

# THE CULT OF THE OLD

SHARING OLD GAMES WITH A NEW AUDIENCE

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on Modern Art

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If you have any thoughts on what you read within these pages, would like to see a specific game featured, or - even better - would like to submit an article yourself, then feel free to get in touch via email to [giles@gilesbennett.com](mailto:giles@gilesbennett.com).



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## A NOTE ON IMAGES

Some images may not show the 'original' versions of games and may be from later editions. This is primarily for aesthetic reasons as old images available on BGG tend to be of lower resolution, and quality. Images of original versions have been used where possible.

## INTRODUCTION

There is no better time to be a player of boardgames. The so-called "Golden Age of Boardgames" shows no sign of ending - indeed, spurred on by large numbers of us having spent untold hours in the company of just our close ones over recent years, the hobby continues to grow at a rate of knots.

In this renaissance, the "Cult of the New" plays an ever-increasing part. Kickstarter brings with it an endless stream of ever-more-shiny games with ever-more-shiny stretch goals, populated with miniatures that are both larger in number, and larger in scale. No sooner has one hotness arrived at the table than it is quickly cast away in favour of the next.

This 'zine exists to provide a counter-point to that. An alternative to the idea that all that is good must be shiny and new. Go back 20, 30, 40 or more years and you will find games released which on first

sight, by today's standards, seem dull and boring but which, should you scratch the surface, will delight you just as much as they delighted those for whom they were new all those years ago.

And arguably the best thing about these games? They are generally widely available - on BGG's market, in bring & buys at conventions throughout the country, or in Facebook's groups and marketplaces. Often you will find them for a fraction of the price one would pay for a brand new game.

So. Come - leaf through these pages as our contributors introduce you to their favourite classics.

**GILES BENNETT**

# MODERN ART

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WORDS BY  
BEN MADDOX



Art has never been pure. This is a concept floated by the academic, those removed from the process of creation. They peddle the myth that art floats in some rarified palatinate, a pure land disconnected from base impulses we all have, like the impulse to look at a ceiling at night and or eat something other than beans. This is a realm in which the crude notion of expecting remuneration for your skill, effort and time is to be unseemly, to be grubby and, dare I say it, common.

**“This is a game of bluff and conniving and chest thumping. It is unruly and loud. I pity those contemplative souls who have to sit next to a table of Modern Art being played”**

This is a fundamental untruth though. Scrape through the pigment and the linseed oil, unpick the canvas and you'll find money at the centre of it all. It is the catalyst behind all of these noble aspirations. It is the thing that gets people off their arses and into rehearsal rooms and ateliers and it has always been that way. I am sure that in those caves at Trois-Freres, back at the dawn of humanity, when our distant cousin had finished daubing hematite on the walls he turned to the tribe and demanded an extra large portion of boar scrotes.

That's not to say that art isn't valuable. Of course it is. Art says so much

about who we are. It testifies to the petty and the grand. It rips open our carapace and pokes around inside us. It pulls out our griefs and our joys, it examines what it is that propels us through this brief sojourn on the planet. Art deals in the moments of greatest import and the flickers of insignificance.

Art can be so transformative that you could be forgiven for forgetting that all of that transcendence costs.

Reiner Knizia hasn't forgotten

though. I'm sure Reiner Knizia doesn't forget much. Except every time he's met me it seems.

Knizia isn't wasteful. You could even say he's parsimonious. There are none of the distracting excesses of other, less skilled, designers. He strips back a game until what is left is something that goes straight into the basal ganglia and forces it to pump out dopamine.

His games are unflinchingly simple. You turn the rule book over in your hands thinking, "There has to be more than this" but when you start to run the machine you realise that this simplicity isn't laziness or



folly. It is the output of a mathematician's brain where everything has been pared away to exactly what is needed to be brilliant.

Also he understands that games are an interactive artform. He understands that the rules shouldn't fence players in but offer a framework, they should be intellectual monkey bars that players can leap around in but, and this is most important, there should be little risk of them falling flat on their face because the monkey bars have been

bolted together right.

Modern Art is the quintessence of a Knizia game. He offers a vast playground to muck around in and that playground is the brutally cynical world of Art.

