality of it looks superb. And as we have seen, really solid production quality does result in lots of people buying games and enjoying them. As we’ve seen with CMON!

Quinns: Yup, and they’ve done a lovely job of production. The theme is so unique and so lovely. I’ve never played anything with a theme quite like this. Although I’m not entirely sure what’s happening that the birds in your aviary sort of join your evil empire in helping you get more birds stuck in the aviary.

Matt: You’ve gotta make birds to get birds.

Quinns: Can’t make an omelette without breaking a few eggs. If I wasn’t trying to describe a game, I could have worked that in as a joke.

Matt: I thought you were going to say, “Can’t make an omelette without breaking a few birds.”

Quinns: See, that’s what I’m talking about!

Matt: That’s a joke, yeah.

Quinns: It’s so difficult to entirely pin down with nebulous card games and engine building games why they do or don’t work, but there was nothing about Wingspan that was enormously exciting and poppy.

Matt: Well, that’s another game which fails to win the illustrious Shut Up & Sit Down Quintin Smith Super Bird Fan Award. [Quinns laughing] Obviously I’ve prepared a 3D badge for that to go on boxes years ago, and we just have yet to find the game that is going to get that sticker. The Quintin Smith Ultimate Bird Fan Award.

Quinns: I do know that No Pun Included are working on a video review of Wingspan. We're not going to be doing a video review, but I believe that they feel quite similar to me, so while Shut Up & Sit Down won’t be doing a video review, if you want to know more about Wingspan, then No Pun Included are doing a review, and you know what? I might be recording a couple of little segments for that review.

Matt [singing]: Oh what a treat!

## Twilight Imperium stream plug [00:10:40]

Matt: Yeah, it’s funny actually, mentioning No Pun Included. For those of you who do not live outside of the Podcastle, we recently recorded, on our Twitch channel, a- How many hours was it? Seven?

Quinns: Nine hours.

Matt: Nine hours. [Quinns laughing] Were we playing for nine hours, or is the actual recording and the video nine hours?

Quinns: No, the video itself of the game will be up for eight hours. We streamed for nine.

Matt: A sweet eight hours. Just a little cool eight-hour game of Twilight Imperium.

Quinns: Matt pulled out all the stops, of course. You did a diary room, you did a Photoshop overlay of the board!

Matt: Yeah, we basically really tried. We knew it was going to be a long game, so we tried to have as many elements as we could to keep it entertaining, but also keep it so people could follow the game and get an idea of what was actually going on. That’s gonna be on Youtube in the future. If you’re listening to this now in recent terms, then you’ll be able to go and watch on the Twitch On-Demand. Actually, we do recommend doing that, because it’s quite cool being able to see all of the comments that went as they go, because the community on Twitch -- if you’re part of those people who watch these things and comment along -- it’s a joy for us to go back and watch people chatting about it, because it’s so interesting and so funny. It’s a lovely community.

Quinns: You know, I used to tell people to go and watch it on Twitch, because the comments are just funny? But actually, watching Twilight Imperium back, I found Twitch, in addition to being really funny and adding a layer of jokes over the entire experience, Twitch also has people being like, “Mmm, it’s interesting that Matt did this move when he could have done this.” Or pointing out plays we didn’t do. Pointing out why we were in trouble. And I thought I was quite clever: There’s one particular invasion I did in the game of TI that was, I thought, quite dramatic. Turns out, watching it back, Twitch chat had been like, “Quinns would be an idiot if he didn’t do this.”

Matt [laughing]: And also watching the explosions of excitement. Having moments where suddenly everything just blows up. And being able to, not watch it live, but still have that a part of it… It’s a shame we can’t archive that completely. But as we said on the internet, we are going to be trying to put some of our favorite joke comments and embedding them in the TI thing, just because it’s such a big, meaty thing, where if you love TI, check that out. But all I was gonna say is we had No Pun Included playing with us and they just reviewed Now Boarding, which is something I might want to dip back into. I played it two players, and I quite liked it? But it was one of those things that just slipped off the review stack, and I didn’t get back to for a little while.

Quinns: Yeah, there’s just too many games.

Matt: Too many games.

Quinns [singing]: Too many games!

## Chronicles of Crime [00:12:50]

[sting]

Quinns: Let’s move on to Chronicles of Crime!

Matt: Why wouldn’t we?

Quinns: Chronicles of Crime is… Oh goodness, how would you describe Chronicles of Crime, Matthew?

Matt: Chronicles of Crime is a pretty good game in which you are detectives trying to solve crimes. It’s a game which has red flags ribboned through it like stick of rock, and made me think, “This is not going to be good.” Because what does it do? Well, first of all, it’s got *QR codes*. [Quinns laughing] Which actually, weirdly, the third act I was not expecting in my life is that I’m actually coming around to QR codes after years of repeatedly going, “Who uses QR codes?”

Quinn: You know Japan had it figured out. Japan’s had QR codes that cause their society to be more efficient.

Matt: Yeah, I’ve just been like, “What the hell are these things? Why won’t they die?” To now being like, “Okay, no, they’re great.” I think it’s because the technology’s just better and they just work better now. So you’ve got QR codes, for one, which is not ideal. You’ve also got a thing which allows you put your phone into some sort of 3D glasses and look at 3D crime scenes.

Quinns: Yeah, when you get to a crime scene, you lift up your phone in front of your eyes and then can physically move your body, looking around a 3D environment.

Matt: Looking around through a window into another room where you can look for clues.

Quinns [laughing]: Which sounds proper naff.

Matt: Which sounds lame. That’s the thing, it sounds naff, right? It sounds naff. You’ve got these two things that basically think, “That’s a gimmick.” But surprisingly, it’s very good. And one of the reasons it’s very good is because of the fact it uses its gimmicks to its advantage within the game design, rather than just having them as a sideshow.

Quinns: Right, so immediately, the thing I’ve wanted to say about this since we played it all those months ago- We gave a really rough ride to Detective, which I just saw won, just recently- Detective: A Modern Crime Board Game won one of France’s biggest game of the year awards.

Matt: A lot of people loved it!

Quinns: A lot of people love it!

Matt: Which is great for them.

Quinns: We had a few problems with it, but a lot of it was to do with text, how text was implemented and how the puzzle was wrapped around the text. Chronicles of Crime, it is one of these games in the style of Detective or Sherlock Holmes: Consulting Detective, another board game we really like, where you’re given a puzzle and you simply have to get the answers. You navigate an environment, you and your friends all play cooperatively, you decide, “Oh, we want to go here,” interview this person, go to this other place, show this person this evidence. It’s kinda like the Phoenix Wright video games, if you’ve played that. And then at the end, whether you win or not is as simple as: You decide when you are done, and the app will go, “Okay, well, who did the crime?” Or ask you perhaps more specific questions: “Who was this person related to? Who was this person being blackmailed to?” And you don’t know what those questions are going to be, BUT if you fully understand the crime, you shouldn’t have any trouble with them.

Matt: And we found we got to the end of it and we really felt like we had cracked the main crime, which we had. But then it asked us questions about stuff and we were like, “Oh, we didn’t know about that.”

Quinns: The main reason the QR codes work, and the main reason it’s interesting and not a gimmick, is the simple way that this works is every item of evidence, every location, and every character card has a QR code. The game, interestingly, has no text, which is also super clever because it means manufacturing the game, it’s language independent! They can ship the same copy to any country. Almost, I guess, actually, because, come to think of it, the manual is…

Matt: No.

Quinns: Yeah.

Matt: But I mean more importantly than that is the fact that it makes it adaptable. And this is a game whereby you get a handful of cases with the game, and then there’s more you can buy, because the game is basically run through an app on a phone. And it means you can play more cases. And what’s really clever about it is you just have a deck of cards which are faces. They don’t have names, they’re just a picture of a person. And it means that these archetypes of whatever this character looks like can be used in different cases as different people. Somebody can be a victim, and then next time they can be a culprit. And they get a different name, a different backstory. But what’s wonderful about this: One of them was a dog, wasn’t it?

Quinns: Yeah [Matt laughing] and I think there’s a monkey in the deck as well.

Matt: So it’s like, okay! So you’ve got a deck of potential characters that can be reused in different scenarios. Then you have a deck of locations, which again can be reused. Then all of the crime things are very non-specific, like “a blunt object,” or…

Quinns: The crime cards, yeah.

Matt: The crime cards are all just different aspects, like “poison.” Which can be all sorts of different things. And then basically, if you want to find evidence then you just scan that QR code and it’ll add it to the things you found. So the game knows what you’ve found. Then once you interview people it’s as simple as being like, “I want to ask this person about this!” You just scan the thing you want to ask them about and scan the person.

Quinns: It’s absolute magic. In Detective: A Modern Crime Board Game, or even Sherlock Holmes: Consulting Detective, you might- Well, Consulting Detective has a thing where you talk to a suspect and he just tells you everything. Detective: A Modern Crime Board Game will have you talking to a suspect and going, “Well, do you want to leave him alone or spend five minutes really grilling him like a kipper?” Whereas Chronicles of Crime, despite looking more childish, despite having what we thought was a gimmick, has something so much more powerful, which is: You can talk to literally any character about literally any location, any other character, any other piece of evidence. Let’s say you find someone who you think is the murderer. Scan murderer, scan park, and your character asks them about the park. Or scan murderer, poison, ask them about poison. But it’s not free because every single time you scan, it deducts five minutes off a clock. Five in-game minutes, and your chief is like, [police chief voice] “You gotta solve this case by the end of the day!” So you have total freedom, and yet, more pressure! More tension! More intensity!

Matt: But I think also the pace of it makes a difference, because when you know that everytime you do something you’re going to have to lose some time -- and that was the same thing in Detective, of being like, “Well, we’re here now, what should we do?” -- in this, because you can do things so quickly, you can do three or four scans in a couple of seconds. You can just have an idea, and before you know it, if you’re the one holding the phone, [Quinns laughing] you’ve just done it! You go, “I’m going to ask him about this! Oh no, it’s nothing.” And then you’ve got the fact that each person, in front of them, has a different character.

Quinns: Oh yeah, every case starts with people who work with you at the police station. So someone might have the hacker in front of them, someone else might have the forensic scientist.

