**Podcast #99¾: Running from the Board Game Police**

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## Intro [00:00:00]

[funky intro music]

**Matt**: Hello and welcome to the very 99th and three quarters podcast of the Shut Up & Sit Down podcast, a podcast all about board games. And we have got a show for you today. My name’s Matt Lees, and I’m joined by Quintin Smith-

**Quinns**: Hallo Matt Lees!

**Matt**: -and we are also joined once again by our current intern, Mr. Ben.

**Ben**: Hello- [laughs] It’s not- [Quinns laughing] For people familiar with the cartoon show Mr. Ben, it’s about a nice middle-aged man who goes on adventures when he puts on costumes. I am not Mr. Ben.

**Matt**: What?! That’s not you?!

**Ben**: No.

**Quinns**: Matt. Matt. We talked about this.

**Matt**: Is that why every time we see you you’re *not* wearing outlandish costumes and going into cupboards and having whimsical adventures?

**Ben**: I mean to be fair Matt, the last time I was at your house, I did put on a costume and get in a cupboard-

**Matt**: Yeah!

**Ben**: -and have a whimsical adventure.

**Matt**: That’s why I did it. I thought that was where you were comfortable.

**Quinns**: If you’ve not seen Matt’s Kemet video, then yeah, guess what, that’s Ben! Ben, you’re a star now.

**Ben**: I am, thank you very much.

**Matt**: Ben, I feel like me putting you in a cupboard suddenly seems quite inappropriate in the context of this new information. [Ben laughing]

**Quinns**: You could see the tribunal calling it bullying, couldn’t you.

**Matt**: Yeah, I can hear them as well. Let’s do a podcast!

**Quinns**: Okay! The board games we’re going to be talking about on this 99 and three quarters podcast- Which we should explain, if you missed last episode. We’re gonna save episode 100 for SHUX, the Shut Up & Sit Down convention (tickets on sale now).

**Matt**: Yeah, it’s the podcast equivalent of a purity ring, we’re just going to wait a little bit longer.

**Quinns**: Yeah, it’d be awful if we had- What fraction are we gonna use if we have to do another podcast between now and then?

**Matt**: Oooouurgghh, an annoying one. Like point nine five or something.

**Quinns**: Okay. The games we’re going to be talking about on this 99 and three quarters podcast are Undo, a new series of board games that can only be played once about saving lives. We’re gonna be playing Super Motherload, a game about digging for gems in a video game style. We’re going to be talking about Rob Daviau’s ShipShape, a game of your ship having holes in and mostly swearing, and your ship leaking. Matt, you have been playing… It says here you have played *fifty hours* of Gloomhaven recently.

**Matt**: Yeah. In about a week. I’ve kinda had a… In retrospect, it may have been an episode. [Quinns laughing] [laughs] But it was a lot of fun!

**Quinns**: Well we’re gonna find out how that went for Matt. We are going to talk about Cerberus, a game about running away from Cerberus, the mythical-

**Matt**: Famous big dog!

**Quinns**: -the mythical protector of Hell, yeah! It’s a game about trying to get out of the underworld before Cerberus catches you, ORRR!!! Working for Cerberus to catch your friends. And, we’re going to be talking a little bit about Lords of Hellas, which made quite a stir a couple of years ago, but we are fashionably late. Matt has some thoughts. [**Matt**: Mmm!] There’s a statue which you can build [**Matt**: Mmm!] out of plastic pieces. Lots to look forward to, but to begin with, we’re going to talk about something you can’t look forward to *that* much, which is Undo!

## Undo [00:02:56]

**Ben**: So Undo is a card game that can only be played through once, as Quinns said. It’s sort of in the style of Unlock, if you’ve played that. Unlock is a deck of cards that mimics being an escape room. Undo, instead, is a deck of cards that mimics someone’s entire life. So you start with you’re just there with a body, which is a strange way to start, and then you’ll see a series of different points presumably linked to that person’s life that you can then jump back to, so you put some time juice in the time engine -- it doesn't say what the time juice is either -- and you will go back to different points in that person’s life at your choosing. You can choose about three quarters of them. At each one you’ll be presented with a choice of how you’re going to interfere -- for want of a better word -- with that person’s life? So that might be going, “Oh, well, the person died because they had a heart attack, so maybe making sure they have less salt in their diet will make things better.” Or maybe asking them to reconnect with their son is gonna be better for them, and then you’ll find out whether you’ve made their life better and their death less likely, or you’ve made it worse and the death more likely.

**Matt**: You should have just run away from *more* of your family and eaten a lot more salt.

**Quinns**: You know, sometimes that kind of thing happens, and you just have to figure out how these darn pieces fit together.

**Matt**: Huh! How does that mechanically work?

**Quinns**: Well, the way it works is you lay out a deck of cards which is a timeline. All of these cards have dates and locations printed on them, so it might be like, “That first card where you found a woman’s body, she was found dead outside of a six-story hotel.”

**Matt**: Right.

**Quinns**: “She has a smiling expression on her face.” Oh, it’s very mysterious. You can then jump back to -- for example -- twenty years earlier in Berlin, or *forty* years earlier in Dusseldorf.

**Matt**: So on the card will it literally say you can go back to this card or this card.

**Quinns**: Exac- Yeah, well no, it’s-

**Ben**: Yeah, you get about twelve of them, and you get nine cards you can go to, so you have to pick the nine that you think are going to be the most salient.

**Matt**: Ahhhh.

**Ben**: But all you get told is a time and a place. Yeah, so some of them are from an hour before the person died. In one of them they go back a few thousand years?

**Quinns**: Yes, that’s the fun thing. “This woman has been dead! Do you want to jump back to 4,000 BC?” And you’re like, “How will this be relevant?” And so part of the game is discussing something like which page of this person’s life you want to flip back to, and also trying to -- as quickly as possible -- figure out how and why they died, because otherwise you’re essentially answering multiple choice questions almost entirely randomly.

**Matt**: MMMMMMmmmmmm.

**Quinns**: It’s alright! It is… fine.

**Ben**: It’s okay. It’s very much a mys- It’s a mystery game, obviously, but it doesn't even tell you what the mystery is, right? It’s not saying, “Okay, you need to work out who was there at the time,” it doesn't tell you any of that. It just says, “This person’s dead. Why are they dead? What would help solve that problem?”

**Matt**: “How you gonna deal with that?”

**Quinns**: Mmmm. There’s some… I don’t know, it’s… One of the reasons it’s interesting as a puzzle is that most puzzles are designed to have a starting point, whereas this is very much “you can go to any point,” and then depending on what you answer a particular question… For example, you jump back to a pharmacy, and a woman -- you might not even know if it’s the woman who died later -- is asking for pills. Do you encourage the pharmacist to give her antidepressants, or, you know, vitamin tablets? Or something a bit stronger, like sleeping pills. And also-

**Matt**: Encourage! How do you encourage, what do you just-

**Quinns**: Well Matthew!

**Matt**: Okay.

**Quinns**: Well so! The game at no point explains who you are, what you’re doing. [Matt laughing] This might be a good point to stress that sometimes we find that German games tend to go a little light on storytelling and aesthetics. This is Pegasus Spiele, you know, a German company who are very disinterested in who you are. I mean, Ben and I immediately started joking about being time cops. Except, as time cops, for a start -- and not wanting to take one of the best jokes you wrote out of your review, Ben -- but why are we trying to save a 70-year-old woman, especially when jumping back into the past, sometimes we are killing tremendously important historical figures to change the timeline to save this woman? It makes absolutely no sense whatsoever, and in answer to your question-

**Matt**: Hey! Every life matters.

**Quinns**: But not maybe this one as much.

**Matt**: No.

**Ben**: It’s kind of like, “Oh, well, that person 2,000 years ago would be dead now anyway, so it’s fine to go back and kill them, but this woman today is dead, and sure she’s in her eighties, but you know, we should save her.”