When I think of human interaction in games I think of Modern Art. There is none of the thoughtful flow of a game like Concordia here. This is a game of bluff and conniving and chest thumping. It is unruly and loud. I pity those contemplative

souls who have to sit next to a table of Modern Art being played. Sometimes we want gentle psithurism and sometimes the roar of the city and Modern Art certainly isn't the lulling sound of the wind through trees.

Knizia wrings auctions dry here. You have so many options on how to oversell to your colleagues around the table. You have to know which auction to deploy when to maximise your shysterism. You need to know when to set a price just high enough to ensure that they don't go for it so you can flog off the work

yourself.

This game is about reading the table and the motivations of people and those with the greatest insight will come out of the other end victorious.

Shyster is the right word too. This is a world in which talent is inconsequential, in which the quality of the art is measured in numbers. Knizia posits a world in which what we think we like is simply the confection of dust-nosed douchebags, using your desire to seem de rigeur and urbane to fund their dick-re-

placement cars and their dick-replacement watches. It is these people, the soulless bottom feeders of the art world, that Knizia forces us to be. It is in this assumption of the despicable that the humour of the game is born.

Modern Art is a work of satire and in this it is important. Satire and irony are suffering right now in the glare of ubiquitous, superficial virtue. The truly evil are running riot because we refuse to see the world through their eyes and understand their motivations. We need to get grubby to beat filth. This is the role of satire. To understand our enemies by becoming them and to use that knowledge to defeat them. Within the safe confines of art we can see their true intentions and excesses. Knizia puts us in the role of those who wouldn't know their Azure from their Heliotrope and asks us. Is the world of Art really in safe hands?

I love this game for all of these reasons. It is an hilariously cynical look at the art world, it is masterful game design and it is the encapsulation of Knizia's ethos but the reason this game has sunk itself deeply into my heart is the effect it has on a group of people sitting around a table. This game changes people. People start to role play. They start to name the paintings, to describe the hues

and tones. They start to develop biographies for the artists and develop aesthetic theories. They get involved in this game. They deride overpayments and curse bargains. So many of Knizia's designs focus on bringing us together through the experience. Gaming can be solipsistic but Knizia reminds us that there is a world out there and sometimes it's only as far as the other side of a table.

Modern Art results in laughter. It results in faux indignance and connection. Through its mechanisms it forges memories. It's games like Modern Art that lead us into this hobby because it leads us to what we really want every day, and that is simple human reciprocation and it is in this kind of reciprocation that we find ourselves because it is only through others that we can know who we are.

This is the power of Art. Art isn't pure but it is vital and Modern Art is the definition of vitality.

*Ben Maddox is the host and producer of the acclaimed podcast Five Games For Doomsday - listen to the show at [fivegamesfordoomsday.com](http://fivegamesfordoomsday.com)*



# THE PRINCES OF FLORENCE

WORDS BY  
TONY BOYDELL

The Princes of Florence is a medium-weight strategic boardgame from the late 1990s – hot off the heels of Catan – that mixes action-taking, ‘recipe fulfilment’, polyomino placement and auctions providing a toolkit for players to create the most prestigious Renaissance community of artisans and craftsmen.

The Princes of Florence is an exemplary exercise in optimization: you only get twenty one actions in the entire game – seven of them being opportunities to buy stuff at auction – with which to play out your Professions (the ‘recipes’), earn your money and invest for the end game.

These Professions, when played,

have a Works Value calculated on how complete its requirements are (the recipe) and can be supplemented by special bonuses; the final Works Value is converted to cash and then you decide how to split it.

Like many designs that came in its wake, The Princes of Florence forces you to decide between cash for now and banked points for later – the most delicious of dilemmas because, should you have to drop out of the bidding or ‘lose by one’, it’s all your own fault for not planning properly.

Within this simple and intuitive framework of tricky options, the game is also willfully obstructive: making it progressively harder to



play out Professions (with a mandatory, minimum Works Value increasing each round); harder to build your community (your polyomino buildings have to exist in a confined, “no touching!” space); and by limiting the total resources available.

There are, however, several ‘outs’ for the befuddled collector of ingredients; design generously offers players the chance to “do what others aren’t” by gifting Prestige Point bonuses in other ways: duplicat-

ing tiles, concentrating on building and/or fulfilling endgame scoring cards – you can win this game by (almost) ignoring Professions altogether.