Matt: Yeah, so it’s like, “Oh, let’s ask the forensic scientist about this.” And in a way, that just semi-formalizes a system to make sure you’re passing the phone around? Which is interesting. Rather than being like, you have the laptop person, it means someone will be using the phone for a while, and then they’ll be like, “Oh, let’s ask the forensic scientist.” And because that’s in front of me, you pass the phone to me, and I’ll have a go. And even the fact that at the start of each case, you get this little crime scene you can look at, which really was often quite gory. But also set the scene and set the tone.

Quinns: It’s funny, isn’t it? It’s not like entrails splattered around.

Matt: It’s quite bleak.

Quinns: You know what? For all that Detective really wanted to nail the feeling of being a detective, and in some ways it does, because it covers the administrative side of being a detective, where there’s a piece of evidence from twenty years ago and you have to find another piece of evidence in a box from thirty years ago. Which is a real part of being police! Chronicles of Crime did something that was another part of being policemen, which is the very first tutorial case, it goes, “Oh, there’s someone been found by a river. Go to the crime scene.” And you lift up the phone in front of your eyes, and you see a river. You tilt the phone up and you see the sky. You tilt the phone down and you see *a corpse*. And it’s… not *disturbing*, but it’s shocking, you know? It’s not gory. There are some crime scenes in Chronicles of Crime where nothing’s particularly 15-rated.

Matt: Yeah, you just literally turn around and you go, [surprised and distressed] “Oh, there’s a dead body!” And it’s kinda weird.

Quinns: But it feels really close to you?

Matt: It does.

Quinns: And it feels shocking?

Matt: Yeah, it absolutely does. And I think another thing I’d say about it, really, and the way that it uses the technology and the way that it uses the freedom that that technology gives it, of not having to have loads of writing on cards, meant it was such a contrast when we played Detective, where we were playing on a full-sized table and everytime we were reading these cards aloud to one another, and I finally I was getting quite tired of reading them out, because it was just so much bloody writing about the salads and colas and lunch breaks and stuff. But also it meant that as the game went on we just had this slightly messy pile of previous cards of evidence.

Quinns: Yup!

Matt: Intermingled with the text of things that was important with this stuff about how many corridors you walked down to get to the canteen et cetera. So it meant that trying to go back and understand the case and remember characters- Because characters were just names!

Quinns: Oh, well this is what shocked me. So… sorry, [unintelligible]

Matt: The thing that’s magical about it is, we played Detective on a full-sized table. We played Chronicles of Crime on a coffee table, with substantially less space, and even despite that, it was so much easier to follow and visualize the plot of what had happened in this case, because you’re just looking at a collage of faces.

Quinns: One hundred percent.

Matt: And you’re like, “That guy did this! This person bought drugs off this person and met them here and then maybe they sold this person to this person?” And some of the storylines were really dark and involving.

Quinns: Yeah! Detective: A Modern Crime Story can have four people, which is basically four full names like Peter Hendrickson, and I’m lost. Whereas Chronicles of Crime can have… Some of the more difficult cases had, you know, what, *sixteen* characters?

Matt: Yeah, maybe.

Quinns: If those were names, I could never remember them. But sixteen faces? Piece o’ cake.

Matt: Yeah, because you just visualize them. You can see it. It was really a huge surprise for me. I would love to play some more of it. We had a dabble and it’s like…

Quinns: Hearing us talk about it, I think it’s everything board games can be, to me? And with so much of the board game press going crazy for Detective: A Modern Crime Board Game, I think we’ve got to cover Chronicles of Crime, because there’s nothing quite like it, it’s great.

Matt: I feel like it effortlessly gets around so many of the problems [Quinns: So many.] that Detective stumbles into. But also I feel like it reminds me so much of Phoenix Wright, which, for those of you who don’t play video games, is arguably a game about being a lawyer, but basically you’re a lawyer and a detective. And even though those games are idiosyncratic and annoying, they are also some of the best detective things imaginable, in a really silly way. And it really was just evocative, fun, exciting, puzzles that slot together in a way that makes sense. But just being able to follow a story, and realizing that the problem I had with Detective was that it was so obsessed with trying to recreate the minutiae of what it must be like- The mundanities of a day-to-day of having a job. Which is what we kind of skewered, fairly or otherwise, in our live podcast at Gencon. But this is just so much more about the human angle of just trying to get a feeling for people and trying to work out, and having gut feelings of being like, “I don’t trust this woman. I don’t trust this person.”

Quinns: Yeah, and you know what else? Just before we move on, I gotta say, Chronicles of Crime, despite having that cartoony look, was in a lot of ways more adult.

Matt: Yeah.

Quinns: It dealt with -- not in a way that was really on the nose -- but it had characters who were like… It had black characters where them being black was referenced in the story, and it had characters who were drug addicts where it didn’t feel like the writer was out of their depth writing about drugs and addiction. It had some crazy bizarre stuff as well, but also it just felt kind of…

Matt: It was caricatured, but it wasn’t cartoonish.

Quinns: Exactly. I mean we’ve complained about writing quite a lot in the history of Shut Up & Sit Down. I felt thatI really enjoyed the writing in Chronicles of Crime.

Matt: Yeah no, it’s cool. And especially interesting in the fact that the different cases, I think, written by different people.

Quinns: Yeah!

Matt: Maybe some of them… are bad!

Quinns [laughing]: Well interestingly, some of the expansions take it to like- One of them makes you a bunch of kids trying to solve crimes, but in a Scooby-Doo, Stranger Things kind of way, rather than just being police. So they’re doing different things for the different expansions-

Matt: Interesting.

Quinns: Which is lovely.

## Franchise [00:24:04]

Quinns: Let’s move on to [mouth fanfare] Franchise.

Matt: Yeah, I want to play Franchise.

Quinns: Matt wants to play Franchise.

Matt: Franchise is one of those things, and I don’t usually ever get salty about this, but occasionally when we’re at conventions, we’ll start playing a game, and then we’ll have to stop playing a game, because it’s like, “Ahh, we don’t have time to do this now,” or whatever. We started playing Franchise, and I was getting into it, and I was feeling really good about my strategy, and I was really excited about playing, and I was like, “I think I’m gonna do really well!” And then we had to stop. And then *you* went off and played it with *other people*!

Quinns: You know what, Matt? I don’t regret it, I had a good time!

Matt: Eurgh, god damn it!

Quinns: Franchise is something we might end up doing a small video on, because it’s unusual and I feel like it’s going to fly under the radar if we don’t cover it. This is from Queen Games, a publisher we have mixed feelings about, but with Franchise they’ve stepped outside of their comfort zone and hired an artist to do a really interesting and striking and -- I think -- quite strong board. This is art by Ian O’Toole

Matt: I thought you were just going to end that on “artist.”

Quinns: They’ve hired a artist! No, I would never be that mean.

Matt: No, that’s not you.

Quinns: Honestly, they just tend to do stuff that’s a little more childish.

Matt: Yeah no, well they’ve got a thing of what they do. They have made some really lovely games in the past.

Quinns: Absolutely. So Franchise is a game where you run fast food franchises, and the board is a HE-YOWGE [huge] map of America! It’s like eight-fold board. And also, the map looks *insane*. It almost looks like a parody of board games, because what Ian’s done: You have all the different cities, you know, from Los Angeles to Denver or wherever. Lots of small places as well. And then everything is connected by arrows or roads or dotted roads, which is basically how expensive it is to travel. So there might be a little tiny dotted line running from Los Angeles to San Francisco, and that means you can travel along it for free, but next to it might be a HUUUGGEE, bubbly cartoon arrow that winds all the way across America and goes to New York.

Matt: Yeah, you’ve got dotted lines, massive thick chunky arrows. It’s kind of like a campaign war map, but designed by somebody who’s taken a lot of psychedelics.

Quinns: I was gonna say. And you know that has to be an apt analogy, because Matt and I don’t like using the “It’s like this, but *on drugs!*”

Matt: Yeah, it’s wonderfully bright and colorful and curvy and it’s very artistic.

Quinns: And you were saying it actually becomes part of the game, because as you’re trying to figure out how to get from El Paso to New York, you end up having to look for arrows as if you’re playing Where’s Wally?

Matt: Yeah, that’s why I fell in love with it immediately. I was like, “I love this game because this has a board which is unintuitive.” It’s like trying to untangle spaghetti with your mind. [Quinns laughing] But, that’s kind of perfect for what the nature of the game is. Because it’s a game about running fast food franchises, and about trying to take over America with your amazing fast food franchise, and it’s all about looking for opportunities, looking for like, “Hey, where are we going to open our next burger joint?”

Quinns: Well, the bizarre thing about the theme though- It would make perfect sense if the player boards were like, “Oh, I run a McDonald’s, and you run a pizza place,” because those people might compete for the same fast food money in the 1940s.

Matt: Right.

Quinns: But, I have no idea why or how this could ever happen in production, but instead, your player boards are one person runs a coffee shop, someone else runs a garage, someone else runs a hotel. And this is, to be clear, an area control game where you’re all competing for the same profit margins.

Matt [laughing]: Doesn’t really make any sense.

Quinns: This is a weird world where people are like, “I want a burger, but I do need to go to the laundromat, but I can only go to one!”

Matt: This town is just full of hotels!

Quinns: It doesn’t make any sense.

Matt: No, that doesn’t make sense.

Quinns: But it would have been such an easy fix!

Matt: Yeah, just make them all different fast food joints.

Quinns: Anyway, this is an area control game, which immediately turns some people off, and with good reason, because area control is a fundamentally annoying genre of board games, where people get points for having the most of their pieces -- their cubes, let’s say -- their pawns -- in a region. So if I have one pawn in the region and everyone else has zero, I win. But, you need to have the most, which means if you have five pawns in a region and I have four, then I’ve wasted all of my time and you get all the points for that region, you know?

Matt: Yeah. What a waste.

Quinns: And just the raw bones of area control, I have recently realized that I’m not alone in finding them just annoying.

Matt: Right, yeah.

Quinns: Ideally in board games, when other people take their turns, you want it to be interesting and thought-provoking, exciting. Whereas with area control, it’s often just annoying. It’s like, “I was in this area. You’re now putting cubes in. Do I give up? Do I fight you?” You know. We like El Grande, that’s maybe the only area control game that Shut Up & Sit Down has really recommended. But with Franchise, it’s a different take on the genre that I really like, because the main thing in Franchise is…

Matt: You kind of own the route, don’t you? Is what’s bizarre.