**Quinns**: But when you’re encouraging the pharmacist to give someone, you know, sleeping pills, the game in no- It says, “Which of these things do you want to do?” And then you a flip a card and it will either be like, “Plus two,” which is great, you saved that woman’s life to the tune of plus two, or it could be “Minus two,” but it doesn't say what your character, or who- [sputters]

**Matt**: Why?

**Quinns**: Doesn't say who, why, what, when. Like, none of these questions are answered. It’s insane!

**Matt**: Yeah that sounds bonkers.

**Quinns**: It is pretty bonkers.

**Matt**: Sounds like an abstraction of a story.

**Quinns**: And I would say that if you know someone who owns a copy of Undo, I would borrow it, because it’s kind of curious. There’s nothing about it that’s enormously inventive or thought-provoking, there’s nothing that it does exceptionally well, but I had a good time playing one of the three.

**Matt**: I like the idea of just convincing a chemist, being like, “Hey!” Just popping in, giving a tap on the shoulder. “Yeah I know they’ve been prescribed this, but you should give them some vitamins instead!” [Quinns laughing]

**Ben**: I mean, they get more ridiculous. Sometimes it’s like, “Hey. Be less of a jerk to your kids.” They don’t… why?! It doesn't make any sense.

**Matt**: Is it like Quantum Leap, maybe, do you think?

**Quinns**: Well we were talking about that. There’s Quantum Leap bits of it. I imagine that you jump back in time. But it never describes you being someone. I always imagine you as a shadowy figure. If we were doing a video review, I would have a lot of fun doing the skits for it, because it would always be someone walking out from stage left in a trenchcoat going, [shady voice] “Hello. You don’t know who I am, but a woman’s gonna come through here, and you should be a total *dick* to her. I mean you should just be so mean!”

**Matt**: Maybe it’s like Ghost Trick, a very, very-

**Quinns**: Oh there’s a deep cut for our audience.

**Matt**: Yeah, Ghost Trick, it’s probably -- in my mind -- one of the best video games ever made. You can get it on the iPad actually, these days, and it’s a story-based puzzle game in which you are a ghost who can manipulate objects and you can always travel back in time to basically a few minutes before someone dies. It’s fantastic, and it really has one of these final third acts of the game which is just sublime, and there’s nothing quite like it. But yeah, maybe it’s the old lady! Maybe the old lady is traveling back through time possessing people like a ghost.

**Quinns**: In asking-

**Matt**: Just think about it!

**Quinns**: -these questions, Matt, as to whether it’s more Ghost Trick or Quantum Leap, you are exhibiting more of an interest [Matt laughing] in the storytelling of this game than the designers ever did.

**Matt**: Oh gosh.

**Quinns**: Ben, any final thoughts you want to give to people around the world about Undo?

**Ben**: I guess the main thing is, yeah, it’s certainly a curiosity, and if you want to give it a go, I don’t think… Everyone I’ve played it with played one and said, “I don’t want to play the other two,” which is probably…

**Matt**: Yeah…

**Quinns**: Except me!

**Ben**: Except, well, you’re an anomaly.

**Quinns**: I played two and then went, “I don’t want to play the third one.”

**Ben**: Yeah, there you go. [Quinns laughing] I’ve played all three, so yeah.

[funky sting]

## Super Motherload [00:10:05]

**Matt**: Super Motherload is a game which came out about five or six years ago, maybe more. It’s been in my pile of things to look at for forever. It slipped down, slipped away, fell into the back cupboard of obscurity, until recently, where basically I realized, “Hang on a minute! That’s published by Roxley Games.” Roxley Games, of course, are the people who made Brass Birmingham, working with Martin Wallace, and who gave a new lease of love and life to Brass, what is known as Lancashire I presume, just a classic Brass. Yeah, I thought, “I’m gonna look at this,” and looked at it. It had a reprinting last year. It’s quite fun!

**Quinns**: Yeah?

**Matt**: It’s not so strong that it’s like, great? But the way it works is, it’s literally based on a video game, I think. I think the video game and the board game came out roughly around the same time, I think? I haven’t researched it so don’t take anything I say on that regard as accurate. But if you’ve ever played a video game which involves you digging down through the ground and collecting gems and sometimes maybe, “Oh no I’ve hit a rock and I can’t get through that rock because I need a better drill or something.” I love those games.

**Quinns**: I’m thinking of, I think, SteamWorld Dig?

**Matt**: SteamWorld Dig is still fantastic, and is one of the best in the genre for that, of being like, “I’ve made money! And I can spend my money on… being better at digging holes.” And just going down and finding big gems, and it making a nice noise as things explode, and getting that nice feedback loop in your head, of going, [whimsical magpie voice] “Ooooh, collecting money things!” The problem is, board games can’t do that, so Super Motherload is really interesting, because it’s like, what happens when you try and take the mechanics of a basically quite solitary game format, which is heavily based on surprise and getting little boosts of serotonin in your brain when you collect loads of gems, and having the excitement of going back and spending all that money on more things so you can keep going down endlessly. In fact there was an ancient game called Miner Dig Deep, which is a super deep cut for anyone who had an XBox 360 and fond memories of the indie game store from a long time ago.

**Quinns**: Oh, yes.

**Matt**: It was basically an infinite mining game that was incredibly budget, but amazing. Really addictive. Loved it. Anyway. What this does, effectively, is it means that you have a hand of cards, and on your turn you play cards that have matching colors of drills. And there’s like three colors of drills, and then maybe a wild set, and if you play three blue drills, it means you can drill down three blocks in a direction. It has to be one direction, like a line, but there’s no rules, you can drill upwards, you can drill sideways. As long as it’s connected to a network of basically tunnels that have already been drilled, you can do it. The thing is, though, you both share, all players share this same network, which means you’re basically digging down, and then the next player is going to be continuing along those lines, so there’s definitely -- and I’ve only played this with two -- but there’s definitely a strategic element of thinking, “Wellll, I don’t want to push that tunnel any farther, because afterwards it gets super juicy, and I want somebody else to push that so I can try and get all that stuff.” And then there’s some interesting bits, like you have specific bits that can only be drilled through with red drills or blue drills, and you have specific things which can only be blown up with bombs. And you have cards that make you good at doing bombs. Where it gets interesting -- and there are some interesting things about this -- is the fact that each player has a deck of cards which you start with, but it’s a deck-building game, with a kind of an upgrade mechanic. So the way it works is you start off with seven or eight cards, and that’s your hand- Well, that’s your deck that you draw from, and then when you get to the end, you will recycle it by shuffling it up and drawing again, for those of you who’ve not played a deck-builder game. But you can buy better cards to add to your deck, and every time you buy a better card for your deck, it does an instant bonus thing, which is quite useful. And the key thing is, the money you make from digging into these things and collecting these gems, you take those gems and you immediately put them on one of the four different shops that you can go to. Now these shops in themselves are shops you dig down, which is quite a nice little touch, of being like, if you want to get all of one type, then you have to just buy them in order and add them to your deck. But it means you don’t have that thing of just collecting loads of money and then going, “Hmmmm. What am I gonna buy?” You have to then just put it on the one that you want to, and when you buy a power, when you buy a new card, you don’t get change. Which means, sometimes you get a really big, like, “This gem’s worth ten dollars!” But you’re like, “Where do you want to put it?” Because yeah, you don’t get change! Which means you might just think, “Screw it, I’m gonna lose a bit of money here because I need that card ASAP,” or you might think, “Okay, I’m gonna get this card that I don’t *really* want as much.” It’s interesting! And it means it keeps it quite pacey, because it means you don’t have people not knowing what to do. You just gotta do it! Put it down. Also it’s something you can work out when other players are taking their turns. You can be like, “Mmm, I’ll put that on there, and that on there,” and then when things pop, you just get the card. Yeah, you dig down through a panel and then when you get to the bottom of it, you add another layer, and then you add another layer, and basically it means that you shift it along, and when you’re two boards down, the first board disappears and you slide it along. So it gives the feeling of digging deeper and deeper and getting better things-

**Quinns**: This sounds like a-

**Matt**: -popping up.

**Quinns**: -really nice piece of design.

**Matt**: You know, it’s actually, it’s solid. It was fun, and it had some lovely art. Each of the four different playable decks have unique art for the four different types of characters that you can have multiples of, and some of the stuff in there is really wacky. Some of them are just kind of like… It has that traditional kind of futuristic kind of… Some of them are kinda like futuristic cowboys, some of them are kind of futuristic Russians? There’s one which is like a dog in an astronaut suit, an actual demon, and what appeared to be a Nazi bird? [Quinns laughing] Which I wasn’t sure about. It didn’t have any-

**Ben**: It’s a classic combo!

**Matt**: I was like, “Yeahhhh!” The guy who was playing was like, “Is that? Is that a Nazi? Is this a Nazi bird?” and I’m like, “Yeah, it looks like it is. I’m not really sure how I feel about that.” So it’s an odd setting, but the art is genuinely quite gorgeous, and it’s a solid little thing. The interesting thing, though, is it kind of doesn't get to be great for a couple of really interesting reasons that are actually to do with video games.

