**Podcast #93: Alone with The Norwegians**

**Sections and Timestamps**

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## Intro [00:00:00]

[funky intro music]

**Quinns**: Hallo everybody, and welcome to the 93rd ever episode of -- hot dog, jumping frog -- it’s the Shut Up & Sit Down podcast.

**Matt**: Has it been 93 already? I don’t feel a day over 92!

**Quinns**: I was gonna make that joke. [Matt laughing] Yeah, what are we going to do for the hundredth episode?

**Matt**: Ummmmmmmmmmm. Something.

**Quinns**: What about if we just talked about board games.

**Matt**: Whoa!

**Quinns**: Because this is a board gaming podcast, ladies and gents and everyone in between! My name is Quintin Smith. I’m joined today by Matthew Lees.

**Matt**: Hello, I’ve got a cold! So if you hear a bit of a nasal twang to anything I’m saying and think, “Is there something going on with that man’s nose?” then you’d be correct! There is.

**Quinns**: You might hear a sexy nasal twang, you might hear a disgusting inhalation of snot.

**Matt**: Yeah, you might hear just some deep breathing. It’s a rainbow of fun!

**Quinns**: All of these things are going to happen in addition to some board games. The games we’re going to be talking about this episode are Corinth, the new roll-and-write game from Days of Wonder, Feast For Odin: The Norwegians, which I sincerely hope is not the last expansion which has the name The Norwegians, because what a name!

**Matt**: I think there’s space for Norwegians in an awful lot of games.

**Quinns**: I think so, I think so. We can talk about this later. We’re gonna be talking about another expansion, which is for Space Base: The Emergence of Shy Pluto. And then we’re going to round off by talking about a couple of big, exciting games. Monolith Arena and…

**Matt** [creepy ghoul voice]: Aloooooone.

**Quinns**: Alone!

**Matt** [singing in a creepy ghoul voice]: Aloooone. When I am aloooone with you in spaaace! I am an alien who will eat yooouuuu!

**Quinn**: Matt, you’ve been alone, haven’t you?

**Matt**: I’ve been alone for so long. At least three hours since my wife left for work. [Quinns laughing] I played some Klaus Wunderlich to her, which is a fantastic way to get the people in your life to leave you.

**Quinns**: Yeah, we’ve realized that Klaus Wunderlich is the music we are going to play as people are filing into the room for all of our future liveshows.

**Matt** [laughing]: It’s the music that kind of plays in my head, in a way (?).

**Quinns**: We’ll have to put a link to this in the episode description.

**Matt**: It’s really something.

## Blood on the Clocktower [00:02:05]

**Quinns**: But also, before we kick off, hey Matt, did you know we published a controversial review recently?

**Matt**: Yeah, we did. We published a review of Blood on the Clocktower, and we wanted to have a little bit of a chat about that, because we said we would. To be fair, lots of people had lots of different concerns about it.

**Quinns**: So first thing’s first, Blood on the Clocktower is a social game that has a lot in common with Werewolf. It is -- and this was a big source of the confusion for people -- it is now my favorite board game of all time.

**Matt**: Uh-huh.

**Quinns**: And for all of the backlash against the review, it’s *still* my favorite game of all time.

**Matt**: Yeah!

**Quinns**: I would maybe rewrite parts of it, but there’s nothing in it that I disagree with.

**Matt**: No!

**Quinns**: My own *mea culpa* that I need to say is that… So, ordinarily, Shut Up & Sit Down gets a lot of praise for approaching expensive games -- or really any board game, because frankly a 40-dollar board game is still quite expensive -- with, “Is this worth the money? Are you getting your money’s worth?” All this stuff. Now, I didn’t do that with Blood on the Clocktower for two reasons. First off, it’s my favorite game of all time. But the second reason is that, when I was writing the script, that there was a furor about the price of Blood on the Clocktower. I knew that people were already on the internet when the price was announced as 100 dollars -- which they later got down to 80 dollars plus shipping -- that, “Oh, that’s ridiculous! It’s too expensive!” And so I felt that was unjust, because frankly I *would* pay a hundred dollars for this game. So I went into the script writing the bit at the end of the script about price basically joining that conversation. Joining that argument that, “It’s worth a hundred dollars!” So where usually Shut Up & Sit Down reviews end with me going, “Is this worth the money? Yes, no, whatever.” With Blood on the Clocktower, I came storming into that discussion about price at the end of our video going, [manic] “It’s worth so much money!” But obviously, for most people who’ve seen the video, they weren’t part of that discussion about price. So it just came across as really aggressive, so I definitely do regret that.

**Matt**: Yeah, I think all I’d say about it really, is it’s been great to have that kind of criticism coming from our community in such a positive and productive way. But I would also say, as well, in terms of the wider reaction and the countless Reddit threads [laughing] that popped up, I think some of it’s not fair. Obviously, yes, it’s a big party social game, and it’s going to be dependent on your friends, and if you don’t like this sort of thing and have friends who like this sort of thing, of course it’s not going to be for you. I don’t feel like we should have had to cover that. But I do also feel like, yeah, just making it clear that this is not for everyone, but if this is your thing, this is your luxury thing. And there’s just a couple of lines which- It’s always the way with this sort of thing, and it’s why we put so much care into what we say and how we say it in our reviews, because sometimes it’s just a case of adding a tiny line or adding a couple of words. It’s like… is it jiu-jitsu, the one that’s about...?

**Quinns**: Oh what, going with the flow of your opponent?

**Matt**: Yeah, like changing the force of things, and just having a tiny change which-

**Quinns**: Aikido, I think.

**Matt**: Aikido, sure. It’s like that. It’s like a martial art, where you just do a tiny change and it completely changes the force.

**Quinns**: Yeah, so clearly what I needed to spend more time on in the review, which I had no idea, is mostly the people get annoyed not because of my point at the end about price, not because it’s too expensive, but because for so many people, Blood on the Clocktower is -- and I’ve read this comment a thousand times -- it is 90-dollar Werewolf. It’s like, “How can they charge 90 dollars, or a hundred dollars for this (if you include shipping), when Werewolf or The Resistance is 10 or 20 dollars?” And to compare this game to Werewolf is just… It’s not inaccurate, obviously we start the review by saying, “The bones of this game are Werewolf.” But to say that it is Werewolf is so incredibly wrong? And the only people really who are making that comment en masse are people who have not played Blood on the Clocktower? So it has similarities to Werewolf, yes, obviously, but also the changes it does make are so important. And we’ve seen this before in board games. Pandemic Legacy is in my top five board games of all time. Pandemic isn’t in my top fifty, despite them sharing so much DNA. There are so many exciting indie RPGs now, but Matt and I got obsessed with Blades in the Dark, which isn’t necessarily *that* different if you’re familiar with the genre, but it was different in exactly the right ways.

**Matt**: Yeah, it’s interesting. I think that’s a really underappreciated nature of the creative process and about creation, and the fact that people can look at things, and often we do get drawn towards things that are so different and so kind of, “Whoa! What’s that!” And in fact a game we’re going to be talking about at the end of this podcast today, Alone, is one of those games where it’s like, just the premise of it is so exciting and so different. But sometimes, actually, the most ingenious things are things that take a formula that kind of already exists. And I do have some bones with- The devs are very much like, “This isn’t Werewolf!” And it’s like, come on, you’ve got to own the roots of this. But, that doesn’t undermine the changes and the quality of the changes, in terms of what you… You can make subtle changes to a thing, and you can make something magical. And the thing is, arguably, on paper, what’s the difference between toast and pizza? There’s not a lot of difference between cheese on toast and pizza, but of course, there’s also a huge difference. But that’s not to say that I couldn’t make Matt’s Pizza ToastTM and it wouldn’t be terrible. [Quinns laughing] Creativity, really, we like the idea of it being about these grand gestures and about these huge changes, but often it’s just very smart iterations. So I do agree that people looking at this going, “Well, it’s just Werewolf.” Well, it isn’t. I’ve played a ton of Werewolf, you’ve played a ton of Werewolf. And I’ve played Blood on the Clocktower as much as you have, but when I played it at SHUX, I was very aware that initially I went, “Eh, this is just Werewolf.” And then as soon as we got into it, I was like, “It isn’t.” It’s doing something very different with the DNA, and very exciting. Werewolf and The Resistance are games I’ve played a ton, and loved a ton, but they’re both games that I really don’t have much interest in playing anymore.

**Quinns**: Exactly.

**Matt**: Whereas this, I’m like, “Yeah. I’ll play this.”

**Quinns**: I’ve played Werewolf. I didn’t get obsessed with it. I’ve played The Resistance a fair bit, but didn’t get obsessed with it. Blood on the Clocktower has -- for the duration of the review process -- it took over my life! Not only were we playing it every week for months, but that was the highlight of the week. And now we’re done with the review, we’re still trying to work out ways that we can continue playing it.

**Matt**: So the Too Long Didn’t Read on it is: No, it wasn’t a sponsorship. Yes, Quinns actually does love it and it’s his favorite game. Yes, we didn’t really do the best job of conveying that in a review. The final thing that we really should mention, obviously, is the fact that this was a review of a Kickstarter game that was currently in Kickstarter. And again, that was something which seemed to contravene lots of things that we’d said before. We didn’t go with what we usually say about value, and we didn’t go with what we usually say about Kickstarters, and that’s something that I really agree with as well.

**Quinns**: Which is that a Kickstarter is a risk. It may not ultimately reach you.

**Matt**: Yeah, there’s that, there’s the fact that it might not reach you, but there’s also the fact that we have always advised in the past to wait for retail. And for this, I would advise this as well, really.

**Quinns**: Yes, that is absolutely the line that is absent from my video that I would put in. If you feel that you’re on the fence about this, then wait for retail, wait for the second Kickstarter when all the production and fulfillment has been tried and tested. I already was talking to the developers being like, “Congratulations on being the first, and last, Shut Up & Sit Down pre-Kickstarter review.” It’s just not worth our time. That said, it’s very difficult to… Our business manager was talking about this. Chris, who runs SHUX, was saying: It seems unfair only because Shut Up & Sit Down should be allowed to publish the ebullient ten-out-of-ten review, because we’re a passion-driven site. But then how do you balance that with the fact that Shut Up & Sit Down are usually the industry’s dads going, [reasonably rational dad voice] “Well, now, why don’t you just wait and see how the finished thing is at retail?” Very difficult to combine those two things.