Quinns: Well, yes. So, the board is a mix of places you actually want to control -- big cities like Los Angeles -- and they’re where all the points are going to come from. But also, you can spend your turn, instead, putting little franchises along the way to places. So I could have Los Angeles, but then what’s even better than filling Los Angeles up with my franchises is blocking all the little roads to get there, which means other people have to use those big crazy wobbly arrows.

Matt: And they’re expensive.

Quinns: They’re so expensive to use! But what’s interesting is that Franchise has multiple stages, where in the beginning you can go anywhere, do anything. Then people start having to pay arrows. And then there’s this bypoint that you haven’t experience yet, where about two thirds of the way through, players start going, “Oh my god, I’m locked in here.” Because actually, without them noticing, every single route around one of their franchises- Because you can only build outward from where you have franchises on the board.

Matt: No, I started to see that even in the early game we played, was the fact that early on you’re like, “Oh, well I can’t really do anything, so I guess I’ll make a small franchise on this road.” And then you suddenly realize, oh all those roads have been bought now, which means you just have to pay for the things. But then it’s like, “Oh, my network! I’ll just go up there!” Then you’re like, “Well I can’t go up there anymore, it’s full, which means I literally just cannot get to New York.”

Quinns: And you know, this is one of those cases where the mechanics shouldn’t work, but it does. Not quite being able to parse the board. If this had all been clean arrows, and you could look at the board and immediately go, [snaps] “Oh, there’s one route out of New York”... There’s enough to look at and the game moves at a sort of gentle pace that means you just miss stuff.

Matt: Yeah no, and I think that was what I fell in love with, was I fell in love with the fact that it works so well that you’re looking at your money, and especially when you’re doing well early on, you think, “Oh, I’ve got like nine dollars!”

Quinns: “I could go anywhere!”

Matt: “I could shoot up on that road down for three, and then I could bump up there for five! Or I could take this massive shortcut and just pay Loadsamoney to go here!” And it means your eyes are just madly darting around this insane [Quinns laughing] connection thing, looking for the next opportunity. And I think what really I loved about it, was it reminded me a little bit of Lords of Vegas. There’s something about Lords of Vegas which has people being brash, and stupid, or cocky, or desperate, which really just amplifies this feeling of you being someone in a loose shirt with a loose tie who’s a bit haggard, and is either swaggering around, or is about to make life’s biggest mistake. And that game evokes that. This game evokes that kind of madness of a sweaty brow and a loose tie of going, [anxious small business owner voice] “Oh god, how am I gonna make my burger business work?” [Quinns laughing] Of you just being this slightly insane businessman who clicks their fingers and goes, “I got it! We’re going to Kansas!”

Quinns: Yeah, that is very apt.

Matt: Yeah, it’s weird! It actually wouldn’t work if the board was clearer.

Quinns: Yeah.

Matt: Which is interesting.

Quinns: Yeah, it’s weird. And also I feel like Ian O’Toole has struck a really fine balance between, yeah we find it tricky to read the board, and the board is surprising, and -- this is a word I think I need to use more in my board game criticism -- it’s mysterious? There’s mystery in Franchise? But it’s not difficult to read.

Matt: Yeah, it’s mystery that comes from your own problems with perception.

Quinns: It’s almost like an optical illusion, I guess.

Matt [laughing]: It is! It’s the fact that you’re looking at it and you’re looking at it and you’re looking at it, and then suddenly you notice a road that you just hadn’t noticed before.

Quinns: Exactly!

Matt: But that gives it a filmic quality, actually. In the way that films are not representations of life, they’re like weird tropes and amplifications of how things works. And people have eureka moments where they suddenly stop and their car breaks down and they look up at a sign and they notice there’s a different road [Quinns laughing] to this place, and they take that road. It’s like that! You suddenly go, “Huh!”

Quinns: Yeah. I was stopped short before I managed to mention it, but the reason that the area control in this is interesting, and the reason it works, is because it has a mechanic I’ve not seen before in area control where each city, depending on its size, will have a number of radial spaces for little franchises. So in Los Angeles, maybe there’s seven spaces for franchises. Now, the money that is generated if you have a franchise there is based on…

Matt: Oh yeah.

Quinns: ...how many free slots there are! Which means it’s an area control game where the places only pay out when they are full. So for example, let’s say you go to LA. If you doggedly spend money putting a franchise in every one of LA’s seven slots, that’s great because you’re gonna get a load of points. But that’s definitely not what you want to do. Much better to have a single franchise in LA to be the only burger joint in town, because guess what, the less franchises there are in a town, the more the individual franchises make money!

Matt: Mmmm.

Quinns: So, NOW, what we have is an area control game where everyone wants to have the most franchises. And it’s very slow to build up your franchises in an area. BUT! Maybe if you could just wait for one more turn, then you’re gonna make more money. So it’s an area control game where the more franchises you have the more points you have, but the less money you make. Which means everyone on the board-

Matt: So everyone on the board wants to fill up everything, but no one wants to fill up everything yet.

Quinns: There’s also a weird thing, because it’s quite difficult to travel because of this wind-y system of arrows, there’s real joy in going, “Oh my gosh, no one’s in Chicago! No one can even get to Chicago! If I just pay seven dollars” -- which is preposterous -- “riding this massive plane of an arrow all the way across America to Chicago, and then I also block this route with my two actions, then I’ve taken Chicago, it’s spitting out money, no one else can get there for a while, which means I can sit on it.” But the board is just big enough -- and it does shrink if you have less players -- it always rides this -- as far as I can tell, I’ve only played a couple of times -- it tends to strike this really nice balance, whereby everyone has their fingers in just enough different city pies that routinely throughout the game, what we had in our four-player game: Players would move into a city and be like, “Okay, I’m quickly gonna move into LA with you and build a franchise.” And players would go, [dawning horror] “Wuuhhh nnnooo!!” Because they were counting on-

Matt: Because you’re like, “I’m gonna do that!”

Quinns [shocked entitlement]: “LA’s mine!”

Matt: Yeah!

Quinns: And it’s so funny.

Matt: And again, that’s why the obfuscation works nicely, in the fact that you go, [proud and confident] “Nobody can get here!” And then you go, [confused] “Well how did you get here?” It’s like, “I just drove down this road.” It’s like, [dismay] “Oh no!”

Quinns [laughing]: It certainly would work less well in a two- or three-player game.

Matt: Yeah, and I also wonder as well if it’s the sort of game where, unfortunately because you have this weird aesthetic obfuscation, if you play it more and more, that will fade.

Quinns: I mean maybe, but also there’s stuff you can do to randomize the regions to make it a bit different every time. But mostly, I think why it works quite well as- Maybe the sweet spot is four, with five it might be a bit slow, I don’t know.

Matt: I think so, yeah.

Quinns: But with four it was so good because most of your time was just laughing, because two players, who weren’t you, were getting really annoyed with each other. [Matt laughing] But in a way that wasn’t true annoyance because they knew that they screwed up. Like, [dismay] “Oh no don’t come here! I didn’t think you could!”

Matt: It’s greed!

Quinns: It’s greed.

Matt: You know you should reinforce it, but… It’s like that thing you do in any military video game of being like, “I should really build some defensive forces… but I’ll build another farm first [Quinns laughing] because then I’ll have more money.” And then that, [dismay] “Oh no they’re attacking me! Oh noooooo oh god!”

Quinns: Yeah, we’re gonna be experimenting with some shorter-form reviews in the near future, so that’s gonna be fun.

Matt: I think it says a lot that Franchise, as soon as you mentioned it, I kind of remember all of the rules, which, for a game we only played a few rounds of, is a bit crazy.

Quinns: I mean, that’s the other thing. Not only is it good-looking, not only is it fun, but it’s simple to teach.

Matt: Yeah. The Teach… is smooth.

Quinns: The Teach on that one… real smooth ride.

Matt: Goes down like a glass of Baileys.

Quinns: Ohh!... no it’s too early for a glass of Baileys.

Matt [laughing]: It’s too early. It’s way too early!

## Woodlouse Chaos [00:36:00]

Quinns: Finally, before we move on to the Pearple’s Choice, I’m just going to spend a few minutes talking about this new ugly bugs game.

Matt [à la Crazy Little Thing Called Love by Queen]: Crazy little game called…

Quinns [stammering]: Uh ooh, Woodlouse Chaos. [Matt laughing] I paused there because I know the German name is [probably mispronouncing] Assel Schlamassel. [pronouncing differently and probably incorrectly] Assel Schlamassel?

Matt [à la Crazy Little Thing Called Love by Queen]: Crazy little thing called… [stammering]

Quinns: Are you done? Are you done?!

Matt: Roach… Panic!

Quinns: Are you done, Matthew Lees?

Matt: I forgot what the game was called, so carry on.

Quinns: Okay. [unintelligible talking over Matt]

Matt: I wasn’t joshing you, just the same thing happened to me.

Quinns: So this is a party game which is real goofy for three, four, five, six players, however many. You’ve got a deck of animals which are things like woodlouse, spiders, cockroaches, all weird little bugs. Every card in the deck has a different number of them. One card might two snails, another might be five cockroaches. What will happen is players take turns drawing secretly a card from this deck, and seeing, like, two snails.

Matt: Mmhm.

Quinns: Now, in the middle of the table, there is a number of cards showing each of the animals to show their position in the order. So let’s say the snails, right now, are in position five. You then have to telegraph to the rest of the table that your card has two snails. Now remember how it’s number five on the track?

Matt: Yeah.

Quinns: That means you’re going to have to clap [claps five times] five times. That is telling the table we’re dealing with snails. You also have to slap the table twice because it’s *two* snails.

Matt: Okay…

Quinns: So you’re going to go [clapping while counting] one two three four five-

Matt and Quinns in unison: SLAP SLAP!

Quinns: Exactly.

Matt: What could be easier?

Quinns: This is one of my favorite games to teach ever. Like Cockroach Salad or Soup-

Matt: I bet your neighbors love it as well.

