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# **Fair-Play: How Women Experience Sexism within Board Gaming Spaces**

**By Katie Peaker, U1256795**

**A thesis submitted to the University of Huddersfield in partial fulfilment of  
the requirements for the degree of MA by Research in Communication,  
Culture and Media Studies.**

**The University of Huddersfield**

**September 2018**

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## Abstract

As a male dominated culture, board gaming demonstrates relative traits to its digital counterpart video games when it comes to accepting women within its spaces. Through the representations of women of both in game and from within the culture, board gaming has a lot to offer in terms of understanding their experiences. Despite this, board gaming has and continues to be a niche community that has been left fairly untouched by scholars and research. Although there has been previous work regarding board games, there has been no full exploration of the fans within this culture. This study aim to change that, and look into the very minority of board games, the women. This study aims to explore how women experience board games on a daily basis when engaging with their own gaming groups and spaces and talks through the labour and challenges that faces them when experiencing sexism and resistance from its male dominated audience. Through the use of twelve interviews with women based in worldwide locations alongside netnographic data taken from the *BoardGameGeek* forums, we begin to understand how women work within these spaces despite being under represented and dismissed. The study provides analysis on the participants answers by delving deeper into the concept of 'play' and subcultural style alongside fannish participatory labour to form a greater understanding as to how women experience sexism within their chosen community.

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## Introduction - “Why Board Games?”

It is surprising that the general consensus of board games amongst people who are outside of the board gaming culture assumes that board gaming consists of *Monopoly*, *Cluedo* and *Operation* and even more so, when you are a 25 year old, female “Board Gamer” talking about your hobby. The looks and frowns from people thinking that you spend your time devoted to passing go can be quite alarming but becomes expected after a while. The funny thing is, that board gaming is so much more than these games. In fact, you need only to look at someone’s ‘Shelfie’ to understand the sheer mass of games that have been produced and published over the past few decades. Despite board gaming dating back the Ancient Egypt whereby Pharaohs were known to engage in ‘play’, board gaming has really come alive in the last few decades. Board gamers play games, because they enjoy it and they are a “fan” but each individual will also have their own unique reasons to engage in board gaming as well. For some participants within this study their reasons are for nostalgia, for distraction or simply to meet other people. What is key to take from this however, is that board gaming is still largely underground and has not been studied in as much depth as other fandoms or cultures.

When getting under the surface of board gaming, it becomes apparent that the passion and obsession of gaming is a growing force within its fandom. With every year, more and more board games are getting released and more and more convention spaces are being filled with a wider variety of people. Having the same stereotypical demographic as gaming, being overly male dominated, it is important to realise that the growth of board gaming is inviting the industry to demonstrate more inclusivity by its titles and represent its growing fandom fairly. This study focuses on the experiences of women that are within and engaging in gaming spaces to provide a new perspective on tabletop gaming studies as previous research does not explore the importance of the players and instead focuses on the games themselves as texts (see Booth, 2015; Woods, 2012). The emergence of board games into popular culture is demonstrated by the rise of board gaming/ ‘hobby’ stores and board gaming café’s that are opening around the UK. This rise in available local spaces also demonstrates that more people are discovering games and although I would argue that board gaming is not yet as mainstream as digital gaming, there is still a requirement to study the culture and its community.

What is unique about tabletop gaming is that it is done face to face, unlike digital games whereby most multiplayer options are online. Gamers come together on a weekly basis to meet,

sit at a table and engage in board gaming and the list of different genres or categories are seemingly endless. There are party games, strategy games, cooperative games, wargames, horror games, escape games and many many more, meaning that players can sit down for a completely different experience every time and whilst this all sounds incredibly positive, face to face interactions can prove difficult for people, specifically women if they are not fully recognised within the culture itself. We have explored sexism in digital games multiple times and through multiple ways, by looking at the representations of women to looking into the players themselves but have not yet done the same from tabletop games despite the similarities between digital and analog gaming. Sexism in video gaming, whilst it does happen in a face to face settings it tends to be more online due to the nature of how players engage in the game itself. If we use this same idea for board gaming, this would mean that because players engage in face to face ‘play’, sexism is likely to happen within these real-life situations.

The focus of this study is to provide a platform for women gamers to outline their own experiences as being the known minority within board gaming spaces. From the interviews with the participants, this study is broken up into two main chapters. The first chapter documents the types of sexism that women may generally experience from within the board gaming community alongside their own thoughts and feelings on the matter. It then looks into the representations of women, within the culture itself and the board games as texts and comes to a close by looking at the ways in which women are challenging sexism and stereotypes within the board gaming culture. The second chapter takes a heavier focus on the work that goes into board gaming, whilst looking at fan labour as a whole, I begin to outline the roles by which women take on in order to gain a sense of belonging and community from a male dominated culture that may not provide a fair space for women to engage in. As a final point, I explore the depths of free labour to outline the emotional and affective ways in which women engage in board games. This study aims to offer a new insight into the board gaming world that has not yet been recognised and hopes to feature and emphasize the need to continue and begin studying players within the board gaming culture in the same in-depth approach that scholars have been doing with regards to digital gaming.



## Literature Review - “Understanding the Lore”

For years, the concept of geek culture has emerged and risen into a more mainstream society, J A McArthur (2008) puts this down to the showcasing of “geeky” characters that can be identified with mainstream television shows, using “Samuel “Screech” Powers from *Saved by the Bell* or the entire cast of the show *Beauty and the Geek* as some examples (McArthur, 2008, pg 61). This emergence of “geek” popularity and has taken the interest of scholars who have begun conducting research on its fans and communities, however geek culture is so vast that not all aspects have yet been covered. Aspects like video games which had since been viewed as ‘geeky’ are now a major part of popular and digital culture and the field has become almost saturated with research from scholars (see Atkins and Krzywinska, 2007; Crawford, 2011 & 2012; Hjorth, 2011; Jenkins, 2006; Newman, 2008). However, some of the considerably more underground and ‘geeky’ hobbies remain fairly unexplored. Tabletop or board gaming is one of these hobbies, having been the central focus point for little research throughout the last few years (see Booth, 2015; Bremer, 2017; Woods, 2012) the hobby remains fairly unexplored. Board gaming has a huge influence over its digital counterpart, whereby many scholars recognise the impressions and inspirations that have been taken from and adapted on to video games, Greg Costikyan and Drew Davidson (2011) explain: “You can draw a direct line of descent from, say *Tactics II* to *Call of Duty*, or from *Dungeons & Dragons* to *World of Warcraft* - or, for that matter, from games like *Rail Baron* to *Farmville*.” (Costikyan and Davidson, 2011, pg 13).

One of the major fields that has emerged from video gaming but has not yet been researched in board games is gender and the exploration of female fans being the minority in both of these cultures. The majority of current research conducted on the board gaming has been largely regarding the board games as cultural texts or using the concept of ‘rules of play’ and the ‘magic circle’ to explore the culture and not the fans themselves (see, Booth, 2015; Callois, 1961; Huizinga, 1938; Salen and Zimmerman, 2004). This study is going to utilise the gap within the existing research to explore female board gamers and their experiences within the male dominated culture. For digital games, the importance of exploring femininity within male dominated cultures and communities has already been established and this work will be used as a stopgap for this study (see Cassell and Jenkins, 2000; Kafai, Heeter, Denner and Sun 2011; Shaw, 2015, Taylor, Jenson and de Castell, 2009). In total, this review will be an exploration of three subsections that

all play a major part into understanding this study, the first will cover the existing material in both digital and analog games. This section will be used to set a groundwork on the basic understanding of gaming, the ‘rules of play’ and an overview of important gamer theory. The second section will look into gender, in particular women and feminism, this will also include existing texts regarding women in gaming. To finish, this study will outline the existing research conducted on fandom. This section will also look into the defining characteristics of fandoms and the concept of free fannish labour that helps produced profit for both corporations and the fans themselves in different ways. All three subsections combined will provide a greater picture that will aid this study into understanding and documenting the complications and experiences of women within the board gaming culture.

### **“The Backstory” - Gaming**

The most fundamental groundwork to cover about gaming is the ‘rules of play’ and the concept of the ‘magic circle’, John Huizinga (1938) first argued that when engaging in ‘play’, the players entered a ‘magic circle’ that existed outside of societal norms. Originally, the theory was used to cover all notions of ‘play’ meaning that the variations were vast and could cover anything from gaming to sports to children playing hopscotch. As Huizinga (1938) defines ‘play’ as:

All play moves and has its being within a play-ground marked off beforehand...The area, the card-table, the magic circle, the temple, the stage, the screen, the tennis court, the court of justice etc. are all in form and function play-grounds i.e. forbidden slots, isolated, hedged round, hallowed, within which special rules obtain. All are temporary worlds within the ordinary world, dedicated to the performance of an act apart (Huizinga, 1938, pg 10).

Since this time however, scholars such as Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman (2004) have used this concept to adapt specifically for gaming. Salen and Zimmerman (2004) also developed Huizinga’s (1938) concept of a ‘play community’. Defined as “a group that still stay together after the game is completed and that there is something special regarding the ability of the group to leave the social norms and go into a circle of play situation together” (Huizinga, 1938, pg 12) with the existence and rise in popularity of “Legacy” type games, whereby the game is required to be played by the same group of people for a set number of games, this type of “play community” that is described can easily be recognised and likened to a tabletop group and therefore adapted on to analog gaming theory. Although Salen and Zimmerman likened the existing theory onto gaming,

Roger Caillois (2001) had since critically developed Huizinga's (1938) original concept of 'play' into six defining qualities. The qualities were that 'play' is *free*, it is *separate* from the norms of society, its outcome is *uncertain*, it is *unproductive* in the sense that nothing is gained, it is *governed* by its own rules and finally is *make-believe*. These qualities were aimed to be the identifying factors of 'play', however when using these to identify 'play' through board games or gaming as a whole, not all of these qualities fit. Engaging with 'play' in a gaming setting can no longer be observed as *unproductive*, as the rise in esports and gaming tournaments offering prize money demonstrates a contrast in the original quality that advises there is nothing gained from 'play'. T L Taylor's (2012) research on esports highlights the benefits to professional players; "Many pro players, for example, operate at what we might think of as a semi-pro level. They are engaged in competitions and winning tournament prize money, perhaps even travelling internationally." (Taylor, 2012, pg 246). Equally for board gaming or more widely, tabletop gaming (which includes all aspects of 'role playing games' and 'trading card games') there are many championships for games like *Magic the Gathering* or *Yu-Gi-Oh!* that offer out large amounts of prize money to winning individuals. On a smaller scale, weekly tournaments set up by local board gaming stores also offer out prizes to winners which contrasts with Caillois' (2001) defining qualities of 'play'.

The theory of the 'magic circle' along with its definitions of 'play' have faced criticism from some gaming scholars who argue that 'play' cannot entirely be separate from real life on going issues as these will always play a role or affect 'play' in some way. Rather than adapting the magic circle to fit games, Thomas Malaby (2007) proposed that the concept needed to be built from the group up and rethought out;

*Play* as it is used in both game scholarship and often more widely, commonly signifies a form of activity with three intrinsic features. It is *separable* from everyday life (especially as against "work"; it exists within a "magic circle"), *safe* ("consequence free" or nonproductive) and *pleasurable* or "fun" (normatively positive). None of these features holds as an intrinsic, universal feature of games when they are examined empirically, however (and play itself may be more usefully treated not as a form of activity but as a mode of experience). Ironically, it is how we have sought to account for what is remarkable

about games by setting them apart (as play spaces, as stories) that is the largest roadblock to understanding what is powerful about them. (Malaby, 2007, pg 96).

Instead, Malaby (2007) proposed that games are “semi-bounded arenas” that can be “relatively separable from everyday life, and what is at stake in them can range from very little to the entirety of one’s material, social and cultural capital.” (Malaby, 2007, pg 96). Mia Consalvo (2009) equally argues that “Players never play a new game or fail to bring outside knowledge about games and gameplay into their gaming situations. The event is “tainted” perhaps by prior knowledge. There is no innocent gaming.” (Consalvo, 2009, pg 415). Malaby (2007) and Consalvo (2009) both use digital games as the forefront of their dispute against the magic circle but Gary Alan Fine’s (1983) work on role players indicates that he also questioned the concept of the ‘magic circle’. Fine (1983) suggests that throughout the role playing game, there are different shifts in frame;

Despite the possibilities for engrossment in fantasy gaming, frame shifting occurs frequently - both up-keying (adding laminations to the game world) and down-keying (returning to players’ primary frameworks or to a discussion of the gaming rules)... The implications of this are consistent with seeing interactants negotiating reality with each other. (Fine, 1983, pg 200).

This implication of players shifting from being within the game to discussing things such as rules or other topics, mirror those of Consalvos (2009) argument in that there is no “innocent gaming.”

Fine’s (1983) study is the most prominent text that features similarities with this study, having written a chapter focusing on the players and ‘fans’ of role-playing games rather than the games themselves. Fine also attempts to define the position of women within the culture by arguing that “females aren’t welcomed and when allowed to play are treated inequitably” (Fine, 1983, pg 68). When one of the participants within Fine’s study explains that women are subjected to sexist remarks from men and how this practice is considered as standard amongst the community, Fine argues that, “Although some women may find this camaraderie enjoyable and respond in kin, others feel uncomfortable or recognise social or political implications, particularly since the game simulates an oppressive male society.” (Fine, 1983, pg 68). These arguments outline the basis of the next chapter which is to look further in depth as to what existing theory is available in terms

of women and gaming however, Fine's (1983) work on women in gaming ends with his chapter and takes a heavier focus on the role playing games and the social functions between players whilst engaged within a role playing game. Additional work produced on tabletop games are Paul Booth's (2015) work on board games as paratexts and Greg Costikyan and Drew Davidson's (2011) research on analog gaming design. Both of these examples, miss out the key ingredient to tabletop gaming, which is the players. Booth (2015) heavily focuses on board games that a paratexts to contemporary films, such as *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hunger Games* alongside popular TV series' *The Walking Dead* and *Game of Thrones*. There is no work within this text that provides any analysis of the games' audience or fandom. Equally, Costikyan and Davidson (2011) offers a detailed look into the design of board games but again does not recognise the importance of exploring the board gaming audience. The study will aim to fill a gap in which it will explore board games through its fandom and through the minority of women on how they experience the male 'oppressed' culture that Fine argues.

### **“Pick your Class, Race & Sex” - Gending in Gaming**

As previously outlined, there are minimal studies that look into women in board gaming cultures. This section will aim to create a background on the existing research regarding women in digital games as similarly this culture is also male dominated. Through this, we can begin to establish links as to how things may be similar within the board gaming community. Many scholars who have researched in 'gamers' have argued that the typical gamer is a male, white adolescent (see Cassell and Jenkins, 2000; Fine, 1983; Kocurek, 2015; Taylor, Jenson and de Castell 2009) as Garry Crawford (2012) states, “Stereotypes include, most commonly, the view of video gamers as, largely, antisocial, aggressive, addicted, male and white adolescents.” (Crawford, 2012, pg 48). Crawford (2012) also goes on to explore the concept that despite this stereotype, there is an increasing amount of women who have begun to play games and enter the male dominated culture, equally other scholars are recognising this and making this central to their research but Crawford highlights, “It is important that academic literature does not just acknowledge women as a minority or excluded from video game culture, but also seeks to understand their participation and role within it.” (Crawford, 2012, pg 55). As the recognition of women within video games grows, so should the recognition within board games however this has not been the case. Much of the work produced on women within gaming spaces has largely overlooked board gaming or tabletop

gaming as a whole and focused predominantly on video games. A lot of this work argued more towards the representations on women within board games as Justine Cassell and Henry Jenkins (2000) explored the impact that misogyny and sexist ideologies within games would have on the exclusion of girls within gaming, “The games console may help prepare children for participation in the digital world, but at the same time it socialises boys into misogyny and excludes girls from all but the most objectified positions.” (Cassell and Jenkins, 2000, pg 366). Whilst Cassell and Jenkins (2000) looked at a younger generation of boys and girls playing video games and understanding the creation of ‘girl games’ such as *Barbie* themed games that aimed to target girls specifically, they argued that the sexist representations of women within the games would further reinforce young boys to grow up believing that women are sexual objects.

As a follow up or adaptation to Cassell and Jenkins’ (2000) work, Yasmin Kafai, Carrie Heeter, Jill Denner and Jennifer Sun (2008) outlined the changes to the games industry during the gap between their research, stating that now more women were playing video games and the industry itself were cracking down on the use of objectified women such as “booth babes” in an aim towards making gaming more inclusive. However, Kafai et al (2008) argued that;

While the number of girls and women players has significantly increased, it remains unclear how extensive gender differences are in what players want, whether girls and women are finding gaming experiences that appeal to the, and where balanced gender roles are being represented. The fact that girls and women now play games in increasing numbers is not an indication that the conversation about gender should end. (Kafai et al, 2008, pg 18).

As the academic field and industry now recognised that women were playing games, this did not seem to change the idea that gaming spaces were largely male dominated and rightly so, as there still continues to be recent titles that remain unchanged and misogynistic in some form. For board gaming, this is very similar, there is some recognition by the industry that the board gaming audience is slowly becoming more equal and that women have also taken an interest in the hobby, yet the production and commodities that are being produced remain unchanged by these notions, Stuart Woods (2012) used the statistic of *BoardGameGeek*’s website to outline the lack in female users, “The level of female participation in the *BoardGameGeek* community is extremely low... with males accounting for about 96 percent of respondents.” (Woods, 2012, pg 122). Within the

six years that has passed since these statistics, the growth of popularity for board gaming has been significant, the largest board gaming convention in the UK, *The UK Games Expo* released statistics that showed just under 3,000 newly unique attendees in 2012 which was around the same time of Woods (2012) research, however 2017 saw 16,300 unique visitors on the weekend of the convention verifying the huge rise and awareness in tabletop gaming. Not only this, but a percentage even it is low, would reflect a much larger audience of women within the community. Despite this growth in players, the representations of women are still largely sexist, misogynist and similar to the artwork expected within video games. Aaron Trammell's (2016) researched the *Dungeons and Dragons* guides to look into misogynist representations of women, he found that;

The key difference between the male and female body, according to Lakofka, is that instead of a charisma score, women have a "beauty" characteristic... These abilities focus on the characters beauty specifically, and consist of abilities such as "Charm Men", "Charm Humanoid Monster", "Seduction", "Horrid Beauty" and "Worship"... These abilities represent a woman who use beauty as a weapon to get what she desires from men who must in turn resist succumbing to temptation. Not only do these statistics reinforce the stereotype that a woman's value and power lie only in her beauty, but they also reify a heteronormative standard of sexuality where relationships are exclusively staged between men and women. (Trammell, 2016, pg 26-27)

Equally, Meggie Fornazari and Litiane Macedo (2016) used *Magic the Gathering* as the base of their research and saw that "There are almost twice as many women (36.6%) showing body attributes than men (20.8%)" (Fornazari and Macedo, 2016 Pg 171) but also went on to say that *Theros* (an expansion pack of the game released in 2013), in particular has more sexualised men due to being inspired by Ancient Greece, "a culture that praised a healthy, strong and fit body for men and women" (Fornazari and Macedo, 2016, Pg 171). Both examples of the research has been conducted to texts that are relevant to tabletop gaming but not exclusive to board gaming which reaffirms the significant lack of research that has been produced.

Women and games has been a longstanding battle against the perception that women 'didn't belong' or were made to feel welcome. These notions spiked when a major movement and

conspiracy known as #GamerGate emerged involving both women in the gaming industry and women within the gaming academic field. GamerGate began as a harassment campaign online towards a female game developer, Zoe Quinn. Her ex-boyfriend had posted online accusations stating that she had cheated on him with male gaming journalists by ‘trading sex’ in return for publicity and good reviews of her game. Eventually, a male actor tweeted using the hashtag, GamerGate attacking the Quinn which caused the tweet to be spread across other social media platforms and websites which generated enough publication to turn the hashtag into a fully-fledged movement. Shira Chess and Adrienne Shaw (2015), two gaming scholars wrote about their experiences within GamerGate, advising that “Those in the GamerGate movement allege that there is corruption in video games journalism and that feminists are actively working to undermine the video game industry.” (Chess and Shaw, 2015, pg 210). Chess and Shaw arranged a large group conversation at the Digital Games Research Association (DiGRA) conference, they also provided a public Google Document that was live and allowed anybody within the conference to participate. However, things began taking a different turn when the Google document was picked up by *4Chan* users who made connections back to Zoe Quinn and GamerGate and believed the document alongside the rise in articles regarding women in gaming to be part of a larger conspiracy. Other scholars also used GamerGate as an important topic within their research (see Banat-Weiser, 2018; Jane, 2016; Kafai, Richard and Tynes, 2016; Massanari, 2017; McClintock 2015; Mortensen, 2016). Despite the original backlash surrounding the concept that women talking about diversifying games, the movement of GamerGate has spotlighted the need and importance for this research which is evident in the amount of work conducted over the last few years since the movement began. This further highlights the idea that more research done on similar fields, such as this study is also important.

Although the connections between GamerGate and board gaming have not yet been established, it should be argued that as a similar culture that runs parallel to video games there is also a need to explore women within this culture as well. For board gaming, there are the same on-going issues of representations and sexism that have been present within video gamer culture yet the difference is that nobody has highlighted this in an academic setting.



## **“Not being an NPC (Non-Playable Character)” - Fandoms and Free Labour**

As a final section, we will explore what work has already been produced on both fandoms and subcultures and look into the requirements to how these groups work as a community of people. I will also explore the concept of fandom and subculture and how for this study, how these terms are closely connected and can be used almost interchangeably throughout this study. The definition of a fan or fandom is in constant development, however each developed is a derived from the simple concept regarding an individual with a particular attachment to some form of medium, this could be a TV show, band or in this studies case, a board game. The word “fan” seemed to be traced back to the term “fanatic” which further coins other religious themed terms such as “cult fandom”, or “devotee”. To understand the history of fan studies is to first look into Nicholas Abercrombie and Brian Longhurst (1998) who separated the term into three identifiable categories of “fan”, “cultist” and “enthusiasm”. A “fan” was defined as someone who had a particular liking to something but may not be in direct contact with other like-minded people who share their similar interest. The “cultist” is the more likened term that demonstrated the widespread fandoms as they will demonstrate particular attachments to their favoured media and will also increase their consumption of media texts that may include ‘fannish’ literature. The “enthusiasm” is a term based more around activities than a form of media and may only consume media that is created by enthusiasts for the purpose of enthusiasts. The use of ‘fannish’ literature will be detailed further within this section, however throughout the development of the academic field of fandom, many scholars across the years have used a variety of words such as in ways such as fluid, dedicated or most emotionally involved to a text to describe a fan (see Abercrombie and Longhurst, 1998; Lewis, 1992 and Sandvoss, 2005). Orion Mavridou (2017) argues that;

Beyond the endless justification of fandom’s existence, however, and the scholarly affirmation of the fans’ creativity, the related field of study has gone in circles in terms of defining the studied subject itself. As at the time of writing there is no consensus on what exactly constitutes a “fandom” or what characterises a “fan.” (Mavridou, 2017, pg 94)

Despite there being a lot of research within the fan studies field, the research specifically outlined on ‘gender’ and fans is slim and does not exist for niche communities such as board gaming. Kristina Busse (2013) focuses her work on the gendering of geek cultures overall, however this

helps to offer an insight into how geek spaces work with regards to gender. Busse (2013) argues that despite geek culture being portrayed as mainstream the culture itself is still heavily gendered:

If female fans are dismissed more easily, then so are their interests, their spaces and their primary forms of engagement. Or, said differently, gender discrimination occurs on the level of the fan, the fan activity, and the fannish investment. There is a ready truism that enthusiasm for typically male fan objects, such as sports and even music, are generally accepted whereas fan female interests are more readily mocked... More than that, affect and forms of fannish investment get policed along gender lines, so that obsessively collecting comic books or speaking Klingon is more acceptable within and outside of the fandom than creating fan vids or cosplaying. (Busse, 2013, pg 75)

Busse's (2013) argument depicts a general overview of a culture that widely disregards women and their investment and dedication within the community. However, this study does not go into depth of documenting the experiences of women that are within geek culture and that are being underrepresented and dismissed by their preferred fandom.

An important argument that is central to understanding the board gaming fandom is Victoria Gosling and Gary Crawford (2011)'s work on video gamers as an 'audience'. Gosling and Crawford (2011) argue that although video games as a culture can be identified to have 'fans' or an 'audience' it has major differences to that of a television show audience due to the 'activity' that is required to actually play a video game. They argue that many of the terms used within fan studies offers up limitations to video gamers because of this aspect of 'playing' a game rather than watching or engaging in other forms as audiences or fans do. When using the term 'subculture', Gosling and Crawford (2011) argue that: "To some extent, it might be possible to theorize gamers as a subculture. Gaming certainly has an identifiable subculture at its core, which involved its own language and terminology, patterns of behaviour, and to some extent identifiable demographics." (Gosling and Crawford, 2011, pg 141). A 'subculture' is identified as a group of individuals that share the same interest or beliefs. Sarah Thornton (1996) researched subcultures in the form of underground music scenes and explored what being involved within a subculture means to them:

“To contribute to the feeling of community and sense of shared identity that many people report to be the primary appeal of clubs and raves. As clubbers and ravers explain... The appeal of clubs comes down to people who you would like to surround yourself with, being with people who are similar to yourself creates a feeling of belonging.” (Thornton, 1996, pg 111)

To apply this on to a board gaming community would not be difficult and despite the term ‘clubs’ being used a different setting. Many board gamers attend gaming clubs for a similar sense of belonging and community. Similarly, J McArthur used the term subculture to apply on to the geek community, “The term *subculture* has some applicability to the community of geeks on the Internet... Their style and resistance are not directly tied to music but rather to these cultures spaces and their search for affiliation” (McArthur, 2009, pg 69). This represents that the term of subculture can be directly applied outside of a music setting and can be transferred onto something lesser. One other key factor into identifying a subculture is their opposition to mainstream culture, another adaptable and identifiable way of seeing board gaming and despite the shift of geek culture becoming more widely recognised, board gaming is well and truly still a niche industry. However, Ken Gelder and Sarah Thornton (1997) argue that there are different aspects that need to be explored such as gender when exploring the idea of a subculture; “It is gender therefore which structures differences rather than subcultural attachment. The same process can be seen at work in the emergence of rock and pop music. Girls and boys, in or out of subcultures, responded differently to this phenomenon” (Gelder and Thornton, 1997, pg 115).

Drawing upon this idea of gender within the subculture Thornton (1996) reviewed what happened to the raving and club scene once it had become more mainstream due to media coverage. This involved people that were described as ‘Sharon and Tracy’s’ who were ultimately seen as the ‘fake’ female fans who were not part of the subculture but began showing up to events and essentially made the rave/club scene ‘feminized’ which was considered no longer enjoyable to its true community, “As one clubber explained to me, ‘the rave scene is dead and buried. There is no fun in going to a legal rave when Sharon’s and Tracy’s know where it is as soon as you buy a ticket’” (Thornton, 1996, pg 100). This idea of a culture becoming mainstream and attracting almost the wrong type of crowd, can be considered to how gaming has become over the more

recent years and represents the developed of social hierarchy to those newer less experienced players. This understanding that authenticity and social hierarchy plays a big part in subcultures, links to Matt Hills' (2002) work on identifying fan cultures, "It allows us to consider any given fan culture not simply as a community but *also as a social hierarchy* where fans share a common interest while also competing over fan knowledge, access to the object of fandom, and status." (Hills, 2002, pg 46). From this exploration of fan studies and subcultures, it is evident that board gaming is not only a fandom or fan community but also considered a subculture. Throughout this study, these terms will be used interchangeably because of this.

Through the emergence of the internet and the explosion of social media platforms, launched fan studies into a new direction and much work has been done on this exploration (see Booth 2017 and 2018; Gray, Sandvoss and Harrington, 2007; Hills, 2002; Jenkins, 2006) outlining and looking at the new ways that fans are able to connect and express themselves through the Internet. The internet provided fan studies to become more of a free movement, whereby fans could extend their experience of the text by creating other mediums for it which include fanart, fan fiction, online discussion platforms or wiki's etc. For video games, active fans may also possess the ability to create 'fan games' that allow other fans to experience their text in a different way, for example, the game developer Scott Cawthon, who developed the series known as *Five Nights at Freddy's* has demonstrated a huge population of online fans and followers, many of which have recreated the game to suit other medias but in a similar play style or producing unofficial sequels to the games series. For board gaming however, the use of the internet has allowed players to become more connected and somewhat more informed as a string of huge popular YouTuber's and bloggers such as *The Dice Tower* who now have their own conventions and cruises (for their own separate following) dominate the spaces to advertise and review board gaming titles. What Abercrombie and Longhurst (1998) described as the "cultist" consuming other 'fannish' literature is pointing towards these similar concepts of fan produced work and through this, other scholars have defined this as 'fan labour'.

The concept of 'fan labour' is that it is free and produced by the fans rather than corporate industries. Although fan labour can be seen as a benefit to both larger corporations and the fans themselves this idea of 'profit' is produced in different ways. Tiziana Terranova (2004) was one of the first scholars to speak about 'free labour' from within a digital world and argued that free

fan labour is both equal to observe but is also smaller acts that we do not immediately recognise, other works such as Vincent Manzerolle (2010) and Trebor Scholz (2012) expanded on this concept. Abigail De Kosnik (2012) expresses that “Online fan productions constitute unauthorized marketing for a wide variety of commodities - almost every kind of product has attracted a fandom of some kind.” (De Kosnik, 2012, pg 99). She goes on to argue that the vast amount of fan work remains to be unpaid and that from a consumer's standpoint that work that fans put into existing products to generate new meaning through stories, videos etc enables a heightened consumer demand for the original product. De Kosnik (2012) also gives reference to subcultures using Thornton’s work (1996) on subcultural capital to form a great understanding in how normal everyday items are morphed into “new modes of social engagement”. What Thornton (1996) originally depicted as a “taste culture” where in Thornton’s example of club cultures she argued that they, “generally congregate on the basis of their shared taste in music, their consumption of common media and, most importantly, their preference for people with similar tastes to themselves” (Thornton, 1996, pg 3) is now argued by De Kosnik (2012) that it can be interchanged with the term of ‘fan culture’. De Kosnik (2012) argues that the groups that circulate around the “common media” can be based on all different types of commodities;

Around these commodities, fans build societies with particular hierarchies, value and belief systems. A great deal of the work of fans consists of the construction of the rules and codes of participating in fan cultures; fans moderate the interactions of other fans, establish the terms of the fan’s discussions and play and initiate and teach newcomers to the fandom. (De Kosnik, 2012, pg 101)

Fan labour work also became apparent during this time, recognising the use of digital platforms, other fandoms demonstrated other ways outside of the Internet whereby free labour was happening but seemed less apparent. For gaming and geek culture as a whole, this came in the form of examples of ‘cosplay’ and the work that goes into the preparations and designs, organising fan meetups or a voluntary get together. On an even smaller scale, free labour could be experienced through doing even smaller tasks. Jonathan Gray, Cornel Sandvoss and C. Lee Harrington (2007) outline the types of labour that may be generated for video games,

Gamer-related social interactions and performances may also extend beyond sight of the games screen (or LAN event), as conversations and friendship networks based around gaming continue into other social domains... Moreover, these social performances can extend beyond face-to-face communication, as the Internet has proved a useful medium for games to construct and share gaming solutions, add-ons, updates, and mods, as well as fictional stories or “fan art” based upon gaming narratives (Gray, Sandvoss and Harrington, 2007, pg 278-279)

However, for board gaming this is still yet to be identified. Through speaking to real fans within the board gaming community may offer an insight into how the board gaming fandom or subculture works and what unique forms of free labour is performed within these spaces. Although fannish labour has been identified in other aspects of fan studies, it has not yet been explored through the board gaming subculture which in turn has also not been significantly researched in regards to how gender operates within its space.

## **Conclusion**

To date, there has been no major advancements in research for board gaming as an academic field that look into the gender and fan labour of spaces it occupies both online and in real life. The research that has been produced on board gaming has largely been regarding the games themselves as texts and has demonstrated a reading on these in multiple ways such as paratexts or from a design perspective. Although the fans or community are mentioned briefly within the research, it has not been identified as a core argument to research despite its digital counterpart's saturation in looking at ‘gamers’ and the fans themselves. With the rising popularity of board games and many players within the subculture identifying that we are within ‘the golden age’ of board gaming, it is difficult to not question why research on the community has not been studied sooner and demonstrates an inconsistency within the existing board gaming research.

In highlighting the existing research within video games and fan studies to explore the concepts of ‘play’, gender and fandom can provide us with a start point to begin to understand board ‘gamers’ and the similarities in behaviors to those within video gamer culture. We can also identify that female fans within subcultural spaces are likely to be dismissed or seen as ruining the sense of belonging and community for everybody else and can draw links again between the likes

of Thornton's (1996) work with Crawford's (2011) to begin to understand the notion of what being inside of the board gaming community can be like. In conclusion, all the theoretical studies within this review have provided the pieces of a study that has not yet been put together and highlights a need for fundamental research on gender within the board gaming culture.

## **Methodology - “Playing by the Rules”**

This chapter will outline the methods that were used to obtain participants and collect data in correspondence to women’s experiences within the board gaming subculture. As there is a significant lack in existing research around women and board gaming, many of the methods used will reflect those that have shown success in other studies of women and video gaming or general work on gamer culture. From this, I have borrowed this existing work to explore and help gain an understanding into what board gaming may be like as a similarity to digital gaming. This study aims to explore the experiences of women who consider themselves as within the fandom of board gaming, as it is largely a male dominated culture, I felt that there was an importance to explore this field by highlighting their experiences and feelings. The methods that were best chosen for this study were mainly through interviews from willing participants and netnographic data. Originally, I had also planned to conduct a survey and use participant observation to explore how males and females interact in gaming spaces and board gaming stores however these did not provide informative details regarding experiences and feelings. Producing a survey would only provide demographic details which would not aid the study and I also changed the method of participant observation by adding in a question to my interviews to ask the participants to describe their experiences in board gaming stores. This would gain a more accurate representation instead of an assuming one from my own observations.

The inspiration to research women and board gaming came from a combination of the significant lack of board game research that currently exists in popular culture research and importantly the lack of research surrounding women as fans in male dominated spaces. In addition to this, I could be considered as a confessed “aca-fan” as I am a women who has an interest in board gaming and has had previous negative experiences when trying to engage with the wider board gaming community. Henry Jenkins (2006) argues that academic fans should be seen in a positive light;

“Since the 1990s it has become increasingly possible for people to merge the roles of fan and academic, to be explicit about the sources of their knowledge and about the passion that drives their research, and to seek collaborations between two groups that both assert some degree of expertise over popular culture.” (Jenkins, 2006, pg 4)

However, through the emergence of academic fans also came a new method known as the auto or self-ethnography. A method that allows aca-fans to use themselves as a subject to research the ‘fan



culture' that the researcher identifies as and despite many common and well known scholars using this technique (see Hills, 2002; & Jenkins, 2006). The practice has been met with some criticism, Adrienne Evans and Mafalda Stasi (2014) explain;

“Our argument then is that autoethnography may end up focusing too much on the individual feelings, and risk oversight of the larger cultural structures that are interacting with those feelings: in short, it can be hard to criticise your own tribe - or indeed yourself.”  
(Evans and Stasi, 2014, pg 16)

Due to this, I have not performed an autoethnography and opted for focused interviews of participants who got in contact because they were self-confessed 'fans' of board gaming. I aimed to not directly disclose my interest in board gaming to the participants prior to the interview and ensured that the experiences being discussed were the participants alone. Frequently after the interview, when asking the participant if they had any questions for myself the most common question asked was if I was a board gaming fan myself which then was followed by a more in-depth and informal conversation about board gaming. Due to this work being a feminist study, it is also important to highlight the need for myself as a feminist researcher to accurately position myself within the research. As Rebecca Campbell and Sharon Wasco (2000) point out that the “The overarching goal of feminist research is to capture women’s lived experiences in a respectful manner that legitimates women’s voices as sources of knowledge.” (Campbell and Wasco, 2000, pg 783). Therefore, the researcher is required to respect women’s experiences and critically analyse the data, and recognise that the “The emotionality of respondents’ lives must be acknowledged throughout the research process.” (Campbell and Wasco, 2000, pg 786).

As a self-confessed aca-fan of board gaming, I was aware that there was a gap in research surrounding board gaming communities, particularly when it came to feminist studies. Being both an academic and a fan, provides me with first-hand experience within the community alongside the ability to distance myself and critically analyse the community around me.

Qualitative methods are best used for this study as it focuses on the study of people and allows researchers to collect data regarding people's feelings and experiences. Steven Taylor, Robert Bogdan and Marjorie DeVault (2015) argue that when studying people “We get to know them personally and experience what they experience in their daily struggles in society. We learn about concepts such as beauty, pain, faith, suffering, frustration and love, whose essence is lost

through other research approaches.” (Taylor, Bogdan and DeVault, 2015, pg19). Juliet Corbin and Anselm Strauss (2014) advise that the two most successful forms of data collection from qualitative research are through “interviews and observations” however Sarah Tracy (2013) advises that “If the topic of study is very specific... interviews serve as a more efficient method to “get to the heart of the matter” by comparison to more open-ended participant observation.” (Tracy, 2013, pg 133). Qualitative data through interviews has also seen success in feminist works, Taylor, Bogdan and DeVault (2015) explain that;

“The most significant development in qualitative research over the past several decades has been the growing prominence of feminist research perspectives... Early feminist scholars critiqued existing research for leaving women and their concerns out of the picture; they argued that bringing women’s experiences into view would produce fresh insights, and the work that has been done since has certainly confirmed that view.” (Taylor, Bogdan and DeVault, 2015, pg 25)

This represents that previous studies of women did not provide the important details of how women have experienced society in their own words and through qualitative data, researchers are now able to obtain this type of data to offer up a new type of feminist research. I feel that it is important to highlight how qualitative data such as interviews has been successful in other similar feminist work. Taylor, Bogdan and DeVault (2015) also describe a feminist scholar who had been previously advised to respond to participants in a “non-committal way” found that “many of the women participants saw her as a knowledgeable friend and asked her for information” (Taylor, Bogdan and DeVault, 2015, pg 26). Interestingly, when conducting my own interviews, I had a similar experience whereby participants asked me for board gaming recommendations and advice similarly viewing myself as the “knowledgeable friend” that Taylor, Bogdan and DeVault describe.

This study utilised social media spaces to advertise online in the hopes that this will attract a wider variety of women who would like to take part within the study. A wider variety of women from various ages, gaming groups and locations may provide more interesting and conflicting data which will provide a better analysis and understanding as to how women interact within board gaming spaces. Interviews are an important part of qualitative data as they provide “opportunities for mutual discovery, understanding, reflection and explanation via a path that is organic, adaptive and oftentimes energizing” (Tracy, 2013, pg 132) not only this but they are also beneficial as the

researcher is able to control and steer the interview to obtain the data that is needed through asking the participant questions. Sarah Tracy (2013) also goes on to explain that;

“Through interviews, the respondents can provide their opinion, motivation and experiences. They may tell stories and narratives - complete with dramatic plot lines, heroes, and villains... Through interviews, participants can provide accounts - or rationales, explanations and justifications for their actions and opinions... Interviews are especially valuable for providing information and background on issues that cannot be observed or efficiently accessed.” (Tracy, 2013, pg 132).