**Matt**: To be behind the curtain again, for a very brief second, it’s been an interesting year for us. Having one of the founders of Shut Up & Sit Down move on means lots of the conversations about us have changed as well, and we have lots of little people at the moment saying, “Aw, I miss it when the guys were super enthusiastic [Quinns laughing] and just wild.” And you know, I don’t know, maybe some of that bled in, and we found this mad enthusiasm and just leant into it, but even though people sometimes say that’s what they want, it’s not the position we’re in in the industry anymore, and it doesn’t fly anymore.

**Quinns**: Yeah, it’s bizarre, isn’t it? Giving people the wild unbridled enthusiasm that they say they want, and then suddenly everyone’s frustrated because we’re not being responsible anymore.

**Matt**: Yeah, so it’s a tricky one, and I think it’s been an interesting review, and I think we’ve been frankly really lucky to have a run as long as we have without making a mistake like this in the past, to be honest.

**Quinns**: Yeah. And hey, I’m just glad that, with any luck, this time next year Blood on the Clocktower will be getting into people’s hands, more people will try it, and they’ll realize what the hell I was talking about.

**Matt**: Yeah, I mean, it’s a great thing. It’s a great thing.

[funky sting]

## Corinth [00:10:08]

**Quinns**: Matthew Lees, I’ve been playing a little board game called Corinth.

**Matt**: Oooh! Roll and write? Or roll and wrong?

**Quinns** [laughing]: It’s a roll and… middling. So this is from Days Of Wonder, who ordinarily put out big games once a year. Big glossy things like, well, originally, Ticket To Ride and Memoir 44, and then less good things like Relic Runners and Cargo Noir. And now they’ve put out a sort of small box, which is very outside their character, but they’re getting in on the roll-and-write craze, which is where everyone gets a piece of paper, and then you usually have a shared resource in the middle of the table, like some dice or something, and then everyone writes down something on their paper, and it’s kind of like an exam, but fun!

**Matt**: Yeah, you all fill in stuff, and you all have the same things, but what kind of an exam paper are you going to do? They are a lot of fun, but we’re also seeing a *lot* of people getting them out.

**Quinns**: Yeah, it’s funny. It reminds me of the Legacy craze a little bit, where you had Pandemic Legacy and Risk Legacy, and everyone said, “Oh my god, Legacy’s the future!” And it was like, no those were just two really good games.

**Matt**: Yeah.

**Quinns**: And then last year we had Welcome To and Railroad Ink, both of which roll-and-writes that Shut Up & Sit Down adores! And now we’re getting all these other roll-and-writes and it’s like…

**Matt**: They’re fine.

**Quinns**: They’re alright. I tell you what, I did play Corinth in the dream circumstances, where it was a Friday, I’d had a really hard working week, I met up with Chris and Annie, who run our stream.

**Matt**: Uh-huh.

**Quinns**: We went to my favorite pub, we got my favorite table, we all got pints of [delicious beer](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JU1mfAIj7zE&feature=youtu.be&t=110), and then we just sat down to play a board game at the end of the week. So if I was ever going to fall head-over-heels in love for a board game and want to enter a romantic relationship with it, it would be Corinth. [deep breath] It didn’t happen. So Corinth is a game where you all run Mediterranean market stalls in history times. On your turn, you’re gonna roll a bunch of dice, like an enormous handful of big dice. And I should say, it’s a Days Of Wonder production, the whole thing looks really really nice. Although, the actual paper you’re filling out, which is your market stalls and the buildings you’re building, and the town your messenger is running around, actually I didn’t like an enormous amount. For all the love and TLC that Days Of Wonder ordinarily put into their productions, I feel like they kind of floundered in producing the sheet you’re actually writing on.

**Matt**: That’s a shame, because that’s the game.

**Quinns**: Right? And it made me realize one of the things we didn’t say about Welcome To, a game where you’re filling out neighborhoods, is just looking at this neighborhood and filling it out is aesthetically pleasing. Whereas Corinth has gone for this aesthetic that’s a little more like you’re filling in a form to get a driving license or something?

**Matt**: Oh wow!

**Quinns**: Like it’s got box-outs, and it’s got pink bubbles…

**Matt**: DVLA time. Yeah, I think the thing for me about Welcome To that makes it really shine is the fact that, yes, you have got this very pretty sheet of things, but also it does feel believably like you are a planner.

**Quinns**: Yeah, exactly.

**Matt**: It’s about the nature of the marks you’re making on the sheet, as well. It’s the fact that you’re circling things, underlining things, crossing things out, writing notes and stuff. It makes you feel like you’re doing a job.

**Quinns**: Yeah, Railroad Ink also has the thing of like you’re sketching out where the railways will go! Corinth doesn’t have that at all, it’s very abstract. What it does have is a kind of interesting probability mechanic that it took me a while to get my head around. On your turn, you roll all these dice, and you take all the sixes and they become available as gold. You take all the ones and they become available as goats.

**Matt**: That’s a big shots-fired at goats.

**Quinns**: Goats are really useful in this game, let me tell you.

**Matt**: Okay, well I just feel like that’s rude.

**Quinns**: Gold is better than goats. You heard it here first, everybody. [Matt sighs] So then... This is tricky to describe, bear with me.

**Matt**: What, goats?

**Quinns**: No, everything other than goats.

**Matt**: Okay, right.

**Quinns**: So all the dice that are then higher than one become available as -- I believe -- olive oil for the olive oil stands. All the dice that are the next higher up, so let’s say you didn’t roll any threes, then the fours would be available as wine. So the slot that’s just below gold, the only way you ever make it available for players-

**Matt**: -is if you get a two, three, four, *and* a five.

**Quinns**: Exactly!

**Matt**: Wow.

**Quinns**: But then it also means that those -- I believe it’s fabrics or spices or something -- acquiring those dice gives you the most points for the least dice. But then the whole thing about Corinth is you need to complete groups. So, let’s say it’s your turn. Everyone then takes turn drafting the dice, and you see that one spice dice is available. Oh my god, someone rolled 1-2-3-4-5-6 this turn! You can get spice. The question you have to ask yourself in Corinth is, do I want to put this dice on the spice? Rather, on the market stall which requires me to get four spice, and then I get loads of points, or I will complete it if I can just get one more spice, and then I’ll get still a nice amount of points. Usually, in roll-and-write games, you’re wondering whether *you’ve* been too ambitious. Whereas with Corinth, it’s really just wondering if the dice will cough up what you need again.

**Matt**: Yeah.

**Quinns**: Which is interesting. The game is alright. I made some notes, because it’s very difficult to describe what makes a game as simple as this tick.

**Matt**: Well it feels less exciting because of the fact that if you fail to get your four spice, for example, and you’ve gone for that, then it just means that the only difference between you and the other players is that they were more astute in their guessing of what the odds would be?

**Quinns**: Yeah, no, you’re completely right. And that’s where Corinth kind of distinguishes itself, because usually, in roll-and-write, the cards you flip or the dice you use that produce the result that everyone then writes down, it’s purely random, you know? Whereas with Corinth, it has a bit of the DNA of a dice game, and the high points of Corinth when I was playing were, people would roll dice and get a result, and then everyone around the table would go, [frustrated] “Aahhhhh!” because it was really lucky for them, or it was unlucky. So, what you were basically saying with your criticism there, Matthew, is, “But it seems like who wins is the person who gets the high dice roll.” And it’s like, yes, but that’s true of so many board games.

**Matt**: No, of course it is, yeah yeah yeah.

**Quinns**: But that’s kind of the fun thing about Corinth. It’s a bit of a roll-and-write, and a bit of a gambling game. However, what meant it was less interesting to me is that usually the roll-and-writes we like have that lovely end game where initially you’re making plans, and then you start trying to make those plans work together, and then in the end game all of your mistakes come back to haunt you.

**Matt**: Yeah.

**Quinns**: In Corinth, I found it was a little mis-structured, where in the mid-game I realized where my mistakes were made? We were all sat around the table -- the two times I’ve played Corinth -- going-

**Matt** [tampered frustration]: “I’m never going to get a spicy goat.”

**Quinns**: Yeah, or just going, “Oh, I’ve realized my mistakes now.” But that should happen in the endgame. In the mid-game, if it happens, then suddenly you’ve got an endgame which is just a bunch of players going, “Oh, I really didn’t do well here.” And then that stretches that moment out? So it’s good, not great. I *am* keeping it in my collection though, full disclosure, because I really like roll-and-writes, and it’s pretty good, and it’s a small box, and it’s quite pretty.

**Matt**: Mmm! Okay. Well that’s good to know.

**Quinns**: Yeah, if you’re interested, if you get the chance to play, I would say try Corinth. Especially if you like rolling big chunky dice and going, [satisfied gravelly voice] “Yyyyeessss!”

**Matt**: Yeah, there’s some simplicity there. It sounds, to me, more like the sort of experience that we had with Quacks of Quedlin-buh-buh-buh. Which is interesting, because that is a game where lots of people, interestingly -- to make this the Internet Comment podcast [Quinns laughing] -- lots of people have gone, “This game, there’s nothing to it! It’s just luck!” And it’s like, well that’s not… It’s not entirely wrong and it’s not entirely true either. But a lot of that fun is about knowing what other people have doubled down on, vaguely, and watching them writhe and scream.

**Quinns**: You know, it’s actually maybe the biggest difference from early Shut Up & Sit Down to late Shut Up & Sit Down, is our growing interest in really simple card games and gambling games? Obviously this year I’ve been doing this video series called Cards Games That Don’t Suck, in which I teach card games that you play with a regular 52-card deck. And that is so appealing to me *now*, but when we started Shut Up & Sit Down, it was like anathema. Someone actually reminded me this week that about four years ago they said, “Do you want to do a series on card games?” And I was like, [utter condescension] “Ha, no, why would I, they’re all bad! Phwa-ha! [snort] Ha! [snort]” [Matt laughing] Whereas now, I’m like, “This is amazing.” So that’s definitely an area where my interests have shifted.