Quinns: Oh yeah, especially if you slap the walls instead, that’s great. [Matt laughing] If you do that, and a player goes, “Two snails!” That’s great, they get the card, they’ve got a point. However, here’s the catch. You don’t have to slap the table and clap discretely. So instead you can go [clap clap SLAP clap SLAP clap clap] or whatever. I think I just did this wrong. And this is why the game is good! Because here’s the thing: If no one gets it because everyone’s too afraid- Because if you guess wrong, you *lose* a point. So players need to be pretty sure they know what it is, *and* they need to do it against the clock. So if everyone screws up or if players are just silent because they can’t figure out what the hell you just did, *you* get the point. And the reason Woodlouse Chaos works and is brilliant is because, I would say about fifty percent of the time, the person slapping and clapping does their level best to make it so confusing, they screw up and do the wrong number of claps and slaps, at which point, *they* lose a point.

Matt: But how can you tell if they’ve done it wrong?

Quinns: Because- [stammering]

Matt: Because everyone else…

Quinns: Sometimes you can’t. There were a couple points in the game where literally no one around the table knew how many times someone had clapped. [Matt laughing] But loosely there’s enough people that-

Matt: -that everyone’s like, “No, you clapped six times.”

Quinns: If everyone gets it wrong and they flip the card and they’re like, “Hang on, no, that can’t be right, because you slapped the table twice.” It’s kind of just groupthink. It works okay.

Matt: Sure, it works.

Quinns: But you know what?

Matt: Oh gosh.

Quinns: I have very little to say about it. It’s pretty funny.

Matt: These card games seem to do a really good line in being the wonderful thing of whenever you’re playing this sort of game, people just come over to the table, and they’re just confused. And it’s people who play a lot of game, just like, “*What’s* this?” [Quinns laughing] Because we had that with Schummel Hummel, with Cheating Bee. People just come over and going, “What the hell are you doing?”

Quinns: It’s surprising to me that these games haven’t gotten a little more traction. Although I guess Cockroach Poker, the game in this series that everyone loves, just wasn’t talked about very much. I think we were part of a sort of resurgence of people going, “Hang on guys, this game is great.” Because I think the original Cockroach Poker came out in something like 2006.

Matt: Yeah.

Quinns: And it’s been a long time since people have started- And *now*, everyone plays Cockroach Poker.

Matt: Yeah, Cockroach Poker is one of the best games in the world.

Quinns: Exactly, but I do think the other games in this series, I think people might be sleeping on as well. I think they might only have good distribution in Germany. So if you’re interested in this, we’ve talked now, in the last few months, about Cockroach Salad and Cockroach Soup, which are basically the same game. We’ve talked about Cheating Bee and Cheating Moth, which are also kind of the same game, but Cheating Bee is the new version, we also like that. And now Schummel Hummel, which means Woodlouse Chaos.

Matt: No, no, you said Schummel Hummel means Woodlouse Chaos.

Quinns: Oh, sugar, sugar, no no no.

Matt: Which is just patently wrong.

Quinns: This is Assel Schlamassel.

Matt: I beg your pardon?

Quinns: It’s… Ash…

Matt: Go straight to your room!

Quinns: So yeah, I don’t know. You’ll have to google… You could try googling “Assel Schlamassel”...

Matt: I mean, I wouldn’t recommend that.

Quinns: No. Just google Woodlouse Chaos, it’s fine.

Matt: Yes, that’s a far safer google.

Quinns: Honestly, it’s a cheap ugly animals game, it’s a tiny box, it’s fifteen quid. For the amount of laughter we got out of it… I think it’s the kind of game which I’m going to play once a year. It doesn’t have the staying power of Cockroach Poker because it’s clapping and slapping a table and it’s really intense. But as a novelty to bring out once a year and show people and watch them all moan and laugh, it’s great.

Matt: Yeah, this sounds like a kind of raucous dinner party thing of being like, “Let’s do this.” Again, there are games where you think, “Ah, this is everything games can be!” But then there are other games of being like, “This is also everything games can be in a way that this can just be silly and surprising.”

Quinns: Yeah, exactly.

Matt: And doesn’t need to have any meat, it can just be something where people go, “What is this? What are we doing?” [Quinns laughing] Which is in itself an aspirational thing to work towards.

Quinns: I think it’s as funny as it is because it’s silly but it’s so tense.

Matt: I mean all of those games are silly and brilliant. It’s no coincidence. You cannot just chuck stuff at a wall and be like, “Yes, we’ve made a silly fun game!” I mean lots of people do that, mentally. But the designers behind this series are clearly very smart, because they consistently make things which are uniquely hilarious. I still can’t get over the fact that you teach people how to play Cockroach Poker, and they kind of go, “Okay. Right.” They don’t really see what the game is. And then they go, [mischievous holding-in-laughter-while-lying voice] “This is a stinkbug.” And it’s just hilarious! [Quinns laughing] The act of just quietly softly lying to people constantly… The fact that you’re talking about stinkbugs and bats and rats, it’s inherently funny things. Toads!

Quinns: You know, that’s not something we’ve put together with this series, but of course the one thing they do all have is-

Matt: Horrible little creatures!

Quinns: -little cute bugs! And I think there’s something about that. It’s just a little devilish.

Matt: Yeah.

Quinns: Yeah, goodness. How lovely.

Matt: It’s great.

## Pearple’s Choice Awards - Intro [00:41:57]

Quinns: Let’s move on to our main event. It is…

Matt: [singing Guile’s Theme]

Quinns: No, stop singing Guile’s Theme!

Matt: [continues singing Guile’s Theme]

Quinns: Stop it!

Matt: [continues singing Guile’s Theme]

Quinns: [joins in singing Guile’s Theme]

Matt [to the melody of Guile’s Theme]: The Pearple’s Choice!

Matt and Quinns [singing out of both tune and sync]: Pearple’s, Pearple’s Choice Awards!

Matt: That’s the official theme tune for Pearple’s Choice that I…

Quinns [continuing to sing softly in background over Matt]: Pearple’s Choice Awards! Pearple’s Choice Awards!

Matt: Copyright Matt Lees. 2019.

Quinns: Awwwwww. Probably should put an actual sting in.

Matt: Yeah, do that.

[Chamber music playing]

Quinns: Oh, thank you very much for bearing with us there. Matt and I just had to change into our matching tuxedos.

Matt: Mmhm.

Quinns: Matt, you’ve gone for an interesting style of tuxedo, there.

Matt: Thanks!

Quinns: I don’t know if it’s still technically a tuxedo if you’re not wearing the trousers?

Matt: Well, I think I have put on an extra bowtie.

Quinns: Yes, that is true.

Matt: Which should count for something, frankly.

Quinns: Did you see, there was a lovely tweet. It was a photo compilation of people adjusting Rami Malek’s bowtie at the oscars.

Matt [laughing]: Oh yeah, and then him on the stage with this really wonky bowtie. And it’s like, *everybody tried so hard!*

Quinns [laughing]: Yeah, yeah.

Matt: Yeah, I love that everyone kept being like, “Oh let’s try and fix this.” I love Rami Malek. I hope he’s really lovely.

Quinns: I hope he’s alright.

Matt: Yeah, you know what I mean, right? It’s got to that point with famous people, where you’re like, “I hope they’re alright!” Because I really like him.

Quinns: Yeah, I couldn’t agree more. You know who else I really like? It is Shut Up & Sit Down forum user clg6000 for- just like he did last year-

Matt: I think they should have won an Oscar, frankly.

Quinns: An Oscar for best forum-

Matt: Yes.

Quinns: -best award ceremony put together on the Shut Up & Sit Down forums. If you weren’t aware, Shut Up & Sit Down does have a message board, which is discussions.shutupandsitdown.com.

Matt: Yup.

Quinns: You can go. You can post in a thread. You can talk to nice people. It’s a lovely community.

Matt: It is.

Quinns: And I tell you what, the thing that we weren’t expecting that it’s become really good for is people playing games online. A lot of roleplaying groups. They even play -- I think -- games like Skull. I don’t know how they make that work, but they do. Lots of play-by-forum games! So that’s nice. But also! There’s enough Shut Up & Sit Down users that they’re all able to vote on awards. That’s exciting because we can see what they thought about the year 2018!

Matt: Yeah!

## Pearple’s Choice Awards - Best Game of 2018 [00:43:57]

Quinns: We’re going to begin with the big award. This isn’t the Oscars! This isn’t other people’s award ceremonies! We are dessert first here at SU&SD. It’s Best Game of 2018.

Matt: [big gasp] We’re leaping straight into the dessert pool?

Quinns: With respect to CLG, I’m gonna do it in the order that he put it up.

Matt: I’m drowning in blancmange.

Quinns: Before we find out what our audience thought, Matt…

Matt: Let’s find out what Matt thought!

Quinns: Well, do we want to do our own thoughts before or after?

Matt: I think you specifically made me choose what I thought my answers were before I looked at the list, so it makes sense for you to reveal them and then make me look like a fool! Or a charlatan!

Quinns: Oh no, I kinda did the same thing. So alright! We’ll have the Shut Up & Sit Down top ten list and discuss it. So, in joint place, at number 10 with 7% of the vote, which is unusual, we’ve got dice game Ganz Schön Clever, Champion of the Wild, and The Estates. At place number 9, with 9% of the vote, it’s Men At Work!

Matt: Mmm!

Quinns: Lovely dexterity game. At number 8 -- maybe a bit high -- it’s Keyforge: Call of the Archons. And also Reiner Knizia card game reprint High Society. Place number 7, it’s Lowlands. At place number 6, it’s Root. Number 5: The Mind. Number 4: Railroad Ink. Third best game of 2018: Brass Birmingham.

Matt: Mmm!

Quinns: The second best game: Welcome To.

Matt [more enthusiastically]: Mmm!

Quinns: Which makes -- are you ready for this? -- the top game of 2018, according to our audience, was -- with 28% of the vote -- Decrypto.

Matt: That’s very interesting.

Quinns: It’s interesting, because I never would have said Decrypto, but as soon as I hear it, I’m like, that’s a great first choice.

Matt: Yeah, I remember Decrypto. I still feel like Decrypto didn’t get the fairest of shakes from us, but that’s the unavoidable part of working as part of an editorial team. People have things, and we have one editorial voice, but occasionally we do disagree, and if we don’t run reviews together, then fair enough. Because I remember when Paul reviewed this, he liked it, but he didn’t like a few things about it and I don’t agree with a lot of criticisms he made, to be honest. But I thought as well, when we played Decrypto the first time, I just felt like it had something.