Through the types of experiences and stories that the participants in this study tell are ones that cannot be picked up through the use of participant observation. Through focused interviews, the participants were asked the same questions, only changing when a participant's response required more explanation. The reason behind the focused interviews featuring the same questions was to provide an order and to collect data that would provide a specific outcome that could be backed up by multiple different participants' opinions on the same matter, for example, the current representations of women in board gaming or to recognise any similarities when asking about target audiences' or negative experiences in certain situations.

Before looking for participants, I planned my interview questions and ran a pilot interview to ensure that the questions flowed and were open enough to allow the pilot participant to be invited to tell stories and experiences easily. Once the pilot was complete and had been successful, I aimed to utilise three main platforms; Twitter, Instagram and *BoardGameGeek* to attract potential participants. Through Twitter and Instagram, the use of hashtags were used to extend the reach of the posts. The use of the *BoardGameGeek* website, targeted female board game players specifically and the thread post on this website attracted a large number of potential candidates for this study. Women who expressed their interest in the study were provided with a consent form that advised the interview would be recorded for transcribing purposes and also allowed the participant to create an alias. Taylor, Bogdan and DeVault (2015) explain that; “It is usually wise to use pseudonyms for people and places in written studies... The risks are substantial: embarrassment of the informant or others, legal problems, self-aggrandizement, and concealment of important details and information.” (Taylor, Bogdan and DeVault, 2015, pg 110). Because this study had the potential to bring up sensitive experiences that women have gone through regarding sexism or harassment, it was advised to all participants that they needed to create their own

participant identifier name. Allowing the participant to do so, also helped towards building rapport from interviewer to participant and make it more of a “fun” exercise rather than a formality.

One of the main reasons why interviews were used as a method was because of its success through other studies that had a focus on gaming, women or both. Bobby Hoffman and Louis Nadelson (2010) conducted a mixed methods study however it did feature interviews that were used explore the reasons as to why their participants were motivated to play certain games, and why they would want to play some games over others. In addition to this, Yasmin Kafai, Carrie Heeter, Jill Denner and Jennifer Sun (2011) include interviews within their research of gender and gaming stating that, “The interviews reveal consistencies with the other chapters, but from a personal perspective.” (Kafai, Heeter, Denner and Sun, 2011, pg 301). Although not referenced throughout the chapters, these interviews are almost used as an appendix to further back up the arguments. J Patrick Williams (2006) used a combination of participant observation and in depth interviewing methods for research that has similarities between this one. Williams (2006) explored the consumption and authenticity in collectable trading card games such as *Magic the Gathering*. He advised that; “I conducted in-depth interviews with seven *Magic* players and one focus group with five additional players. I made audio recordings of the sessions and transcribed all audio tapes to enable close analysis of participants’ talk.” (Williams, 2006, pg 78).

Gary Alan Fine’s (1983) research on role players follows close methods to my own. Despite focusing on participant observation, Fine (1983) also used in depth interviews and then examined contents of gaming magazines;

“In addition to participant observation, I conducted lengthy interviews (one to three hours) with two dozen gamers. Although the interview subjects are neither random or systematic sampling of gamers, an attempt was made to interview gamers of different ages and levels of commitment and skill... In addition to the interviews, I examined the contents of seventeen magazines... These magazines were valuable in showing how committed gamers viewed their hobby and how they shared their interests.” (Fine, 1983, pg 24-25)

Although not engaging with participant observation in this study, Fine’s (1983) work reflects my own by using the methods of interviewing techniques and attempting to receive a wide variety of different players, which was similarly an aim of this study as well. The examination of the gaming magazines also represents a similarity in this study as a secondary method, this study uses netnographic data which would have been more inaccessible for Fine during the time in his

research. Netnographic data is the examination of online archived data and for this study is where *BoardGameGeek* became a vital piece of data.

As *BoardGameGeek* is both an online database and a forum space for fans, it seemed a central and critical to utilise the archived data from this website. The forum which was to be the focal point of the data collection was the ‘Women and Gaming’ forum which housed 975 threads and 178608 posts. Robert Kozinets (2015) argues that;

“Actual netnographic data itself can be rich or very thin, protected or given freely. It can be produced by a person or by a group, or co-produced with machines, software agents and bots. It can be generated through interactions between a real person and a researcher, or by sitting in digital archives. It can be highly interactive, like a conversation. Or it can be more like reading the diary of an individual.” (Kozinets, 2015, pg 5)

Equally, Catherine Haythornthwaite (1996) argues that through using social networks as research examines people as individuals before labelling them as a group of people;

“It is not one’s membership in a particular class, ethnic group, gender, and so forth that makes the category of the group a useful construct, but the patterns of relationships to others within that group. The patterns reveal who one interacts with for receiving and forwarding information, and what exposure one has to information, new ideas, and opportunities.” (Haythornthwaite, 1996, pg 325).

Using netnographic data such as forum posts, demonstrates the relationships of fans, how they are interacting with each other. For board games, I feel this is important because women recognise that they are within the minority within the culture, therefore having an entirely separate forum thread opens into a world of women supporting each other, interacting with each other by recommending women friendly games or providing an opinion.

From an interview with a fan, you are putting the participant into an unfamiliar and informal environment and the participant is expecting to be asked questions. By looking at netnographic data, you are examining archived data of fans interacting with other fans in their natural environment. Nothing is forced and it appears more natural, Kozinets (2015) argues that online spaces can, “Create strong social ties between members, resulting in more meaningful or longer lasting relationship, but where the participants are not firmly or lastingly focused on a shared or unifying focal activity, purpose, project or interest.” (Kozinets, 2015, pg 35) Through using a combination of formal focused interviews and netnography, I am able to create research

that demonstrates a fairer outlook on how women are experiencing male dominated board gaming spaces. I am able to use the interviews alongside the netnographic data to present my arguments in a more honest light by representing both an informal interview with a participant within board gaming and real-life data taken from the leading board gaming website and forum that further backs up the arguments throughout this study.

From using social media platforms as a call for participants, I intended this to be inclusive and open and received the majority of my responses when the *BoardGameGeek Twitter* page retweeted someone discussing the forum post regarding the study. From this retweet, 73,000 followers were then notified of the study and I began an overwhelmingly positive process of working through responses. Despite this response, after going through participants consent and information sheets, the participants dropped to around 20 women that were located around the world. After working to fit in interviews, the number of participants that attended their interviews dropped again to 12, 10 of which were conducted over either *Skype* or *Google Hangouts* and two conducted via email due to technological or medical issues. The forum post experienced some negativity from male users who were set out to argue that the study only wanted to focus on how discriminating and judgmental male players are within the board gaming community. I feel that it is important at this point to clarify that I ensured the safety and confidentiality of the participants before taking the time to explain what this study entailed. This backlash may have been predicted due to the nature of the board gaming community being male dominated however these comments were from one particular user and did not affect the research in any other way. Having recorded the interviews, they were then transcribed and are available to read in full in the appendix section of this study.

## **Chapter One: “Character Creation” Sexism within the Board Gaming Community.**

### **Introduction**

This chapter aims to explore and set out a guideline in how the board gaming community works as a gendered subculture. I will first explore the concept of the ‘magic circle’ as playing a board game is largely the entire concept of the community, I feel it is necessary to discuss how the magic circle works within the community and particularly what happens when sexism is experienced within the magic circle. The next section will also look at the current examples of representations of women within board gaming and highlight through the use of the participants within this study how women feel about these representations. Finally, I will discuss how women within gendered gaming spaces challenge sexism within the community and how many women who are wanting and attempting to challenge sexism in gaming spaces are labelled as feminist killjoys or social justice warriors through the work of Sarah Ahmed (2010).

The core argument of this chapter is to argue that women experience sexism within board gaming spaces both internally as within the ‘magic circle’ and externally. However, sexism within the ‘magic circle’ directly contrasts with its theory that reality-based issues would cause the circle to break. I also argue that any type of femininity represented by women in gaming spaces is viewed as both foreign and alien and when women attempt to challenge this view, they are met resistance by male players who dismiss their opinions by naming them ‘feminist killjoys’ or ‘social justice warriors’.

### **1:1 - Sexism within the ‘magic circle’.**

Board gaming is largely situational and requires the element of socialisation from this, there is also a need to understand who feels included and who does not. This can produce an important division in who operates within this gendered space and subsequently how the minority gender, women are treated within this space. As board gaming has a centralised theme of ‘play’ it is critical to understand the theories surrounding ‘play’, in particular the ‘magic circle’. John Huizinga (1938) first developed the concept surrounding the ‘magic circle of play’, a theory that occurred when people came together to engage in ‘play’. From a board gaming perspective, the ‘magic circle’ would transpire when people came together at the table and began playing a board game, but Huizinga’s theory regarded all types of ‘play’ including sporting events and

performances. The premise of the circle was defined as a protective space that excluded the norms and rules of general, everyday society and created a ‘play-community’;

A play-community generally tends to become permanent even after the game is over. Of course, not every game of marbles or every bridge-part leads to the founding of a club. But the feeling of being “apart together” in an exceptional situation, of sharing something important, of withdrawing from the rest of the world and rejecting the usual norms, retains its magic beyond the duration of the individual game. (Huizinga, 1938, pg 12).

As a further development, noted within the literature review in this study Roger Callois (1961) helped the ‘magic circle’ become even more of a focal point when looking at communities or fandoms that engage with ‘play’. However, it was Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman (2004) who advanced the concept directly on to gaming spaces. Whilst the ‘magic circle’ has largely revolved around the concept that there are no real external factors, Salen and Zimmerman argued that both internal and external social interactions happened within the space;

When we frame a game as social play, we consider the relationships between elements in the game system to be social relationships. The word “social” refer broadly to player interaction, and occurs on two levels. The first level of social interaction occurs *within* the magic circle, as a product of the formal system of a game... The second level of social interaction is derived *externally*- social roles brought into the game from outside the magic circle. Pre-existing friendships and rivalries that affect in-game strategic choices. (Salen and Zimmerman, 2004, pg 462).

Previously, the magic circle had been recognised as a restricted and closed off domain that would become severed and broken should real life issues be brought into the space, however now there was this development that provided an allowance for some external interactions if they still derived around the game. From this, the notion of the magic circle was largely kept the same, with Huizinga and Callois arguing that conversations regarding external topics or playing without the feeling of freedom can cause the illusion of the circle to break.



However, this idea can be largely criticised by the premise that women within gendered spaces who are engaging in 'play' therefore within the magic circle are regularly faced with sexism, a real life and external topic. Mia Consalvo (2009) argues that the concept of the magic circle was simply used to measure the enjoyment and fun of people engaging in 'play' however these spaces are now much more complex;

Players never play a new game or fail to bring outside knowledge about game and gameplay into their gameplay situations...Players also have real lives, with real commitments, expectations, hopes and desires. We can neither ignore such realities nor retreat to structuralist definitions of what makes or defines a game... We cannot say that games are magic circles, where the ordinary rules of life do not apply. Of course they apply, but in addition to, in competition with, other rules and in relation to multiple contexts, across varying cultures and into different groups, legal situations and homes. (Mia Consalvo, 2009, pg 415-416)

Equally, Gary Crawford (2011) explains that although games may take place within a specific place and time this space is very much located within the player's everyday lives and there is no restraint in external forces being brought into these spaces. One of the largest criticisms regarding the magic circle and this study is from knowing that gaming spaces are largely gendered and that there is no possibility that gender issues such as sexism would not arise when engaging in 'play' and from within the magic circle, therefore it would be broken. As an example, Annie, a participant from this study explained that her gaming group is made up of four-five male gamers and herself, throughout the years of meeting up on a regular basis to play games, she has begun to notice that her gender is having an impact on the behaviors of the male players and how they treat her from within the 'magic circle';

I have been feeling over the last couple of years, more stuff potentially to do with my gender in gaming... a couple of people in my group, definitely don't listen to me when I explain rules or kind of when playing collaborative games. I'll sort of suggest that we do something and then if a guy suggest that we do something, which is the same thing then they will pay attention to him.

(Annie)

Annie's experiences are internal and are happening from within the players space, therefore within this magic circle. These experiences are real life issues, she is documenting the feeling that she is being targeted for her gender and dismissed or ignored by the other players. This also cannot be put down to an external role of social interaction either as Salen and Zimmerman (2004) would express, because these subtle actions of ignorance are not reflective of the game that they are playing at all. Although demonstrating that 'sexism' happens within the magic circle, Someone Subcool (2018) mentions her own disappointing experience when gaming with her now ex-boyfriend regarding him being unable to accept defeat when losing a game:

My ex was a sore loser. So, him losing was a referendum on his value as a human being and this sucked! It was horrible. For a long time, I couldn't even game with him. It came to a breaking point during a game in which he was behaving poorly, I'm like be cool or quit and he quit! This was a breakthrough moment and he did get somewhat better, at least at hiding his displeasure, but it pretty much tainted gaming with him. It was a factor in the eventual demise of our relationship.

(Someone Subcool)

This speaks volumes for the concept that the magic circle 'resets' and nothing is gained or lost from it. It represents that there are things that can happen within the "magic circle" that are real life issues that will be taken from the experience. Although Someone Subcool (2018) does not directly reference any form of sexism, it is interesting that Annie (2018) went on to say that her male players show resistance to when she wins during games as well, stating that the male players put this down to luck, "I also notice that when I win or do well in a game, it is kind of dismissed off as luck rather than strategy which is interesting or like bad luck of the person who didn't do well." (Annie).

With these experiences happening internally and within the circle, it shows that board games are a gendered subculture which is in turn part of the wider gendered society as a whole. Gender no longer simply refers to our anatomical parts but has a real connection with how we

identify with, which includes fandoms such as board games. For Annie, the evidence of sexism is happening at the table within a group of five/six players that meet up on a regular basis. Both Annie's and Someone Subcool's experiences happen in private around people who are considered as close and who both women have some form of relationship with, be that a friend or partner. The real-life issues of a gendered society intersect and inhibit subcultures as well, Karen Lumsden (2010) studied the premise of female participation within the male dominated 'boy-racer' subculture. Similarly, to board games, the subculture houses a very male dominated outlook to society, females participating within these spaces were subject to very similar forms of sexism; "Sexist treatment and sexual hustling were common and were a means by which the boys could attempt to resist and discredit female participation in the culture" (Lumsden, 2010). What is important to realise from this, is that there is no impenetrable bubble of the 'magic circle' in male dominated subcultures and that sexism is happening and will continue to happen on both macro and micro scales. Annie's experience would be considered on the more micro scale due to it being in a private enclosed space, however the next example happens on a larger and more public scale, which really promotes the idea that board gaming is not protected from outside issues being drawn in and with a largely male dominated audience, they are keen to discuss the minority of women who want to be part of their community. It is important to explore the 'magic circle' because as a community, board gaming is so closely linked and focused on 'play'. Although there are other aspects to board gaming, like going online and interacting with other players through online forums, it has a heavy focus on 'play' and largely centres around face to face 'play' with other like-minded people from within the community.

A recent incident that would be considered as a macro example of sexism happened within a board gaming convention. The convention housed 18,648 attendees and received negative attention when it was reported online that a male game designer had been sexually harassing female attendees. The claim of the harassment was posted online and discussed by popular content creators during and after the convention. From this, a forum post on *BoardGameGeek* was published where it has now received nearly 400 posts. Instead of discussing the importance of ensuring this does not happen within gaming or convention spaces that both men and women should be equally free to attend. Many of the contributors argue amongst themselves about what type of evidence would be required should the incident go to court or wanted direct information to the personal accounts of the people involved. Karen Dill (2008) researched the effects that

representation of women in gaming medias linked with sexual harassment would affect male players;

Our results suggest that men may disregard women's reports of sexual harassment, blame the victim and assign weaker punishments to perpetrators, thus condoning sexual harassment and punishing victims. Sexual harassment is both a form of aggression against women and a form of gender discrimination and is a serious and widespread social problem. (Dill, 2008, pg 1407)

Many of the males on the forum thread became dismissive of the idea that multiple women had been sexually harassed and instead were focusing on the idea of evidence and whether the woman who had come forward should be perceived as a credible source. One female poster argued that the conversations happening within the thread confirmed beliefs that women will continue to be disregarded when speaking out;

“But this thread shows the opposite. This thread confirms the fears that we shouldn't speak up, that there's not much support, and that many men don't care or won't listen when something bad happens. Instead they'll ask for proof, ask if there were witnesses, ask why we would make up such a horrible thing about someone else and why we would be willing to ruin someone else's reputation.”

Although Dill's work was largely looking at the representations of women in video game spaces, it seemed to mirror the events of Dill's findings whereby men could become dismissive and disregard the reports of harassment.

The patterns that begin to emerge through these experiences and examples are that women are consistently being dismissed in some form, whether this be after a report of sexism or sexual harassment or even being dismissed or unrecognised as a representation of the board gaming community. What we can also observe is that these things are happening regardless of whether players are within the concept of the 'magic circle' or in other external gendered spaces such as conventions. Board gaming cannot simply be looked at as a protected space of 'play' that Huizinga, Callois and Salen and Zimmerman recognised it to be and instead these spaces need to be evaluated

in the inequalities and ongoing sexism that is happening within them. These ongoing issues regarding sexism can create problems for women who are wanting to identify and be considered as an 'authentic' fan within these spaces and can be considered as the reason why women try and find other ways of being more accepted and acknowledged within the community.

## **1:2 - Subcultural Style within the Board Gaming.**

Knowing that women are likely to express sexism within the board gaming community, it is important to explore what women have to do within the subcultural capital. When exploring subcultural style in a male dominated space, it is evident that anything that represents the form of femininity is immediately seen as exotic or alien, with the majority of existing research done to explore gamers depicts them as male and white. Gary Crawford (2012) defines the stereotype of a gamer "as, largely, antisocial, aggressive, addicted, male and white adolescents" (Crawford, 2012, pg 48) equally, Stuart Woods (2012) defines that "The picture that emerges of the typical *boardgamegeek* member, then, is one of an educated and relatively affluent married American male in his mid-thirties. (Woods, 2012, pg 123). What is largely and widely recognised is that males are associated with 'gamer culture' at larger, further strengthening the notion that women are within the minority in these spaces. Being integrated into board gaming spaces myself, It is understood how difficult it is for a woman to identify and be herself within these spaces within the consideration of others around her, particularly if the representations around the culture are hyper-sexualised or alternatively more masculine. Lauraine Leblanc (1999) explored femininity in women in regards to punk music as at the time this was seen as a more male dominated subculture;

Girls in male-dominated youth subcultures such as punk continually confront ideologies of gender that remain largely invisible, perhaps even tacitly accepted, in many young women's everyday lives. Punk girls struggle to construct their gender within the confines of a highly male-dominated and therefore "masculinist" context... Gender is problematic for punk girls in a way this it is not for punk guys, because punk girls must accommodate female gender within subcultural identities that are deliberately coded as male. (Leblanc, 1999, pg 8).

Equally, when revisiting Karen Lumsden (2010) and her study on women within the ‘boy racer’ culture, she argued that:

Female members of the group who were active participants were required to adopt the masculine traits of the culture. To be accepted as authentic participants the ‘girl racers’ were required to adopt characteristics of the hegemonic ‘boy racer’ such as toughness, bravado, competitiveness, aggression, the use of crude language, a particular style of dress, driving ability and knowledge of car modification. (Lumsden, 2010)

From both Leblanc and Lumsden we can identify a pattern that for authenticity within gendered subcultures, women may be required to demonstrate more masculine traits or characteristics that are somewhat not represented as feminine in addition to this, they may also attempt to resist their own traditional feminine roles.

Despite board gaming, not having a specific cultural symbol or dress code, many male gamers can be identified by their jeans and ‘nerdy’ pop culture reference t-shirts. Women however appear as both fitting in, by wearing similar attire to males or alternatively dressing differently or considerably more feminine. Women within this study explained they felt their authenticity was questioned due to not exclusively looking like a stereotypical board gamer, when talking about experiences within board gaming stores Rebecca (2018) stated;

It was intimidating honestly, it just felt like there was so much there, lots of people and again mostly men and I have not really had the best of experiences when going into comic book shops where I tend to get started at as a women and the whole ‘is she lost?’ you know because I usually come in dressed in office gear and thing people think that I am shopping for like a niece or nephew or something and I have to clarify no this is for me, I can’t wear a t-shirt and jeans all the time.

(Rebecca)

Rebecca explains that she regularly visits board gaming stores whilst she is in London where she works therefore when going into these stores, she is dressed in office attire as per her work uniform, because of this her authenticity is questioned and she is not recognised as part of the board gaming

community. Arguably, when any form of femininity is displayed, a woman's authenticity to the community appears to be questioned by others. Nora (2018) explained that a friend who attends a regular board gaming club was faced with inappropriate and sexist comments from a male player when she was discussing another one of her interests which was pole dancing. Nora's husband, who is in charge of running the board gaming club stepped in and discussed this with Nora once the incident had been resolved by him. He advised that the comment was inappropriate and attempted to rectify the situation by asking genuine questions in an attempt to steer the conversation into a more appropriate one. Although, pole dancing does enforce sexual connotations within mainstream media and society, Nicholas, Dimmock, Donnelly, Anderson and Jackson (2018) reviewed the motives in which females engage in stigmatised physical activities, they argued that;

Although outsiders may perceive pole dancing as a sexualised activity, and that some studios may promote ideals of a postfeminist raunch culture, participants actually reported appreciating the *absence* of any evaluation of their physical form, and the lack of pressure to conform to physical standards. (Nicholas, Dimmock, Donnelly, Anderson and Jackson, 2018 pg 111).

Not only this, but pole dancing can also be viewed as an empowering activity for females to participate within, with women feeling less than empowered within board gaming spaces, there may be a connection as to why women would be likely to participate in more empowering spaces alongside. Women are allowed to feel sexy and empowered by the things that they either choose to do or even wear however it becomes a double standard when observing these patterns within a gendered subculture.

Whilst femininity is not seen as authentic for the women within the spaces, the representations of women throughout board gaming texts display femininity through hyper-sexualised traits. The representations of women that male players see and recognise on a daily basis reinforces the sexism that women are experiencing within the culture and it invites harassment and objectivity as women are viewed in a sexual way. Crawford (2012) explains that "When female characters are featured within video games, they are usually portrayed in sexualised or passive roles." (Crawford, 2012, pg 53) this is also present within board gaming. Many of the

female characters represented in board gaming are over-sexualised and overly feminine. Aaron Trammell (2016) documents the differences in male and female *Dungeons and Dragons* abilities;

The key difference between the male and female body, according to Lakofka, is that instead of a charisma score, women have a “beauty” characteristic... These abilities focus on the characters beauty specifically and consist of abilities such as “Charm Men”, “Charm Humanoid Monster”, “Seduction”, “Horrid Beauty” and “Worship”. These abilities represent a woman who use beauty as a weapon to get what she desires from men who must in turn resist succumbing to temptation. Not only do these statistics reinforce the stereotype that a woman’s value and power lie only in her beauty, but they also reify a heteronormative standard of sexuality where relationships are exclusively staged between men and women. (Trammell, 2016, pg 26-27).

Although these examples demonstrate how women are seen within game texts, two of the participants of this study went on to discuss the lack of representations and diversity within convention spaces, deeming that through their own experiences with the lack of female speakers demonstrates the lack of inclusivity of board gaming. Moll Hackabout explained that she had contacted a UK gaming convention after seeing that the list of speakers was entirely male and featured no women. As a mother whose daughter aspires to work within the board gaming industry, Moll Hackabout wrote to the convention to ask why there was such a lack of female representation. Sarah Banat-Weiser (2015) argued that seeing other women within spaces can empower others; “Media visibility *does* represent a form of power - after all, media activity organisations representing women, people of colour and gays and lesbians have advocated for years for a kind of recognition through representation.” (Banat-Weiser, 2015, pg 190). Moll Hackabout knew the importance of representation as she is an organiser for a science convention which faces a similar issue of being more male dominated;

There are female voices within the community and not enough is being done to kind of step up and showcase them. Another example I give, is the science festival that I run, we have an implicit policy that we will be 50/50 male and female and this is within the science community which in itself has had problems of representation as you might know. Female



speakers on the whole, this is my experience of finding women who wish to speak within a community and talking to people, it is kind of similar within the board gaming community is that men will come to you and they will say ‘Oh I have this talk, that talk, I do this thing or that thing’ and they sort of offer themselves up, women often don’t and you have to put in a little bit more legwork to get those female speakers and say to them sometimes they have a childcare issues and they have these other issues that women do and you have just got to be a little bit more realistic about what their lives are if you want good representation.

(Moll Hackabout)

Not only do the women within this study recognise the lack of representations for their gender. Some are keen to try and avoid these types of board games altogether. Eeyore argued that;

Unless somebody told me that it was some incredible and amazing game then I wouldn’t touch it with a barge pole. It’s like trying to drink a beer with old fashioned sort of ale style boozy ladies on, as a matter of principle I would not touch them, if I think it was in any way sexist then I wouldn’t touch it.

(Eeyore)

Equally, Invincimeeples advised that;

I think there’s a good deal of room for improvement but the games that I am finding appeal to me most are like, *Red Raven Games*, with *Above and Below* and *Near and Far*, they are being very inclusive... There is actually a geek list on *BoardGameGeek* written by somebody who has been very diligent in analysing just how women are depicted in board games.

(Invincimeeples)

Someone Subcool also advised that the representations of women were not great;

So much gratuitous boob I call it. My favourite example is the cover of *Dungeon Petz Dark Alleys*, no reason for boobs, none yet there they are, highlighted even. Chvatil is one of the worst. Compare the female warrior figures in *Mage Knight* with those in *Scythe*. *Mage Knight* figures are going to battle in bikinis. Emphasis on the boobs and crotches.

*Scythe* women are fully clothed but are still attractive and sexy. I don't mind sexy, just do not need to have boobs just for the sake of boobs. I do like games where each character can be either female or male, I think *Xenon Profiteer* is an example of this. Of course, then you are dealing with gender binary but... Even robots have gratuitous boobs! See *Android Infiltration* cover. There is also a dichotomy where beauty equals good and ugly equals evil. This is a whole other level of problematic. I am not sure I have ever seen myself represented realistically in a game.

(Someone Subcool)

These lists on *BoardGameGeek* that Invincepeople mentions appear to be useful to women who want to do their research on the inclusivity of females and female representation within board game texts. From a fan laboured forum post in July 2018 on *BoardGameGeek*, a list was released with sexist games that are being produced or released in 2018 or later to highlight there are still promoting the on-going representation problems within the community. These sexist games were split into categories and documented as 'gender imbalance' or 'sexist depiction' and allowed other fans and users to post under each title or alternatively add new titles to the forum post. This demonstrates that even new board games that are being released are still not representing the full community of board gaming or that it is inclusive to women. Many of the games within this list featured either a more male to female player character ratio or that their mini-figures that came along with the game depicted a highly sexualised woman in scantily clad armor. The use of these forum posts allow women to participate in labour to either create, add to or just use the posts as research to better understand what games are going to appeal to them. Labour in regard to the subcultural style of board gaming appears to be more in the form of representations and women having to engage in more in research to be further educated in what is inclusive for females. Carly Kocurek (2005) explored how the perception of female representations both in game texts and as fans could be altered;

This restrictive vision of who gaming is and should be for is used to justify the exclusion and harassment of women and other people who do not fit in, and to excuse the lack of diversity in the industry's workforce. These two arena of homogeneity present a feedback loop. An industry of men imagines a consumer base that is like them and so makes games

that reflect their own interests and experiences; with games serving as a point of entry into the industry, this production cycle helps maintain the status quo. If the industry and the culture of gaming are to change, this feedback loop must be disrupted. (Kocurek, 2005, pg 24).

The representations and views of the women within this study reinforces this loop and that women will continue to be objectified until the cycle is broken and women become recognised and included as a wider audience and part of the board gaming community.

### **1:3 - Challenging sexism within the community.**

Recognising that board gaming is gendered towards men, it is fundamental to highlight what happens when women challenge the sexism that they are faced with from within the community. It is found that many women find that board gaming spaces, particularly online are restricted when they are trying to access them. Rebecca believes that there is a presence of 'gatekeeping' by males when they recognise that there are women who want to become involved within certain spaces;

I do feel like there is a little bit of gatekeeping still and I can see that online, I see that on *Twitter* and I see female writers being called out or being told that they are turning everything into SJW stuff because they, you know people are moaning about having more women when it's just one more woman in something that is predominantly men. So yeah, it feels like any sort of attempt at representations or an increase in representations does get a little bit of push back because it feels like everyone just piles on the SJW crap.

(Rebecca)

The instantaneous mention of 'SJW' or 'Social Justice Warrior' that Rebecca had when discussing negative aspect of gaming communities provides an insight as to what it is like when challenging sexism within male dominated spaces. To understand the term 'social justice warrior', we need to explore its origin and definition. With the idea that 'Social Justice' was once an empowering and well respected form of activism throughout feminist practices, the term has now become the forefront of hatred and dismissal to women online particularly within gamer culture. Although

sexism and feminism are not newly discussed concepts within gaming culture, the widespread and well-known controversy surrounding 'GamerGate' helped bring 'SJWs' term to what it is today. Yasmin Kafai (2016) explained that;

Social justice feminist practice online is a departure from earlier feminist identities because it encompasses a very wide set of concerns and forms of discrimination. "Social Justice" feminists are a vocal and diverse group who are often stereotyped and dismissed as "PC," or "politically correct" This has led those who identify with the movement to come under attack as being too sensitive to form bias that do not directly concern them. (Kafai, 2016, pg 36).

Kafai continued to mention that the term of 'SJW' is now characterised "as insincere or "fake"... which stresses that SJW arguments are "shallow or not-well-thought-out." (Kafai, 2016, pg 39).

As discussed within the literature review chapter of this study, GamerGate (abbreviated to 'GG') became a highly controversial movement that targeted women within the industry as well as female academic scholars who were depicted within a larger conspiracy to ruin 'gamer' culture for its overly male dominated audience. During this time, many women speaking against the movement were also brandished with labels such as a social justice warrior or feminist killjoy, as Kafai (2016) argues:

Death threats, along with other abusive and misogynistic comments coordinated by users who gathered on Twitter and other social media using the #GamerGate hashtag effectively grieved these women in their personal and public lives... These GamerGate target and their defenders on social media were derisively labeled "social justice warriors," or "SJW's" because they publicly claimed the identity of "feminist" and asserted the need for more diverse games and game cultures. (Kafai, 2016, pg 35)

The conspiracy that feminists were attempting to 'ruin' and destroy gamer culture was rife and 'GG' had gained so much publicity that larger news chains were also documenting and reporting on it. In present, typing 'GamerGate' into Google simply provides hundreds of results that promise to explain the events of which occurred and themes that were central around the controversy.

However, this is not the only thing that has continued from its notoriety. Regardless, that ‘GG’ was centralised around video games, the concept of ‘gamer culture’ also implicates board games as the audience largely classify themselves as ‘gamers’ or ‘players’ similar to the digital industry.

From ‘GG’, it has now become even easier to call out and dismiss online users by simply calling them an ‘SJW’. Jacqueline Vickery and Tracy Everbach (2018) argue that “Within a convergence culture, people use social media platforms as a way to enhance and extend their engagement with traditional media in practices that can lead to harassment and abuse and the perpetuation of misogyny.” (Vickery and Everbach, 2018, pg 10). Through the anonymity of the Internet, harassment and sexism in this form can be easier than ever and Vickery and Everbach continue to develop the notion that through online spaces misogynistic and derogatory comments can often lead to the misconception that women are just ‘over-reacting’ to a joke and as something that is not intentionally harming anybody thus continuing the cycle that women are too ‘sensitive’. On the *BoardGameGeek* forums, within the ‘Women’s Chat’ forum, many users were discussing the term ‘SJW’, after one regular user was accused of being an ‘SJW’ on another thread and it had upset her. Many of the user’s attempted to turn this into a positive whereby one user commented:

“Easier said than done, I know, but take it as a compliment rather than the insult it was intended to be. Often those who use the term do so because they just can't imagine fighting for something that actually matters, and thus assume everyone else must be pretending to do so. It's always easier to belittle someone else than do something that takes more energy and courage”

Whilst another posted:

“I had to look up SJW...I learn a lot from this forum.:) I'd probably qualify as one, too...particularly since I live in a pretty traditional, conservative area. I figure many gamer girls are probably considered SJW even if they don't originally intend to be...it just runs with the territory so to speak. Recently I had a non-gamer friend send me a link to some pretty despicable treatment of a woman gamer asking if it was a common experience in the gaming world. And if it is true, I totally advocate all women gamers becoming SJWs. I'm all for rocking a boat that needs rocking...”

Andrea Braithwaite (2013) explored the criticism women were met with on an online forum for *World of Warcraft*. After a female beta tester picked up on the fact that dialogue from a non-playable character was changed depending on whether the player had chosen to play a male or female character in game, for the male characters they were identified as being “strong” whereby female characters were “gorgeous”. The female beta tester took to an official forum to express that she found this to be ‘creepy’ had this happened in the real world. The female poster received backlash from the community expressing that this type of opinion “ruins perfectly acceptable things (like silly flirtatious cartoon characters) for everyone else” (Braithwaite, 2013, pg 708) Not only did the backlash connote to the original poster being a SJW or a ‘kill joy’ as she was killing everybody else’s fun, they also disregarded her as a ‘real feminist’;

If ‘real’ feminists are off battling ‘real’ sexism, the implication is that dialogue - both by the game’s characters and on these forums - is not actually a problem, and that those who think it is are not actually feminists. One poster even coins the term ‘hobby feminist’ to dismiss the arguments appearing in these threads: ‘You know, the ones that have nothing better to do than sit around and complain about vaguely flirtatious comment made in a video game, instead of battling REAL sexism. (Braithwaite, 2013, pg 708).

To know that Braithwaite’s research on the displaying the rejection of women challenging sexism before GamerGate is absolutely crucial as it demonstrates that the controversy of ‘GG’ did not outwardly cause sexism in gendered spaces, it just brought it more into the limelight and highlighted the awareness that women were and continue to be called out when challenging sexism within gendered subcultures such as the gamer scene. This idea that women who are called out for being an ‘SJW’ because they are “not real problems” also seems to be a common theme in the board gaming forums as well. Many women within board gaming forums are consistently called out or discredited after being brandished by the name of a ‘social justice warrior’. For example, when researching the responses of online users on *BoardGameGeek* regarding the allegation of sexual harassment at a leading convention, one poster wrote:

“Where can I make a formal request for BGG Admins to treat the term "SJW" the same way they treat the word "troll"? They are both dismissive and derailing insults meant only to alienate and demean, and they contribute nothing meaningful or productive to the conversation.”

The concept of the ‘social justice warrior’ or the ‘killjoy’ being associated as negative and derogatory has definitely been something that has blossomed from the popularity of ‘GG’ and women who have challenged both sexism pre-GG and post GG are likely to experience the term in its current form. For women to be recognised as challenging sexism within gaming culture, should also recognise the notion that women are continuing to participate in labour for these communities. Women within board games, represented within this study have outlined and demonstrated their free fannish participatory labour within online and offline spaces and throughout it all they have been singled out and targeted for being women. Having performed labour within these spaces, this should provide the women within a sense of belonging and community but instead are met with these damaging titles.

Sara Ahmed (2010) provides an alternative feminist outlook on how women could perceive the depiction of ‘SJW’s’ and ‘Killjoys’. Ahmed first argues that the concept of ‘happiness’ is in the form of a happy housewife, which provides an assumption that women are generally happy to participate in labour for their family and this in turn generates a motivating sense of happiness for the housewife, “The claim that women are happy and that this happiness is behind the work they do functions to justify gendered forms of labour not as products of nature, law, or duty, but as expressions of a collective wish and desire.” (Ahmed, 2010, pg 573) This concept identifies that it is the desire and wish for a woman to participate in labour because it makes them happy. This concept will also be discussed in further detail in the second chapter of this study, where I will begin to explore how this notion of “happiness” can often be used as a disguise or as a ‘show’ of women who want to ensure the happiness of others around them. When applying Ahmed’s (2010) idea onto a participants experience, for example, Invincimeeples documented that after setting up and running gaming events her husband was provided with the credit and recognition of her hard work by receiving emails from other gamers asking about his success, this made her feel disappointed. Therefore, Ahmed (2010) argues that happiness is constructed in particular ways in which women are controlled and made to feel that their happiness is created by labouring for

others, it is only when a women questions their place within the concept of happiness that she is then read as a feminist and in turn a killjoy;

Feminists declaring themselves feminists, are already read as destroying something that is thought of by others not only as being good but as the cause of happiness. The feminist killjoy spoils the happiness of others; she is a spoilsport because she refuses to convene, to assemble, or to meet up over happiness... The feminist subject in the room hence brings other down, not only talking about unhappy topics such as sexism but by exposing how happiness is sustained, by erasing the signs of not getting along. (Ahmed, 2010, pg 581-582)

What Ahmed alludes to here, is that feminists are seen as ‘kill joys’, ‘SJW’ or ruining the fun because they are open to talking about the things that others have turned a blind eye to. In gamer culture, this is demonstrated through the ideologies surrounding female representations and as such Braithwaite’s (2013) study of the non-playable character. The woman from within Braithwaite’s study is simply speaking up about sexism and how she found that being called “gorgeous” by a non-playable character in a game was creepy. Similarly, when Rebecca spoke about the ‘gatekeeping’ that she notices online, she also mentioned that although there were women attempting to come into the community, there were “very few women who are taken seriously within the community.” To understand that women are being called out as these names, is to understand the true meaning that feminists are seen as disrupting the happiness of others and ruining the tone of the conversation. . This depiction that women within the community are rising up to have these conversations could be empowering and liberating through the outlook that Ahmed provides rather than being perceived as a derogatory and negative term, feminists and women are able to take the titles of ‘SJW’ and ‘Kill Joy’s within their stride to continue their conversations that challenge sexism within gendered spaces.

## **Conclusion**

To conclude this chapter, we can now observe how women are experiencing sexism through a variety of different ways, through their subcultural style to being face to face with players



at the gaming table we can recognise what experiences women are going through. We can also begin to observe that the concept of the 'magic circle' in regard to the board gaming community can sometimes serve to not exist as these real issues are penetrating the bubble in which the 'magic circle' is taking place. We can also recognise that regularly women are trying to challenge the board gaming community by calling out or posting things that demonstrate sexist behavior. Instead of this being widely recognised by the community and then the community as a whole learning from these, women are dismissed and made out to be ruining the fun for other people from within the community. From the perspective of an 'Aca-Fan' this research promotes the notion that speaking up and challenging the current climate of the board gaming community, may present myself and others within the light of being a 'kill joy' or 'justice warrior'. However, without this type of research, the community may continue to treat women as unequal through the examples of sexism that the participants and myself have experienced and documented within this study.

A continuation of this study may be to look and observe the effects more deeply of the 'magic circle' to begin to explore the impact that this has at the table when these issues arise and whether players recognise that there is a change within the circle when sexism or other real- life issues are brought to the gaming table.

## **Chapter Two - “Worker Placement” Labour and the Board Gaming Community**

### **Introduction**

This chapter will explore the different forms of labour that is contributed towards both the community itself and the largely corporate board gaming industry. The first section looks into free labour and highlights how fans contribute to labour in different ways, through digital spaces such as the *BoardGameGeek* website and through Kickstarter campaigns. I will also explore the labour produced through offline spaces as these are largely misrepresented or forgotten about but serves a much larger and important purpose. Finally, I will begin to explore affective and emotional labour, outlining the differences between both and highlighting the examples of both through the experiences of participants within this study.

The core arguments of this chapter are to recognise the labour that women regularly put into the community but are then not provided with the same type of recognition that would be expected. Much of the labour within the board gaming community contributes to both cultural and economic capital but many of the women who contribute and labour for the board gaming community are not fully seeing the same recognition that other players may receive.