**Matt**: Well, they swing around, don’t they. I think we always go through different phases of being interested in different sorts of things. Like I think we were quite shocked to play War for the Ring and be like, “This is amazing,” whereas I think maybe ten years ago, it would have been like, [major enthusiasm] “This is the best!”

**Quinns**: Before even we’d started playing. [nerdgasm voice] “Look it’s got a plastic elf!” [Matt laughing] Moving on...

**Matt**: It does have quite a lot of plastic elves. But not that many! Because when they run out, it’s GAME OVER!! [Quinns laughing] I love that game.

**Quinns**: It’s really good.

**Matt**: I wish I was twelve and we could just play that forever.

**Quinns**: Oh man, maybe when we’re retired, we’ll just be two weird dudes...

**Matt** [laughing]: As if we’re going to remember the rules when we’re retired!

**Quinns** [laughing]: Yeah, you’re right, when I’m retired, I intend to shark people at the old people’s home with poker.

**Matt**: Yeah, fair. I think you’d just go to get a cup of tea and never come back. They’ll find you talking to a water cooler down the corridor, [Quinns laughing] imagining you’re in an office.

**Quinns**: Dear me!

## A Feast For Odin: The Norwegians [00:18:36]

**Quinns**: Let’s talk about the expansion for A Feast For Odin.

**Matt**: A Feast For Odin. Let’s bring out The Norwegians.

**Quinns**: We’ve talked about this game a fair bit.

**Matt**: [making a fanfare noise]

**Quinns**: Is that the Norwe-

**Matt**: Norwegians!

**Quinns** [unamused]: Is that- They have a bugle?

**Matt**: It’s a vuvuzela.

**Quinns** [laughing]: Oh, vuvuzuela [sic]. Okay, great. Very quickly, because we’ve talked about this game a fair bit, what is your thirty-second pitch for what A Feast For Odin is.

**Matt**: Ah, okay. A Feast For Odin is a game where you’re all Viking people, and you’ve got all sorts of things you can do [Quinns laughing] to make things. You can make things out of sheeps, or other animals, and you can breed animals, and then you can get leather and make clothes, or you can go and raid things with your boats, but then you get boats and then maybe you want to send people away on your boats so you have less Vikings to feed in your house, and you get points at the end of the game, but it means you don’t have to make as much food which means you can concentrate on making more stuff, and there’s this huge board of things that are all different shapes, but the thing is, whenever you make something, you then have to put it onto one of your boards, and your boards are little weird Tetris-gone-wrong things and you fill them up, and you *have* to fill them up, otherwise you lose points at the end of the game, but then you can get *more* boards and you have to fill *them* up! And there’s just so much going on, but at the same time it’s incredibly gentle, it takes four hours to play, and it’s best done with cups of tea on a Sunday.

**Quinns**: You know, I was watching you do that. First off: [applauds]

**Matt**: It’s really hard to describe that game!

**Quinns**: Second off, about halfway through your spiel there, I was like, “Oh this is really impressive,” and then about two thirds of the way through your spiel, I went, “What are we doing with our lives?” [Matt laughing and coughing and laughing] Why does anyone listen to us?

**Matt**: Yeah, I don’t know. I really like A Feast For Odin, I really like it.

**Quinns**: It’s amazing. I think A Feast for Odin is in my top ten board games of all time.

**Matt**: Yeah, it’s almost annoyingly good, to the point that whenever we play any other Uwe Rosenberg game -- is the developer of the game -- you kind of go, “Yeah, it’s good, but it’s not as good as A Feast for Odin.” I’m like, “It doesn’t have to be!”

**Quinns**: I know, I know.

**Matt**: I really like Nusford! [sic]

**Quinns**: Nusfjord.

**Matt**: Nusfjord. I really like that game! And you’re like, “It’s not as good as A Feast for Odin.” I’m like [desperate] “Not a lot is! Alright?” [Quinns laughing] Not a lot is.

**Quinns**: You know, Joseph Heller, who wrote Catch-22, he wrote a bunch of other novels, but none of them were as famous, and a guy went up to him in a restaurant and said, “Are you Joseph Heller?” “Yes.” “You know, you’ve never written a book as good as Catch-22.” And Joseph Heller replied, “Well, neither have most people.” [Matt laughing] Which is like…

**Matt**: Yeah.

**Quinns**: Yeah. I love that story. So, now we have an expansion for A Feast for Odin, The Norwegians. Aaaannnd, it adds- I’m gonna fix this, sorry, because I’m not close to the mic with the pop shield on.

**Matt**: I think we’re fine. You’re not popping very loud, it’s fine.

**Quinns**: Okay, I was worried that I was [making pfbt sounds with lips]

**Matt**: Well, you are then. Jeez, don’t-

**Quinns**: [raspberry]

**Matt**: Stop it!

**Quinns**: This is all being cut out, it’s fine. [clapping]

**Matt**: Don’t cut it out! It’s fun!

**Quinns**: Okay! Yeah, so A Feast for Odin is… Sorry. So The Norwegians is actually one of the most interesting expansions I’ve ever played. [Matt laughing] What, what? Oh, were you just laughing that I’m talking about The Norwegians and saying it’s-

**Matt**: No, I’m just laughing at you, carry on.

**Quinns**: Okay. So, here’s the thing. They sold this expansion -- because they know what board game fans want -- as like, “Oh, there’s new shapes of tiles you can get! Herbs!” There’s all these new little features. But actually, I believe The Norwegians is kind of a trojan horse, because they have all these new features. They have lovely stuff, like everyone starts with a shed that only they can build. I had a stables. What did you have?

**Matt**: I had a pig sty.

**Quinns**: Lovely.

**Matt**: But I never got a pig. I thought about it, but I just never did.

**Quinns**: Yup. There’s new islands, there’s all this new content. But what The Norwegians actually is is essentially an update that -- in video game terms -- I’d say turns the game from version 1.0 into version 1.2. The main thing The Norwegians adds that’s great is it completely replaces the worker placement board in the middle of the table. The original one is gone. I’ve thrown my copy away. And it shrinks it and makes it tighter and adds a new rack of spaces which you can only go to if you’re placing your last Viking there.

**Matt**: That’s pretty cool.

**Quinns**: So the main thing The Norwegians adds is actually a board that works better. If they sold The Norwegians as, “Oh well here’s a new player board that replaces the old one that didn’t work as well, and also we’re going to take all these spaces that weren’t actually that powerful, and we’re going to make them better,” people wouldn’t want to buy that. It would make them like the original game less. The Norwegians is Uwe Rosenberg going, [German accent] “Ja, is loads of new content!” But then you actually get it and you’re like, “Oh my god, this is actually a fix.” It fixes all of this stuff that I didn’t even realize was wrong about the original game. And I’ve never played an expansion like that.

**Matt**: Yeah! I think the main thing I really like about it is that final column. You can only use this final column of powers when you have either one or two people left. What that does is create a little bottleneck that doesn’t get away from the game, that is still a wonderful sleepy Sunday afternoon scratching your head and gradually going, [overwhelmed cry] “Aaahhh!” game. You’re not fighting for spaces still, you’re not desperately trying to compete for things.

**Quinns**: Yeah, the tone of the game is intact.

**Matt**: Yup. But you have got this slight element where you are, because these powers, some of them are really good, and it means, if you really want to do that thing, it basically has its cake and eat it. You can have this full buffet of choices, so you’re generally not stepping on each other’s toes, and not having a bitey time, BUT, you have still got that element of like, “If I really want to do that this turn, then I’m gonna have to rush for it.”

**Quinns**: Completely. I couldn’t have put it better myself. The original A Feast for Odin, players are interacting so rarely, that when someone takes a space you want, it’s a nasty surprise. Whereas The Norwegians, in shrinking the board ever so slightly, means that every single decision I was making of, “Oh, do I want my Vikings to lay a snare, or go raiding, or build a boat or a shed?” was infused with just a little *frisson* of danger. And it was still, like you say, super relaxing, and yet, the game is just fine-tuned, you know?

**Matt**: Yeah, and also I think the fact that there’s something you have to do *at the end* means that it isn’t the traditional thing you get in eurogames sometimes of it being like, someone stepping on a landmine they didn’t know was there, of doing the thing you want to do, and you go, “Oh, really? Okay…” Because it’s like, if you can see someone burning through their people fast, you know it’s because they want to grab one of those things at the end, one of those treats. And if you look at what they’ve got going on at that point… So basically it’s like a warning bell, which is something you don’t usually get in eurogames, and it’s usually just like, “Oh! They did the thing you want to do.” Whereas in this it’s like, they’re going for one of those things. How much does it matter to you that you get the thing you want to get? And that doesn’t just dictate your next turn, it dictates the whole round for you, which is, in a way, good, because it doesn’t create any more paralysis.

**Quinns**: Yeah, the game isn’t any harder to teach either. It adds new content, but all of the content works within the rules of the existing A Feast for Odin framework. It helps that so much of the new content is just new shapes of tiles you can get.

**Matt**: Yeah, and some of it just makes sense. Like being able to send a small boat away.

**Quinns**: Do a small migration, yeah.

**Matt**: Just a little migration. That’s just like, “Yeah.” Honestly, considering how you framed it, it’s kind of like- If I’d said it at the start, it would sound like a big diss, but as it is, I think it’s probably just a good sign of how well they’ve done this? I’ve only played A Feast for Odin maybe a couple of times, and I hadn’t played it for a couple of years. When we started playing the expansion, it took me quite a while to work out which things were new.

**Quinns**: Right! [Matt laughing] Now this is the amazing point. Here’s the funny thing about The Norwegians.

**Matt**: Usually, for an expansion, that would be *terrible*, because you want something new and sexy.

**Quinns**: So here’s the thing. The question now is, should people who own A Feast for Odin buy The Norwegians? And here’s what nuts: If I didn’t buy The Norwegians, I would not be aware -- and I’m not even going to say them on this podcast -- all of the areas in which A Feast for Odin is slightly unbalanced. Some strategies kind of don’t work. Whereas as soon as you buy The Norwegians and it replaces them, you’re like, “Oh yeah, of course. I always had a sense that that strategy wasn’t very good.” But if you don’t know what’s in The Norwegians, you can live in ignorance. And A Feast for Odin was one of my top ten games before I bought The Norwegians. It’s *definitely* one of my top ten games now I’ve bought this extra expansion. But if you never find out what’s in the expansion, you can continue playing this game on version 1.0, and be perfectly happy and save money.

