

# LIBRARIAN'S GUIDE TO THE GAMES BUNDLE

## Thank you for your purchase of this tabletop games bundle!

It's a carefully curated selection of some of the best, most iconic, and most interesting (to libraries) games currently on the market.

To help you make the most of your purchase, here's a quick introduction to the contents of this bundle and some brief tips on how to use them.

Don't forget that I also offer training about games and play in the wider library (and broader cultural) context, and that you already have a credit towards the cost of that training of \$120 per bundle you purchased! The training uses many of these games as examples, giving you a chance to get familiar with them, and to situate each in the bigger picture – which you will quickly realise is much bigger than libraries traditionally understand!

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### **Apples to Apples** (card game)

*Apples to Apples* is an accessible, family-friendly game with a flexible duration – you can play to a fixed number of points or rounds, or you can just keep playing for as long as everyone is enjoying themselves (or until some other activity is ready). Good for all-ages and family game events, and useful as a filler while waiting for people to turn up or be ready to play a more structured game.

Each turn, the player whose turn it is draws a random adjective card. Other players select a noun card from their hands that they think will most appeal to the player who drew the adjective card as a match for the adjective.

Accordingly, *Apples to Apples* can be used to familiarise players with the vocabulary of grammar. It also rewards theory-of-mind – the ability to understand how others think, or in this case more specifically, predict how others will react to your choices.

### **Balderdash** (card & writing game)

*Balderdash* is somewhat like *Apples to Apples* (see above), except that it requires creativity as well. Each round, the active player selects a movie title, name, acronym, law, or word from a randomly-drawn card. Other players then make up a definition or description. The active player shuffles these definitions in with the correct one, and everyone else tries to guess which is correct. Players get points if they guess the correct definition, and more points for each other player who thinks their false definition was correct.

If you are familiar with the folk game *Dictionary*, the word option for *Balderdash* is the same, making this a good game for teaching (somewhat obscure) vocabulary. Discussing etymological clues for words could be a good way to extend the language learnings from this game.

### **Blokus** (board game)

In *Blokus*, up to 4 players each have 21 attractive gemlike tiles composed of squares arranged in different shapes, and are seeking to place all of them on the board according to one simple rule: each tile you place must touch at least one other of your tiles, but may only ever touch them at the corner (never with an edge flush against another tile of your own colour). This process is complicated by other players taking up spaces you need, and it is very rare for all tiles to be placed. The game ends when no player can place another tile, and players are scored according to the number of squares in the tiles they have *not* placed, with the lowest score winning.

An excellent game for abstract spatial reasoning and strategic planning, its rules are simple enough to be playable by quite young children, but the gameplay is deep enough to be interesting to all ages.

### **Carcassonne** (board game)

A modern classic, *Carcassonne* is a European game where you build the board as you play out of randomly-drawn tiles containing varying elements – city, road, farmland, and cloisters. On each player's turn they will draw a tile, which they must place adjacent to at least one other existing tile, matching edges appropriately. They may then choose to place one of their limited supply of "meeples" (tokens) on one part of the tile, claiming it for themselves. Player gain points for completing cities and roads, and at the end of the game depending on where their workers are on the board.

There is little direct competition in this game – claiming someone else's territory is tricky. More often, you are deciding who else to benefit in addition to yourself. The game rewards deal-making, mutual advantage, and long-term planning, but the core gameplay is simple enough for quite young players.

### **Catan: The Settlers** (board game)

Another modern European classic, this game is on the verge of going mainstream the way Scrabble and Monopoly have. (In Germany, a country where boardgaming is hugely popular, this has already happened.) Originally published as *Settlers of Catan*, it has launched so many spin-offs that *Catan* has become the primary brand.

The game revolves around harvesting and trading resources to build roads and settlements, and is played on a board that is randomly created from hexagonal tiles at the start of each game.

The game is a good all-ages game, and is useful as an introduction to basic probability, as the design of the board makes visible how often a particular roll on 2 six-sided dice will come up. A combination of luck, strategy, and persuasion is required to win.

### **Citadels** (card game)

A game of city-building intrigue, *Citadels* has an unusual turn sequence. At the start of each round, whoever was the King last round gets to choose one of 8 role cards, each with a unique ability, with the remaining cards passed around the table till everyone has one (or, in smaller games, two). Play then proceeds not in player order but in a fixed order according to roles, with players revealing their roles as each role is called.

On your turn you acquire gold and/or cards, choose whether or not to use your role's special ability, and then spend gold to build districts for your city.

It takes a little getting used to the quirky turn sequence, but once you have, the game is quite simple and fun to play. It strongly rewards theory of mind, particularly in predicting which roles people will choose.