Quinns: It’s pretty magical. It’s crazy how rare it is that board games truly allow you to do stuff that makes you look clever.

Matt: Yeah!

Quinns: But Decrypto is a game where you can be capital-C Clever. Even more so than Codenames.

Matt: Much more so than Codenames. Decrypto is a game which you really have to build your own cleverness engine. And if it flies or crashes into a wall, that’s completely on you guys. I played it over Christmas with my family, and initially it was quite bumpy because it was a bit more rules-y than people would have liked at that point, and that number of sherries, but people really got into it by the end. I had that horrible thing for the first half of being like, “Oh, I’ve made a mistake, we shouldn’t have done this.” But then I was like, “Ah, you know, we can stop.” And everyone was like, “No no no no!” [Quinns laughing] And everyone was really locked in by the end of it. It’s a fabulous thing. I think in many ways I’m glad that people seem to be giving it a fair shake, because I think many people -- in the wake of Codenames -- just thought, “Ehhh, do I need another code game?”

Quinns: I’m absolutely guilty of that. I saw, it’s a team game, it’s for 4-8 players, it comes in the same size box as Codenames, same price. But when you play it: Yes it’s a word game, but it’s so different. And I’ll tell you what else. I don’t think it gives enough kudos for just looking so beautiful.

Matt: Yes.

Quinns: Because Codenames…

Matt: And that was the major disagreement I had with Paul. I think he didn’t like the art style of it, and I think it’s just gorgeous and perfect.

Quinns: I think it’s beautiful, yeah. And also, you know what else? The theming of it -- which is like, I want to say Cold War spies, it’s kind of early computing, 1960s white plastic computers -- actually fits the game.

Matt: It does!

Quinns: Codenames’s very loose theme of like, you’re picking spies out from a crowd, doesn’t really work. But you could play Decrypto in costume of suits, and in a darkly-lit room, and your friends smoking if they’re into that. And that would feel like a sort of Cold War spy thriller, you know?

Matt: Yeah! Yeah.

Quinns: Hearing their codes and being like, [hushed tones of a codebreaker] “What could it mean?” Have you heard about the first little expansion they’ve announced for Decrypto?

Matt: Yeah! Is it the Laserdisc expansion? [Ed: Laserdrive.]

Quinns: Laserdisc! I’ve now read what’s in it. If you haven’t heard, I’ll be curious to hear your thoughts live.

Matt: I heard some of it, but I didn’t look too closely.

Quinns: Okay! Well the Laserdisc expansion is a module that means that players will have the option of- Because in Decrypto, you just have to be able to decrypt what the opponent…

Matt: Yeah, you don’t need to know what the word is.

Quinns: But with Laserdisc, you get the opportunity to guess what the word is. And if you guess fully two of the four words, then you win. So it’s an alternate victory condition. I think there’s something else. Oh yeah! [snaps] There’s another thing which is, it forces you to give words beginning with specific letters occasionally? Oh no, not letters. It might be like, this turn all of your clues have to be movies. And you have to do that with one of your three clues? But if you give all three as names of movies? Then you get like an extra bonus, which enables you to do something.

Matt: Interesting. Interesting.

Quinns: Little fussy stuff.

Matt: The latter half sounds more like an expansion. The first part just sounds like, that’s just a rule you could… add?

Quinns [completing Matt’s sentence]: ...play with now? [laughing]

Matt: Yeah. But no, that is interesting. Especially because it’s quite delightful when you think, “Yeah, we’ve got this word, we know exactly what this word is now.”

Quinns: Yeah.

Matt: It’s the realization, and I love that moment. That’s the difference between real codebreaking, you can see the other team going, [quiet dismay] “Oh no.” [Quinns laughing] You can see the moment where they go, [gasp] “That’s the…!” And then they go, “Oh my…” And you’re like, [miserable] “Oh yeah they’ve got it.” And it doesn’t matter what you write now, because they know what that word is.

Quinns: I love the doubling down on the crap early era computing with the expansion that’s like, [hard-boiled codebreaker] “You’re not going to believe this. It’s data… *on a disc*.” Like the expansion looks like a CD-ROM drive?

Matt: Yeah, no.

Quinns: But it’s like, [impressed codebreaker] “Oh my god, it’s a circular disc we read with a laser?! That’s crazy!”

Matt: Yeah.

Quinns: It’s cool.

Matt: Yeah no, it’s very cool. It’s very cool.

Quinns: But of course, we -- before looking at this list -- named our own games of the year, didn’t we? So I’ve got down here that, Matt, your game of the year was…!

Matt: [mouth fanfare]

Quinns: Brass Birmingham.

Matt: It’s Brass Birmingham. Slash!

Quinns: Quacks of Quedlinburg.

Matt: Quacks of Quedlinburg.

Quinns: Which we’re not entirely sure came out last year, but we’re not gonna bother checking, because-

Matt: I don’t care! I played it last year!

Quinns: -life’s too short.

Matt: Life is too short. I played it last year. Therefore... it came out last year. It’s not true, it’s not true. No, those two games, obviously incredibly similar games. [both chuckling] That’s a joke. Brass Birmingham being, of course, a big, slightly fiddly, but slightly more forgiving eurogame than its original but beloved cult classic Brass. I just fell in love with Brass Birmingham. I played it a lot. I could play it now.

Quinns: I could play it. [laughing]

Matt: I think about it a lot. Everytime I think about it I want to play it. And everytime I set it up I get excited about playing it. And everytime I play it, it does not disappoint on that. It’s a wonderful production. It put Roxley Games on my radar in quite a big way, and I want to check out more of their stuff. I’ve still actually got- I’ve had in my cupboard for many years -- to my shame -- Super Motherload, which you just gave me, I think, because you were like, “Hey, you might like this! Check it out at some point.”

Quinns: Oh yeah, occasionally I give out review copies and be like, “You can check this out!” And sometimes people check it out and sometimes they don’t. And that’s fine!

Matt: Yeah, I might forget. I forget stuff.

Quinns: Life is busy!

Matt: Yeah, life is busy, and you’ve always got new stuff coming {?} and you need to check it out. But it’s made me really want to go back and look at a lot of their stuff more closely, because there’s a level of care there, and a level of attention that I think… these guys! These people. They’re good.

Quinns: Yeah, I’m playing a bit of Dice Throne Season 2, which Roxley Games also picked up. And again, production values, gorgeous.

Matt: As a production, that’s crazy. I’d like to play that again actually, when I’m not exhausted, because I played that at a point which my brain… was off.

Quinns: I’ll tell you what: It’s good.

Matt: It looks good. And also Quacks, we reviewed that really recently. I adore it. I think it’s one of my favorite games in recent years, as I’ve said, and I still feel that. I’ve played it again since the review a couple of times. It’s so fast! We played two games of it back to back in an evening, and it was just not a thing.

Quinns: That’s lovely. I will say, I think Quacks is also a fine contender for game of the year, [high-pitched] buuuutttttt! I could see myself playing Decrypto for thirty years. I could see myself pulling out Decrypto every other Christmas forever. Quacks I do feel like has a shelf life, which is not a criticism because most board games have a shelf life. I think Quacks is still good, still good. My own pick for game of the year, and I feel- I don’t know why I picked this, but I did, and I’m going to follow my heart. I chose Welcome To.

Matt: Yeah! I mean, that’s fine.

Quinns: Yeah.

Matt: I was worried you were gonna be like, “I think it’s Captain Sonar, again.” [Quinns laughing] Like, really left field.

Quinns: Last year we picked the Arkham Horror Card Game, I think, you and me both.

Matt: Yeah, no, and I’m fine with that. I had some of my best times with that.

Quinns: Yeah, you know, I don’t know what it is about Welcome To. This is really just personal taste, because… Roll-and-writes are coming back as a genre in a big way.

Matt: Yeah.

Quinns: You know, any new genre emerging in board games is a big moment that year, so in some ways the emergence of roll-and-writes might be, for me, the most exciting movement to happen this year? Welcome To was the first one I played and also it’s just astonishing, so for me, it’s maybe my game of the year because when we first played it, and a friend of ours put it in front of us, it was a moment of me going like, “Oh my gosh. I’ve never played anything like this. I love playing it. The tactility and how it works is so unusual. It’s simultaneous.”

Matt: We played Ganz Schön Clever before that.

Quinns: Oh, so we did, yeah.

Matt: But I just didn’t really click with that. It was fine. But it didn’t excite me. Whereas Welcome To was immediately exciting.

Quinns: It’s funny, because you’re a big fan of Wolfgang Warsch, but for some people, Ganz Schön Clever is gonna be their favorite thing he’s done. But you’re not hot on it.

Matt: It’s fine! I just think it didn’t grab me. It was basically like playing Bingo. It was very fun, but it was like a kind of background thing. Whereas Welcome To I found evocative and interesting. And also, I think we’re seeing a lot of roll-and-write but also we’re seeing a lot of the board game industry’s obsession with components, which are leading to games which have all these little plastic pens and all these little whiteboards, and I don’t like that for a whole bunch of reasons, but I think the tactility’s just not as nice. I think there’s something lovely about the tactility of paper and pencil.

Quinns: Yeah, yeah!

Matt: And I think especially in Welcome To, a game where you’re effectively trying to plan out a neighborhood, scratching stuff, and scribbling stuff. And the fact that it has you underlining things, and circling things… It gives you reasons to use a pencil in lots of different ways that makes you feel like you’re doing work.

Quinns: Yeah!

Matt: But in a way which is interesting. Whereas there’s nothing workmanlike about very daintily and carefully rubbing out a marker with a little eraser thing.

Quinns: It’s like for the Twilight Imperium Let’s Play, you got really excited because you realized you could put checkboxes in the overlay?

Matt: Yeah!

Quinns: And Welcome To is basically a game of checkboxes.

Matt: Yeah, it is. There’s something very satisfying about ticking boxes and circling things.

Quinns: Yup! We’re gonna go through… There’s a lot of categories in the Pearple’s Choice.

Matt: Let’s just do top threes for most of the categories.

Quinns: I agree, I agree. I thought, just for that one, though, it would be exciting.

Matt: Yeah, for the big one! For the big potato! Peel it all!