Such a balancing of approach – aka the now-ubiquitous ‘multiple paths to victory’ - speaks further to the game’s pioneering importance in the evolution of the modern Euro.

I should really return to the auctions as these are the black heart of the game; all the key elements



for scoring can only be acquired in this phase: landscapes (ingredients), builders (helping with the polyomino problem), jesters (Work Value boosting), prestige cards (end game scoring) and the clever Recruitment card (lets you 'play' a Profession that someone else has already played).

get something; whether it's what they want is all down to timing, bluffing, up-bidding and shenanigans.

It might be an 'old' game but The Princes of Florence feels as fresh and innovative today as it would have done twenty years ago; its

**“[a]n exemplary exercise in optimisation - you only get twenty one actions in the entire game”**

When it's your turn as auctioneer in the phase, what item should you offer as a Lot (only one of each can be sold each round) and when do you offer it? Tracking other players' wants is essential, so should you lead off with something of no interest just to narrow down the bidding field later?

easy to teach and seamlessly-integrated rules offer a tight, highly-interactive and impressive challenge.

A timeless classic.

Bidding starts at 200 - with increments restricted to 100 at a time (no jumping) - and you might find yourself priced out at the wrong moment OR (joy of joys) picking up an absolute bargain. Everyone will

**Tony Boydell** is a game designer, and proprietor of the Museum of Board-games in Newent, Gloucestershire

# PUERTO RICO

WORDS BY  
GILES BENNETT



There is one unifying truth about the bring and buy stalls at conventions. Well, two, actually. Well, three.

The first is that those who are selling large piles of games “to free up space” will inevitably be those who buy the most games with which to fill that space up again.

The second is that there will invariably be at least one copy of the original edition of Puerto Rico somewhere among the mounds of cardboard.

And the third is that said copy will be ridiculously cheap - usually at around the £10 to £12 mark - for such a wonderfully intricate game.

What perplexes me about its appearance isn't the price - that's a reflection of its age, the quality of its components, and its seeming omni-presence. It's why someone would be selling it in the first place that always raises an eyebrow, because (in my humble opinion) it is one of the greats.

Broad, sweeping, generalisations such as that one cannot, I realise, go unsupported. So let's start with the broad brush.

The gameplay is deceptively simple

and ostensibly bucolic. Each player has a board divided into two sections. On the bottom, the jungle area, with space for up to a dozen plantations (to grow one of the four crops) or quarries (to generate a discount on new buildings). On the top, the town area with space for up to a dozen buildings. The main game board is the marketplace from which those buildings are purchased, whilst dotted around it are cards for the incoming colonists, a trader to sell crops to, and three ships into which outgoing crops are loaded.

Each round sees players taking it in turn to choose one of the roles on offer, and taking the action associated with that role. Whilst (with one exception) all players get to take the action, the player who chose the role gets a small bonus - so if they chose to take the Builder role, every player gets to buy a new building from the building market, but the person who chose it reaps a small discount. The sole exception is Prospecting, which allows the choosing player, but no other, to take a solitary coin. Roles which remain unchosen in a round are laden with an extra coin to make them more attractive in the next round.

The end goal is victory points,



earned by producing goods and shipping them overseas, and from buying buildings. Small buildings will also, when staffed by your colonists, give you benefits of differing kinds during the game itself, whilst large buildings (which are unsurprisingly expensive to buy and very limited in number) will score you additional points based on how much you've done during the game - how many of your plantation or town spaces you've filled up, how many colonists you have, and so on - but only if staffed by a colonist at the end of the game. And that's pretty much it.

Whilst it has, according to BGG, a suggested play time of between 90 and 150 minutes, to my mind those figures are woefully over-stated. Even at the max player count of five, and even allowing for new players amongst your number, once the first few rounds are out of the way the game rattles along at a decent lick and it's not unrealistic to expect a game to be done and dusted in 45 minutes to an hour.

That speed is paired with little to no downtime. Even when you're not choosing the role, you will still (Prospecting aside) get to do something. And whilst others are choosing what they want to do, you're not resting. You're plotting

and planning. Because unlike many Euro games before and since, the opportunities to screw your opponents over are numerous - and if you don't take them, others will, and you'll lose.