**Quinns**: Okay?

**Matt**: And that firstly is the fact that really, that synapse pop that you get from collecting a gem, and get from unlocking a new thing, just isn’t in board games, and you need to satisfy people in different ways. So actually just drilling down and collecting gems doesn't feel as exciting as it would. And the other thing is that a lot of the points you score in the game are based on a achievement system, which is just a constantly cycling- There are three major achievements in the game, and you can get them by scoring that, then there are minor achievements, which, unbelievably -- again this is pointed out by Clark, friend of the show who’s appeared on some stuff -- they missed the opportunity for it to be spelt “miner,” like mining, which is...

**Ben**: Yeah, yeah.

[Quinns laughing]

**Matt**: It’s just such an open goal. But those keep cycling in, and those are worth a lot of points, but again, if you’re playing a video game and there’s an achievement which is like, “Do this five times in one turn,” when you’ve done three of them, it will pop up, going, “Hey! You’ve only gotta do this two more times and you’re gonna get this achievement.” You think, [excited noise]! But in a board game… it doesn't. And you forget. And so really, a lot of the game was not about this excitement of digging down and collecting gems, it was about keeping an eye on this list of objectives-

**Quinns**: Oh I hate that.

**Matt**: -that was constantly cycling. And it’s just interesting, how it’s like what they’ve done is they’ve taken wholesale a video game-style design and made it into a board game. It’s solid, it’s quite fun, but it’s also a really interesting look at how, if you do that and you just take video game mechanics and turn them into card games and board games, a lot of it just doesn't translate. A lot of it you should just leave to one side.

**Quinns**: You know what’s really interesting about this is CMON has just announced their flagship board game technology thing that’s coming out this year. It’s called Teburu, which I think is a riff on the Japanese pronunciation of “table.” But it’s a mat you’re gonna put under their board games that work with it, and then the mat will read what’s happening in the board game. Everyone will have an app on their phone that means the game you’re playing can beam information straight to your app. Essentially, it’s a board game that will be read by… You know what, this isn’t the point I was trying to make. There’s a bunch of complicated stuff that CMON are trying to do. Statistically speaking, it’s an advanced technology that probably won’t be adopted and probably won’t work? I say that as someone who’s been a games journalist just for too many decades that like this, statistically, doesn't usually work. However, my god! A simple thing it could do in this exact example: If you’ve got Super Motherload on the Teburu app, whenever someone picks up a crystal, if there’s just a delicious “pop” noise? Just picking something off the board?

**Matt**: You know, that is an interesting point, but I’d actually counter that by being like, you don’t need that. And actually it’s a game which I believe our review- Ah yeah, it’ll be up on the website bynow! Silk!

**Quinns**: Oh yeah.

**Matt**: Which I’ll maybe talk about a bit later, but one of the things about that is it has creatures eating things. You’ve got little worms eating patches of grass, and you’ve got monsters stealing away worms and hiding them in its lair to maybe eat them later. And it’s implied that they’re not being eaten then. But, every time I’ve played it, everyone just makes sound effects. And I think that’s the really key thing is if you’ve got it right, if you’ve got the mechanic right, you don’t *need* to have a sound effect, because people will either make it out loud, or make it in their head. Actually, the Sonic Crash Team Racing thing, which again I’ll take about either on this podcast or a podcast at some point. You know, every time you get a ring, you hear a ring noise. Every time you go over a spring, you- Because everyone knows, if you’ve played Sonic the Hedgehog, you *know* the noises, and they’ve made a game which actually is evocative in terms of what Sonic the Hedgehog should feel like, that you just hear the noises when you make the noises.

**Ben**: The game Tobago, which I don’t know if you’ve played or not-

**Quinns**: Oh yeah, sure.

**Ben**: -but it’s about finding treasure on an island. At various points, the giant stone heads on the island turn, and the rulebook says it’s mandatory that you make a [deep stone grinding noise] noise. [Quinns laughing] And that fixes the problem rather nicely!

**Quinns**: You know I think another thing that fixes the problem is, this is why poker has big weighted chips. If you make a component that’s actually weighted- I know the crystals you’re talking about Matt, because games always include plastic crystals. There’s a new Bruno Cathala game -- called Gardens of Ishtar? Or Ishtar? Ishtar -- that has those plastic crystals and I’ve touched them so many times, and I know, they’re always used as rewards and it always feels crap to pick them up.

**Matt**: Mmm. They look nice.

**Ben**: I mean I almost bought the original Brass, just because I was like, “It’s got metal money. I want it.” You feel like you’ve earned money because you get the little jingle of money!

**Quinns**: Yeah, so it just goes to show.

**Matt**: The only way that those little plastic crystals are good as a reward is if you get a handful of them that you then pour into a little box.

**Quinns**: Yyyyyyyyyyup.

**Matt**: Because that’s satisfying.

**Quinns**: See now we’re thinking with gas. But yeah, no, so that was Super Motherload, I guess. What do you say Matt, if you see it for cheap in some kind of math trade or something, maybe grab it?

**Matt**: It’s interesting. It’s quite fun. I enjoyed it. I had a nice time with it. It was a really pleasant little game. It wasn’t exciting to a massive degree, but it was one of those really satisfying little things.

## ShipShape [00:20:42]

**Quinns**: Okay, well, mmm, sadly along the same lines, as something that did impress us but maybe not that much, Ben and I played ShipShape. So, this is a game from Rob Daviau, who you might know as the brainman -- that’s not a term -- behind Risk Legacy and Pandemic Legacy. ShipShape is a game where all players are going to be smuggling booty in their holds? Every player is given a ship hold, which is a three-by-three grid. The ship hold contains little rats on some of the nine squares. Players then have to try and win an auction -- but this is a bit tricky, essentially you have to play a card and you never know what quite where you’ll land in the auction -- to get lots, and the lots are three-dimensional, again, three-by-three grids which have some squares in them. So imagine, if you’ve bought a board game before, imagine a piece of punchboard that isn’t fully punched out? That then goes on top of your hold, and you’re going to do this -- what is it -- six times?

**Ben**: You do it three times per round, and there are three rounds.

**Quinns**: Okay, yes, so, ideally, once you’ve done this correctly, you will draft, or win, a series of holds which, when you view your hold from above, the three-by-three grid-

**Matt**: No rats?

**Quinns**: -has no rats, but also these things you’re drafting have things like cannons, gold, contraband! But ultimately you’re gonna take them, hopefully not covering up all the good stuff you got before, building this lovely, entirely 3D cube of goods, which you will then view from above and see what you can see in your three-by-three grid. Did that make any sense? That was one of the hardest things to explain.

**Matt**: No, that made perfect sense to me.

**Quinns**: Okay, good.

**Ben**: It’s one of those things where you very much need to see it, and we played with five -- I think it goes up to six -- and what’s really interesting about it is that the rules say... You have this huge stack of fifteen crates, right, so each of the five players are going to get three crates per round. The rules specifically state you’re allowed to stand up to look at what’s coming, but you’re not allowed to change where you’re sat, so every player can see slightly differently what’s coming up, because obviously any of the nine squares can have something on it, which means it’ll obscure anything beneath it, which means if there’s nothing on, say square 4, for three ones down, you can *sort of* see what’s coming, which is where the bidding mechanic comes in, in that you can very clearly see what the top one is. You can *kind* of see what the second one is, and so on and so forth. When you got five, you have no idea what number four and five looks like, so you don’t even know, it might be the absolute thing you want, but you don’t know it, so you’re kind of bidding for an unknown quantity, because you don’t know how much you want it, or how much anyone else wants anything else.