### **Cranium** (board game)

*Cranium* is a race-to-the-end game not unlike *Trivial Pursuit*. It has three key differences: team play, no endless turns for a single team, and a much wider variety of questions and tasks – general knowledge is only one of four categories, with wordplay, visual art, and performance tasks also in the mix.

A fun party game, *Cranium* is a good icebreaker, and its range of activities mean most people will find something they can do. The play with words and knowledge is also a good entry point for libraries. For instance, you could have a house rule that if someone can look up an answer in the library's collection and get back in time, they can answer the question that way.

### **Dixit** (card game)

A game of free association and creative translation of the visual into the verbal, *Dixit* is not unlike *Balderdash* in the core mechanic – the player whose turn it is chooses a card from their hand and describes it, then each other player chooses a card from their hand that could match the description. All cards are shuffled, and then players choose which they think was the original.

The difference is that the cards in *Dixit* are wordless, resonant, fantastical images – surreal visual moments that could have come from a fable or a dream. And the object is to describe your card so ambiguously that *some*, but not *all*, other players choose it. The description can be a single word, a quotation, a sentence, or even a wordless sound effect.

Worth playing just for the striking artwork, *Dixit* is also great for theory of mind, and for the fascinating discussions that can arise from players' interpretations of the images. And, like *Apples to Apples* and *Balderdash*, it's relatively flexible in length of play.

### **Dominion** (card game)

A game that sparked a whole new genre – deck-building games – you play *Dominion* by adding cards to your starting deck, and gradually eliminating those you don't want.

The box holds more cards than you will use in any given game – there are 25 different types of Action cards, but you only select 10 of them to use in each playthrough. This means there are 111,861,676,288,000 (nearly 112 trillion) different possible starting setups, making for endless variety and replayability. When selecting which 10 to use, you can opt for predesigned combinations, random selection, or designing your own unique mix.

*Dominion* is great for understanding probability and systems thinking. It also showcases some interesting game design decisions, and allows players to dip their toes into these waters by customising the card mix in their games. Which cards are in the 10 selected will determine how directly players interact – some selections allow players to attack and defend, while others tend towards a less interactive game that is almost a parallel solitaire race.

### **Dungeons & Dragons** (tabletop roleplaying game; 3 books)

Back in the 70s, this game spawned not only a new genre but an entirely new mode of play: fantasy simulation. The three core rulebooks of the latest edition of *Dungeons & Dragons* are an engine for your players to tell their own imaginative tales of derring-do, dungeon delves, and maybe even a little dragon-slaying. Here's what each book contains:

- The *Player's Handbook* has the rules for creating characters and playing the game.
- The *Dungeon Master's Guide* contains advice for the "Dungeon Master", or DM, the player who takes on the special responsibility of creating the stories and the world that the other players' protagonist characters will inhabit and explore. (Note that despite the title of "Dungeon Master", the story of the game may never go near a dungeon – wilderness exploration and urban adventures are just as possible.)
- The *Monster Manual* is a fantastic bestiary of creatures with whom those protagonists might interact. Some are wicked, some are benign, some are mischievous, and some mysterious – not all interactions are combat.

Players play the game by declaring what they intend to do. If there is a chance of failure, they roll various dice to decide the outcome. Then the Dungeon Master narrates how it all plays out, giving the players their next situation to respond to.

Tabletop roleplaying is a terrific way to stretch your players' imaginations, encourage thinking about things from different points of view, incentivise reading and learning some pretty advanced vocabulary, and even get them writing. It's not uncommon for roleplaying groups to give extra experience points (a currency that allows a character to improve their abilities) to players who write in-character accounts of their adventures, for example. A great many notable novelists and screenwriters have attributed some of their storytelling success to roleplaying games. If you're interested in using these games to promote literacy, please contact me!

Roleplaying games (RPGs) also develop systems literacy, understanding of probability, genre literacy, and boost performance and leadership skills.

### **Escape: The Curse of the Temple** (board game)

A frantic, real-time co-operative game of dice-rolling to escape a trapped temple (think the opening sequence of *Indiana Jones and the Raiders of the Lost Ark*, only with multiple explorers), *Escape* sees players working together to beat the clock, discover and unlock the exit to the temple, and get out within a strict time limit of 10 minutes. They achieve all this by rolling and then spending dice as fast as they can.

Ideally played with the accompanying soundtrack (which acts as a timer and helps set the atmosphere), *Escape* is a great way to practice grace, communication, and teamwork under time pressure. High-stress and highly competitive individuals may need to debrief after their first game or two, but once they've got the hang of the game, they often love it even more than most folks.

### **Fiasco** (story game)

*Fiasco* is a story game – similar to a tabletop roleplaying game, except that rather than creating a simulation of a fantastic reality, it aims to generate a story more directly, so its rules are more about narrative elements.

