Cascadia Review - One Board Family

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2-Player Games

Co-op Games

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Drafting Games

Party Games

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Previews

Interviews

News

Opinion

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by

Ric White

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5 min

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As I’ve mentioned

in the past

, I sometimes have a bit of a problem when it comes to buying board games. This is especially an issue late at night or early in the morning when I’m just browsing online. I seem to be more easily sucked in by game concepts, and my FOMO rages like a bull that’s heard that the grass is way greener on the other side and will be better than any other grass that it’s ever had before.

Then the reality sets in when the game finally arrives, and I’m immediately disappointed with myself. That sort of impulse buying is how I ended up with a copy of

Cascadia

a while back. This time was really bad, though, as I actually didn’t even remember that I bought the game until it arrived. When I started reading the rules, I again was disappointed, thinking that I’d sunk quite a bit of money into something I wasn’t going to enjoy.

And yet, there was so much buzz. Everyone seemed to want a copy of the game. So I did what any good board gamer would do… I quickly put up my copy in an auction and made all of my money back (if not a little more).

But as the buzz kept going, that FOMO started creeping back up again, and then, on an impulse, I purchased a copy while visiting a local game shop. A few days ago, I broke out the game with my buddy Adrian, and we played a few rounds.

So was this epic (really?) journey worth it in the end to finally get to play one of the Top 100 games on BGG?

Well, maybe…

Living Off the Land

Cascadia

is a very straightforward game. The rules may, in fact, be the most simple of any game that I’ve reviewed in a while.

But hey, before we get started, if you’re looking for a lot of theme here, you’re gonna be sad. You should get over that right now.

Each player begins the game with a tile made up of three hexagons that feature different types of habitat, like desert or rivers. Over the course of the game, you’ll obtain new tiles that you’ll add to your map from four faceup options. You don’t have to match up the different terrain types, but there are points to be had if you do. At the end of the game, you’ll get points for your largest areas of each type of terrain, with the player with the largest areas getting some bonus points.

Wild for Wildlife

Oh, and there are some animals, too. Five to be exact. These are featured on small circular tokens that you place on your land tokens.

Whenever you grab a new land token, you’ll also take the animal token that’s next to it. You can only place certain animals on your land tokens, so you’ll have to carefully decide which land tile and animal token set you’re taking each turn so that you’ve got a place for everything.

At the end of the game, animal tokens will score based on different rules that can change up each game. Foxes usually get points for the animals that are near them. Eagles get points by being further away from other eagles. There are four different scoring options for each animal, so you can mix and match to your heart’s content.

At the end of the game, players add up all the points they got from land and from animals, and the person with the most points wins!

It Seems So Simple

So that’s it. Them’s the rules. Yes, there’s something about pine cones in there, but it’s not that complicated.

But it’s the decision-making within the simplicity where

Cascadia

is said to shine. When you get a new tile, you have to constantly balance between whether or not you want to make a terrain area larger, or set up your animal tiles to get more points. Sometimes you can do both, and yay, hooray! But other times you can’t, and you will be sad.

But you’ve also got to consider the animal token that comes with your new terrain token. Do you have a place to put it? There will be four open places at any one time, so you’ll usually have plenty of options. But what if you don’t? Are you willing to give up placing an animal token so that you can have the right land tile?

In some games like this, you find yourself regretting a move that you made earlier in the game, as it might completely ruin a strategy or an approach to winning. Fortunately, with the amount of variety in the tiles that you’ll see and the frequency at which different animals will show up as the game continues, you likely won’t be stuck in such a situation with

Cascadia

. You’ll just say, “Aw, shucks!” then be ready to move on to another plan that will likely get you about as many points.

Worth It?

So in the end, the big question is… is

Cascadia

worth all the hype?

For me… not really. I mean, the game is fine. It plays smoothly, I could teach it to anyone in about five minutes, and we would likely finish a game with any number of players in about 20 minutes. There’s enough thinky bits to keep me engaged and entertained, and you do get that feeling of accomplishment when you’ve set up a big point score with some of your terrain tiles or animal tokens.

So what the game aims to do, the game does well, and that’s really all I can ask of the designers. It’s also very versatile. I could play this game with a bunch of newer gamers, or I could break this out at a gaming convention. In both scenarios, I think everyone would enjoy themselves.

But for me, after hearing so many people gush about the title and seeing the big prices people were paying for copies, I was expecting something amazing. That’s not really what I got. I don’t think there wasn’t anything that I hadn’t seen before in a game. There weren’t the most amazing components and artwork – they were fine, but not breathtaking.

This game is currently ranked on BoardGameGeek above classics like

Five Tribes

and

Lords of Waterdeep

. If given the choice, I would easily pick to play those two titles over

Cascadia

. And while I don’t see myself ever letting go of my copy of

Five Tribes

, I think I could be easily convinced to trade away or sell

Cascadia

in a year or two.

So in the end, sure, it’s good and it’s fun. But if you’ve heard the hype and think you’ve got to get your own hands on a copy, I would temper your expectations a bit before opening the box.

You can purchase a copy of

Cascadia

at your local game store or online

through Amazon

today.

Highs

Incredibly simple rules that take less than 5 minutes

Opportunities to increase the variability from game to game

Lows

Nothing particularly new or innovative about the game

Doesn’t live up to the hype

Complexity

Time Commitment

Replayability

family game

142

light strategy

223

nature

21

tile placement

34

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Written by

Ric White

I teach math for a living and enjoy time with my super awesome wife, awesome kids and almost as awesome dog. I like card and board games, and I truly enjoy learning and experiencing new games whenever I can.

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AQUA: Biodiversity in the Oceans Review - One Board Family

1 year ago

[…] tile that someone else might need. The game shares similarities to other tile placement games like Cascadia, Akropolis and Calico. It’s worth noting that AQUA has caused some analysis paralysis (A.P) […]

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