## Pearple’s Choice Awards - Best Expansion Released in 2018 [00:54:35]

Quinns: We’ll gloss over a couple of these real quick. Best Expansion Released in 2018. At the number one slot, it’s a tie, with 21% of the vote, between Root: The Riverfolk, and Arkham Horror the Card Game: The Forgotten Age expansion, which is the one that casts you into South America. Not played that one. I was a little disappointed with the cycle before it, which was Dunwich Legacy, because… I was.

Matt [laughing]: Yeah.

Quinns: Well, there’s an unusual thing. The central conceit in Dunwich is that there’s a weird play going on. That’s the first scenario: There’s a weird play. But the thing that it tries to -- I guess -- borrow from the books is like, “But is it real? Or are you *crazy*?” And that’s not what Arkham Horror the Card Game does well! We’re literally fighting things that are eating us. Maybe I am crazy, but this not an interesting question to me because I can’t engage with it meaningfully. I can’t decide not to play the game.

Matt: Yeah. Yeah.

Quinns: Anyway, there were a few other things that bugged me about that. But certainly I’m excited to play the Forgotten Age, because it’s just colorful and raw and exciting to be like, “We’re going into this pyramid in the middle of nowhere. What’s going to happen? Probably awful snake monster things.” And I’m more comfortable with that than questioning our own psychology? Am I going crazy? I just want to buy a laser gun and shoot a dog.

Matt: Yeah, yeah.

Quinns: I don’t. That came out wrong. I don’t want to harm dogs. I like dogs.

Matt: Yeah, it’s funny, because Lovecraft is about more than just shotguns and explosions.

Quinns: As we always talk about, yeah.

Matt: At the same time, all Arkham Horror does well is desperately running around hoping you’re going to find a stick of dynamite [Quinns laughing] whilst being chased by an assortment of bad things.

## Pearple’s Choice Awards - Best Kickstarter Delivered in 2018 [00:56:08]

Quinns: We’ve got Best Kickstarter Delivered in 2018. The winners are: Champion of the Wild, Root, and Brass Birmingham. Sure.

Matt: It’s heartening to see Champion of the Wild popping up all over the place. In the same way it’s been heartening to see their second Kickstarter doing really well, because it’s a game that we loved. We tried to communicate to people why we loved it, and people didn’t see it, which is fine. And I think really actually it was the live show we did at PAX Unplugged that made people realize that, look, arguably people say, [no-fun-allowed voice] “It’s just a box of animals.” It’s not true. It’s not true! It’s the fact that you’ve also got some gifted event ideas, and some gifted artwork, which really does just get the imagination going. And I think we showed people that it’s not just a funny game, it’s genuinely interesting. It genuinely does raise interesting questions.

Quinns: About…

Matt: About whether or not you could rob a bank better than a rhino. [laughing]

Quinns: Yeah, if you haven’t seen our live show of Champion of the Wild, you should, because I think it’s hilarious. If you search for Shut Up & Sit Down Champion of the Wild, you’ll find the live show we did, which involved- The most contentious round was the audience and all of our panelists arguing whether Matt would be better or worse at doing a robbery than a pacific octopus.

Matt: Yeah. Yeah.

Quinns: I very much fall in the camp that that octopus could go through vents, it could unscrew things.

Matt: I do feel like the octopus honestly would give me a really… I think I’d struggle to be better at a heist than an octopus. I can say that now, in a non-competitive setting. But I do think I’d be better at a heist than a rhino. Anyway, we’re not going to get back into this. [laughing]

Quinns: No, sorry, I was tapping away at the laptop to check whether the second Kickstarter for Champion of the Wild was still live and we could tell people to back it. They cannot. It finished raising about fifty thousand dollars. Okay bad news, you can’t back the Kickstarter. Good news, that second print run from the Kickstarter for Champion of the Wild is gonna be in shops, it’s gonna have some retail presence, but also, it’s gonna have new events and new animals.

Matt: Mmm!

Quinns: So, the box we loved is getting- Oh and new variants of ways to play! So if you were on the fence about, “Oh, I’d like Champion of the Wild”, don’t worry, because a second edition with all kinds of improved qualities… I know that one of the new sporting events is musical chairs! That’s gonna be great!

Matt: Yeah, there’s a lot to love there and it’s definitely something which you need to jury-rig into a shape that you like. But I think that’s fine.

Quinns: Yup.

## Pearple’s Choice Awards - Best Game Production of 2018 [00:58:23]

Quinns: Okay, moving on. We’ve got a category which we’re going to spend a bit more time on: Best Game Production of 2018. Gonna do a top five here, because I think it’s super interesting. Rising Sun, getting 13% of the vote. Everdell, game with a big cardboard tree. That sounds catty, it also has some beautiful art of all kinds of animals in a little society.

Matt: You don’t like it at all.

Quinns: No! Moving on.

Matt: That’s fine! That’s fine!

Quinns: I was gonna be like, “No, I…” But then it’s like, I actually, full stop-

Matt: No, you really don’t like it, and that’s fine.

Quinns: We have got, in joint number third place, with 20% of the vote, Decrypto and Treasure Island. [chuckling] Treasure Island, of course…

Matt: Yeah, I was like, that shouldn’t… Treasure Island didn’t really… It’s wonderful, but the production of it…

Quinns: Since our review I’ve been told to use chalk pens.

Matt: Yes.

Quinns: That’s the ideal for the…

Matt: I did wonder that. But still, it doesn’t come with chalk pens. And it’s a beautiful piece of art on the map, but they messed up some production.

Quinns: Is there something to be said that the best production for the year should be people pushing the envelope, even if they screw up, than people who just do something-

Matt: No.

Quinns: Okay.

Matt: Because production is not ideas, production is fulfillment.

Quinns: [laughing] Okay. Number two slot, it’s Men At Work, with 24% of the vote. And in the number one slot -- shouldn’t be a huge surprise -- with 55% of our voting audience of voters, it’s Root.

Matt: Yeah, I think Root is -- aside from maybe the player boards could have been slightly nicer -- it’s a remarkable production.

Quinns: Without looking at the awards, Matt and I both selected Root as our own personal award for best production of the year.

Matt: The game itself, I have mixed feelings on, but the production is stellar. Actually, Rising Sun, it’s not a very informed production. It’s kind of strange Tarantino-esque mishmash of cultural things, which in the same way that Tarantino was like, “That was cool!” fifteen years ago, it just doesn’t feel that cool anymore. But the production was so good in so many regards that I felt almost pained to be writing a review where I was like, “This game’s not really that great,” whilst also finding myself unable to not make the game look absolutely brilliant in focus, [Quinns laughing] because it’s just such a gorgeous… But then CMON, you know all of their games are gorgeous and poppy and I don’t really like any of them.

Quinns: Except for, well, they picked up Railroad Ink, but that’s not theirs. That’s from an Italian publisher, they just bought the rights for it.

Matt: Yeah. I don’t dislike many of their games, actually, I think they’re all just like, okay.

Quinns: I agree.

Matt: Like, quite good.

Quinns: I agree. Yeah, Root is a funny one. There’s an interesting thing where they’ve announced what’s going to be in the next Kickstarter for it, which is two new factions, which is crows and moles. The crows sound particularly interesting, because the crows are a faction of spies, and the way you infiltrate spies to people’s factions is you put your crow cards in their hands? So people’s hands are gradually filling up with crows, which I think is a lovely way to interact with people. But the thing that’s the most striking to me about the second Kickstarter is they’re going to include a completely new deck. So you know that deck in Root, which is all the stuff you can craft, all the special abilities…

Matt: Yeah.

Quinns: They are putting out a new deck that they said is going to be… It’s essentially pushing the envelope and it’s going to be weirder. And that is really interesting to me, and it makes me more happy that I didn’t get my copy of Root, because if you’ve seen my quite long Root review, I ended up saying, “Eh, I dunno. There’s something about this game that I just find a little bit unsatisfying.” But I really did like it when I was trying to figure it out, as opposed to once me and all my players knew how to play. And it lost a bit of that mystery. So it’s interesting to me that, yeah, of course we knew they were going to put out new factions, but a new deck of cards is a way of making the game instantly weird and unknowable. I don’t know, it’s as if they’re acknowledging that maybe Root is better as a wacky experiment like Cosmic.

Matt: Yeah, I was gonna say like Cosmic.

Quinns: Well, the designer Cole Wehrle has actually named Cosmic when he talks about putting out the new deck.

Matt: Yeah, well that sounds really interesting then, because, I mean, honestly, even the fact that with the Vagabond you’ve got five different types of Vagabond you can be, I could see that being kind of like Cosmic Encounter but with animals. Even with the current factions, being like, “Hey, it’s a new alternate birds or alternate rules,” and at the start of the game just being like, “Hey everyone, draw a card.” And it’s like, “Oh, you are this race. And now draw one of these cards, oh you’re this one of this race.” And just having weird randomization. Because then you are more into the oeuvre of what Cosmic is. And the same with TI! Of being a game of trying to convince other people-

Quinns: Twilight Imperium, yeah.

Matt: Yeah, Twilight Imperium, sorry. Of trying to convince people that you’re not the problem. [laughing]

Quinns: Yeah, but that’s kind of-

Matt: Which doesn’t work at the point at which, with Twilight Imperium, it kind of doesn’t work because you get to the point when people have enough knowledge that they go, “No! A Hacan with that many trade goods is a problem!” [Quinns laughing] It’s all a bit academic in Cosmic Encounter. You can be like, [desperate] “They’re really powerful!” But you can be like, “Yeah but in this scenario I’m not that powerful.” And who’s telling the truth?

Quinns: Yeah, it’s interesting. But to circle back to the idea of Root being best game production, I’m excited to play Root again with the new factions and the new deck once the Kickstarter reaches backers, just because I get to play with those little primary-colored pawns again.

Matt: Yeah, the board is beautiful. The pieces are beautiful. It’s just lovely stuff. *Lovely* stuff.

## Pearple’s Choice Awards - Most Unique/Original Concept of 2018 [01:03:33]

Quinns: We move on to Most Unique or Original Concept in a Game Released in 2018. We’ve got -- I might spend a bit of time on this -- we’ve got Stuffed Fables, the game where a book is the board and you can turn pages to advance through the game. We’ve got Holding On: The Troubled Life of Billy Kerr, a worker placement game where you jigsaw together a bunch of different art assets which form someone’s memories. So sort of through a collage you get to see their life, which is pretty interesting. Number three slot, we’ve got Nyctophobia, a game you play blind by touch, that Matt- Matt, if I remember correctly, you love Nyctophobia.