### **2:1 - What Free Labour is produced for board gaming community in online and offline spaces?**

With any fan community, there will also be fans that express themselves through content or promotion of their set interest. Many fans want to discuss, promote and contribute towards their chosen fandom as an act of their devotion to their community, this creation of content is known as ‘free labour’ which is outlined within the literature review of this study. As board gaming is largely face to face, free labour happens in two different ways both in online and offline spaces. For online spaces, contributions of free labour are seen in examples of blog posts, reviews, engaging in forums or promoting games in some form. For offline spaces, this can differ into more ‘mundane’ tasks such as accommodating players, planning the event/meetup, reading the rules/learning the game prior to the event, teaching new players the rules and providing snacks or food during the event. These smaller acts of free labour can sometimes be dismissed or forgotten about when thinking about the concept of free labour in board games.

It is also identified that free labour in either small or large examples, can be used as a tool to gain more authenticity and become ‘closer’ to the community therefore gaining status and moving up within the hierarchy. Looking at this concept, women may feel the need to perform acts of free labour in an attempt to present themselves as more authentic and create a sense of belonging because they do not receive it from the fans themselves. Referring back to the literature review, whereby Hills (2002), De Kosnik (2012) and Thornton (1996) outlined the underpinnings of authenticity, hierarchy and belonging with fandom or subculture. Pearson (2010) explains that “both face-to-face and digital fandoms are as ridden with hierarchies, cliques, and conflict as all social organisations; the existence of the uber-fan or the BNF (big name fan) attests to this.” (Pearson, 2010, pg 93).

For board gaming, this is no different and Hills (2002) presents that not all fans are considered equal with societal classes and gender becoming a key factor into how somebody may be perceived as a fan. Hunting and Hains (2018) consider hierarchy in fandoms in a gendered way, by looking at the popularity in male viewers who watch and identify with the TV show *My Little Pony*, they argue that;

Cross-demographic fandom suggest a fundamental change in attitudes about gender hierarchies that make girls’ media (and implicitly girls) “less than.” At stake is not just a question of individual textual consumption but consumption as an avatar for attitudes about girls, masculinity and the backbone of patriarchy that holds that the feminine must be “less than” the masculine. (Hunting and Hains, 2018, pg 2).

From understanding the importance of hierarchies and need to feel the sense of belonging within fandoms, it is difficult to ignore how the Internet has allowed fandoms to utilise its social spaces to expand this. To explore, ‘free labour’ in the digital world is to look at the much referenced, Tiziana Terranova (2004). Recognising that the growth of the Internet provided fans with more opportunities to create and engage with free labour which provides profit to corporate industries, Terranova also explored the movement of subcultures into the digital economy, “The digital economy is an important area of experimentation with value and free cultural/affective labour. It

is about specific forms of production... but it is also about forms of labour we do not immediately recognise as such.” (Terranova, 2004, pg 79-80).

Terranova helped mould and shape what developed into an explosion of theories and research on subcultures within the digital age and what the effects of these are towards fandoms when they are used to create free labour. In just one click of a button, hundreds to thousands of fans can be connected and interacting with one another which allowed the development and definitions of a digital fandom or subculture to come to life. J A McArthur (2008) explored digital subcultures by looking at self-identified “geeks” who took to online spaces to communicate with other like-minded people, “These identities are shaped by the values and beliefs espoused and supported by the members of these groups. Thus, the Internet provides an opportunity for would-be members of cultural groups to seek out like-minded people.” (J A McArthur, 2008, pg 62). These forms of labour in turn, could then help generate sales and develop profit for larger industries. This is also important for board gaming because much of the free labour produced digitally is based on recommending board games to other members of the fandom; talking about why it was good, how it played and what they thought about it, through the influence of somebody else’s opinion this can turn into more sales of the commodity which generates profit for the industry. Fans have provided many commodities with extra hidden values that would not be generated otherwise, Abigail De Kosnik (2012) explains that appeal of commodities is generated by fans and without this there would be “little to no social aspect to consuming”. (De Kosnik, 2012, pg 102. To understand the ‘profit’ gained from free labour we need to explore the differences of economic and cultural capital and how these affect board gaming. Pierre Bourdieu (1986) defines ‘capital’ as something that is always a production of labour in some form. Economic capital is defined through the production of goods and resources that directly transfer back into the profits of the industry. As outlined above, economic capital is that aspect of board gamers recommending games to other players who then purchase the games, this is the basic understanding of ‘profit’ as it affects the gaming industry. Bourdieu also highlighted that two other forms known as ‘cultural’ and ‘social’ capital can be generated. Which highlights that the different variations of ‘profit’ that can be obtained through fan labour should be outlined as such; On the one hand and for the economic capital; free labour can help in generating sales, free marketing and exposure for companies that produce board games. On the other hand, and for cultural capital, the profit is

contributing towards meaning and value of the object within the fandom thus enabling the object to become symbolic or a reference within the subculture, not only this but free labour can also help expand the fandom and bring newcomers to the community.

With fans appearing at the centre of media production and consumption, Henry Jenkins (2006) argues that with new technologies, industries now recognise the on-going change in the ways fans and audiences receive information; “Media convergence is more than simply a technological shift. Convergence alters the relationship between existing technologies, industries, markets, genres, and audiences. Convergence alters the logic by which media industries operate and by which media consumers process news and entertainment.” (Jenkins, 2006, pg 15-16). The shift that online spaces has created is that fans are likely to produce and consume in new ways. Free labour is one of those ways that will affect both the audience and corporation through the aforementioned ways of which profit can be obtained through both economic and cultural capital. There is no rule stating that a fan needs to engage in free labour to be considered a ‘fan’, however many consumers still log into social online spaces such as *BoardGameGeek* to promote the things that they love and therefore engaging in free labour. Specifically, within the *BGG* forums, there are threads dedicated to fans discussing their favourite games or what they are currently playing which acts as online marketplace filled with recommendations for other fans who are looking to purchase new games. However, there is still a defining factor on how free labour differs to the official marketing of the corporation involved as De Kosnik (2012) explains:

Fans feel they must labour - that is, dedicate time, attention, creativity, intellect and energy to commodities - to make those things be what they want them to be... The fans’ efforts to customise mass commodities are for themselves and their fellow fans only, not for the marketplace and not for the average consumer. (De Kosnik, 2012, pg 102-103)

For fans, their dedication and loyalty are fully displayed through small online spaces, as the board gaming industry still heavily relies on a smaller but more engaged audience. These small online spaces are key to understanding and recognising how knowledge and labour is exchanged throughout the board gaming community. With the ideas of fan labour outlined, it is easy to begin to recognise the ways in which fans participate in labour within their own communities. Many are easily identifiable like contributing to content on websites or producing items like fan art, however

there are also some unique forms of labour that are specific to the board gaming community. Some of these more unique and smaller forms of labour for the board gaming community will be outlined further within this chapter and can sometimes go completely unrecognised or go without proper acknowledgment from other fans within the community. *BoardGameGeek* is a very focal website and database that describes itself as an ‘online board gaming resource and community’. The website consists of a large board game database and forum, whereby fans can register and contribute. Fans do this by adding photos of the games, helping others with rule queries or posting reviews. Matt Hills (2015) and Paul Booth (2010) have both discussed the creation of fan databases through fan labour which really highlights the importance of fan knowledge, dedication and commitment towards their set interest. However, the focal point for both of their research was mainly to do with cult TV shows, which provides episodic and narrative points to explore throughout a database. Board games do not have an episodic structure to them and therefore are categorised in different ways through the *BoardGameGeek* database. Despite this, both types of databases would require a lot of work and dedication to uphold and keep relevant. These constructs of fan labour can help introduce other fans or newly found fans decide whether they are willing to participate within the said community. The idea goes back to and builds on the argument that cultural capital regulates fans and will have a select amount of rules that fans of the community are expected to follow. *BoardGameGeek* is no different to this and has a whole ‘help’ feature that documents the regulations and policies that need to be followed by users if they wish to engage within the community.

For digital free labour, Kickstarter is another way in which women from this study advised that they regularly contribute to. The use of crowdfunding has seemingly gained in popularity alongside the digital age, but what is interesting about crowdfunding is its recognition towards fan cultures who are willing to put down money on a commodity that is deemed so precious to their culture that they are willing to purchase it before it has even been created. This idea really stipulates just how important fan cultures and fandoms can be to the success of commodities within today's society. Matt Hills (2015) produced a case study on the *Veronica Mars Movie Project Kickstarter* which was created by the writer-executive producer of the first two seasons, Hills (2015) documented the reasons as to why the project became a success due to effects that it had on the *Veronica Mars* fandom. Hills explains that the use of the Kickstarter in projects on such a scale allows the ‘producer’ or industry to become or appear closer to the fandom, there is something

personal about received direct updates and managers from such a corporate background. Similarly, Moll Hackabout (2018) from this study discussed about how talkative the designers and developers of board gamers are on online space platforms and in particular KickStarter. This establishment of having a corporate figure in and amongst the fans is then also parallel to the ‘reward tiers’ and ‘stretch goals’ that the company has to offer if monetary milestones are hit within a timeframe. Not only is the industry providing the fan with a choice of how much money they are willing to contribute, they are also allowing the fan to decide how loyal or ‘authentic’ they feel towards the product or company from within the fandom. Hills (2002) recognises that fandoms as such produce a social hierarchy to determine authenticity and loyalty within the community which can be a contributing factor into the decision that a fan makes when choosing which ‘reward tier’ they select for a KickStarter campaign. Hills (2015) argues;

The decision to become involved in a Kickstarter can involve selecting specific tiers/rewards that offer fan cultural capital (in the form of exclusive merchandise), or those which proffer symbolic closeness to the production itself (e.g. backers’ set visits, or those which offer social capital in the form of belonging to an imagine community of supports. these forms of poaching do not produce ‘resistant’ or reworked fan texts, but they do articulate Kickstarter option with fans’ pre-existent affects and authenticities in ways that cannot be presumed a priori to simply be structured into the campaign’s design. (Hills, 2015, pg 190).

What Hills (2015) continues to recognise is that providing reward tiers through a KickStarter campaign differs from a fan simply purchasing standardised memorabilia and instead offer a more inclusive object that is not mass produced. For board gaming, a lot of the rewards allow the backer to receive an ‘exclusive’ edition providing extra content and normally comes in a different style box that will never be available through a store purchase. Overall, Kickstarter and other crowdfunding spaces factor in the ideology that fans produce free labour by using the fans authenticity to financially aid a project or campaign resulting in a commodity that will be culturally symbolic to the fandom. Paul Booth (2014) argues that; “Crowdfunding campaigns that successfully engage their fans in a more participatory manner - acknowledging previous fan work,

noting the saliency of fan activities in the past, appealing to fan attention in the future - highlight the temporal existence of a fandom” (Booth, 2014, pg 151).

However, what is not explored is how these sorts of campaigns can create a gendered subcultural capital and that there is a significant lack in exploration of women within fandom spaces. Fandom is looked at through a general sense that everyone within the community is happy and if producing free labour it is of the same value, but for board games and other male dominated communities this is not the case. Erin Duffy (2015) argues that gender and femininity are severely underrepresented when studying digital labour; “As I have argued, we also need to remove the gender-neutral lens by foregrounding digital labour’s reliance on socially constructed notions of gender - particularly discourses of authenticity, passion and community.” (Duffy, 2015, pg 453). Although the board gaming community is represented as male dominated, there has been no research into how women have felt within this and other male dominated spaces. Previous work on fandom has always insinuated that the essence of fandom creates a ‘sense of belonging’ or an equal community, however this is not always the case.

Some of the women within this study explained that the marketing of board games, does not reach them without them having to look for it themselves. Therefore, having to participate in labour by researching to find board games that they will like and enjoy. Kaylee (2018) explained that; “I do a lot of research when I’m buying games so that I know we are both going to enjoy it. So, I go to *BoardGameGeek*.” Rena (2018) also explained that due to board games being quite costly, she is never one to pick up an expensive game that she may not enjoy, therefore she does her research;

I always check them out online first because I don’t want to spend £30-£40 on a big box game only for it to be crap or unplayable because I know people who have been stung by that, who bought board games just because it looked cool... So, I go online and I try to find videos of people playing the games because that also helps me get around the rules a little bit. I will ask around, I will ask people what’s good, mostly my friends or at a games expo I will go and try different things and see what I think.

(Rena)



From a fan laboured forum post in July 2018 on *BoardGameGeek*, a list was released with sexist games that are being produced or released in 2018 or later that highlight there are still on-going problems within the community. These sexist games were split into categories and documented as ‘gender imbalance’ or ‘sexist depiction’ and allowed other fans and users to post under each title. This demonstrates that even new board games are being released or marketed and are still not representing the full community of board gaming and that it is inclusive to women. This demonstrates why women have a need to labour and a need to research the games that make them feel included and provide that sense of belonging. Women feel that this is important, as Eeyore (2018) previously mentioned when talking about the representations of women in board games that, “Unless somebody told me that it was some incredible and amazing game then I wouldn’t touch it with a barge pole.” When asked about the marketing of board games, the women throughout the study advised that it was not largely aimed at them because the community is largely male dominated. This idea links back to the premise that board games are gendered spaces and regardless of being online or offline women are likely to come across some form of sexism whilst engaging in the board gaming subculture. When looking at the examples of offline free labour, many women within this study provided examples whereby they contributed to the board gaming community for the benefit of others around them. Not only this, but it highlighted how free labour can affect their view of their own authenticity of being a fan of board gaming as Matt Hills’ (2002) argument outlines in the literature review.

Kaylee (2018) a participant within this study demonstrated how she used these smaller examples of free labour to prove her authenticity at a board game meetup that her and her husband were hosting. She explained that her husband had invited people to come over and play *Twilight Imperium*, a notoriously time-consuming game. Kaylee advised that she was really nervous due to the “preconceived notions about what it would be like and what kind of challenges there would be.” She explained that she hadn’t met the players previously which added to her nerves;

We were playing it with people I had never met before so there was a lot of pressure for me, like knowing what was going on and I had read the rule book knowing it was the first time playing... I was so nervous about proving to people that I was a good enough player to even play that game.

(Kaylee)

What Kaylee explains regarding this experience is that, she was aware of the existing representation of *Twilight Imperium* being known as a ‘complex’ game and she experienced nerves from this that caused her to read through the rule book and prove to the other players that she was ‘authentic’. There is a likely chance that when the board gaming meetup happened, the rules would have been outlined in a shortened variety to all players, but Kaylee participated in labour by reading the rule book beforehand in a way to express proof that she has the ability to play the game and is a fan within the board gaming community. Someone Subcool (2018) also outlined the ways in which labour provides her with a view of authenticity as well:

“I spend a lot of time on *BGG*, I am a level 3 poster and have secured one good citizenship star. In some ways I like it more than *Facebook*. I run games at our own meetups. I have gone to four or five of our little local conventions. I have edited rules for games that did not get published. I recently worked on the *Automa Factory* playtest team for a new *Scythe* expansion *Rise of Fenris*. I have been invited to work on other *Automa Factory* projects. I am a *Stonemaier* Ambassador which means I am tasked in teaching *Stonemaier* games should the opportunity arise. All of these activities make me feel as if I continue to level up in the gaming world.”

(Someone Subcool)

Someone Subcool’s choice of words here and using ‘level up’ connote this sense of hierarchy and that she is involved within all of these activities to provide this sense of belonging that Hills (2002) and other scholars refer to when researching fan studies. Other participants provided examples of larger forms of labour by creating or running large gaming groups, this also demonstrates that women are participating in labour in a way of gaining authenticity and social hierarchy within the board gaming fandom.

BeetleGran, Eeyore (2018) all provided examples of running or setting up largely board gaming groups, despite their examples being similar their reasonings are slightly different. BeetleGran took over the group she was attending due to the other organiser being unable to continue running it due to other commitments, she expressed that “I’ve happily taken it on to make

sure it continues.” Although BeetleGran seemingly only overtook it because she was afraid that the gaming group would not continue she has demonstrated that she wants to continue working and providing the same level of labour that the previous leader had. She explained that;

I suppose every year we have a Christmas thing that involves some fun activities and a prize table which the person who was running it then managed to acquire all sorts of games from everywhere and absolutely everyone went home with a prize and I’ll have to emulate this now that I’m running it.

(BeetleGran)

Using this example, it shows that not providing the same amount of labour could cause the players attending the group to view this as BeetleGran being less authentic and less of a fan as she would show unwilling to provide the same amount of dedication to the fandom as the previous leader did. Eeyore (2018) explained that she created a board gaming group because when looking for one she was unable to find one that she like;

We were trying to find a board gaming group to join, I couldn’t find anyone that I liked so I thought I might as well start my own, so I started my own at the pub... I wanted it to be a bit more girl friendly and just to play the games that I liked and basically control it.

(Eeyore)

Eeyore’s experience highlights the issue that women face within the gendered space when they are unable to find a group that they feel they like or can fit in with. In some cases, like Eeyore’s rather than being subjected to forms of sexism in existing board gaming groups, she decided to create her own in the hope that it would become a more neutral space for other women to get involved in. Eeyore’s labour can be reflected across other platforms whereby women are actively trying to level the playing field of board gaming spaces to make them a less gendered and more open to female players. Invincimeeples (2018) also provided examples of how she participated in the board gaming community, whilst her interview took place, she was currently at a convention whereby she was running half of the gaming programme, she explained that she is also a committee member of the board gaming association for her state. She also advised that she participates with online groups

as well such, “I am currently the voice of a tournament being run which has about 90 players.”. Invincimeeple exclusively puts both the convention and the online tournament in the same category of labour by mentioning them both in regards to the same question which demonstrates that online forms of labour can be just as much work as providing them on a face to face basis.

However, many women within this study also had experiences within larger ‘tabletop’ culture such as experiences with trading card games (TCG’s) such as *Magic: the Gathering* or role playing games (RPG’s) such as *Dungeons and Dragons*, and with these also came more experiences of sexism from within the community and some interesting forms of free labour. For example, both Rena and Invincimeeple spoke about being a ‘DM or GM’ known as a ‘Dungeon Master/Games Master’ in the role-playing game *Dungeons and Dragons* (abbreviated to *D’n’D*). What is important to note about a DM is that they are responsible for the entire game campaign, in some cases they will use prewritten campaigns or alternatively create and design their own stories which displays a huge sense of dedication to the role-playing fandom and community. Depending on how often the group meets there is a huge sense of forward planning and free labour that goes into each and every time the group meets up and continues through the campaign. This is a very unique form of free labour that is exclusive to the RPG fandom and being a DM seems to come with a large appreciation for the time and effort they contribute for their group, Invincimeeple expressed that one of her most memorable experiences was when she had finished creating the beginning scenario for her new campaign that she was DM-ing, “They all got so fired up about it and excited about the characters they had developed for it. They were sending me notes and ringing me up very excitedly to say what they had done.”. Invincimeeple here is feeling rewarded for her labour and authentic within the tabletop space by the reactions of her fellow players who she explained consisted of a demographic of two women (including herself) and five men. However, there are other experiences that show that within the RPG community it is still massively male dominated and gendered with similar experiences occurring to those that happen within board gaming. Rena explains that;

I have met people who I know are part of the community at large but who, if they ask me if they can join my gaming group, I will say no to their face and make up reasons why, but the truth is I just don’t want them there because they are not nice people. I met someone

through a friend who want to, we started talking and who he found out that I was into gaming, he basically started trying to tell me how to DM and I just sat there thinking I have been doing this for two year, I know what I'm doing but he just didn't believe me.

(Rena)

In this instance, Rena as a DM feels a sense of social hierarchy to the fandom by being able to turn people away from her gaming group if they exhibit sexist behaviour, however in this particular instance she was met with someone who essentially questioned her authenticity of her chosen RPG thus demonstrating that in larger tabletop culture, women are still continually experiencing sexism and therefore are having to contribute and participate in free labour to gain their 'sense of belonging' with their chosen community.

## **2:2 - How emotional and affective labour exists within board gaming.**

Now I have explored free labour and outlined some examples that the participants are engaging in for the board gaming community, I feel we need to delve deeper into the aspect of 'labour' and look into both affective and emotional labour within this section. Affective labour has been outlined as 'women's work' as explained by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri (2001);

Affective labour is better understood by beginning from what feminist analyses of "women's work" have called "labor in the bodily mode." Caring labor is certainly entirely immersed in the corporeal, the somatic, but the effects it produces are nonetheless immaterial. What affective labor produces are social networks, forms of community, biopower. (Hardt and Negri, 2001, pg 293).

In other definitions, Melissa Gregg (2009) simplifies affective labour as "To explain meaningful and productive human activity that does not result in a direct financial profit or exchange value, but rather produces a sense of community, esteem, and/or belonging for those who share a common interest." (Melissa Gregg, 2009, pg 209). From this definition, it becomes easily recognisable that many of the participants' experiences that have already been mentioned have a basis of affective labour in some form. As board gaming is gendered, women will be contributing towards free labour to gain the sense of belonging and community despite engaging with dismissal from other

members and forms of sexism and harassment of varying scales. However, the sense of community and belonging is not just for them as an individual, as the idea of affective labour is to create the sense for others as well. This is a hugely important task for women who are within a gendered subcultural capital as to create these spaces and these senses of belonging are what will eventually be the catalyst in which women become recognised within the subculture.

The notion of ‘women’s work’ spans from a concept that society has become accustomed to the premise whereby women are able to deal with their emotions better and thus would create more of a sense of community and care for others. An example of this within board games is when Eeyore (2018) decided to create her own group in order for it to be more ‘girl-friendly’, Eeyore is using affective labour to produce a sense of community for those with a shared common interest. As many other women may find it difficult to go into largely male dominated gaming groups, Eeyore’s alternative option would provide them more with a sense of belonging. Invincimeeples (2018) explains that the whole reason that she plays board games is to create a sense of inclusion;

What I’m reaching for is those few times when we were together playing a game because of that sense of unity and family and belonging. Whenever I sit down at a table or across the miles with a computer, I am feeling that inclusion and warmth, that hearthside feeling that I am continually reaching for.

(Invincimeeples)

Invincimeeples is trying to achieve a sense of belonging and inclusion from board gaming and her community through affective labour. Through this, it is likely that Invincimeeples makes all of the groups and tournaments that she helps host emulate these feelings across to other players. This was evident from Invincimeeples’s interview, after all the questions had been answered and knowing that she was at a gaming convention at the time. She used her iPad to show me around the convention space, documenting all of the player areas and outlining where things were happening such as the talks and panels. She then took me into the room in which she was in charge of running half of the gaming events the next day, her gaming group were making use of the space and playing games that evening. She showed me around the tables, showing to me via the camera the games that each group was playing and then introducing me to the players ensuring that I was welcomed by them. This is a clear demonstration of Invincimeeples’s participation of affective labour. From

this outlook, you can begin to recognise and notify the forms of labour that women may engage with in regards to hosting a board game night. Themes would begin to emerge about the pre-planning and domestic side like cleaning and providing food would be regarded as ‘women’s work’. Moll Hackabout explained her groups pre-planning for when her gaming group was playing a legacy game.

We usually have to do a lot more planning behind it as well so we wouldn’t only play the game; we would have a *Facebook* group going and be doing little planning strategies and gift parties afterwards to celebrate victories or awful losses and stuff.

(Moll Hackabout)

Other forms of labour could be ensuring that other players are feeling accommodated and comfortable. Someone Subcool (2018) provides a shoutout to a woman within her community that runs her local gaming group, which highlights some of the potentially missed forms of labour that women take on within the community:

She is a fabulous human who does so much for her community. She runs a Christmas programme for needy families to which I have donated and last year received help. She once bought a collect of *Magic the Gathering* cards she believed to be stolen. It was. She found the owner and reunited him and his collection and working with law enforcement to arrest the thief. She closes the store and treats her staff to movie nights like when *Star Wars* opens. After the shooting in Parkland she wrote an open letter to the gaming community that she is there if anyone ever feels they are alone or are considering harming themselves or others. She is a real community hero.

(Someone Subcool)

All these things mentioned, are normally overlooked as the conception that someone is simply doing all of these things for the community and not many realise the time and effort these types of contributions of labour take. One thing, as an ‘aca-fan’ that I deem an important aspect of affective labour is tailoring the games experience to the players; this involves picking out games that I think other players will enjoy not things I necessarily would like to play, ensuring the rules are clear for

everybody at the time of playing and then sometimes going 'easy' on players. If I recognise that a player is having a hard time or being 'picked' on in a competitive game I might choose to strategically help them in some way. This may feel to the other player that they have an ally and in turn makes the experience more fun and enjoyable than what it was when they were being targeted by other players. The overall enjoyment of the other players within the group when hosting a board gaming night is significantly more important than your own feelings at that moment. Equally, Someone Subcool argues that she spends a lot of time alone with her games doing things that could be identified as these smaller acts of labour:

I also play a lot alone, about 80% or more of my total time on the hobby is spent alone - researching games, curating my collection, learning my games, printing aids and strategy articles, sorting the components, arranging my wall of games and then actually playing them.

(Someone Subcool)

This idea of compressing your own feelings for other peoples is largely known as 'emotional labour', a concept that Arlie Russell Hochschild (1979) developed when studying that airline flight attendants are trained to suppress their emotions in exchange for the passenger's enjoyment and expected to maintain throughout their employment. The form of 'emotional labour' can be described as having to manage or regulate feelings in order to maintain and fulfil a job role. Hochschild's research outlined the growing requirements and demands that female flight attendants were faced with and their ability to suppress their own emotions to maintain a smile throughout difficult times as this is what is expected of them and advertised by large airline companies. Hochschild defined emotional labour as an exploiting tactic by large consumers;

Emotional labour is the silent work of evoking and suppressing feeling- in ourselves and in others. When you drive a truck or swing a hammer for a living, you give the company your time and sweat. But you don't relinquish your way of seeing things. You don't give the company your face or your feelings. Those aren't used. Those aren't exploited. But when you do emotional labour to express the company's disposition toward the public, and



to make a profit for the company, you put your feelings to work. (Hochschild, 1979, pg 333)

One of the significant differences between Hochschild's work is that the emotional labour is for the profitable gain of a large corporate company and for women in board gaming, it is in the sense of belonging and authenticity which is as valuable to the fan as the monetary profit gained for a larger company. Emotional labour is largely recognised in the board gaming community as women being misrepresented or dismissed when they have participated in free fan labour. Invincimeeples (2018) labour to the gaming community has already been outlined, she spends a lot of time and dedication running gaming programmes at conventions, organising tournaments and having her own gaming group with an additional role-playing group. When discussing disappointing experiences, Invincimeeples advised that the most disappointing thing to her is;

When I go to all this trouble to organise a tournament and everybody thinks that it's my husband that has done it. When people contact my husband about stuff that I have organised asking how they do it or what they do to do it and they always seem very surprised to be referred to me. When I have been playing a game for five years and my husband hasn't and they will ask him about the rules, I find that all very saddening.

(Invincimeeples)

Although, she described the event as a disappointing experience, during the times that this has happened, she will have controlled her feelings of disappointment to still ensure that everybody involved is going away feeling content and happy with the event.

BeetleGran (2018) also described a similar experience when running her weekly gaming group, when discussing her experiences, she explained about the time that she was mistaken as the 'tea lady' and how she then "gritted my teeth and brushed it off as one of life's experiences." (BeetleGran). These examples from both Invincimeeples and BeetleGran do not directly link with emotional labour, as the main differences between affective and emotional labour is determined by the outcome and who 'profits' from this. It does however highlight that the engagement of labour is not evenly split between the fans within the community. Affective labour's outcome is solely for the subcultural capital, which in this case is the board gaming community and even

though the community recognises the act of labour that Invincimeeple and BeetleGran have participated in, the labour has been devalued and does not equally convert back to recognising the work that the women have put in. This goes back to the examples that the board gaming community is gendered and because of this space being gendered, women are more likely to experience an example like this whereby they are not evenly recognised for participating in labour. Emotional labour's outcome is strictly corporate. The outcome is to generate profit in the form of happy consumers at the price of suppressing their employees emotions.

It can easily be documented that within gendered cultural capital, women are engaging in emotional, affective and free labour to gain a sense of belonging and authenticity. Women are regularly creating or running groups, therefore producing a 'job role' that should then offer the recognition and respect however they are being dismissed and then forced to suppress the emotions they feel. As a whole, the board gaming community runs on this affective and free labour that is being produced by women from within the community, but these women are not seeing a direct benefit or profit from that work. One reason why women will suppress their emotion is to refrain from being subject to the potential sexism and harassment that women have experienced throughout the community. What is also important to note is that Hochschild's argument focuses on the idea of large companies capitalising on a woman's emotional labour for economic capital. In cultural capital spaces like board gaming, women are choosing to suppress their own emotions in the hope that they gain a sense of belonging, to suit the needs of the community and to ensure that other players happiness is gained from their laboured events.

## **Conclusion**

To conclude this chapter, we can begin to recognise that women are widely contributing to the community via affective and emotional labour, however this is not as highly valued as cultural capital, therefore women can be sometimes dismissed and not provided with the same amount of recognition that is due. As the gaming industry does not provide wide spread marketing campaigns, it is up to fans from within the subculture to provide content that then reaches others. Not only this, but when looking into more basic forms of labour we begin to recognise that women are very involved in this production. However, despite receiving some form of profit or cultural capital via a sense of belonging or community that they enjoy, they are regularly suppressing their own happiness or emotions for recognition that is then split elsewhere and given to other players.



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## **Conclusion - “Final Round”**

As a final comment, this study has offered an insight into how women are currently experiencing board gaming spaces. It also emphasises the need to extend research on the board gaming community to provide more in-depth analysis of players and the culture as a whole. What the participants within this study have demonstrated is that, in present, women within the culture are currently experiencing forms of sexism both in online and real-world spaces and when attempting to challenge this are met with forms of dismissal. We can also begin to identify how women are regularly working and participating within these spaces to ensure that the larger community remain happy and comfortable but rarely experience any cultural capital or profit back from this. It is interesting to understand that despite obtaining rightful recognition when engaging in labour, the women within this study were all still happy to consider themselves as part of the community and enjoy gaming nonetheless.

As an ‘Aca-Fan’, I felt that there was an existing need for research that involved the minority of the board gaming community. In recent years, gender studies alongside digital gaming studies have become prominent within the gaming field and analog or traditional styles of gaming such as boardgaming has been very much left on the sideline. However, the board gaming community is growing and is becoming ever more prominent within ‘Geek Culture’, as a woman within this culture and community, I felt that to provide an in-depth study that solely involved women participants was something that needed to be studied and needs to be continued to be researched in the future.

A further extension of this study could begin to look at women and the ‘magic circle’ more closely to provide a full outlook on what happens within the ‘magic circle’ when issues like sexism and other real-world issues arise. However further study on board gaming and its players should be a requirement. This study highlights the importance of research on this group and other closed off niche groups such as the Live Action Role-play (LARP) community or by dividing board gamers up even further to look at the subcultures of trading card game players and role players to see how their experiences may differ as despite being within a similar environment, the concept and ‘play’ styles are completely different.

## **Appendix 1 - “Kickstarter Exclusive” - Annie**

**Interviewer:** Katie Peaker

**Interviewee:** Annie

**Interview Setting:** Over Skype.

**(Start of Interview)**

**Interviewer -** Hello?

**Annie -** Hello, sorry I just accidentally answered without the video on.

**Interviewer -** No, no that’s fine.

**(Annie hangs up call and redials)**

**Annie -** Hello, can you see me?

**Interviewer -** Hello, I can yes!

**Annie -** I can’t see you but that’s ok!

**Interviewer -** Yes sorry I’ve been having problems with my webcam set up on this computer that I’m using to record us so I’m sorry.

**Annie -** It’s alright.

**Interviewer -** First of all, thank you very much for taking the time out to be part of this study.

**Annie -** Yes, that's not a problem sorry it's taken us a while to arrange a time!

**Interviewer -** No it's fine. Obviously with the time difference it was a little bit tricky but I'm glad we have been able to find some way to do this, it is really good! Is there anything that you would like to ask me before we get into the questions or do you want to just go ahead and ask any after if they crop up?

**Annie -** Yeah, I am happy to go ahead and ask any later but I mean it has been a while since I read the consent and participant information but I am yeah, it all seemed fairly straight forward from what I could remember but if I think of anything I will ask but ask your questions and I will answer them as best as I can.

**Interviewer -** That's fine, so first question is how did you first get into tabletop gaming?

**Annie -** Erm, I guess I played a lot of board games as a kid so I have an older brother and a cousin that I am very close to and we used to play games a lot from when I was very little. I think I continued throughout although a little less in my teen years but then after both getting together with my partner and also having a group of friends who are interested in tabletop gaming, I have sort of got more regular over the last ten years. So now, I play at least once a week with a regular group and we went as a group to a convention last year, we have quite a collection between the five of us which are the most regular players so yeah, we are still very much hobby gamers but we do do it very very regularly.

**Interviewer -** Yes, well that sort of leads on to my next question which is how often do you play games which you have said and who do you play them with?

**Annie -** Yeah, so minimum is once a week and then sometimes we will have an extra session and generally it is the same group of about four or five guys (laughs). So I am really the only regular woman who plays with them, we have some of the partners of those other

guys who will occasionally dip in and play games with us but it is generally me and four main guys that I play with and my partner is not actually within that group of guys.

**Interviewer -** Ok, can you tell me how you discovered that group or the community that you play with?

**Annie -** Yeah so, really through friends of friends. So I knew the partner of one of the guys who kind of started out our group and then a couple of the other players, I met through him and then the partner of one of my friends came and joined us as well. So, it was really through someone who I knew that had no interest in board gaming and she still doesn't but her partner was very very interested and it was through getting to know him through her that a few of us then realised that we had a mutual interest in playing games and decided to play regularly together.

**Interviewer -** That's good! Can you tell me about any memorable experiences that you have had with your gaming group?

**Annie -** So I guess, we went to our first convention last year which was my first board game convention that was this big *PAX* convention so it was both video gaming and board gaming but we were definitely there for the board game side. Although I have also played video games sort of since my teens, although again, I wouldn't consider myself a serious video gamer but throughout my teens I played more and then more recently I have a console that I do play on but anyway, board games are more my interest and so there's this massive convention that happens, I think all over the world but Melbourne hosts it once a year so we went there for three days. It was because one of our friends, it was his birthday and he wished that we'd go for his 40th birthday and we just sort of stayed in the tabletop gaming area, playing games in their library and playing games with a group of us and meeting some other people. I guess that other sort of most exciting thing about board gaming in the past twelve months, a smaller group than our usual group has been playing *Pandemic Legacy* and I must say that it has been really really fun and has opened up a totally different style of gaming and has been a great experience to play with the same people, over it has been over twelve months and we have got one more game to go. Yeah, that has

been just different from our week to week gaming, so I think those two things have been an anchor in becoming more interested and investing in board game playing over the past twelve months and that is playing *Pandemic Legacy* and going to PAX.

**Interviewer -** Good, do you have any favourite games and why do you enjoy them?

**Annie -** So I think that has changed a lot over the time that I have been gaming. So, I would say *Pandemic Legacy* because it has been such an amazing experience and that's probably my favourite game and the people that I play with, whenever we get together with other members of our gaming group to play other games we are often thinking "Oh god I wish I could be playing *Pandemic Legacy*!" I really like it because of the cooperation element and I also like how the complexity of the gameplay grows over time and how the game has changed over time and I like that on going story throughout the game as well. When I first started playing, no one in our group had children so we were playing lots of long form games, we often played on a weekend for a few hours and I think we were playing a lot of trading games so at that point I was really enjoying games like *Puerto Rico*, that was probably my favourite game at that time but I think we sort of played it out and played it too many times. Now that we have been playing together for so long and the nature of our group has changed in that we now meet on a Wednesday evening because people have kids there is less time to play so we don't have time to spend playing games that are kind of multi-hour games. The other thing is that once we've played a lot of games, things get very similar over time so we have started looking for shorter form games that have more interesting mechanics and I think an enjoying game at the moment that just has so much replay-ability for our group is *Codenames*. Just because, again it is something that you can play in teams, it is something that is always interesting and fun and in that simpler more element, the game that is based around guessing and bluffing and that sort of stuff we have been enjoying as well is *Mysterium*, the mechanic is very different to other games that we play. At PAX we played *Secret Hitler* which was really great and I usually don't like bluffing games, it's interesting because there's a couple of us in our gaming group where we are real kind of rule followers so bluffing games can feel very unnatural for us but *Secret Hitler* and the dynamics and mechanics of that game were really great but we don't get to play that very often because it works well with a larger group of people. I think the other game that I've really enjoyed from me and right from when I

started gaming, is that I still really enjoy playing the base game of *Settlers in Catan* and I think that that's, in terms of trading games it is very basic but it's elegant and I just find it really enjoyable. If I am going to play that element and that kind of strategic game I am always going to want to rather play *Catan* than any of the more sophisticated or more complex games that we have, just because with those sorts of games I feel like the rules are all the same and the rules are just layering up the complexity and layering up the time that it takes to play and *Settlers of Catan*, you know, it is very contained but it is enough of a mixture of luck and strategy to be satisfying. I don't know, that is a lot of different things but as I am playing more games I am realising that the thing that I like is, I don't mind a long form game but the opportunities to play aren't really there anymore so I like a 60-90 minute game and I like a game where there is either a unique mechanism, or it's collaborative or it's you know, just sort of simple, elegant and straight forward rather than lots and lots of layered complexity.

**Interviewer -** Good. How do you purchase your games and why?

**Annie -** A few different ways, so number one we sort of have this collective library between the group of us. So it has sort of slowed up a bit now but often for everyone's birthday we would buy a game for that person which would then go into the collective library but we are not doing that as much now but it kind of built up the library of games that we have so sometimes we'd be buying for other people. It is a mixture for me of buying online, through a couple of sites in Australia but really shopping around to find the best price and sometimes buying second hand through *Gumtree* or trading groups through *Facebook* so I have done a bit of that some trading and swapping online through trading groups. We have a game store that we usually go to, there's a local game shop to us that is really trying to foster community around board gaming and role playing and even though they are a little more expensive, I still like to support them as they have a nice space where you can go and play games and we do sometimes go there and try things out in their library and I often buy a game there, I'd probably buy a couple of games there a year through them so even though they are technically 10 to 20 dollars more expensive than you will find online, I think it is worth it to support those guys.

**Interviewer -** Good stuff, I like the birthday idea to build up the group library, I think that is a really cool idea. (laughs)

**Annie -** (laughs) Yeah it's really good, you kind of think "Yeah, I'm buying a gift for somebody but actually it is a gift for us!"

**Interviewer -** Can you tell me about the first time you went into a board gaming store?

**Annie -** I probably don't remember the first time I went into a board gaming store, I was probably in my teens. Probably the first time that I bought one of the newer style euro game rather than what I would consider a traditional or kind of kids game, was when I was in my early twenties and visiting a friend who lived in another state and it was raining and we were looking for something to do so I bought a copy of *Carcassonne* but it really wasn't that notable but it was probably the first time that I made a purchase that has been specifically going out to find a different style game to say like *Pictionary* or *Scrabble* or *Connect Four* which is something that you would probably find in a big department store. I don't really have a recollection of that experience.

**Interviewer -** That's fine. Can you tell me some of your memorable experiences when buying board games or going into board gaming stores?