*Fiasco* is a game that produces grimly hilarious farces like a Coen Brothers movie (particularly *Fargo* or *Burn After Reading*) – where ordinary people get overly greedy or ambitious and overreach, and forget that Murphy’s Law is waiting to kick them in the behind.

A great game for discussing narrative and genre conventions, it would go down especially well with movie buffs and aspiring writers.

### **Fluxx** (card game)

When you start a game of *Fluxx*, there are only two rules – on your turn, draw a card and play a card – and no way to win. That’s because *Fluxx* is a game about changing the rules. The cards you draw and play are of four types – New Rules, which add to, modify or replace existing rules; Goals, which define victory conditions until they are replaced by another Goal card; Actions, which do something specific; and Keepers, which stay on the table until something changes that, and help you meet victory conditions.

*Fluxx* is simple enough for anyone above 7 or so to play, though a bright 5-year-old could probably manage. (And younger kids love the idea of changing the rules!) It fosters system thinking, strategy, and thinking not only within rules but about rules.

### **Hanabi** (card game)

*Hanabi* is a beautiful little haiku of a game. It’s a co-operative game of hidden information whose elegant simplicity hides surprising depth.

The task is simple: play cards in each of five colours (suits) in numerical order, 1 to 5. The catch: you are holding your cards facing *away* from you, so you can’t see the cards you might play, only those belonging to other players! And the other players are strictly limited in what they can tell you about your hand – or even whether they can tell you anything at all!

Playing this game well requires your full focus, demanding memory, probability, logic, the ability to get inside other people’s heads and interpret their actions (and work out the best way to communicate what they need to know) – and the ability to collaborate positively with others while doing all this. Engrossing and rewarding, *Hanabi* richly deserves the prestigious Spiel des Jahres (Game of the Year) prize it won in 2013.

### **Marrying Mr Darcy** (card game)

This is a competitive game about being a young, single woman in Regency England – or more precisely, one of the young women in Austen’s *Pride & Prejudice*.

You are all trying to prove your eligibility for an offer of marriage from one (or preferably more, just to be safe) of the men in the book. To do this, you deploy Wit, Beauty, Friendliness, Reputation, Cunning and your Dowry to meet the requirements of each of the men... and then hope that you get a proposal from the one you want, or at least, one you can put up with.

The game is interesting for a range of reasons, two foremost among them. First, it was crowdfunded – 1679 people from around the world paid \$58,000 before the game existed because they wanted to play it. Second, of course, it is built around one of the most beloved works of literature in the English language! And it raises some interesting questions about the relationship of story to game, and about translation between media generally. (I for one consider that making Mr. Collins the preferred match of any character is cruel. The whole *point* is that Charlotte was visibly settling.)

*[Fans of Pride & Prejudice & Zombies will be glad to know that there is an optional Undead Expansion for this game... though I did not include it in this bundle.]*

### **One Night Ultimate Werewolf** (card game)

*Werewolf* is a folk game of intrigue and deduction, which I highly recommend, but – while commercially published versions exist – could not bring myself to charge you for; as a folk game you can learn how to play free, online, for instance at <http://eblong.com/zarf/werewolf.html>. It has no board or pieces, and is a great game for large groups. Every library should know how to play – and if you’re interested, I have some pre-written rules and role slips that will help you do it quickly and for free. (That said, if you enjoy the game, it’s worth investing in a commercial version – I recommend the *Ultimate Werewolf* cards.)

*One Night Ultimate Werewolf* condenses the bluffing, deduction and intrigue of the game down to a much shorter play session and somewhat smaller group of players. It can be played with the assistance of a free phone/tablet app, or with one of the players moderating. Its customisable and short play time makes it a good “filler” game to play while waiting for numbers.

Both *Werewolf* and *One Night Ultimate Werewolf* are excellent games of social observation and persuasion, and as such, work extremely well as icebreakers. *Werewolf* is a great game for large groups to all get to know each other.

### **Pandemic + expansion** (board game)

Pandemic is a co-operative board game where players work together to treat, contain and find the cure for four deadly diseases that are threatening to go critical.

Starting at the Center for Disease Control in Atlanta (the World Health Organization doesn’t get a look-in; Geneva’s not even on the map!), players must travel the world, negotiating their priorities: save lives and prevent the disease spreading in the short term, or focus on finding the cure before it’s too late?

While the actual act of playing naturally bears no resemblance to the work of fighting infectious disease, the game does a terrific job of capturing that tension between short- and long-term goals, and the struggle to manage against terrible odds. (Odds which can be customised during setup, to make the game easier for newer players or harder for veterans.)

I've also included one expansion for *Pandemic* in the bundle, to showcase the ways in which games can be modified. (And also because the expansions are great!) I encourage you to use this as a springboard for discussion of game design.

