**Podcast #95: The Danish Crisis**

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## Intro [00:00:00]

[funky intro music]

**Quinns**: Hallo everybody, and welcome to the very 95th ever episode of the Shut Up & Sit Down podcast, a podcast all about board games and…

**Matt**: That’s it.

**Quinns**: Honestly, that’s kind of it.

**Matt**: Nothing else.

**Quinns**: My name is Quintin Smith, and I am joined by Matthew Lees!

**Matt**: Hello, it’s me, Matt Lees. And board games.

**Quinns**: And you’ve brought board games with you.

**Matt**: I have.

**Quinns**: In spirit.

**Matt**: Yes. And physically. We’re in my house, so we’re surrounded by board games because I’m an incredibly messy man.

**Quinns**: Working as a board game journalist is kind of like living Tetris, you know? Where boxes come, they arrive, you need to get rid of them because if you don’t, you’re gonna be crushed to death.

**Matt**: Yeah, you have to line them all in one flat row and then they disappear.

**Quinns**: I know! No one knows that except us.

**Matt**: Yeah.

**Quinns**: This is gonna be an unusual episode of the podcast because it’s all about our recollections of Fastaval! A tabletop convention you probably haven’t heard of because it is Danish.

**Matt**: Mmm!

**Quinns**: The land of Denmark.

**Matt**: Mmhm.

**Quinns**: The home of Hamlet.

**Matt**: Mmhm.

**Quinns**: And…

**Matt**: Ham.

**Quinns**: Uh, Danish ham?

**Matt**: Hamlet, I believe, is just a small ham.

**Quinns**: Oh, right.

**Matt**: So it’s just ham. They’ve just got a lot of ham, a lot of bacon. It’s a great country. [Quinns laughing] There’s a lot about it I really liked.

**Quinns**: Our audience aren’t going to realize: There was a point there where you went from being insincere to sincere.

**Matt**: To being sincere, yeah. Well that’s the line, we’ve just stepped over it. But no, in sincerity, Denmark was great and Fastaval was great. And on today’s podcast, we’re also going to be talking about -- just so you know -- some of the games we played at Fastaval.

**Quinns**: Yes! We’re going to be talking about Hansa Teutonica, a classic eurogame. We’re gonna be talking about some unreleased games, like Deep Blue, which is coming out next year from a very big French publisher. We’ve played the new upcoming big box expansion for Flamme Rouge. The designers, who were there at Fastaval, showed us their upcoming racing game -- kind of a spiritual successor to Flamme Rouge - which will be coming out next year -- we think -- called Auto, and it’s about: Matthew, what if you were racing not bikes, but cars?

**Matt**: That sounds ridiculous.

**Quinns**: Finally we’re going to end this podcast by talking about midlife Crisis.

**Matt**: Mmm, the midlife crisis. What a great time it is to have a midlife crisis. But is it great… in a board game? Well!

**Quinns**: This is the sequel to Fog Of Love, from Jacob Jaskov, the designer of Fog Of Love, and he said, “Hey, what’s a much harder thing to market and make? I’m gonna do that.” It’s a four-player game about midlife crisis.

**Matt**: It’s a man who loves a ridiculous challenge.

**Quinns**: Yeah.

**Matt**: But yeah we’ll be talking about that. It’s still a work in progress, but we’ve had a go at it, and it’s interesting.

**Quinns**: So we’re going to be talking a bit about what Fastaval is and why we felt it was so special at the end of this podcast, but you know, we’re gonna give you your pudding first. Let’s talk about some gosh darn board games!

**Matt**: Pudding first. It’s just naughty.

[funky sting]

## Hansa Teutonica [00:02:56]

**Quinns**: We’re gonna start talking about Hansa Teutonica.

**Matt** [lovely and sonorous]: Mmmmm.

**Quinns**: And if that sounds like a boring g- Oh that was a lovely, sonorous *mmm* from you there.

**Matt** [even lovelier and more sonorous] Mmmmmm. Hansa Teutonica.

**Quinns**: And if that sounds like a boring name for a boring German-style game, it kind of is. But! Hey. This is by Andreas Steding, famous German designer who most recently did Gùgōng, which we did a video review of on the site, just recently. Had a lot of fun filming that. And Mr. Steding is responsible for some absolute classics.

**Matt** [amused]: You said “Mr. Steding” there as if he was your teacher. [falsetto] “Mr. Steding!”

**Quinns** [falsetto]: “I love Mr. Steding!” [normal voice] I mean, you can look at his games on Board Game Geek.

**Matt**: No, you sounded like you were in trouble. You didn’t sound like you were admiring him.

**Quinns**: Oh!

**Matt**: You sounded like you were in a lot of trouble, and you knew what you’d done, and Mr. Steding was very angry.

**Quinns**: Well he probably would be angry, because I didn’t do very well in Hansa Teutonica.

**Matt**: No, and we didn’t play it until quite recently.

**Quinns**: No. But! Hey. Well, we didn’t play it because it’s out of print. It’s still out of print, but I’m just gonna come out here on the podcast and say, [straining from emotion] oooh I really want it to get reprinted!

**Matt**: Yeah, what a lovely game.

**Quinns**: What a fantastic game!

**Matt**: It’s a very, very plain-looking thing.

**Quinns**: So what this game is, is you all… Basically you’re going to play a eurogame from 2007 or so, which is to say: You represent German trading houses-

**Matt**: Yup!

**Quinns**: -and you’re going to be spending your turn placing little wooden… tokens-

**Matt**: Yup!

**Quinns**: -between two points.

**Matt**: But! But. Sometimes they’re little square tokens, and sometimes… they’re round tokens.

**Quinns**: Mmm.

**Matt**: And the round tokens are far more rare than the square ones, but also have the capacity to unlock some of the most interesting bonuses.

**Quinns**: I feel like I was on the way to making this sound interesting.

**Matt** [“European” accent]: Have you ever played a eurogame? Would you like to come to my house? [normal voice] No I’m sorry. You know we used to take the mick out of this stuff, but we just increasingly love dry German eurogames. But no, you make it sound exciting.

**Quinns**: Okay, here I go. [straining from effort] WeeuuEEUUeeuuuurrggh I’m gonna give it a shot!

**Matt**: You can do it.

**Quinns**: So, on your turn you’re going to be placing a handful of these wooden tokens, which may be square, or maybe they’re big circular *merchants*-

**Matt**: The good boys.

**Quinns**: -between spaces around the board. Now, when you complete a route -- so let’s say you’ve put one of your cubes on every space between two little towns -- then you get to pick one of the rewards in either of the two towns. Okay?

**Matt**: Mmhm.

**Quinns**: And these rewards are *either* essentially a little merchant house that’s gonna score you points, OR, they are a permanent improvement to your ability to -- for example -- place cubes, number of cubes you can place a turn, the number of points you get for connecting routes. All of these sort-of dry, but -- in the context of such a simple game -- *unbelievably* exciting bonuses.

**Matt**: Uh-huh.

**Quinns**: But where the game *is* is, you might now think, “Okay, so it’s on my turn, I can place four cubes. I’ll just put four cubes between these two towns.”

**Matt**: Fill out one route.

**Matt and Quinns**: Done.

**Quinns**: No! What you want to do here in Hansa Teutonica is, you want to place your cubes wherever you think other people will need them, because anyone else can, for an action, dislodge one of your cubes. So if Matt’s between -- I don’t know -- Hamburg and… other German town… and I want to fill up that route, Matt has a cube there, I have to dislodge that, which means I have to pay a little extra, but most importantly, in dislodging Matt’s cube, it becomes *two cubes* for Matt-

**Matt**: It’s compensation time, Susan!

**Quinns**: -that he can place on routes adjacent to this! So suddenly now you’ve got a game where everyone’s trying to complete routes, and literally every player is trying to get in literally every other player’s way.

**Matt**: Yeah, it’s fantastic.

**Quinns**: And it’s magical!

**Matt**: It’s so simple and so good. Just looking at the board and going “Where are people going to go?” Because if you can spend the whole game just basically trying to work out exactly what everyone’s going to do, and rather than just trying to build routes of your own from scratch, just basically squatting on other people’s pre-planned roads, you can just be placing a *huge* amount of things! Just popping down loads of stuff everywhere!

**Quinns**: If you do an expert job of getting in everyone’s way, you’re placing twice as many cubes as everyone else from being dislodged all the time.

**Matt**: But.

**Quinns**: [overwhelmed with board game passion] But eurrgh!!!! The lovely risk/reward there is that, let’s say Matt puts-

**Matt**: Let’s say Matt’s doing really well.

**Quinns**: Let’s say Matt’s doing quite well, and there is a four-cube path between two towns. Matt could put a cube there and just get in my way a little bit, but no, Matt’s smart. He puts *two* cubes there, so, oh my god, I’m gonna have to pay through the nose! But what that means is, I then look at that path and go, “Nah, sod this. This is a disa- I’m going nowhere near that.”

**Matt**: “I’m leaving.”

**Quinns**: “I’m not gonna put any more cubes there.” But what’s great for that is, every time players just look at your routes and go, “No, I’m not gonna dislodge that person,” that means more and more of your cubes get stuck on the board?

**Matt**: Yes.

**Quinns**: And suddenly no one’s dislodging you, which means you’re just putting cubes on routes that nobody wants.

**Matt**: Yeah. So basically, there’s a wonderful twist where, at some point during your play, if you’re going for this mean blocking constant tactic, you go from being somebody who has a finger in every pie to discovering that all of the pies are full of super glue. [Quinns laughing] And you’re just like, [foiled Machiavelli] “Oh no!” That kind of happened to me. I had a route early on where I thought, “He’s gonna want to finish that,” and popped down a guy. And it was only one guy, but he just thought, “No, I’m not gonna finish it then.” And I just didn’t get that guy back for like 90% of the game. And I was like, “Are you gonna bloody finish that route…” Because I didn’t care enough about it to remove all of his. But I really wanted that guy back! I was really jonesing for an extra guy.

**Quinns**: You just want so much. What’s nuts about this is- Because it’s a eurogame from a while back. We’re so used to German-style management games -- which is what a eurogame is, if you’re new to the podcast -- having a ton of components, and a ton of mechanics. But what’s beautiful about Hansa Teutonica is, you open up the box and it’s just a board, little player boards for everybody, a bunch of cubes, and that’s it. There’s no cards, there’s no randomized board setup, it’s just this really solid, simple product.

**Matt**: Yup.

**Quinns**: It’s quite easy to teach as well.

**Matt**: I’ve got so much time, really, as well, for having a game with player board with rules on it that you just fill it up with cubes that are all basically the same, and then you remove them one at a time to put them on the board, and when you do that you get the powers underneath it. It’s such a simple thing. It’s not sexy. Nothing sexy about-

**Quinns**: It is *kind* *of* sexy.

**Matt**: But yeah, I think now it’s a weird thing. I really would love to see a reprint of this game, and yes, in some ways it could do with a lick of paint, but in some ways it’s quite classical in a way that’s nice. But at the same time you kind of think, would they all be different shapes and…? You know.