**Annie -** (Laughs) I think the most memorable experience and actually, these guys who had the local store near us, you know they are really friendly and really good about sort of directing you towards games that you might like, you know if you say I like this then they say oh have you tried this but one of the first times we went into this board game store to check it out when it first opened there was three of us that went into the gaming store and there was the slight, sort of surly guy who worked there. Anyway, he was showing us a few games and showing us some games in the library and he had this one game, you know we asked what the game was like because we hadn't really heard much about it but it looked interesting and he looked at us and said "Oh yeah, we have a regular gaming group that comes in here and plays it quite often" and then he turned to me and said "And the female of THAT group really enjoyed painting the miniatures."

and I was like alright, every gaming group has one designated female and I guess I'm it so that was something that we still sort of talk about that I am THE female, the one female permitted and it's true when we have gone to play in the library and play in the gaming shop it is not uncommon for me to be the only woman sitting in the players area and similarly when we went to *PAX*, that ratio of men to women was very stark. But that was a very memorable time of when I got referred to as the female of the gaming group so...

**Interviewer -** Have you engaged in the wider gaming community and if so, how? So I know that you have mentioned that you went to your first convention but other wider gaming communities could be online, any tournaments, any events, anything like that.

**Annie -** A few years ago, I played *Settlers of Catan* online for quite a bit through a site that's since banned any new members and I have since forgotten which password and username I used so I can't get back on to that but I was playing quite regularly for a couple of years there and doing fine when playing against actual people. So, I guess going to *PAX*, which was our first kind of venture into the wider gaming community and we kept to ourselves but we did have a couple of times when we met a couple different people and invited them to play with us that was actually very successful and very very fun. It is interesting, that the group that I'm with and the group that I play games with, really strongly identify themselves as not part of the wider gaming community and we are kind of split down the middle and I only realised this recently, when a couple of us suggested going and playing games at the game shop and a couple of the other people said "Ahh, no it is just too nerdy there and I don't like it" and I thought that was really interesting! Clearly they don't, you know, I wouldn't mind getting more involved but I don't really have the time and I think, had I been more active when I was at uni maybe then I would have probably been more involved in the wider gaming stuff. My partner, he mainly role plays rather than plays table top but when he was university, I didn't know him then but when he was at uni he was very involved with the role playing community so I think that had this been something I was doing as much then as I am now, that I would probably be quite interested in getting involved in more widely but it is just that I don't have very much time.



**Interviewer -** That's fine. Can you tell me about any disappointing experiences that you have had when engaging with board games or the community?

**Annie -** I think that, for me, possibly over the last couple of years and again while I've gotten to know the people, you know, when you are new to something and you are starting to get to know the people through just doing that thing together and then those people don't just become your board game friends or whatever or hobby friends they go off and they start to become being more of your friend friends and you start to do more things with them and I think it is interesting that as my relationship with the people that I game with has, because none of them started off as my close friends like I knew their partners more than I knew them and it has been really good to get to know them but then at the same time, I have been feeling over the last couple of years like more stuff potentially to do with my gender in gaming and I don't know if that is me being more aware of that stuff or if it is actually ramping up. A couple of people in my group, definitely don't listen to me when I explain rules or kind of in playing collaborative games, I'll sort of suggest that we do something and then if a guy suggests that we do something which is the same thing then they will pay attention to him and I especially find that a couple of the guys within the group that will make the point of that is exactly what she was talking about and would be quite supportive of me and will also acknowledge when I make suggestions or say things. Then, another couple of the guys, well one guy in particular will be very and is very dismissive when I say things and I think that is to do with gender and that has been increasingly frustrating and I do wish that there was more women, I mean like when friends come and play like female friends when they play with us then we have a really good time and it changes the dynamic a bit which is good. I think that has been the biggest thing and I also notice that when I win or do well in a game, it is kind of dismissed of as luck rather than strategy which is interesting or like bad luck of the person who didn't do well but yeah that is interesting. That is probably the frustrating and disappointing things, is that my expertise in games is not as much acknowledges, to me it doesn't seem to be acknowledged in the same way that it is for some of the guys.

**Interviewer -** In your opinion, how are games marketed and what is their target audience?

**Annie -** I think it is very dependant on the game and the style of game like, you know, I don't see war games like *Risk* are at all marketed towards women. I feel like I love playing *Risk* but I don't see that style of game being marketed towards women at all but to me, it is very based on theme and possible mechanic, like collaborative games like I've mentioned *Codenames* before or *Mysterium* which isn't collaborative but has a very different mechanic when someone is guiding the game, I don't see them being, like I don't think that they are marketed towards people more my age and I don't see a gender difference in their marketing. I don't think we see any miniature-based games being marketed towards women at all and that is not even a world that I have ventured into and similarly with deck building games, like that doesn't seem to be a world that is really targeting women but I see some of the more euro style games, not that they are necessarily targeting women but they are not so gendered. I think that it is very, thinking about *Pandemic Legacy* I don't even know if I could tell you even who that was marketed to, one thing I could tell you about that is that there is a mix of men and women in the roles that you get and it is not heavily gendered either way. I guess I don't generally see games being marketed, even when we went to *PAX* and it was clearly defined between video games and board games, and the video games because it obviously has heaps more money so everything was marketed and it was glaring at you the whole time and I could clearly say "This game is for a 15 year old boy and this game is for kids and this game is for women..." whereas the board games, I don't think because there isn't the marketing and there isn't the money even at the convention it was kind of like someone who had designed a game just stood saying "Here's my game!" and apart from the ones that are just blatantly like 'here's a sexy lady' or here's a game based on drinking, but in terms of serious tabletop euro style games like I couldn't tell you really.

**Interviewer -** That's completely fine. What do you think about the representations about women within board games?

**Annie -** Yeah, it is pretty generally pretty poor. You know, if there are characters within the game, generally there might be one female character. There is obviously exceptions but where there are human characters that you can be or that are somehow involved in the game, obviously it is really heavily men that are represented. I suppose we just don't, or, like the women who are represented, I'm just thinking about a couple of other games like the images

of the women like the drawings or whatever are very scantily clad and it's just fairly typical of what a lot of media in the way that women are represented within board games but you know, again there are exceptions and there are obviously games that just don't feature any sort of human character so things like some of the sci-fi games that we play or trading games that we play, everyone is just a meeple and there is no gender unless you pile it on top, there is nothing to indicate a gender either way. So, yeah I would say where gender is apparent in players, I think it is predominantly men or women who are scantily clad but obviously there are exceptions to that.

**Interviewer -** Can you tell me what the enjoyable experiences are when engaging with board games and the community?

**Annie -** I guess, again the more I play games the more I think about what I like and I think about the gaming experience and I do really like getting together with friends over something to do together rather than just going out to a pub or something. You know, you are actually getting together and doing something together, I really enjoy collaborative style or creative style games and I just like games where there is a focus on the journey and the focus of the game itself is quite enjoyable. I am a competitive person and I like to win, but those games where the actual playing of the games is enjoyable to the point where it doesn't matter if you win or not, like that doesn't affect your enjoyment of it, I think that is really important. I also like critiquing games and figuring out why I like them and why I don't and I like talking about that with the people that I play games with. I hate post game analysis where someone has won and then they tell you all about their strategy that they used to win and you know, yes I know I sat through that and we really don't need to dwell on why you won... (laughs) but I do like talking about why something worked in a game or why something didn't work in a game and you know, playing games where you can actually think about the elements and the mechanics of it and what worked and what didn't and having that kind of post game discussion. I know I keep talking about *Pandemic Legacy* but I one of the great things about *Pandemic Legacy* is that we are four people playing together over an extended period of time and the game is evolving and changing and we can kind of talk about that and say why this is really good because of this or say that something is a really great mechanic and I can't see how this would work in another game or why I can't see another legacy type game could be this good which is something that kept coming up again and

again. But I like, kind of examining the mechanics and thinking about what makes a good game so those are the things that I really enjoy, I do, I enjoy the being with people and doing something and I enjoy the more that you do it and the more exposure to different games that you have, the more that as a group you can start to discuss what you like and what you don't and what works and what doesn't so those are the kind of real pleasures for me in gaming.

**Interviewer -** Good, would you say that there are any negative aspects to board gaming or the community?

**Annie -** I think, probably just what I touched on already. That sometimes there are time when I often feel that my gender is highlighted and that my expertise, I guess, is seen as lesser because of my gender. You know, if I have success then it can be downplayed, even the other night we were playing a deck building game that had elements of *Scrabble* and then I did really well and I won but everybody else was like "Well, you know, certain types of people like word games and we are just not that type of person." and so it was not that they didn't have skills it was that they just didn't like it and I was sort of like 'Come on guys'. That is probably the negative experience that I have and when I am talked over or when my suggestions are dismissed and you know, you sort of say well maybe it is just me, maybe it is them and just their personality but also I think there's an overlay that it has happened enough and I am old enough that there's this overlay of gender I think is across it all even with my close friends. Overall, it kind of makes me a bit hesitant to play with other members of the community, so to go out and play with other people because at least I know my friends and I can tell my friends to fuck off basically, I can stand up for myself within that group and also I have people in that group who I know don't accept that either and will come to my defence if needed whereas those dynamic even with my close friends makes me a little bit hesitant to go out and find another group of people and I must admit that I haven't explored this but I wonder if finding another group of women who play board games would be a different experience and maybe would be a way to branch out into the larger community by finding women who play. That is tricky though because I don't know many women who do play board games so yeah.

**Interviewer -** Ok so final question now, what advice would you give to somebody who is wanting to get into board gaming?

**Annie -** I guess I would say that it's a really good hobby to have, see if you can find a group of friends that are interested in doing that as well and play lots and lots of different games to see what you like. If you can go somewhere that you can try games before you can buy them then that is a really good way and if you don't like a certain style of game there are lots of other different mechanics in board gaming so everyone should be able to find something that they will enjoy. I also think that for people who are brand new, that collaborative games are a really good way to get into it because it removes that competitive element that I feel some people can find a little bit threatening so that is the advice that I give.

**Interviewer -** Ok, good! So that is all the questions that I have is there any additional comments or anything you would like to add?

**Annie -** I have probably said everything that I want to say.

**Interviewer -** Ok so once again thank you very much for taking the time to answer these, I really appreciate it.

**Annie -** No problem, thank you.

**(End of Interview)**

## **Appendix 2 - “Kickstarter Exclusive” - BeetleGran**

**Interviewer:** Katie Peaker

**Interviewee:** BeetleGran

**Interview Setting:** Over Skype

**(Start of Interview)**

**Interviewer -** Hello is that BeetleGran?

**BeetleGran -** It is and camera is now working.

**Interviewer -** Hi There!

**BeetleGran -** Hi there, it is good to meet you.

**Interviewer -** It's good to meet you too.

**BeetleGran -** I can't see you but it doesn't matter.

**Interviewer -** Yes, I do apologise. I tried to make this work on my Mac where I have a webcam but for some reason it wouldn't work on Skype.

**BeetleGran -** Fair enough, I haven't used Skype for a few years myself so I fiddled with it the other day to make sure that it still worked.

**Interviewer -** No that's fine. So, if you are happy we can get straight into the interview.

**BeetleGran -** Yeah!

**Interviewer -** Yeah? Ok, so first of all can you tell me how you first got into tabletop gaming?

**BeetleGran -** Erm, probably playing *Snakes and Ladders* and things like that as a child. Adult gaming, oh goodness I am quite old! I mean, gosh as a teenager I played *Monopoly* and carried on as new games came out and played on with my children and in recent years, I have spent many years not having the right people to play with. Getting on from ten years ago, I moved to this area and some new friends I'd made then introduced me to a club where I found lots of new people to play.

**Interviewer -** That's good. So how often do you play games and who do you play them with?

**BeetleGran -** Right, said club meets once a month and I try to attend as much as possible. In fact, I have just taken over running it because the previous person who set it up has got pressure from work to work on Saturdays so it won't work and I've happily taken it on to make sure it continues. Playing with friends, at least once a month I'd say, so basically I am playing games a couple of times a month. There is also a small convention that meets sort of a few miles from me, but that is just twice a year but that's a much bigger all day thing which has also just been rescued after the people who run it retired and somebody else has taken that one on so the games live!

**Interviewer -** Yes that's what's important isn't it? That everyone can continue playing! And what is the demographic of your gaming group?

**BeetleGran -** Signed up online there is around 60 people and we never see them. There's probably around 20-30 that turn up regularly occasionally. It's probably men to women about seven to one and age wise it is anything from teenagers to very retired people and there's something in-between on every age level.

**Interviewer -** Oh so it is quite a mixed bunch of people getting together. And can you tell me about how you discovered the group/community that you play with?

**BeetleGran -** The one that I play with? I was introduced to it by friends who are members of it.

**Interviewer -** Ok, and can you tell me about any memorable experiences with your gaming group?

**BeetleGran -** On the whole it is tremendously enjoyable, one very irritating one was when one new gentleman that was pretty elderly decided that I must have been the tea lady.

**Interviewer -** Oh wow!

**BeetleGran -** I gritted my teeth and brushed it off as one of life's experiences and I would have to say that that is not true for most of the group. It's basically people that play games and it doesn't matter what they look like or anything. It is a very friendly group, but what is memorable about it, I've been there quite a number of years and I suppose every year we have a Christmas thing that involves some fun activities and a prize table which the person who was running it then managed to acquire all sorts of games from everywhere and absolutely everybody went home with a prize and I'll have to emulate this now that I'm running it next December but I've got a good stock in so that should be alright.

**Interviewer -** That's good. Do you have any favourite games and why do you enjoy them?

**BeetleGran -** Oh gosh! Quite a few. I really enjoy *Ticket to Ride*, I don't play it as much as I might because a lot of people that I play with think it's a bit beneath them. I don't, nothing is beneath me! Otherwise I really like playing new ones, so I'll come across a new one and play it for a bit and then something else pops up. The game of the month varies, I mean obviously at the moment I am enjoying *Terraforming Mars* and not playing it often enough, and then just odd others things that just pop up. Is that making sense?

**Interviewer -** Yeah, *Terraforming Mars* is one of my favourites as well so it's really good.



**BeetleGran -** There's just so many different directions, so I think you'd have to play hundreds of times before you exhaust all possibilities.

**Interviewer -** Yes definitely, how do you purchase your games and why?

**BeetleGran -** I put them on my Christmas list because my children have more money than I have. I look around charity shops because you can look around and occasionally pick up bargains. One or two, I have actually walked into shops and bought and others I have looked online to try and I have bought games online so it is a variety. I have to say, the games that I play regularly, I don't necessarily have to own, because if you are playing with somebody else they might own it. So the answer is just to know people that have huge collections and then you don't have to buy them! Because they are and they can be really, scarily pricey if you are on a limited income.

**Interviewer -** Yes, the definitely can, especially new!

**BeetleGran -** I have no problem with second hand games because as long as they have been looked after then it's fine. Whatever you do, someone else is going to touch them because they are playing with you.

**Interviewer -** Yeah, exactly! Tell me about the first time that you went into a board gaming store?

**BeetleGran -** I don't think I have ever been literally into a dedicated board gaming store. I am going too soon, because a new one is in the process of opening that is near to me, so I have been in stores that sell board games and other stuff. Also, I have never been into a board gaming cafe (pause) yet.

**Interviewer -** There isn't one actually local to us so because I play with my boyfriend mainly, we just can't seem to find a cafe that is close enough to actually go into and enjoy.

**BeetleGran -** It's the same problem here.

**Interviewer -** Tell me about some of your memorable experiences when buying games?

**BeetleGran -** Frustration at not being able to find things online or buy second hand copies of things I want, that is memorable because I decided I wanted a copy of *Paperback*, which is a tabletop game, it's on card but same thing. I didn't decide that I wanted it whilst it was in print, I only decided later because the friends that owned it actually left the country. Then I thought, right I will have to get my own copy and found not only it is not being produced anymore, there was nothing available online so a memorable experience is the frustration of not being able to get what I want.

**Interviewer -** Mhm, definitely. How have you engaged in a wider gaming community?

**BeetleGran -** Well, I am on *BoardGameGeek*, and there are one or two things on *Facebook* that I have signed up for. I have to tell you that I can't remember which ones they are because they are all very much of a muchness and just joining the group there's similar posts that come through so the answer to that is *BoardGameGeek* and *Facebook*, plus joining things and going to the local convention.

**Interviewer -** Tell me about any disappointing experiences you've had when engaging with board games or the community?

**BeetleGran -** With the community, I don't think I have found anything disappointing apart from when I was thought as as the tea lady but most of it has been very good. I have had the occasional disappointing game, which yes, the main one was one of my children who I might add is middle aged but doesn't know as much about board games as I'd like decided to put in an extra one in my stash of board games for Christmas and bought *Exploding Kittens*. That game was a disappointment.

**Interviewer -** Was there a reason why it was a disappointment, did you just not enjoy it?

**BeetleGran -** Not only did I find very dull, all the people I was playing with found it really dull as well (laughs). I'm being unkind someone must love it, they've sold a lot of them.

**Interviewer -** And in your own opinion, how are games marketed and what would you say the target audience would be?

**BeetleGran -** Target audience, a lot of the marketing tends to be that board game players are male and youngish, especially youngish men that are pre-middle aged. Especially the board game type thing and some board games are marketed to a general audience in shops you know like book shops and charity shops and things. Going around charity shops, I tend to find that they all put board games on the shelf with the children's games which a lot of them definitely aren't but I think the old ladies see board games and think oh that is something for children. So if you are buying them for charity shops you just need to know where to look. However, I can't remember the original question.

**Interviewer -** So it was, how games are marketed and what their target audience is?

**BeetleGran -** Erm, right how they are marketed, not well enough for me actually because I have to look, I get to hear about board games from other people rather than things being marketed at anywhere that I pick up.

**Interviewer -** So it is not kind of commonly advertised or readily available?

**BeetleGran -** No, but however they are marketed it doesn't reach me as much as I'd like.

**Interviewer -** What do you think about the representations of women within board games?

**BeetleGran -** Varies tremendously. If anything is gender specific it tends to be male oriented. Some games that I have observed and this is not typical but some games have pictures or depictions of female characters that are, shall we say that are not real females. They are the *Disney Princess*

or pornstar version of females. I mean it isn't always but that is a trend that I do notice in some things but I can't give you specific examples of those but it is just something that I notice in life generally and find it a bit frustrating. I have never come across a board game with a character that looks like a depiction of me, but perhaps nobody would buy it.

**Interviewer -** I am sure they would! Tell me what the enjoyable experiences are when engaging with board games and the community?

**BeetleGran -** Right, there is the social interaction. There's the exercising the brain, doing calculations and taking risks in a safe environment as in it is really only a game so the world doesn't end if I lose, even though it sometimes feels like it! Yeah, I mean those are the main things I think but it's allowing my mind to work in ways that it will work and that I couldn't earn money at even when I was young enough to earn money and don't get so much in day to day activities. If that makes sense.

**Interviewer -** It does, thank you and would you say there are any negative aspects to board gaming and the community?

**BeetleGran -** The community is not big enough and not localised enough to me and really though people in general are very interesting and very varied, there is very little I don't like about it apart from a few games that I don't like and I don't have to play them so that is ok.

**Interviewer -** It is just the final question now, what advice would you give to somebody who would be wanting to get into the board gaming community?

**BeetleGran -** Right, try it and find lots of available and local people, get in touch with somebody and go along and meet them. For instance, I know that the group that I have now taken on, we encourage that and the first visit is free and we don't mention subs until they come back for a second time. Yes, just give it a go, contact people and meet them it is always worth a try. If there is something that you want to happen and it doesn't exist or it isn't working then just start it

up yourself! It is amazing what is out there and you can always contact them by social media or however.

**Interviewer -** Yes, definitely that is perfect. Is there anything that you would like to add or any comments that you would like to say?

**BeetleGran -** I probably have summed up most of what I think apart from wishing you the best of luck with your project and I'd love to hear about the results of it when you have tied it all up.

**Interviewer -** Thank you very much and thank you also for participating.

**BeetleGran -** I enjoyed it! Thank you.

**Interviewer -** Good! Thanks and bye.

**BeetleGran -** Bye!

**(End of Interview)**

### **Appendix 3 - “Kickstarter Exclusive” - Eeyore**

**Interviewer:** Katie Peaker

**Interviewee:** Eeyore

**Interview Setting:** Over Skype.

**(Start of Interview)**

**Eeyore -** Hello!

**Interviewer -** Hi.

**Eeyore -** How are you doing?

**Interviewer -** I’m good thank you, how about you?

**Eeyore -** I’m fine thanks!

**Interviewer -** Good to hear. First of all, I just want to say thank you for taking the time out of your day to come on here and be interviewed.

**Eeyore -** No problem at all, it sounds interesting!

**Interviewer -** Thank you, is there anything that you would like to ask me before we go ahead with the interview or are just happy to kind of answer the questions?

**Eeyore -** Yes I’m happy to go through the questions, I’m just curious to know sort of what sort of MA you are writing and what its about and things but I think that will become a bit more transparent as we go on I think so that’s fine you fire off the questions.

**Interviewer -** Ok, so the first question is can you tell me how you first got into tabletop gaming?

**Eeyore -** Well I have always like board games, I liked them as a child. I am the eldest of three children and my thing was to get a new board game for my birthday or Christmas and then read on it so that I could beat my sisters and family so that resulted in them never wanting to play board games with me! (laughs) I then didn't play board games for ages after that but then I was going out with a boyfriend about maybe seven or eight years ago and he was hugely into board games and sort of got me back into them really and introduced me into some of the more less traditional ones. I was used to *Monopoly* and that sort of thing but he introduced me into a lot of the German stuff and all sorts so yeah, that is how I got into it.

**Interviewer -** Ok and how often do you play games and who do you play them with?

**Eeyore -** Well I have a core sort of group of four of us that play usually about once a month I'd say.

**Interviewer -** And what is the demographic of your gaming group?

**Eeyore -** Well there is me, I am the only girl in the group, I'm 40. There is Al who is 49/50ish, I think he's 50 this year, his friend Andy who is 50 and Matty who is 42. So three guys and me.

**Interviewer -** Ok, that's perfect and can you tell me how you discovered your board gaming group or community that you play with?

**Eeyore -** Yes so Andy, he is a good friend of another ex boyfriend and we discovered that we both liked playing board games and we are also in the same pub quiz team which we still are and then basically we were trying to find a board gaming group to join, I couldn't find anyone that I liked so I thought I might as well start my own, so I started my own at the pub which is how I met Matt and various other people and in the end there was just four of us that would meet

regularly so I stopped saying that we had to do it in the pub and we just sort of starting going round to each other's houses so yeah we have been doing that for the last two years maybe.

**Interviewer -** Good and tell me about any memorable experiences with your gaming group?

**Eeyore -** Oh well, there is all sorts. It is extremely satisfying to beat them all (laughs) I just have to say that there is nothing better than having bunch of older blokes and trouncing them completely, I mean that is always good! Yeah, the reason I got into it is because I'm not really a big fan of sword and sorcery or any type of role playing games, I have avoided those which is why I started my own one up, well that and I wanted it to be a bit more girl friendly and just to play the games that I liked and basically control it! (laughs) So yeah, we play all sorts of things, actually what happened was about a year ago, we got one of the legacy games *SeaFall* so we have been playing that for ages which I think everyone kind of got a bit sick of, but we have grimly agreed to still play it but we haven't actually met for ages so we've been playing that for a bit, but that is quite fun to do something regular like that rather than just swapping between different games. Yeah, I mean I like the fact that we can play silly things as well as slightly more serious games, a friend of mine, I remember got a copy of *Dream Phone* which is just a hoot also a big fan of *Marrying Mr. Darcy* that has gone down really well, if you know that one the Jane Austen one. I mean we have tried to go to a sort of bigger board game cafe that sort of started up last year and became popular which was one of the reasons why I stopped doing it on our pub because everyone pretty much just went there. They had a much larger collection and much more space so I have been there a few times but I sort of got a bit bored with it really, I don't know how serious of a gamer you would call me, I do like playing but it is not my life sort of thing.

**Interviewer -** No that's fine. When you said that you were trying to make up a group that is more girl friendly.

**Eeyore -** Well I looked at what sort of groups there were, I live in the Glasgow area so what is here around the Glasgow area and there was one that seemed to play an awful lot of *Magic the Gathering* which is a big no no for me, the whole sword and sorcery thing is just not



found. Again, lots of ones at the university were very RPG heavy as far as I could tell, most game groups were very much blokes and it was just a bit intimidating, I'd go down to our local board gaming shop which is full of blokes and it is quite intimidating going in there I suppose and I don't think I felt like I fitted into that scene and wanted to do my own I suppose. I'm not saying that there aren't any female players out there, you do meet a few but it is still seen as a very bloke thing I guess.

**Interviewer -** Yeah, definitely. Do you have any favourite games and why do you enjoy them?

**Eeyore -** Hmm, what are my favourite ones? I like *Kill Doctor Lucky* because that was one of the first ones that I played with the boyfriend who introduced me to the idea that there were these unusual sort of indie board games available and it is also very funny which is what I like. I'm a big fan of *Dixit*, I really like the creativity of that, I like *Ticket to Ride* because I always win (laughs) and I think *Cards Against Humanity* is hilarious, I have played it with my parents which was a very interesting experience, I have a memorable experience of explaining what fisting was to my father like oh God! What else have I been playing recently, I'm looking over at my board gaming shelf trying to remind myself, I really like *Timeline* as a little game, I think that is really nice and I've got *Munchkin Adventure Time* which is really fun. I really like learning new board games and think that half the fun of it is learning a new game and trying to get your head around the rules and how something works even though that can be extremely tortuous and leads to numerous arguments as to what the correct rules are. We have been playing something called *The 7th Continent* which is some online game that a friend got and boy do they have arguments over the rules for that one and say "Well, if that applied to me then it's got to apply to you now" and then we realise that it's wrong, it's just like oh God! (laughs)

**Interviewer -** How do you purchase your games and why?

**Eeyore -** A lot of them, I do go down to the board gaming shop and see if I can find them, if they are prohibitively expensive then I might see if I can find a better deal online but then the postage is normally so much that it's probably easier to buy it in person and it is kind of nice

to support a local shop. I have picked up a couple of things from *Waterstones*, it is nice to have a board game collection there so I have probably popped in there a few times, I have bought stuff at a game fair, I've asked for things for Christmas if there is something specifically wanted. I have done a couple of *Kickstarter's* done a couple of those, yeah.

**Interviewer -** Cool, can you tell me about the first time that you went into a board gaming store?

**Eeyore -** Oh gosh, I try and remember the first one I went into, there are two of them, *AI Games* and *AI Comics*, because I quite like comics as well so I probably went into the comic store first and if I was going into the game shop then it would be to specifically look for a copy of something that I had in mind to get rather than going in for a general browse. I will go in for a general browse these days but even then, half of the stuff is collectible cards and miniature figures that you paint so there's always these teenage boys that are hanging round there and it is genuinely intimidating and making you realise this really isn't your world and why are you looking at all these things and you are not necessarily sure what you are looking for and if you are picking something up and you can't decide whether it is any good or not and somehow making a bad choice or something that you will be judged for that. It is something about the culture, I mean they are perfectly nice when you buy stuff, I wouldn't say that they are unwelcoming... yeah I find it very interesting as well and looking at all these wonderful things that you can play with is great but I'd happily spend some time browsing in there.

**Interviewer -** Can you tell me about some of your memorable experiences when buying games or going into a board gaming store?

**Eeyore -** The thing that is memorable to me is when you find something in the bargain bin and think yes this is only a tenner, brilliant! I frequently do, like if I go in the New Year and there is a reduced shelf and I see something that is only a fiver I think yeah, I'll give that a shot, I think price dictates a lot of what I'll play. It has been pretty uneventful apart from looking at things and thinking wow that is fifty pounds I definitely can't afford that and you end up picking it up and putting it back again hoping that it might be on sale.

**Interviewer -** Yeah, they can be very pricey. Have you engaged in the wider gaming community and if so how?

**Eeyore -** Not particularly, I mean I will go on *BoardGameGeek* and look up reviews and sort of how to play stuff, rule clarifications that kind of thing. I'm not sort of, I don't think I have ever really contributed to anything like that. In terms of, wider gaming community we have been to things like a game festival that they have in Glasgow, which is kind of fun but I have to say, I do find that there is a certain type of teenager that I sort of associate with it that haven't really been acquainted with how bodily hygiene works (laughs) it's fairly unpleasant if people have been gaming there all day. I tend to avoid that sort of thing these days, sorry I have forgotten what the question was now!

**Interviewer -** No, that's fine it was just how you have engaged within the wider gaming community.

**Eeyore -** Oh yeah, I don't think I really do. I am probably not one for even feeling like I'm part of a community as such.

**Interviewer -** Ok, so for you is it more about the people that you play with and the instances between that and your family and friends?

**Eeyore -** Yeah I think is like that. I mean I will certainly look things up online like rules and things but I'm not going to contribute myself to it.

**Interviewer -** So you wouldn't be posting on the forums or anything like that.

**Eeyore -** It's unlikely, unless I want to rave about something but that hasn't happened yet, no.

**Interviewer -** Can you tell me about any disappointing experiences that you have had when engaging in board games or the community?

**Eeyore -** I would only say, as I have said the teenage boys of the non-washing variety when I have played a few games with them. They are perfectly nice people but just not someone I would want to spend a lot of time with. Being an older woman as well, you sort of associate board games with younger people in a community. It would have been nice for more people to have turned up to the board game club really but then that was probably because I didn't market it. In terms of sexism and things, there is still artwork, where you just think "Oh look here's a bunch of people fighting zombies but all the women's clothes have fallen off!" and I do pick up on that and there are always lots of male lead main characters, lots of violence stuff and very little, I quite like cooperative games, I like something that is just a bit different. I get a bit bored of the artwork styles and it's a bit dated a lot of it, I think it could be a lot more creative in some areas.

**Interviewer -** Yes, this kind of leads on to the next two questions, the first one being in your own opinion how are games marketed and what is their target audience?

**Eeyore -** Well I think traditionally you have different areas. You have your traditional family board games where there is quite a large number, which most people think of and then you have the more serious gamer stuff which is terribly expensive and you have to spend hours learning it and that sort of high end stuff and then you have the more kind of I suppose you could call it the *Dungeons and Dragons* side of things. But yeah, most of it is male, probably white middle class background is what you would imagine the demographic to be. In terms, of anything I don't think I have ever seen anything that has specifically targeted women, it was more sort of targeted at girls so it may be something pink and to do with phones or something. In terms of coming across any marketing as such, I don't think I see it very much really unless I see something on *Kickstarter* and I go looking for a game then I don't see the marketing particularly. The most marketing I will see, is if I do a search to see what won game of the year or that kind of thing basically going through the lists to see what was good and then looking at *BoardGameGeek* for recommendations are or just picking something up and giving it a go. I guess box design is the only other thing that

I seem to come across or the leaflets that are inside them. Yeah, other than that you don't really come across it so much.

**Interviewer -** So, what you are kind of describing is that you actively have to go looking for things and that it is not specifically advertised in the mainstream.

**Eeyore -** Yeah I think so, I think it is something where you just go along and see what they have on the shelf but there probably are magazines or website where these things do place adverts but it's just not the ones that I am likely to look at.

**Interviewer -** That's fine. What do you think about the representations of women within board games?

**Eeyore -** (laughs) Yeah it is getting better but it is clearly aimed at teenage boys and it is all women with their clothes falling off. I think it is fine to have something like that but it is really off putting if that is the only character option that you've got. I mean you are seeing a lot of change between that at the moment, I really love the fact that in the *SeaFall* game you can choose your character and of course all the blokes picked the male characters and left all the female ones and then of course at the end of round one they had to tear them up and in the end and they had no other choice in becoming women. I mean I suppose I avoid anything that is overtly sexist in the first place so I probably have not been exposed to that and most stuff can be considered quite gender neutral to be honest, it is only a small part of that where I'm not really interested in it anyway.

**Interviewer -** Ok, so when you are actually looking for board games on the back of what you have just said, if you look at a board game and you see that it is potentially sexist would that deter you away from picking it up?

**Eeyore -** Oh yeah! I really would be very, unless somebody told me that it was some incredible and really amazing game then I wouldn't touch it with a barge pole. It's like trying to

drink a beer with old fashioned sort of ale style boozy ladies on, as a matter of principle I would not touch them, if I think it was in any way sexist then I wouldn't touch it.

**Interviewer -** Ok, can you tell me what the enjoyable experiences are when engaging with board games and the community?

**Eeyore -** It is nice to do something in person, there's now just so much stuff where you would end up doing something on a computer. I prefer to experience to that than video gaming I suppose, I think I like the fact that it is tactile and the physicality of the objects and the nice things about printed colours and boards and designs, all that visual effects, I think is lovely. Obviously, the competitiveness which is what I talk about, there is nothing better than winning and I think that is the whole joy of it! But yeah, learning something new, trying to figure out how things work, the sort of will I/won't I, is it working, am I double crossing someone or stabbing them in the back all of that sort of stuff makes it great fun!

**Interviewer -** Would you say there are any negative aspects to board gaming or the community?

**Eeyore -** I wouldn't say that much of the community represent the culture at large, I don't think it is down to any particular fault with board gaming in particular but I think there are a lot of backwards attitudes. What I find really annoying is that there are so many board games about conquering and you know setting up colonies, and I just think, really has nobody thought about how this could be slightly problematic for a lot of people? There is a lot of stuff that is very much about guts and glory and that haven't just taken into account the lives of people of colour and women and all sorts of stuff, it still feels like there's a lot of that. I'm sure there are a lot of designers that aren't about that which is great but yeah to me some of it seems to be still dragging its heels in what is quite a very stereotypical idea of what is fun to play. I think a lot of it has come up from the ideas of *Risk* and other war-games being what people used to play with in regards to toy soldiers and things and I think it is just a step up from that in a lot of ways.

**Interviewer -** Oh so it has like developed from there?

**Eeyore -** Yeah so that's kind of understandable that a lot of people liked that but it is just there are issues, particularly with that that I dislike. For me, I would probably prefer stuff that was more creative or I quite like all the stuff that is you know, set in turn of the century places and its a random game about brewing or something that you don't even think about or something abstract but there are stereotypes out there where I have stepped back and thought yeah ok that's maybe not so good, maybe in twenty years time we will gaze back and wonder about this stuff. Even now you look at games like *Cards Against Humanity* and realise that some of that is just not cool but I think that is the way culture games have where they will look back in horror at this.

**Interviewer -** Final question now, what advice would you give to somebody who is wanting to get into the board gaming community?

**Eeyore -** I suppose I would say, find what suits you and don't just go with what everyone else is doing because there are other people that will like what you like and you don't have to like the first thing you see I suppose. Try and get other women to play, it is difficult but it isn't impossible and if you don't like what you find out there then set up your own thing because that worked alright for me.

**Interviewer -** So that is all of the interview questions that I have, is there any further comments that you would like to add or say or anything you would like to ask me?

(The conversation turns to the actual Master's degree title and her being interested in reading the finished product, towards the end I asked if there was anything further she would like to add)

**Eeyore -** Talking about the geek culture, I think that is quite interesting because I think that is quite an off putting thing, I do have a lot of assumptions surrounding the geeky-ness of board games and board gaming and it's somehow an unusual and weird thing to do. I think it depends on who you speak to as some people could ask why you still play board games and see it as an old fashioned type of thing to do and then you have to explain that there are new games and they say they would probably just rather play a video game. One of the things that I find that I

don't think I completely identify with being a geek, sometimes I do and that's fine but I often find that the geek culture can be a bit overwhelming and I don't want to sideline myself and say well I'm a geek and this is everything that I like because I find it a bit limiting as a term and I would rather it be open to everyone and I think everyone can play games, it is a shame that it should be seen in any ways as niche because I have persuaded many friends of mine who would not see themselves in that group to come a play and they are from all sorts of backgrounds and a lot of them enjoyed it some of them didn't but certainly my family enjoy playing games mainly at Christmas and I think that is where a lot of it comes from, sort of family games at Christmas and things like that. It is not to say the geek as a term is bad, I mean it's nice to have a celebrated thing but maybe it can be transcended, I don't know.

(The conversation turns to recommendations of board games before coming to an end)

**(End of Interview)**



## **Appendix 4 - “Kickstarter Exclusive” - FancyDice**

**Interviewer:** Katie Peaker

**Interviewee:** FancyDice

**Interview Setting:** Over Email, the questions were emailed in full to FancyDice who completed and answered the questions before emailing her responses.

**(Start of Interview)**

**Question One -** Tell me how you first got into tabletop gaming.

**FancyDice -** (“Tabletop” in this case means “RPG’s” to me. Boardgames of the non-family game variety came later, see below) I tried to get into it aged about 15-16 of so; I had asked for *Dungeons and Dragons* for that Christmas, (red box version, this would have been somewhere around 1983). Unfortunately, I couldn’t find anyone to play with - all girls school, the boys I knew from out of school activities had already given it up by then - so I didn’t get a chance to start until I went to university, where I immediately joined what was then the *Dungeons and Dragons* society (later it became the role playing games society) which also involved a weekly board game night. 1986 and onwards then, The board game I mostly remember playing at that time would have been *Blood Bowl* as the society had a league for a while but I’m sure there were others.

**Question Two -** How often do you play games and who do you play them with?

**FancyDice -** It depends. It probably works out at somewhere around once a fortnight, maybe a little more but that covers two-player games played with my husband (who was in the gaming group mentioned above but was also on the same course as me, so I can’t quite claim to have only met him through gaming). Our ongoing game of *Pandemic Legacy* is played with him and two friends, our ongoing campaign of *TimeStories* and its expansions play with two different friends, plus also the board gaming convention that we go to once a year.

**Question Three -** What is the demographic of your gaming group?

**FancyDice -** Mixed gender but all around the same age, within about five years either way of being 50. This doesn't apply at the convention, which skews slightly younger and slightly male-r, but possibly not as much as you might expect. Note that we don't have a consistent "gaming group" when it comes to board games, we've got several different sets of people we play with.

**Question Four -** Can you tell me how you discovered the group/community that you play with?

**FancyDice -** Mostly this has been an outgrowth of the people I/we play RPGs with, or have played RPGs with in the past. Aside from the convention I don't think there's anyone with whom I play board games and not also RPGs with unless your counting *Scrabble* for example, which I play with my Dad.

**Question Five -** Tell me about any memorable experiences with your gaming group.

**FancyDice -** *Pandemic Legacy* is doing well at giving us at least short-term memorable experiences ("Oooh, we have just made it to the end of the month before the [redacted for spoilers] overran the place!") But overall, I would say that most of my long-term memorable gaming experiences have been with RPGs rather than boardgames.

**Question Six -** Do you have any favourite games and why do you enjoy them?

**FancyDice -** Well, *Pandemic Legacy* is up there at the moment. We've also just discovered the *Unlock!* Series of escape room games, which are like, crack and there is not nearly enough of them! Longer term, *Dominion's* a favourite, *Splendor's* getting a fair amount of love and in the two player end of things, we've pretty much worn out our second copy of *Lost Cities* (the two player card based game, not the board game) and I really like *Battle Line*. I prefer games

which don't take forever to set up (*Arkham Horror*, the original version lost me when it took 90 minutes to get it all set up) which also don't take forever to play (I love *Civilisation* on the computer but not the board game) and where you're not specifically trying to undercut other people. Co-operative games are good, or things where it's basically skill against skill rather than how much of a bastard you can be to other people.

**Question Seven -** How do you purchase your games and why?

**FancyDice -** This has actually changed recently. There are basically three sources: 1) our friendly local board game store, 2) the board game convention once a year, 3) *GenCon US* (annual visit). The FLGS (Friendly Local Gaming Store), which isn't actually all that local on the grounds it's the shop in Oxford that we've both been buying games from since 1986, just changed hands (the owner retired). This means that we don't feel quite the same loyalty to it anymore. The board game convention also has their FLGS there with a wide range of tempting looking stuff (we spent about £230.00 with him this time around). And *GenCon* often has the first releases of games we've been waiting for, so we'll pick those up if they are not too huge and heavy (and if they don't have a queue around the hall of people waiting to purchase them). We do buy online but mostly only expansions of stuff we've already got. The FLGS mentioned in (1) was great because the owner knew us both well and knew what type of games we'd enjoyed in the past, so she could recommend new games and be right most of the time!