Aside from how many victory points a player has earned (which you can keep a rough track of anyway), there is no hidden information in the game. You know, at any given moment, exactly what resources your opponents have, what resources they can produce, what benefits their currently-staffed buildings will get them, can make a decent guess at who will be able to sell what to the Trader, who's likely to be able to ship goods and who will have to throw surplus goods away....you get the idea.

So whilst there is no direct player interaction, the indirect player interaction is not limited to the usual "I wanted to do that" you find in most Euros, because if I, for example, choose to take the Builder role, you still get to build, it just costs you a little bit more. But if you were banking on that discount to be able to afford what you wanted...well...tough.

So often, in this game, in choosing what I do I can not just delay you in achieving your aims, but complete-

ly screw up your entire plan.

That wharf-full of coffee you were aiming to turn into freshly-roasted victory points? Well...I could be nice and ship my indigo first, leaving you the chance to get some victory points. But why would I do that when instead I can fill up the last space on the last ship leaving the shore, thus ensuring that your finest Arabica is left to rot on the quayside.

I'll say it again, there is no down time in this game - if you think you're having some down time between turns then you're not playing it right. Your eyes should be frantically darting around the table whilst you run through the possibilities available, aiming to come up with a move that benefits you - and preferably only you - whilst ideally causing detriment to as many other players as possible. It's what chess would be if - with apologies to chess-lovers - chess were fun.

This is a game that undoubtedly works better at higher player counts - you do not suffer much of a time penalty for adding on more players. Indeed, there's something to be said for playing at the full complement of five because, if nothing else, you do not have to count out the requisite number of

colonists and victory points when setting up the game.

The more players in the game, the more you can reap the benefit of - and suffer from - that indirect player interaction. With greater opportunities for cut-throat moves that scupper your opponents' plans, or your own carefully cultivated strategies, the darker this game becomes beneath its seemingly bucolic surface.

Unsurprisingly for a game which was so highly rated on release, it has left its fingerprints all over the scene. San Juan (named for the main town featured on your player board in Puerto Rico) is a card-based version that many recommend as an alternative to Puerto Rico at 2 players, whilst Race for the Galaxy takes the same mechanics and puts them in a space-faring environment.

Also unsurprisingly, it has been expanded on and re-released considerably since it first arrived on our tables. The original game spawned two large (relatively speaking) expansions - the New Buildings in 2004, and the Nobles in 2009, before being reissued in a 10th Anniversary edition in 2011, incorporating both expansions and significantly improved components. Then, in

2020, a completely new edition was released - as well as incorporating both large expansions, it included two smaller expansions (Festivals and Buccaneer) as well, but, most importantly, made a number of changes to address the elephant in the plantation. The colonists.

The arguments around this have been done to death, and won't be re-hashed in detail here, but, in brief, a large number of people over the years have become increasingly uncomfortable with the idea that the colonists (a) are brown, (b) arrive on ships, and (c) don't get paid - they are colonists in inverted com-

mas, if at all, and to all intents and purposes are slaves.

On the flip side, others argue, slavery was abolished in Puerto Rico long before the time period in which the game is set and that the colonists were just that - colonists arriving from the Spanish mainland - and could only really come in boats. And the choice of brown as their colour was ... a poor one.

The 2020 edition addressed this to a degree by purple-washing the col-

un-chosen), these are truly variants, and make the game feel like a very different experience.

The component quality is not great - but let's face it, it's costing you a tenner, so don't be expecting gold-plating and inch-thick cardboard. What that tenner does get you, though, is an awful lot of game for your money. If the same range was applied to game weighting as to steaks, this would definitely be at the "well done" end of "medium-well".