**Matt**: Yeah. It’s strange. It’s unusual to have something which is so unexciting, just being like, “What’s in this?” It kind of felt like -- for those of you unfamiliar, you can google it -- but the Mandela effect, of being like, [total confusion] “Have horses always been in this game?” [Quinns laughing] Because it doesn’t add rhinos, or dinosaurs, or whatever. It’s just horses. What did you put in the game? Horse. Right?

**Quinns**: It replaces the islands that you can take as additional boards to fill up with stuff, but you might be like, “Were these islands always these four?” And you can be like, “Yeah, sure.”

**Matt**: It really took me a little while to put my finger on what was different. But that was good! Because it didn’t make it worse? And from the perspective of someone who’s played it a lot, it makes it better, and I trust that? And I had a really nice time.

**Quinns**: I had a great time, yeah. So if you want The Norwegians, by all means buy it. If you want to save some money, don’t find out anything about it and live in sin.

**Matt**: Yeah, or just wait until you’ve got like, “Oh, I’m kind of bored with this now.” And then spice it up!

**Quinns**: Mmhm, mmhm. What a game! What a game.

[funky sting]

## Space Base: The Emergence of Shy Pluto [00:27:32]

**Quinns:** Briefly, then, we also got an early play in of the first expansion for Space Base. Which is a game where everyone has twelve ships in a little rack, and then you’re gonna roll dice on your turn and you can either use the individual numbers on those dice or the added together version of those dice to trigger different ships. What do the ships give you? They give you money, they give you victory points, they give you special powers that let you swap ships ‘round. You’re basically building a slot machine. You and I really quite liked Space Base.

**Matt:** Yeah, Space Base is fantastic. I remember playing for the first time at SHUX -- at the first SHUX a couple years ago -- and I was so tired and sleep deprived that I was playing it and I found myself thinking, “I think this is excellent, am I going mad?”. [Quinns laughing] Because it looks kind of ugly and it just feels like, “Isn’t this just Machi Koro?

**Quinns**: [Interjecting] Yeah.

**Matt:** with spaceships?”. Which is the same thing of just rolling dice and then things popping off, but it isn’t and there’s a bit more to it, and it has some really fun, simple choices which give the game a lot of life.

**Quinns:** I will say that, like Machi Koro, which Shut Up & Sit Down kinda liked and the rest of the internet hated,

**Matt**: [Interjecting] Yeah.

**Quinns:** Space Base generally has been received on the internet by critics as, like, “ehhh, it’s only average.” Whereas you and I honestly think it’s pretty good, so.

**Matt:** I think it’s a lot of fun.

**Quinns:** Hey. Well the first expansion is pretty fun. So, the first expansion, which is called “The Emergency of Shy Pluto”, is actually a little Legacy game.

**Matt:** It is; just a little one. Don’t get too excited, it’s just a little one.

**Quinns:** It has no less than, like, two secret decks of cards and two secret boxes.

**Matt:** Yeah, but it comes in a tiny, tiny box.

**Quinns:** Yeah, it’s really cute.

**Matt:** Which is wicked. It actually is a lot like the, um, was it “Flash Forward”?

**Quinns:** Oh, yeah.

**Matt:** The Friedemann Friese

**Quinns:** [Interjecting] Yeah, yeah, the Friedemann Friese “Flash Forward” series that introduced you to new mechanics as you play.

**Matt:** As you play. Yeah, so it’s kind of like that. Rather than being a Legacy game of being, like, the first game you play, do this. The second game you play, do this. It just, you play, and it has criteria and when those criteria are met, you do the next thing. Which means you might get through two new reveals in the first game.

**Quinns:** Yeah.

**Matt:** Or, you know. But the idea is that you just have more of a framework to keep playing it. So if you’ve played it a bit and you think, “This is fun, this is light.”, cool. You can get this and you can have something going on in between games. Like, I managed to push for a kind of -- I snuck in and and stole an objective from you, basically.

**Quinns:** Yeah, which meant that

**Matt:** [Interjecting] I got a really cool thing for it

**Quinns:** A microspoiler: you got satellites!

**Matt:** I did.

**Quinns:** Which let you do something, I forget.

**Matt:** They were weird. [Quinns laughing]. But it was -- it reminded me a lot of that Friedemann Friese mechanic of being like, here’s a simple, fun game. And then, as we go, we’re going to introduce new mechanics.

**Quinns:** So, historically, the way that card games have received expansions is of course, “Here’s a bunch of new cards! I guess they might show up in your next game; shuffle ‘em in, find out.”. Whereas what this does is so much more fun, whereby you play an ordinary game of “Space Base” and, suddenly hit a trigger and then all the new ships of this one particular type suddenly [Quinns snaps fingers] POW, enter the shop.

**Matt:** Yes.

**Quinns:** And so you get a table of players going, “Ah, look, this is a new mechanic.” , and it’s instantly available. And then by the time you’ve sort of bought or got tired of all these new ships, suddenly there’s another trigger and there’s new ships. And it’s like such a gorgeous, surprising, fun, interesting way to ensure that the expansion really spices up the game.

**Matt:** Yeah. I think it’s a really cool idea. I’m really glad it’s a really small box. And I already thought “Space Base” was a great game, but if it’s something you played and thought, “Ehh, could do with a little more of an incentive to keep going or something to spice it up a bit.”, especially for a game which is effectively about making judgements, and rolling dice, and hoping that your luck pans out. Having things where mid-game something just suddenly turns up which is a game changer is -- would be very frustrating, in most circumstances, but in “Space Base”, it’s a perfect fit.

**Quinns:** Well we’ve compared “Space Base” to, like, pinball machines and slot machines before. But, like, pinball machines and slot machines often do things where mid-game suddenly it’s like, “Ugh, multi-ball nonsense!”

**Matt: “**It’s the black hole multi-ball bonus.”

**Quinns:**  And that’s what I imagine Shy Pluto feels like.

**Matt:** Yeah, maybe. I’d be really interested to see -- we played a couple of games of it and got a flavor for some of the early stuff. It seems to have a bunch of stuff there. It seems like it would last you a good, like, three or four games or more, I dunno how long it would keep going for. It depends -- actually it depends on all sorts of weird factors, impossible to predict. But, yeah. I mean, I *really* like “Space Base”.

**Quinns:** [Interjecting] [chuckling] It’s good.

**Matt:** I love the ship you can get that allows you to swap, when activated, swap that position with another position. You get this ship and it’s on seven, which means you can swap it for something else, which means that when you roll a seven you’ll get something better. But then you can be clever and be like, “Well I’m gonna move it to number three or number four, then move it to swap it with twelve.”, and it means you’re getting twelve bonus on rolls of four.

**Quinns:** I think we might just be in to, like, random chance at the minute.

**Matt:** It’s just, I think -- I think what I like about it is that it is just random chance, but it’s the same thing. Again, it’s the same thing that it sounded like “Corinth” was lacking. If you’re gonna do that, don’t just let people take mad gambits. Let people invent their own mad gambits.

**Quinns:** Mmmm.

**Matt:** And I think that’s why I love “Quacks” is the fact that you can -- you can look at what’s available in the shop and you can choose a strategy. You can go for it. And it might pan out or it might not, but if it doesn’t or if it does, it feels like you did that. It feels like, when your thing, your hypothetical thing, that might happen and get you loads of points actually happens it feels amazing. When it doesn’t, it feels awful in the best way.

**Quinns:** [Laughing] “What were you thinking?”

**Matt:** “What were you thinking?”.

**Quinns:** Matt was referring there to “Quacks of Quedlinburg”. Which is, hey, if you haven’t heard of that game, give it a Google. It’s amazing.

**Matt:** I think it’s great.

## Monolith Arena [00:32:42]

**Quinns**: Moving on to our two meatier games, let’s start with chat of Monolith Arena.

**Matt**: Mmm!

**Quinns**: So, this is a reimplementation of a beloved design called Neuroshima Hex. The original Neuroshima Hex, which has had multiple versions across more than ten years now, is a game of Mad Max-style tribes fighting against each other on a hex-based grid. You pick a faction, which might be the weird armored troops of New York, or just a big sand snake, or whatever. They’re gonna battle it out in this post-apocalyptic future, and you do that by placing hexagons on a board which is a circle made up of hexagons. And every so often a fight is triggered, and all of your little people will attack in the directions that they are facing. So it’s kind of like chess, if players took turns putting out chess pieces, and then suddenly all the chess pieces activated at once and everything died.

**Matt**: That’d be cool.

**Quinns**: Neuroshima Hex is pretty cool!

**Matt**: Yeah, no! Yeah!

**Quinns**: So Monolith Arena is exactly the same thing. It’s fantasy now, but the art is a little spiky, a little nasty, a little bit nu metal, which I kind of like. And it’s very pretty, and you’ve got factions of weird elves vs. nasty humans vs. demons vs. dwarves, who are battling out in an arena, again made of hexes. Again you’re taking turns putting out pieces, and again, occasionally triggering fights which causes all the pieces to smash each other. BUT! Now we’ve got a monolith.

**Matt**: Monolith. What’s a monolith? It’s sort of a tower! So basically, the way this works is you have this very cool three-stack of plastic pieces [**Quinns**: So cool.] that shelve on top of each other [**Quinns**: So cool.] like a war cake. So you’ve got these three tiers, and what you do at the start of the game is you choose three tiles from your pool of tiles, from your whole stack basically, and you can choose to put in any three you want into this tower. But the nature of it means that you can put one cardboard hexagon into the tower, and then stack another one on top, but then keep what is within the tower hidden. So it means that you start the game with your base, basically -- the thing the other players have to destroy -- having within it three units that are hidden.

**Quinns**: Two are hidden.

**Matt**: Two are hidden. The one on the top obviously is visible. But basically it means that you’ve got a little surprise up your sleeve! And then the way the game works is-

**Quinns**: This is so cool!

**Matt**: -you can choose -- basically at any point -- to unfold your monolith, and go boom, boom, boom, and basically drop, in order, those other pieces outwards, and make your tower a sideways castle fort with all of those units now revealed.