**Quinns**: And you know, that actually worked really well. This is just a light party game, but all players have is a hand of pirates listed 1-9. You all put one in, reveal, duplicates are discarded, and then that determines who goes first, essentially. So there’s this curious auction which I’ve not really seen done before, where everybody knows what the first tile is. If you win, everyone knows exactly what you’re getting. Second, you can maybe see a bit of it. Third, nothing, and then everything beyond that is just a complete mystery. But sometimes that’s what you want! If you don’t like any of the top three, you’re like, “Yeah, I’ll just take a punt on whatever’s coming last.”

**Matt**: I suppose you get to orient it as well, because it’s a square, right?

**Ben**: Yeah, so you can… Three of these spaces are covered, but you can flip the tile, and you can orientate it however you like.

**Matt**: Got some options.

**Ben**: So you get a bonus if you cover all nine squares, so you basically have to do things perfectly, because you’ll get three crates that cover three squares, so you have to kind of match them up perfectly.

**Quinns**: But then there’s fun stuff like the player with the most contraband receives no points for their contraband, but everyone else receives it, so you want the purple contraband squares, but not so many that you have the most.

**Matt**: It sounds fun!

**Quinns**: You know what? It was fun. I think it’s safe to say, we played it with five, everyone had fun, and then it was that kind of game where if I bought it just for a fun family Christmas or something, it would have done its job, gone in the box, wouldn’t have come off the shelf for maybe another year or two. I think the nicest thing to say about it is it was *really* smooth. Like there was no friction in our play of it.

**Matt**: You know, this might be wrong, it’s not the same sort of thing at all, but it reminds me, in terms of the description, slightly of Reef?

**Quinns**: Okay, yes.

**Matt**: I mean it’s not the same, but what I’m saying is Reef was one of those things where basically, it was a puzzle game of trying to carefully build stuff up and cover stuff up, and you’re always just looking straight down [**Quinns**: Yeah, exactly.] at a thing. But the problem is, that game kind of almost got a bit confused by the fact that you were building these towers that you could still see the stuff underneath them, but as soon as you covered it up it became immediately irrelevant?

**Quinns**: Yup. No, ShipShape is the same thing.

**Matt**: Yeah, but in a way that you don’t get bamboozled, and you can just keep looking down at it and having a fun time.

**Quinns**: Yeah, I think the easy way to say it is that ShipShape is maybe slightly too smooth and too simple? It was the depressing thing of, we finished round one which is a third of the game, and you’ve built up your hold, and you’ve totaled up the point, and everyone was like, “Oh wow! That was fun! What was round two?” Because you get a new player mat for each round, because the players in the lead get more rats. But what every single person we played with thought would happen is, “Ah it’s round two! What does that introduce? Leaks! Oh, if we haven’t covered up the leaks-” No. It’s exactly the same thing three times. There is *no* new mechanic that is introduced, despite the fact the game is structured in three acts? Which is a real bummer. But I would say that ShipShape is too smooth to hold my interest, and then Reef was just too difficult?

**Matt**: Yeah. No, I didn’t like Reef. It’s fine. It was more just that there was something fun about the idea of building something up vertically and looking down and seeing what you got.

**Ben**: It’s absolutely gorgeous. I feel like when I was teaching the game, I set up the game and put this stack of crates down, and I basically could have just gestured at them and players instantly knew what you had to do!

**Quinns**: Yeah.

**Matt**: Yeah.

**Ben**: It’s very, very straightforward.

**Quinns**: Because it’s not made of cardboard, they’ve actually thickened it with a bit of… It’s like cardboard sandwiching a piece of styrofoam, so it really is quite thick? So you do end up making quite a large little structure in front of you? It’s lovely to play with.

**Matt**: That’s pretty cute.

**Quinns**: You know… [stammers]

**Matt**: This kind of sounds like something on a bit more of the lighter and that I might get on with you more than you.

**Quinns**: Maybe, maybe. Maybe? Yeah.

**Matt**: Maybe.

**Ben**: The crowd we played with are quite gamer heavy, and we played a few games that night, and everyone, as Quinns said, everyone loved it and then we never mentioned it again the rest of the night. [Quinns laughing]

**Matt**: Yeah yeah yeah yeah yeah. Yeah absolutely.

**Quinns**: But if you’re interested, even in just looking at a picture, or maybe picking it up for family or for Christmas, that’s ShipShape by Rob Daviau.

## Gloomhaven [00:26:54]

**Quinns**: [chuckling] On *completely* the other end of the spectrum, Matt, how many hours did you spend playing Gloomhaven?

**Matt**: So it was like fifty or sixty, I think.

**Quinns**: Okay. Let’s have a moment. This isn’t an intervention, [Matt laughing] but Ben and I, we are worried about you.

**Matt**: Well, there was a really hot patch in the UK not long ago, and I know that people who don’t live in the UK might be like, “Alright, we actually deal with proper temperatures where we live, it’s not a big deal,” but, the UK, if you’re not familiar with it, is not set up with an infrastructure for temperatures, or weather. We can deal with drizzle, and that’s it. So we had a heat wave, and it just wasn’t pleasant to go out, and certainly I *tried* to go to the office and do some work work, sitting in front of a computer, and my brain just wouldn’t function. So my brother was here, and I had a friend down the road whose flat was very, very, very hot. So I said, “Hey, do you wanna just come round and we’ll just play loads of Gloomhaven?” We played loads of Gloomhaven. Then our friend left and my brother was still staying at my house, and we didn’t have anything on, so we were just like, “Should we just keep playing Gloomhaven?” And basically, I think because there is a real set up cost with Gloomhaven-

**Quinns**: Aaaaahhhhh.

**Matt**: -getting it out, we just left it out on the table. Because we’re like, “Well, we won’t pack it away, because we might play some tomorrow.” But then because it’s so compelling, we just kept playing it all the time.

**Quinns**: Yeah. My wife and I did the same thing with Pandemic Legacy Season 1, where it was on the table, and then that meant every night we were just always looking at it, so it was always in our minds?

**Matt**: Yeah. Yeah. Well we just kept thinking about it even when we weren’t looking at it. We’re like, “Ahh, thinking about that,” and then be like, “Should we play some?” “Yeah, sure!” And it was the only thing consistently, for the whole week, that we both really wanted to do every time, being like, “Should we play some more Gloomhaven?” “Yeah! Let’s do it!”

**Quinns**: Matt, I have a question. Are you still a little rat lady?

**Matt**: Yeah!

**Quinns** [deep growl of ambiguous emotion]: Aaahhhh.

**Matt**: I am! Although I’m pretty close to not being. I think I’ve got to do one more- Basically yeah, at any point, I will transcend from being a rat lady. But you know what! I’m not bored of it. I’m still having a lovely time being a rat lady. I think I’ve got up to like level six, or seven, and each time you level up you just get a couple of cards that you can add to your hand, and you roughly get more powerful, but some of the stuff you can do later on is just bonkers fun.

**Quinns**: Oh yeah.

**Matt**: I can explode things with my mind now. [chuckles] I just walk into a room and just go, [psychic energy blast sound effect] *Mrrrrrrrrm*! And an enemy just dies immediately, and then does damage to everything around it?

**Quinns**: So let’s talk a bit about… You, of course, did the exhaustive half hour video review of Gloomhaven-

**Matt**: Yeah.

**Quinns**: -which now, goodness gracious, it’s up to like seven hundred, six hundred thousand hits on Youtube or something?

**Matt**: It’s a game that really interests people.

**Quinns**: Yeah.

**Matt**: Because it’s just the scope of it, and people say it’s good, and I think that’s enough really. It’s like, “This is a massive big board undertaking.” It’s kind of like D&D for people who don’t really feel in the mood for pretending to be characters.

**Quinns**: Yeah, it’s just crunching and leveling and crunching and leveling.

**Matt**: But then not exactly, no, because there’s story, and there’s theme.

**Quinns**: Yeah, of course.

**Matt**: There’s actually a lot of character to it. That’s what’s kind of mind-blowing, is you find yourself having a card and being like, “What should we do in this situation?” And as I’ve played more and more of it, you realize, sometimes it’s lovely because sometimes you think, “I’m gonna do this because it feels like what my character would do,” and then on the back it’s like, “Oh, you get some special effects because you’re specifically playing that character.” So the game kind of knows, it’s like, “Yeah, that might be the sort of thing that that character would do.”