**Quinns**: Oh, no, I think they’d have to keep it classic.

**Matt** [talking over Quinns]: Yeah, I guess you have to keep it simple.

**Quinns**: Yeah.

**Matt**: But I just think if it was designed now, it would be, how can you differentiate all these different…

**Quinns**: I don’t know!

**Matt**: I don’t know, I don’t know.

**Quinns**: I think it’s just so clean that any new designer would want to keep that cleanliness.

**Matt**: No, I meant it in the kind of very conceptual idea of it was a new game being designed now.

**Quinns**: Ohhhhh, yeah, no, if it was a new game being designed now, it would have a module to randomize the board setup. It would have -- I don’t know -- unique player powers? I don’t know.

**Matt**: It’s one of those weird things. You can kind of understand as well why so many games of that era were just like, [dry eurogame designer voice] “Ah yes, some people wrote (?) trading roads.” Because yeah, it conveys that. It doesn't convey any of the other theming in terms of the era, like technically you’re making… Was it making monasteries at some point?

**Quinns** [laughing]: Monasteries?

**Matt**: Monks? There was something with monks, wasn’t there?

**Quinns**: No, you’re just putting trading houses down.

**Matt**: What were the circles, then?

**Quinns**: Uh, merchants.

**Matt**: Merchants. Oh I thought they were like monks or something, I don’t know.

**Quinns** [talking over Matt]: Which raises the question of: What are the *squares*?

**Matt** [laughing]: Yeah, I know, right? Just guys you pay to stand in the road so someone can’t finish walking down it.

**Quinns**: It’s really not clear.

**Matt**: It doesn't matter! It’s a general thing. It’s basically just like Ticket To Ride with teeth!

**Quinns** [impressed realization]: Yeeahhh!

**Matt**: Being like, “Hey, you want to build that road? Cool! I’m just gonna stand here, and you can pay me money, and I’ll leave.”

**Quinns**: You know, they’ve put out those Ticket To Ride: My First Journey, which are the new Ticket To Rides for like, seven-year-olds.

**Matt**: [chuckling] This is Ticket To Ride: [deep dark voice] *My Last Journey*. [laughing]

**Quinns**: That’s exactly what I was gonna say. [Matt laughing] But my goodness! The last thing i’ll say about it -- and I heard about this from the So Very Wrong About Games podcast, when they were talking about Hansa Teutonica -- but I’ve never played… or I struggle to remember a game where I -- from turn *one* -- wanted to do eight different things with about three actions. Because you want the buffs that improve your player board, but you also want to block the spaces that everyone else is going to be going for. You also want points. There are crazy points if you manage to connect the left and right side of the board. So ideally you’re kind of working towards *that* from turn one. Your turn is over in an instant, which gives the game incredible speed, because on your turn you’re like, “Okay I wanna do five, six, seven, eight things, but my gosh, I want to do this one thing most of all.”

**Matt**: And there’s also the whole system about the fact that whenever a town pops because a road’s been next to it, it’s the person who currently owns that thing that gets the bonus.

**Quinns**: That gets points, yeah.

**Matt**: That gets points. And then it means if you keep filling it up with your things, then if it’s a tie, it’s the last thing to get placed, which means basically it’s also kind of an area control game, really. Just being like, “I’ve got to dominate these bits of road and then I’m gonna be able to do this.” It’s got a lot going on, but it does a lot with very little.

**Quinns**: Yeah, you know what we always say about Skull, where it’s the most game packed into the least rules? Hansa Teutonica is not a particularly simple game to learn or teach-

**Matt**: No.

**Quinns**: -but it packs more than any other eurogame I can think of into as few components as possible.

**Matt**: Mmm. Yeah.

**Quinns**: And I would love to see it reprinted. Love love love love *LOVE*!

## Deep Blue [00:12:02]

**Quinns**: Let’s talk quickly about Deep Blue next, which is going to be announced next year from a sizable French publisher. And this is from a design duo who most recently worked on Copenhagen: Asger Granerud, who you may remember from Flamme Rouge, and Daniel Pedersen, who is working with Asger on just about everything now, I think.

**Matt**: Yeah, yeah. Real powerhouse of a team.

**Quinns**: Yeah! And Deep Blue is a game where players control tiny little boats that are going to be exploring the deep blue sea! And it just had a couple of mechanics in it that we really liked.

**Matt**: Yeah! I mean, basically the way it works is, you shoot off into the sea, and you find sea-prospects. It’s like traditional sea-mining. You go around and you think, “This little sea-prospect is mine!” You plop your boat on it, and then eventually somebody is gonna declare a big cool treasure dive. So it’s not a game where you go off and then dive immediately. It’s a game where you go, find a patch of sea, and go, “Hmm. I think there’s gonna be some exciting underwater treasure here.” And then you basically scout out the best location for finding some goods. And there’s different sorts of things you can do in terms of like, “Oh! I think this water has less sharks in it.” Or, “Oh! I think this water has less of a chance of drowning?” I don’t know. Or maybe there’s going to be more gold in this area, et cetera. But you don’t actually always get to control the dive itself. So the way it works is, eventually somebody in that area activates it, and goes, “Look, I’m gonna dive here,” and then anybody who is in that area on a spot, they have to join the dive then, and they will get the bonus attribute they got if they were already there. But also, people nearby can quickly go, “Yup. I’m coming.” And they can motor their boat over to that patch, in this weird world in which everybody has to go diving for treasure at the same time. And it’s a conceit that doesn't make sense, but it’s so much fun! [Quinns laughing] Because it means that if you’re nearby, or a couple of spaces away, you can be like, “I’m coming! I’m coming! Wait for me!” And you can motor your boat over there, and you won’t get any of the bonuses, because all of the good spots are already gone and you’re not eligible for them, because you didn’t scout it out earlier, but then the person who does the dive plays a push-their-luck game of pulling out cubes from a bag, which have been affected. And you kind of know what’s in the bag based on things people have been buying from the shops. And then you just are at the whims of whoever is pulling things out of the bag. And they keep going until *they* decide to stop.

**Quinns**: So this is where you bring in the card management. Everyone has a hand of cards, which might allow them to get more points out of gold, or might let them avoid sharks.

**Matt**: Mmm! Or maybe they have specifically a card that lets them get loads of points if a pink comes out. And pinks are useless to everyone else, but every time they’re on *any* dive, they’re just there going, [low chanting] “pink pink pink pink [Quinns laughing] draw a pink out of the bag draw a pink out of the bag.”

**Quinns**: So the main mechanic here is that if two sharks or two oxygen cubes come up, then it means you have to come up because there are sharks, or because you’re going to get the bends. But that means, if you’re controlling the dive and you have a card that means you’re protected from the second shark, you are now playing a very weird push-your-luck game where you’re pulling out gold, and everyone’s going, “Hooray!” But you don’t *want* to pull out gold, you wanna pull out just enough sharks that everybody else [**Matt**: Yes.] who does not have shark protection has to leave the dive [**Matt**: Yes.] and you get all of the rewards.

**Matt**: Yeah.

**Quinns**: So really, the reason we’re talking about Deep Blue is because we like the idea of a push-your-luck game, like Quacks of Quedlinburg, but where your decision to push your luck affects everybody in different ways.

**Matt**: Yeah, and having people begging you around the table to not go any further whilst you look in their eyes and keep going. Keep going. It’s really interesting. I didn’t gel with it that well, because I was playing the game wrong in our demo of it. [chuckling] And it meant the whole time I was like, “I don’t know, this just doesn't seem to work,” and at the end there was like, “Oh no I completely got a core mechanic wrong, and that’s why I didn’t have a good time.” But that idea as a core thing: Very very cool.

**Quinns**: Yeah, that was pretty lovely. So let’s gloss over Deep Blue, because, you know, I didn’t get on with it *that* well either. Also, it’s not announced.

## Auto [00:15:50]

**Quinns**: Let’s talk about something that you and I did *really* get along with from the same design team, which is also coming out next year. Let’s talk about Auto.

**Matt**: Auto is a game of cars and the drivers who love them. And it’s fascinating to see the designers of Flamme Rouge come and approach the as-of-yet untouched world of cars that drive around on tarmac.

**Quinns**: Has there ever been a board game before where cars drive around a track?

**Matt**: I don’t think there’s been a *game* before.

**Quinns**: I don’t think, yeah, no video game *or* board game.

**Matt**: It’s just such an unusual idea to have lots of cars on the same road all racing one another.

**Quinns**: I should jump in right here and say that actually Flamme Rouge was designed by Asger Granerud alone, I think?

**Matt**: Alone.

**Quinns**: But now he’s working with Daniel as this-

**Matt**: He was so lonely. But now, it’s okay.

**Quinns**: Now he’s got friends!

**Matt**: He’s got a friend!

**Quinns**: So this game shares a lot of DNA with Flamme Rouge. Flamme Rouge being a game of racing bicycles that Shut Up & Sit Down *ruddy loves*!

**Matt**: Mmhm.

**Quinns**: It’s a game where you play cards that dictate your movement, but you don’t want to be leading the pack because then you get tired, and you don’t want to move so slowly that you fall out of the pack, because then you’re tired and aloOOoone, and in last place. So Auto is then borrowing some of that DNA for a game about car racing. What we’ve got here is we still have, everyone’s car is a deck of cards. You’re still playing cards to move your cars forward, but unlike Flamme Rouge, when you play a movement card, it doesn't then leave the deck. Instead, Auto is a game about managing damage?

**Matt**: Yeah. Basically managing the wear and tear on your vehicle. Some of which happens naturally, some of which happens because you’re being really cool. Basically, it’s a lot about just cycling through and knowing what’s happening. And rather than having the kind of- Obviously with Flamme Rouge you do know the composition of your deck, but it feels a lot more about having a small deck that you cycle through a lot and really looking at the probabilities. And the main difference is, unlike in Flamme Rouge -- where if you’re coming up to a hill, and then you end up playing a big card, then it’s a waste because you can only go up a hill so fast, or if you’re going down a hill and you play a big card it’s a waste, because you could have played a low card and got the speed boost -- in this it has corners.

**Quinns**: Yes.

**Matt**: And you’re going real fast. Which means that you basically need to be able to get to a certain speed to be able to turn the corner without just going off the track and spinning out.

**Quinns**: Yeah. There’s a board game classic, which I don’t believe you’ve played but some of more venerable listeners may have, which is Formula D, an award-winning German game which had that same mechanic of, when you approach a corner, you have to stop in that corner a number of times? And that mechanic is something I love, although Formula D isn’t a game I love, so I’m so happy to see something similar show up in Auto.

**Matt**: But the interesting thing about this, and the way you control your speed, and the big difference, is that cars have more powerful gears than bikes. That’s another fact.

**Quinns**: And this was in Formula D as well.

**Matt**: Yeah. So the fact that you’re moving up and down and using different amounts of card is basically Flamme Rouge, but sometimes maybe you play five cards. [Quinns laughing] Which-

**Quinns**: That sounds insane!

**Matt**: It does sound insane, and it might be fine, because the wonderful thing as well is that they’ve added a little bit of additional spice in the form of a boost dice.

**Quinns**: Oh, yes.

**Matt**: And it means that, let’s just say you’re looking at this, and you’re in the right gear, but you wish you were a gear higher, and you’re only going eight, but if you could go *nine* spaces this turn, then that would be amazing.

**Quinns**: That would mean that you’re just behind the next person’s car, which would mean you can use slipstreaming to slip in front of the whole pack!