Matt: [stuttering] I yeah. I don’t like Nyctophobia very much. [Quinns laughing]

Quinns: It’s fine, it’s not very good.

Matt: It’s not very good, no.

Quinns: But, it’s still a lovely concept.

Matt: It means I just have to get guided by Quinns’s clammy hands. [laughing]

Quinns [laughing]: My hands are dry! It’s great that for like, for what, 31 years my hands have been dry, and then as soon we start playing Nyctophobia and I need to touch my friends’ hands, my hands just become clammy for the first time.

Matt: They weren’t even that clammy, but it was wonderful for us all to be blindfolded and really winding you up [Quinns laughing] with the idea that you had tremendously clammy hands.

Quinns [indignant]: I have dry hands!

Matt: Just making you self-conscious whilst also trying to pretend to be a murderer. It was absolutely hilarious.

Quinns: How many hands have we shaken over the years of doing Shut Up & Sit Down-

Matt: More than I’ve had hot meals.

Quinns: -at conventions, yeah.

Matt: Quite a number.

Quinns: I should have a lot of people backing up my dry hands. Finally, in the number one slot, it’s no surprise, the most unique or original concept for a game in 2018 is Keyforge: Call of the Archons. Do you want to describe the twist of this to people if they’ve missed it?

Matt: It’s an interesting thing that we didn’t discover, well, I didn’t think about until after the review was out, like, oh, I bet Keyforge was designed as being an anti-piracy measure, because there’s been huge amounts of problems with piracy within the board game industry and Amazon over the past few years, so I wouldn’t be surprised if it came about from those discussions. That doesn’t diminish from the fact, though, that it’s a very cool idea in the fact that decks in Keyforge are unique, and they have a little QR code- again, QR codes! It’s the year of the QR code. And you can scan it into your app and then you own that deck, and you can play with it in competitions, and it’s all entirely unbalanced! Which means that some decks are just better than others, but if they are good, then you balance it by using your own handicaps within the game, and if they’re too good, then they’ll win tournaments and then be basically not allowed to play in tournaments ever again because they’ve ascended? The whole thing is wacky as hell, and I love it because it’s simple and fun and seems to be like kryptonite to the more serious kinds of hardcore CCG gamers.

Quinns: It was so funny. Our Keyforge review did quite good traffic, but just about the worst commenting community appeared on our Youtube Keyforge review. And it was funny because it was all the same kind of person.

Matt: Yeah.

Quinns: We said in the review, “Oh, well this isn’t for competitive card gamers.” And there were loads of competitive card gamers in the comments going-

Matt: “This seems bad!”

Quinns: “But why don’t I like it?!”

Matt [laughing]: Yeah, that’s exactly it.

Quinns: It’s like, we covered you, you missed it.

Matt: Yeah, that was a funny thing. And you know I had a great time just playing it, and messing around with it. And it’s interesting how the lens with which people talk about it and view it is sort of broken, and it really heartened me to see we’ve had lots of people getting in touch with us since our review of that, actually saying, “You know what? I thought it looked fun, and I also thought that it probably wasn’t for me, but I checked out your review and I thought, ‘Oh yeah, I’m gonna give it a go!’” And lots of people who’ve just been giving it a go and having a lot of fun with it, who wouldn’t have expected to. And I think that’s cool, and especially with the first wave of the expansion they’ve just announced. Adding a whole bunch of new cards, and keeping some of the better cards of the first wave.

Quinns: My favorite thing about the new announcement is that yeah, we’ve got all these new cards which the new decks you buy will be built from, but there is a small chance that some of the cards in your deck might be from previous decks.

Matt: Yes.

Quinns: Which is just a lovely way to implement all the old cards they’ve come out with.

Matt: Yeah, of just being like, “Hey! This isn’t going to be in the pool, but you might just get something random.” Of being like, “Hey, this shouldn’t be in here, but it is.” In a way that’s cool. Which adds some really odd flavors things, but also, for me, as somebody who just likes to explore these decks and explore the game, having a new set of things coming out means if I want to ensure I’m going to play a bit more and have a new experience, I can just buy some of the newer decks, and get some new cards.

Quinns: Completely. I think there’s one failing of me for when we were working on our Keyforge review together, which is… Given hindsight is 20/20, I’ve realized that actually, I *adore* Keyforge’s high concept. I actually -- and I never said this in the review -- I *love* that you buy a deck and it’s unique. I love that I get a pile of decks and I like these, and I like playing with these, and I think these are actually good. I’m not as sold as you are on the game itself, and I’m not sold on the universe, but I made a point of that in the review, that’s what I *did* say. But honestly, if Fantasy Flight want to do the unique custom deck thing with a different game? Oh my goodness, I’m all over it. If they want to bring Netrunner back with this format, that would be fine! Maybe… [Matt laughing]

Matt: It’ll be a Star Wars thing probably, Quinns.

Quinns: Oh, custom Star Wars deck, yeah, errmmm. Yeah you’re probably right. Now they’ve got this thing and it’s selling like hotcakes, why wouldn’t they do it with a proper IP attached, yeah.

Matt: I don’t know. Yeah.

## Pearple’s Choice Awards - Best Digital Board Game App of 2018 [01:08:35]

Quinns: Moving on, our next award, Best Digital Board Game App of 2018. Top three. Number three, it’s Through The Ages.

Matt [chanting a la the Digimon theme]: Digital board games! Digital board games!

Quinns: Number two is Tabletop Simulator, which…

Matt: It’s not a game!

Quinns: It’s not a game.

Matt: It’s a drink!

Quinns: And number one is Galaxy Trucker, which I heard is good.

Matt: Oh yeah?

Quinns: There’s a Galaxy Trucker app, yeah.

Matt: Mmmmmm!

Quinns: And the AI is coded by Vlaada Chvátil himself.

Matt: Wow.

Quinns: Because he’s a polymath.

Matt: Wow. Is that what that means?

Quinns: Polymath just means you study multiple things.

Matt: Okay.

Quinns: Like poly -- multiple -- math.

Matt: So what’s a Poliwhirl?

Quinns: It’s a Pokemon that demonstrates someone doesn’t understand English word assembly.

Matt: Right, got you. Anyway, I think about Galaxy Trucker a lot.

Quinn: It’s good!

Matt: I thought about that when I was sleeping in your house the other day, because it’s in a cupboard next to the bed. And I looked at it and I thought, [wistful reminiscence] “Aww, Galaxy Trucker!”

Quinns [laughing]: Matt has to stay over at my house a fair bit these days, same as I have to stay at his, but the difference is I sleep in Matt’s guest bedroom, whereas Matt sleeps in my office, surrounded by- You’re at floor level with dozens of board games.

Matt: But what games. What games. I was thinking we should Galaxy Truck on the stream at some point. Just because it’s so fun.

Quinns: It’s a good game! It’s a good game.

Matt: It’s so fun.

Quinns: We’re really enjoying using the stream to get coverage of games we wouldn’t review because they’re dumb.

Matt: Yeah, or things we covered a long time, or just things we just want to play again.

Quinns: Yeah, completely.

## Pearple’s Choice Awards - Erik Tengblad Award for Best Game of the Previous Year I Only Got to Play for the First Time in 2018 [01:09:58]

Quinns: We move on to... Got some weird categories now that the forumites love, which I kind of love as well. This is the “Eric Tengblad Award” -- who’s a forum user, and one of our moderators -- “for Best Game of the Previous Year I Only Got to Play for the First Time in 2018.” Top three being: Fog of Love, Gloomhaven, and Azul.

Matt: Mmm! Three good games!

Quinns: It’s basically a rehash of the top games from 2017, but in a different category. But yeah, you know what? They’re all still good!

Matt: They are.

Quinns: They’re all still good.

## Pearple’s Choice Awards - Best Game of Any Previous Year that I Only Got to Play for the First Time this Year [01:10:28]

Quinns: Then, this is a new category for this year: “Best Game of Any Previous Year [Matt laughing] that I Only Got to Play for the First Time this Year.” And top three: Arkham Horror the Card Game, Concordia, and Flamme Rouge.

Matt: Yeeaahhh!

Quinns: Glad to see people finally coming around on Flamme Rouge.

Matt: It’s good.

## Pearple’s Choice Awards - Best Designer as of 2018 [01:10:43]

Quinns: Best Designer of 2018. Oh sorry, Best Designer *as of* 2018.

Matt [skeptical]: Hmmmm.

Quinns: So, we think this might just be forumites voting on who they think the best designer in the board game industry is right now.

Matt: Right, yeah.

Quinns: And you were saying you think this category should be like…

Matt: Well, I don’t think that’s fair, in a way. Because it’s not how it works.

Quinns: But that is how they voted for this.

Matt: I know, I know, I know. But I just wouldn’t have set the category like that, because that’s why you have lifetime awards, because otherwise you kind of think, well, how many years does a film director have to have bad films coming out before it’s like all of the previous work is just irrelevant, you know?

Quinns: Yeah.

Matt: Like John Carpenter, for example, is a fabulous director. A lot of his recent work… is bad! [Quinns laughing] But like, he’s still great? You know what I mean?

Quinns: I like the idea of -- who’s the guy who did Space Odyssey? Stanley Kubrick -- I like the idea of the Oscars: “And the best director award goes to…”

Quinns and Matt in unison: Stanley Kubrick!

Quinns: Again!”

Matt: Exactly! Because it’s like, well yeah but he made great films, so, who’s gonna argue with that? I mean that’s the thing. A lot of modern films are not that good, so you’d still be giving people awards from the 80s and stuff.

Quinns: The way this data becomes interesting is if you collate it on a graph over time. So every year, people are like, “Oh, they’re cooling on Vlaada this year!” Anyway!

Matt: But it’s just a popularity thing, and it doesn’t make- I mean it makes sense to just be like, “Who’s been the best designer this year?” And the answer is… [Quinns laughing] Wolfgang Warsch.

Quinns: Yeah, okay.

Matt: That’s my answer anyway.

Quinns: Let’s talk about your answer for a bit. So, I kind of agree with you, it was Wolfgang Warsch’s year.