The game rewards collaboration, strategic forward thinking, and understanding of probability and systems. The theme of saving lives also makes it very popular.

### **Qwirkle** (board/tile game)

A simple game of placing square tiles in a row, such that each row shares either a colour or a shape and contains only one of each shape or colour. (For instance, if the row is all red, then it must have one and only one of each shape; and if the row is all squares, then it must have one and only one of each colour.) There are six colours and six shapes, and 3 of each combination, for a total of 108 tiles.

It plays (and scores) a little like *Scrabble*, in that tile placement to allow for (or block) multiple sequences right next to each other is a key part of the greater strategy. But the basic rules are simple enough that quite young players can enjoy the game.

*Qwirkle* rewards counting, understanding of probability, strategic thinking, and pattern-matching skill.

### **RoboRally** (board game)

*RoboRally* is a game about bored factory computers running a demolition derby with robots in a factory while all the human staff have gone home overnight. Each turn, you selecting a series of 5 moves from your hand that (you hope) will take you to a series of checkpoints; these then resolve more-or-less simultaneously. First robot to reach all the checkpoints wins.

The catch is that the factory floor is not a safe place. There are rotators that will change your direction, conveyor belts that will move you along regardless of your plans, holes in the floor, and of course other robots who might bump into you and knock you off your carefully plotted path... oh, and lasers that might damage you, both on the factory floor and on the front of each of the robots. But surely none of your competitors would *deliberately* zap you... right?

At first, damage is not such a big deal – you just get a slightly smaller card pool from which to choose your moves. But as you take more damage, your commands start getting locked, so that you always end your turn by (for instance) turning right and going ahead 3.

It's a slightly more complicated game, but the theming is fun and kids love it. It teaches spatial reasoning, forward planning in a complex environment, game theory (aka taking into account what others will do)... and the turn structure is even a (very) basic form of programming. It comes with multiple boards which you can even place next to each other for larger (and usually longer) games.

### Six-sided dice (dice bundles)

Six-sided dice are surprisingly versatile once you start getting into game creation. Not only can you roll them to generate random results, you can use them as counters or tokens, and even use their blockish form to stack them like bricks. Plus, of course, dice get lost all the time and need replacing. Finally, if you're hosting events for serious tabletop gamers, bundles of dice can be used as prizes and rewards – gamers can never have too many dice!

Use these bundles for game design workshops and “make-our-own-game” events, as giveaways and incentives, and to teach probability and randomness.

### Polyhedral dice (dice bundles)

These polyhedral bundles are mainly used in roleplaying – particularly fantasy simulations like *Dungeons & Dragons* and *Pathfinder* – and advanced wargames. You may wish to lend these as kits to support tabletop roleplaying games, or even bundle them with your RPG books. Alternatively, keep them to support in-library play.

There's a little specialised vocabulary around these odd-shaped dice.

First, “die” is the singular and “dice” is the plural – so it's one die, two dice, etc. (Don't worry too much about this; everyone will understand just fine if you talk about “a dice”. Just be aware that there is an opportunity for demonstrating knowledge of the medium – and/or pedantry.)

Second, when discussing the dice, gamers will commonly refer to them as d4, d6, d8, etc. – basically the letter “d” followed by the number of sides the die has. If you want multiple dice, you say the number of dice, then the type. So 3d6 is three six-sided dice, 2d10 is two ten-sided dice, and so on.

Standard roleplaying bundles contain:

- a d4 numbered 1-4 (a triangular pyramid; whichever number is upright when the die lands is the roll. Pro tip – don't let these stay on the floor! They hurt like Lego to stand on),
- a d6 numbered 1-6 (the normal cube die),
- a d8 numbered 1-8 (looks a bit like a square-ish diamond with triangular faces),
- a standard d10 with faces numbered 0-9 (where a roll of 0 can be taken as 0 or 10, as the game requires)
- a special d10 with faces numbered 00-90 (sometimes referred to as a d00, d%, or percentile die, this can be used as a normal d10 by ignoring the extra 0, or combined with a standard d10 to generate random percentages. So if you roll 60 on this die and 7 on the other d10, your roll is **67**; a roll of 00+5 is **05**; and 00+0 can be **0** or **100** as the game requires),
- a d12 numbered 1-12 (five-sided faces),
- a d20 numbered 1-20 (small triangular faces).

As with the d6 bundles above, these are great for teaching about probability and randomness. In game design, they also allow you to fine-tune the range of possible results – which is why they have been so heavily adopted by simulation games.

*Bonus points if you noticed that the dice can also be used in a minor way to teach geometry! You can play the classic Sesame Street “one of these shapes is not like the others” game with these dice... The odd shape out is the d10: all the others are Platonic solids, i.e. shapes whose faces are all equilateral and whose vertices are all identical.*