**Quinns**: So my question was gonna be, having now played it for so long, is there a sort of new lens from which you’ve come to appreciate it? Is there something you didn’t realize about it before?

**Matt**: A bunch of things, actually! I’m actually thinking quite seriously about making a kind of video about things I wish I’d known about, or really kind of like a starter set for if you want to play Gloomhaven, then here’s some stuff you should know, here’s some stuff that’s useful, here’s some stuff that you might want to think about. And you know, if people have some extra stuff about this stuff, then feel free to get in contact in the comments about this podcast, and let me know what sort of stuff you’d be interested in. But yeah, first and foremost, it’s reminded me that it’s just a fabulous game. I love it. I love playing it. And it just doesn't get boring. And I think the key thing with that is, yeah, when you level up and get new skills and stuff, it’s nice, but it’s not why you’re playing it. You’re playing it because the turn-by-turn combat loop is really fun? And really satisfying? And when everything clicks and you’re working well as a team and it’s all going beautifully, it’s just so, so cool? And also, you do kind of get into the world and the characters. So mainly I’ve realized, it’s amazing. [Quinns laughing] Secondly I’ve realized that to play it for any meaningful amount of time without putting a lot of the components back in the box and buying a couple of apps on an iPad, or downloading, or using a web browser for helpers, is a bit insane. Because we have a thing… When I reviewed Kemet recently, a lot of people said, “Hey, why are you complaining about the fact you only get one little booklet of powers? Have you ever heard of a photocopier?” And for anybody listening at home who asked that question, I have actually heard of photocopiers, yeah, I’m quite familiar with them. But we gotta review what’s in the box! We gotta think about what’s the experience in the box. And Gloomhaven, I perversely -- as I talked about in the review -- found a real satisfaction in doing all of the fiddly admin, of moving things around and basically being a human spreadsheet, but with… What are they called, the little maths things with the pegs?

**Quinns and Ben**: Oh, abacus.

**Matt**: Yeah. It’s basically doing an Excel spreadsheet with an abacus.

**Quinns**: Hang on. Ben and I answered that at the same time, we can-

**Matt**: Have a high five, yeah.

[high five sound]

**Ben**: Abacus high five, the third one of the day! [Quinns laughing]

**Matt** [to the tune of Don’t Stop Me Now]: Abacus good time.

**Matt, Quinns, and Ben** [to the tune of Don’t Stop Me Now]: Abacus good time!

**Matt**: So, yeah, I liked that, but I could see why you wouldn’t. But! When you’ve got these apps, they take away a lot of the stuff which is kind of rubbish. And that’s really interesting. And I think I must have spent a tenner on apps now, because I bought two for a fiver each. Don’t regret it at all. Perfect. Brilliant. I’m probably gonna get one of those little dividers made out of laser stuff?

**Quinns**: Oh, the custom-made box inserts.

**Matt**: Yup. Yup. Yup.

**Quinns**: Don’t they cost like, fifty, sixty quid?

**Matt**: Yup. They do. Yeah. I was gonna buy one, but then I remembered I met a guy at UK Games Expo who said, “If you ever want or need to look at them or whatever, then-” So I’m gonna get sent one, and if it’s good, I will let people know.

**Quinns**: Confirmation there that Matt and I are living the dream.

**Matt**: Yeah, no, it’s like I usually would think, “Nah, I don’t need one of those.” But I thought, “You know what? I’m tryna…” Because it’s such a beast, right? Gloomhaven is such a big beast, and even though I’ve played it now for probably about eighty or ninety hours, I maybe feel like I’m only halfway through the campaign? Maybe?

**Quinns**: Mmm.

**Matt**: If that? We’ve unlocked like, *one* new character? [chuckles] But I feel like we’re gonna unlock a bunch soon, now. But I’m interested in ways that it really can be streamlined, by the community, by like, you know, what happens if you have got a proper inlay insert to organize it? What happens if you are using an app? And I’m using an app to track the enemies’ decks and health, and also a second app which allows you to basically type in the number of the mission, and it allows you to set up each of the rooms in the dungeon without showing you what’s in the rest of it, which is really neat.

**Ben**: That’s always very satisfying.

**Matt**: Yeah!

**Ben**: When I DM in D&D, I used to give people, “Here’s a map! And where do you want to go?” And now I just say, “You see a room.”

**Matt** [talking over Ben]: This is the room.

**Ben**: Yeah.

**Matt**: Yeah.

**Ben**: If you want a map, you’ll have to draw one.

**Matt**: Yup. Yeah. So it basically just does exactly the manual. It’s such a simple idea for an app. It’s literally just like, “Here’s a PDF of the manual, but we’ve covered it with blocks that you have to tap on to make them go away.” [chuckling] So it’s just like, “I don’t want to see that yet!” So that’s really lovely. The final thing it’s really taught me is just like, it’s made to have fun with, so you can just dip (?). I now know the rules for Gloomhaven in a way, honestly, I thought I did before, and I didn’t? And I’m sure I knew most of them when I reviewed it, to be honest? But it’s just so many rules, and they’re so fiddly, and there are so many very specific edge cases that because the core of the game and cycling through your deck of cards is so good and so fun, you can play that game and get a lot of rules wrong and still have basically as much fun. It doesn't matter, it doesn't get in the way of it. But when you really do know all of it, you know when you just fudge it. There was one mission in particular where it was like, at the end of it, out of the blue, it was like, “Oh! Everyone who was in this mission immediately gets this amazing reward!” And I was like, “Whoa!” But it made me feel like, “Oh, but that sucks, because I sometimes play this with my mate Lawrie, and he’s not gonna get that,” and so I was like, “Hang on a minute! It’s a book!” I’m just gonna be, like, everyone I play this with from now on is gonna get that reward. “Oh, we did a mission earlier that means you get this.”

**Quinns**: Yeah yeah yeah, for sure.

**Matt**: Because I’m just like, yeah I’m not gonna just… [deep breath] Yeah, so there’s elements of that, and it’s a reminder that it’s like, this is a system designed to allow you and your friends to have fun, and it’s like, if something doesn't seem fun… And you know, in our last podcast we were talking about finales that aren’t satisfying.

**Quinns**: Oh yeah!

**Matt**: That happens a lot in Gloomhaven sometimes, if you’re really close and you just don’t quite do it? Because you don’t get cut down by a boss and then like, “Oh nooooo! They defeated us because they’re too powerful!” It’s like, “You didn’t manage to kill that skeleton this turn and you needed to,” and so it’s like, there’s four people in a room who didn’t quite manage to kill one enemy, and it’s like, “Mission failed.” Because you ran out of time. And the timer, it’s a system that works, and it’s quite exciting when it works, but when it doesn't, you’re just like, “Oh. We didn’t do that mission so we have to do it again?” And sometimes you’re like, “Yeah, we did it.” [laughing] And that’s fine! If the idea of having to do the whole thing again just doesn't seem fun, just don’t! [awkward silence] [fanfare noise] Duh-duhhhh!

**Quinns**: I mean, it’s what we always say is that the board game police, they’re out there, but they probably won’t find you.

**Matt**: They probably won’t. Just make sure that before you have that conversation with your friends about, “Should we just pretend that we did kill that skeleton and didn’t miss that hit, because then we can-”

**Quinns**: There’s not a narc in the room!

**Matt**: Yeah, just close the blinds. Just speak in hushed tones.

**Quinns**: Mmm. Mmm.

**Matt**: Just be careful.

[funky sting]

## Lords of Hellas [00:36:20]

**Quinns**: Well, speaking of big boxes then, you’ve also had a little poke of Lords of Hellas, haven’t you?

**Matt**: I have. I’ve been poking that a lot actually. It’s been on my table maybe three or four times, because I was just really interested in it. I wrote it off for a long time, just because you open up the box and it has a very large model of a Greek lady with unrealistically positioned and weighted bosoms, and you think, [groaning] “Aouff, one of these games.”