**Quinns**: It’s maybe my favorite mechanic that I’ve seen this year.

**Matt**: It’s so cool!

**Quinns**: So usually you draw some tiles, and you have to put them on the board, and you’re really restricted by random chance, and that’s part of the game. Whereas in Monolith Arena, you might draw a bad hand of tiles and go, “You know what? This turn, I’m gonna unfold my monolith,” and suddenly your opponent is facing a wall of cannons?

**Matt**: Yeah! If you don’t know what’s in there, as well, in the early game, you have to then make decisions based on information you just don’t have. And if you can set it up just right that suddenly you drop out this complement of something which just makes what you’ve got on the board go from being like, “Eh, that’s not much of a problem,” to, “That’s a huge problem,” then you can have this one amazing turn. Then after a fight, the monoliths all retract up.

**Quinns**: Yes, and this is again a lovely mechanic, because if the units you’ve put on the plastic monolith pieces are killed, that then is a plastic piece with nothing in it. So if someone places a new soldier in it, or even if your opponent places one of *their* soldiers inside your monolith, after a fight, when the monolith [sucking noise] sucks itself back into a tower, your opponent’s troops are sucked in with it.

**Matt**: Yep!

**Quinns**: Which is amazing, because then if you choose to unfold your monolith later, yes you’re putting out one of the pieces which has what you want on it, but also you’re going to have to put your opponent’s soldiers somewhere?

**Matt**: Yeah, it’s fascinating, and I love the fact that it’s a really tight little wargame where at the start of it you feel like you have huge amounts of possibilities in terms of tactics and space, and you’ve got these ranged units, and you think, “I’ll put that there and snipe over there.” But very quickly, it just jams up, and very quickly you’ve got no room to move. Your ranged units feel like they’re crammed in against other things. And especially your monolith, maybe you just can’t unfold it, and I enjoyed the tactics of that, of being like-

**Quinns**: Oh, I really enjoyed, yeah, surrounding your monolith so much that you didn’t have the two hexes next it to unfold it.

**Matt**: Or you don’t have the two hexes you need. Once you know what’s in there, you think, “Okay, well I’m just going to block off that angle, and then what they’ve got in there is useless.” So it’s an incredibly fascinating, interesting design, and it has absolutely amazing production values. Even the boards you have in front of you, the little player sheets, are just beautifully designed. They’re laminated and slightly glossy.

**Quinns**: And it was really nice for me to play a one-on-one game. Although you can play it as two-on-one, or even two v. two. There’s fun four-player stuff in there. But I recently played a couple of games. Critical Mass, a lovely game of robots fighting each other, and Dice Throne, which is a beautiful thing of players rolling dice and trying to make sets and fighting each other. But those were both one-on-one games where I played them and then I just felt, “Euuurrggh where am I going with this? What’s missing?” Because I didn’t want to play them again.

**Matt**: Yeah.

**Quinns**: Lovely thing about Monolith Arena was playing a one-on-one game which did have that spark, where I finished it and went, “Oh, I just want to take everything I learned and play again.” But also, games feel very different. You can have very quick games of it, or games that last an hour and feel incredibly thinky. It’s a very surprising experience in that way.

**Matt**: Yeah, we had a lot of games that felt very close, which was unusual, particularly because some games it was really swing-y. I think you were grinding me down, and then right at the end, I just started doing huge amounts of damage to your tower all at once, and it became really on the line.

**Quinns**: This is so important for one-on-one games. It’s what chess doesn’t have but -- for example -- Netrunner does. It’s the idea that you could just get lucky in the final turns, and turn it all around.

**Matt**: Mmhm.

**Quinns**: And Monolith Arena has that in spades. You can be pummelled by your opponent, but you still have hope. You have that little hope in your heart that, “You know what, in the final turns, I might just do enough damage to their banner to win this.” And you did that to me twice!

**Matt**: Yup. Yup.

**Quinns**: Which is great!

**Matt**: Yeah, it’s a great little game, and it’s something that, especially if they expand it with some more-

**Quinns**: Yeah, they’ve already announced the first expansion for it. Boom.

**Matt**: It’s a very cool little thing. But!

**Quinns**: But.

**Matt**: But.

**Quinns**: But.

**Matt**: We were really thinking about doing a video review for this game, and in the end we decided against it because it’s just really lacking in one regard that we find very difficult to forgive for stuff that we would review on the website and be recommending more broadly.

**Quinns**: Yup, which is…

**Matt and Quinns**: The rules.

**Matt**: Yeah, the rules. The rules are just a bit unclear.

**Quinns**: You know, it’s such a shame, especially because this is from Portal Games, who put out First Martians a year before last, which I had to tear apart because the rules were just- It was unplayable. And Monolith Arena does have a similar problem, where it should be a simple game, but… And I have sympathy for this, because I like- well, I just mentioned Netrunner, but there’s games like the X-Wing Miniatures games, or the Arkham Horror Card Game. Stuff put out by Fantasy Flight that’s also very thematic, lots of different conflicting rules, and Monolith Arena falls into that area. But when Fantasy Flight put out these games, now, they put out big reference sheets. They put out errata. They put out all the support that lets you play it. And Monolith Arena, despite all this publisher support, does not have any support when I needed to find out what the hell was happening in our game.

**Matt**: Yeah, we were struggling. We were nose-in-the-manual quite a lot.

**Quinns**: Uughh, I had my nose in the manual *all the time*.

**Matt**: And when we weren’t sure about edge case stuff. And because it’s an interesting little game, where edge case stuff just comes up quite a lot, we just really struggled to find answers.

**Quinns**: You know what’s uniquely infuriating is that Portal have actually announced an Alexa app for Portal games, whereby if you have an Alexa in your house -- an Amazon Alexa, the talky robot -- you can go, “Alexa, in Monolith Arena, how does poison work?” And they’ve shown this in the trailer for their upcoming Alexa app. They have two people from their studio talking to an Alexa and going, “Alexa, what about this rule query in Monolith Arena?” It really actually boils my blood that they’re working on that, but I’m trying to play the game, I want to review it now, and I cannot for the life of me just google answers.

**Matt**: Yeah, you don’t want that. You just want a webpage.

**Quinns**: Yeah.

**Matt**: You just want a webpage.

**Quinns**: Just give me the answers.

**Matt**: Just get some SEO on there, do a webpage with a Q&A.

**Quinns**: You know, it’s nuts how often… Sometimes you don’t even need a webpage, if you just have a designer who is reliably answering questions on Board Game Geek?

**Matt**: Yeah! That’ll do!

**Quinns**: Because when you google it, that thread will often be the first result. And they don’t have *that*!

**Matt**: Yeah, you’re not going to have other websites competing for that incredibly [Quinns laughing] esoteric chain of words. That’s the thing, when you want to find the information out, if you can’t find it out, it’s frustrating, especially when there’s edge cases and, in this game, a lot of edge cases. Another thing though is, it’s very fair to be critical of Fantasy Flight. Particularly, I think, the Arkham Horror Card Game ends up -- sometimes, especially if you’re not playing frequently -- it does have a similar thing to Gloomhaven of just being very like, [confused] “Oh, how does this work? How does this work?” You know, you have to be in the flow. But because it’s cooperative, when you’re stopping the game to look in the manual, that’s not a big problem? When you’re playing head-to-head games where you’re constantly checking a manual, and constantly having to go, “Oh no, I need to look this up,” it just reminded me of playing Warhammer as a nine-year-old, and just being this intensely unsatisfying rules legal-off. And I think the thing for me was, I remember when we were playing it, and I was like, “How harsh am I being on it? Maybe because the game is very good-looking, we’re holding it to an account which is just not fair.” But then I realized, on these amazingly glossy sheets, that are beautifully produced- This is a really nice production by Portal (?). There’s so much of this game they can, and should, be really proud of.

**Quinns**: Oh, one hundred percent.

**Matt**: And if you’re big into games, it’s worth checking out.

**Quinns**: And I should also stress that if, in a year’s time, Monolith Arena has really good rules support from the publisher, I would consider going back and still doing that video review.

**Matt**: Yeah, absolutely, absolutely. But there was a thing on these sheets, these little A5 sheets that you flip over which have your information about basically what your race is, how to play them, what their special rules are. There is a little header for each sheet that says: Common Problems.

**Quinns**: Yup.

**Matt**: Which is like… When you find yourself writing in a nice font and embossing [Quinns laughing] something that says Common Problems, I really feel like you’ve got to take a step back and be like, “Have we done something wrong here?” Because it is a game, unfortunately, whereby it’s a lot of fun, but your fun and the flow of what should be a punchy wicked head-to-head game, just gets a bit stifled by consistent stumbly problems. Which is a real shame.

**Quinns**: If your players are regularly having problems, that might be a time to stop and rethink how you’re teaching the game.

**Matt**: Yeah! Or, I just think, have a really solid little Fantasy Flight-style book of being like, “Here’s all the edge case stuff, head-to-head.” Which you think, “Alright.” But then if you’ve designed this game, you must, you *must know* all of this stuff. You must have run into all of this stuff.

**Quinns**: Oh no, they have all the answers. That’s why it’s frustrating.

**Matt**: They’re just not giving them!

**Quinns**: Because it’s based on Neuroshima Hex. It’s the same design, which means all the problems in Monolith Arena have kind of been solved in Neuroshima Hex. Except because everything has a different name -- it’s a Dwarf with Guard, rather than a Punk with Shield, or whatever -- you can’t google any of the rules!

**Matt**: Yeah. It’s unfortunate. Otherwise a really great piece of work from Portal.

**Quinns**: Absolutely, and I sincerely hope they’ll get the rules together so we can do that video review.

**Matt**: Yeah. Yeah.

[funky sting]

## Alone [00:43:52]

**Quinns**: Matt, I hear you have been alone.

**Matt** [singing]: To be aloooone, with aliens. [Speaking] That’s a song by Sufjan Stevens about being alone with aliens. I’ve been playing a game called Alone. It’s a Kickstarter game whereby, rather than having that old classic formula of, three ostensibly good people have to fight against one ostensibly bad person who is well powerful, it flips that on its head, and has three ostensibly bad people [Quinns laughing] having to hunt down one ostensibly good person.

