

The Dad Game 2013 Gift Guide

by John Kaufeld

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The holidays are the perfect time to spend with family and friends around a game. This guide introduces you to 17 American and European board games that are great for gift giving or gift getting (or as clever suggestions to the people in your life looking to buy something cool for you).

What you'll find inside

The guide is split into several sections based on the kind of games in the list, how much the games cost, or whether I couldn't find anywhere else to put them. (That's the list called *Something Completely Different*, in case you wondered.)

Each game entry in the guide includes:

- Name of the game (for obvious reasons)
- Manufacturer (makes it easy to get help finding the game)
- · Game's suggested retail price
- · A quick blurb about the game

The vast majority of games on the list are family-friendly -- well, everything except The Walking Dead game, but you probably saw that coming. The age ranges for the games start around 8 years old and go up to adult.

That being said, these aren't "kiddie games" by any stretch of the imagination. The games in here will keep both kids and adults engaged, challenged, and making memories for many nights to come. Really. I promise.

Where to buy

You can find most of these games at your Friendly Local Game Store -- or game stores, if you happen to live in a city like Fort Wayne, where we're blessed with an abundance gaming goodness.

Of course, you can also find these games online and in some larger bookstores (notably Barnes and Noble). You probably *won't* find them at most big box retail stores. Target and Toys 'R Us carry a few of these games, but nowhere near all of them.

Please buy your games locally if you can. Yes, you can probably save a few dollars by ordering online, but shopping at a local store keeps your money in the local economy, and that's worth quite a lot right there. Even if they don't have a game in stock, they can usually order it with delivery in a couple of days at no extra charge.

Where to buy in Fort Wayne

For the Fort Wayne folks out there, here's a list of the city's Friendly Local Game Stores.

TIP! If you're new to the world of board gaming, I recommend starting with either Clem's or Gamequest. The other stores will certainly help you, but those two are particularly good at helping families get started!

Recommended Stores

- Gamequest on Clinton (http://www.facebook.com/gamequestfw)
- Clem's in Jefferson Pointe (http://www.facebook.com/ClemsFtWayne)

North Side

Nerdvana Games on Till Road (http://www.facebook.com/nerdvanagames)

Central

- Deck Factory Gaming Center on Parnell (http://www.facebook.com/DeckFactory)
- Gamequest on Clinton (http://www.facebook.com/gamequestfw)
- Power Nine Gaming on Coliseum (http://www.facebook.com/PowerNineGaming)
- The Keep on Goshen Road (http://www.facebook.com/TheKeepGaming)

South Side

- Clem's in Jefferson Pointe (http://www.facebook.com/ClemsFtWayne)
- The Game Annex near Jefferson Pointe (http://www.facebook.com/thegameannexfw)

What if you want to know more?

That's a great question. I like the way you think!

Your Friendly Local Game Store probably has demonstration copies of many of these games just waiting for you. Most stores also have game demo nights where they teach new games. Call your local store and ask -- they'll be glad to help you!

You can also look up the games on YouTube. You'll find reviews and how-to-play videos in abundance. In particular, look for videos from The Dice Tower. Their productions cover an amazing array of games, in a light and entertaining way. The Tabletop video series with Wil Wheaton is another great source of information, although they haven't tried as many games as the Dice Tower folks.

And now, to the games!

And now, to... um... wait, I already said that. Darn it. Got ahead of myself. (Sorry.)

Stocking Stuffers

Every shopping list has several spaces for small, inexpensive gift options. These games will please both your people and your budget. And it's tough to beat that combination.

- Love Letter (AEG, \$9.99) is so small and portable that I wondered if was a complete game the first time I saw it. The game is easy to learn, with the important text right on the cards. Best of all, it comes in a red velvet drawstring pouch for easy transportation.
- **Continuo** (US Game Systems, \$9.99) is an ingenious game of matching colors on tiles. It won a number of "best game" awards, including one from Mensa. Buy an extra copy for yourself. It's that good.
- A Fistful of Penguins (Wattsalpoag, \$17.95) puts a different spin on Yahtzee-style dice games thanks to custom dice with animals instead of numbers, along with a scoring system that rewards both combinations and single rolls. And it includes a ton of adorable lucite penguins which are awesome by themselves. Just sayin'.
- **Dungeon Roll** (Tasty Minstrel Games, \$19.95) caters to the adventure-minded game lover and/or people who can quote every Lord of the Rings movie. It's great for two players, and has some inexpensive expansions available.