**Quinns**: That’s the first thing you see when you open the box.

**Matt**: Exactly. You just think, “Alright, it’s a titty miniatures game. There’s a market for this stuff. Fair enough.” As it turns out, it isn’t, and actually most of the other miniatures are great, and they’re just big robotic Greek mythological cybernetic creatures. Which is fun.

**Quinns**: I’ve been hearing this name for a long time. Matt, what is happening in Lords of Hellas?

**Matt**: It’s Greek war… stuff… but… with robots.

**Quinns**: That’s a direct quote from the back of the box.

**Matt**: It is, that’s what it says. But it doesn't make sense, because all of the enemies in it are big monstrous cybernetic Cerberuses and Hydras and all that stuff, but then the map is just old-school Greece countryside, but every now and then you’ve got a motorway-style bridge, and you’re like, “What’s going on with this?” They’ve got some really interesting ecological values, of like, “Yeah, we’re gonna really mess up anything that... Humans, animals, cybernetic as hell. The countryside? Leave it alone!” These are the people who would campaign against wind farms but will happily turn their dog into a laser-firing machine. [Quinns laughing]

**Ben**: No one wants robot grass though, that’s why. [Quinns chuckling]

**Matt**: Well, apparently, yeah, apparently not. Anyway, it’s interesting. It’s quite exciting in some places, and every time I play it, I like it kind of slightly less?

**Quinns**: Okay.

**Matt**: It has that thing that Inis has of a horrible explanation in the fact that the game is actually quite easy to play, but you can win it in like four or five different ways? And then it’s always that thing of halfway through the game, people going, “Sorry, can you explain, how do I win?” You know, it has too many win conditions in a way, and it sort of feels like some of the win conditions in the game exist just to counter other ones, in a way, you know?

**Quinns**: Okay?

**Matt**: The most interesting thing about it is fighting monsters, and it is really fun.

**Quinns**: Okay?

**Matt**: Because it means that basically you do a thing where you go into a fight, and before- At the start of the fight, you then draw the majority of the cards that you will probably use in the fight, so it means you go into the fight and you don’t even really know if you’re equipped for it or not. And then each time you stay in the fight, you have to then spend some of the cards in your hand to stay in the fight without being hurt badly. When you’ve got three injuries and all three of your stats have been nerfed with an injury, you get knocked out and you’re done. But, effectively, it’s a push-your-luck thing of going, “Eugh, should I stay in one more round? Is it worth it, is it worth it?” Whilst the player to your left is the person who draws two cards from the monster attack deck and chooses the thing that they think is the most horrible. And it’s really fun, because it’s properly like rolling the dice, you don’t know what’s gonna happen, it’s a thrill, another player gets to choose the specific flavor of misfortune that gets served on your plate. But because of that, the win criteria of “kill three monsters” ends up being the one most people get most of the time, because it’s the most fun thing to do. And also, it’s a thing to do whereby even if it looks quite unlikely that they’re gonna do it, you’ve got no idea. Whereas the other win conditions say like, you know, “Hold two areas on the board in a traditional area control bit,” you can see that happening. That is like an absolute. It’s like, “If we don’t take that off them, then they’re gonna win the game by this.”

**Quinns**: Right, whereas this is a bit obfuscated.

**Matt**: Yeah, whereas it’s like, “Well, Matt’s about to go and punch a gryphon” -- I don’t think gryphon’s in it -- “he’s gonna go and punch Medusa.”

**Quinns**: Okay.

**Matt**: “And… he’s probably gonna die, because he’s not got any cards, and ddddddddd.” But then I might just draw the cards exactly I need, and it’s like, “Oh I’ve won the game.” So-

**Quinns**: That sounds infuriating.

**Matt**: It kinda doesn't work, and it’s interesting. I was talking about this, I briefly mentioned it in my video review of Kemet and the expansions and had some people say, “Oh actually no, it’s not unbalanced, and the monster strategy doesn't really work, and most people agree it’s balanced because you can stop people doing it,” and it’s almost like people arguing that the monster strategy *is* very good, which means players have to actively stop people from doing it immediately. And it’s like, okay, I get that, but it’s like, when something is balanced by the meta, how good is that for when you’re just playing a game one or two times with some friends around a table? It’s a strange thing.

**Ben**: Yeah, if you’ve got five different win conditions, and one is demonstrably better, and the other four exist to stop that one being too good, then you’ve not balanced [unintelligible].

**Matt** [talking over Ben]: I mean, I don’t know, it’s one of those things where every time I play it I’m like, I can’t tell, but it always seems to lean towards that. And I’m not entirely even sure if it is a balance thing. I think it might be a fun thing. Because the other thing is, I realized after playing it four times that I still didn’t really know the rules for combat? For like, my army fighting your army? And that’s partly because it’s like a shopping list of things that add a plus one to your combat value, but also it’s just like, fighting other people’s armies isn’t fun. Fighting monsters is fun. But getting into a war with someone else? It’s not fun. Players don’t want to do it, because it’s not satisfying, it’s messy, and so it’s this weird game where you’ve got ancient cyber-Greece! Area control! Like, “Who’s going to war?” “Oh I don’t know. Probably no one. [Quinns laughing] I might take that but I mainly just want the temple.” And it becomes this weirdly sexless bloodlust thing where everyone’s happy to go and kill the monsters. Especially because the monsters are these giant bloody cool minis, and you do want to go and bash up a minotaur. So in that regard it’s really quite successful in my mind, of it feels like a game of area control and going off fighting big monsters, and fighting the big epic creatures feels epic in a way that the big creatures in Rising Sun was just rubbish. So it’s interesting. But also it’s a rod for its own back, I feel, because it’s a game with one of these- It kind of has a laboriously slightly randomized setup, of being like, “Ah, but use this card, or use one of these cards for this,” so every time you set up, it’s kind of like slightly different. But not really? Kind of always plays in the same way? And there are four playable characters in the base game that all have a little power, and all slightly change up the way you play, but not massively? And then the creatures, which do different things, et cetera. And it feels like a game a bit like Root, where it’s like, the first few times you play it, it’s really fun. The more you play it, and the more you get to the grittiness of it, the more I think, “Actually, I don’t know how- I don’t think this is very good.” And it would be so easy to make it a game where you’d be like, “Yeah, this is great,” by just having loads of playable characters, loads of monsters that can pop up. And they kind of can’t do that, because they’ve just gone so plastic-heavy.

**Quinns**: This, I believe, was a Kickstarter game, and like so many Kickstarter games, it’s… You don’t have the luxury -- when you’re designing a Kickstarter game -- of just throwing away the rest of your game and keeping the mechanic that works really well? Because, you know, Lords of Hellas was sold as a million cool miniatures on a map, whereas actually what might have been great about the design isn’t necessarily that. But you did remind me of Root when you were talking about the victory conditions thing, actually, because in Root the very clear victory point marker -- you win if you hit thirty victory points -- but that means if players have bad early turns, they lag on the victory point track. But to keep those players from being checked out, there is another win condition where if you control all four fox clearings, or all four rabbit clearings, you can just win instantly. And so when I was complaining about players being left behind in veeps, in my Root review, people would come and go, “Ah, but of course, that’s why the other win condition is there,” [Matt chuckling] and I engaged a couple of these commenters, being, “Have you *ever* seen someone do that?” And obviously, people have done it in the history of Root, but those commenters were like, [insufferably smug voice] “What about the other win condition?” When I say, “Have you ever seen anyone do it?” they go, [weakly] “No.” [Matt laughing]

**Ben**: Having played Root, the alternative win condition is basically, “Hey, if you’re losing, you just need to control a *third* of the board in a territory control game. [**Matt**: Just do that.] And then you win! It’s easy!”

**Quinns**: And you better hope that other players don’t notice you’re doing that, because if they do, one of them will instantly stop you.

**Matt**: It just becomes a fascinating thing where you’ve either got the control two areas, or you’ve got control five different temples, I think? Which basically means control areas-

**Quinns**: This is in Lords of Hellas.

**Matt**: Yeah. But not in contiguous areas, just control five specific areas on the board. And then the other one is, if one of the big statues gets fully built, whoever is holding that statue at the end of three turns in that area is the winner? Again, this is the thing, with like the big-titties statue. It’s just like, you never see it! It stays in the box, because it’s so rare that you play a game that actually sees any *one* of these statues that get built up gradually throughout the game reaching beyond ankles and knees.