**Quinns**: So it’s all versus… One person plays the hapless space marine on a ship with-

**Quinns** [talking over Matt]: -flickering lights and aliens.

**Matt** [talking over Quinns]: -with problems. A ship with issues, let’s just say.

**Quinns**: You can have one, two, or three people being the bad guys, right?

**Matt**: Yes. So basically, if you’ve ever played a video game, it’s kind of like Dead Space, or the film Aliens. [Quinns laughing] It’s more Aliens than Alien, for those of you wondering. Yeah, you’re a space marine walking around, and you’re in a dark space base, trying to do some objectives and survive, whilst in between there are aliens popping out, and bad things happening. It’s got some really, really bloody interesting mechanics, and I’m not surprised that it did well on Kickstarter. I presume it did, it did well enough to exist.

**Quinns**: It did quite well. I think it’s Horrible Games as well, who I want to say did Railroad Ink, but I should fact-check myself later.

**Matt**: Okay, well yeah. It’s one of those things where as soon as I got it -- because I don’t really keep an eye on Kickstarter stuff -- and as soon as I got it I was like, “Yeah, I can really see why people got excited about this.” Because the way it works is, you have two maps in this game. You have the *map*, which only the bad aliens can see, and you have the *labyrinth*, which is basically the map that the person who’s in the dark can see. And the way it works is you move around, and every time you move around or explore, you uncover more of this map, and in a traditional Imperial Assault or Descent-style things, you’re adding these new map tiles that you can then go, “Okay, well this is more corridor. Okay, this is a T junction. Okay there’s a door here.”

**Quinns**: So, when the game starts, what does setup look like?

**Matt**: Setup looks like: You have a big cardboard shield, like a GM-style shield, where behind it the aliens will sit and conspire with a map, which is covered in little icons of things. So they know where everything is. They choose where you are, and then all you can see, as the human player, is just whatever bit of corridor they’ve plonked you in.

**Quinns**: Oh wow, so setup-

**Matt**: Like one bit of corridor.

**Quinns**: -so setup is as simple as putting a corridor in the middle of the table, and a miniature on it.

**Matt**: It’s basically, “You’re in this space.” And it’s just one space. This corridor is where you are.

**Quinns**: Wow.

**Matt**: And then you can choose to explore, which basically means using your little wrist computer to find out what’s down the corridor, or you can just walk into the dark and see what’s out there, or you can do a bunch of other things. You can block doors, if you find a light panel you can use it to switch on the lights.

**Quinns**: It sounds a lot like Resident Evil.

**Matt**: It kind of is. It’s supposed to be. Dead Space, for those people who don’t know, was basically Resident Evil in space.

**Quinns**: Video game.

**Matt**: Video game. So it’s supposed to be a kind of horror thing, of you going around trying to find your way around, and it has some very cool ideas. So the really cool thing about it is that you have, say, eight turns, maybe ten turns, and you can do a thing one at a time, like exploring, going to this room, searching for equipment, fighting alien maybe -- sometimes a good idea, never know -- or just running around like a terrified person. The aliens don’t actually ever get a turn.

**Quinns**: Okay?

**Matt**: Which is interesting. They just react to what you’re doing. So each alien player has a hand of cards, and they’re not allowed to tell their other alien friends what cards they have, and on a three-player game, the other two aliens just have their own decks to draw from. There are four different decks, and they’re very loosely like, “These make the aliens nastier, these make the aliens faster, these make the player’s items and things go wrong more often than not.”

**Quinns**: But every alien player has their own *thing*?

**Matt**: Yeah. The way it works with four players is a little bit weak, in the fact that you have two aliens each have their own unique deck, and then the alien in the middle draws from both and can choose.

**Quinns** [laughing]: Oh come on!

**Matt**: But they could have allowed them to have their own deck! I guess maybe it just makes it too hard. I don’t know. Anyway, it basically means that you just do things, and you just keep taking your turns, and in between your turns the aliens will basically go, “Ah, we’re going to do this.” But they kind of have to negotiate, of being like, “I’ve got something *quite* good I can do,” et cetera?

**Quinns**: Oh, can only one of you play a card?

**Matt**: You can play two each round, but the second one you play basically fills up two slots on the players’ board, and if they fill up too many slots, then they get less danger tokens to put on the board? [Quinns laughing] Listen, I’m going to let you in on a secret here. Alone is pretty cool, it’s pretty close to being a genuinely quite great game. It’s not quite there. And one of the reasons it’s not quite there, it reminds me of another sci-fi Aliens-inspired game that we played at UK Games Expo-

**Quinns**: Oh, yes!

**Matt**: -of just being like, “This is a cool idea.” And they’ve tried to squeeze in too many mechanics. And they’ve tried to make it too true to an idea of a thing, and in that it was Aliens. They had everything you have in Aliens. And there comes a point where it’s like, “Slow down there, soldier. You’ve got a lot of cool ideas here, but you’ve got a few too many cool ideas, and it just doesn’t quite hang.”

**Quinns**: Okay, so would you say it’s missing… When you compare it to Descent and Imperial Assault, I feel like the core of those games is, it’s fun to just move across a room and roll some dice and kill a monster. Or a Stormtrooper!

**Matt**: Yeah, it doesn’t quite have that. So the combat is, you have a bunch of different aliens, but really the way you fight the different aliens isn’t dramatically different. There is a gigantic worm, which is really dangerous, but if the lights are on is pretty useless, and that’s cool, but everything else is just a little bit tougher, or a little bit scarier. Also you have a weird mechanic whereby you have your health, and your willpower -- two separate bars, basically --

**Quinns**: Okay…

**Matt**: -but then when you run out of one, you just start eating through the other. So the only real reason you have them as two separate ones-

**Quinns**: Ahhhhhh.

**Matt**: -is because at the end of each round, you get some new tokens, which allow you to basically do two actions in one turn. Adrenaline tokens. And the amount of adrenaline tokens you get is based on the difference between these two values? In game mechanic turns, it makes sense, because what it means is, at the start of the game, you don’t have many. In the middle of the game, if you’ve really lost a lot of health, or lost a lot of willpower- It’s not called willpower, I can’t remember what it’s called. All games just have- It might be called horror, I don’t know. It’s just brain-ness.

**Quinns**: Brain strength!

**Matt**: It’s brain strength. If you’ve got a big discrepancy in the middle of the game, which you might well have, it means that suddenly you have this burst of doing loads of stuff and getting double actions, and running around the spaceship. And then towards the end of the game, when you’ve wound down both of your meters, you’re going to have less and you might be in trouble.

**Quinns**: Okay.

**Matt**: But, in reality, it just makes losing health or losing mind stuff feel a bit inconsequential, because you kind of know that they’re the same meter.

**Quinns**: Ahhhhh.

**Matt**: And this is the thing. It’s got so many different mechanics, and so many different interlocking systems, and so many different things you can do that it doesn’t become overwhelming, it just becomes a little thin, and I couldn’t help but wish that they’d focused a little more on less of the ideas.

**Quinns**: You know, we have encountered this with Kickstarter games before. I’m thinking of Rising Sun, which was pitched as a negotiation game, because that’s what’s exciting, but then in practice, the core conceit that made people excited and made them want to back the Kickstarter is kind of absent from the design? And I haven’t played Alone, but I have read the manual, and what struck me is, I wanted to play Alone because you’ve got a team of players, all of whom can see a map, and they’re moving monsters around in the dark, and they’re telling the player, [coy alien voice] “Oh, you can hear noise from below you.” But what put me off when I was reading the manual is that the bit that excited me was so little of the manual, and so much of the manual was other junk?

**Matt**: Yeah, this is the thing. There’s all sorts of things, like you can block doors after moving. But then aliens can get through doors by spending movement. And you’ve got all this other stuff, like you can search for equipment, and use equipment, and you can level up by killing monsters. The thing about it that’s really cool is the fact that you have this map and you have to move around the map, and you have to memorize it. At the end of each round, your labyrinth, what you can see as a player, resets to what you can currently see.

**Quinns**: Wow.

**Matt**: Because it basically means that your wrist computer, that does maps for you, is the same one from the film Prometheus, in that it’s rubbish. [Quinns laughing] And it’s like, “Oh, we’ve apparently lost all of that map now, because, I don’t know, it’s just gone!” So it means that you go through and at the end of the round, you’re just aware that you can currently see all of this stuff, and if an alien moves into any of these areas, you’ll see them, because it’s on your temporary radar, being like, “Oh, there’s an alien there, it’s coming after me!” At the end of the round, gone. It means that setting up the game is actually really fast, which is great for a game like this, because it’s just like, “Here’s the map!” Bumpfh. Done. Then you add on stuff generally, but then at the end of the round again, clear it away. It means it doesn’t take up too much table space, and it means that what would be really messy and unwieldy keeps getting cleaned up and reset in a way which is really pleasing.

**Quinns**: Mmm!

**Matt**: But the real coolness of the game is, you’ve got on your little player sheet a little mini thing, and you just use whatever tokens you’ve got available to try and create your own little map. Now there’s a video game called Etrian Odyssey which is-

**Quinns**: Wait, hang on. So the space marine player has some tokens with which they can essentially try and make notes on what the map is?

**Matt**: You’re allowed to, yeah. Basically, all you have is this one type of token, which is blue on one side and green on the other side. And just with these one tokens, and this little grid, which is the same shape as both floors of the map, you can then put them however you want-

**Quinns**: Oh my gosh, that’s amazing! So you can make a map, but you’re given inadequate tools to do it?

**Matt**: You’re given, well, basically, just enough adequate. My rule was if it was on the bottom floor, then I’d have it on the blue side. If it was on the top floor, I’d have it on the green side. So I could remember the locations of rooms just by doing that.

**Quinns**: That’s so cool!

**Matt**: Yeah, but also you can have a thing of you can ask, “How many spaces am I away from this certain thing?” And you can ask two things, like, “How many spaces am I away from this room I’m looking for,” and they might say, “Six.” And then I put -- because there’s loads of these tokens -- I put like six on that space, so I knew that it was six from there. And then if I asked somewhere else I could put three there, and I could triangulate, basically.