Matt: Yeah!

Quinns: So of course Wolfgang did a bunch of very different games! Did Quacks of Quedlinburg, a push-your-luck potion-brewing game we adore. Did Ganz Schön Clever, a roll-and-write that is by all accounts loved. He did Illusion, a little cute card game of optical illusions that’s just great.

Matt: Just interesting.

Quinns: And he did The Mind! Which frankly, I’ve seen as a folk game that actors play from time to time, but no one had put it into a card game and he deserves full credit for that.

Matt: Yeah. I mean this is the thing, for me, as somebody who wasn’t really arsed about Ganz Schön Clever-

Quinns: Which I think is now available in English under the name Pretty Darn Clever.

Matt: -which a lot of people love that, I wasn’t that bothered. But even despite that, Illusion I think is a really fun little idea, just really interesting, kind of made my mind go, “Ah, this is such a clever idea for a little game.” But really, for me, it’s just two games in one year, Quacks… I know I’m hotter on it than most, but I love Quacks! And The Mind is just one of those games that’s just been everywhere. An electric wave. You’re just seeing people trying it and talking about it and having an amazing time.

Quinns: He’s so prolific.

Matt: And I think, two games that are just different, and he’s released so many games in just a short amount of time.

Quinns: Yup. And he’s got more coming out next year. It’s been really good for him. The forumites voted for the top five to be, Tim Fowers at fifth place, then Wolfgang Warsch, Uwe Rosenberg, Alexander Pfister, and Vlaada Chvátil. Pfister, of course, another sort of- I don’t want to call him up-and-coming because he’s been working for a long time, but yeah just putting out really solid boxes. Like Isle of Skye and his other games. [Matt laughing] No, I don’t say that as being catty, I’ve just forgotten.

Matt: Great Western Trail!

Quinns: Great Western Trail! And of course he did Blackout: Hong Kong.

Matt: So I don’t know when Isle of Skye came out. Was that a couple of years ago? So actually it’s one of those things where it was probably the year of Pfister a couple of years ago, and might not have realized that until this year.

Quinns: Yes.

Matt: But you know, two years ago Pfister putting out a couple of great games in a short period of time.

Quinns: If you’re new to Shut Up & Sit Down, then we haven’t covered any of Vlaada Chvátil’s games for a long time, but I think he’s still loosely Shut Up & Sit Down’s favorite designer. You’ll know him for designer Codegames, but before that he didn’t really do party games.

Matt: Code*names*. Sorry, I’m not being mean, you just-

Quinns: What did I say?

Matt: Codegames.

Quinns: Oh gosh. Why would I say games?

Matt: I have no idea.

Quinns: That’s crazy!

Matt: It’s got nothing to do with anything!

Quinns: But prior to that, Vlaada did some big heavy games that were all funny -- well, almost all funny -- all unique, all very good games, like Space Alert, Galaxy Trucker, Mage Knight, Dungeon Petz, Dungeon Lords, and something I’ve forgotten that will come to me. But yeah, just a storied designer. And while we haven’t seen any big games from him for a while, I’ve just heard rumors now that his next big game is currently being passed around or being playtested.

Matt: Mmm, yeah, he’s a wonderful mind.

Quinns: Oh, the one thing I wanted to say. At sixth place in this list is Reiner Knizia, board game’s, you know- Board gaming owes a huge debt to him in the 90s, designing great games like Tigris and Euphrates, and Ra, and Samurai, and Taj Mahal. All kinds of little card games like High Society. Personally I was guilty of thinking he was very much in the past. A lot of creators have a period where they’re making golden stuff, and then Reiner Knizia has literally made -- literally literally, not just using it as a turn of phrase -- *hundreds* of bad games since then. However, next podcast I’m going to be talking about a new game of his called El Dorado, which is great! And that really threw me, because if a designer like Reiner Knizia can make great games in the 90s, but then still make great games now? That suddenly puts him into a very different category of like, “Oh my gosh he didn’t go away he’s still really good.”

Matt: The call is coming from inside the house.

Quinns: Precisely.

## Pearple’s Choice Awards - Best Artist of 2018 [01:15:40]

Quinns: Moving on, we’ve got the category Best Artist of 2018. The top three being Chris Quilliams, Ian O’Toole, and at number one -- this might be contentious in this room -- Beth Sobel, with 32% of the vote, who hasn’t done any art that Matt and I are huge on, but oh! Oh! It’s refreshing seeing a woman at the top of one of these lists.

Matt: Yeah, no, absolutely.

Quinns: But, for you and me, we’re a bigger fan of the artist in second place, who is Ian O’Toole.

Matt: Yes.

Quinns: You’re the -- I believe artists call themselves -- you’re the arthead.

Matt: I’m the arthead, yeah. You cut me open, I bleed art through a gash in my skull.

Quinns: Why don’t you talk a bit about what makes Ian O’Toole so good?

Matt: I think there is a joint appreciation between us and Ian O’Toole about details, and beyond aesthetic details, but actually mechanical details. He’s somebody who’s equally driven mad by perspectives not matching and things. [Quinns laughing] And I also think that there is a degree of push where it goes beyond illustration and does veer into art, and that’s not to do with the quality, it’s more to do with the purpose, you know? If you’re illustrating the board it’s your job to make it look nice in some ways?

Quinns: He’s two things, isn’t he? He’s able to do beautiful illustrations, but then he’s also able to do proper art design. Lots of clean lines that clearly telegraph how the game works.

Matt: That’s not even it either, actually, no. Because sometimes it doesn’t do the best job of that. What was the game that was really blue that I always forget the name of?

Quinns: Lisboa.

Matt: Lisboa. So Lisboa is a really good example. It has such a vision of what it wants the board to look like that it kind of, in that case, doesn’t gel 100% well with the game, and it’s already a complicated game, and I can understand -- I didn’t have a problem with it -- but I can understand how people go, “Why is this board entirely blue? Why is everything blue?” I get that. But I think that what I like about their work is that it is excellent, and it is precise, and it does come from a place of care, but it’s also, for whatever reason, usually not afraid to actually put some directorial vision into it in ways that are -- and this is me being a real arthead, really -- in ways that don’t always work. Illustration really is, you’re doing a job. Like, “This is your job. Do this.” Dumpf. And there’s nothing wrong with that. But there’s the fact that it does end up pushing against the edges in a way that sometimes doesn’t always work, and I think it’s interesting that in Lisboa, I love it but I can see why people would say it doesn’t quite work. However, Franchise, you know, is like this level of pushback, of going beyond the idea of, “This is what an illustrative board game looks like,” and coming up with a concept and coming up with a design which is just different and strange. Changes the game!

Quinns: I think Franchise is really what excites me about Ian O’Toole’s work, because we’ve seen him do tons of clean lines with his Vital Lacerda games, games like The Gallerist, Vinhos Deluxe is one of my favorite illustration jobs from him, and of course Lisboa, which is clean but messy. Anyway. But seeing him do Franchise, which is a lot of bubble arrows, a lot of bright bizarre colors, a lot of stuff that is still clean in its way but also just a bit wild, I guess?

Matt: Well I think what we’re seeing at the moment is we’ve had a long era of board games that just look ugly. And now, we’ve been lucky over the past five years to suddenly being like, “Hey, these games aren’t ugly!” And we’ve been able to have a luxury period of games that just look nice and games that pop and games that have clear iconography so you can track the game and track the systems. And I think what’s exciting is beyond that. Once you get to that point where it’s like, “Hey, this looks nice. It is readable, it is clean, it is not horrible.” You’ve then got this whole realm of exploration which isn’t just like a lick of paint, a lick of color, a lick of style, but actually is like, “Well, in what ways can the presentation of this artwork *as artwork*, really, influence the way that you actually interact with the board?” And as I say, I saw that in Franchise, and I just think that there’s a lot of people out there who are lovely artists, who are producing lovely work, but I think Ian is one of the few people in the space now who’s actually kind of pushing at the edges of what you can do, in a way that sometimes is experimental, and sometimes doesn’t quite work? But that’s good! [Laughing]

Quinns: Yeah, no, goodness, well said! Because that put a lot of thoughts that I kinda had bubbling away in my mind, but you’ve actually named them.

Matt: Turns out, I think about art too much.

Quinns [burpy voice]: Excuse me I did a burp.

## Outro [01:20:06]

[sting]

Quinns: Thank you [Matt laughing] very much for listening to the ninety-first Shut Up & Sit Down podcast! It’s been an extra long one, this one, but hopefully that makes up a bit for us taking an absence.

Matt: Mmm. Soon we’re gonna be less absent, for a whole bunch of reasons, excitingly. Our first intern will be starting very soon, which is exciting. You’ll have to be introduced to them in the future. We’re going to be having some interns throughout the year, and hopefully some new voices and some new people on Shut Up & Sit Down!

Quinns: Imagine that.

Matt: Look forward to hearing some new voice on the podcast. Be nice to them. Be nice to each other! Have a lovely day.

Quinns: Yeah, Matt and I are so excited and our interns are so excited. It’s been so nice after sending out so many “Thanks but we can’t hire you” letters to actually get to send out the final few, which is like, “Hey!”

Matt: “Hey, we wanna do this.”

Quinns: “Do you want to come to my house and play a game?”

Matt: It’s been wonderful, we had such a huge amount of people applying. And maybe you’re listening and you’re one of them, thank you so much. It was wonderful going through all of these different videos, looking at the amount of effort and heart people had put into things, watching people put themselves out there, talking to people and then finally picking the people we wanted to work with was not just something which was… It was very inspiring. It reminded us of exactly what we do and why we do it, and who we are, and who our fans are. And it was really good for the soul.

Quinns: It was genuinely moving, yeah.

Matt: It was.

Quinns: And to be able to end that process by, you know, making some people very excited, like, “Come down and work with us,” wicked!

Matt: Yesss.

Quinns: That’s just awesome. Thank you very much for listening to this Shut Up & Sit Down podcast. Thanks to Mr. Steve Davit for providing musical stings.

Matt: Mmhm!

Quinns: Gosh, I still love listening to those stings.

Matt: Mmm. Those stings.

Quinns: They are super hot. We will be back in another couple of weeks. We’re definitely not going to make you wait so long until the next podcast. Have a lovely day everybody.

Matt: Bye!

[Funky outro]