

THE EVOLUTION OF BOARD GAMES IN NORTH AMERICA

BEFORE AMERICA

Board games might be as old as the written word. Archeologists have found boards that date back to Ancient Egypt, though the rules for many of them have been lost to time. Other games have seen their rules shift and change over centuries. What does it take to be remembered?



THE ROYAL GAME OF UR
3RD CENTURY BC

The oldest board we have a near-complete set of rules for is a game archeologists named **The Royal Game Of Ur**. Thanks to ancient tablets, we know it involved players racing each other to the end of the board using dice. Unfortunately, we don't know the exact path players took, nor the game's actual name.



BACKGAMMON
8TH CENTURY AD

Originating as a Persian game called **Nard** — a possible relative to Ur — its name and rules evolved over numerous centuries. A scoring system to enable gambling was added: in 15th century England, where it was renamed **Backgammon**. You might know it best as the game of the other side of the checkerboard.



CHESS
8TH CENTURY AD

Every piece could only move one space in the original game from India. Each kingdom it spread to changed a few details, until the game was standardized for international play in 1849. In the meantime, a 15th century-French player on Backgammon pieces on a Chess board to invent what became **Checkers**.

IN AMERICA

The printing press revolutionized board games. After making books more affordable and more widely available, 17th century British book publishers began branching out into items like card games and board games. It was only a matter of time before America followed suit.



THE TRAVELLERS TOUR THROUGH THE UNITED STATES
1822 | F. & B. LOCKWOOD

The earliest known board game published in the US was a simple map game, likely inspired by similar games from England. Dice were thrown upon for children's games due to their association with gambling, so movement was instead determined by using a spinner — a spinning top with numbers.

Designer: unknown



THE MANSION OF HAPPINESS
1822 | W. & L.B. WIS

Heading to the center of a spiral was a game popularized by **Game Of The Goose**, a 15th century Italian game. **Mansion Of Happiness** was a hit in England in 1820, where the brand was games that revolved around religious morals and values. When published in the US, it looked off an industry here.

Designer: George Fox



THE CHECKERED GAME OF LIFE
1860 | MILTON BRADLEY

Inspired by **The Mansion Of Happiness** and sudden inactivity of his printing company, Milton Bradley designed and patented his own morality-based board game. In an unusual move, the rotation was used to determine which directions you could move in, with the end goal of reaching "Happy Old Age."

Designer: Milton Bradley



PARCHEESI
1867 | SELIGMAN & BRIGHT (as E.G. SELIGMAN & CO.)

Parcheesi was the US name for **Parchisi**, a 19th century game from India. It was trademarked by E.G. Seligman & Co. in 1874, but was first published some time earlier. It led to simplified variations such as **Bored!** in 1934 from Parker Brothers and **Treasure** in 1965 from Trivial Pursuit Co. and Milton Bradley.

Designer: unknown



GAME OF THE PILGRIM'S PROGRESS, GOING TO SABBATH SCHOOL AND TOWER OF BABEL
1875 | MCLOUGHLIN BROTHERS

Dice were becoming less taboo but still didn't seem appropriate for very young children. This led to the creation of the first spinner by McLaughlin Brothers, who were the market leader at the time. They called it the **Indicador**, and it came packaged with children's games or could be bought separately.

Designer: unknown



THE AMAZING GAME OF INNOCENCE ABROAD
1888 | PARKER BROTHERS

The first board game released under the name Parker Brothers (previously Geo. S. Parker), **Innocence Abroad** combined the three most common board types of the time: the spiral road, the map game, and the checkerboard. By answering a spiral to fit on a map, it might have introduced the first winding road board.

Designer: Mrs. Mayhew



MONOPOLY
1883 | CHARLES DUTTON, 1885 | PARKER BROTHERS

Monopoly began as **The Landlord's Game**, a 19th century game from India. It was trademarked by E.G. Seligman & Co. in 1874, but was first published some time earlier. It led to simplified variations such as **Bored!** in 1934 from Parker Brothers and **Treasure** in 1965 from Trivial Pursuit Co. and Milton Bradley.

Designer: Elizabeth "Lizzie" Magie, et al.



CHUTES AND LADDERS
1942 | MILTON BRADLEY

Like **Parcheesi**, **Charles And Ladders** came from India. Players moved along a checkered board trying to land on ladders (green) and avoid snakes (black), which made it easy to adapt into an English morality game circa 1892. Milton Bradley removed the morality and replaced the snakes with slides.