**Quinns**: I was gonna say, breasticles aside, the construction of these multistage huge statues on the board was the thing that caught my eye the most about Lords of Hellas.

**Matt**: Yeah, it doesn't really happen. Usually, you’ll have two of them go about halfway. I think I’ve seen one being fully built once, in about four games? So it’s like, it’ll happen in twenty percent of games, twenty-five percent of games, and then it will be one of the three things? So again, you’ve still got a similar problem to Rising Sun of you’ve got a lot of big chunks of plastic in a box that- The game doesn't really use them. But yeah, so you have this situation whereby only one of the mechanics is really, really fun to engage with, and it’s just sort of- There’s something about it which is slightly… Sad is too strong a word, but slightly melancholic about having people saying, “Oh yeah, actually the game is balanced, it’s just whenever you see people trying to fight the monsters, you just need to basically cut their Achilles’ heels. You need to just stop them from doing that. And there are ways you can do that.” It’s like, okay, I believe that’s true. I believe there is a meta of Lords of Hellas games where they’ve realized that as long as you know that if people are doing that you need to stop them from doing it, it does balance the game out and it all works quite well. But then it means you’re just purposefully trying to stop players from doing the thing which I think is the only thing about the game which is really fun and really solid? Of being like, “No! Don’t let them do that! Don’t let them do that!” [Quinns laughing] When actually it’s like, most time, even though it kind of did… It’s a game that doesn't outstay its welcome, to be honest. Each game I’ve played usually doesn't last longer than an hour, sometimes they’re over very quickly. And up until the point where you go, “Oh! Oh they’ve won,” watching people fighting monsters is quite fun. But yeah, I would have loved to see a bit more of a scaled-down version of the game about being like, “Who can be the best Greek hero?” Going on quests in this game, I should point out -- this is like there’s so many ideas -- and it’s just an unbelievably damp squid. There’s an area on the board where there’s a quest. You need to have the criteria of certain stats to go on the quest. When you go on the quest, your hero character then just disappears for upwards of one to three turns, and they’re just off doing the quest. And then when they’ve done the quest, you get a reward, which might be like, two hoplites, two little army people.

**Ben**: It’s not like going on a quest, it’s like being Penelope sat at home, just waiting for Ulysses to come back, basically, and just going, “Oh, I wonder what he’s up to.”

**Matt**: Yeah. I thought you were talking about- I thought you were gonna say, “Being Penelope waiting for the Thunderbirds to come back.” [Ben laughing] Because I’m cultured!

**Quinns**: There’s two levels this podcast is accounting for (?).

**Matt**: Yeah, I’m on the low-brow tree, but that’s fine. But yeah, it’s weird. It’s like you’re technically going on an epic quest, but in reality it feels like a sitcom where a character is said to have gone on holiday, but actually just… You know like, “Oh yeah, Donny went to prison,” it’s like, no they just couldn’t make it for a season or something, you know? Disappear, and then just arrive back, and they’re like, “Hey, what happened?” “Hey I got this golden sheepskin!” “Cool.”

**Quinns**: So, Lords of Hellas, out of ten? [Matt laughing] Sorry, that was me-

**Matt**: That’s a joke.

**Quinns**: -being facetious, yeah.

**Matt**: I mean, basically, I’m at the point now where I feel like I’ve played so much of it, and it is a very popular game still. There’s some really cool things about it, it just doesn't quite hang together, and I’m wondering if there’s a way it can be cobbled together via other boxes and special nails.

[funky sting]

## Cerberus [00:48:02]

**Quinns**: I feel like we’ve been unusually negative on this podcast, so I’m gonna do two minutes on Cerberus, then talk about an unexpected game that I’ve been having more fun with.

**Ben**: So spoiler warning, you’re probably not gonna be positive about Cerberus, then. [All laughing]

**Quinns**: [high-pitched] What makes you think that? [Ben laughing] [normal voice] No, Cerberus is an interesting game that came out from… uhhhhhhhh… France. That’s the extent-

[Matt cackling]

**Ben**: The country?

**Quinns**: Yes, that’s the extent of what I [unintelligble].

**Matt** [talking over Quinns]: Inventor of dogs. France?

**Quinns**: This is a well-researched segment I’m doing here. It is a sort of party-ish game for three to seven players. You’ve done some kind of raid, like a sort of panty raid into the underworld. Because the character cards depict you being modern explorers, or one of you looks a bit villainous, one of you’s a dog. But you’ve run into the underworld, and now you’re running back out. That’s when the game begins. You’ve got a sort of track of stones to get out of Hades, but Cerberus is always moving forward. Players have to play cards that always give you a choice: Either it’s something that only benefits you a bit, or benefits you *even less*, but benefits other players more. So on my turn I might say, “Matt, look, I’m gonna move you and I’m gonna move Ben, and then I’m not gonna move, but on *your* turn, you’ll play the same card and move *me*, right?” And then it gets to Matt’s turn and Matt goes, “No, I’m moving myself even more.” And I go, “What?!” And then we’ve now played enough cards that Cerberus moves and I get eaten. But here’s the catch! The first players eaten by Cerberus -- not all of you, but the first ones -- keep playing and play cards to move Cerberus to pull other players back. It’s a whole push-and-pull thing. This is where I would sort of circle the fact that I didn’t like it, but I want to move on to something more fun. Didn’t particularly like Cerberus! We played it twice in two styles, the first of which was playing it sort of naturally, which involved a lot of talking, a lot of just exchanging, “Well, you didn’t move me last turn, so why-” Which for a game when you’re running away from a dog from Hell didn’t feel particularly apt?

**Matt**: Sounds like it. [exasperated spouse voice] “Can we please have this conversation later, Barbara?”

**Quinns**: Yeah, exactly. So that turned the game into like an hour and a half long parental bickering thing. So that wasn’t great. But then I thought, hey. Hey. What if we played this game thematically, and like play it with a timer? There’s no talking allowed, because your turn can be no longer than twenty seconds, just play a card, go. That was also tremendously unsatisfying, [laughs] so.

## Bunny Kingdom: In the Sky [00:50:12]

**Quinns**: I’m gonna move on to something that’s quite good that I think will see a little glimmer of interest in Matt’s eye. I played the expansion to Bunny Kingdom.

**Matt**: Mmmmm! I saw that!

**Ben**: Matt’s eyebrows just flew up to the ceiling there.

**Matt**: Yeah, I’ve caught most of them I think. No I saw that on Instagram. If you don’t know you can follow Shut Up & Sit Down on Instagram.

**Quinns**: What was that website Matt?

**Matt**: Instagram. It’s short for instant… gram. And it’s a website full of photographs, most of them are tinged with a slightly orange and pink effect, and yeah, it’s very pleasant, and it’s fun because we’ve got an instant gram for Shut Up & Sit Down, and I sometimes post Instagram photos of what I’m playing, and sometimes Quinns does that as well, but it means sometimes we haven’t spoken for a day or two, and he’ll be like, [high-pitched] “Oh, you’re playing that!” and I’ll be like, [high-pitched] “Oh, he’s playing that!”

**Quinns**: You know what, Matt-

**Matt**: It means I saw that and I was like, “You’re playing Bunny Kingdoms with Chris Bratt!”

**Quinns**: I did play that.

**Matt**: And we played Bunny Kingdoms-

**Quinns**: At the Gathering of Friends!

**Matt**: And I was like, “I really like this,” and you were like, “Eh, it’s alright.” And then, to rub salt into my wounds, [Quinns laughing] you’re over there playing Bunny Kingdoms again, like nothing happened.

**Quinns**: You know what Matt, I don’t regret it. I had so many bunnies. [Matt sighing] Some would say a kingdom of bunnies. We must have talked about this game on a previous podcast?

**Matt**: I’m sure we did. I think you were like, “Eh, it’s okay,” and I was like, “I like it.”

**Quinns**: Well, so I wanted to play the expansion, because I really like expansions. I like the art of Bunny Kingdom, and the idea that they extended the world. The twenty-second pitch of Bunny Kingdom, if you’re not aware: It’s a drafting game where you’re drafting grid references, and you put a bunny on the grid reference. Hopefully you’re getting contiguous bits of territory as the board fills up with bunnies, and what you want is territories that contain towns and rare resources, because you’re gonna multiply the number of towns with the number of resources in every bunny fiefdom.