**"[I]f you think you're having some downtime between turns then you're not playing it right"**

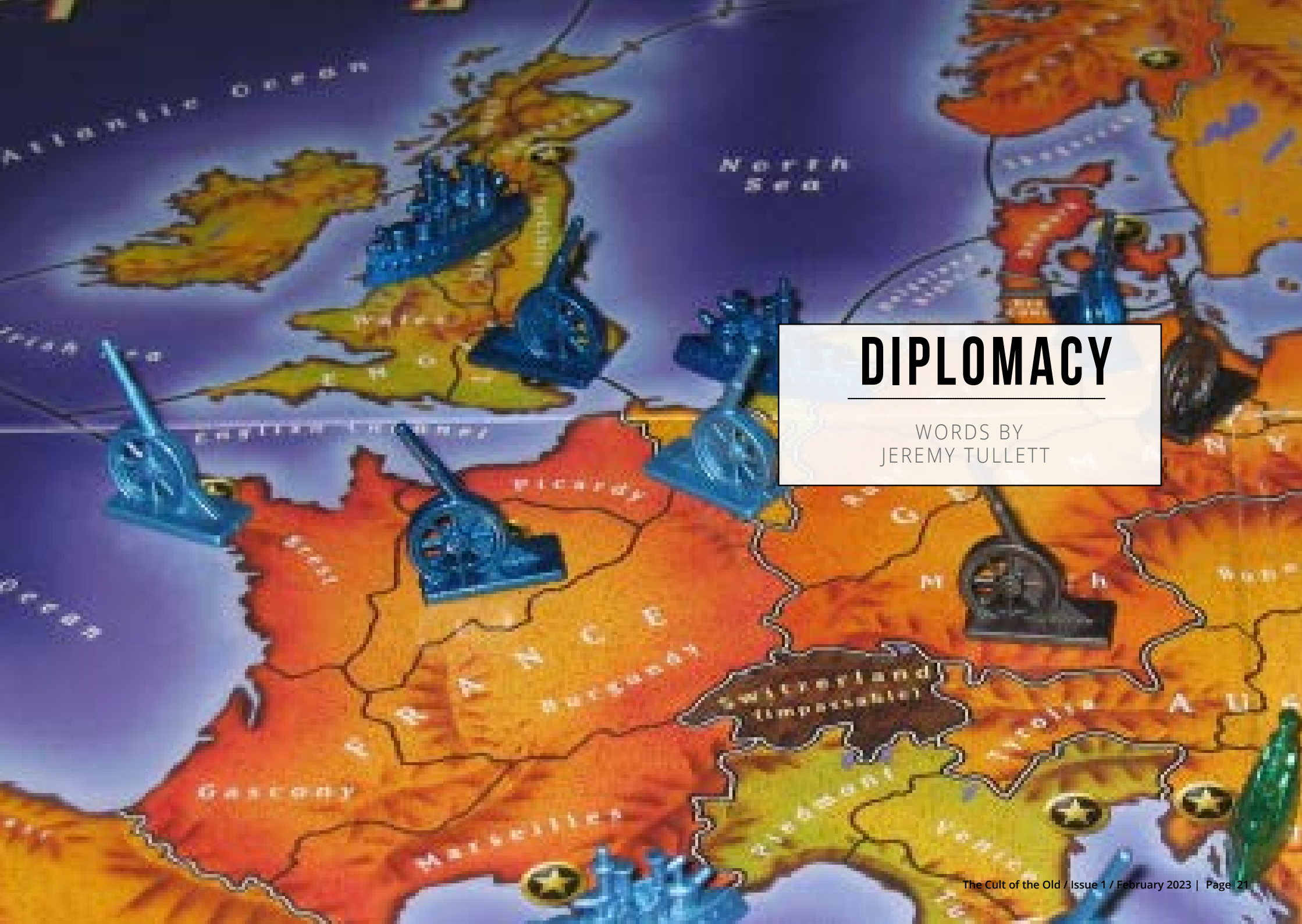
onists, and having them hired from a tavern rather than dragooned off a boat. But to answer my own (admittedly rhetorical) question earlier - distaste with the theme and its implementation is a one - very valid - reason why one might be selling the old edition.

Why else? I imagine many may find the minimum player count of 3 to be awkward - whilst variant rules have been published which allow it to be played by 2 (both players choose three roles, leaving one role

But no matter how long you cooked it for, it would still be bloody.

***Giles Bennett** spends a lot of time playing boardgames and has no real claim to fame other than accidentally once buying a copy of Keyword*





# DIPLMACY

WORDS BY  
JEREMY TULLETT

If you were at MidCon or Manorcon around 1980, you'd have found just about everyone there taking part in a three-day Diplomacy tournament.

