

More Information for Beer Games Display (GHH Lobby)

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Communication & Sustainability Studies

A Collection of Board Games with a Beer-Brewing Theme

What is the meaning of this?!

Many scholars and enthusiasts of board games believe we have entered a Second Golden Age of Board Games. The first came between 1840 and 1920, though some say it ended with the advent of *Monopoly* in 1935. Industrialization brought about this Golden Age, as game-makers took advantage of color lithography and cheap cardboard. *The Game of Life* comes from those days.

The Second Golden Age began sometime in the 1990s and really got going in the mid-Aughts. Today's board games offer experiences of both elegant gameplay and extravagant components, with a host of themes, familiar and bizarre. One of the big trends in theme now is that of games making play out of work. You can play farming games, shipping games, urban planning games, games about managing hotels or running restaurant chains or serving food. Or brewing beer.

There are dozens of beer-brewing games. They are interesting, not just as exemplars of contemporary board gaming, but as both the latest instance of a long-standing relationship between board games and beer and as evidence of an extreme devotion to play. Brewing beer is work meant for luxury, and it is itself an art—a kind of play—especially when brewers forego the efficiencies of industrialization. It is this quality that makes the games in this display so odd. Board games themed with beer-brewing—and especially craft or homebrewing—are merciless: they make play out of the most playful kind of work. Nothing escapes them!

And perhaps this all-consuming play without mercy is a habit we should spur on. It might be good for us, as a rule of thumb. That's one meaning this display asks us to ponder.

Board Games and Beer

Two for Humanity!

Beer and Board Games both have a long history. Good evidence for beer-brewing goes back at least 13,000 years. Equally strong evidence for board games goes back 9,000 years.

Here, we have a replica of a board game found in the tomb of Queen Pu-abum, laid to rest in the Royal Cemetery of Ur, over four and a half thousand years ago. Thus, we call this game, the *Royal Game of Ur*, or, if we count its squares, the *Game of Twenty*. It is of note that the Queen's tomb also featured a drain, used to guide libations of beer into the earth that covered the Queen.

About thirteen hundred years after Pu-abum, the funeral attendants of the Pharaoh Tutankhamun decked out the boy king's tomb with, among other treasures, a set of equipment for brewing beer and several deluxe sets of a variant of the *Game of Twenty*. One must have fresh beer for oneself and for one's gaming opponents in the afterlife, it seems.

This variant game has special significance for the story of board games and beer. About a thousand years after Tutankhamun (still over two thousand years ago!), a Babylonian scribe named Itti-Marduk-balātu set down the rules for this game, which he would have called *Pack of Dogs*. Irving Finkel of the British Museum translated this cuneiform tablet. On one side, the tablet tells how to play the game; on the other, how to use the game to tell fortunes. The rules are for gambling: a player who scores a certain piece on a certain square wins beer—paid for by the opponent. Among the good fortunes one may get is that of drawing “fine beer”.

What Do Board Games Teach about Beer-Brewing?

Not much!

In his *Anthropology*, Immanuel Kant had this to say:

Games, which some pretend should merely serve to fill the void of conversation after the meal, are after all usually the main thing: a means of acquisition whereby affects are vigorously stirred, where a certain convention of self-interest is established so that the players can plunder each other with the greatest politeness, and where complete egoism is laid down as a principle that no one denies as long as the game lasts. Despite all the culture these manners may bring about, such conversation hardly promises really to promote the union of social good living with virtue, and so it hardly promises to promote true humanity.

In a game, says Kant, “contestants believe they are playing with each other; in fact, however, nature plays with both of them”, and, for the players, the “well-being they feel while stimulated in this way, because it is closely related to ideas of illusion (though ill-construed), is for this very reason the cause of a propensity to the most violent and long-lasting passion.”

Well, Kant would know, as he gambled on billiards and cards to make ends meet in his early career as a great philosopher. Perhaps it is better to say he hustled. At any rate, he gave up games as he buckled down to write *The Critique of Pure Reason*.

And he had a point. Games do not teach us much about their themes. One can learn trivia about beer-brewing by playing the games shown here, but nothing about the experience of really doing it. That's why it is important to have these lengths of hop vines in this display: we must keep in mind that a real and separate phenomenon is out there.

The books are here for a related reason. They keep us mindful that, while playing games is not terribly educational, the *study of that play* teaches us a great many things indeed.

What Are These Games, Really?

The beer-brewing-themed board games on display here are hobby games, made for and by enthusiasts, outside the mainstream—not unlike garage breweries, coincidentally enough!

During 2020, sales of board games went up about twenty per cent, for obvious reasons. Where do hobby games fit into this market? In the cracks. The games most everybody has heard of are the games most everybody buys, to an extreme degree: *Monopoly* makes up nearly a third of all board game sales on its own; *Scrabble* is almost as large. Chess does quite well, perhaps another tenth. From there, mass-market games of lesser brand, such as *Sorry!* and *Clue*, as well as hobby games that have swelled to massiveness, such as *Catan*, *Ticket to Ride*, and *Pandemic*, account for most of the remaining sales.

To put the hobby market in perspective, consider that one of its biggest success stories of the past five years: *Gloomhaven*, a game designed by a single person, financed by crowdfunding, and ranked by many as the best game in the world. If we claim *Gloomhaven* has sold 200,000 copies over its five-year lifetime, then we are likely overstating its sales. *Monopoly* sold nearly 300,000 copies in 1935, the year of its debut. In 1936, it sold 1.75 million copies. Last year was its best year, says Hasbro. *Monopoly* wouldn't notice if its sales rose or fell by *Gloomhaven's* numbers.

These beer-brewing games are true hobby products. They piggy-back on the infrastructure built for *Monopoly* the game and for monopoly, the goal. Small studios and individual creators have some access to capital, which they leverage to make these boutique games. We can think of it as a kind of industrialized folk art (which, by the way, is what *Monopoly* is: it spent decades as a game hand-made by its players before Parker Brothers got a hold of it).

Today's hobby mode of game making can be phenomenologically interesting. *Bräumeister*, for example, is printed on demand. Its cards have a strong and sour ink scent to them, while its laser-cut cardboard tokens smell of charcoal and smudge one's hands over the first few plays. Not the sensory delights of beer-brewing, but it is an experience with strong character.

Are These All the Beer-Brewing Games There Are?

No! This is a small sample!

Here is a list of board games with at least some form of beer-brewing gameplay—a list we should not think of as comprehensive:

Battle Of The Breweries

Beer IQ

Beer Fest The Board Game

Beer Empire

Beeropoly (a.k.a. Brewopoly)

BEERSLINGER

Beer: The Card Game

The Belgian Beers Race

Brauerei

Brew Crafters

Brew Crafters: Marketing Basics

Brew Crafters: Travel Card Game

Brewery, The Card Game

Bräumeister

Brewin' USA

BrewMaster: The Craft Beer Game

Brew This!
Craft Beer Brewer
CRAFT BEER - the card game
Dice Brewing
Don't Fall in the Mead Hall
Dragon Brew
Every Round Counts
Fürstenfeld
Goldbrau
Hallertau
Heaven and Ale

Hip Hops Card Game
Homebrewers
Legends of Dsyx: Mushroom Ale
The Little Game of Beer
Microbrew
Moonlight Brewers
Oktoberfest
Rise of the Gnomes
Le Secret de Grimbergen
Six Sided Stout
Stier zoekt Bier