**Matt**: And, you would have just got around in the perfect position to then start slowing down for that corner. It’s just ideal. However. If you were to get ten, that would be disastrous, [Quinns laughing] because it would actually push your car into the edge of damage, and you would basically spin out. Or if you were to get eleven, oh that’s just terrible. Everything’s bad. So then you have the bonus to be able to do, “Alright I’m gonna spend a damage to roll this dice,” which will then move you one, two, or three extra spaces. But you have to take it! You take the damage, and then you roll the dice, and if that movement is too much, then yeah, you’ve just caused yourself more damage. So having that extra thing of being like, “I don’t have the cards here to do exactly what I want,” and being able to push your luck, I really enjoyed. And I really enjoyed the framing of the damage, and the fact that at the start of the game as well, there was a little bit of a flavor-crafting, in terms of being able to choose a couple of powers that are specific to your deck, and then work with that. I went for a combination of things with the idea of like, “I’m gonna mess up this car. I’m gonna drive it too fast, I’m gonna rag it, but then I’m also gonna be able to repair it on the go more easily.” I don’t understand how that works in the fiction.

**Quinns**: Honestly, one of the pieces of feedback I gave to them was, if you’re making a car game, it makes a lot of sense to have like, oh the car gets damaged and then it gets repaired. However, because there are no pit stops in Auto, there’s the thing of like, “Oh, my car’s really falling apart!” But if you’re in last place, or you just drive slow, then your car gets better?

**Matt**: Yeah.

**Quinns**: So I’m wondering if, for the finished product, it should be called strain or stress, rather than-

**Matt**: Yeah, driver strain rather than damage makes a lot more sense. [chuckling] Yeah because it’s like, “I healed my car again!” Like it’s a World of Warcraft sort of buff. But yeah, I just enjoyed the thematicness of just pushing my driver to the edge and taking it really… Having really hard lines. And it became incredibly tense. When it got to the final lap, and there was two more little chicane [sic] to get through, I was really concentrating hard, and found myself crunching the numbers in a way I never have with Flamme Rouge, of being like, “Okay, well if I play this and this and this and then get this back, and…” Because you *do*- Having a limited set of cards, and a discard pile that you can look through, it means it’s not very difficult for even idiots like me to start working on the probabilities. Of being like, “What do I need to happen this round?”

**Quinns**: It has some stuff in common with Automobiles, the bag-building [**Matt**: Yeah!] -- I’m not gonna explain that term because we’re not talking about Automobiles -- but a lovely game of building up and deconstructing your car, going round and round a track. Automobiles never really got much pick-up in terms of people buying it, which is a shame, because it’s a lovely game. But hopefully people will be interested in Auto, because we had just a lovely time.

**Matt**: It’s really cool.

**Quinns**: The deck-building it has, where when you take a bit of damage, you deal yourself cards off the top of your damage deck. And initially these are cards which essentially make you move at a random speed.

**Matt**: Mmhm.

**Quinns**: But if you keep taking damage and you keep putting these cards in, the final two cards in the deck are *major damage*! Which you can still repair, but it’s the lovely thing of… Deck-building is a genre we’re all familiar with, but this is deck-building and -deconstructing as well. You’re constantly putting dangerous cards into your deck, but also taking them back out?

**Matt**: Yeah. So yeah, the minor ones are fine, you end up getting rid of them in scenarios where you think, “Oh, I can afford to go once three extra here, it doesn't really make a difference.” But the major ones don’t do anything. You just can’t get rid of them out of your hand without repairing specifically.

**Quinns**: So they’re narrowing your options.

**Matt**: Yeah, so you *can* just keep burning out, but it means if you get it wrong, and your calculations go wrong or your gambles don’t pay off, then you just end up having less cards, and less options.

**Quinns**: This is not a complicated game either. I feel like we’re describing it and it sounds like there’s tons of mechanics. This is a simple game. I can see the rulebook being like four or five pages.

**Matt**: It was so exciting, and I really enjoyed the fact that it really wonderfully -- and maybe other racing games have done this -- but I really enjoyed how much it captured the thing of, yes thinking long-term about the track, but also just thinking about that next corner. As soon as you turned a corner, you’re like, “Right, planning for the next corner. How can I do this?”

**Quinns**: Yeah.

**Matt**: And having the feeling when it went slightly wrong, of just your heart dropping in your chest as you realize you’re not going to take the corner well, and when you took it smoothly it just felt glorious. You felt like you were flying.

**Quinns**: It’s that thing of coming round a corner and realizing, oh you’re not in third gear, you’re in second, which means, yeah you’ll be able to handle the corner up ahead, but you’re not gonna get enough speed down the straight.

**Matt**: There was a point where I took a corner towards the second lap so well that I was honestly amazed that anyone caught up with me, [Quinns laughing] because in my mind I was like, “I’m outta here. You guys just lost this race.” And then when people caught up with me again, I was like, [betrayed by the universe] “How’s that possible? I took that corner so perfectly!”

**Quinns**: There was a guy who flipped his car, or who span out-

**Matt**: Yeah, spinning out seems bad.

**Quinns**: -one of the designers, but actually managed to catch up with us? We had an interesting discussion with the designers, where I’m like, “How is that balanced that he spun out and still caught up with this?” But then they explained to me that yes, he caught up with the pack-

**Matt**: Yeah, but he didn’t win.

**Quinns**: -but the state of the car and his cards were such that he was never going to win. Which was pretty interesting.

## Flamme Rouge expansion [00:24:05]

**Quinns**: But Auto, which is coming out next year -- so that should certainly be on your radar -- is not the only racing game that we played at Fastaval! We played Flamme Rouge’s big box campaign expansion. If you like those sweet bicycle boys, those cute little bi boys, then my goodness, this campaign box is going to blow your mind a little bit.

**Matt**: Yeah. There’s a lot going on.

**Quinns**: Yes. So first thing’s first, we’ve got, now, rider powers! As if your bicyclists were superheroes. Some of which were explained to us by the designer Asger. They’re all real bicycling terms....

**Matt**: Yeah, like you could be a squirrel. But not a real squirrel.

**Quinns**: Or a grimper.

**Matt**: A grimper! Grimpin’ ain’t easy!

**Quinns**: Yes, as we said about four hundred times during our game.

**Matt** [laughing]: It was too much fun to say!

**Quinns**: So all this means is that you’re gonna pick, for each of your cyclists, some special traits that they have, which means basically you’ll be removing two to three cards from their deck, and replacing them with two to three better cards. So one of your cyclists might be a specialist at cycling away from the pack without letting people draft behind them.

**Matt**: Yeah, so you can’t slipstream that guy, he’s too… slick.

**Quinns**: He’s just too slippery. I think that was the squirrel, wasn’t it?

**Matt**: Maybe. And then there was the people who could basically pop on the side.

**Quinns**: Yes.

**Matt**: So it was like, “Hey! Oh no there’s two people in that slot. But it’s fine, I’m just gonna cycle on the grass next to you.” So they can just never get jammed up, they just cycle on the grass.

**Quinns**: Which is a thing of beauty.

**Matt**: People who are really good at going up hills! Or people who are really good at going *down* hills.

**Quinns**: And all of this within the context of normal Flamme Rouge is not enormously exciting. It takes a game that’s pretty simple and light and makes it more complicated.

**Matt**: Yeah.

**Quinns**: But! When you’re playing a campaign -- and this is the main thing that the box adds -- when you can look at four or five races coming up in sequence -- because in Flamme Rouge, that’s as simple as putting out four or five little cards, and you can immediately see all the details of the race -- you might pick a grimper, which is what I did, the mountain-climbing person, being like, “This person’s going to be pretty useless for like two thirds of the tour, but then in that final third of the tour with all those hills, hopefully he’s gonna be alright?”

**Matt**: Changes the texture of the game completely as well. Because it’s already interesting, I think, to have a game whereby yeah, you can burn through your cards, you can end up really exhausted and win the game, but then *next* race, you’re gonna be in quite a bad way. But then to even have it be like, “Alright well look, this race is not mine. I’m not even really gonna try and win it.”

**Quinns**: “I just want to have it so that when I cross the line I’m not exhausted.”

**Matt**: Yeah. “I’m just gonna cross the line and get myself ready for next race, and then *next* race, I’m gonna just boss it.”

**Quinns**: Or, you know, you screw up again and that’s fine.

**Matt**: Yeah! And it’s just an interesting contrast to the kind of Mario Kart school of racing, where it’s like, [menacing voice] “If you don’t win every single of these four races, you’re dead to me.” [Quinns laughing] The idea of coming last is like, “Oh that’s the end of the world.” But it’s actually fine! If you’ve got a plan, if you know that this race is going to be the one where you’re weakest, but you can dominate in the other ones... It was really interesting, yeah.

**Quinns**: It was also our first time getting to play with an expansion that *has* been released, which is the Meteo expansion.

**Matt**: Weather, yeah.

**Quinns**: Which adds weather, yeah. And I found that quite interesting because I read the rules for Meteo online, and the way that weather affects the game is relatively minor, and it seemed that way even to me as someone who plays a lot of Flamme Rouge, whereby you put… Ah I’ve just realized that all the people listening to the podcast and laughing every time I say “whereby”…! I just gave them another point.

**Matt**: Do they?

**Quinns**: Argh!

**Matt**: I didn’t know people laughed at you for that. I know they laugh at you about saying “email” on the Twitch streams.

**Quinns**: Yup.

**Matt**: And I know they laugh at you…

**Quinns**: Burying the lede.

**Matt**: Burying the lede is something we both do. Which I don’t know why people find that so funny, but.

**Quinns**: It’s because we say it about once every five minutes.

**Matt** [laughing]: Yeah, yeah.

**Quinns**: So, the way that weather works is that you put out these little tokens for every possible stretch of the race, then you flip them all face up! And some of them might add weather.

**Matt**: Oh no! It’s wet!

**Quinns**: Well, wet is actually pretty dramatic, Matthew. [**Matt**: Yeah, alright.] It’s more like, “Oh no! [**Matt**: It’s windy.] It’s a tailwind!”

**Matt**: It’s a sit (?) windy, or it’s bad windy or good windy.

**Quinns**: Crosswinds versus tailwinds, yeah.

**Matt**: That’s the ones!

**Quinns**: There’s rain, and then [voicing rising in pitch] there… is… some… thing… else?

**Matt**: I thought it was just like, “Fair.”

**Quinns**: No, because everything’s fair.

**Matt**: Oh everything’s fair, yeah.

**Quinns**: Except for…

**Matt**: It’s not Quinns. That’s not the way the world works.

**Quinns**: I mean there might be… I don’t know.

**Matt**: Nothing’s fair! I can’t remember either. But yeah, the crosswind, tailwind…

**Quinns**: Yeah, so-

**Matt**: Fascinating kinds of winds.

**Quinns** [laughing and frustrated]: Stop! Let me get out the rules! [Matt laughing] What these mechanics do is: With the tailwind, if you start on that space, you draw an extra card. Whereas a crosswind means that- Oh no, crosswind means you can’t slipstream, and then *headwind*-

**Matt**: Yes.

**Quinns**: -which means you draw one *less* card. So mechanically, these are very small effects that only may or may not show up. Rain is the only really dangerous one because it can mean massive multi-bicycle pile-ups.

**Matt**: Yeah.

**Quinns**: And yet! When playing with them, because Flamme Rouge is such a simple game, where one choice might make the difference between you coming second or third or fourth, playing with weather actually *did* change the game.

**Matt**: Oh, hugely.

**Quinns**: And I’m absolutely picking it up. Because it means that when you add things like breakaway, where players bid extra cards in order to start at the front of the pack, that’s so much more important if, for example, you know there’s a rainstorm coming up ahead.