**Question Eight -** Tell me about the first time you went into a board gaming store.

**FancyDice -** Honestly couldn't tell you, sorry. We're talking over 30 years ago at this point!

**Question Nine -** Tell me some of your memorable experiences when buying games or going into board gaming stores.

**FancyDice -** Well, mostly it will have either been Carol (former proprietor of that FLGS) recommending stuff, or possibly us buying games after demos at *GenCon US*. Nothing's

immediately leaping to mind as “memorable” sorry... There have been some games where you look at it and say “Oooh that looks really pretty/impressive” (*Cthulhu Wars* might be an example there) but they don’t necessarily involve immediately buying the game concerned.

**Question Ten -** Have you engaged in the wider gaming community, if so how?

**FancyDice -** We go to *StabCon*, a board gaming convention in Stockport once a year (sometimes twice but their summer run tends to clash with other unrelated events more locally). Also we go to *GenCon US* each year but that is mostly for the RPGs rather than board gaming. Board games are a bit of an ancillary thing there, we might play a couple of demos but we won’t typically sign up to play any board games specifically for an extended period of time. We’ve occasionally borrowed a game from their board game library to fill a spare hour. I not that a long time ago we were quite engage in the *Magic the Gathering* community but we are talking about 20+ years back.

**Question Eleven -** Tell me about any disappointing experiences you’ve had when engaging with board games or the community.

**FancyDice -** Remarkably few - in fact I am struggling to bring any to mind. However, I’m a women working (for myself) in the technology industry with two technical degrees and thus my tolerance for e.g. men telling me that I don’t know what I’m doing or trying to mansplain the rules to me is right about zero! Most don’t try and those very few who do get shot down in flames very quickly. Really it’s only ever been “Huh, that game looked so cool but it didn’t really work well”.

**Question Twelve -** In your opinion, how are games marketed and what is their target audience?

**FancyDice -** I think that hugely depends on the game. Also, to be fair, I very rarely see the game marketing aside from maybe booths at *GenCon*. When choosing, it’s either by recommendation or because I checked out the box and though “that looks interesting”. I specifically don’t see it as gender-based; there probably are games which are more marketed

towards men - possibly wargames? But because I have no interest in that type of game, I don't really care who they are marketed towards.

**Question Thirteen -** What do you think about the representations of women within board games?

**FancyDice -** Players, there aren't enough of us but we're getting there. The aforementioned convention in Stockport is probably, I don't know 70-30 male to female, maybe 75-25? A lot of the long-term regulars are female (as is one of the organisers). Illustration/representation within the games themselves is historically a bit crap, of course, but in modern games I think they've done a lot better at an even split, like *Pandemic*.

**Question Fourteen -** Tell me what the enjoyable experiences are when engaging with board games and the community.

**FancyDice -** I'm quite happy to play occasionally with like-minded people I don't know though I confess to preferring to play with people I do already know, but probably the most enjoyable is finding a cool new game to play. Well, that and playing a game I already enjoy. Winning's nice but it's not everything... except playing my Dad at *Scrabble*!

**Question Fifteen -** Would you say there are any negative aspects to board gaming or the community?

**FancyDice -** The occasional mansplainer. The occasional socially inept people (who can be male or female, yes the majority of them are male but the women exist too). The main negative aspect is that board games take up a lot of space!

**Question Sixteen -** And finally, what advice would you give to somebody who is wanting to get into board gaming?

**FancyDice -** Go for it! There are meeting in pubs and that sort of thing, there are plenty of people who'll be quite happy to help you learn a new game or to play a game with you or whatever. Not every game will be for you and that's just fine.

**(End of Interview)**

## **Appendix 5 - “Kickstarter Exclusive” - GameBee**

**Interviewer:** Katie Peaker

**Interviewee:** GameBee

**Interview Setting:** Over Skype. Originally this interview was planned for a different day however we had to reschedule quite a few times.

**(Start of Interview)**

**GameBee -** Hello, is this working for you?

**Interviewer -** Hi, yes it is!

**GameBee -** Very good!

**Interviewer -** Hello! First of all, thank you very much for dealing with all the delays and everything to get this interview sorted. I really appreciate that you are happy and still willing to partake.

**GameBee -** Yeah, I think it is a really cool study so yeah I definitely want to.

**Interviewer -** Thank you! Is there anything that you would like to ask me beforehand before we get into the questions or do you just want to jump straight in and ask questions at the end?

**GameBee -** So, one thing in advance is that you have already had an interview with a very good friend of mine.

**Interviewer -** Ok.

**GameBee -** So our answers might just overlap a bit because our group of friends and our gaming group kind of overlaps a bit so I just wanted to make you aware of that but I have no further questions right now.

**Interviewer -** Yes ok that is perfectly fine. If they do overlap then it's perfectly fine there is no problem.

**GameBee -** Good.

**Interviewer -** So can you tell me how you first got into tabletop gaming?

**GameBee -** Does that include role playing games or just board games?

**Interviewer -** Board games and role playing so both.

**GameBee -** Ok, well I have been playing board games since childhood and a lot with my family. All of us are very into board games, I guess but recently I started role playing, well I started playing *Dungeons and Dragons* about three years ago. Basically, a friend just asked me whether I wanted to join their role playing group and I said yes and then all the people who were playing regularly met up for board games so I have been getting more and more into, I wouldn't say modern but I'd say like... board games that have only just come out.

**Interviewer -** Ok, so how often do you play games and who do you play them with?

**GameBee -** We play *Dungeons and Dragons* once a week with a certain group of friends, most of whom I actually know through dancing. Board games, is once a week as well but on the weekend usually with the same people mostly.

**Interviewer -** What is the demographic of your gaming group?

**GameBee -** That is age and gender?



**Interviewer -** Yes, age and gender.

**GameBee -** Ok, I think all of us are mid twenties to early thirties and we've got, I think half and half guys and girls.

**Interviewer -** Good. Can you tell me how you discovered the group or community that you play with?

**GameBee -** I met a friend through a fantasy convention where somehow we just got talking and her boyfriend is in the local board game club, I guess if that is the right word. So, they just kept inviting me over to play board games with them and we became friends through that.

**Interviewer -** Can you tell me about any memorable experiences that you have had with your gaming group?

**GameBee -** Well, I went to the board games fair in Essen for the last two years with parts of that group which was pretty amazing. Other memorable things, umm, the finales of the last two campaigns of our games were pretty amazing as well! Yeah, the dynamic of the group changed a little in the last year or so because some people left but new people have come into the group through the dancing that some of us do so, the finale of the current campaign that we are playing of *D&D* is going to be next week so I'm really looking forward to that and we are all kind of hyped up about that.

**Interviewer -** So do you -

**(GameBee begins to speak)**

**Interviewer -** Sorry, you continue.

**GameBee -** What was the complete question again?

**Interviewer -** It was tell me about any memorable experiences that you have had?

**GameBee -** Ah right ok, I think those were the most memorable ones.

**Interviewer -** Ok, and do you have any favourite games and why do you enjoy them?

**GameBee -** I think my favourite board game is *Ticket to Ride*. Personally, because there's so many different maps that you can play on and there's different strategies depending on each map but it's also not too complicated so if someone hasn't played it before, you can usually explain it in less than ten minutes and they will get it and won't be frustrated all through their first few games. I think it is a nice game.

**Interviewer -** Good, is there any others that you enjoy or would you say *Ticket to Ride* is just up there as your kind of ultimate favourite?

**GameBee -** Yeah, I really like *Dixit* because it is so creative. It is a good party game even, it also doesn't need a lot of explanation and it can be whatever you want it to be, you can even dance to explain it which is just yeah, I like that.

**Interviewer -** Good. How do you purchase your games and why?

**GameBee -** Umm, the last few games that I bought, I bought them at the board games fair in Essen because most of them aren't really available in Switzerland or even Germany otherwise. So a couple of the games I bought were Korean and Japanese, I think. Other more widely available games, I usually get at the local game store or toy store even because I want to support the local economy a bit.

**Interviewer -** That's fine. Can you tell me about the first time that you went into a board gaming store?

**GameBee -** Erm.... I don't really remember I think.

**Interviewer -** That's fine if you can't remember.

**GameBee -** I don't remember because we have been buying and playing board games all my life so the first time I went into a board game store would be when I was a little child so I don't really remember.

**Interviewer -** Ok that's fine, I completely understand why you don't remember! Can you tell me about some of your memorable experiences when buying games or going into board game stores?

**GameBee -** Let me think, so, I think most of those memorable experiences were at the board games fair in Essen because you get to interact with the creators of the games themselves. We got to play a check game with the creator and half way through the game, all of a sudden he realised that there was a spelling mistake in the game and he was so embarrassed but it was kind of adorable and he promised to send us a sticker to put on top of the spelling mistake and that kind of just made the game feel more approachable. That I got to talk to the actual inventor of the game, so obviously I bought that game afterwards because it was pretty cool. The local board game store also has a really big selection of dice and so when I first started playing *Dungeons and Dragons* and role playing games, I went in there and there was a really helpful person there and he showed me all the dice and I asked him which ones I would probably need for the role playing games that we were going to play and he explained through everything and showed me all the sparkly ones and that was just really nice.

**Interviewer -** And have you been playing role playing games for quite a long time now and that has just stuck in your head?

**GameBee -** I've been playing for about three years now.

**Interviewer -** Ok, so even though that happened at the beginning of your journey that experience has just sort of stayed in your mind.

**GameBee -** Yes.

**Interviewer -** That's really nice.

**GameBee -** It immediately made me feel sort of welcome in the role playing gaming community, because sometimes you hear people say that it is just for guys or only nerds do that kind of stuff and I was slightly put off by that but that whole experience just kind of me less afraid of that.

**Interviewer -** Yeah so it made you feel more welcomed.

**GameBee -** Exactly yes!

**Interviewer -** That's really good. Have you engaged in the wider community and if so, how? So that could be online, at tournament or events. I know that you have mentioned that you have been to Essen which is a convention but have you done any other things?

**GameBee -** I have an account on the board game website, which I can't remember the url of.

**Interviewer -** Is it *BoardGameGeek*?

**GameBee -** Yes, that one! And I have posted on the forums a bit but mostly read things. I have also got an account where you can play board games online against people from around the world and I do that regularly because it is a lot of fun. As you mentioned, Essen, I have participated in the European championship for the last few years so that was a lot of fun as well. I didn't place very well but it's all about the participation! (laughs)

**Interviewer -** Would you say that, when you are playing board games online would you say there's a big difference from playing it face to face?

**GameBee -** The main difference for me is that I don't get to interact with the person or people that I am playing with online. There is a chat function but almost no one uses that very much.

**Interviewer -** Oh ok. You would think that they would kind of chat alongside whilst playing wouldn't you.

**GameBee -** Yeah but definitely not.

**Interviewer -** And when you said that you post to forums in *BoardGameGeek*, is it any forum or do you go to the - I know that they have the women in board game section, do you do it exclusively through there or is it just wherever?

**GameBee -** Wherever but I mostly read anyway.

**Interviewer -** Can you tell me about any disappointing experiences that you have had when engaging with board games and the community?

**GameBee -** Not really no, thankfully there is nothing I can really think of.

**Interviewer -** Ok, in your opinion how are games marketed and what is their target audience?

**GameBee -** Sorry, can you repeat the question?

**Interviewer -** Of course, in your opinion how are games marketed and what is their target audience?

**GameBee -** Just any games or?

**Interviewer -** Just board games in general, so how are they advertised and...

**GameBee -** Ok, so most board games I find, they are either targeted to families with younger children or teenagers maybe or specifically board game geeks and nerds who are interested in playing long, complicated and strategic games. So there isn't really an overlap between that family-friendly, colourful, fun, short marketed games and those complicated games which I find kind of sad.

**Interviewer -** Ok and what do you think about the representations of women within board games?

**GameBee -** There could be more, I noticed that at Essen in the competition. There were very few women in that competition which made me a bit sad but it was expected as I had heard that that was the case, it is the same in our local board game comp as I know, I am not a member but I have heard other people talk about that. I can't really say for how it is in marketing to be honest, the family friend games are usually marketed towards no specific gender in the sense that they are for a group of people as in a family but the more nerdy, geeky or more complicated games, I feel that those are marketed more towards men than women.

**Interviewer -** Ok, why do you think that women don't partake in tournaments or why there is less women?

**GameBee -** Because board gaming, at the moment, is seen as a primarily male hobby for some reason which I don't understand. Possibly because, of the whole, women not liking complicated things which is something people seem to believe but is something I don't understand but yeah.

**Interviewer -** That's fine. Tell me about what the enjoyable experiences are when engaging in board games and the community?

**GameBee -** In what sense?

**Interviewer -** So what is enjoyable to you when your playing board games or when talking to people in the board gaming community.

**GameBee -** Ok, I really like sharing, first of all hearing about other people's experiences about games that I like playing or games that I am interested in mostly. I mostly read about games that I would maybe like to try playing or that I am thinking about buying because I want to know what experiences other people have had with those games. I quite like watching those short reviews that people do on *YouTube* on games, mostly because if they like a game they get excited about it and there enjoyment of the game kind of transfers and I like that a lot. I just like the competitiveness of actually playing games against people, I really enjoy that.

**Interviewer -** Would you say that there are any negative aspects to board gaming or the community?

**GameBee -** I definitely think that the community could be, I'm not sure more open to women is the right words to say but I feel like there could be more women in the community and maybe also I find that some people, if they have a really negative opinion about a game even though they haven't actually played it yet and then they play it and review that, that review is not going to be any good even if they might have enjoyed the game otherwise so the specific example that I am talking about, is that one of the reviewers didn't like a previous game from this particular inventor so he already started playing the other game with negative expectations and I thought that that was not really the point of a review because you are supposed to be neutral but yeah, that is the only negative things that I can think of.

**Interviewer -** Ok, that's fine we are just onto the last question now which is what advice would you give to somebody who is wanting to get into board gaming?

**GameBee -** Find someone who really likes board games and has a lot of board games so that you can try them out with them. Alternatively, try and find a local board gaming club because they will have a lot of board games and there will be a lot of people who like playing those games so you will be able to play them all and figure out from there which you like.

**Interviewer -** Cool, so that is all the questions that I have is there anything that you would like to add like any additional comments or anything?

**GameBee -** One comment and the reason that I am not in the local board game club is that I have heard from other women that are in that club that sometimes it can feel like it is a bit too male dominated and they have had some stupid comments, I don't really remember what but they were some gender related which has actually put me off joining the club but my group of friends that like to play board games with, one of them is a member of the club so that means he can borrow games from there so we get a nice supply!

**Interviewer -** Ok, yeah I guess the supply is a little bonus but yeah if you have nothing else to add then thank you so much for doing this.

**GameBee -** No problem, thank you.

**(End of Interview)**



## **Appendix 6 - “Kickstarter Exclusive” - Invincimeeples**

**Interviewer:** Katie Peaker

**Interviewee:** Invincimeeples

**Interview Setting:** Over Google Hangouts, the original interview time was pushed back as the interviewee was travelling so we had already had a short talk to rearrange the call back in +10 mins.

**(Start of Interview)**

**Invincimeeples -** Hi there Katie!

**Interviewer -** Hello!

**Invincimeeples -** Can you see me?

**Interviewer -** I did briefly and now it has gone too just a picture.

**Invincimeeples -** Oh, hang on I might have turned it off! Ooops!

**Interviewer -** I can see you now!

**Invincimeeples -** I cannot see you.

**Interviewer -** Yeah, unfortunately the PC that I was originally going to use had a webcam and it just wouldn't accept Skype or Google Hangouts so I had to go to plan b.

**Invincimeeples -** Oh well, never mind!

**Interviewer -** So, are you happy for me to just get straight into the questions for you or is there anything that you would like to ask me first?

**Invincimeeples -** Erm, no. Sorry about the delay, I was just seeing if the gaming room up here by the convention would be not noisy but it was! I thought it would be a pretty cool background but it was just too noisy.

**Interviewer -** No worries, that's fine. So the first question would be tell me how you first got into tabletop gaming?

**Invincimeeples -** It was interesting, I learnt *Mahjong* in high school with a very good friend that I went to high school with and he sort of taught me that. We had played a few card games with the family but we are a broken family so we didn't get that sort of family encapsulation like some people would have. Then I went to art school after high school, I went to a science fiction bookshop and met my husband, well future husband and before that during the high school period I was into role-playing in the early sort of years in Australia and I went to one of the clubs there and if there was no GM available we would play interesting board games or what was considered interesting board games at that time. Then I met my husband at the science fiction bookshop in 1987 and we started going to science fiction conventions together, met somebody else who was very interested in board games and we just started collecting after that and we were founding members of the Western Australian Board Games Association.

**Interviewer -** Wow that's impressive!

**Invincimeeples -** And we have been going to the last 24 *Swancon*'s, that's the state's science fiction convention and that has always had a strong board gaming ethos since *Swancon* way before our time and they just sort of started bringing interesting board games that then sort of it all brought up a momentum here in Perth. So I guess it's just the family that plays together, stays together because well we are at a pretty interesting anniversary last year from '87 to 2017 and we're still together and still playing.

**Interviewer -** That's good! So how often do you actually play games and who do you play them with?

**Invincimeeples -** I would play physical board games, would you say as in face to face?

**Interviewer -** Any really.

**Invincimeeples -** I have, at the moment about 40 active games on the [yucata.de](http://yucata.de) website which is a free to play site with licensed games and no advertising, I would be playing on that everyday. Physical or facts to face games, oh and also *Galaxy Trucker*. These are all with humans, ok this is not just fooling around on the computer by yourself. Physical games, once a month it would be from one o'clock to 11 at night at the club, we mostly, our more regular meetings are at an RPG meet so I don't know if that comes under the board gaming ethos for you.

**Interviewer -** Yeah, I mean the study is looking at tabletop gaming as well as obviously board games so also role-playing games.

**Invincimeeples -** Once a week and that is a regular thing every Friday and throughout the week maybe scattered free forms of just on the fly.

**Interviewer -** What is the demographic of your gaming group?

**Invincimeeples -** Two women and let's see there's Richard, Gary, Rob, Steve... so two women and four men.

**Interviewer -** Ok, is there a varied age range or are you all-

**Invincimeeples -** Oh, sorry sorry! Two women and five men. There's seven of us.

**Interviewer -** That's fine, is there a varied age range or are you all kind of the same?

**Invincimeeples -** No, I think our youngest is in his thirties and our oldest would be 61 maybe.

**Interviewer -** Oh right, so it is fairly varied.

**Invincimeeples -** Yep.

**Interviewer -** Can you tell me how you discovered the group/community that you play with?

**Invincimeeples -** Sorry, what community?

**Interviewer -** So either your gaming group or the community that you play with.

**Invincimeeples -** The gaming group, I met through my husband. They were already an RPG group at the time but earlier than that, a friend who I met through the friend who taught me *Mahjong* in high school introduced me to the Northern Areas Gaming Association which is now defunct but that would have been in like 1984, '83 so through a friend of a friend who became a friend.

**Interviewer -** (laughs) That's fine. Can you tell me about any memorable experiences that you have had with your gaming group?

**Invincimeeples -** I think when, I was developed our current scenario, I had taken on the GM role and they all got so fired up about it and excited about the characters they were developed for it. They were sending me notes and ringing me up very excitedly to say what they had done and how they were developing their characters back story and they were all just bouncing off each other in a huge energised frenzy of creation. These people are mature people, these are IT professionals, one of them is a stone mason and they were all just so very excited at this frenzy of creation because I had just given them the world's timeline and said ok this is how it is, you're there and you have this many points to build, come back to me and they did. At any hour of the day or

night just about, I was receiving all of this feedback and they were just so excited, I think that is the most memorable thing that has ever happened to me. It only happened a couple of years ago, but the memory is still sweet. (laughs)

**Interviewer -** Yeah it definitely sounds it and especially because it is your creation and their kind of taking it and running with it and then coming back to you.

**Invincimeeple -** It was just an amazing sort of thing because most of them are pretty grumpy and taciturn so just to see them delighted to play.

**Interviewer -** Yes, that's good! Do you have any favourite games and why do you enjoy them?

**Invincimeeple -** I enjoy the storytelling sort of games, board game wise, *Tales of the Arabian Night*. I'm a role-player first and foremost so the ones with a role-playing element really appeal to me. More recent, *Above and Below*, *Near and Far* from *Red Raven Games*, that have taken the close your own adventure sort of style of game and really done some interesting things with it so that is really appealing to me at the moment but anything with a theme that is pleasing really, your typical *Ticket to Ride: Europe*. I'm not one who likes *Carcassonne* terribly much but my husband loves it which is a bit of a role reversal, generally its the other way around, you know the wife loves *Carcassonne* and the husband wants go kill something (laughs) but anything with a strong role-playing element or anything with a nice theme or a clever idea really. We are mainly a *GURPS* RPG bunch of players so I don't have that much range in the RPG world but board games, I've probably got around 300 at home. I could send a photo of a shelf if you like, I would have to take a photo sphere to get it all in! So you could sort of walk amongst our shelves, I could tick all the ones that I like but there's a lot. For me, the role-playing element is the most exciting to me.

**Interviewer -** Ok.

**Invincimeeple -** Not games that are the great sprawling collecting epics.

**Interviewer -** Yeah, how do you purchase your games and why?

**Invincimeeple -** Most recently, I have been utilising *Kickstarter* or other crowdfunded games but we have tried to reign back on that because suddenly our shelves filled up and we haven't played everything! Occasionally, we will be walking through a friendly local game shop, we'll see something that "Oh that looks interesting" or "Oh I've heard about that" or "I've heard about that, it's interesting, it's got good ratings and it's really cheap!" and that's what happened with *Photosynthesis*, this last week! So mostly, either here the buzz about it and order it from overseas which is interesting being in Australia, shipping is rather abhorrent here and friendly or local gaming shops if we haven't already ordered it through *Kickstarter*.

**Interviewer -** We have a similar problem with shipping too!

**Invincimeeple -** Yes, you get horribly taxed! Here it just takes a really long time and it's really expensive because the people on the other end charge us horrible postage to get all the way to this most isolated corner of Australia. We are the most isolated city in the world but with you guys, your own government throws all the taxes on, doesn't it?

**Interviewer -** It does!

**Invincimeeple -** Whereas we get a thousand dollars which is about 300 pounds free with no charges. I can order 300 pounds worth of stuff and not have to pay any sort of duty on it so there you go, who is better off? (laughs) We just have to wait three weeks for it to get here!

**Interviewer -** Yes true, especially if you are wanting to buy something for like the weekend or for Christmas!

**Invincimeeple -** For Christmas! I just ordered this thing, ordered the *Munchkin Shakespeare* that was kickstarted, it came through like lightning until it hit a dock strike in Melbourne! It just sat there for about five weeks because it was due to arrive just before Christmas, great timing for the present that I was buying for the person! And then, it just sat there while they

war-ed with the people in the dock. It was fun, I've got it here now though, it's wrapped and ready to give to the person tomorrow! So, even when it hits Australia we are not assured that it will get to us within a couple of weeks.

**Interviewer -** Oh gosh! (laughs).

**Invincimeeples -** It's a big country and there is a whole lot of nothing in the middle!

**Interviewer -** So tell me about the first time you went into a board gaming store?

**Invincimeeples -** I was fascinated by the miniatures, I never bought any but I liked the look of them. I have never really used them and our board gaming store was more, it sold military figures and a whole lot of military stuff for miniature wargaming and *Warhammer* and things like that sort of tabletop. It did seem to do a range of *GURPS* RPG books, so that was quite interesting and not very many euro games at all, barely any. They weren't really thought of and we were just more interested in the role playing scene then. About 20 years ago, when *Settlers of Catan* hit WA by way of another friend of others, suddenly there was this huge blossoming and awareness of euro games in Australia.

**Interviewer -** That's good. Can you tell me some of your memorable experiences when buying games or going into a board gaming store?

**Invincimeeples -** Just thinking... Going into this pokey little place which no longer exists but that was one of the two prime places to get hobby style games. The lift was very very dodgy and the stairs were dodgier so you were taking your life into your hands both times, one of the oldest buildings in the city, which wouldn't seem old to you in England but a 100 year old building is something that is to be scared of in Perth! If it is not well maintained, and just getting up there and there's an explosion of colour of paints for models and they sold kites as well and just looking around the shelves, it was a real magpies nest of different stuff and nothing really cohesive and not the neat lined up shelves that you see these days, in the ranks of shiny board games there were these mysterious packages that no-one really knew at the time or played very few of

them and it was kind of dusty. It was also fun to go there when Rob and I were courting and Rob showed me this game he had got in high school called *Ogre* from *Steve Jackson Games* that he's had a couple of years and it was this tiny little war game which I had never played a hex-and-counter game and we sat down in cafes every afternoon and we would have a cappuccino and a game of *Ogre*. A game of *Ogre* would last about a cappuccino and it was really good because I was not experienced in war gaming but when you give a woman a huge cyber tank and tell it to go forth and destroy an army that is a very empowering sort of thing and having a boyfriend that enjoyed having that happened, you were on a unique sort of experience! From there we got into hex-and-counter games as well, we met some war gamers and *Ogre*, I think if any game could be called our courting game it would be *Ogre* from *Steve Jackson Games* and that was a great game in itself and it destroyed a lot of myths of how a game could be.

**Interviewer -** Have you engaged in the wider gaming community and if so, how? So stuff like online, tournaments, events, conventions that kind of thing.

**Invincimeeples -** I am at a convention at the moment called *GenghisCon*, it has been running for 15 years in Western Australia and it is aimed at students and it always has a strong gaming element to it. I am actually running half of the gaming programme tomorrow, where I will be assisting my club in running *Crazy Catan* which is 20 people playing *Catan* at once off a single central die roll and then rotating their tables leaving the islands that they have developed for new islands, I will be assisting in that. I am a committee member of the Western Australia Board Gaming Association and I play *Galaxy Trucker* as an app, what is that other one that is like *Twilight Imperium*, oh what is it called... I've got it just here but I can't look it up because I'm talking to you. (laughs).

**Interviewer -** (laughs) Sorry!

**Invincimeeples -** No, that's alright! Nope, I can't think of it. It's by *Lautapelit* in Finland, there you go, there's a clue for you... *Eclipse!* I remembered! *Eclipse*, yeah. I play that as an app against humans and I am on the [yucata.de](http://yucata.de) website which is the not for profit site with licensed games and no advertising, a very big community and I currently am the voice of a



tournament being run there which has about 90 players there at the moment called the 'Mediocre Olympics' where very poor players, you can only have a certain skill level, you know erm so if you are really bad at a game, then we want you. We want to delete the elite and in the 'Mediocre Olympics' you are never alone, I've got plenty of company. So yes, I am engaged in the wider community, I don't really get into the webcasts or podcasts, I am probably of a generation that is, it just doesn't engage my brain quite so much as some of my younger friends. I don't know why, I seem to be able to game across the platform but I don't really enjoy sitting around and watching people play, I prefer to be doing it. Quite reasonably, but you know.

**Interviewer -** Tell me about any disappointing experiences you've had when engaging with board games or the community.

**Invincimeepie -** It is when I go to all this trouble to organise a tournament and everybody thinks that it's my husband that has done it. When people contact my husband about stuff that I have organised asking how they do it or what they do to do it and they always seem to be very surprised to be referred to me. When I have been playing a game for five years and my husband hasn't and they will ask him about the rules, I find that all very saddening.

**Interviewer -** Yes definitely, rightly so.

**Invincimeepie -** Oh, hey you are supposed to be the neutral here! You can never say that (laughs) just say "mmm yes that is very interesting"!

**Interviewer -** (laughs) I'm sorry it is hard sometimes!

**Invincimeepie -** I hear you! Objectivity, you are being objective, yes put on your objective hat!

**Interviewer -** I will do. So, in your own opinion how are games marketed and what is their target audience?

**Invincimeeples -** I think that's a very generalist sort of question. I can only say that the marketing that reaches me, would be very targeted because I read *BoardGameGeek* and I keep an eye on the hotness in *BoardGameGeek*. The news comes to me either through my friends or what people are talking about in the club. I do not watch television, I may see the occasional commercial in *BoardGameGeek* that I click on but I am an outlier because I don't watch TV, I don't see the commercial games being marketed at me. I may go browse the shelves of one of the game stores over east that I know gets good stuff in but no, I think Google knows my tastes and puts stuff my way and that is really the way that I get it besides the *Kickstarter* and word of mouth. So, it might be marketed out there but it is not reaching me except by those venues.

**Interviewer -** Ok, what do you think about the representations of women within board gaming?

**Invincimeeples -** I think there's a good deal of room for improvement but the games that I am finding appeal to me the most, are like the erm, *Red Raven Games* the one with *Above and Below* and *Near and Far*, they are being very inclusive. If you look at the artwork on them there are across the entire spectrum and they are to be commended. There is actually a geek list on *BoardGameGeek* written by somebody who has been very diligent in analysing just how women are depicted in board games which I will find for you and send you a link to because I think you will find it a very interesting analysis, she has done about 20 games so far and some are really commendable some are just really quite good so it is an interesting list to look at from somebody in this project I think.

**Interviewer -** Yes definitely, I will look forward to reading that. Can you tell me what the enjoyable experiences are when engaging with board games and the community?

**Invincimeeples -** Because my parents separated and my family wasn't much into any sense of fun, I was the youngest, I had a sister who was four years older than myself so she was a little bit too grown up to bother herself about a kid sister most of the time. Just that bit too ahead of me I think, in years. What I'm reaching for is those few times when we were together playing a game because of that sense of unity and family and belonging. Whenever I sit down at a table or across

the miles with a computer, I am feeling that inclusion and warmth, that hearthside feeling that I am continually reaching for and never quite got enough of as a child, I think. So I am probably over compensating now and I have a really nice time in my life and it's just that sweetness of belonging and having fun, bright colours on the table, friendly laughter and that sense of community.

**Interviewer -** Would you say that there are any negative aspects to board gaming or the community?

**Invincimeeples -** There can be, but I try not to associate myself with people like that.

**Interviewer -** That's fine, this is the final question now, what advice would you give to somebody who is wanting to get into board gaming?

**Invincimeeples -** Check out your local club, you are bound to have one because board gaming is very popular. We are in the golden age of board gaming, I mean *Australian Financial Review* which is our extremely respected financial style newspaper, it's the equivalent to the *Wall Street Journal* in America had an article on board games and the growth in the financial sector. That was only a couple of weeks ago, so board games are big and they are getting bigger. I don't think they are going to explode any time soon and people are enjoying being with people again. This increasing isolation of the internet, even though we are all more connected than we were, I think it has aided isolation and people are drawing together for that feeling of hearth, community and warmth. So yeah, check out your local club if you have no one to play with, check out game shops they always have signs up of people looking for groups, *BoardGameGeek*, of course, is the huge mammoth in the room, possibly an elasmotherium but they have got a section that you can find just about to your suburb people who are playing and meeting. We visited *Worldcon* in Helsinki last year and we made our way across Finland by looking at *BoardGameGeek* and finding groups to play with for all the way up the coast and we played and found groups that were meeting on certain days when we were in those cities and had a lovely time board gaming with 'Fins' all the way up to Helsinki.

**Interviewer -** That's great. So, that is all the questions that I have is there anything that you would like to add or any comments or anything like that?

**Invincimeeple -** Well, I would look forward to seeing the results of what your research is once it is published and is in an acceptable format it will be interesting to have a look at what other people are saying.

**Interviewer -** Yes, definitely. One of things that I do want to do for everyone who has taken part, once it has been submitted and everything is just provide you all with a link so that if they do want to have a look through it then they are more than welcome to do that.

**Invincimeeple -** Very good! Splendid, well it has been a pleasure and I'm sorry about the lateness but one of our friends had a birthday and somebody had to give someone a lift home and I was in the same car and I didn't think this would have gone so well in the back of a car!

**Interviewer -** No it is completely fine! I don't have another interview for another few hours so it wasn't any trouble.

(Invincimeeple then proceeded to ask me questions about my own interest in board games and what I enjoy playing, then because she was at a board gaming convention at the time of the interview she took me on a virtual tour).

**(End of Interview)**

## **Appendix 7 - “Kickstarter Exclusive” - Kaylee**

**Interviewer:** Katie Peaker

**Interviewee:** Kaylee

**Interview Setting:** Over Skype.

**(Start of Interview)**

**Interviewer -** Hello.

**Kaylee -** Hello can you hear me ok?

**Interviewer -** Hi, yes I can! Thank you so much obviously coming on here and participating. Before, we actually get into the questions is there anything that you would like to ask me or anything like that?

**Kaylee -** No, I guess lets just see what the conversation is!

**Interviewer -** Yes, that's fine. So tell me how you first got into tabletop gaming?

**Kaylee -** So, mostly it was one person who I am now marrying! (laughs) So, I played a bunch of games kind of randomly and I was already playing *Magic the Gathering* a lot but that was separate and Matt my partner, he always had a board game night at his house so there was always people coming to his house to play games so I met a lot of people that way and yeah, I just started through those people and then I met other people through board games and even when we moved across the country, we started meeting more and more people that would come over to our house and play games so it kind of went from there.

**Interviewer -** Ok, how often do you play games and who do you play them with?

**Kaylee -** I think maybe, I would say at least once a month, if it is not just Matt and I, we will have a big game night every couple months so I would probably say once a month on average.

**Interviewer -** Is it just you and Matt or is it multiple people, do you have a specific gaming group that you play with or tend to play with more often?

**Kaylee -** It really varies, I don't know if you consider *Dungeons & Dragons* to be a tabletop game but I have like my own group that I play *D&D* with. Then, usually me and Matt will have separate game nights or we will invite people over or if people are available and when we get a new game, we want to play it for the first time before we invite people over unless it's a game that is for three or more players. It is a big combo, we like to have people over but sometimes it is just the two of us, especially if we've got a new game. Separately, I play *D&D* with a group of friends that I have so.

**Interviewer -** What is the demographic of the *D&D* group?

**Kaylee -** I'd say we are all, we are in late twenties or early thirties. All of us either work for, well we like in DC so most people work for the federal government. Everybody that I play with now is either white or hispanic and it is a pretty big LGBT group actually so I don't know if that's what you're looking for.

**Interviewer -** Yes that's perfect, can you tell me about how you discovered the group or community that you play with?

**Kaylee -** For *D&D* or for board games in general?

**Interviewer -** Both would be good.

**Kaylee -** Both, yeah, so *D&D* was a little not intentionally but a little separate because I was playing that separately from playing games with Matt though our groups have really merged a lot. I play *D&D*, my old roommate was our DM so, I'm sorry can you actually repeat the question I started answering it but I was trying to break them into two groups and I yeah? (laughs)

**Interviewer -** So the question was can you tell me about how you discovered the group or community that you play with?

**Kaylee -** Ok yeah! So one was with my roommate, I started playing *D&D* with my roommate before Matt and I started dated and then for board games that I really credit Matt for helping me meet a lot more people who play board games. It's people I know but separate people.

**Interviewer -** That's fine. Can you tell me about any memorable experiences within your gaming group?

**Kaylee -** Memorable... I have two, so the old *D&D* group that I played with in Colorado, it was a lot of beginners which made it really fun because, you know when you just don't know the things that you can and can't do so you come up with these crazy ideas of like "Oh, we'll solve the problem by whatever!" and one of the girls in my group, she somehow had, she was like a wizard or something and she had this pet horse that rode around on a floating disc. I don't know how this happened, but (laughs) we would always try and use this floating disc for different things and our DM was always like "No, you can't use it for that, that is not what it's for" and then we would be in these impossible situations where we would like be about to die and we'd all be like "Bring out the floating disc!" (laughs). Then for other board games that I've played, one thing for me personally, that is significant was that, I've been playing games for a while now but I was always really nervous about playing this game *Twilight Imperium*, which is Matt's favourite game. I don't know if you've ever played it, have you ever played it?

**Interviewer -** I haven't, but I know of the game and how it takes forever!

**Kaylee -** It takes like 12 hours to play, but I was really nervous about it because I kind of had some preconceived notions about what it would be like or what kind of challenges there would be, especially because that game to me, I was nervous about, we were playing it with people that I had never met before and that Matt hadn't met before so there was a lot of pressure for me to be like knowing what was going on and like I had read the rule book, blah, blah, blah even though it was my first time playing and then I was also like, if I don't like this game I am stuck in it for forever. So that was kind of a game where I just perceived it to be so complicated and I was so nervous about like proving to people that I was a good enough gamer to even play that game and it ended up being not a big deal at all and it was really fun. It was one of those things where I was realising wow I should really just like relax a little bit (laughs) so.

**Interviewer -** Good, do you have any favourite games and why do you enjoy those?

**Kaylee -** Hmmm, yeah we have so many I'm having to look on our board game shelf right now! I think, some of the games. Ok so I love this game that we got last year, I'm always telling people about it, it's called *New Angeles* have you heard of it?

**Interviewer -** I haven't.

**Kaylee -** It's like partially a co-operative game but you are also competing against each other. It's in this futuristic Los Angeles, where you are these evil corporations and you're like taking advantage of all the people who live in LA but you can't corrupt them too much because you need them to work for you and the dynamics of it are really cool because there's a lot of deal making, you work together with all the other players but you are also working against them so there's so many layers of things that you need to achieve to win the game and it's just really fun. I really love games that are more thematic, we make a playlist for all of the games that we play so we like having cyberpunk music for that one. I really like *Arkham Horror*, that is a game I love inviting people over to play, especially if it's people who haven't really played a lot of games before because it is so you know there's so much going on. I mean I don't know if you have played that game either but there is just so much going on and you are like battling Cthulhu and it's kind of silly but intuitive enough that you don't have to worry as much about one specific turn because



you are working cooperatively. I really like cooperative games, I guess that is what I'm saying. I really like ones where you are working together and towards a goal but there are still competitive elements to it. So, those are two that I always think of when people ask me that question but we have so many games, I'm sure there's more.

**Interviewer -** Yeah, if you have a big collection, it is just so hard to pick like a few that you enjoy.

**Kaylee -** Yeah!

**Interviewer -** So, how do you actually purchase your games and why?

**Kaylee -** We kind of keep track of what is coming out, well I think Matt keeps track of it a little more than I do but I buy him games for the holidays and because he has played so many games and I know his style pretty well, I want to find a game that works for both our styles. I like, as I've said some of the more cooperative games but Matt's more of an analytical player and I think that he likes games that have some more analytical choices so I do a lot of research when I'm buying games so I that I know both of us are going to want to play because I want to enjoy but I also want him to enjoy it. So, I go on *BoardGameGeek*, and then I like to keep track on games that are new for whatever we are buying games for. We also go to a board game convention that we like to go to in DC, where you get to try out games and meet some of the people who actually create the games so, you know, I actually put a lot of energy into it and then we have a board game store that I like to go to because I like the people that work there and they obviously play a ton of board games and I usually tell them about the games I like and what games my partner likes, and ask what's something that is kind of in the middle that maybe we haven't played before but will be fun for both of us. It is a lot easier the more I play games to describe what I'm looking for but I like to get them at our game store or at board game conventions that we go to. I like buying them from a local business or sometimes we like to buy them from the creator themselves.