**Quinns**: Wow.

**Matt**: But there’s always a degree of you having to remember stuff, like remembering where T junctions are, remembering where it’s not a clean through gap, in terms of making calculations. That was really cool. Having a thing of basically knowing you were going to keep losing your map, and having to draw a map and remember it with limited information: Such a cool mechanic! However, just not that interesting in the game, because even though you’ve got these two boards that represent the different potential floors you can have, leading to a combination of sixteen different configurations, by turning them upside down and flipping them, and then there’s another one in the expansion which has another one. But because the floors are always the same size, they’re always the same shape, it makes it quite easy to do this element of the game? Because as soon as you find an edge wall with a staircase, it’s then very easy to work out the rest? Because it’s always a rectangle. It’s always a loose rectangle. It just made me realize that a game where basically you were going through, trying to evade aliens, trying to do a job, whilst also printing out a map that was slightly imperfect, is such a cool idea.

**Quinns**: Yeah, and that’s what they sold the Kickstarter on, for sure.

**Matt**: Yeah, but then there’s other stuff, and it just ends up feeling a little bit like this other stuff just isn’t that interesting. And playing as the human on the run, in the manual it’s like, “Oh, it might feel really intense and scary, but it’s supposed to.” It didn’t, really!

**Quinns**: That was going to be my next question. This is a thematic game. What was the storytelling like?

**Matt**: The storytelling, not so great.

**Quinns**: I should clarify, I meant that in terms of: In Descent, when you fight a dragon, if someone spends their turn moving up to the dragon and then hits and rolls the best possible on the dice and kills the dragon in one hit, that feels evocative and exciting and electric, and I was wondering if Alone made you feel outnumbered, or outgunned, or scared, you know, all of the feelings you would associate with a sort of Aliens-style pastiche.

**Matt**: There were definitely some points of mild dread. Of trying to outwit what you thought the aliens might be doing, and having no idea really how many aliens there were around? You’d be running down a corridor and thinking, “Is this what they’re expecting, or not? Have I just killed most of the aliens or are there more out there?” I think the thing that kind of lets down the alien side is, because they have these hands of cards, and these shared units, and they don’t actually have any control over specific things, it doesn’t feel like you’re really being hunted in the same way. And also, they haven’t really done the best job of the actual decks of cards that the aliens can use. They’re just not that interesting, sometimes. Like one of the decks, the green deck, was to do with messing with you a bit, but a lot of time it was just like, every time I found an item… The flavor text on them is fantastic. It would be like, “What was that noise?” or like, “I think I just saw something,” for the names of the card abilities, which really really does nail the kind of like, “What’s going on?” But a lot of these cards were things like, “Oh it’s not working,” or “This thing’s broken,” so it’d be like, “I found an item,” and then it’d be like, “Oh, I play this card which means now the item you got is kind of broken?” Which, mechanically, fine, but it’s not very cool for being like, “I’m an alien hunting you down. I’ve just made your jetpack a bit crap.” [Quinns laughing] It doesn’t feel super alien-y. And I tell you what -- and again, this ties into the fact that I just wish they’d focused a bit more on this conceit of mapping under stress -- one of the cards -- and this is the best thing in the game -- one of the cards allowed the aliens to basically, if they choose, when you moved into this room, to give you incorrect information about the room. And then the only way you could find out if that information is correct or not is to spend an action searching the room again, or, next time you move into the space, it will be corrected. But it meant I moved into an area where I knew the stairs were-

**Quinns**: Do you remember what the flavor text on that card was?

**Matt**: I can’t remember, no.

**Quinns**: Ah, shame.

**Matt**: I think it’s like, “Oh it’s not quite what it seems,” or “Something isn’t as it seems,” or… But I moved into a space, and on my map it’s like, “This is where the stairs are,” and then Ed, friend we were playing with, played this card with a grin, and it basically meant that they then showed me what the room was, and it was just a corridor, and there weren’t any stairs. [Quinns laughing] And we kind of both knew that there *were* stairs there, but it meant that because they’d done something- And that works, having an alien that’s like mess with your mind a bit, so you go to find the stairs, and there aren’t any stairs, but it’s because you’re hallucinating.

**Quinns**: Yeah.

**Matt**: That’s really cool. So it’s like, there’s so many really cool ideas, but unfortunately, the bottom line of it is, the puzzle of how you’re playing as a human is not quite interesting enough and intense enough, and you don’t feel like you’ve got enough up your sleeve to feel you can use your ingenuity to get around being hunted.

**Quinns**: Right.

**Matt**: And hunting isn’t that exciting either. To be honest, a lot of what you do as an alien is about updating the map. In some ways it’s really good. One of the things I really like about it is, if you want to play a game and be the evil character, like in Imperial Assault, you have to be the person who knows the game the most.

**Quinns**: Yes.

**Matt**: You can’t be somebody who doesn’t. Whereas in this, we had somebody who was an alien the first game who just doesn’t really play board games. And because you’re collectively doing things, because you’re collectively maintaining this map and giving information and doing things, you can kind of cruise along, but obviously that’s also the downside is the fact that, really, you’ve got the person who’s playing the human running around, playing a slightly more complex game, but then the other people are kind of playing a beer-and-pretzels game?

**Quinns**: Ahhhhh.

**Matt**: They don’t *have* to do that much, they can just occasionally chuck a thing down.

**Quinns**: You know, it does seem to be a cornerstone of really great asymmetrical games is making every faction- Whichever faction you’re playing, you need to feel really powerful in what you can do, but that you’re just so outgunned by the crazy powers of your opponents, you know? That was something that Root got, is like, whichever faction you play in Root, you have other players going, “You can do *what*?” And you feel proud in that secrecy. Whereas Alone, it feels like neither the aliens nor the humans feel very strongly about their role, maybe? Like you don’t feel enormously empowered, or that your opponent is crazy powerful.

**Matt**: Yeah. I think the second game we played when I was playing as the human, everyone just felt a bit like they were struggling to get me, because I just kept gunning them up, which was a bit unusual, but it seemed to be working for me with what I had.

**Quinns**: But did you even feel powerful in those moments?

**Matt**: No. And I think, really, I never knew what was in the dark, so I didn’t really feel powerful when I was winning. And I think the biggest problem we had actually, when we first played it, is, when you’re in a scenario where the aliens are really giving them hell, it just feels a bit mean. And I think that’s the interesting thing [Quinns laughing]. You know, when you’ve got Imperial Assault, the whole thing- This is the thing sometimes, when you turn things on their head, sometimes there’s a reason that they’re one way up already. Because when you’ve got Imperial Assault, and you’ve got three people smashing Darth Vader, that feels good for everybody. [hushed tone] I mean, obviously, when you’re playing as Darth Vader, it still makes you quite sad. You’re like, “[whimper] This isn’t nice for me!” as everyone cheers my demise. [regular volume] But! It’s good beating evil and going, “Hooray!”

Quinns: Yeah.

Matt: Whereas when it’s like three evil aliens crushing somebody in the dark, “Hooray!” And I think it’s one of those games where, both games when they’ve ended, it just felt like a bit of an anticlimax, in a way. It’s a really cool idea, and it’s not bad, is the thing. It’s not a bad game. It’s pretty cool. I think it’s really one of these games that’s an interesting Ameritrash game that I wish just tried to do a bit less, and tried to focus a bit more on doing what it does. And again, I think there is a slight bleed of Kickstarteriness into the fact that it’s got all these different minis of all these different aliens. And there’s not many, it’s like five different alien types. But there’s not a lot of distinction there, you know?

**Quinns**: It has the miniatures, but it doesn’t have the rules to back them up. Before we move on-

**Matt**: Two aliens! Just put two aliens in it, and that’d be fine.

**Quinns**: But two aliens that are kind of like, different? I mean, Space Hulk, of course, only has genestealers-

**Matt**: Exactly.

**Quinns**: -which is one kind of alien.

**Matt**: I feel like it would be fine with one alien.

**Quinns**: Also, because we haven’t used that term in a while…

**Matt**: Oh, yes, yes, yes.

**Quinns**: So, for those of you who are new to the podcast, who’ve just heard the word Ameritrash, that is not Shut Up & Sit Down calling American board games bad. That is a beloved industry term for American games that put storytelling first. Alone is made, I believe, by an Italian team.

**Matt**: Yes, but it has that same punchiness of being dumb theme, over-the-top stuff, cool minis. It has some really fun elements, and it didn’t outlast its welcome. It isn’t too hard to set up and learn. It has a weird quirk that it has two manuals? One to learn how to be the good player, one to learn how to be the bad player? But they’re basically the same manual, just with the information framed differently, which is kind of insane, but actually having a game like that where you can have your own manual to check at the same time is neat?

**Quinns**: It’s frustrating as well, because-

**Matt**: Yeah, it’s also frustrating.

**Quinns**: No, I mean, I was going to say… Back in the day, you know, you might have a game like this enjoy sort of a version 1, but then because there’s so much potential here, they do a second edition that’s really exciting, whereas, with Kickstarter games? It just seems to be like-

**Matt**: There’s always going to be something new.

**Quinns**: -Alone has been on Kickstarter now, and they can’t do that again. All the people who bought it and got excited aren’t going to buy it again. It’s kind of a shame to see an idea like this that’s maybe not going to get any more tender loving care from the designers, when it has so much potential.

**Matt**: Yeah, and there were some big slip-ups as well. I really like the fact that it’s very quick to set up. You can basically just randomize some missions by being like, “Here’s three random objectives, let’s just go.” And it’s a game that is quite quick to get on the table and get going. It does have a big campaign book, which has some art and some story, and you play through these campaigns. But the campaign mission setup -- because it’s a game where you don’t have to set up a specific map, you just get going -- the missions themselves don’t have a lot of flavor, and it has such a dramatic amount of text to read out! It’s like somebody clearly enjoyed writing little science fiction things, but I don’t know how many times… I mean, I don’t know how many designers listen to do what we do [Quinns laughing] or care about what we do, but I don’t know how many times we have to say on podcasts or videos, “Do not make players read out a side and a half of A4 before doing anything.” I am somebody who likes reading stuff out. I’m somebody who’s *good* at reading stuff out.