These events grew out of the postal Diplomacy hobby as places where the game could be played 'as designed' with each turn's order writing confined to 20 minutes or so, rather than days or weeks.

There are still strong support for Diplomacy by email, and systems may use human or computer adjudication, and have varied length turns, but there's nothing quite like a face-to-face game with 20min turns to get the adrenaline flowing.

The occasional game still runs at major games conventions, and there is at least one person organising a board for the interested as a standalone day event, but it would be nice to see more of it.\*

The challenge is getting exactly seven (or an integer multiple thereof) people together for something that can last several hours.

Briefly, play is on a map of Europe c.1900, with the players ordering for Austria-Hungary, France, Russia,

Italy, Germany, Turkey and England (it was designed by an American). There are 34 supply centres on the board. 22 start owned by the players, and the other 12 are in (unarmed) neutrals. The objective is to capture 18 supply centres, although in time-limited games the winner is the person to hold the most centres when the game ends.

It is impossible to achieve this merely by ordering one's units about; essentially you have to negotiate your way to a victory by striking deals with the other players, and, yes, lying to some of the others, whilst keeping an eye on the strategy and tactics.

In each 20 minute burst, you have to do your negotiating and write orders (secretly, and simultaneously with the others), before they are all revealed, the consequences of the moves revealed, and negotiating starts all over again.

Think of a room with seven people going off in to small huddles, frantically scribbling orders, being relieved or shocked at the consequences, and then going off again, over a period of several hours. "Read 'em and weep" might be a

poker term, but it applies here as well as your best-laid plans are turned to dust in front of you.

As you might imagine, a visit to the bar after one of these games is almost de rigeur.

The mechanics of the game are really simple, the tactics can be quite subtle, but what really grips me here is the interpersonal aspect. Is your neighbour telling the truth, or is s/he a lying scumbag? Can you think of a set of orders that can cover both eventualities, or capitalise on your estimate of their (dis)honesty? Can you accurately write a set of orders and get them in be-

fore the deadline? Can you resist the urge to thump your neighbour when it turns out he's just 'stabbed' you, and, more importantly, is this all-out war, or can you patch it up?

Why not get your fellow email players together one day and try the face-to-face version. It is a quite different experience from the remote version, and worth the effort.

\* So far as I can tell WorldDipCon is still running, but I don't see any evidence that EuroDipCon has happened since 2016.

**Jeremy Tullett** is the chairman of the annual Midcon boardgame convention





Reiner Knizia

# Medici

## MEDICI

WORDS BY  
JOHN WEBLEY

Reiner Knizia doesn't seem to be in vogue with modern gamers, and never was with the Spiel des Jahres jury.

One SdJ pöppel, 18 years after his first published game, for what was no more than a rehash of an early hit, seems a very poor return for his career.

Maybe the problem is that he has been so prolific. With more than 600 published games, there

each round causing scoring for both the total score of all your cards, and also for the number you have in each of five categories? Add in a couple of minor quirks, a double score non-category card, and bonuses for higher scores for one type of card and you're done.

But how many decisions go into each round. How many cards do you draw when it's your turn in the auction? Stop after the first

**"[a] tie-in with a film, or with LEGO, does wonders for sales and royalties but is unlikely to impress serious gamers"**

are bound to be a few misses, especially as he has done a lot of work for various franchises, most notably LOTR. A tie in with a film or with LEGO does wonders for sales and royalties but is unlikely to impress serious gamers.

But from the early 90s into the 2000s he produced a run of games that are still classics. They are notable for having relatively simple rules, especially when compared to some more modern games, but still giving players a plethora of interesting decisions. Medici fits this description perfectly. What could be simpler than 3 rounds of auctions, with

one if it suits you? Or draw more, in the hopes that something even better turns up? Which categories should you shoot for, which do you sacrifice? Go for broke and concentrate on one or two types, hoping for a couple of first places with bonuses, or look for a bunch of second and third places?