**Interviewer -** And tell me about the first time you went into a board gaming store?

**Kaylee -**                    Hmm, that would be back when I was playing *Magic* which I was only going in the to buy *Magic* cards. I think part of why I stopped playing *Magic* was because you are always buying stuff, you are always trying to keep up and I'm also not a great player and I had a lot of problems playing *Magic*        because it's so male dominated, you'll be playing against a lot of people who've been playing since they were like ten years old and it I just kind of lost interest in it because there's only like a few women I was playing with and it was so much more fun to play with them because I don't know we had never really been socially conditioned to play it as kids who were learning it as adults. So it started becoming, I would go into board game stores to buy my *Magic* cards and then I was like "Wow there's all these cool other things in the store!" (laughs) and then just meeting more people who play board games, I would go in there and wonder if they had played this or that or I'd just get recommendations so it was just kind of funny that it is a store where you can buy any fun thing and I was only going in for one purpose so it was kind of silly but yeah.

**Interviewer -**            No that's fine! Tell me about some of your memorable experiences when buying games or going into board gaming stores.

**Kaylee -**                    So *Labyrinth Games* is the game store in DC that I like to go to and I just love that store because everybody there is just so excited about games and I've never had an experience where I have asked about a game and they've said "that game sucks" or like, they just have a very positive way of, I know they are trying to sell games but you can tell that they really really love it and I feel comfortable asking them for recommendations because I feel like nine times out of ten, whoever I am talking to that day has played the game that I'm interested in too and I just feel like wow you must spend a lot of time playing games but I just have to mention them because they are such a good games store and they are just a small locally owned game store and they just really seem to have that enthusiasm that makes me want to spend even more money than I probably should! (laughs)

**Interviewer -**            Good, have you engaged in the wider gaming community and if so, how? So that could be online, tournaments, events, conventions that kind of thing.

**Kaylee -** Yeah, we definitely go to board game conventions, sometimes comic cons, our comic con here is called *Awesomecon* and sometimes they have board game rooms so sometimes we will play board games there. I don't like doing tournaments, so going back to when I was playing *Magic*, I had like probably one of my worst game experiences ever playing in a tournament setting, I was playing with a bunch of beginners and there was this whole like "Woah, you are so old and you are the only girl in the room" and it was really horrible so I just stopped playing in a tournaments whatsoever but I think now it could be fun to play certain games in a tournament setting but that's not really the reason why I play games, obviously the objective of the game will be to win but if I am sitting in the room for like six or seven hours with people, I would much rather it be a fun experience where when people leave our house they think that it was cool, like they will want to come back. So I don't really do tournaments, I like to go to conventions and find people on the internet which is maybe not the safest way to find people to play with but we have had people come over to our house that we have never met before, that we have just known from board game groups in the area so yeah.

**Interviewer -** Ok, well your story about your tournament experience sort of links in with the next point which is tell me about any disappointing experiences that you may have had when engaging with board games or the community.

**Kaylee -** Yeah, I think that is probably the worst one. I feel that I have been pretty lucky, I do get to play with a lot of people that are much different and have many different reasons for playing games which I think when we played *Twilight Imperium* Matt was the one that invited everybody over and I was already so nervous about playing and feeling like, you know, I had to make sure that everyone knew about my nerdcred but all the players who came over where like "Oh Matt, that is such a cool poster" or "Oh Matt have you played this game?" and I was like, hey I play games too but these were people that had never met us before but I felt like I was always jumping in and being like "Oh yeah, that is my poster" we have like, they aren't on the video but we have pictures of *Star Wars*, *Star Trek*, *Futurama* posters and stuff and they just kind of assumed that all the board games were his and all of the nerd stuff in our house was his so I was like "No, No that's my things" and I was just trying really hard because I was so nervous about that game

and it ended up being like a great game and the guys who we played with were really fun. I feel like if we are in mixed groups especially if I don't know anybody that there is that pressure to be like, 'I know what I am doing' so yeah, I haven't really had anything horrible happen minus the *Magic* card thing.

**Interviewer -** In your opinion, how are games marketed and what is the target audience?

**Kaylee -** That's a good question, I don't know how they are marketed because I feel like we have to do a lot of work to try to find games so I think, I feel like more and more when I go to *Labyrinth* or something the way they have their store laid out I think when I first started playing board games all of the games really did seem that they were marketed towards men and maybe it was the type of games that we were playing like *Magic* is definitely marketed towards men I think 100% boys and men, and like *Warhammer* is kind of similar in some of the games when the objective involves more war aspects or battle scenes and I think they are just in our culture traditionally seen more as a male activity so they are male games. The games that we own though and the games that I actually enjoy playing, I don't feel like they have that marketed strategy like *Arkham Horror*, you know, you open the box and there are all these characters that you can play and half of them are girls and we just got this game that was *kickstarted* called *Periorbis* and it's like one of those worker placement games but the cards have all of these different workers on them and like, you are seeing a pretty good variety of men and women of people with different ethnicities and different ages and I don't feel like I'd seen that when I first started playing board games. So, I don't know I have been playing for like five years or so now so hopefully that is something that is changing but I think that even when you are asking how they are marketed, I don't think that people are marketing them specifically to me but I also don't know board games are supposed to be marketed because there are no commercials or ads for them and you kind of just have to find them yourself, at least from my experience.

**Interviewer -** Yeah I suppose they are sort of underground and you don't see it on like a billboard or anything like that!

**Kaylee -** Yes, (laughs) that would be weird!

**Interviewer -** What do you think about the representations of women within board games?

**Kaylee -** I still think that really needs a lot of work, I actually was recently trying to figure out game designers that are women. I don't really know a lot about game designers in general but we went to this panel at one of the last board game conventions and it was, have you ever heard of the term 'Manel' where its like a panel of all men and it was all of these white, I mean board gaming at least where I live is very white and that is something we need to change and I am a white person so that is something where we should ask ourselves why is it like that and who are we not including in board gaming and that is something we need to ask as well so looking around the room there's a bunch of white dudes in this room and there is like me and this one women of colour in the back, who then raised her hand and asked that question. She asked "What do you think about this representation that you are seeing right now and why do you think they aren't as many women in the room?" so the panel was just like "Yeah, you're right" and these were a bunch of white guys that make games and I think it was really encouraging to her that girl ask the question and we did meet this one games designer who had made like a Jane Austen game which I was not really sure about that but it has gotten such good reviews and it was so cool to see her, you know, marketing her game and looking at the people playing her game who were like men and women and everyone seemed like they were having a good time with it. So I don't know the answer, right now when I open a game, what I want to see is whether I can play a female character or can I play like a big variety. I don't really know what is a good example, let me look at my board games again, some of those it might not apply like we have the *Star Wars Rebellion* game and that is just a miniatures game, there is not really a need for having that much representation when you are just moving ships around a board but I feel like I like to be playing character driven games so like the *Firefly* game that we got which is from the show *Firefly* at least one of the characters you can play is a girl and that is important to me. It doesn't really change the way that you play the game but it is just nice to see and I want to see that representation more.

**Interviewer -** Tell me what the enjoyable experiences are when engaging with board games and the community?

**Kaylee -** I think my favourite part is, just because we have only lived in DC for a couple of years and it is the kind of town where people don't really move here to make friends necessarily, like they are here because they work for the federal government or they are helping somebody trying to win an election and it is like a city where people move a lot so they are there for a certain purpose and then they move away. So, it has been really fun when we get to know people and we are like come over to our house and play our games and people are always saying that they are not a big board game person or they are not good at games and we will just get them to come over and then those people then text us asking when is the next game night so it is really fun to me. I don't really know where this comes from, it must be the same thing of when I started playing games where I thought that it seems complicated or wanting to make sure that you are making the right moves and my favourite part is when you invite someone over who doesn't necessarily play games and they are like "Oh wow, that's really cool" and then they want to come over and do it again that is always my best experience and that is the goal that I try to achieve for anytime we play board games especially at our house.

**Interviewer -** That's nice, would you say that there are any negative aspects to board gaming or the community?

**Kaylee -** I've mentioned a couple already but at least in my experience it is very white and it is very male. I think like I said that is something that we really need to work on and I talk about representation, I remember seeing games that are a little bit more diverse but you know as a white person it is not really up to me to decide. I think that when we invite friends over, DC is a pretty diverse city, it is really fun to invite all the people that we have met over and that is something that we are like trying to be more cognisant about but yeah, when you go to board game conventions here, it is just white people everywhere and it's just not great. I don't really know how to solve that except to just try and get as many of our friends who will play with us and have their friends play with other people. I think that it is kind of a problem in our larger community, I mean I can only speak for like living in the US but we obviously have a lot of race issues here in the US and that permeates everything including things that are not necessarily a race issue like board games, that is sort of a negative in our country in general and then that is something you see in

pretty much, like board games are not a high stakes societal thing but you do see it in that too. I'm not explaining this very well but...

**Interviewer -** No, no it's fine. Final question now, what advice would you give to somebody who is wanting to get into board gaming?

**Kaylee -** I think, for me, I wish that someone would have just told me to chill out when playing games because I just really felt like I was going into them needing to prove that I was worth playing with and I know I try really hard and Matt tries really hard to make sure that that's not an experience that people have when they come over to our house. It is so niche to begin with, I think anytime that you are a part of something so niche there's that pressure to really show that you are dedicated to that scene and this is so silly because board games are supposed to be fun and are supposed to be just like sitting round a table and eating snacks. So I think just showing up and playing, we have people coming over to our house all the time and they are like "Oh I'm really not good at board games" and it's just like if you are a new player I would say don't say that and just come over and just play and see what you like and if people are mean to you then just don't play with them anymore! (laughs).

**Interviewer -** (laughs) That is really good advise! So that is all of the questions, is there anything that you feel like you would want to add, any comments or anything like that. Is there anything that you would like to ask me about?

**Kaylee -** No, thanks and goodbye.

**(End of Interview)**

## **Appendix 8 - “Kickstarter Exclusive” - Moll Hackabout**

**Interviewer:** Katie Peaker

**Interviewee:** Moll Hackabout

**Interview Setting:** Over Skype.

**(Start of Interview)**

**Moll Hackabout -** Hello?

**Interviewer -** Hello is that Moll Hackabout?

**Moll Hackabout -** Yes, speaking. Sorry my iPad is being weird!

**Interviewer -** No that's fine. First of all, thank you for taking the time out of your day to sit down and do this interview for me. Is there anything that you would like to ask me or would you prefer to get straight into the questions?

**Moll Hackabout -** Just a bit of background really on how you are going to use the research and what your outcome is, would be good. I did read the stuff that you sent me a while back but just remind me.

**Interviewer -** So I'm basically looking at females experiences with board games and the board game community. I'm interviewing people about their experiences and their opinions on stuff like that.

**Moll Hackabout -** Yep.

**Interviewer -** Ok, so if we start of the first question, can you tell me how you first got into tabletop gaming?



**Moll Hackabout -** So can I just ask when you talk about tabletop gaming, are you referring to RPG's as well as board games or just board games?

**Interviewer -** RPG's as well.

**Moll Hackabout -** RPG's as well. Ok, well I started with RPG's actually when I was in my mid teens which would have been late 80's early 90's and then I kind of did a little bit of RPG-ing through university, a little bit of board games but then I probably picked it up again, in quite a big way about ten years ago.

**Interviewer -** Ok and how often do you play games and who do you play them with?

**Moll Hackabout -** I thought you would ask me so this so I have noted this one down. So, I've got a local meetup group that meets maybe once or twice a month so I go once or twice a month to that. I play games, well I actually work in a school so I take a class for an hour a week and do social board gaming with them that forms as part of a functional skills class. Most weekends, I have various sets of friends round to play board games and I usually play with my kids a couple times a week and I have an ongoing legacy game. I'm playing *Pandemic Legacy* with a group of friends well legacy two we are now and that's kind of, well my friend has just gone back to Spain so we are trying to figure out how we can play games over *Skype* at the moment but that is ongoing. Then every fortnight I play *Dungeons and Dragons* RPG, oh and my husband on a Wednesday when the kids aren't here, we play a board game so, yeah lots!

**Interviewer -** Yes, so you are playing fairly regularly then.

**Moll Hackabout -** (laughs) Would that have done, if I had just said lots?

**Interviewer -** (laughs) So this question may be a little difficult, because it is what is the demographic of your gaming group?

**Moll Hackabout -** Yeah, ok well do you want me to talk through each group I've mentioned, would that be useful?

**Interviewer -** Yeah, that would probably be the best way to go about it.

**Moll Hackabout -** Ok, so are you wanting age and male/female ratio?

**Interviewer -** Yes please.

**Moll Hackabout -** So the age of the board game group, well my son sometimes comes along which would make him the youngest and he's 14 but generally I would say it is in the 30-45 range and I would probably say it is a quarter women to three quarters guys. My weekly class is with post 16 students, because I work in special education there's kind of 16 up to 23 year olds because special education extends a little bit longer, so that is that group. With the weekend, it's kind of my friends round my age, around the 35-45 age group and then my kids who are 10 and 14. Oh sorry, the friends who I play at the weekend with are around a 50/50 split of male and female.

**Interviewer -** Ok so with that group it's fairly equal.

**Moll Hackabout -** Yes, fairly equal and my kids I've got a boy and a girl. Now my legacy gaming group is an interesting group as well as my RPG group because we are predominantly female for both of those. So the legacy group is three girls and a token guy who is playing a female character which I think is amusing and the RPG group, sorry in my legacy group there's four of us and in my RPG group there is four players and a DM and three of us are female and again same age demographic of 35-45 on that and yeah interesting again that the women who play in the RPG group play male characters so that's good. My husband on a Wednesday, he's 50 but we are not going to tell him that (laughs) and I'm 42.

**Interviewer -** Good, so it is fairly diverse then, the amount of people that you play with. Can you tell me how you discovered the group or community that you play with?

**Moll Hackabout -** On *Meetup*.

**Interviewer -** Right so did you go look for it?

**Moll Hackabout -** I did because some of my friends who we were playing board games with were getting more into RPG's at the time and I kind of like a mix of RPG's and board games and I already run a group on *Meetup* which is called *Sceptics in the Pub* in Portsmouth so I knew about *Meetup* through that and that was about three or four years ago and I thought to check to see what board games are in the area and fortunately there was one that was just down the road and that's how I found out about that one.

**Interviewer -** Good and was it that with your friends, you just found out they had a similar interest to you or did you come together from board games?

**Moll Hackabout -** My core group of friends who I play the legacy games and the RPG's with are kind of a core group of gamers, I actually met them originally through doing martial arts so through doing something completely different but it just turned out that we had games in common and then we started gaming at weekends.

**Interviewer -** Oh well that's good. Can you tell me about any memorable experiences that you have had with your gaming groups?

**Moll Hackabout -** Playing legacy games and actually playing *Pandemic Legacy* has been absolutely wonderful. You have probably talked to quite a few people now and I don't know if you have talked to many who have done them but there is *Risk Legacy* there seems to be a lot of legacy games coming out now but oh its been great and oh goodness me the whole experience of that and the kind of highs and lows, for me, it is just a really nice experience because it is halfway between an RPG and a board game so you have got that kind of emotional attachment that you get with an RPG and the evolving storylines but it is a set time period where you have to play it. We usually have to do a lot more planning behind it as well so we wouldn't only play the game, we would have a *Facebook* group going and be doing little planning strategies and you know how gift

parties afterwards to celebrate victories or awful losses and stuff so the legacy games have been great culturally because it is quite an immersive experience I guess. You could say that it is not just the in game play with that, so that has been amazing.

**Interviewer -** Good, is there any others that you can think of?

**Moll Hackabout -** Again, RPG's because they are so immersive but I think good experiences are games that appear quite tricky to begin with and that you have to invest quite a lot of time in to get your head around and the game that I am thinking of here is *Arkham Horror* which is a long player board game and it took quite a few weeks to learn but the pay off from learning it with the board game experience, games like that have been really great. But social gaming is great as well, *One Night Werewolf* can be a brilliant experience and some friends round the corner that play with us every once in a while have gone on to buy the alien version of that and they have a lot of kids and they came round with their kids the other weekend and we just laughed all evening so that kind of social thing with quick social games can kind of be brilliant as well.

**Interviewer -** Good, do you have any favourite games and why do you enjoy them?

**Moll Hackabout -** Board game wise, I think my favourite game or the board game that I go back to time and time again is called *Lords of Waterdeep*.

**Interviewer -** Oh yeah.

**Moll Hackabout -** So it is a euro style game set in the *Dungeons and Dragons* world and it just plays really nicely. I play it with the expansion, with the *Scoundrels of Skullport* expansion. Some expansions can really ruin games but yeah, it's just think-y enough but you can have a chat when you are playing it as well. You can strategize with it, my husband and I can often go head to head quite a lot but he plays it on the app as well (laughs) I always say that it's not fair but I do beat him even though he does play on that occasionally and if friends come round, even if it is people who are fairly new to board gaming as well they can play that game and it is just the one that I keep returning to, I like the theme and I like the mechanics of the game and its expansions.

**Interviewer -** That's fine. How do you purchase your games and why?

**Moll Hackabout -** A couple of different ways. As I've become and engaged more in board games in the last ten years, I have been more careful about what I buy in the way that I like to try out the games first before I buy them because I have some games sat on my shelf downstairs and I kind of purchased them because the reviews were good or this was good or it had shiny artwork and I don't do that so much anymore, so I go to a convention every year up at the *UK Games Expo* in Birmingham and I try out new games, well it doesn't necessarily need to be a new game but I really do like trying out the new games and I often well I save up my pennies to go there every year so I usually buy a big stack of board games there or I will try out board games there and buy them later in the year. So, yeah there is a big lot that I buy there, I tend to buy others well I try to go to local retailers if I can because we have a couple of independent game shops locally but when they talk about small friendly game shops they are not all that way! (laughs) I've got to say. Yeah I use *Amazon* sometimes and my games group will sometimes will buy and sell games through that as well. Yeah, I'm a bit more discerning this time when buying board games and I will occasionally go for the odd *Kickstarter*.

**Interviewer -** Cool, can you tell me about the first time you went into a board gaming store?

**Moll Hackabout -** Oh god! I don't know how long ago that was! That was probably when I was in Manchester in the 90's. It would have been a *Games Workshop* but I would have been going in looking for, that was probably when it was more about *Warhammer* stuff which I have never particularly been into it although my other half does it. I remember walking into a *Games Workshop* in the early 90's and going "Woah what's this place?" (laughs) yeah I probably walked in and walked back out to be honest. It would have been a really long time ago but more recently, it is interesting that each gaming store is different but yeah that was my first experience.

**Interviewer -** Yeah.

**Moll Hackabout -** I don't know if you want me to expand on any of that.

**Interviewer -** No, no that's fine. It kind of links on to my next question which is tell me about some of your memorable experiences when buying games or going into board gaming stores?

**Moll Hackabout -** Well, as I say, usually buying games at conventions is good because you have tried them out and sometimes you even get to speak to the people who have designed them or people who have worked on them. There was a specific one, called *Cornish Smuggler* by *Grublin Games* and I just spent ages talking to the people who designed it and how they did it and it really gave more depth to the game, to actually meet the people behind it.

**Interviewer -** Did that make it feel a little more personal as well?

**Moll Hackabout -** Yeah, I think it did, it was really nice. To be honest the board gaming community online kind of designers and writers and people are usually very talkative online especially if you want to know about their game. Especially people with a *Kickstarter* although it can get a bit too much when talking to people with *Kickstarter's*! Sorry, I have veered off the topic, ask me the question again.

**Interviewer -** Memorable experiences when buying games or going into board gaming stores?

**Moll Hackabout -** Yeah, so that is the good but I've got to say that the bad sometimes is walking into a store and being completely ignored! I've had that where I have been standing waiting to talk to somebody and not knowing quite who to talk too and yeah, it is kind of it depends who is running them and I probably making sweeping generalisations here.

**Interviewer -** No it's fine, it's all about your own experiences so.

**Moll Hackabout -** Sure, but sometimes it is just not obvious what to do or who to talk to in some game stores or even who is running the shop. I think that is changing, I think game stores have sort of realised that board games are becoming more kind of diverse that just young white guys these days so they will talk to you and ask your opinions and see what you are into but I've never had kind of a, I know some people go into game stores and have a slightly snobbish reaction from game store owners if they don't quite get the terminology right but for me, it is more socially going into a board game store, what do I do and what do I say? I think that might have something to do with myself and my social awkwardness in situations like that it might not just be the store but it cuts both ways I think. I do like it when stores, in particular I found one when I was in France a couple of years ago when there was a kind of person running demos in the store and that kind of helps because it is obvious there is a demo on the table and you can try the demo and that it kind of a way in to not even talking about the demo but talking about other games. Yeah, I think some shops need a bit more social glue going on. Yeah, I have actually used *Esdevium* games who are a distributor, there is another thing that I do in my spare time is that I organise a science festival and I got them to come and demo games there, games with science themes and people wanted to know where to buy them people who haven't bought games and they (*Esdevium*) were really obtuse in where people could buy them and everyone was thinking just tell them where to buy them. They didn't help themselves at that point so yeah, I think demoing is great but people need to know what to do from there, that was an interesting experience but I have digressed again, I'm sorry!

**Interviewer -** No it's fine! Have you engaged in the wider gaming community and if so, how? So this could be through being online, having an online presence, tournaments, events, conventions. Obviously you have mentioned that you go to *UKGE* already.

**Moll Hackabout -** Yeah, so other conventions that I've gone to, there is a local Portsmouth convention called the *Portsmouth on Board* that is an annual one. We've got another local, well they are looking to open a board games cafe but currently can't fund it so they are currently doing pop up events and pop up days and they are called *Dice Portsmouth* and I go along to a lot of those and find out about that from *Facebook*. Other gaming type conventions, I always want to go to *Dragon Meet* but it is always the wrong time of the year, I am always ill so I can't go to that so

there are a lot of wants of where I want to go to but family life sort of gets in the way of that. I did go to the *Nine Worlds* convention a couple of years ago and they had a gaming strand there, that one was kind of interesting because I don't think it ran as well as it could have been and then they had little offstrands of people talking about games which was really good. So that kind of conventions, other than that I have an online *Twitter* account and on that I talk to lots of board gaming people on there, I probably have a kind of core group of probably about a couple of dozen of people that I talk about board games to on there and I love *Instagram* for games, really like that, I usually post up to five times a week on there and it is usually board games, my cats get a look in occasionally but I do post and talk, I would say that *Instagram* is my happy place (laughs). So that is were I like to engage with people, I do have a *BoardGameGeek* account as well but *BoardGameGeek*, I don't know it seems like it can be impenetrable at times with its whole forum based stuff. I know that yours was originally on there but some of the commenters are really quick to jump on people, yeah I don't know if you have had that experience yourself on there but I would read a lot of stuff on there so I probably lurk more than engage on, if that makes sense just because the etiquette of the engagement and the moderation on the boards there could sometimes be a bit better and again, I have done moderation myself of other things in education and I feel that good moderation is always important. Yeah, I would like to engage more with *BoardGameGeek* but I don't. I sometimes watch a lot of instructional videos through *YouTube*, I guess that is sort of engaging because you can comment afterwards but my commenting goes as far as a thumbs up usually for that. How else do I engage outside of my group? Oh yeah! I have just recently discovered a really good forum on *Facebook* called *BoardGameGrrls* which isn't exclusively for women but it seems to be a nice, polite forum and yeah, I don't usually go into women only ones but people seem to be nice to each other so there is probably decent moderation going on so yeah that is a nice one. Again, I've probably given you too much information there!

**Interviewer -** No it's fine! This is the kind of thing we need. Can you tell me about any disappointing experiences that you have had when engaging in board games and the community?

**Moll Hackabout -** So, yeah I was talking about this with somebody the other day, I have only really had one bad experience and I wouldn't even really call it a bad experience that I could mention it was a person, who had a particular personality should we say that was involved in an



RPG that I had signed up too. I really like doing that at the conventions, signing up to a one hit RPG and he was quite a difficult personality, I wouldn't even say that he was an alpha gamer he was just like his experience mattered and the other players round the table didn't to the point that he was almost shouting "me first, me first" and yeah just a bit rude to the other players at times. It was kind of quelled by, sometimes at these conventions they attract the most amazing DM's and the guy who was DM-ing the game clocked what this guys personality was like and he kind of tied it into the game. So his player character wasn't really much different from his own character and he made a few adjustments to the game and I could see him looking and doing it and I quite like observing people and he wove him as a difficult character into our game but it ended up being brilliant because he basically sent him off to do something whilst the other players were doing other things. I actually thought that because he was a difficult person, it kind of made it really good in the end. I mean we all worked off and though "Oh god what a knob" but after thinking about it, it was fine because of the expertise of the DM who knew how to deal with people like that. So that was one weird situation, another one has been through my local player group when one player from our group who is very active online, he kind of knows the *Dice Tower* guys and you know sees himself as an amazing blogger and I don't think he understands social etiquette sometimes in that he will sometimes comment on games that he has played with people quite pointedly about the other players on social media quite soon afterwards. An experience, I had was that we were playing a game and he complained that the game that players, this was a not a good game especially if you were playing with AP players which is analysis paralysis. I don't know if you know that saying.

**Interviewer -** Yes, where players could sometimes be taking a long time to make decisions.

**Moll Hackabout -** Yes but it's kind of used really pejoratively sometimes when talking about players when actual the person might just want to think about their moves and it can be taken quite the wrong way. I don't think it's very polite to comment about it and make a comment on social media about it with a picture of the people playing. So, the way we navigated this was instead of going straight to him because I would never engage on social media and have a set to with somebody because the amount of times that I have seen that end in kind of fisticuffs of words

it's just no. So we approached the people that run our group and said this has happened, not happy about it so what do you suggest so we kind of put it in their hands and not because it was their group that had been photographed and put on social media, I mean I have to say if I take pictures of a group or anything I am really careful to say to people do you mind if I take a picture now or do you mind if I put this on *Instagram*? I think that is really important, etiquette wise and I would never comment on individual players unless we are best mates and that's fine, ripping cards up from *Pandemic* gleefully and that's fine. So we approached the people who run the group and said what should we do and they said well actually it had happened before and he had done it with another player as well so they ended up having a quiet word with him and he came up to us in the next meeting and said he didn't quite realise he had done that or caused offence in his words and you know that was kind of it. I don't know if he did realise or if he didn't but it kind of was a decent conflict, resolution and he, I have seen him comment about games since then but I don't think he has been as pointed about who he is commenting about so maybe something has come out of that.

**Interviewer -** In your opinion how are games marketed and what is there target audience?

**Moll Hackabout -** I would have to say, board games and RPGs are different here. Just because board games are probably more ahead of RPGs to appealing to a more diverse growing audience, RPGs despite the fact that I primarily play *Dungeons & Dragons* but I have played the *Star Trek* and *Doctor Who* ones etcetera are about ten years behind in their appeal and their storylines and the way that they are and people's perception of RPGs is still, I think board games are becoming a bit cooler but RPGs aren't and they could be because they are brilliant and so much fun so it is a shame really. So yeah, who are RPGs marketed at, it is a kind of niche audience that are still into niche things like *Lord of the Rings*, I don't think that have caught up with the more modern fantasy that is coming out as much. Although saying that there is quite a lot of independent writers so you can go out and find little one hits that have been written by independent people but yeah, I still think that RPGs are a bit more behind board games which are now, I don't know, you name it I think the marketing is really expanding but it is difficult for me to say because I am looking at stuff for board games all the time, if I wasn't into board games then how would they be marketed. I think the fact that there are things like board game cafes and things springing up all over the

place, it is becoming, the idea of social gaming and the decline of pubs, there's a lot of people getting into gaming and saying "oh this is great thing to do in an evening" and I think they are kind of getting into it that way and they hear about it, word of mouth or social media or people having experiences by going to cafes and groups that way. I guess if you are talking about the marketing of the games themselves, I just think that whatever you are into then there is a board game kind of for that. The students that I play board games with in my weekly class, are really neuro-diverse and I don't think there are any games specifically aimed at that group for example but they play a whole range of stuff. I was playing *Colt Express* with them on Friday and for a really wide range of spectrum students as well and they absolutely adored it but that is a really interesting game because it is taking the board and making it 3-D so you've got the train there. So maybe, the moving away from the traditional board game that is a board per say is really good. I still don't think that I am answering your question though, I feel like I'm just waffling on!

**Interviewer -** You are fine, honestly!

**Moll Hackabout -** As long as I am making some sort of sense!

**Interviewer -** You are! What do you think about the representations of women within board games?

**Moll Hackabout -** (laughs) Don't go there with RPG's! No actually with *D&D* the fifth edition stuff, the representations in the artwork in the latest *Dungeons and Dragons* is much much better, it is not bikini clad barbarian woman and stuff. Oh I, was trying to buy, well I was looking for a mini to paint for my player character about two years ago and my player character is a well she is a great weapons fighter and playing in a world that my DM has situated it just after the Norman conquest so it is quite traditionally because he is quite a history geek as well. But could I find many minis of women in armour? Nope. So, in the world of miniatures or painting miniatures rather than oh my god just don't go there. Although, *Wizards of the Coast* are changing their art you just go out there and look at the kind of male fantasy stuff that is still going around, and people say "Oh it's ironic, it's postmodern" and it's like no it isn't and it's still not good come on! (laughs). So yeah, RPG's again are lagging behind but there's representations of women that is getting

better. Again, you can tell by the artwork, things like *Dead of Winter* that has got some great female characters in it, if you look at some of the artwork for that it is superb and yeah, I tend to be quite artwork and player character driven in these things and things like *Clue*, that's got some wonderful artwork. The games I play, it's in terms of representations of women still not enough. Yeah, female-ness within games is coming more in with, oh god I'm going to say, games like *Patchwork*, you know, I don't sew or knit myself but there's something about that game that feels really nice and more female and games that are co-operative as well also have that feeling. Although, I am saying that as I can be quite a feisty strategic player sometimes but which realm of board games are you talking about because it is so diverse and wide but even in the sci-fi stuff you kind of, women within sci-fi board games are still either borgy *Seven of Nine* type of women or they might get a sub-part on a ship and be part of tokenism stuff. Yeah, it is not there yet, getting there and I think there's awareness of it. I did, can I say this as a side note, I actually approached a convention and this just reminded me, a couple of years ago, it was the *UK Games Expo* that they had lists of guest speakers and there wasn't one guest speaker that was a women amongst them and I actually wrote to them about this because it did annoy me because I was taking my daughter along and she is quite arty and says she would like to design board games when she gets older and in fact she won the design competition for the kids ticket last year. So she, that is her thing at the moment, she's 10 but I wrote to them and said 'Come on, where are the women here?' and they wrote back and said 'Oh no, we would if we could but there aren't that many in the board games industry at the moment' and if they are they are a one man band and it was quite a cur rebuff basically and I was being very polite about it and I didn't post them to website where you get the award for having all male panels but they did have all male panels! I know you were talking about experiences so this would probably fit in an experience category, that was a bit like really, come on guys there are plenty and I remember putting a post out on *Twitter* about it and getting a huge response from people wondering what they were talking about, you know, a lot of the American conventions, I know they are trying to be more diverse in general, not just having kind of female panelists but more diverse across the board but it just doesn't seem to get to *UK Games Expo* yet. So, yeah but representation within the community does bug me probably more than the artwork of the games which I think is evolving in the right direction but it all feeds into itself. Yeah, I'll just stop there.

**Interviewer -** Well, I am quite interested in what you said about the representation of women in the community now. What do you think about that?

**Moll Hackabout -** There are female voices within the community and not enough is being done to kind of step up and showcase them. Another example I give, is the science festival that I run, we have an implicit policy that we will be 50/50 male and female and this is within the science community which in itself has had problems of representation as you might know. Female speakers on the whole, this is my experience of finding women who wish to speak within a community and talking to people, it is kind of similar within the board gaming community is that men will come to you and they will say ‘Oh I have this talk, that talk, I do this thing or that thing’ and they sort of offer themselves up, women often don’t and you have to put in a little bit more leg work to get those female speakers and say to them sometimes they have a childcare issues and they have these other issues that women do and you have just got to be a little bit more realistic about what their lives are if you want good representation. I think the complaint, I was a bit like, I think everyone thinks that it is a level playing field out there, everybody has got a chance to have a say in this community, blah blah blah. It isn’t, again I work in disability education and I know for sure that it is not a level playing field so I think that experience of mine, getting female speaker for a science community event is almost at the same pace of getting them for a board game community and I think that if you are an event organiser or you’re doing a blog or doing something online, you have to put in a little bit of leg work to find the women in the community because they are there. They are definitely there. I think it’s, for me as a science community organiser, I feel that it is my responsibility as an organiser to get that diversity of speakers so you know, we shouldn’t say “Oh, you know where are they and why aren’t they speaking up?” it is other people as well in the community that have to showcase them.

**Interviewer -** Yes, definitely. Can you tell me what the enjoyable experiences are when engaging with board games and the community?

**Moll Hackabout -** Snacks! (laughs) One-upmanship on snacks with our local game group, it’s like when people come along with cakes to it, it’s just brilliant! (laughs) I’m sorry and then there is the board games. It’s that whole community thing and getting to meet people who you wouldn’t

normally meet somebody who is again, I might not sound like I'm socially awkward but I really am when I meet new people and I find it quite difficult, having that focus of a board game to get to know someone. Sometimes when I'm playing board games with people, I realise that I actually don't know their name but I know a heck of a lot about them from just watching how they play this game. So, you can find out quite a lot about a person from playing a board game and then you get to learn their names afterwards but it is a good enabling social experience, I think, particularly with my game group. You know, games tend to be cross cultural, cross political, cross all sorts of things and it kind of, yeah it's just nice coming away with that nice feeling that you have had a good time with people who you don't necessarily know that well but have actually got to know people very well since specifically going to the meetup group and not kind of had doing games through our engineered friends as in my close core group of friends so yeah.

**Interviewer -** And would you say there are any negative aspects to board gaming and the community?

**Moll Hackabout -** I think I have given you some of those! I am trying to think of other negative aspects, the idea of game hoarding and it being all about how many games and having the latest games but I think that could be with anything, you've got to remember that it is a hobby as well and you know that will be part of a hobby, you know the accumulation of games. For me, it's not having enough time to play games, that's a bad aspect. I am trying to think of other negative aspects apart from the ones I have given you. Yeah, work getting in the way of board games (laughs) No, well actually incorporating board games into work has been great and even before I did those weekly classes with my students, I did spend time for a couple of years running a board game group at my daughters school as well so that's a good thing. I think, negative stuff, apart from my sister hates board games so when I'm with her, I have to find something else to do with her (laughs). Let me think, yeah there's lots of games out there that I'd like to play and sometimes trying to find the right people to play them with maybe. It's been great for my kids as well, my kids love the gaming but they do occasionally say "Oh god, not a board game mum!" which I will go yeah that's fine don't worry about it but no, for me, it is a roundly positive hobby.

**Interviewer -** That's good.

**Moll Hackabout -** Yes, really good.

**Interviewer -** And just the last question now, what advice would you give to a female who would be wanting to get into board gaming?

**Moll Hackabout -** Let me think, female specific stuff I think looking at a demographic of your local board game group. I mean, *Meetup* is really useful because you can see who is going along, check it isn't you know all guys or if it is all guys then there might be a reason. I know a female war gamer who was quite worried about going to wargaming groups because she was the only girl and she said that she was kind of welcomed with open arms it was like 'Yes, please come in!' and she has been really welcomed to the war gaming community and now she is writing and blogging about it and all sorts so I think. Actually I think you can find her blog online she is called Katie Aidley online. Look her stuff up but yeah, she has got into the war gaming community. It depends, if you are a woman on your own or what your social... the context of you going into this is, yeah if it was me and my husband and my kids weren't into it and it was just me who wanted to game, I would again I'd look online to see what is going on and decide whether I wanted to go to something. I don't think I would ever go to a convention on my own straight off, I think I'd find a local game group and just go along and give it a go. Don't buy anything! Save your pennies until you find games that you really like! But there are lots of people out there who can give you advise and talk to you and actually if you are own *Twitter* or *Instagram* or you find a decent *Facebook* group and you say that you're a newbie, people are so generous with their kind of advise and I've seen newbies come on and kind of be avalanched with intentions of you can do this or that but I think there is an awful lot of goodwill out there in the board gaming community and so yeah, I'd do it through social media first and then go real life and go and do it in real life and go find a game to play. Specifically female, I'd separate RPG's, mind you, some RPGs or playing RPG's as a one hit at a convention would be really worth doing as well because you get an idea of what RPGs are and I think that world is a little bit harder to break into than board gaming. Oh of course, there's board gaming cafes as well. Just a little bit of research, your gender with board gaming shouldn't make the slightest bit of difference but me and you both live in reality and we know that sometimes it does. We need more women in the community, so yeah, just go for it. There you go.

**Interviewer -** Cool, well that is all the questions that I have. Thank you so much for participating.

**Moll Hackabout -** Yes, thank you.

**(End of Interview)**



## **Appendix 9 - “Kickstarter Exclusive” - Nora**

**Interviewer:** Katie Peaker

**Interviewee:** Nora

**Interview Setting:** Over Skype, when first calling we ran into an original problem whereby I was unable to hear Nora. I then restarted recording once she called back.

**(Start of Interview)**

**Interviewer -** Hello.

**Nora -** Hello, can you hear me now?

**Interviewer -** I can yes!

**Nora -** Ok, good!

**Interviewer -** There we go, so first of all I obviously want to say thank you so much for actually wanting to participate in the study. Do you want me to just go ahead and get straight into the questions?

**Nora -** Yeah, I mean. I don't know whether or how much you are happy to tell me about the study maybe? Like, what is it that you're looking at?

**Interviewer -** So basically, I am looking at just women experiences in general with the board gaming community, being a fan of board games myself I have my own experiences and I just wanted to go out and see if women had the same experiences as me or alternatively a different experience!

**Nora -** Mhm.

**Interviewer -** I work very closely with my two supervisors and the tabletop industry as an academic field is very unheard of and there's not a lot in it at the moment.

**Nora -** Yeah, I can imagine!

**Interviewer -** Yes, (laughs) it is all more about digital and video games and everything. So we are trying to kind of pave a way by showing the tabletop gaming is as important.

**Nora -** Lovely!

**Interviewer -** Is that alright?

**Nora -** Yes, sure let's go ahead then.

**Interviewer -** Ok. The first question is tell me how you first got into tabletop gaming?

**Nora -** Yeah, I mean I obviously played some games like most people in a family context but those obviously were less serious board games. I first got into board games at University, with a bunch of friends that were into board games as it goes and it was still fairly casual gaming so it would be mostly a social gathering, dressed up as a board game evening or afternoon or something and with the focus still heavily on socialising. We would play stuff like *Settlers* or *Dixit* and I have been a bit more serious about it in the last few years, mostly when I moved in with my now husband then boyfriend and I mean he was new to this country, he is British and moved to Switzerland where we both now live. He mostly met new people here through board gaming so he went out and looked for people to just get to know in this country and he did this via board gaming. So when I moved in with him, I already could rely on his personal network of people vaguely interested in board gaming and basically since we have moved in together, we have been having board gaming evening and afternoons and building a collection.

**Interviewer -** That's awesome.

**Nora -** Yeah it's nice!

**Interviewer -** I also play with my boyfriend so I completely am the same. How often do you play games and who do you play them with?

