



## POUR OVER DICE

ARTICLE

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Forget Monopoly and Scrabble, we're living in the golden age of designer board games. Join us as we explore the rise of this curious trend, take a closer look at some of our favourite titles, and give you tips on cocktails that will turn your tabletop evening into a celebrated talking point.

by Daniel Hayden

In an age of smartphones, cloud-based data storage and instant video streaming, the idea of gathering around a table to play a game made of cardboard and plastic may seem antiquated. For some it may be a relic of forced fun at awkward family gatherings, or a lacklustre pastime during a rainy holiday.

It may be a surprise, then, to know that board game sales are rising consistently each year, becoming a billion-dollar industry. More and more new titles are being produced. Crowdfunder websites are currently dominated by intrepid designers and creatives, financing their own games and accompanying accessories with huge success. Across the globe, board game sales and bars are springing up in vibrant cities, letting patrons pick and choose from vast game libraries with accompanying drinks and snacks.

To those who have enjoyed their own 'game night' in the past few years, this will not be a surprise at all. Playing together with friends, face-to-face, is a deeply rewarding experience that can quickly become quite addictive.

#### A TIMELESS TRADITION

Some speculate that in the digital age, physical human interaction has become a prized commodity. A quick instant message or a scroll through social media can be seen as 'catching up' with an acquaintance without any real conversation, leaving even some old friends, bonding over shared memories, looking slower and siller as you interact with something tangible and tactile has an almost primal appeal.

But more than that—board game design has simply become better in the past decade or so. Aside from ancient strategy games like chess, checkers and go, many people may think board games

have a limited scope in what they can accomplish. The mass market has, historically, been dominated by repetitive dice-throwing affairs, catch-in-quit games or nebulously-complicated, needless-consuming roleplaying games. Today, a vast spectrum of titles have emerged to fill the gap there once was.

#### FORWARD-THINKING DESIGN

European-style games like *Catan* and *Settlers of Catan* were at the forefront of the resurgence, with a focus on resource management and diplomacy. These mechanics helped to keep everyone involved at all stages of play, rather than limiting their concentration to their turn at a dice roll.

Some games are notoriously complex for those who thrive on the struggle of strategy, with hundreds of intricate components and thick, beautiful rulebooks. Like the grand space opera game *Terraforming Mars*. Conversely, some titles can easily be explained in seconds and carried around in a pocket or purse, such as the quick card-game *Love Letter* or the storytelling-focused *Cheers*. There are also abstract, social games that require you to really understand your gaming companions. The Resistance gives every player a secret role and tasks you to weed out imperial spies. The Czech-designed game *Codenames* is a more recent arrival that requires players to set up linguistic traps of logic to band together seemingly random words.

But we're here to help you get started. We've selected four of our favourite gateway games to kick-start your new hobby. We have also consulted with our best barmen to suggest some great cocktail pairings that'll help convince your friends to join in too.

## Ticket to Ride: Europe



Step back into the golden age of steam (and travel): the first step to setting up *Ticket to Ride: Europe* involves unfolding a beautiful, vintage-style game board map. Destinations like Dieppe, Venezia and Constantinople are connected by colourful, cross-crossed routes. The game conjures a wonderful sense of nostalgia, reminiscent of a journey aboard the famed *Venice Simplon-Orient-Express*.

The objective is to outdo your opponents as you create a personal rail empire. Each turn players collect coloured carriage cards, which they can then exchange for matching lines on the board. The real strategy arrives in the secret 'tickets' you can also collect, each detailing a longer route that will award bonus points should you succeed in claiming it. You will have to keep an eye out for what your fellow entrepreneurs are collecting, and decide if you should pursue your own goals, or sabotage theirs.

#### TO DRINK:

A classic game deserves a classic cocktail, and where better to find inspiration than from the menu of the Venice Simplon-Orient-Express itself? We recommend our ever-popular Pousse Caffé du Train, a variant on the classic Pousse Café that is typically served after coffee.

The layered colours reflect the vibrant routes available, and much like setting out your delicate carriages, preparing the cocktail requires a steady hand. Begin with 30ml of violet green, herbal Coca Bubb. Carefully layer with 30ml of purple, Barolo Market Amaretto. Finally top with 30ml of sweet, golden Calvados. It's a timeless, elegant tipple for an entrepreneur on the rise.

## Tsuro



Sideline: *The Game of the Fox*. Tsuro is a classic strategy game whose beautiful simplicity is matched by its gorgeous wood carving. The board is printed to look like an ancient Japanese wood carving, where rich reds, ochre and cream create a many-faceted, plebeian scoring against the clouds.