And then there is the limit on cards you may win, five per round. Do you pick up that lovely set of three early, knowing that you will be blocked out of bidding on later sets of three, or do you save your powder and hope to pick up a bargain late on? How

much should you bid? Will this set suit an opponent better than it suits you? Will it suit them too well and give them too much of advantage? Should you bid high to drive up the price, or stay low and hope that no one else steps in? Wait for your own auctions when you can choose the number of cards and have the last bid, or jump in on someone else's, even though other players will bid after you?

So many decisions to make, any one of which could make the difference between winning and losing. And each one is intensified by the fact that every ducat that you spend in an auction, is one point less for you at the end of the game.

So that's Medici, a slim set of rules, half of which are examples of play, some basic, if attractive, art work on the 36 cards and board, a few wooden discs. Not much really for your money. No minis, no packs of

several hundred cards, no celebrity artist.

But what you do get is a game that, according to BGG Marketplace, is available for £20 or less (although it goes for a lot more in the U.S, despite the fact that Rio Grande published a version), that scales well between 3 and 6 players, packs into a thin box, plays in well under an hour, and yet gives you an intense gaming experience.

And that, for me, is a bargain.

***John Webley** is a keen quizzer who has been gaming since childhood, and spent most of the 90's translating German game rules into English*





# SCOTLAND YARD

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WORDS BY  
GILES BENNETT

Those of us who are not above trawling the odd charity shop in the hopes of finding boardgame gold will, over the years, have noticed that if there's one thing you can bank on (other than the ubiquitous copies of 50 Shades of Grey that every charity shop is legally obliged to stock), it's that in amongst the copies of Monopoly, Scrabble and other family favourites, more often than not you will find a copy of Scotland Yard tucked away.

This is testimony more to the sheer

Its mechanics are straightforward, and have been played out both before, and after, in a variety of guises (older and more experienced games should think 'Letters from Whitechapel' but with fewer dead prostitutes), or Fury of Dracula but for a more family-friendly audience.

The board is a straight-forward map of London, with locations, marked by numbers, linked by one or more taxi, bus or Underground routes. Mr. X has committed a crime, and has to evade capture from up to

### **“[t]hink ‘Letters from Whitechapel’ (but with fewer dead prostitutes)”**

quantities of it that have been printed, than it is to the quality of the game. Whilst it rocks up at a relatively middle-of-the-road 6.5 out of 10 on BGG, it's a surprisingly good game. And if you see one lurking on charity shop shelves, generally for around a fiver or so - unless you're in one of those charity shops which now wishfully price older games based on researching eBay's asking prices, rather than its sold listings - and you don't already have a copy, then you should definitely pick it up.

five police-officers, who must work in conjunction to track him down.

Both Mr. X and the detectives move around the board, and as Mr. X moves each time, he reveals his method of transport, and at four points during the game, he must also reveal his location. If he can evade his pursuers for 24 rounds, he wins.

Whilst the detectives are rationed to their starting supply of travel tickets, as and when they use them

up, they pass them to Mr. X, who therefore has a practically unlimited supply.

In addition, Mr. X also has two 'double move' cards which he can use to - as the name suggests - move twice to the detectives' once. If used at the right time during the game, this means that no sooner does he have to pop up into view than he can disappear straight out of it.

He also gets one 'black' ticket for each detective he is competing against, allowing him to record a move but without showing what travel method he used. Whilst every space is connected to its neighbouring spaces by a taxi, bus routes are around three spaces apart, and Underground spaces even further apart.

With cunning play, Mr. X can appear on a spot on the map which has all three, and then travel away using a black ticket, leaving the detectives with a baffling array of locations that he could have gone to.

For my money, this is almost the perfect family game, particularly if your family is comprised of a variety of ages. Older children will not struggle to take on the role of Mr. X, as it's not demanding (and comes with a useful visor so that the detectives cannot see where Mr. X's eyes are roaming as they scan the map). And younger children can be assisted, as detectives, by adults without the former having to take control of everything for them.

It's short - maybe 45 minutes or so for a game - but deep enough to get your teeth into. It's lively, and whether you're playing as Mr. X or one of the detectives, as the game clock ticks down, you cannot help but feel the excitement build as you either smell the sweet smell of freedom, or the stench of sweat as your slowly detectives slowly encircle Mr. X.

*Giles Bennett still has no claims to boardgame fame*