**Nora -** It's not super regular, the thing that is more regular is the role-playing evenings, those are weekly because we want to, you know, get on with the campaign that we are running. Board games are a bit more ad hoc and spontaneous so really we'd figure out we have nothing planned this weekend lets ask some people to play board games and it's very fair that we can't find the people to play them with. We've got like a more inner circle that largely overlaps with our role-playing group as well and a few more adjacent people that we can invite for more players. Either we decide beforehand what we want to play and then invite the people we know we can play that with or we see who is interested and has time and see what we can play with them. So for example, we've been playing *Pandemic Legacy* specifically always with the same people and we are on season two now so it's been work getting there! (laughs)

**Interviewer -** Yeah, we actually have season one and two still in shrink-wrap because we haven't found a dedicated group that we want to start the campaign with!

**Nora -** Yes, I can see that. When we initially started we didn't always play with the same people but that was only the first three or so games and after that we knew who we were playing with which was the people who enjoyed it and we always kept inviting those people. I mean it's usually when we just randomly invite everyone who may be interested we get five to six people and then it is suddenly difficult finding things to play even, so when we play *Pandemic* we always make sure that we just invite those two and that there's the four of us so that we play it. We were quite proud to make it through, we bought season one at Essen in 2016 and we managed to play through it before going to Essen in 2017 where we bought season two so we are keeping up!

**Interviewer -** So it was almost perfect! (laughs) so as part of your role playing group or your *Pandemic* group, what is the demographic of those groups?

**Nora -** My role-playing group in it's current setup we've got the DM is my husband and then the players we have two men and three women, one of whom is myself, so it is evenly split.

**Interviewer -** And is that the same for your *Pandemic* group? Do you use the same people or are they different?

**Nora -** Basically the *Pandemic* group is again, myself and my husband and one woman and one man from the role-playing group so it also evenly split.

**Interviewer -** Ok, perfect and can you tell me how you discovered the group or community that you play with?

**Nora -** I think mostly we know people, well, initially we met people or my husband mostly met people just by looking online and looking for people who wanted to play locally and then he actually ended up being the founding member of a local board game club and so then we started occasionally playing with people from there. I never joined the club, I went to try it once but there not really actively recruiting people because they kind of struggle with space and so on anyway and I also don't quite see the appeal because I really enjoy playing with friends and with people I like, with people whose company I enjoy and I for me, I don't really see the appeal of playing with random people or strangers who I might not have as much fun with. Occasionally, I have actually participated in the European Master's competition or whatever at Essen from our local team and the team is mostly made up of people from the club but they always struggle to find people so I have participated in the past. I have always found that I'm really happier playing with my own group than playing with the people I end up being randomly put together for the competition team because like sometimes they don't necessarily share the same sense of enjoyment of the game or value the same things about a game. One time, I criticised jokingly about them taking a lot of time taking a turn and he got really pissy at me. We have one of our core players

who is in the *Pandemic* group, the role-playing group and a regular board game player in our home who always suffers from analysis paralysis but he can take a joke about it! He knows it so we're good! And yeah, we met a few people through the club and we have been playing with people from the club and outside of the club so to speak. For the role-playing group specifically we actually ended up recruiting quite a few people from elsewhere so one of our regular players, the other member of both the board game club and the *Pandemic* group, we actually met her at a local fantasy convention. That was a really funny coincidence because we started chatting because her friend who she was there with, was dressed as the same character as I was dressed so that is how we got talking and then I basically, we took the board gaming clubs seating area as an opportunity to sit down and chat and also play a game on the side. I said that I'd invite them round for games sometime and that's how we got to know them and one of them basically, yeah, stayed in our group. The two other group members, I actually recruited from my other big hobby which is swing dancing. So, one of them was just new to town and she had looked up the local swing dancers to meet new people because it was something she did in her hometown and we met there and she was talking about how she was new and she was asking me what I did with my time, basically looking for more things to join to meet new people and I mentioned that we were just about a new campaign in *Call of Cthulhu* it was then and she seemed really interested so I said why don't you just come along and join us and it was her first time roleplaying but she enjoyed it and has stuck with it and she is now, we slightly reconfigured but she is now also part of the *D&D* group that we are running. At some point, another person from dancing heard that we were playing or about to play *D&D* and mentioned how he had always wanted to try it but never had the opportunity and since we had just lost a few players who didn't want to switch from *Cthulhu* to *D&D*, I invited him to join. So we recruited some people from a completely different hobby which is kind of funny I guess, so now more than half of our role-playing group is made up of swing dancers.

**Interviewer -** That's amazing, how you don't even realise that you matched multiple interests with other people.

**Nora -** Yes, it is weird because you wouldn't exactly think that swing dancing and board games is something that goes together at all but both are hobbies that attract nerds so... (laughs).

**Interviewer -** Could you tell me about any memorable experiences with your gaming group?

**Nora -** This is difficult (laughs), erm I mean in general, just like going to the Essen board game fair is always memorable and we do tend to go with friends from gaming.

**Interviewer -** Yes, so it's almost like a holiday.

**Nora -** Yes, it's like a road trip with your gaming buddies and yeah, I mean there's always lots of fun moments in both board gaming and role playing but it is mostly of the 'you had to be there' type. It is not really stuff that gains from being retold.

**Interviewer -** No, that's fine. Do you have any favourite games and why do you enjoy them?

**Nora -** Yeah, one classic favourite at our table that we just keep going back to is *Ticket to Ride*, we play the Europe version and I'm actually not that good at it really, I'm pretty average I'd say (laughs) but I still really really enjoy it. I just think that it's a game that has, it's complicated enough to not get boring but simple enough that you don't have to overthink it, you can just sit down and play. It is just always fun and people do get incredibly emotional and be shouting at the table, when your whole plan got ruined because somebody took that one piece of line that you really really needed to make your route work and its probably in the middle of everything and now everything is ruined and "How dare you? How could you?". I mean it gets worse the more you play it because you start to know which routes exist and you start guessing after the first few turns. People start to build those specific tiny bits of the route that they cannot be without and you try to guess based on that which route they are building and we don't actively play to sabotage but it just happens constantly.

**Interviewer -** So how do you purchase your games and why do you do it in that method?

**Nora -** The vast bulk of our games at this point is really bought at Essen because once you start going regularly and buying large amounts of games, you just can't really justify purchases during the year because you are still working on the pile from Essen (laughs) and then you're lucky if you get to play them all before going back! Occasionally there is something that we do buy in between for whatever reason say just because that just came out and we are keen on having it or my husband has backed *Kickstarter's* as well but then sometimes you back a *Kickstarter* and then just pick it up at Essen and it just ends up in the Essen pile anyway. So yeah, I mean we usually, the last few years we have gone to Essen and just come home with a pile of board games worth like 350 euros or so and that then lasts us through the year easily. Oh and we are really running out of space at this point!

**Interviewer -** (laughs) Yes, we are getting to that point! Tell me about the first time that you went into a board gaming store?

**Nora -** I think, that was before I was a very active player. I think that was with a bunch of friends who played role-playing game before I played role-playing games as in they had an established group and weren't looking for people they were just my friends and they happened to go into the shop and I went along. I wasn't familiar at that point with most games, I only knew a couple from my casual gaming but I mean, they are always very colourful and I think that always strikes me. They just look like candy shops really especially where dice get involved and the answer to can you ever have too many dice is no!

**Interviewer -** That is true!

**Nora -** My husband disagrees, but we will have to agree to disagree on that one!

**Interviewer -** Yeah, they are just too pretty!

**Nora -** Oh yeah, I got this really nice set though, they were two-coloured ones like iridescent and they swear they are incredibly balanced, somehow, something about the

manufacturing process but I don't believe it because my rolls have been horrible with that set!

**Interviewer -** Oh no!

**Nora -** But they are very pretty anyway.

**Interviewer -** So tell me some of your memorable experiences when buying games or going into board gaming stores?

**Nora -** I think because we buy so many games at Essen, the most memorable things are usually when you try something, when you actually get to test something and it's not as you expect it to be and you end up buying something different than what you had in mind or you end up buying something that you didn't think you'd like or you end up not buying something you thought you'd love.

**Interviewer -** I'm guessing it creates more of an experience at Essen where you can kind of try before you buy.

**Nora -** Some really memorable things are exactly when you can't, for example, I remember at one point we got in on Thursday morning and we knew we wanted something very specific which was an expansion for a game we already had. We knew we wanted it because we enjoy the game. We went to the store and they were sold out on Thursday morning before lunch and I just thought that was incredible and since then we have always gone there first because we don't trust their stock. Or last year, we had an eye on *Ex Libris* and we thought that it was a nice theme and it looks pretty and it sounds like something we might enjoy and we kept walking past and they hadn't got their stock in because there was some issue with customs. They were basically demo-ing in front of an empty stall and they had nothing to sell and the demo tables were always occupied and we kept going past and we never got to try it. At one point, we actually asked when they expected to get stock in and they said "Oh, you know, Friday afternoon." so we went past shortly after, like seriously half past twelve and we saw a line forming and they had gotten in



lots of boxes which hadn't been unpacked yet and there was a line forming that grew by the minute and we thought either we queue now without having actually testing the game or we are just not going to get it. We ended up buying it without actually testing it because we got there at that point and stood in the queue and we didn't regret it, we love it!

**Interviewer -** Yes, I was going to ask whether it paid out for you!

**Nora -** Yeah, we have played it a couple of times already which is good for an Essen game at this point in the year. Like most of them we have only played once but that one we have definitely played twice and yeah it's really good. The theme is just really well implemented and there is just so much detail that went into the design of that game and it's really lovely. But I mean it would have sucked if we hadn't have liked it.

**Interviewer -** Yes, having queued and not being able to actually test it. Have you engaged in the wider community and if so, how? So I know that you have mentioned obviously Essen which is a larger community but do you online, any tournaments or anything like that?

**Nora -** I am not super active online, I vaguely follow the board gaming reddit, subreddit. I know of *BoardGameGeek* but I don't really, I only use it to look things up I don't participate in the community really or even read, I use it mostly to look for information if I am looking for something specific so overall online, very litter. Also, in terms of online board gaming, I have done very little and only with people I actually know in real life and I have mostly done it to train for those tournaments. So I was in the proper team, one time and the reserve for the team the second time. There were two reasons why I was the reserve, first of all we didn't get enough people to make a second team so there was just one team because otherwise we would have probably just taken people who were there but not interested in playing into the reserve but the other thing is I also have problems with my lower back, I get back pain and that's really bad for board gaming competitions because you're supposed to sit at the table for hours and hours and hours on end. I physically, it's really no fun for me. I notice that the year when I did participate, I couldn't do it without painkillers and it just really dampens the enjoyment so that and the fact that

you never quite know which games are actually gonna be chosen and if they choose something you hate you end up training intensively in a game that you hate.

**Interviewer -** Yes, which wouldn't make it fun.

**Nora -** Yeah, I mean maybe if you are not picky about the games you like it is probably better but I think I am fairly picky. So yeah, I think it was a good experience to do once but I am not super keen on repeating it which is a pity because I feel that women are sorely under represented at those competitions. I actually got really annoyed with the local board gaming association when they contact people for the team, now last year, they only contacted the members of the club and the not the people who had participated in the year before's team if they weren't member of the club. Pure coincidence, but that's the women in the team and I basically think that it's not that he thought let's exclude the women its that he didn't realise that the only women in the team weren't in the club and maybe to a certain extent also that he just thought "Oh they will hear about it" because were friends with people in the club and I mean I'm married to someone in the club so, yeah of course I heard about it! But it would have been polite to have just sent me an email. It really bothered me and I told him that it bothered me and he really just didn't get it at all. Yeah, that was a bit unpleasant.

**Interviewer -** Yeah, that kind of links into my next question which is tell me about any disappointing experiences you've had when engaging with board games or the community.

**Nora -** (laughs) Yeah, that is certainly one of them! I feel that it's just there is little awareness of any of that with a lot of male board gamers and I think that the women board gamers, they know. They all notice and like you notice when you are the only woman at the table or when you are one of five women in the room of 25 men, it is really noticeable except the men never seem to notice that and that is one thing that does bother me. I just feel and wish that they would make an effort and wish that they would ask themselves that why is it that, you know, the women aren't here because it is not that we are not interested in playing as evidence in the fact that our board gaming group is perfectly balanced and I mean, I am not in the club so I can't speak to the interactions in the club from my own experience but I have heard from a friend who is in the club

who said that it sometimes bothers her when there's just unreflective comments or its basically, and there is that stereotype of the social awkward nerd who doesn't know how to behave around women and it has a certain basis in reality sometimes. I don't even think that they are in the majority but they are just really noticeable when you encounter them. Like, this specific friend, she does pole dancing as a sport and you can just about imagine how incredibly awkward and inappropriate the responses can be from a person like that and like there was that one occasion, again I am a bit hesitant to talk about this too much because it is not my own personal experience but my husband came home from a club meeting and told me how there was that awkward interaction where she was mentioning this pole camp that she had been to where they had done a lot of training and so on and she really enjoyed it so she was talking about it because it was something that she had done and that she had enjoyed. This guy makes these really awkward weird comments about it that are probably supposed to be funny but really are just awkward and maybe not so appropriate and he (her husband) noticed this and he wasn't really sure how to respond to essentially steer the conversation away from that and basically asked questions that made it clear that he was engaging with her in a more interesting and serious manner. He wasn't quite sure how she had perceived it but on his way home he got a text message from her, thanking him for having helped her out like, she clearly noticed that guy had been inappropriate and that he had noticed and attempted to help her out and he wasn't sure if would have been helpful to explicitly speak out but then often it is kind of subtle and you're not quite sure how to really address it so yeah. I mean, hearing that just confirmed my opinion about being in the club.

**Interviewer -** It is something that you almost have to, not learn to deal with but it seems to happen to all women who try to get into a board gaming club, that first encounter of going and people looking and saying "Oh, it's a woman." like its a shock but yeah.

**Nora -** I noticed that recently when there was this thread on some role-playing subreddit where people shared a picture of their group and there were a few comments along the lines of "Ha ha where did you find the women?" and then people started pointing out to those people who said that, that guys, you are in the minority, women aren't playing with you and it's not because women don't play they are just not playing with you and you should ask yourselves

why because having an actual look at the pictures and you will notice that most groups do have several women. Yeah, it is not the hobby it's you.

**Interviewer -** In your own opinion, how do you think games are marketed and what is there target audience?

**Nora -** I'm not really sure. I find it quite... I think I just don't notice board game marketed very often which probably means that it is not geared towards me or I would have probably noticed it, that's all I can say about that!

**Interviewer -** No that's absolutely fine. What do you think about the representations of women within board gaming?

**Nora -** Quite often, the games are too abstract for that to be a big deal. Occasionally, especially games with historical themes and especially if there are characters are involved, it can be a bit lacking. One thing for example when I have actually noticed it, we have a game called *Dreaming Spires* about Oxford colleges, do you know that one?

**Interviewer -** I don't actually, that is a new one for me.

**Nora -** I don't think it is too well known, I don't remember where we bought it but I do remember seeing it at some point in Oxford itself, of course in a book shop. You go through different era's and try to make your college bigger and more prestigious and have more students and more scholars and you have to recruit different scholars. Obviously, most of the scholars are male but you can really tell that as soon as you come to the era that female scholars come in in Oxford, they have made a point of making it really sure that they have had the modern era kind of balanced to make up for the historic eras. Then one really negative example that I noticed at one point is, my husband was in some local board gaming competition from the club and he won, the *Star Wars Carcassonne* and they have characters and there is not a single female character in there! I was appalled to notice, absolutely appalled! Yeah, we are getting rid of that game, we still haven't done it but it is on the to trade or to sell pile.

**Interviewer -** Tell me what are the enjoyable experiences you've had when engaging with board games and the community.

**Nora -** I mean it is mostly just the playing itself that is enjoyable, that's why we do it I think.

**Interviewer -** That's fine. Would you say there are any negative aspect to board gaming or the community? I know that we have mentioned some there already.

**Nora -** One thing that I notice sometimes in terms of the game themes etcetera, is that I think compared to other medias such as films or video games there is very little reflection on, you know, I hate to use the word but problematic themes and contents. So, there is so much orientalism and you know tropes that border on racist and just I mean there is the whole thing on how colonialism is basically one of the most popular board game themes and I find that really awkward. I'm not really happy about that and I don't think it's something that people are very aware of at the moment and I wish that it was something that people actually talked about and reflected upon. We will get there eventually I hope, I mean if you look at films and video games etcetera it is clearly a topic there at this point so.

**Interviewer -** So hopefully and eventually in the future those types of questions will start getting raised.

**Nora -** Yeah, it is a niche market. That is probably why you find so much more research on you know the video game community than the board gaming community because it's still so small, it's niche and so I don't think people engage with it as much and as critically as they would with something bigger. I think especially considering how, game also target families and children strongly, I mean like even the more complex games are usually marketed as being playable for 12 and up or whatever so I think it would be good if we maybe reflected as to what we are letting kids consider normal.

**Interviewer -** Yes, definitely it is something that needs to be raised. We are just on the last question now, but what advice would you give to somebody who would be wanting to get into board gaming?

**Nora -** I would say get a bunch of people that you feel comfortable with and then just start playing because I think it doesn't matter if you have a few friends who are already interested and you start playing or if you go out and look for people to play with to specifically play with. Don't just think that I want somebody to play so I'm going to put up with anybody, but get people you actually enjoy spending time with because otherwise I don't think it is half as much fun as it could be. In the end it is still a social activity, even if you are playing something really complicated or whatever, you are not playing against a machine, you are playing with friends hopefully.

**Interviewer -** Ok, thank you so much! Is there anything that you would kind of like to add to or any final words that you would like to say?

**Nora -** Erm, no, I don't think I can think of anything right now so yeah, that's that.

**Interviewer -** Thank you again for taking the time and participating. I am planning once it has all been written up and finalised, for people who are interested can then read it and obviously you will be under your participant identifier name but you know what that was so you will be able to pick out your bits!

**Nora -** Yes thank you, that will be great!

**Interviewer -** Thank you very much.

**Nora -** Good luck with your research, bye.

**Interviewer -** Bye!

**(End of Interview)**

## **Appendix 10 - “Kickstarter Exclusive” - Rebecca**

**Interviewer:** Katie Peaker

**Interviewee:** Rebecca

**Interview Setting:** Over Skype.

**(Start of Interview)**

**Rebecca -** Hello.

**Interviewer -** Hello is that Rebecca?

**Rebecca -** It is hello.

**Interviewer -** Hi, it's Katie.

**Rebecca -** Hiya.

**Interviewer -** First of all, I obviously want to say thank you for coming on here and answering the questions for me.

**Rebecca -** No problem at all.

**Interviewer -** Is there any questions that you'd like to ask me or would you just like to get straight into the questions?

**Rebecca -** No, I think I have asked all of the questions that I wanted to beforehand.

**Interviewer -** Ok, that's perfect so we will just get into it now. So can you tell me how you first got into tabletop gaming?



**Rebecca -** I would probably say via my husband, it was always something I knew about but never really knew anyone who was interested in it so kind of didn't feel able to. Then my husband actually designs games himself so that kind of brought me into it and friends the he gamed with and I used to pick him up after a session and eventually it became "Well, why don't you join one?" and yeah that is kind of how it started.

**Interviewer -** Good, how often do you play games and who do you play them with?

**Rebecca -** It depends. So, at the moment we have just set up a night where we are going to be seeing friends once a week on a weekday night to do a bit of gaming, we are going to be doing, first one is a tabletop game that my husband has designed because he's wanting to play-test and then we are doing some *D&D* after that. But in terms of board games and things like that it is kind of random, we will have days when we see this group of friends who we games with and like on a bank holiday we might do a board game day but recently, my sister and a couple of friends of theirs have been getting into, they have been playing *Monopoly* (laughs) quite a bit to which me and Ben were not really interested in anyway because I hate *Monopoly* but we did this thing called a cultural exchange is what my sister called it, where we had to play *Monopoly* according to their rules and then we got them to play a board game that we had brought over so I think we got them to play, the first one was *Gloom* which is more of a card game and then we did *Ticket to Ride* and that seemed to take off quite well. So yeah, we kind of try to arrange that every couple of months to try and have a night together but it can be difficult when everyone is busy, families etc.

**Interviewer -** Yeah, we are the exact same, we game with my sister and brother in law and trying to track a day down when we can all be there can be quite difficult. So, what is the demographic of your gaming group?

**Rebecca -** So, I think across both groups it is roughly the same. It's around our age, so its around early thirties to late thirties and I'm slap bang in the middle with the middle thirties. Me and my sister are both mixed race so there's that. One of our family friends of my sister who comes over and games as well, he's from Sri Lanka, the rest of them are caucasian but like I said

me and my sister are mixed race, it's a kind of even split with gender I would say that because we play in couples a lot of people have the you know husband and wife thing but we do have a couple, I'd say it's a little bit more very slightly more men than women in the groups.

**Interviewer -** Right, that's fine and can you tell me how you discovered the group or community that you play with?

**Rebecca -** Well like I said, the one that I play with at the moment is mostly family and friends but if I want to play outside of that, I have actually found some people through work who we have tried setting up a games night that way and that happened via just happening to notice that we were all talking about the same things and were dressed in very similar ways and that kind of thing, it is always a bit tentative when people are wanting to make the first move and ask are you interested in geeky things as well? Oh yeah, you are! (laughs). I have gone to, there is a games day that is put on locally, like once a month, I have been but I find that people still play in their own groups, you have to quite willing to go out there and play randomly with other people and that is quite difficult for people who go there to try to do. I think that, we went there once and we played a game and we had someone else join us and that was nice but again, they kind of only wanted to be there for that game and didn't want to do anything else because they were quite shy, didn't really want to socialise apart from wanting to just play games but that is fair enough. So that is kind of our community, it is quite local and quite word of mouth and I think the only other time that I have played board games is where I have gone to *Nineworlds* which is a convention down in London. Are you aware of that one?

**Interviewer -** I'm not actually, no.

**Rebecca -** Ok, so *Nineworlds*, it calls itself a geek-fest, it is about three days of people talking about geek related culture and academia and literature and all sorts of other things but they also have board gaming and things like that. So, yeah I have played some games there and that has been quite a fun atmosphere because everyone knows what they are signing up for, it is there to just come along, be sociable, everyone knows that they are with people who think in probably a

similar way to them and they are fairly inclusive actually and that is the entire ethos of the convention, is to be inclusive so that helps.

**Interviewer -** Yeah, it sounds quite similar to the *UK Games Expo* that is in Birmingham.

**Rebecca -** Mmm, oh sorry there was one other, I just remembered, we did the London *RPG Meetup*, God I think it must have been about a year ago I think and that was again, really awesome. That was downstairs in some pub or something and again it was fairly evenly split, quite a lot of women, a lot of men though but yeah it was fun to definitely try different games with them like I, erm what is that one called again, is it called live action role playing? I can't remember. But someone gave us a scenario and that was quite challenging in its own way but a lot of fun.

**Interviewer -** Good, can you tell me about any memorable experiences that you have had with your gaming group?

**Rebecca -** Yes, we were running a *Pathfinder* via *Dungeons and Dragons* and I have a, my character is a rogue, and this was when I was still fairly early on with I was playing this so I didn't really know the tropes quite yet, I should have known this one but our characters were walking through a field and the GM who is one of our good friends says that there are some scarecrows in the field and we had just been attacked by goblins or something and I was certain that one of these things was going to come to life because in my theory of horror film tropes there was something that was going to come to life so I started shooting arrows. So, I hit one and nothing happened and the next one he said "Ah, something twitches within it" so I hit it again and this time a bird flies out and I thought right third one, this is going to be it and so I didn't even wait he asked if I was sure if I didn't want to do a perception check and I was like nope, because you are going to screw me over so I just shot it and he said, 'You hear a scream come from the scarecrow' and I was like why is it screaming and he said 'You find out it is one of the villagers that you have been sent to save and they have been tied up as scarecrows' and I was like you bastard! and he'd decided that because I was going to be so gung-ho about it that he was going to make sure that I accidentally injured one of the people I was coming to save. I think it was to teach a lesson about not just barging in and shooting everything which was sort my tactic at that point, but yeah, it still gets

brought up now where he just sort of says ‘Are you sure you want to?’ and it’s like the third time he’s says it I’ll be like shut up (laughs). Yeah, he kind of set me up with that one and ever since I was a very very cautious rogue after that.

**Interviewer -** Do you have any favourite games and why do you enjoy them?

**Rebecca -** I think in terms of board games, I think *Ticket to Ride* because it is so simple and straightforward. It is fun but I’d probably, actually the one I like the most at the moment that we have really only just started playing is *Lords of Waterdeep*, because whilst I like *Ticket to Ride* and there is that interactive kind of combativeness to it, *Lords of Waterdeep*, you are actually interacting with other people and you have to talk to them and you have to discuss things with them. I suppose I like *Pandemic* for that same reason, although *Pandemic* is a little more difficult though because you do get the people who know and who can see the meta of it and say “If you do this, and you do this...” and they end up taking control and it feels slightly less co-operative and more didactic whereas *Lords of Waterdeep*, you can still play with each other and fight against each other but you don’t necessarily screw the same person over every single round, you have got an opportunity to do that. So, that is probably my favourite at the moment definitely.

**Interviewer -** Good, so how do you purchase your games and why?

**Rebecca -** Mostly, we buy them from shops and we don’t tend to buy them online for a couple of reasons, I think we once ordered it online before and the box turned up quite damaged but it is not really worth it when you have got quite a lot of stuff in there. So yeah, we used to go up too *Orcs Nest* in London but we have got some places round here that are local little shops that have them now and *Waterstones*, of all things that has probably been the weirdest thing for us, seeing games that we like like *Pandemic* and things turning up in *Waterstones*. Yeah, theres a little shop that is dedicated to game that we will go to because we like supporting indie shops and also they are fairly reasonably priced honestly.

**Interviewer -** And tell me about the first time that you went into a board gaming store?

**Rebecca -** I think, probably the first time I went in was when I went to *Orc's Nest* when it was predominantly a board game store and it is a very small shop with very narrow spaces between the shelves with a lot of people in there. A lot of them were men and I felt quite intimidated, and all I wanted to do was buy games because, this is so terrible but because I thought the box art looked good so I remember being quite taken with *Alchemists*. It was a really complicated game and I was just saying that it looked really awesome and my husband was just like "I would not recommend this for your first game, this is incredibly complicated, maybe we should look at some other stuff first but if you really want it we will come back to it but maybe you should look up how to play it before you decide." (laughs), so I went with my husband because I felt totally out of my depth when I was in there, it was intimidating honestly, it just felt like there was so much there, lots of people and again mostly men and I have not really had the best of experiences when going into comic book shops where I tend to get stared at as a woman, "Is she lost..." you know because I usually come in dressed in office gear and things people think that I am shopping for like a niece or nephew or something and I have to clarify no this for me, I can't wear a t-shirt and jeans all the time so yeah there is definitely an expectation of what we should look like... maybe it is changing I don't know but I think certainly in the more traditional stores like *Orc's Nest* it was definitely a weird one.

**Interviewer -** Can you tell me any memorable experiences that you've had when buying games or going into board gaming stores?

**Rebecca -** Trying to think now, I mean *Orc's Nest* is probably the main one but I can think of one good experience and one bad experience. One good experience was that I remember going into a store and picking up this box and the woman that was behind the counter was going "Oh, that's a really awesome game" and she was just talking to me about it and then the guy behind the counter also said "Oh yeah, if you do this..." and they were just having a nice chat about it and it was really lovely to have that experience. I think the negative experience that I had was again, *Orc's Nest* and it is London it is busy and they probably don't have much time for people asking questions but I was quite new and I just remember getting this look when I, I can't even remember what board game it was now but I think it might have been *Carcassonne*? I never know how to

pronounce that game but I remember picking that up because I wanted to pick something that I could play with my niece and nephew and I remember saying, “Would this be something that in your opinion, I could play with somebody who is around and about seven or eight?” and they just sort of looked at me as if it was the dumbest question they have ever heard and they sort of went “Well, I mean you could but it is a really complicated game, are you sure this is something...” and it was quite condescending to be honest because I knew it was complicated but I was asking you for your opinion if it was but they just didn’t seem to have a lot of time. I mean, that was only one person to be fair to them but I don’t remember ever seeing them there again so maybe their winning personality didn’t last the long but yeah, it just felt really strange to be, having had inclusive and positive experiences to having a guy pretty much asking my why I didn’t know this and why I was such an idiot for not knowing it or why did I even pick it up not knowing anything about it, I’m like well I don’t know everything about it and I am quite happy to admit that, so yeah that was really the only negative one whereas everything else has been pretty positive actually but it’s just that one that sticks out unfortunately.

**Interviewer -** Have you engaged in the wider community and if so how? So, that could be online, tournaments, events, conventions anything like that...

**Rebecca -** Well I mentioned the *Nine Worlds* convention which is probably one way that I’ve done it, the *London Indie RPG* was one but unfortunately, I don’t know why but we just haven’t been back. I think it was because it takes... I work in London but my husband doesn’t so in terms of convenience it is not easy to do. There is as I say, a gaming day but it is quite insular, everyone already knows each other and it feels a bit cliquey and I’m sure they would be quite welcoming but yeah it still feels like there’s a barrier of trying to get to know people and not feeling instantly inclusive just puts me off a little bit. I haven’t online, I’ll be honest and I think that is more from my own prejudice than anything else, I went on a *Pathfinder* website a while ago and went on their forums because I had some questions about things and I was writing some fiction and it was kind of inspired around my character and I wanted to know like ‘would this work in this universe?’ and I don’t know what their gender was but again, I got a kind of condescending thing of “Well, I don’t know why your character would do that.” and lots of asking and I wasn’t looking for them to approve of my character, I was asking if it seems realistic that that could happen and

lots of people were telling me, they seemed to have a very straight forward understanding of morality, there was no ambiguity, you were either good or you were bad and you couldn't have a good character doing anything that might be slightly shady and there was this really rigid thinking and it kind of put me off because I thought well if there's this rigidity there, I play in quite a, my character is quite morally ambiguous (laughs) and I'm not sure I am a good fit for this. So yeah, I kind of, that wasn't really a great experience and I've not gone back on there, it just felt a bit rigid and they wouldn't take any possible exception to a rule, what's that word, rule-lawing and it felt like rules lawyers ruled the board and I just want to play games and have fun and we are lucky that we have a DM that focuses on that and that will go "Well if you do something that it awesome I'll allow it" or "If you can describe it to me that is totally kick ass then fine you can do it!" so yeah I steer clear of online for that reason, it's just not a good way for me to interact with the community and I prefer doing it in person.

**Interviewer -** That's fine, tell me about any disappointing experiences that you have had when engaging with board games or the community? I know that you have touched on some already there.

**Rebecca -** Yeah, I have touched on that one, I think the only really disappointing one is like I said when I went to the local board gaming event that they put on once a month and it felt like there are people that already knew each other which is fine, but they didn't really want to integrate any new people. Instead of saying 'Oh ok, these people are new how about we do this and do this and try and split the groups up a bit' it all felt like they all had their groups and they played with their people and again, I get it but it also felt like we were just there to use a space it didn't really feel like we were gaming with other people we just happened to be sharing the same space. So, that was a bit disappointing and again maybe it turned out that we could be a bit more out there or we could have done a few other things but I know, for example, my husband just kind of wading straight in and was like 'I want to play that game, I'm going to go join that group' and he was a lot more forthright about it but they didn't seem to go out of their way to include us which I think after having gone to *Nine Worlds*, you unexpectedly get used to this level of inclusive "Yeah join us, come and sit down!" and that's great and people are generally more enthusiastic

about the whole thing. So that was slightly sad but you know I get it as well that people come to game and maybe have their own set up on how they want to do that.

**Interviewer -** In your own opinion, how are games marketed and what is there target audience?

**Rebecca -** I don't know if it has changed, I'll be honest, the way that they are marketed tends to be... I see a lot of *Kickstarter's* to be honest and I am interested in how they play out but they always focus on the details, so how this thing comes with all these detailed coins and it is all about the object and the skill that goes into them and they are really appealing to people who value that kind of tiny little details, the quality of something, people who are really invested in that side of things. I think it might be changing, I see a lot of *YouTube* series' where they seem to be trying to promote it now as something for everyone to join in with. So like, *Acquisitions Incorporated* for example, they have been pushing quite a bit with *Penny Arcade*. They have been pushing *D&D* through them and it has picked up a huge amount via that I think because it has been promoted as this fun thing that you can play with all your friends, it's not just for geeks and that anyone can join in. I think celebrities doing it as well has probably helped with that, but I think it has definitely moved more towards it being fun activity that you can play with your friends and it doesn't have to be *Monopoly*, board games aren't just *Game of Life* and *Monopoly*, these are amazing intricate things and they can be lots of fun and you can screw over people whilst having a good time and you know you won't be getting bored to death as you inevitably just move around a board just trying to pass go. So, I think they are trying to market them as more fun and like an alternative to going out with your friends, you can spend the night in and it's more acceptable to do that now. That seems to be the way that it is coming across, and in the videos that I have seen they are definitely focussed upon promoting it with people who are playing and people who are friends and get on with each other and show them having a really fun time. Whereas the *Kickstarter's* tend to focus more upon the fiddle-y details and the craftsmanship and that kind of neediness that some of the more old school gamers have. I personally know of a friend who has spent, I think it was *Myth*, which unfortunately the *Kickstart* dissolved but he would have been prepared to spend a lot of money on that because of the detail and everything and with *Kickstarter* that is definitely how you sold it.



**Interviewer -** And what do you think about the representations of women within the board gaming community?

**Rebecca -** That is difficult to know, I'll be honest, when you say representations do you mean the games themselves or that representations of people having their mind in the board gaming community?

**Interviewer -** A bit of both really.

**Rebecca -** Ok, I don't think that there is much variation in a lot of board games and how they represent women, they all tend to be terribly attractive, thin and white women again, fine but there is no variety there (laughs) or if there are any other characters they are always scantily clad especially if they are fantasy, you know elves and things like that. I remember getting annoyed with my friend because there was a thing, I think it was the *Myth* game and I looked at the mini figs and just went "Why does the guy basically have a toga and she has a cloth bikini, what is that about!?" and he said "Well, you know because..." and I was like "No, there is clearly a cloth that is big enough for him to wrap around his body so why isn't there a cloth big enough for her? Why does she have to split it into two?" and I remember I got really annoyed because it just seemed so stupid to do that and the whole chain-kini thing as well but in terms of the community itself, again, from what I have seen, there definitely seems to be a drive towards more women taking part in it, between them kind of leading it almost to streams that I watch with *RPG*'s for example, like there was a *Dragonage* board game stream and all of the players were women, I see that in things like *Critical Role* there is more women being put in there and they seem to be getting a little bit more diverse. Still quite painfully white and thin but at least there are more women out there that look more like women, I'd say normal but again a bit more variety in how they look. I wouldn't say that there is a massively diverse mix of women in terms of race, ethnicity and general body size for example but I think we have started to move away from the idea that they are all really thin and attractive and wearing low cut tops or chain-kini's and things which is always a good thing. When I go to the conventions there are people who are in cosplay anyway but yeah there is now such a big mix and a lot of the people there are women now, majority tend to be women and it

seems more positive. I know there is likely to be a push back against it, there always is when the feeling of mens spaces being invaded by women, you know you only need to look at the *Star Wars* film recently to know that but it does feel like it is actually becoming more like, you know, if women can join in these groups then it is a good thing and they are not dumbing it down, they are merely saying that they like this stuff too and you just never knew we did. So, I hope there aren't still a lot of men who think women are only joining board gaming because they are there with their husbands or because they are there to be a 'fake geek girl'. I think that is still quite alive and well but I know from my own gaming group that we treat each other very much as equals so that has helped me kind of push back against anything that I have come across in person, like "No, I do get a say in stuff".

**Interviewer -** And what are the enjoyable experiences are when engaging with board games and the community?

**Rebecca -** I think, for me, it is probably that it is a way of interacting with people that is, I know what I'm doing with them, I have some social anxiety so put me in a conversation with random people and I have to think to remind myself to ask them how they are doing and what they did over Christmas and try and think of things to say and it's really hard because I could care less and I find that kind of talk really difficult because it seems to meaningless, but put me in a board game as like, I know what I'm doing it's kind of a social lubricant and we can talk to each other. It takes some of the pressure off because you have a reason to be there so you are able to socialise with other people without having this pressure of artifice to it. It also is a nice way to interact with people, well as long as, they don't get grumpy about stuff (laughs) there has been a couple of occasions where somebody has felt like they have done the wrong thing in a co-op game, for example, and then felt like they have let everyone else down but that's more that person and that sort of then colours everything because really we just want you to play a game, you know please don't self regulate. I think for the most part that people are there because they want to socialise in a specific way, it allows you to build new memories, like I said about my friend with this constant bringing up of my rogue accidentally shooting an innocent villager and I rolled incredibly well on this as well so I nearly killed her and he does bring that up quite a lot, so yeah, it is that kind of way of forming new memories and interactions with friends which I never felt when a group of

friends wanted to go out drinking and I couldn't hear anyone talking in the club and I was just bored. This actually allows me to interact with people in a way that I don't have to be drunk to do, it is always nice to do that but you don't have to. Also, I think it's because you are on an equal footing, there is still the possibility that you will get talking down to because you are a women and clearly you have not played this before, but that evaporates very quickly once you kind of get into and you realise that yeah, maybe you don't know this but want to get into it. When I went to the *Indie RPG*, my husband asked "Do you understand what you have just gotten yourself into?" because I had never played a live action role playing game where everyone is just acting basically and I thought, oh that's what that is, ok this is going to be interesting... and it was a really new experience and it put me in a very strange situation that made me feel much more confident so it allowed me to build more confidence there because suddenly I was subverting everything that was going on, I'm sure I probably annoyed one person but I was just subverting everything that was going on and it was huge fun, to play off that and to gain confidence in a way that I genuinely didn't think I would be able to. I think those are the main things that I can think of.

**Interviewer -** Good! Would you say there are any negative aspects to board gaming or the community?

**Rebecca -** It is hard for me to talk about the wider community and my experience has been generally quite inclusive along the way but I think there is definitely a bit of gatekeeping, when I listen to podcasts about gaming and things like that they all seem to be white men and there is very few female voices that are taken seriously within the community. When I went online to the *Pathfinder* one, I could pretty much tell straight away that the person that was talking to me was a guy because they were being quite patronising about everything and I know that most of the time, I have never experienced that with women, they tend to be more inclusive. So, I don't think there is as much as there used to be but I do feel like there is a little bit of gatekeeping still and I can see that online, I see that on *Twitter* and I see female writers being called out or being told that they are turning everything into SJW stuff because they, you know people are moaning about having more women when it's just one more woman in something that is predominantly dominated by men. So yeah, it feels like any sort of attempt at representations or an increase in representations does get a little bit of push back because it feels like everyone just piles on the SJW crap but that

is a knee jerk reaction. Personally, face to face with people, I don't think I have had that many negative experiences at all, it has only ever been when it's been online, where it has kind of festered and people can hide behind stuff. I think that is really, in terms of negative experiences, that is the only place I've really found it massively anyway.

**Interviewer -** Yes that's fine and this is just final question now, what advice would you give to somebody who is wanting to get into the board gaming hobby?

**Rebecca -** Erm, I would say start small, if you can start off with a group of friends first so you can build your confidence with it because it can be quite daunting talking to a store and finding yourself surrounding by games. If you can't then there are local groups, I mean *Facebook* is amazing for this, *Twitter* is amazing for this, I have been able to find out about stuff via that that in the days before the internet I wouldn't have known about it so if people are looking for gaming groups then just go on *Facebook* or go on *Twitter* because you will find them really quickly and if you by yourself, like when I said when I went to our local one, we went as a group so that might be why they didn't feel like they would integrate us but I do remember one kid coming along and they did make a special effort there with him because he was a kid and he was on his own, they made an effort so I think if you are on your own and wanting to get into it then the gaming groups will be more inclusive to you because they are going to recognise the people that are on their own because they have probably been on their own and they have been isolated and told that nobody understands what you are talking about or why you like these things then those people will be more likely to integrate you or to try and include you as much as possible. In terms of what somebody should do themselves, is just listen and learn for a bit and you know, if you want to research then go online, go on *YouTube* there are lots of videos and tutorials of things but yeah, just let people guide you and then once you gain your confidence then you can run with it.