**Matt**: Yeah, that’s the thing. We really messed up in the first race -- I think I did anyway -- because I bid quite highly for the starting point in the breakaway, and then the weather conditions in the first section just meant that that was really stupid.

**Quinns**: Everyone just caught up with you.

**Matt**: Everyone caught up with me immediately, and I was like, [dismal] “Oh god. [Quinns laughing] I’ve just wasted nine points of speed...” And yeah, having those decisions, or even having the difficult crunch of like… There was another race where there was rain on a weird corner, just after a horrible little mini-chicane, and myself and someone else just shot ahead and just really burnt ourselves out with exhaustion. And then again, it ended up meaning I didn’t win the race. Although we did discover at the end of the campaign I was [chuckling] missing all of my special cards.

**Quinns**: Oh yeah!

**Matt**: Because I’d made my deck wrong. I’d taken out the cards and then hadn’t replaced them with good ones? Which explained why I kept losing quite dramatically, even though I was trying real hard!

**Quinns**: While everyone else had made their cyclists various kinds of superheroes, [Matt laughing] you’d basically taken one of your cyclists and removed one of their feet?

**Matt**: Yeah, just a little foot. Anyway, it was a really exciting decision to be like, “I think I’m actually gonna push ahead now,” knowing that people are gonna catch me up and it’s gonna be bad for me, but just because it’s not worth the risk of getting caught in that rain? And it was so frustrating, because, when it came to it, this horrible fateful patch of wet concrete, everyone just very neatly came through in single file and nothing happened.

**Quinns**: That’s kind of what I love about rain, as well. [Matt’s frustrated sigh] Rain adds all these extra rules that means if the pack gets really bunched up, someone might fall over. If multiple people fall over, then-

**Matt**: We were playing with six people, were we?

**Quinns**: Yeah, so twelve cyclists.

**Matt**: Twelve cyclists. There was a good chance that a lot of people were gonna fall over-

**Quinns**: But it’s funny that-

**Matt**: -and nobody did!

**Quinns**: -we were all playing with that in mind, and all of us playing different cards to make sure it didn’t happen. But because we all did that, it didn’t happen. That doesn't mean it didn’t change the race, you know?

**Matt**: Yeah. But everyone could have been trying to play cards so that it didn’t happen, and then it could have still happened, because everyone had played low cards, so we’d be like, [proper bicycle gentleman voice] “Oh no, after you! [Quinns laughing] Oh nooooo!” I mean, it was pure happenstance that there wasn’t. But it was that thing of going, “Oh, no!” I’d banked on there being a horrendous wet crash-

**Quinns**: Behind you, yeah.

**Matt**: -behind me, as part of my strategy. But again, I think it’s interesting that it’s one of those games that *is* so simple that people can look at it and go, “There’s no strategy here,” and it’s not true. There really is. There are choices. But these extra bits of additions, as well as stretching out Flamme Rouge across multiple games in one evening, really just does change it, and does make it like wins and losses of being like, not trying to win every race.

**Quinns**: Yes.

**Matt**: And sometimes thinking, “Is it wise for me to continue to win every race?”

**Quinns**: Oh yeah, yeah.

**Matt**: Let’s try…

**Quinns**: I think all of the expansions for Flamme Rouge have been so good, because it’s what we want from expansions, where the base game is entirely strong by itself. You don’t need any of it. But if you want it, then all of it makes the game just that little bit richer, that little bit more complicated. The last thing that this big expansion that’s coming out -- oh, I wanna say maybe later this year? -- the big Flamme Rouge campaign expansion adds, is roundabouts! Which-

**Matt**: Oh! They’re so funny!

**Quinns**: So, gosh. [Matt laughing] We had to have this explained to us on one of the evenings of Fastaval when we were drinking with Asger, the designer of Flamme Rouge. He was like, “I’ve added roundabouts!” And he saw my blank expression as someone who doesn't watch professional cycling, and then he said, “Okay okay, I’m going to show you a Youtube video.” And he had to show me on his phone, and I watched it happen in a real cycle race, and still didn’t understand it, but what roundabouts model in professional cycling is, when you have a roundabout and you’re coming at it, then you can either go left or right around the roundabout, right?

**Matt**: You break the usual laws of the road-

**Quinns**: Yes.

**Matt**: -and be like, “I’m not gonna go round this roundabout as I usually would.”

**Quinns**: Which is like clockwise, or whatever.

**Matt**: Because there are no cars here, the cyclists are kings!

**Quinns**: So a roundabout doesn't mean you come out just on exactly the other side of it. You’re going to go to the left or right. Which means there is a short way round the roundabout, and a *long* way. So what the new roundabout track pieces in Flamme Rouge do is, they split the ordinarily two-lane race into a left lane, which everyone wants to go in because it’s only two spaces long, and a right lane, which is four or five spaces long, which represents the fact that in professional cycling…

**Matt**: It’s too jammed up, you have to go round the other way.

**Quinns**: Exactly. In professional cycling, it means you might only lose a second or two seconds, but-

**Matt**: That’s enough to lose you the race!

**Quinns**: -that’s enough to lose the race, yeah. So it’s kind of an abstracted piece. But the way this [Quinns burps, Matt laughs] works mechanically is that the pack comes up to a roundabout, and everyone takes the short lane, but if it’s full and you would lose movement, rather than losing movement and braking, you keep your momentum and go the long way round. Which is, for whatever reason, *side-splittingly* funny.

**Matt**: It’s so funny, because it’s just watching- It’s that classic thing of like- It takes the thing of Flamme Rouge of taking it in turns to move your people forward and hoping that the card you’ve spent isn’t a waste. But rather than it being like, “Ah, damn it, I played a six and I only moved five.” It’s like, “I’ve played a six and now, because everyone else has already filled up all the slots, I have to go around the long way on the roundabout.”

**Quinns**: Yeah, and I think it’s funny because you’re often the *only* person doing this? [laughing]

**Matt**: Yes. It’s like, “It’s just me.” [Quinns laughing] It’s just a weird randomized kind of- You know, humans, for better and worse, in-group out-group, and it’s like, [sing-song] “We all took the shortcut and you had to go the long way.” [Quinns laughing] And there’s just something about it that’s mean and silly, but it’s also the fact that when you do it you’re just like, [forlorn] “Ugh, no, I’m going round the bloody wrong route.”

**Quinns**: I think it’s also because you have to take exhaustion as well, because you’re by yourself.

**Matt**: It’s just very funny. I mean we found the whole thing very funny. It’s weird how when you play it in a campaign, it does really take on a more Mario Kart kind of tenor, even without any silliness, in the fact that, you know, you can keep losing and losing. I didn’t really care. It was that thing of I’m going, “I’m gonna try! I’m gonna try! This race is gonna be mine!” [Quinns laughing] And it’s like, “Oh no, it’s not!” I think it’s the fact that at the point when you realize your loss isn’t completely pointless. Until the final race when it’s like, yeah, losing just means you’ve lost.

**Quinns**: I think it might also benefit from the fact that, with each race, the only thing you get points for -- loosely, there’s also an overall time medal -- but basically you only get medals for coming first, second, or third. That’s not the players who come first, second, or third, that’s the cyclists, and because everyone has two cyclists, it means, in a big game, probably only twenty percent of the players are going to get points for any given round, which means- Like if I play a eurogame, I’m worried about coming last. I’m worried about coming fifth.

**Matt**: Yeah.

**Quinns**: With the Flamme Rouge campaign, it’s like-

**Matt**: There comes a point it doesn't matter.

**Quinns**: Well it’s more like, there are players who are winning. There’s the player who’s in second. Everyone else? Pbbfth, they’re kind of doing about as well as each other, because they’re not in first, you know?

**Matt**: Yeah. Yeah.

**Quinns**: So it kind of takes a little bit of the pressure off. It’s like you say, it’s more like Mario Kart.

**Matt**: Yeah, it is more like Mario Kart.

**Quinns**: Mario Kart doesn't make a big deal of who comes fifth and sixth.

**Matt**: No, it doesn't care. It only cares about who came first and who comes eighth, usually. But really it’s first, second, and third, and nobody cares about anything else.

**Quinns**: Exactly.

**Matt**: Which is kind of like- That’s exactly what happens here. You shoot off, you try to win, and you’re like, “Oh my gosh! I might win this race!” And then you run out of steam and somebody else shoots past you, and you’re like, “I’m *not* gonna win! And now it doesn't matter. I can come last. Does not matter.”

[funky sting]

## That’s Not Lemonade [00:35:43]

**Quinns**: Before we move on to our big game of the month, let’s talk about our littlest game of the month. Let’s talk about That’s Not Lemonade.

**Matt**: That’s not lemonade.

**Quinns**: Which is almost a really amazing- I wanna say it’s almost a great game. I don’t know if that’s true.

**Matt**: I didn’t play it, so I don’t know.

**Quinns**: Yeah you did!

**Matt**: No I didn’t.

**Quinns**: You were part of the team, we were all playing.

**Matt**: I was sitting at the table… Oh no, I was technically part of *your* team! [Quinns laughing] But every time I turned around to talk to somebody, I’d turn around to discover you’d made a decision that I had no idea why and what was going on.

**Quinns**: Oh, okay!

**Matt**: Technically I played, but I couldn’t really tell you… I mean I think I know how the game works, but I don’t know anything about it.

**Quinns**: Okay! Well you can talk about the art design later, because you liked that.

**Matt**: The art design was fun, yeah!

**Quinns**: Okay, so this is from Tuesday Knight Games, who make Two Rooms And A Boom. It’s a tiny little card game about drinking pee. You all play kids who run lemonade stands, and you’re all competing for business and the way that you’ve competed is not by lowering prices or making a better product, it’s by peeing in various cups and people accidentally drinking it. This is all a thematic wrapper for a very stupid, very simple push-your-luck game. Each round will be won by whoever draws the most lemons, okay? So on your turn you draw a card from a deck and look at it, [contemplating imaginary card] mmm. And then, on future go rounds, you can choose to either hit, and take another card, or essentially stay. And the amount of lemons you’ve got will be your score, but it will be secret.

**Matt**: So it’s kind of blackjack, but with a very small deck of cards.

**Quinns**: It’s exactly like blackjack, but the reason the small deck of cards is important is because it then means that the probability of everything becomes quite accessible.

**Matt**: Yes.

**Quinns**: So in round one there’s something like -- oh, I’m inventing this -- but it’s something like eight lemons, a couple of double lemons, four ice cubes, which are worth 0 points but let you look like you’ve got a lemon, and then…

**Matt**: Piss.

**Quinns**: Five or six piss cards. And if you draw that, you’re just out, you knock over the little plastic cup that you’ve got that the game comes with. You also turn that cup upside down when you’re sticking, so there’s some visual telegraphing stuff. And, that’s it! On your turn you go, “Yup, I’ll have a card,” or “I won’t,” and you draw a lemon and go, [softly] “Yesss” or you draw pee and go, [loudly] “Damn it!” and then you’re out.

**Matt**: Mmhm.

**Quinns**: So the game, where it exists at all, is from when- Let’s say Matt’s drawn two cards, and I’ve got two lemons? So if I -- because Matt’s first clockwise from the dealer -- if I pass and Matt reveals that he’s got two lemons, then his score is better than mine because he’s closer clockwise to the dealer. Unless Matt’s holding an ice cube! And if he *is*, then I’ve actually got the winning score, and then I’ll stop, and then Matt might think I’ve got two lemons, or a lemon and a double lemon, and Matt might hit and hit and then Matt could drink some piss, and is out, and I win! So it’s like a push-your-luck game… No, it is a push-your-luck game.