Designer: unknown



SCRABBLE
1948 | 1952 | BARKING, 1952 | SELIGMAN BROTHERS

Games involving forming words out of letter tiles go back as far as the 18th century with games like **Anagrams**, but **Scrabble** added two important innovations: assigning a score to each letter, and including a crossword-inspired board to place the words on. The initial publisher couldn't keep up with orders.

Designer: Alfred H. Butts



CLUE
1949 | PARKER BROTHERS

British board game company **Waddingtons** named the game **Cluedo**, a reference to the popular game **Ledo**. But in America, **Ledo** was known as **Parcheesi**, so Parker Brothers renamed it **Clue**. A movie adaptation starring Tim Curry was released in 1985, the first film based on a board game.

Designer: Anthony E. Pratt



CANDY LAND
1949 | MILTON BRADLEY

Candy Land could be played by young kids who hadn't yet learned to count because movement was determined by color. But when previous games did it, they ended up forgotten, like **Piggy's Progress** (mentioned earlier). Was candy the secret ingredient that lodged the game in everyone's memory?

Designer: Eleanor Abbott



HEX
1942 | PARKER BROTHERS

The earliest known game to use a grid of hexagons is an 18th century French game called **Agon**, and the first one published in the US was **Office Boy** from 1895, but **Hex** is notable because it inspired **BAND** Corporation to replace squares with hexagons on their maps used for war games by the military.

Designer: Piet Hein or John Nash



TACTICS
1954 | AVOLON HILL (as AVOLON GAME COMPANY)

Military use of war games dates back to 1810 and **Kriegsspiel**. Charles S. Roberts had heard of these games but wasn't sure where to find them, so he made his own. His company **Avolon Hill** became a favorite among war game hobbyists. He started using hex grids in 1951 after seeing **RAND** was doing it.

Designer: Charles S. Roberts



RISK
1959 | PARKER BROTHERS

Risk began as a 1952 French game called **Le Campaigne du Monde**, but Parker Brothers adjusted the rules so the game would play faster. Compared to other more complex war games, the ease and quickness of play gave **Risk** greater mass appeal, making it one of the most popular military board games.

Designer: Albert Lamotte



DIPLOMACY
1959 | ALAN CALAMER, 1961 | GAMES RESEARCH

Diplomacy was the polar opposite of **Risk**, a complex and lengthy game that was entirely strategy and no dice. It gained a cult following, but in the days before the internet it wasn't so easy to find opponents to play. **Parkies** helped to organize matches played by mail, similar to **Chess** pen pals.

Designer: Alan D. Calamer



THE GAME OF LIFE
1960 | MILTON BRADLEY

On the 100th anniversary of **The Checkered Game Of Life**, the game was completely redesigned and updated for the times. Now instead of reaching "Happy Old Age," the goal was to become the wealthy millionaire. The game board was enhanced with rolled plastic pieces to make it slick out.

Designer: Maxine Klamer



MOUSE TRAP
1963 | IDEAL

Toy designer **Marvin Glass & Associates** took plastic game boards one step further, creating a **Rube Goldberg** machine that blurred the line between toy and game. They pitched it to Ideal, a toy company who didn't consider **Bernieries**, a game company, but **Mouse Trap** instantly made them the third largest.

Designer: Marvin Glass, Bud Meyer, et al.



BATTLESHIP
1967 | MILTON BRADLEY

Based on an old pencil-and-paper game known by various names but first published as **Sea or No Sea** in 1921, **Battleship** replaced the hand-drawn rectangles and X's with plastic ships and pegs on a plastic peg board. The upper half set of a 90 degree angle so you could shield your opponent from peering.

Designer: unknown



CONNECT FOUR
1974 | MILTON BRADLEY

Connect Four also had a vertical board, and played like a mix of **Tic-Tac-Toe** and **Checkers**. Milton Bradley published numerous plastic concepts that challenged the definition of "board game," including **Operation** in 1965, **Hungry Hungry Hippos** in 1970, and card-board hybrid **Guess What?** in 1976.

Designer: Howard Wexler & Ned Strangin



DUNGEONS & DRAGONS
1974 | TSR

From the world of war games came an idea so innovative that it spawned its own genre. Although the board was typically created by the player, a simplified board game edition for beginners was released in 1981 as **The New Easy To Master Dungeons & Dragons**.