**Quinns**: You have been paid to do voiceover work.

**Matt**: Yeah! And somebody gives me a sheet of A4 and says, “Read that out to people.” That’s like, you’ve got to pay me! [Quinns laughing] By the time we’ve done that, I’m gonna be tired!

**Quinns**: Other players are gonna be bored!

**Matt**: Yeah, everyone’s going to be bored by the end of the second paragraph, even if you’re really giving it everything. Don’t ask people to read out that much information. It’s interesting that they have this little story campaign book, and I am just like, “I’m not doing this. I’m not reading this out.”

**Quinns**: Or! Print out multiple copies of it and do it as a script, like a script readthrough.

**Matt**: You know, that’s not a bad thought exercise for designers, because that’s what you really should do. If you want people to read that much stuff, print it out four times. Oh, maybe you can’t afford to print it out four times? Do you need to print it out at all. It’s a question of being like, if it’s not so good and so vital that everyone reads it, maybe make it shorter.

**Quinns**: It’s like how Pandemic Legacy is such an interesting thought exercise, because Pandemic Legacy’s plot is about- [chuckling] The entire thing cannot be more than 800 words, for the entire campaign. And yet, it has -- while the storytelling is disappointing and thin in some ways -- it also has some of the best storytelling, because if you have one sentence which is -- you know, I’m not going to say anything because it’s a spoiler -- but there are individual sentences in Pandemic Legacy-

**Matt**: Where you just go, [big shocked gasp]!

**Quinns**: -which do more storytelling lifting than a page of reading.

**Matt**: Yeah, it’s just naturally evocative. And as always, I think the daddy with this stuff is Gloomhaven, so if you’re in doubt, if you’re making a game and you’re like, “Hey, what’s the right amount and right tone in how to write these things?” look at the cards in Gloomhaven, because they just whack a lot of flavor into not a lot of space.

## Mailbag [01:05:27]

*Mailbag jingle: Ohhh, put your hand in my mailbag. Find me a letter!*

**Matt**: It’s that time again. It’s time for me to put my hand into the big old mailbag of life. [Rustling sounds] And pull out! [Rustle rustle] A letter! I think it’s just… who put this in here? [grumbles] Okay, alright, I’m passing you over a letter.

**Quinns**: Oh, that’s interesting, okay. So this letter actually comes from Twitter!

**Matt**: How does that happen?

**Quinns**: I don’t know! @conmanau asks, “I love games that alternate between me thinking, [mad scientist voice] ‘I am a tactical genius!’ and, ‘No, I’m the world’s biggest idiot.’ What game would you recommend that maximizes that rollercoaster?”

**Matt**: Ohhhh. I have two recommendations for you on that front. Decrypto is a very good example of a game that makes you feel like you’re the cleverest person in the world, followed by a huge idiot, because you will give a clue which you think is *sooo* clever, or you’ll come up with a solution for the other team’s that you think is *sooo* clever, and then you’re just completely wrong. Or, your entire team just doesn't get it at all, and you either oscillate between feeling like *they* are the biggest idiots in the world, but fundamentally at the end of the day, you’re the idiot. You made the choice. You thought they’d get it, and they didn’t.

**Quinns**: I mean, presumably, there’s room in Decrypto also to give a really good clue that is then decoded by the other team.

**Matt**: Yeah, oh absolutely. [Quinns laughing] Because you don’t understand the line of thinking that they’re using, and then you just give them something which is just like, “Oh, brilliant, we’ve got it.” And you’re like, [wailing in shock] “Whaaa noo!!” [Quinns laughing] So yeah, that is rife for feeling that you’re smart, and feeling that you’re an idiot.

**Quinns**: There’s a few games that I don’t own because you own them, and Sheriff of Nottingham is one, Decrypto is another where I’m like, [whispering] “I wish I could play it more.” I might have to get my own copy.

**Matt**: Yeah, we had a thing where we got ruined at Christmas, because we’d all just seen something on television that the other team made reference to. And that wasn’t cheating, that was allowed, because the whole rule in this sort of game is you cannot make reference to things, like in-jokes, that not everyone knows. But specifically, because it had been related to something we’d just seen on TV [Quinns laughing], I never would have thought of it, because, you know?

**Quinns**: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

**Matt**: But it was like, “Ah, damn it! How could we…?” You know.

**Quinns**: That’s great. What was your other recommendation?

**Matt**: My other one is probably Tigers & Pots, Tigris & Euphrates [**Quinns**: Ooooh!], just because it’s a game whereby when you’re winning in that, when you’re doing great, you just feel like you’re king of the world, and you’re like overseeing, overlooking this vast city of perfection. And then you realize, you’ve left the bloody back door unlocked, and somebody just flips over your entire empire.

**Quinns**: Tigris & Euphrates definitely makes me feel stupid, it’s not a game that makes me feel clever, ever. Even when- You know, you and I have played the fabled game of Tigris & Euphrates after we filmed the review, which was the most intense one vs. one game we’ve ever played.

**Matt**: You definitely feel clever when you spot the chink in the armor. When you go, “[big gasp] If I do that though, then I will literally flip over their entire city and it will be mine.”

**Quinns**: It’s like glimmers of intelligence in a sea of being a berk.

**Matt**: Yeah, but I dunno, I very much felt like in some of those games that-

**Quinns**: Hey, I mean you’re better than me at Tigers and-

**Matt**: Ahhhh.

**Quinns**: Here’s the thing, on the podcast, we need to call it the correct name-

**Matt**: Tigris & Euphrates.

**Quinns**: -because people *will* google “tigers and pots.”

**Matt**: Yeah, Tigers & Pots. I don’t think you’d even find our Youtube video, doing that.

**Quinns**: No, because it’s not in the body copy of the video. [Matt laughing] So yeah, Tigris & Euphrates, two rivers.

**Matt**: Just two rivers! Just two rivers having a good time. What could be more natural?

**Quinns**: The game I chose for what makes you feel like an idiot, and then makes you feel amazing, is a game I don’t believe you’ve played, and I’ve just realized it would be perfect to do on a stream: It’s Space Alert!

**Matt**: Oh, yeah!

**Quinns**: This is a game by Vlaada Chvátil, who made games that Matt loves, like Galaxy Trucker and Codenames and a ton of other stuff, who’s probably Shut Up & Sit Down’s favorite designer, [stage whisper] and Matthew, he has a new game coming [regular voice] a new big game.

**Matt** [intrigued]: Oooh.

**Quinns**: He was doing party games for a while, he has a new big game coming out, I believe. I’m so hype, I’m so hype, I’m so hype. Anyway, so Space Alert, I’ve realized, is the ur-game for this question, because Space Alert is a co-op game, you’re all on a crew together. It’s a deeply Soviet version of Star Trek, where the ship has a screensaver that turns on and disables everything unless someone wiggles the mouse every thirty seconds, the elevator can only hold one person at a time… So Space Alert is a real-time game where threats come out, and let’s say it’s an attack ship coming off the port bow, then it’s like: Okay, well, right, it’s a co-op game, so first off someone needs to go to the room with the port laser. Someone else needs to go to the port laser’s engine room and put a battery in there.

**Matt**: Yeah?

**Quinns**: So what it might be is, “Okay Matt, you go down the elevator in turn one, turn two enter the engine room, turn three put the battery in. Then I can fire the laser on turn four and we’ll blow that ship out of the sky.” Except you’re not dealing with one threat, you’re dealing with like *seven*. So you have intruders *on* the ship, and you’ll be like, [whiny voice] “But Quinns I can’t get into the port area until someone goes in with a gun to kill the person who beamed aboard in there!” Anyway, the point is, you puzzle out this, and you work out a solution, and the game only takes fifteen minutes because it’s real-time, and you work so hard, and you go, “Yes, but if you fire the laser in turn twelve, then we’ll do it before the…!” You program everything with all of these cards, and then finally, once the game is over, you reset the board and then you work out what actually happened. So turn one, you all flip over your card, and yes, Matt goes into the elevator, and I go into the laser room.

**Matt**: Oh wow.

**Quinns**: And then turn two, you all flip over the card, and you go, “Okay, Quinns, you put a battery in there, right?” And I look at the card, [aghast whisper] and I put the wrong card in. [regular voice] Which means I didn’t put a battery in there. Instead, I pressed the shield button [Matt laughing], draining energy from the engine room, which means-

**Matt**: Oh my.

**Quinns**: -the ship doesn't have the energy we thought it did for the entire rest of the thing.

**Matt**: That might cause a problem! [laughing]

**Quinns**: You go from feeling like a SWAT team to feeling like children.

**Matt**: I always get confused and feel like I’ve played this game, when actually I’ve played Space *Cadets*.

**Quinns**: Yes!

**Matt**: Which has such a similar…

**Quinns**: They’re both co-op games of being a goofy team in space.

**Matt**: Yeah, but this one sounds a lot more interesting, actually.

**Quinns**: Space Cadets is a fun romp.

**Matt** [weird reedy voice, very fast]: Space space space space space.

**Quinns**: Space Alert is one of the best board games. The only reason I don’t play it is because it’s so intense. [Matt laughing] We’ll play it on a stream, and you’re gonna have your mind blown.

**Matt**: Yeah, no, that sounds great, that sounds great.

**Quinns**: It’s phenomenal.

## Outro [01:11:22]

**Quinns**: Thank you very much for listening to a very long, very long bumper episode of the Shut Up & Sit Down podcast. Thanks as always to Mr. Steve Davit for providing the incredibly scronky sax that so thrums through this podcast. That wasn’t a sentence.

**Matt**: Keep it scronky and thrumming.

**Quinns** [laughing]: What are you going to do for the rest of the day, Matthew Lees?

**Matt**: I am going to do whatever you tell me to do, because you’re at my flat, and we’re working!

**Quinns**: Hooraaaaayyy!

**Matt**: Hooray! But in between, I might blow my nose!

**Quinns**: Thank you very much for listening everybody [**Matt**: Ye.], we’ll be back with another podcast… full of games, it’s what we do, I don’t know else the podcast would be full of.

**Matt**: Games! [pause] Bye!

[funky outro music]