**Matt**: So having ice cubes just makes your hand weaker.

**Quinns**: No, ice cubes just do nothing.

**Matt**: They just do nothing. Okay, fine, I’ve got it I’ve got it I’ve got it.

**Quinns**: But they look like a lemon.

**Matt**: But they might be a lemon.

**Quinns**: Yup! And then that’s entirely it. But then where the game comes in is, in order to win properly, like Skull, you need to have won multiple rounds, but part of the humor and the silliness in the game comes from not just drinking piss, but from… Every time a player wins a round, they take a lemon, which means that sixteen-card-type deck constantly has changing probability.

**Matt**: That’s the way markets work. Lemons disappearing.

**Quinns**: As the game gets more tense, there’s less lemons and more players getting knocked out.

**Matt**: Huh. Interesting. So it has a timer to it.

**Quinns**: Yeah, it does, and a sense of chance that humans will kind of struggle with because, just as they’re getting more excited and more optimistic about their chances-

**Matt**: They’re getting worse and worse…

**Quinns**: -odds, yeah.

**Matt**: Yeah. That’s interesting. You know, it’s funny, because I watched you guys play this, and I kind of understood it roughly. And I really like the style of it, and I like the presentation, and I like the box. [unintelligible]

**Quinns**: The cards are pretty lovely.

**Matt**: And the fact that you get these tiny little cups. I don’t know if that’s a thing in America, but they’re like a shot-sized version of the little red cups that people… I know they’re a thing in America, the little red cups *are* an American thing. I’ve seen films. But I don’t know if the little ones are a common thing, or if they were made for this, or whatever. Or if they’re a thing you see quite often. But they’re very cute. Having these little tiny versions of the big American red cup things that Americans love to have and drink from and do *beer pong* with.

**Quinns**: Yup.

**Matt**: I’ve seen American films!

**Quinns**: There ya go! You’re very cultured.

**Matt**: There was something about the whole package I found really interesting. And I found it really interesting to watch people who were a mixture of game designers or game critics or people who knew about games playing -- after a few drinks -- this game and trying to dissect what the game was, and basically determining that there really wasn’t much game to it. But I have to say, as a counterpoint, I think so much of the silliness of the idea and the fun of the components-

**Quinns**: Yes.

**Matt**: -just made it come to life. And it’s one of those interesting things where it’s like, yeah as a game I don’t know if it’s a great game. Don’t know if there is much of a game there. But watching people play it was tremendous fun. Watching people mime to drink from the tiny cups and then go, “Eueww.” It’s like, that’s somebody pretending to drink wee from a tiny little cup! That is inherently a lot of fun.

**Quinns**: Yeah, I don’t have much to say about it, because-

**Matt** [rapid and high-pitched]: Yeah no yeah yeah!

**Quinns**: -it is what it is, but I would almost like to use it as a case study if I was teaching game design, you know? I’d put it in front of students and say, “Why does this work and why does it not work?” Because yeah, the box is *so* lovely, the core idea of it, there’s definitely something there. I think for me, I don’t know-

**Matt**: I think all the things that work about it actually exist outside of traditional game design. I think it’s like Jedi stuff. [Quinns laughing] It’s like, “You’ve got to stop trying to move the spaceship, and you’ve gotta-” Even the simplicity, actually-

**Quinns**: No I might need you to explain that point a bit.

**Matt**: Alright, well, it’s like, we can think about probabilities and we can think about, is it like a card game, is it like blackjack, but I think one of the key things about it that’s really fun and really cool is the fact that when you’re out, you knock over your cup!

**Quinns**: Yes.

**Matt**: How often do you get a game where you are specifically told that you’re allowed, in part of your failure, to knock something over? And to knock something over which then bounces and makes a fun sound, and you can’t really break?

**Quinns** [skeptical]: Yeah…

**Matt**: It’s so simple how like… These things don’t necessarily make it a good game, but they definitely, from what I saw, made for a box which just created -- temporarily, for twenty minutes -- a really fun experience.

**Quinns**: Yeah, I mean we were kind of having fun in spite of the game, not necessarily because of it, to some extent.

**Matt**: Yeah, but that’s what I mean. This is the point where it becomes an interesting question, really, that there’s no answer to. If you’ve got a box of things, and then you have fun with that box of things, even maybe not because of-

**Quinns**: Even if you’re kind of making fun of it?

**Matt**: Even if you’re making fun of it, and just having fun with the components?

**Quinns**: Yeah, I think that was- The high point for the game, actually, you’ve now helped me to realize, was turning to the prestigious Danish game designers who I was sat with, and it took me taking out this review copy, and they would take their turn or they’d lose, and I’d be like, “There’s… not a game here right?” And they’d be like, “Eh, no. Not really.” But that conversation in and of itself was kind of funny?

**Matt**: Yeah, no, I mean I was just watching other people as well who were just- People were having fun! And you kind of question what matters. Obviously to us as critics, it matters, but… yeah. I find it interesting.

**Quinns**: I think card games can exist in a really interesting wooly space. Specifically I’m thinking about theming card games. To what extent is Arboretum a great card game because it’s about trees? Trees that actually fit the kind of slow pace of the game, and yet make the toothiness of Arboretum funnier?

**Matt**: Mmhm.

**Quinns**: I’m reviewing Piepmatz at the minute, a game about little songbirds, which is birds jostling for seed and trying to avoid crows.

**Matt**: We’ve all been there.

**Quinns**: And again, there’s something funny about a squirrel stealing your seeds.

**Matt**: Yeah! Yeah. I mean, with this it’s an interesting one, because I think with party games particularly -- and this is the area of our remit where it does stop being games criticism and does become psychology -- but with party games, what the purpose of a party game is is to enhance a party. And I’ve noticed that even though everyone at the end of it was like, “Eh, I don’t know if that’s a very good game,” but everyone played it for twenty minutes, and it increased and improved the mood of the table dramatically. [laughing]

**Quinns**: Yeah!

**Matt**: Everyone had a lot of fun. And it was a thing that people got up, and they were silly with, and they knocked things over, and they laughed, and then they were like, “We’re done with this now.” But it enhanced the party!

**Quinns**: Maybe that’s a feature for a Shut Up & Sit Down video later: The best bad games.

**Matt**: It’s not even that! And I think that’s not fair, and that’s what I mean. I think that’s why it’s an interesting thing to think about. It’s all very well to look at something and go, “This is a bad game because the design isn’t interesting or there’s nothing there,” but if it’s a party game and it enhances a party… is that good?

**Quinns**: Well yeah. I mean, what about black- You said earlier, and I agree, that it’s kind of like bl-

**Matt**: Would blackjack improve a party? I’d say no.

**Quinns**: Well, is blackjack a good game? I would say definitely not, [Matt laughing] but it still exists for a purpose, right?

**Matt**: Kind of! Yeah! So that’s the thing. I think it’s the multitude of games, of being like, what is this. And actually, in this, it’s like, in our lens of thinking about games, maybe that’s not useful. You think about party games, you’re like, “Well is this a good form of play in the form of humans allowing to play at being childish and knocking over cups and pretending they’re drinking wee and pretending they’re getting other people to drink wee.” And if it’s a good medium for doing that, is it a good party tool? It’s a complicated question and there’s no answer. [Quinns laughing] That’s my-

**Quinns**: Should we move on?

**Matt**: Yeah yeah yeah yeah yeah. I think it’s just interesting. To me, anyway.

**Quinns**: No, completely. That’s definitely the most excellently pretentious conversation [Matt laughing] that Tuesday Knight Games could have hoped for from us about their game about drinking piss.

**Matt**: Nothing you can get from me that isn’t gonna be slightly tinged with pretension.

## Midlife Crisis [00:45:23]

**Quinns**: Finally, oh! Oh! I’m excited to talk about this one, because it’s *so strange*.

**Matt**: It’s weird.

**Quinns**: We have played an early, *early* prototype of Midlife Crisis by Jacob Jaskov, the designer of Fog of Love.

**Matt**: Mmm!

**Quinns**: If you missed Fog of Love a couple of years, it is a game that sort of simulates relationships. It involves players playing scenes, and then deciding how their entirely fictional characters act in those scenes, working their way towards a destiny of perhaps breaking up, or being the dominant partner, or being a perfect love team.

**Matt**: And it kind of works and pops to life, because you end up not just attached to your fictional character, but attached to this weird fictional relationship, and maybe you really want it to work. Maybe you don’t. And it ends up being weirdly like watching a TV show.

**Quinns**: Yup. At it’s best, Fog of Love is both moving and funny and accessible. Certainly one of the most amazing releases of two thousand… and… seventeen??

**Matt**: Yeah, it’s just one of those experiences where there’s nothing quite like it.

**Quinns**: Speaking of things there is nothing quite like, now we have played the prototype of Midlife Crisis, which is sort of Jacob’s next game in the series, and it is not a two-player game with two people controlling two fictional people, it is now a [slowly and deliberate] four, player, game.

**Matt**: Yeah. And I mean, honestly, the definition of the difficult second album, frankly. Fog of Love is *so* unique, and so different, and so amazing, to then not just go, “Alright I’m gonna make another game,” but “I’m gonna make another game about a topic which is even hairier, even less sexy, and even more complicated.” That’s wild.

**Quinns**: Oh my godness [sic]. My godness!

**Matt**: My godness!

**Quinns**: My godness! But you haven’t even described how the four-player thing works, which is nuts. So you’ve got something like Fog of Love. When Matt and I played, Matt and I were sort of the conscious mind of two characters in a relationship. I was a guy who I think was a vet? And Matt, you were a woman who worked in a car dealer?

**Matt**: I think I was a car salesman, yeah.

**Quinns**: Yeah, you were a car salesman.

**Matt**: Saleslady.

**Quinns**: Saleslady.

**Matt**: Person.

**Quinns**: So, similarly, just like in Fog of Love, we would play scenes from our hands, but of course this is a midlife crisis thing, so the scenes were -- and I’ll get back to this scene because it’s really stuck in my head -- it was Matt saying- He came home, or his character came home-

**Matt**: “No one thinks I’m sexy?”

**Quinns**: “No one looks at me anymore!”

**Matt**: “No one looks at me anymore.”

**Quinns**: Because you’d been to the coffeeshop and you were really upset. And then it’s how I respond. And then, like Fog of Love, you have these big weighty poker chips which say A, B, C, or D, and you put them face down as to which way you would respond. However, in Midlife Crisis, there are two additional players. So Matt and my character- Matt had Jacob Jaskov sat to one side, and Jacob-

**Matt**: He was my subconscious.

**Quinns**: He was your *subconscious mind*! Your subconscious desires, your subconscious fears.

**Matt**: Mmhm.

**Quinns**: And I had Asger, designer of Flamme Rouge, who was playing *my* subconscious mind. And we should stress, immediately, just about everything about this game is subject to change. It’s very, very experimental at the minute.