Players select a coloured stone, embellished with the symbol of a dragon, and choose a starting point on the edge of a grid overlay. You then take turns laying tiles, each one patterned with sprawling white lines which become a path for your stone to follow. The object of the game is to create a path that keeps you on the board for longer than your companions. While some have argued the game is a metaphor for the quest to enlightenment, the truth is this is a very quick and easy abstract game, perfect for all ages. It could also double as decorative art.

#### TO DRINK:

Hiroyuki Laska, the Assistant Bar Manager at *Belmond The Serravallo Hotel* in Bell, suggests his own colourful creation, *Imagined Dragon*. The different shades in this layered drink are inspired by the colours of the stones. The gradient symbolises the levels of intensity as the game progresses, beginning with a tranquil green and ending with a chaotic red as you see left with fewer and fewer dragons to play on the board.

To create the cocktail, you will need to layer 40ml of Bacardi with 30ml of Midori, 20ml of pineapple juice, 2ml of orange juice, a dash of lime juice and top it off with 80ml of red dragon fruit juice.

## Tokaido



Tokaido asks its players a simple question: what makes a holiday special? Set in Edo-period Japan, Tokaido is named after the famed Great Sea Road that all manner of pilgrims once journeyed along. Each player takes on the role of a specific character, whether an aged priest or a wandering artist. The journey is split into four days, and you can use each day to pursue whatever interests you most. Unwind in hot springs, with a chance to meet the local masquers. Take time to savour and paint the scenery. Pick up beautiful souvenirs from boutiques and make new friends along the way. The only inevitability is that you must all gather each evening for dinner at a *taberna*.

Both the gameplay and the visuals of Tokaido are incredibly peaceful and zen. The board and accompanying cards use a minimalist art style, rich in pastel colours with bright splashes of green and pink. It's also easy to overlook the sense of competition the game fosters. On your first playthrough, you might not realise how many points you've been awarded until the very end as you get

stuck up in the beauty of the experience, finding avenues for tactical play only after repeated games. Ultimately though, Tokaido champions the importance of a journey well travelled, which is a notion we can all raise a glass to.

#### TO DRINK:

In order to capture the tranquil spirit of the game, we turned to Rejane Kawasaki, the Sake Sommelier of *Mizu* at *Belmond Capotaormina Palace*. She worked with Rodrigo Melis, the Bar Supervisor, to create *Cherry Blossom*. It's a very light, simple and fresh cocktail that uses the best Japanese ingredients to capture an authentic *Ranbu*.

Begin by mixing 50ml of Ume-no-yodo Junmai Daiginjo sake with 30ml of strong, cold hibiscus tea. Layer this with 5ml of cherry syrup and top with 50ml of Oishi Hana Awaka sparkling sake. Adding a final decorative flourish of edible flowers truly reflects the image of cherry blossom in bloom.

## Pandemic



Unlike our previous suggestions, *Pandemic* is a cooperative rather than a competitive experience. You'll have to work together, talking through ideas and strategies, because you either collectively win or collectively fail. Removing the competitive edge from the game does not make it a wide affair, however. *Pandemic* is one of the most challenging and high-octane experiences on the market, enjoying a great deal of popularity as a result.

The board showcases a map of the world, highlighting key cities. Four infectious diseases have broken out across the continents, and you must band together to work on containment and vaccine development. Each player has a role with certain specialities, from medic to operations expert, but ultimately each person only has a very limited number of moves they can make before more cases become infected. Luck and misfortune in crucial moments can really turn the tide of the game, as there is an endless way to lose and only one condition for victory. Forward thinking and co-operation

planning are key, which makes this a fantastic team-building exercise that you cannot help but get caught up in.

#### TO DRINK:

Sergey Prosvirkin, bartender at the Lobby Bar of *Belmond Grand Hotel Europe* created a cocktail that captures the curative spirit of the game, aptly named *The Healer*. One of the most important discoveries of the 20th century was penicillin by Alexander Fleming in 1928, so Sergey put his own creative spin on a classic penicillin cocktail.

Mix 20ml of Bacardi Oldmout with 40ml of single malt Scotch whisky, 15ml of salted Angost or Lapsang. Add in 15ml of honey, the egg white from one egg, 15ml of fresh lime and three slices of fresh ginger root. Dry shake, hard shake and strain. Serve in an old-fashioned glass, and garnish with ginger chips. Even if you are unsuccessful in saving the world, this will surely cure what ails you.