**Matt**: Bunny Battleship Bingo.

**Quinns**: Uhh… let’s go with that. But the expansion is one of the most creative and lovely things I’ve ever seen. So already, Bunny Kingdom was quite an inventive world, right? Because rather than settling cities, it’s bunnies! They’re farming carrots, they’re, you know, collecting pearls. It’s all very twee. The expansion turns the tweeness so high that it cracks a smile even on my face. So the expansion is called Bunny Kingdom: In The Sky. It adds a secondary board, which is the bunnies building cities… in a cloud. What resources can you get in clouds? Well you can get ice cream. You can get colored jelly. You can get unicorns. It even adds Chocobos from Final Fantasy as a resource you can get on the main board?

**Matt**: What?!

**Quinns**: They’re like Chocobos with the serial numbers filed off, but yeah.

**Matt**: Okay, right, fine.

**Quinns**: Not that you could do that to a Chocobo.

**Matt**: [laughs] Yeah. Well it’d be fine if they’re on the claws? Let’s not get into it.

**Quinns**: Yeah, so this adds essentially yet more cards. It makes the game longer, because there’s just more territory to fill up. But how the clouds work is absolutely fascinating if you’re a math dweeb like me, or Richard Garfield, inventor of Bunny Kingdom! Let’s not forget, Bunny Kingdom was invented by the guy who made Magic: The Gathering. So, unlike the main board which is pretty straightforward in trying to create blocks of bunnies with the correct resources, the cloud board is bizarre, because it’s full of all these magical resources, which would create unbelievable scores if you were playing just on the base game, but you can’t get things off the clouds onto the main board? So you’re trying to connect up cloud settlements, which are worthless, and then use chimneys and rainbows and sky ships to get those resources back down to the main board where all your bunnies are. It’s got more of the fabulous art that we loved so much in the base game, but leaning so heavily into what made the game special in the first place? So first off, the theme is even better with the expansion. Second off, the game is that much richer and more complicated, and third off, Matt, in that Instagram, I wasn’t playing Bunny Kingdom: In the Skies [sic]. I’d hacked the game to make my own version of Bunny Kingdom.

**Matt** [incredulous]: What?!

**Quinns**: [laughs] So check this out. We never normally do this on Shut Up & Sit Down, but I changed some of the rules, because everyone I know, including us in that past podcast, complains about the same thing in Bunny Kingdom, which ties into what we talked about at the end of last podcast, where games that end with a lot of scoring?

**Matt**: Right, yeah.

**Quinns**: The thing everyone hates -- including us -- about Bunny Kingdom is that at the end of a game, you reveal all of these hidden scoring cards, and then you go, “Oh, I scored 200 points during the game, but I’ve got another 150 points based on these cards that you didn’t know I had.” It’s tons of admin.

**Matt**: Yeah, so you just get rid of them.

**Quinns**: I didn’t get rid of them, I got rid of twenty percent of them. So the game had like eighty percent of the end game scoring. More importantly, I got rid of the twenty percent that were the hardest and slowest to count.

**Matt**: Yeah, that makes sense, yeah.

**Quinns**: And I gotta say, I certainly didn’t feel that I missed them. I enjoyed the game much more. So in addition to loving the expansion, I just loved playing without the most tedious end game scoring cards. If there’s a reason that breaks the game that I haven’t figured out, do leave a comment, but I had a really good time with Bunny Kingdom: In The Sky.

**Matt**: Hey, nobody can break the fact that you had a good time.

**Quinns**: No! They can’t take that away!

**Matt**: No.

**Quinns**: You can tell me that-

**Matt**: They can try.

**Quinns**: -I did it wrong.

**Matt**: They can really try. They can try so hard!

**Quinns**: They’re not gonna succeed.

**Matt**: They just can’t.

**Ben**: What Quinns is saying, basically, Matt, is not only did he play a game you love without you, and an expansion without you, he also tried to make the game *more fun* [Quinns laughing] without you.

**Matt**: Ah, it’s just deeply upsetting.

**Quinns**: The layers.

**Matt**: I mean, [sighs] god. I do love that idea of theme though. It’s very Jack and the Beanstalk, isn’t it?

**Quinns**: One of the new resources on the board is beans from a giant beanstalk.

**Matt**: Yeah. Of course. The idea of being like, “You’re not gonna believe it up there. There’s unbelievable riches. But good luck getting them back down alive!”

**Quinns**: It’s really nice.

**Matt**: And if they do, it’ll make you unhappy.

**Quinns**: Also, it uses a mechanic that- I mean, this is now deep into Bunny Kingdom lore, but Bunny Kingdom spaces can only have one building on them, whereas the clouds start with a bunch of- All the new special resources like ice cream and magic beans are actually a token on the clouds, which is unusual for Bunny Kingdom. What it means is you can’t build on the clouds -- because guess what, clouds aren’t a particularly firm foundation -- which means you’re more beholden to the draft. I feel like talking about an expansion for a game we only talked about multiple years ago is going to be somewhat impenetrable for our audience, but I will just tease, if you like the sound of this, if you like the sound of a drafting city-building game full of bunnies and fabulous Chocobos and beanstalks, then I think I’m gonna do some coverage on Shut Up & Sit Down!

**Matt** [high-pitched]: On our website?!

**Quinns** [high-pitched]: On the website!

**Matt**: [high-pitched] On the website? [normal voice] I mean yeah, I thought that Bunny Kingdom is quite wonderful. It’s definitely like it wasn’t quite for us, you know? I think when we played it, for context, the night before for the first time we’d played Brass: Birmingham, [Quinns laughing] so we maybe weren’t in the mood, but it definitely was something that was fun, and probably meaty if you’re a family with some kids. But for us, we were like, “Ah there’s not quite enough,” but it sounds like clouds have added just enough substance unbelievably, and that’s it to interest Mr. Smith.

**Quinns**: Hey, I like that. That was funny.

**Matt**: Such a funny little, just a little-

**Ben**: Always the reaction you want, isn’t it? No laughter, just, [flatly] “That was funny. The joke was done. Well done.”

[Matt mumbling in the background]

## Silk [00:56:55]

**Quinns**: I have to shoot off and catch a train, but before I do that, Matt, do you want to tease your Silk review?

**Matt**: Uh, okay, yeah. You can check out my review of Silk on shutupandsitdown.com, or our Youtube channel. It’s not a game that most people are gonna be talking about or looking about. It’s a niche little thing. It’s a very small box. You have a grid of things, you have little silkworms that move around on it, and it’s basically an abstract… [struggling to find the right words] economic… farming… worker placement thing… but…

**Quinns**: But for an abstract game that looks pretty that we’ve talked about on the podcast, you can now see it in glorious video Technicolor.

**Matt**: You can, and it’s worth a look. It’s one of these games where honestly, I’m not gonna lie, it’s not amazing. It’s not like, “You gotta get this game.” But it’s interesting. It does tick some boxes, and I think it serves a purpose in a bunch of people’s collections, so it’s worth having a look at the video, and seeing **why**!

**Quinns**: Wow! That was lovely!

## Outro [00:57:50]

**Quinns**: That’s been the Shut Up & Sit Down podcast, everybody. Bit of a rushed episode, but hey, trains wait for no man, except my uncle Adam, who owns all the trains.

**Matt**: He drives trains, though, doesn't he?

**Quinns**: Yes, he does, yeah.

**Matt**: So sometimes they wait to him to the detriment of everyone else, frankly.

**Quinns**: Yeah, that’s where we’re at. Ben, thank you very much for joining us once again.

**Ben**: Thank you once again for having me.

**Quinns**: And Matthew Lees, thank you very much for joining me.

**Matt**: ‘S’alright.

**Quinns**: Is anyone gonna thank me?

**Matt**: Nahhh. Well, thank you for… coming?

**Quinns**: Well Matt, I have a short prepared statement, I’d like to say. [Matt laughing] Thank you very much for listening to shut up, shut up, shut up…

**Matt**: Bye!

**Quinns**: Bye!

**Ben**: Bye!

[Matt laughing]

[funky outro music]