**Matt**: Yes.

**Quinns**: However, the mechanic in it that I love more than anything was: In Fog of Love you play a scene, and then how you react is you just put your poker chip face down and then you both reveal. In Midlife Crisis as it stands, currently, all four players have poker chips, and how you respond to a scene- Sometimes, I would look at Asger and sort of have a little think with my conscious and subconscious ruminating on this, and then one of us might put a chip down. However, with that scene where you came back from the coffeeshop, Asger just put a chip down. *CLACK!* It went straight down to the table, because the rule is, whichever of you reacts first gets to decide how your character acts in that scene, if you don’t want to discuss it. And I just cracked up and was laughing- I’m *still* laughing about that. Because the way it felt for me was: My wife comes home and says something quite thorny, which is, “Oh, no one finds me attractive anymore,” and as I’m thinking to myself, “Should I tell her she’s attractive to me? Should I tell her she *is* attractive? Should I tell her this is a natural part of aging and she should maybe get used to it?” Instead, my subconscious mind just did something-

**Matt**: Goes BAM!

**Quinns**: -and I was like-

**Matt**: I’m acting!

**Quinns**: “Wha-wha-what am I doing?! This doesn't seem like a good thing to do!”

**Matt**: What are *we* doing! Arrghh!

**Quinns**: Yeah.

**Matt**: Yeah, and it’s basically a weird detective game in the fact that the way you succeed in the game, rather than in Fog of Love -- where it was a thing of going through and trying to work out if you were a match or not, and maybe you stay together, maybe you break up, but that’s just the end of the little story -- it’s the idea of, you are basically trying to track what your subconscious is doing in the idea of basically getting self-fulfillment?

**Quinns**: Yes.

**Matt**: So you have to try and work out who you are, based on what your subconscious seems to want?

**Quinns**: Yeah. As opposed to Fog of Love, Midlife Crisis is now a deduction game. A full half of the board -- again, in our prototype, this is all subject to change -- is taken up by little cards that are things you might want. For example, I want to be more interesting. That was my secret goal, I just wanted to be more interesting. Or you maybe want to feel sexy, or you want to feel that you’re in a more fair partnership with your partner. But there’s a huge grid of these possibilities, and all you’re doing with the choices you’re making in scenes -- there’s no tracking whether you’re an introvert or an extrovert, all that stuff like in Fog of Love -- in Midlife Crisis you just act in ways -- and it’s kind of sad and bittersweet -- you are just acting in ways so that you can explore what your subconscious might want, or what your *partner* might want.

**Matt**: Yeah.

**Quinns**: So out of these four people, I believe the conscious mind is trying to figure out what the subconscious wants, while the subconscious is trying to work out what your partner’s conscious wants?

**Matt**: Yes.

**Quinns**: I’m definitely getting that wrong.

**Matt**: Well no, I think that’s right, and I think the crucial thing with this- We keep saying, you know, it’s subject to change and it’s really interesting, and both those things are true, but also it didn’t really *work* at the moment. And I think it’s a really interesting combination of stuff. And I said this to the designer. I had a conversation, you know, he asked me what I thought, and I was like, “It doesn't really work.” There’s a lot about it that’s super interesting, but it’s this kind of strangely confused deduction game where you’re trying to work out what your partner- Well no you’re *not* trying to work out what your partner wants, but I found myself doing that, and at the end of the game, when it came to guessing, and my subconscious got it wrong about what Quinns’s conscious… [Quinns laughing] what my partner wanted, but I worked it out! Because I was kind of engaged, and it had this strange thing of you wanting -- like you do in Fog of Love -- to take ownership of your character, but you kind of can’t, because the traits of your character, the true traits, are hidden from you? But then also that person who’s sitting next to you is arguably half of your psyche. But I didn’t really feel like that.

**Quinns**: Well this was one of the things we were talking about afterwards, it was how it has some of the same DNA, some of the same game design as in Fog of Love. For example, it’s a game about a midlife crisis, and yet, it’s also a game about couples.

**Matt**: Yes.

**Quinns**: So Jacob has actually taken some of the foundation of Fog of Love and then said, “Well what if this couple was essentially having a midlife crisis?” However, that was slightly unusual for us, because I was trying to fixate on myself, but I was in a partnership? So there was this weird thing of, my only means of self-expression were what my partner was doing or wanted to do?

**Matt**: And there’s also the fact that this is trying to tell the story of somebody undergoing a midlife crisis, but we had no real concept of our own relationship history. So you’ve got no skin in the game. It’s not like a real midlife crisis, where you go, [soft desperation] “Oh my god what am I doing with my life, maybe I should leave my family.” It’s like, “Here’s two fictional characters, they might break up.” And you’re like, “Alright.”

**Quinns**: There were glimpses in it of stuff that did absolutely work, and so while I agree with you it didn’t work-

**Matt**: Oh yeah yeah yeah.

**Quinns**: -there was some *excellently* funny, and really thought-provoking, and sad moments in it. I remember one card you played which was like, you came to bed, and then what do we do versus what do we want? So the four options were, you know, you could snuggle, or you could have a conversation, or you could read a book, or you could go to sleep. It was something like that. But it was one of the events where both the conscious and subconscious put out chips, so everyone’s conscious did what their character was doing, but the subconscious revealed what you *wanted* to do. And then when we all flipped that, that was really funny, because it was this moment that we ended up- I think your and my characters in the partnership chose to both snuggle, and we’re like, “Oh, we match! That’s cute!” But both of our subconscious minds wished we were reading? [Matt laughing] And you know, *that*-

**Matt**: I mean, that’s the thing. In the same way that was electric about Fog of Love, there were moments that popped out of it, gems of truth or interesting things that sparked conversations and were fascinating. The thing I felt about it, basically, was, it was, in trying to follow on from Fog of Love, and taking some of the DNA from that game, it just felt like two games. It felt like neither of the games had room to breathe. And in a way, I think they *could* be two games. You’ve got Fog of Love 2: Relationship Boogaloo. And then you’ve got-

**Quinns**: Fog of Love 2: Old and Sad.

**Matt**: Yeah, old and sad. Fog of Love 2: Old and Sad, and then you have a game about somebody having a midlife crisis, and a game where you have your conscious and the subconscious, and a psyche, about somebody changing. But rather than having a negotiation of a relationship, having a negotiation of somebody’s life, of like, what’s gonna win here? Is it gonna be somebody going off the rails a bit, and are they gonna keep going off the rails, or are they gonna settle down? Having two meant there was so much going on that it had glimmers of interesting stuff in it, but nothing really landed. But here’s what’s fascinating. I was talking to a bunch of people at Fastaval, and Jacob’s been going to Fastaval for a long time and knows people there, and actually, Fog of Love -- as with many other classic games, like Magic Maze, and Flamme Rouge I think? [**Quinns**: Uh, maybe.] Maybe, I’m not sure about Flamme Rouge -- were kind of children of Fastaval. They were games that kind of came out of it, and came out of some of the competitions there for board game design. And the thing that was really interesting is that somebody said, “You know, he brought Fog of Love *years* ago, and it was awful. And everyone hated it. [chuckling] And we were like, ‘This is just rubbish,’ and it didn’t work.” And then he went away and he kept tweaking it and he kept tweaking it and he kept tweaking it, and everyone was like, “Why are you bothering? [Quinns laughing] It doesn't work!” And then, yeah, basically, he entered it for the competition again, and again it was like, people were looking at it in the run up to the competition, and they were like, “It doesn't work. It doesn't work.” And then basically, in the last three weeks before the competition, he just…

**Quinns**: Didn’t he add the destiny cards or something?

**Matt**: Yeah, he clicked. Something clicked and three weeks before, it changed. And I think that year it ended up not winning the competition, and there was an uproar, because everyone was really annoyed it didn’t.

**Quinns**: Oh wow.

**Matt**: Because everyone was like, “What the hell. Why didn’t this win?” So it was one of these really interesting things that I feel, and felt really confident and comfortable saying, both on the podcast and to the designer himself, “I don’t think it quite works yet.” Because this is a guy who clearly likes taking on very difficult problems.

**Quinns**: Yes.

**Matt**: And crunching and trying and crunching and trying, and I’ve got confidence that eventually, when this appears, it might look drastically different to what we saw, but there’s some really cool stuff in there, and I’m sure he’ll find it.

**Quinns**: Yeah.

**Matt**: With Fog of Love it took time, and I think these things, especially these flippin’ things… Some people spend years making a game about firing arrows at orcs, and then still manage to make something that’s slightly rubbish. To be like, “I’m gonna make a game about… midlife crises?” [Quinns laughing] It’s like, this is probably gonna take a bit of time!

**Quinns**: That was one of the really interesting things, talking to some of the design community at Fastaval, when we were over there. They were saying that one of the useful things that they do when they’re playtesting each other’s games -- and I found this very interesting, because it doesn't really have parallels in video game design -- you would put a prototype in front of this design community, and they would say, “This doesn't have *It*.” Obviously, it’s a prototype, it’s not gonna be particularly fun, but all the designers would look at a game and say, “There is no *spark* here, and therefore, you are wasting your time on it. You shouldn’t be trying to refine it into something that’s good.”

**Matt**: Interesting, yeah.

**Quinns**: And for me, Midlife Crisis *did* have that spark.

**Matt**: Oh yeah, absolutely, absolutely. It was like, “This is not there. This does not really work.” But there were so many little sparks in it. It’s just one of those things where you think, “This is fascinating. You’ve created a bizarre monster. It’s got some fascinating heart in it, and I’m sure you’re gonna find it.”

**Quinns**: Also, who’s the market? Can you imagine this being on Kickstarter? Walmart aren’t going to buy a hardcore deduction game about midlife crises, are they?

**Matt**: Yeah, I mean, there is something I think very interesting about the concept of self-rezalation [sic]- self… [sigh]

**Quinns**: Self-realization? Self-actualization!

**Matt**: Yeah, self-actualization. There was something really interesting and sad about, you know, as you say, the things being like, “Hey, let’s cuddle.” But neither of us want to cuddle. [Quinns laughing] We just want to read. And that’s fine.

**Quinns**: You know, the thing it didn’t have is, Fog of Love was always able to emulate crap romantic movies. The game’s subtitle is, you know, romantic comedy as a board game. Whereas what we didn’t have from our Midlife Crisis experience, playing this board game, were all of the stereotypes in midlife crisis movies. You know, I’m guessing there’s a card in there about buying a motorcycle or dyeing your hair…

**Matt**: Well that’s it, and that’s why I really did feel like we were looking at two games that had been spliced together in a way that didn’t quite land, in the fact that when people have midlife crises, they don’t tend to have them at the same time as their partner. That would be really… I don’t know if that’s convenient or inconvenient. You’d be like, “Oh, I really wanna buy a bicycle.” “I really wanna go and live in Thailand!” “Alright! See you later!” That would be kind of amicable, in a way, maybe.

**Quinns**: Yeah! Or maybe you both go to Thailand, and both drive motorcycles around?

**Matt**: Don’t know if that counts as a midlife crisis. Maybe it does. Maybe you can have a midlife crisis together, and both just become different people that also are the same.

**Quinns**: These are questions for more ambitious board game designers than us, Matthew.

**Matt**: Yeah, it’s true. I found my midlife crisis to be a solitary experience, but hey, who knows! Maybe they can be co-op!

**Quinns**: Wellll, if you’ve had a midlife crisis, why not get in touch [Matt laughing] at contact at shutupandsitdown dot com. Don’t do that.

**Matt**: No, don’t do that. Unless you’ve had a joint midlife crisis with somebody else, and it’s been strange but enjoyable.