Designer: Gary Gygax & Dave Arneson



TRIVIAL PURSUIT
1981 | HORNBLADE, 1982 | SELIGMAN & BRIGHT

Board games were typically considered something for families or for hobbyists, with very few options for party games for adults. There'd been previous trivia board games, but **Trivial Pursuit's** secret weapon was asking pop-culture questions to the first generation of adults who'd been raised on television.

Designer: Scott Abbott & Chris Haney

RENAISSANCE

The 20th century history of the US board game industry played out like a real life game of monopoly, with companies buying each other up until only one remained. Innovation stagnated, and so did interest in board games. But then smaller companies began to introduce new ideas...

1920: Milton Bradley buys McLaughlin Brothers
1944: Hasbro buys Milton Bradley
1986: Hasbro buys Seligman & Bright

1989: Hasbro buys Coleco
1994: Hasbro buys Parker Brothers
1994: Hasbro buys Waddingtons

1997: Wizards Of The Coast buys TSR
1998: Hasbro buys Avalon Hill
1998: Hasbro buys Wizards Of The Coast



THE SETTLERS OF CATAN
1994 | HAVARD GAMES

Settlers Of Catan introduced Americans to German "Euro-style" games, which focused more on strategy than luck, yet weren't as lengthy or complex as war games. **Catan** was a game that both hobbyists and their families could enjoy, and by 2013 it had become the fourth-largest board game brand in the US.

Designer: Klaus Teuber



CARCASSONNE
2000 | BIG CIGARET GAMES

Both **Catan** and **Carcassonne** used boards made of tiles so the game played differently every time, but the latter made tile placement part of the game. Published in the US by **Big Cigaret Games**, a company founded by former **Parkies** Games employee Jay Tummelson, it became another strategy hit.

Designer: Klaus-Jürgen Wrede



TICKET TO RIDE
2004 | DAYS-OF-WORNER

Ticket To Ride completed the triad of Euro-style games that acted as a gateway to players seeking out slightly more advanced games. Downloadable app versions of games were also responsible for converting people into new board game fans, as was the YouTube series **TableTop** starting in 2010.

Designer: Alan R. Moon



TWILIGHT STRUGGLE
2005 | GMT GAMES

In contrast to German games, which typically avoid the subject of war, **Twilight Struggle** was designed as a war game intended to be easier and faster to play. The resulting game spent a record two years in the #1 spot on **BoardGameGeek**, a site that's been bringing together board game fans since 2000.

Designer: Amanda Gupta & Jason Matthews



PANDEMIC
2007 | Z-MAN GAMES

Pandemic was designed of the opposite of a war game. Instead of battling players for control of the world, you worked together to try and save it. Like other successful strategy series, it had a number of expansions and spin-offs, and a currently experimenting with a story-driven season-based format.

Designer: Matt Leacock



THE SETTLERS OF THE SOUTH SANDWICH ISLANDS
2010 | TAYLOR & GAY

Kickstarter was founded in April 2009, and it changed board games forever. One game in 2017 raised \$38M on **Kickstarter**, but few remember the very first board game to be successfully **Kickstarted**, which reached its funding goal in February 2010 to print 500 copies, shipped in August 2010, and was quietly forgotten.

Designer: James Taylor



ALIEN FRONTIERS
2010 | CLEVER GAMES GAMES

The first big hit based game to come out of **Kickstarter** raised \$10k toward its goal of \$15k in June 2010 and shipped in October 2010. It led to additional **Kickstarter** campaigns that funded an expansion, an app, and additional printings, each of them even more successful than the first one.

Designer: Tony Klaman



XCOM: THE BOARD GAME
2014 | FANTASY FLIGHT GAMES

As smartphones became more commonplace, companion apps for board games began to appear, which sped up and simplified complex aspects of games, or were just a little more convenient. **XCOM** was the first board game that required downloading a free companion app in order to play it.

Designer: Eric M. Lang



GLOOMHAVEN
2017 | CRYSTAL BALL GAMES

Gloomhaven was the #1 on **BoardGameGeek**, a position it's held since December 2017. It initially raised \$38M on **Kickstarter**, but gained so much positive buzz via word-of-mouth that a second campaign for an additional print run raised nearly \$4 million. It's one of the heftier board games around, weighing in at 20 lbs.

Designer: Isaac Childres

Sources: BoardGameGeek.com, Eurogamer.com, Kickstarter.com, MuseumOfPlay.org, TheBigGameFunnel.com, BGG.org, it's A4-A.com. The history of Board Games from Monopoly To Settlers Of Catan