Entertaining a Crowd

'Tis the season of joy, good cheer, and innumerable house guests. To keep everybody happy and entertained (even during the dreaded *Afternoon Turkey Doldrums*), try these party games.

- Choose One (Looney Labs, \$29.99) is my new favorite party game -- and that's saying something. It's a perfect ice breaker, family entertainer, and conversation starter. It's as close to a perfect party game as I can imagine. You need this one on your shelf.
- Snake Oil (Out of the Box, \$19.99) casts players as fast-talking inventors developing crazy products for each turn's zany customer. Snake Oil puts a new spin on the "creativity game" genre that makes this game a whole new level of fun.
- **Schmovie** (Galactic Sneeze, \$29.99) is perfect for movie lovers. It's all about making up movie titles and making people laugh. It's a very new game, so you'll probably only find it on Amazon (but you can check with your local store anyway).
- UnNatural Selection (R&R Games, \$10.95) is both a stocking stuffer and a dessert topping for a hysterical round of group fun. How else could you explain that a squishy, over-caffeinated dragon lost a fight against an ambidextrous chocolate cake monster that was making spaghetti? (I promise the last sentence makes perfect sense once you see the game.)

For People New to Eurogames

These games make a great start for anyone who wants to begin playing games with their family or friends. In fact, you might as well just buy them all now and get it out of the way.

- Carcassonne Winter Edition (Z-Man Games, \$34.95) puts a beautiful spin on the award-winning original, Carcassonne. Players collectively build a map with square tiles, scoring points as they play. The balance of luck and skill keeps this game coming back to the table regularly.
- **King of Tokyo** (Iello, \$44.99) is pure giant rampaging monstery goodness of fun, with dice. Think Kaiju monsters from *Pacific Rim* or *Godzilla* combined with your favorite dice game. (No, not Craps... more like Yahtzee.) It's awesome family fun!
- Settlers of Catan (Mayfair, \$41.95) is the one that introduced German board games to the United States. It won both US and German "game of the year" awards. It's unlike anything you ever played, and totally different than Monopoly. And your friends probably love it already.

Because I'm a Train Game Geek

This section snuck in because, yes, I'm a train game geek. I loved my Lionel trains when I was growing up, and I still love my trains today (except now they don't move on their own, which is probably a good thing because I'd get really freaked out if that happened in a board game). These three games use light strategy, so they're good for adults and kids alike. In fact, my 9 year-old beat me in a game of Empire Express at Thanksgiving. Completely took me down. It was brutal. (I'm so proud!)

- **Ticket to Ride** (Days of Wonder, \$49.95) is another multi-award winner that belongs on everybody's shelf. Collect cards, connect cities, and out-score your opponents. It's simple, engaging, and engrossing. You'll love it.
- String Railway (Foxmind, 29.99) puts a unique spin on train games with a combination of cards and, yes, string. A random board (with string boundaries, string rivers, and a string mountain) provide completely new challenges every time you play.
- Empire Express (Mayfair, 29.99) is a great intro to the world of railroad "crayon games." They're called that because you draw your rail lines on the board as you play. (Cool, eh?) Of course, you use a special wipe-off crayon, because you'll keep coming back to play again and again. And again.

Something Completely Different

These games just don't fit anywhere else, but I couldn't leave them behind this season because they're each really awesome. They're unique in their own ways. Like snowflakes. Big, boxed, colorful snowflakes. With pandas, zombies, and spaceships on them. Sweet.

- **Takenoko** (Asmodee, \$49.99) almost defies explanation. It's a beautiful game about building gardens, growing bamboo, and helping the royal panda gorge itself on every bamboo plant in sight. You have to see this to know how fun it is. For a wonderful intro, check out the Tabletop episode about Takenoko on YouTube.
- The Walking Dead Board Game: The Best Defense (Cryptozoic, \$39.99) is a cooperative game especially for fans of the AMC TV series. If your family loves the show, this game gives you a great way to turn off the TV and spend some time together fighting off Walkers, gathering resources, and generally trying to stay human.
- Firefly: The Game (Gale Force Nine, \$49.95) puts you in charge of a *Firefly*-class spaceship and invites you to gather your crew, take on some jobs, and occasionally misbehave. If you're a Firefly or Serenity fan, you should own this game. It's probably the most challenging game on the whole list, but the learning curve is worth the effort.

That's it for 2013.
Until next time, happy gaming!!