**Quinns**: Yeah, I wouldn’t mind reading about that, that sounds nice!

**Matt**: Yeah, particularly if you’ve had one and then come back to normal again, and been like, “What the hell just happened? Why did we go to Thailand on motorbikes for three months? Are we okay?”

**Quinns**: Yes.

**Matt**: Yeah.

**Quinns**: It is a natural thing.

**Matt**: Yeah. [pause] Quinns… [quietly] let’s buy a motorbike.

**Quinns** [shouting]: Okay!

**Matt** [shouting]: Yeeaaahhhhh!!!!

[funky sting]

## Fastaval [00:59:18]

**Matt**: So that’s all the board games that we checked out at Fastaval, but now we’d like to talk a bit about the actual festival, because it was wonderful and deeply strange.

**Quinns**: And I’m gonna just start this conversation by saying: We talk about drinking a little bit on Shut Up & Sit Down.

**Matt**: Yes.

**Quinns**: We talk about drinking games, or which games are good while drinking.

**Matt**: Uh-huh.

**Quinns**: Which games you can teach while drunk! I got an email in the Shut Up & Sit Down inbox this week asking, quite candidly, if we were alcoholics.

**Matt** [surprised]: What?

**Quinns**: Yes! So I want to say, first off, **no**, but also Matt and I do drink responsibly, which is why Fastaval was an event where we drank more than we had drunk in the last six years.

**Matt**: Yeah, we drank irresponsibly.

**Quinns**: But that’s not par for the course-

**Matt**: No.

**Quinns**: -for us.

**Matt**: No, it’s not. So why did someone think we were alcoholics?

**Quinns**: I don’t know!

**Matt**: Is it just because- Oh it’s probably because every time they see us, we have a beer. But that’s because we drink beers whilst we’re doing a Twitch stream on a Thursday night?

**Quinns**: Yeah, I think that was part of it, for sure.

**Matt**: Which is- It’s like- That’s not- We’re not drinking three or four beers *every* night. [Quinns laughing] It’s maybe once every two weeks when we stream?

**Quinns**: Yeah, I guess if you extrapolate, it’s like, “Are they drinking while filming reviews? [Matt laughing] While writing scripts?”

**Matt**: Yeah, like, “Well, based on this, they have a beer every hour. [Quinns laughing] And if I extrapolate that across their day, that’s an incredible quantity of beer.” No, we’re not alcoholics, actually. But we kind of temporarily engaged in some rather heavy drinking whilst we were in Denmark, because Denmark is a country that basically has *as* bad if not worse of a drinking culture than Great Britain England, which is really saying something.

**Quinns** [singing to the tune of God Save The Queen]: God save our gracious… drink?

**Matt** [continuing the tune]: Get me another drink. [Quinns laughing]

**Matt and Quinn** [continuing the tune]: Drink all the-

**Quinns** [over Matt]: -time.

**Matt** [over Quinns]: -drinks.

**Quinns**: But this is actually kind of what set Fastaval apart from all the other board gaming conventions we’ve been to. You described it, I think, on day one, as like a crazy wedding.

**Matt**: It was. It was like crashing a crazy wedding, in a wonderful way. Like crashing a nice wedding though, in the fact that you turned up and everyone was hugging each other, and everyone was bumping into people they clearly hadn’t seen for ages, and everyone knew each other, and then there was us. And we’re like, [moan of social anxiety]. But the difference is, I’ve never crashed a wedding but I like the idea that if you did crash a snooty bad wedding, you’d turn up, and you’d see that, but then everyone would be looking at you and going, [incredibly snotty voice] “Who are you?” Whereas this was just people going, [incredibly friendly voice] “Oh, who are you? Nice to meet you!” So, you kind of were surrounded by people who knew each other, but then everyone seemed really excited to get to know *you*, as well. And the crucial thing here, which I need to say straight away, is the fact that it wasn’t because people knew who we were. In fact, one of the fun things about Fastaval for us was, a lot of people didn’t have any idea who we were. We were just a couple of British guys. And it meant we had people who were talking to us for twenty minutes, and then their friend came up and they were like, “Oh, they’re the guests of honor!” And they were like, “Whaaaat?” And we’re like, “I assumed you knew that because you came to talk to us.” No, everyone was just really nice!

**Quinns**: Yeah, there’s a policy within Nordic- Which is Scandinavian, which is Sweden, Norway, Denmark… Finland kinda, but Finns are weird as we found out from all the stereotype jokes when we were in Denmark.

**Matt**: Is it the open chair thing?

**Quinns**: The open chair policy, which is that whatever you’re doing, if you’re having a conversation with your friends or playing a game, you kind of spiritually leave an open chair so that if anyone comes over, then you can be like, “Oh, we were just talking about omelettes.” Or roleplaying or whatever.

**Matt**: Yeah. It probably makes business conversations incredibly difficult. [Quinns laughing] “Oh, we were just having a confidential conversation about-” “Oh, great, [murmur].” No, but as a general rule of thumb at parties and social events and things like that, it’s perfect. But also, the thing about Fastaval was, for us, we just became fascinated by it. Initially we thought it was gonna be really crap, for lots of reasons, but mainly because we’re cynical. But in reality it ended up being one of the most wonderful experiences I’ve ever had at a festival.

**Quinns**: Well, you said “festival” there, rather than “convention,” which I think is telling.

**Matt**: It is telling. Basically, Fastaval, for those of you who don’t know, is just the word festival, but with too many A’s. [Quinns laughing] And really, it was much more like a music festival than it was a board game convention, and that’s why a lot of the stuff within it, and a lot of stuff we talk about, you kind of need that context, because really what they’ve managed to get, by Denmark being a democratic socialist country in many ways, it means that they have way less of a problem with gender equality than we have elsewhere. They’ve still got massive problems with race, don’t get me wrong, it seems like a [pretty racist country](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Modern_display_of_the_Confederate_battle_flag) unfortunately, but you know, you just think, okay, you can’t win. Something’s wrong everywhere. Things are complicated. But, it means that lots of people in Denmark grow up roleplaying, and that’s a normal thing. Kids do it in schools. So, over here, roleplaying and live-action roleplaying has a lot of stigma, a lot of weight, a lot of connotations. People will think, “Oh, Big Bang Theory,” etc. etc. Whereas over there, it’s just a thing everyone does, which means, when you have adult conventions that are like, “Hey, come and roleplay!”, it means you don’t just have a group of people for whom the main core of what you’re doing is, “We are nerds.”

**Quinns**: Yes.

**Matt**: The main core is, “We are people.”

**Quinns**: Yes!

**Matt**: And it means that around that, you can have a culture which blooms in different ways. It doesn't have to be the traditional things that you have at conventions. It can be the things you have at music festivals, and it can be looser and wilder!

**Quinns**: Yeah! I mean, part of the gender equality that was so present at Fastaval just meant that every night, there was kind of a small sort of clubbing scene, you know? There was a bar, there was a dance floor, the dance floor was full every single night.

**Matt**: Yeah!

**Quinns**: And we’ve seen small one-off dancing events, like Gencon has some kind of big cosplay masquerade, and that’s kind of fun, but Fastaval was just -- you know what? -- it was just a lot of boys and girls of whatever age, whatever sexuality, just having fun together?

**Matt**: It was a lot of young, sexy people having a lovely time together and dancing. I can’t imagine a board game convention where A) people go out to the bar and dance all night, but then also, people really put some effort into looking nice.

**Quinns**: Oh, this was fantastic! So Fastaval ends with this enormously prestigious, and beautifully well put-together for the budget [**Matt**: Yeah!] ceremony where they give out these golden penguins for- And we should stress here, because we haven’t said it yet: Fastaval is primarily a roleplaying convention. It is, in fact, some of the best roleplaying you can ever do, with some of the best games-masters, for whom winning one of these golden penguins is the most prestigious thing they could get. And unfortunately, we didn’t get to do *any* roleplaying because of some scheduling errors.

**Matt**: Which is ridiculous.

**Quinns**: I know.

**Matt**: And honestly, we’re as annoyed with ourselves about it as anyone else can be with us.

**Quinns**: But it’s just why we have to go back next year.

**Matt**: Yes, absolutely.

**Quinns**: But this award ceremony at the end was… It was vaguely black-tie, which Matt and I were so thrown by that Matt had to borrow a shirt from the designer of Flamme Rouge.

**Matt**: I did, I panicked, because they were like, “Yeah, you’re gonna go on stage and talk for five minutes.” I was like, “But everyone in this room, which is a large school gymnasium which they turned the lights off and put cheap LED lights on the tables and made it look magical on a shoestring budget-” Everyone was wearing amazing gowns and tuxedos and stuff!

**Quinns**: It was like a prom from Twilight or Riverdale or something.

**Matt**: It reminded me of Back to the Future. It was Under The Sea themed, as well! It was like, “This is like the Under The Sea themed ball.” Yeah, just a totally different culture to anything I’d ever seen in the gaming scene, and it made me feel old in a really *good* way, in a really nice way. Every night, being like, “All of these young, wonderful people, who are just open and free and having a great time, and celebrating the fact that they all love games as well.” And I was like, “This is a vision of… the world that could be.”

**Quinns**: I mean, yeah, maybe to put it at its most base- Because we were telling people in Denmark, “Oh, you’ve got such a special convention here,” and they just didn’t know why!

**Matt**: No!

**Quinns**: But then I was saying things to them like, “You’ve got to understand. Generally speaking, board game conventions in America, England, wherever, smell really bad.” And they were like, [surprised] “What?” And you know, you say this to young kids who are wearing tuxedos and dresses… And that’s not to say it was a standoffishly formal event.

**Matt**: No!

**Quinns**: It was just perfectly lovely. It was just another world.

**Matt**: It was, and it reminded me much more of being at a music festival, in sort of the way I used to in my early, early, early years. The early years! Of just, you know, going and basically drinking too much for a weekend, and having a lot of fun and dancing around to music. It’s just a music festival that didn’t have music, but it had everything else! And I found myself drinking til the early hours of the morning every night, just because I was having *loads* of fun!

**Quinns**: Yeah.

**Matt**: And everyone was lovely!

**Quinns**: And I think the reason we’re spending so much time talking about this is, with SHUX, the Shut Up & Sit Down convention- Tickets on sale now by the way! [Matt laughing] Just go to shux.show. But for that, we’re constantly thinking, “How can we make tabletop communities better? More accessible? More welcoming?” And going to Fastaval was like this enormously heartening thing of, “Oh! Geek culture doesn't have to be primarily geeky, it can just be warm and welcoming and accessible and leave so many of the unpleasant trappings of geekiness aside!”

**Matt**: Yeah, you can just take what you want and leave the rest. But also, there was so much we could try and absorb and think about, especially in trying to make this a similar sort of atmosphere, but at the same time, it was built on such a cultural basis that it’s impossible to get into.

**Quinns**: So, let’s talk about the one thing that SHUX, or any other board game convention, [Matt laughing] could not steal from Fastaval.

**Matt**: No, yeah!

**Quinns**: Which is the dirtbusters.

**Matt**: The dirtbusters! So, as we said, it’s based on socialist roots, in terms of the way this stuff works. You can’t rent out big convention centers, which means that a lot of these things are pitched as cultural events, and you go to schools! And you say, “Look, we want to use your school -- during half-term when the kids are all gone -- to run this event.” And then the local council go, “Alright, well that’s gonna bring in this money from tourism, et cetera, and this looks like a cool cultural thing. Okay, you can do it, providing that you look after it and you clean it up at the end and all that stuff.” But then the problem with running it in the school is it means, you’re not doing it for profit, and it means if you’re not doing it for profit, the whole purpose becomes keeping the cost down low.

**Quinns**: Yup.

**Matt**: Again, the other problem is -- and it’s a good problem to have -- in Denmark, because they actually have some pretty decent social equality, if you’re a cleaner -- if you’re someone who cleans toilets -- you get paid *well* for that. As arguably, you *should*! [Quinns laughing] Because it’s a horrible job.

**Quinns**: Yup.

**Matt**: So it means that if you’ve got a convention, and you’re running not for profit, and you want people to clean the toilets, you can’t do that, because it’s going to be way too expensive. So, what you do, is you get people to volunteer to come to the convention for the weekend to clean toilets.

**Quinns**: Matt, how on earth are you going to get people to volunteer to clean toilets -- and everything else, by the way -- at a board game convention?

**Matt**: Yeah, and how are you gonna do that whilst also they’re not even getting a free ticket? They pay for their ticket, and then they come, and they spend the entire weekend -- pretty much -- cleaning toilets.

**Quinns**: Okay, so, now, we’ve framed the problem for you. The solution-

**Matt**: The solution, it turns out-

**Quinns**: Matt and I first encountered this when we’d just arrived at Fastaval, and we were leaving the school through the main entrance, and a *column* of about twelve people wearing jumpsuits and singing in Danish -- [**Matt**: Uh-huh. Blaring metal!] Oh yeah! Carrying an enormous amplifier blowing metal -- marched in! And we were like, “Are they cosplayers? Is this some kind of live-action roleplay?”

**Matt**: Yup.

**Quinns**: Turns out, we had just witnessed the dirtbusters for the first time, who basically are a cross between cleaning staff and Viking berserkers.

**Matt**: Yeah. And it’s sort of people roleplaying as…

**Quinns**: As an army unit.

**Matt**: As an army unit with American biker gang roots, [Quinns laughing] and inspirations, who roll around wearing sunglasses and berets and a combination of military attire and biker attire, and then traditional cleaning attire, and mops and fluorescent jackets, and then… they clean! But they also cause mild chaos constantly.

**Quinns**: Yeah, so the way that it might look for you as a board game convention attendee is, you’re playing your board game, and then suddenly the doors to the room blow open and four people wearing jumpsuits with cleaning equipment tied to their belts- They look like Ghostbusters, more than anything else.

**Matt**: They do actually, yeah.

**Quinns**: But Ghostbusters who’ve seen some bad stuff.

**Matt**: And maybe *done* some bad stuff!

**Quinns**: Yeah! It’s like Ghostbusters but a gritty reboot.

**Matt**: It kind of reminded me of The Rowdy 3 from Dirk Gently’s Holistic Detective Agency.

**Quinns**: Oh, yeah.

**Matt**: Just jumping out of a van and being like, “What’s going on?”

**Quinns**: So you’re playing your board games. These people come into the room and then they’re blaring metal from a huge amplifier, and they just start cleaning. And the respect- Part of the reason they do it, I’m sure, is the sheer quantity of respect they get from all convention attendees. When they walk into a room, people smile, people cheer, they thank them. Because, guess what? They’re keeping the convention center clean. They’re keeping the cost down. But the thing is, they’re having fun while doing it.

**Matt**: They are! Some of them are sober, but a lot of them are drunk, [Quinns laughing] and a lot of them have been drinking all day, possibly all weekend. And again, we should point out, A) we’re not alcoholics, and B) obviously drinking excessively is not a good or a smart or a clever thing. However! Everybody has done it, and I did it when I was younger at music festivals, and I know it was stupid. Do I regret it? No. And there is a time and a place for being mildly irresponsible in a safe way. It’s just that you never see that in the board game scene.

**Quinns**: No! And you definitely don’t see it in cleaning staff.

**Matt**: No! And so basically they just roll around being *loud*! Sometimes slightly obnoxious, listening to heavy metal, but boy, they leave everywhere they go *very clean*!

**Quinns**: Oh my god, I have never seen cleaner toilets than at Fastaval. They were reliably spotless for the entire weekend.

**Matt**: Yeah!

**Quinns**: And I know exactly who to thank for that! At the closing ceremony at the end, they always get, at Fastaval, a parade of honor, where every single person who attends the convention stands up, does a salute, and then they do a sort of parade through the convention as like hardcore metal plays.

**Matt**: They just all listen to Manowar and it was… yeah. It was very weird. And the thing is, we did a shift. This is one of the many reasons we didn’t actually do any roleplaying, [Quinns laughing] but arguably, technically, *technically*, the dirtbusters are a kind of weird real-life roleplaying group, because you’re kind of roleplaying the fact that you’re some weird mad cleaning Viking.

**Quinns**: So we were given hard hats that said like, Assistant 1 and Assistant 2 on them. We showed up, we started drinking-

**Matt**: We had to start drinking at 9 AM as part of the… It wasn’t really hazing, it was more that we were on the edge of a slightly drunk AGM that we didn’t understand. [Quinns laughing] It was a weird meeting. Anyway, we did this, and we did a morning of it, basically because we knew that the convention had this socialist roots, and the idea that you- You can’t just go to Fastaval and buy a ticket, you have to go to Fastaval and buy a ticket, and then as part of that ticket, you do a bit of volunteering. You do something. Whether it’s a little bit of cleaning, or a little bit of tidying, or a bit of serving food, or helping at a desk, or whatever. Everybody helps out. Which is great! But as the guests of honor, we didn’t have any of that to do, and we thought, “Well no, we kind of want to do something.” So when we discovered there was a crowd of people who roll around cleaning toilets and drinking in the mornings, we thought- Admittedly when we agreed to do this-

**Quinns**: Well, cleaning everything, let’s be clear.

**Matt**: Cleaning everything. Admittedly, when we agreed to do this, we had had a couple of beers. But we promised, and we were there. We were there at 9 AM and we did a morning, and it was… It was a real experience, and it was a really fantastic way of beginning to get to the heart of what on earth that festival was.

**Quinns**: Yeah, I mean, maybe we should wrap this up from my favorite anecdote, which is: We’d had three beers. We discovered that breakfast was served at 11. So we still had multiple hours to go.

**Matt**: I was really worried about that.

**Quinns**: Matt and I were both- Because you don’t- I can’t remember the last time I was drunk before breakfast, but then not only am I drunk before breakfast, you and I are dressed in these ill-fitting jumpsuits… cleaning a Danish school???

**Matt**: Yeah. And we weren’t even sure we were cleaning the right room, and I was like, “Well, look, worst case scenario, it’s 9 AM, I’ve had three beers, and I’m just cleaning a Danish school.” [Quinns laughing]

**Quinns** [high-pitched]: I love that so much!

**Matt**: I mean, I don’t think we were supposed to clean that room. I don’t think that room was being used by the festival, but...

**Quinns**: You left it spotless.

**Matt**: A teacher will come back and be like, “Hey! This room is a lot less dusty than it was before half-term.” Because that room, let me tell you, was *real* dusty.

**Quinns**: So yeah, that’s some basics about Fastaval.

**Matt**: That’s a thing. And we don’t do this to tease it, but we do -- for those people who do support Shut Up & Sit Down and donate -- we have a newsletter that we send out every month, and we decided, basically for all the caveat reasons that we’ve just gone through, we did make a video of us -- record a video of us -- being dirtbusters for the morning, which we will edit and put on Youtube unlisted, but we kind of felt that without this incredible long caveat background of “This is what Fastaval is” etc. etc. etc., it didn’t feel responsible just to put that online being like, “Hey, here’s Matt and Quinns just getting drunk in the morning, and cleaning,” without understanding everything about where this exists within this big picture. So, we’re gonna do it as a thing for people who get the newsletter, with the huge caveat of information that we’ve given people in that format, so that they know. So if you do want to watch that, and you’re not a supporter, then just ask somebody who is a supporter, or find somebody, maybe on the Shut Up & Sit Down supporters forums- It’s completely fine for anyone listening to this to go, “Hey! Somebody give me a link.” Because I’m happy for more people to see it, we just felt a bit weird, reasonably, for promoting it without some caveats. Because there’s some other stuff. You know, the dirtbusters use- As part of their gear they have around on the walls, and all their mad flags, and all their mad traditions, they have a Confederate flag and it’s this thing of being like, I don’t think these Danish people have any concept of the [current connotations of that really](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Modern_display_of_the_Confederate_battle_flag), and if they did they probably wouldn’t be cool with it, because everyone we met there was super open-minded and super kind, but it being like, uhhhhhh yeah, there’s a lot you need to… It was so much lost in translation for us, as Europeans, going to a place in Europe, that I feel like just putting that into the wild, to America, without a real heavy set of caveats-

**Quinns**: Yeah, of course Matt, of course.

**Matt**: Yeah. So that’s that. But if you are a subscriber or you are looking forward to asking for a link, you can look forward to that stupidity in the next month.

**Quinns**: Yeah, should be in the next few weeks after this podcast is released.

## Outro [01:16:52]

**Quinns**: Right! I think that should just about wrap it up for this month. Thank you very much for being patient as we’ve talked about games that aren’t out yet, games that aren’t finished. We’ve talked about a Danish convention which pretty much all of our listeners won’t ever go to.

**Matt**: No.

**Quinns**: But hey! We’ve really enjoyed this episode, thank you very much for listening.

**Matt**: Thank you very much.

**Quinns**: If you are interested in, hey, having a little bit of a midlife crisis yourself, why not join us in Vancouver in October of this year?

**Matt**: That’s a great way to spend money, and the middle of a midlife crisis, because it’s beautiful! The weather’s nice. They’ve got whales.

**Quinns**: The third ever Shut Up & Sit Down convention is happening this October on the 4th, 5th, and 6th. Matt and I are gonna be there, we’re gonna have loads of special guests.

**Matt** [chuckling at the absurdity]: Ha, are we gonna be there. Like, yeah, we’re gonna be there.

**Quinns**: We’re gonna be there!

**Matt**: I’m definitely gonna be there. It’s gonna be fantastic. We’re already preparing a lot of stuff, and obviously it will not be as wild as Fastaval, but if you do like the sound of a convention which at its heart tries to be a little bit less about buying stuff and consumerism, and a little bit more about community and coming together and making new friends, and just being surrounded by nice people being kind to one another, we think it is one of the best things in the world for that, so yeah.

**Quinns**: We certainly do, and if you’re interested in a bit more of what standard board game conventions have to offer, we’re now the biggest board game convention in Canada, we’ve got over fifty publishers, we’ve got a board game library with more than a thousand games.

**Matt**: Yeah, and we have a lot of people who come from North America, who just get the train, or get a flight over and pop over. Check it out, you can go to shux.show for more information if you’re interested, and yeah. Do have a look. It’s gonna be real good.

**Quinns**: Matthew Lees, I… feel the need. The need… for lunch.

**Matt**: Yeah, I’ve got that need as well. It might be... spreading.

**Quinns**: Thank you very much for listening to the Shut Up & Sit Down podcast everybody. We’ll be back in another three weeks with some hot, hot, hot... well, I was gonna say games there, but then I started thinking about lunch again. We should go!

**Matt**: Lunch! Bye!

**Quinns**: Bye!

[funky outro music]