**Interviewer -** Good, so that is all of the questions that I had for you. Is there anything you would like to add or anything you would like to ask me?

**Rebecca -** I think the only thing I would say is, that it is becoming more inclusive. I think that is definitely the case from where I have seen it but I don't think that is just in places with

like a big city mentality, where it is a bit more integrated already. I don't know how much of that is happening at local levels honestly, and it is still very white. I say this as a woman of mixed race because I notice it, I go to conventions and it is really white, again, I get it, you know, we live in the UK where there are a lot of white people but it is painfully obvious to somebody like me that there's either people who are from different racial backgrounds don't feel like they can or because there is this stereotype of the white geeky guy who is just pretty much on his way to be a writer. I think that has put people off a little bit, that association with geeky males becoming more pushed towards pepe memes and Trump politics and things. I don't think it is much the case in the UK, I think we have pushed back against that quite a bit but yeah, it is still a way to go of integrating people from different ethnic backgrounds and things definitely.

**Interviewer -** Yes definitely. If that is everything then I would like to say thank you so much for taking the time out to do this.

**Rebecca -** I hope it all goes well!

**Interviewer -** Hopefully yes! What will happen is when everything submitted, I will give a link or something to everyone who has helped contribute so that if they want they can have a look through it.

**Rebecca -** Oh cool, that would be great! Thank you very much and good luck with it!

**Interviewer -** Thank you! Bye.

**Rebecca -** Bye.

**(End of Interview)**

## **Appendix 11 - “Kickstarter Exclusive” - Rena Delacreaux**

**Interviewer:** Katie Peaker

**Interviewee:** Rena Delacreaux

**Interview Setting:** Over Skype.

**(Start of Interview)**

**Rena -** Hello?

**Interviewer -** Hello is that Rena?

**Rena -** Yes, speaking.

**Interviewer -** Hi, it's Katie.

**Rena -** Hiya.

**Interviewer -** Before we get into my questions, is there anything that you would like to ask me before we go ahead or are you happy to just get straight into it?

**Rena -** I'm happy to get straight into it as long as you will forgive the not really dried hair!

**Interviewer -** (laughs) No that's fine! So can you tell me when you first got into tabletop gaming?

**Rena -** I first got into tabletop gaming... my first love really is tabletop RPG's like I started playing *D&D* in my second year at uni and that was in January 2014 and it was my ex that got me into it because she was very into board games and she had played *D&D* at

school but then stopped when she got to uni and then she wanted to start again, so she asked me if I would play, got one of her friends from school involved and got a couple of other friends involved and that was sort of how I got into it. I cut my teeth on third edition *D&D* really and then after that I started going to games expo's every year and I have gone to the *UK Games Expo* four times now, I think and yeah I just, once I started playing RPG's that was really what got the ball rolling and then I did play *Warhammer* before, I picked that up in the first year of uni. I started collecting 'Tomb Kings', I am awful at it (laughs) yeah I'm absolutely shit! But yeah, my first love will always be *D&D* and tabletop RPG's but since then I have sort of got into a bit of everything really, as I say war-games, RPG's and board games. Board games is the more recent hobby or interest but I probably got into board games more because of the internet, I started watching *TableTop* on *YouTube* and *The Dice Tower* and things like that and it sort of snowballed from there. That was in my third year at uni and since I left that I have got into that a bit more.

**Interviewer -** Ok, so how often do you play games and who do you play them with?

**Rena -** Not as often as I'd like! My RPG group, we try and play once a month but it doesn't always happen, like we haven't played this month and it's not going to because we can't get our timetables to align but we try and play *D&D* at least once a month. As for board games, it is difficult to say because it is more sporadic, like sometimes I will play a game with my Dad in the evening, sometimes I will meet up with some girlfriends. There is a core group of gamers but like there is only one group of gamers that I will regularly meet with and that's the once a month but then I will play a board game with my Dad, once a month there is a group of girlfriends who wouldn't consider themselves gamers but we meet up once every three months and play board games and sometimes if I am meeting up with my general girlfriends then we will play a board game together, sometimes I will take a board game over to my boyfriends and we will play. It is not as regular as I would like really. Yeah, the most regular of gamers I have is with *D&D* when it is at least once a month, or at least we try.

**Interviewer -** What is the demographic of your gaming group? So in this case, it would probably be your *D&D* group.

**Rena -** My *D&D* group, there are (names people in the group counting on her hand), six of us, two girls and four guys. I am the oldest at 23 and the youngest is 22 because we pretty much all met at uni so...

**Interviewer -** Ok, that's fine. Can you tell me how you discovered your group or community that you play with?

**Rena -** One friend, I was friends with at school so we have known each other going on ten years now but then we lost touch a bit and then when he came to the same, because he is an academic year younger than me, when he came to the same uni as me we met up again and then he introduced me to one of the other people in the group who is now my boyfriend and then he introduced me to another person and I sort of met the other friend through those two as well because the three of them were living together. The other girl in the group, I was living with in second year, so I lived in halls in second year and she was a first year and we just met and had a lot of interests in common because we both like anime so we became friends like that and then she said she had an interest in tabletop gaming and wanted to try out *D&D*, so we brought her into the group in that way.

**Interviewer -** Oh that's good!

**Rena -** Yeah, there have been other people that have joined and dropped out but the core group is yeah, myself, my friend from school, my boyfriend and my friend who I used to live with and the others just tend to drop in and out as and when, they are the latest editions to the group.

**Interviewer -** Tell me about any memorable experiences within your gaming group.

**Rena -** Oh gosh! (laughs) this current group or throughout the whole?

**Interviewer -** Yeah throughout the whole of you playing, if you can think of many then that's fine!



**Rena -**

(laughs) So one experience that really stands out in my memory is when we were playing *Pathfinder* and we were playing on *Roll20* because it was when I had another friend who I have lost touch with now and my ex, who I don't speak to anymore. My friend in the group, who is still in the core group, Nikki, we were playing *Pathfinder* on *Roll20* because the friend whom I've lost touch with was doing a year abroad for uni so it was easier for us to do it online. We were doing 'Rise of the Runelords' and my ex was GM-ing and we had these little mini's on the screen and there was one that was brought in that we all just called the purple man and my one friend, she rolled to rob him but she rolled like a 1 or 2 so she actually ended up accidentally groping him and from there we sort of developed this in joke, like the mini was purple and we sort of developed this in joke about the purple man. Like whenever we went round a corner and the GM would say "Ok you've gone round the corner and you see..." and we would all be shouting "The purple man!" and this went on for weeks and weeks because we played fairly regularly back then, we played once every two weeks sort of at the latest. We finally got to the big boss fight and we got round the corner and the GM just lost it and we were just sat wondering what was so funny and asking her to come on and tell us what we are up against or what was happening and she just laughed and then moved the mini on the screen and it was the purple man and we couldn't finish that night because we were just laughing so hard that this person that we had thought was totally inconsequential was actually the puppet master behind all this stuff that we had been doing. This character had become the butt of all of our jokes and then suddenly we were actually faced with it and yeah we were just wetting ourselves laughing and yeah, that one really stands out... what else... There is a *Call of Cthulhu* adventure that we played, oh gosh, ok I say adventure but it is kind of becoming a campaign that a friend of mine runs, set in Soviet Russia because he is a history graduate so it is set in Soviet Russia. There was this one bit, the party had split up and we were doing investigations and one person, who I knew from school that I'd lost touch with and then got into gaming again, he got seduced by a woman who had an auxiliary tentacle... and he just kept rolling sanity checks and he was fine for all of them and he was going yeah, I'm going along with this and apparently I'm really into it! His girlfriend was also in the game, which just made us laugh because since then we are always teasing them both about his Eldritch preferences. What else has there been... oh gosh, there was a time when we went off map because the first adventure we ever played was, I'm actually using it to lean my mouse on

now, I don't know if you can see this but it is the *Ruins of Castle Ravenloft*. This was were me and my boyfriend met, we went off map really really badly and we all had had enough and just decided we were going wherever, we just said that we were going to keep walking East and the DM was questioning what we were doing and the DM had to just make it all up and bear in mind that she only really ran campaigns from books, she didn't make her own stuff up so when we went off map she was floundering and you could tell and we turned up in the town of 'Tent' that was populated by old people, all old people and one goblin. Oh and there was a pig which my now boyfriend stole and ran away with to make bacon out of! That leads to another story when I didn't actually know his real name for weeks and weeks and I just kept calling him by his characters name, eventually I had to take my friends off to one side and ask what was Aznax's real name. Oh gosh, that has brought me onto another story... we were playing this adventure where the DM was celebrating and I can't remember what she was celebrating but she was drinking whilst still playing, she was the only one that was drinking and as we went on, she got drunker and drunker and she had no idea what was going on and it was clear that she had no idea what was going on so we were just sat there laughing more at her than with her really, which sounds cruel now that I think about it! But we were in this castle which we had cleared it out of the goblins and we were trying to find something and we came into this room that had a goblin just simply sat behind a desk and this became the goblin administrator Brenda and after that Brenda became a long standing joke because Brenda kind of became like *Roz* from *Monsters Inc.* So you'd go up to Brenda with a query and she'd just go "Take a number get in line!" and this whole joke came out of like Brenda's sister who is on a low calorie diet of Splenda and Brenda's cousin who doesn't wear belts who's called Suspender and all of that came out of this one tidbit of the DM's brain and the next day she didn't remember and we had to explain to her because she had been so pissed at that point. There have been a lot of moments (laughs).

**Interviewer -** Yes, but they all seem to have brought you all together more as a gaming group, you know having all of these inside jokes and everything.

**Rena -** Oh absolutely! I mean we have group chats and stuff, and if one of us ever comes across a particularly hideous garden gnome then it goes down as 'I found Brenda!' so yeah.

**Interviewer -** Do you have any favourite games and why do you enjoy them?

**Rena -** Board games or tabletop games?

**Interviewer -** Both, we will go with...

**Rena -** Ok, well in terms of RPG's, probably fifth edition *D&D* because it whilst I cut my teeth on third edition, fifth edition is the one that I DM, so I know it the best and that is what my current gaming group is and where are current gaming experiences have come from. In terms of board games, I'm probably going to have to go with *Mysterium* because I wasn't expecting to love it as much as I did but I've got so many different groups to play, like I have my regular gaming group to play it with, I've got my non gaming girlfriends to play it, I got my parents to play it, including my non gaming Mum and yeah, I got it as a bargain because I wasn't sure if I wanted it or not and then I started playing it and I just thought wow this is actually fantastic so yeah, I just love that game.

**Interviewer -** Good, how do you purchase your games and why?

**Rena -** I always check them out on the internet first because I don't want to spend £30-£40 on a big box game only for it to be crap or unplayable because I do know people who have been stung by games like that, who bought games just because it looked cool and then they have just not been able to fathom the rules. So, I go online and I try and find videos of people playing the games because that helps me get around the rules a little bit. I will ask around, I will ask people what's good, mostly my friends or at a games expo I will go and try different things and see what I think. If the creator is there then I will chat to the creator and yeah, stuff like that really.

**Interviewer -** So if you decide to make a purchase do you buy that online or do you go into a store?

**Rena -** It varies, sometimes I will go into a shop if I want to have a look at the game itself, so like if I want to see what bits it comes with then I will go into the shop. There is a shop here in Birmingham city centre that I go too that is quite good. I will look on *Amazon*, but I don't always like buying them from *Amazon* because they don't pay tax so if I can help it I would rather go in store or I will wait till a games expo. I will always have a shopping list in the run up, I think that if I wait till *Games Expo* I can haggle a little bit, the prices will be a bit lower anyway so. I have never been disappointed and I've never not being able to find something that I wanted even if it's a game that's maybe a little bit old or something that wasn't so popular, I have always been able to find it at *Games Expo* so yeah, that is my biggest gaming purchase of the year. I save all of my Christmas money and I add to the pot as I go along throughout the year for *Games Expo* and then that is my biggest gaming spend of the year. So I probably, thinking about it across a year that is probably where I get most of my games from, others I will ask for like my birthday or Christmas and stuff, just in terms of my own purchases that it probably it.

**Interviewer -** Tell me about the first time you went into a board gaming store?

**Rena -** First time I went into a board gaming shop, there were a couple of people already in there and I went in with my then girlfriend and I had never been to the shop before, she had and I hadn't so I was a bit nervous about going in. I don't really know why, but yeah I was a bit nervous and I was talking quite a bit and for some reason we started having a discussion about whether if you dropped a porcupine on someone whether it would do piercing damage or bludgeoning damage and we ended up getting the shop assistants involved. I think it was just me, her and two shop assistants, it was midweek and I ended up getting *Letters from Whitechapel* because I wanted to get it at the *Games Expo* but I didn't and yeah, so I went in and bought *Letters from Whitechapel* and after that it was alright, I haven't been particularly nervous about going back since if that makes sense.

**Interviewer -** Yeah, tell me some of your memorable experiences when buying games or going into board gaming stores.

**Rena -** Some of my more memorable experiences about buying games?

**Interviewer -** Yes, if you have any.

**Rena -** At the *Games Expo* just gone, I went Friday and Saturday and on the Saturday I went with my Dad. I saw a game I wanted and this is going to sound awful, I was wearing a Cthulhu t-shirt and I made sure to wear a push up bra under the t-shirt and erm (laughs), I saw a game I wanted but it didn't have the price on so I went to the male vendor and asked how much and he said "£27.00" and then he sort of looked at me and then said, "For you, I would do it for £22" and I was like "Aww, thank you" and yeah (laughs) when I came back my Dad wanted to know why I'd told him to go over there and I said I'd tell him later. So yeah, that's one I can't really think of many others... I remember when I went to a *ComicCon* and I was taking someone else, it was the girl I used to babysit and I was taking her to her first convention and there was a stall that had games and I was really in it to buy anime merch or anything like that because I haven't been big into the anime scene for a while now but when I was going round I found a gaming stall and I was chuffed to bits that I had found a gaming stall and so I ended up having a really long chat with the guy who was there and I ended up buying *Sushi Go*. I can't really think of any others to be honest.

**Interviewer -** No that's fine. Have you engaged in the wider gaming community and if so how? So this could be like online, tournaments, events, conventions obviously you have already mentioned that you to *UKGE*.

**Rena -** That's really all I do, there was a tabletop society, well there still is. There's tabletop society at uni but I don't really go because I have heard stuff that puts me off, like I've hear that the smell alone is enough to put people off and that is from male gamers who are big into the scene who just say that they don't like it. I will occasionally browse *BoardGameGeek* but I don't really post or anything. It is mostly *Games Expo*, because thinking about it my gaming experience is more insular and it is only really at *Games Expo* that I branch out a bit and I mean, I enjoy talking to people and I always sign up for games and stuff, like tabletop games and I always play at least one fantasy game and atlas one horror game and I always meet people through that and I find that fun but I never keep in touch with anyone and never make the effort to meet up with

people the following year. Sometimes it so happens that I end up gaming with the same people for a couple of things and that's fun but apart from that I am quite insular, if that makes sense?

**Interviewer -** Yeah, that's fine, can you tell me about any disappointing experiences that you have had when engaging with board games or the community?

**Rena -** Let's have a think about disappointing experiences... Oh yeah, when I was at *GamesExpo* in 2016, I signed up for, what I try to do is try and sign up for a game that I have never tried and when I was browsing systems, I saw a *Doctor Who* game and I know someone who knows someone who worked on the *Doctor Who* RPG so I thought great I will go and play it and then I'll come up and tell me friend who can then tell his friend that I really enjoyed it because I do enjoy *Doctor Who*. I got to the table, I was early but there was one other person who was there so I sat down and started chatting and it turned out that because I am quite into collect old *D&D* stuff like rule books and old boxes and things like that so we started talking about books that we had both read from the *Dragonlance* series. Some people joined who I had played with on the previous day and some more people joined, a woman turned up with a baby in a pram and we were all sat waiting and all the other games around us started but we were just sat there looking at each other wondering who is the GM... and then someone went to ask one of the staff members what was going on and they said that they would find out and get back to us so we waiting a bit and then staff came back and said "We don't know what is going on, it looks like your GM hasn't turned up." and I was a bit disappointed because I still haven't played the *Doctor Who* game because there wasn't one that I could sign up for last year but yeah, that was a bit disappointing and what they said was that we could either go and get out money back for the ticket because we had to pay for the tickets or we can drop in on another game. So there was a guy on the table next to us who was running fifth edition *D&D* and he had had some people who hadn't turned up so he said that he had three spaces if anyone wanted to drop in so I dropped into that game instead but I wanted to try the *Doctor Who* game and was geared up to try a new system so that was a bit disappointing.

**Interviewer -** Yeah and a convention is obviously the perfect place of where you can do that so yeah that would be disappointing.

**Rena -** Yes it was, other than that I can't really think of anything that was disappointing.

**Interviewer -** No, that's fine.

**Rena -** Maybe just instances of where games are just a little bit expensive and it is a bit out of my price range, like I want to get the *Legend of Drizzt* board game but, to be fair it does come with a lot of mini's but for a game that has limited replay-ability it is still at the £40.00-£45.00 mark. I'm waiting for *Games Expo* for that one, I'm going to try and haggle a bit this year.

**Interviewer -** In your opinion, how are games marketed and what is their target audience?

**Rena -** I think increasingly so, marketing is branching out but I think there is still very much a perception that it is a male dominated hobby like the girls who I know who play games have got into games through other girls and I'm no exception. I admit that most of the friends that consider themselves gamers are male but I have introduced a lot of girls to games who I don't think would have gravitated towards it as a hobby whatever the reason may be, so I think the marketing is getting better but with 70+ years history of marketing almost exclusively towards men, it is a difficult one. So yeah, that is kind of how I feel about it.

**Interviewer -** Ok, what do you think about the representations of women within board games?

**Rena -** Within the games themselves?

**Interviewer -** Yes.

**Rena -** Ok... improving. I can speak more about RPG's a little bit with more relevance. I think RPG's are making absolute strides within their representations because you just

have to flip between the pages of the fifth edition handbook and you see a massive range of women, you see ethnically diverse women and you see women in partial armour and which just compared to the third edition book is a huge step and even compared to the *Pathfinder* book, it is a huge thing. (the conversation drops and lags here so it is inaudible) oh sorry did we break up there?

**Interviewer -** Yeah sorry, could you repeat that last sentence for me sorry.

**Rena -** Basically what I was saying was that I have a fifth edition book with me that I can point at the screen to show what type of point I am making.

**Interviewer -** Yeah, you can show it.

**Rena -** Give me one sec... (whilst flipping through the fifth edition book) ok so it's just got, I don't know how well you can see that but there are female characters that aren't in support roles, who are in a variety of roles like you have got a spell caster and a rogue and in this picture it actually goes into detail that the dragon is female and I think that is absolutely amazing that tabletop games throughout the world no matter how dominated by men, there will always be women in present at a gaming table and I think that is fantastic. So RPG's in particular are making... sorry my cat is shouting at me give me a second. (calls to cat and goes to open the door). Sorry about that, I think in terms of board games it is most likely when you can choose to be a character, I think some board games are making efforts to sort of make it equally male and female but in some it is difficult. In the *Legend of Drizzt* game that I mentioned, I have played it before and there is only one option for a female character and I know that that is because the board game is based on the book and there is only really one female character in the main party if you like, so I understand where that is coming from but it would still be nice to see more women in that regard. I think it is improving and RPG's in particular are massively improving but there is still a way to go and we are not there yet.

**Interviewer -** Tell me what the enjoyable experiences are when engaging with board games and the community.



**Rena -** So, I'm playing through adventures that I wouldn't really get to try because you know, it costs a lot of money to go out and buy a whole new set of rulebooks or to go and buy a stack of new board games so to meet with people who have different resources to you so that you can try stuff is one of the more enjoyable things about interacting with the community at large. Meeting new people and being able to connect with people over a shared hobby and a shared love of gaming is good.

**Interviewer -** Would you say that there are any negative aspects to board gaming or the community?

**Rena -** The smell.

**Interviewer -** Elaborate on that for me.

**Rena -** (laughs) Gamers have a particular odour, yeah I didn't go to *Games Expo* when it was in the city centre but I have been told that when there are a lot of gamers together and they are in a building with no air conditioning, because I am always shocked with how cold the hotel is when I got the Hilton for bits of the expo, I'm always shocked and sat there in my winter woolies but I have been told be veterans from the convention that it is entirely necessary. I think there are individuals within the community who make it bad for the masses, so things like rules lawyers, I'm not fussed by rules to be perfectly honest. If something works, home brewed then just do it as far as I am concerned but I think rules lawyers, I find them really off putting if there is one in a game then I really don't want to be involved to be honest. People who can't take a joke or sore losers is what I guess I am trying to say and this is going to sound a bit ridiculous but me and my Dad always have a bit of banter about "Ooh I am the winner and you are the loser", we will do that but we know that it is in jest but I'm aware that sometimes people can take that a little bit too far.

**Interviewer -** Yeah or take offence to it, if they are on the receiving end of it.

**Rena -** Yeah and like just individuals. I have met people who I know are part of the community at large but who, if they ask me if they can join my gaming group, I will say no to them and I will say no to their face and make up reasons why but the truth is I just don't want them there because they are not nice people. I met someone through a friend who wanted to, well we started talking and when he found out that I was into gaming, he basically started trying to tell me how to DM and I was just sat there thinking I have been doing this for two years, I know what I'm doing but he just didn't believe me almost and I thought, you're what is making gamers look bad and you're what is putting off a lot of new people especially women.

**Interviewer -** Did you think that is was kind of targeted because you are female?

**Rena -** Absolutely, this is kind of similar but is more about nerd fandom at large, he asked me if I had *Wheel of Time* and I have only read the first eight books in the *Wheel of Time* and when he found out that I have read that many, he started quizzing me on absolutely every aspect of the series to ascertain that I had read it. He asked my boyfriend if he had read *Wheel of Time* and he has never read any but said yes just to get this guy to shut up and the guy accepted it without question. Yeah, although I did find out recently that he did get fired from *Wetherspoons* for sexist comments towards staff. So there is a bit a justice there, I am happier than I should be about that, that's going to make me sound really spiteful but yeah he has kind of hinted that he wants to join my gaming group and it has always been absolutely no way, we have enough people and we don't need anymore and I don't want you telling me how to run a game because you have a dick and I don't. Sorry to be cross about it but that person makes me very angry.

**Interviewer -** Just the final question now, what advice would you give to a female who is wanting to get into board gaming?

**Rena -** Just find games that you enjoy, find things that you are going to enjoy and things that you can get other people involved in and you know if it is just about starting board games in general I'd say just come to a *Games Expo*, try things out there and yeah just try and get your friends involved, be savvy in your investments for board games, get games that you can play with an unlimited replay-ability instead of games that you can only really play 10 times

and then you've finished all the scenarios so yeah. My advice would be to invest wisely and get games that you can replay a lot.

**Interviewer -** Ok, that's good! So that is all of the questions that I have, is there any additional comments that you would like to make or any questions that you would like to ask me or anything like that?

(The interview then turns more into a conversation of board games, interests of my own and master's degrees as Rena is studying for a master's degree also)

**(End of Interview)**

## Appendix 12 - “Kickstarter Exclusive” - Someone Subcool

**Interviewer:** Katie Peaker

**Interviewee:** Someone Subcool

**Interview Setting:** Over Email, the questions were emailed in full to Someone Subcool who completed and answered the questions before emailing her responses.

**(Start of Interview)**

**Question One -** Tell me how you first got into tabletop gaming.

**Someone Subcool -** I have always enjoyed gaming, even as a child I would play with my games alone. I think it was the systemising aspect of my nature. I had *Monopoly*, *Life*, *Parcheesi*, *Checkers*, cards, the basics for a kid in the 1960s-1970s. Around 1980, I got into *Backgammon* and even joined a club at the local college, There no gaming in my 20s other than large and raucous *Pictionary* tournaments. After I got married, aged 32, we started playing games. *Rummikub* and especially *Scrabble*. We got pretty into *Scrabble*, buying books and studying word lists. When I became ill (I have chronic pain - fibromyalgia), I spent some time online playing against other opponents and friends. In 2010, I saw a flyer at the library advising a gaming day in a private home sponsored by *Danger Room*, the local comic book store. I went to have something to do as I was not doing well with my health and my marriage and the door was opened. I was nervous at first because I was much older and female, but it was never an issue. I always felt welcome. My first game was *Friedemann Friese Fearsome Floors*. My guides, Frank and John, were experiences and had large collections and were willing to lend me a game now and then as I was incredibly broke at the time. I was immediately taken, but it took a couple years of casual play and then a couple more years of focused study or so before I really got into the level I am today. Currently, I feel I have earned a place at the table in terms of my knowledge and experience. I have also starting think about design, even taking a class and sketching out ideas but I am limited by my disability. I now have a nicely curated wall of games, about 100 including expansions. I recently had strangers over and they were all impressed for what it's worth. I am able to go into new situations and learn

games rapidly, though my first play is generally middling. I am able to easily learn games on my own and I am capable of distilling the game in order to be able to teach fairly effectively. I am a decent teacher, not the best, but solid. I have learned my tastes in games, am able to converse on an intelligent level about them, I know etiquette. I am able to weigh in on the geek and I am a Level 3 poster with one Good Citizenship Award. It is a perfect hobby for me, mentally engrossing. I have had periods with slightly more income and built my collection then, and through dogger pursuits of good deals and trades. Right now, I am back to very low income so I either have to use gift money, or sell something to even have the shipping money for trades.

**Question Two -** How often do you play games and who do you play them with?

**Someone Subcool -** I play games a few times a week, though there are period where I play much less and even now and then time I will take a break for a few months and pursue another interest, but in general games are now a stable part of my routine. I can get obsessed so I need to be careful, like I am abstinent when it comes to any online or video game or a CCG like *Magic the Gathering* as I would get in too deep. It has happened with other collections, so this is born out of wisdom. Board games are expensive enough, and have enough friction to limit my participation, though I spend a lot of time learning, researching and other gaming relation activities. I still have the monthly group noted in question one. There have been periods as long as a year when I could not go regularly, but I love Frank the host and now I am one of the veterans. This month in a group of about 16, I was the oldest member and that felt good. Frank is so supportive and like I said, always made me feel 100% welcome, even when my experience level was low. I also have another group I meet with semi-regularly, sometimes going a couple times a month, other times we will go a few months without seeing each other due to life circumstances. This group centers around a younger couple with kids so it's always at their house. There is another couple that now lives with them, assorted other drop in friends and me. In general, we are just gaming friends. There is also drop in gaming twice a week at another local nerd emporium, *Olympia Cards and Comics*, owned by Gabi, more on Gabi below. There is some overlap of people with the *Danger Room* group, but I have made the acquaintance of many fine competitors who have more resources than me, and so often have very current games. We also sporadically have a tiny local gaming convention, the latest this past weekend February 24th-25th. It's very low key and informal but great for people

who want to show off their games. Games are the focus, it is very low frills in terms of anything other than actual game playing. At home, I sometimes have friend over or now and then play at a random friends house. I have met people on *Facebook* and had them over. I now am beginning a monthly meetup with a younger couple, and met a couple more couples at the con this weekend and we have tentative plans to meet in the future. I also play a lot alone, about 80% or more of my total time on the hobby is spent alone - researching games, curating my collection, learning my games, printing aids and strategy articles, sorting the components, arranging my wall of games and then actually playing them. I do like solo games but I have no problem playing a multiplayer game alone. I even have a *BoardGameGeek* microbadge called "I am my own worst enemy - I play multiplayer games solo" I also have one that says "I arrange my games". I do it for learning but also because I like it. Some games, obviously, would not be suited to this but most of the ones in my collection I am able to do this with. In general, I enjoy playing solo and with people equally. Nothing beats an epic session or game with great people, nothing beats being alone and deeply engrossed in flow. I would game with others more often but am limited by my health - I have moderate to severe chronic pain, so it limits me. I do use games to help with my pain, I will discuss that below, I also do not own a car, so transport can be a barrier though I do have a couple of people who give me rides and I can make it to most places on my own. But having a car would make getting to the local game shop much easier. I know I am really lucky to have all these options! I wish my daughter was more interested, she loves games as a little girl and was quite good as a young teen, even beating an experienced gamer as *Dominant Species* and *Betrayal at House on the Hill*. She finds them boring now, though she enjoys part games occasionally with her friends.

**Question Three -** What is the demographic of your gaming group?

**Someone Subcool -** Mixed, 80% male, a couple of genderqueers and one transwoman. Mostly in their 30s and 40s with some in 20s and some in 50s. Most are white, but I have a couple of black friends in my closest groups and there are a few people of colour in the bigger community. This is mostly a function of living in a mostly white area. Many have families but not all, most are straight but not all. A fair amount are couples who game together. Most are middle class though some are lower income like myself. Pretty much everyone is just getting by, but a few people earn enough to spend more on games. A variety of professions, off the top of my head, I game with a

public defender, a few IT guys, state workers, a couple of guys who work in groceries, a couple artists, the guy who owns the comic book store, an occupational therapist, an air quality scientist, a write, a couple of librarians, an insurance guy, an actor, store assistant, retail managers, a veteran and students. I am a disable 55 year old white pansexual genderqueer who identifies as an artist/writer/activist.

**Question Four -** Can you tell me how you discovered the group/community that you play with?

**Someone Subcool -** See question one. Also, word of mouth about the second store, meeting people through both places, friends, met in the private group who were friends with my ex. I still go, he doesn't like to. As I have made more friends, the more we organise private gaming nights and the more people I meet.

**Question Five -** Tell me about any memorable experiences with your gaming group.

**Someone Subcool -** Our local cons are great, as is *International Tabletop Day* in April, full days of gaming! I love getting together for full days of gaming. They exhaust me, four days later and I am still recovering from this weekend's con. All of the sessions in general blend together. The ones that stand out are because of the people on the epic quality of the competition. I don't win a lot due to playing with very good gamers. I am in the general vicinity but not the best, so for me, it is always memorable when I beat these guys, particularly if it is a game I had not yet played. I have one motto, "Never Give Up" and I don't. I always play to my highest abilities but for my sake and for opponents. We play hard but it is all a given that we will go for the win. There is only one and a half times I have gotten my feelings hurt and that was in *Dominant Species*. The one time I genuinely felt ganged up on in a meta way, the half time was when [unreadable] play but it stung just a little. Overall, I feel very at home with games. They might not be people I would ordinarily come in contact with socially but there is an immediate and easy bond that comes with gaming. There are things about gamers that are stereotyped but that is for a reason. There is a feeling of belonging to a group that shares many of your personality qualities, like finally people that think like me - the celebrate my [unreadable] and going in deep. You also have to have a

certain intelligence level to play these heavy games, so it is self reflecting on that regard. You have to be curious and have intense motivation to game at this level. There are also hints of OCD around collection, displaying and maintaining one's games. A lot of gamers are also I think into games because it allows for structured social interaction. You get to be around people but you aren't expected to converse much. For introverts and people with social anxiety this is a huge plus. In the book *Superbetter* I read about how game playing actually helps people who have theory of mind difficulties because by playing the game you are forced into your opponent's head. There is also emotional mirroring, you all are also literally on each others brain wave length. I think this explains the closeness I feel with my game friends even though we don't do things outside of gaming.

**Question Six -** Do you have any favourite games and why do you enjoy them?

**Someone Subcool -** Of course I have favourites! The current ones will change but there are definitely old favourites as well. Right now, I have been playing *Scythe* a lot because I was playtesting the *Fenris* expansion. I tend toward medium to heavyweight euro/strategy games. I will enjoy a light party game with the right people but strategy is my preference. I will play a co-op but won't seek them out. I like games that have a solo mode but as noted I will play two or three hands in a multiplayer game. At least I am pretty competitive, not day to day, though I set competitive goals for myself. Gaming is a safe place to express it, it feels good to play hard against other smart minds and see how I fare. Other than some epic victories, once I walk away from the table I forget about winning and losing. In general, games are like exercise or an outlet for my ever active mind. They give me puzzles to solve. Since I am disabled, there are not many outlets for me to use my brain at a high level. Gaming also helps me forget or relieve my pain. I thought it was just distraction/gateway pain theory but in *Superbetter* they proved that an immersive enough environment will actually block pain signals. Plus I think there is also dopamine high associated with gaming. Each little win makes you feel good. Aesthetic matters somewhat, I do have a preference in game art, so suck of the fantasy tropes. I also appreciate good design, a game that is so elegant it is as if it always existed. I like games that have replayability, some games once you figure them out, they get boring. I have tremendous respect for game designers as artists as they have to keep so many balls in the air.



**Question Seven -**

How you do you purchase your games and why?

**Someone Subcool -**

My collection is 85% used. I am low income so I rarely buy games for retail. Now and then are if I have my birthday or Christmas money and the game is not really available on the secondhand market, *Scythe* is a good example of that. I buy them from the *BoardGameGeek* marketplace, geek auctions, silent auctions at our local cons, often local games selling stuff, a couple math trades and other trades on *BGG*. At this point, my collection must be self-sustaining, I have to sell on trade to get new games. In general, I do not totally mind this as it keeps my collection manageable at around 100 (including expansions). I have about 65% of my games player, so about 35% unplayed, partially because I just picked up 10 games at the con last weekend. I try to play every game in my collection at least once. I do like that most games hold their value or increase. I feel like they are a type of savings account in that should I have to, I can turn them into cash fairly quickly, that is what I do to earn and spend at the con.

**Question Eight -**

Tell me about the first time you went into a board gaming store.

**Someone Subcool -**

I don't really have much to say here. My first time in *Danger Room* was to visit my friend who had started the game group. I vaguely recall my first visit to the major local emporium - just overwhelmed with the stuff and the amount of stock. Sadly I rarely show local as it is a luxury I cannot afford.

**Question Nine -**

Tell me about some of your memorable experiences when buying games or going into board gaming stores.

**Someone Subcool -**

I don't really have much to say here as my visits are pretty generic. I will give a shoutout to Gabi who owns *Olympia Cards and Comics*. She is a fabulous human who does so much for her community. She runs a Christmas programme for needy families to which I have donated and last year received help. She once bought a collect of *Magic the Gathering* cards she believed to be stolen. It was. She found the owner and reunited him and his collection and working with law enforcement to arrest the thief. She closes the store and treats her staff to movie nights like when *Star Wars* opens. After the shooting in Parkland she wrote an open letter

to the gaming community that she is there if any one ever feels they are alone or are considering harming themselves or others. She is a real community hero.

**Question Ten -** Have you engaged in the wider gaming community, if so how?

**Someone Subcool -** See question two and five as well. I spend a lot of time on *BGG*, I am a level 3 poster and have received one good citizenship start. In some ways I like it more than *Facebook*. I run games at our meetups, I have gone to four or five of our little local cons, I have edited rules for games that did not get published. I recently worked on the *Automa Factory* playtest team for the new *Scythe* expansion *Rise of Fenris*. I have been invited to work on other *Automa Factory* projects. I am a *Stonemaier* ambassador which means I am tasked with teaching *Stonemaier* games should the opportunity arise. All of these activities make me feel as if I continue to level up in the gaming world. Since I recently got rid of cable, I have been watching more video content related to gaming.

**Question Eleven -** Tell me about any disappointing experience you've had when engaging with board games or the community?

**Someone Subcool -** See answer to question five. I hate buying a lame game but that's on me, I do more research these days. My ex was a sore loser. So him losing was a referendum on his value as a human being and this sucked! It was horrible. For a long time, I couldn't even game with him. It came to a breaking point during a game in which he was behaving poorly, I'm like be cool or quit and he quit! This was a breakthrough moment and he did get somewhat better, at least at hiding his displeasure, but it pretty much tainted gaming with him. It was a factor in the eventual demise of our relationship not just the gaming part per se but the personality issues that hid underneath. Every now and then another guy I play with will take a loss hard but I wouldn't call it sore losing. Same for myself - every now and then there will be a game I put 110% in and then lose by one point. I will feel it a bit emotionally but I hastily move on, and am never bad about it. Most people are good with putting their phones away but there was one guy I would never play with again because he couldn't and wouldn't stay focussed on the game which had little to no downtime.

**Question Twelve -** In your opinion, how are games marketed and what is their target audience?

**Someone Subcool -** Target audience is men 25-55. Marketed? Video blogs seem to drive a lot of purchasing as does *Kickstarter*. Work of mouth seems to be the most effective marketing tool. For me, it is either a friend having the game or seeing it talked about on *BGG*. I do not have the funds to invest in *Kickstarter*.

**Question Thirteen -** What do you think about the representations of women within board gaming?

**Someone Subcool -** Yes, representations of women. So much gratuitous boob I call it. My favourite example is the cover of *Dungeon Petz Dark Alleys*, no reason for boobs, none yet there they are, highlighted even. Chvatil is one of the worst. Compare the female warrior figures in *Mage Knight* with those in *Scythe*. *Mage Knight* figures are going to battle in bikinis. Emphasis on the boobs and crotches. *Scythe* women are fully clothes but are still attractive and sexy. I don't mind sexy, just do not need to have boobs just for the sake of boobs. I do like games where each character can be either female or male, I think *Xenon Profiteer* is an example of this. Of course, then you are dealing with gender binary but... Even robots have gratuitous boobs! See *Android Infiltration* cover. There is also a dichotomy where beauty equals good and ugly equals evil. This is a whole other level of problematic. I am not sure I have ever seen myself represented realistically in a game. One aspirational project I have is to design feminist games. No one seems to design specifically for women, I am having difficulty even imagining what would a game for women look like? I can imagine issues like getting elected, stopping cat calling but I'm not sure how it would translate into an actual game. I do know men will avoid games that have too much of a female theme like *Pret-a-Porter* which was a heavy game about fashion. They are retheming it. I am not sure if these issues are barriers to women getting involved in gaming. It doesn't stop me from playing a game. I am more just disappointed by the lack of imagination.

**Question Fourteen -** Tell me what the enjoyable experiences are when engaging with board games and the community.

**Someone Subcool -**

The sense of flow and being able to be hyper focused when I am ADD the rest of the time. Socializing and getting out of the house, stretching myself mentally, distraction from pain/pain control, politics free zone which is much needed! There's a sense of community with other high IQ, OCD, odd balls like myself people on the spectrum.

**Question Fifteen -**

Would you say there are negative aspects to board gaming or the community?

**Someone Subcool -**

The cult of the New, completionism, obsessive collecting. It is easy to get obsessed with this hobby in general, both playing, learning and collecting. Opportunity cost, time spent on gaming is time not spent creating or doing other "productive" tasks although gaming has productive qualities. There is sexism and misogyny in some areas though I've not experienced it directly.

**Question Sixteen -**

And finally, what advice would you give to somebody who is wanting to get into board gaming?

**Someone Subcool -**

Start slow! Meet with people who have lots of games and are eager to play them. This way you will learn what you like and what you don't - you will save yourself some money. There are a lot of different types of games out there and it can be overwhelming at first. Many people go through an intense period of collecting when they first discover the hobby. It can become compulsive so know yourself and place appropriate limits on your purchasing. Also try to be realistic about how much time you have to devote to the hobby. Buying long heavy games can be hard to get to the table. Some people stand with what are called gateway games, somewhat lighter games with less rules overhead. As you gain experience the harder games will become more approachable. You may get frustrated if you dive right into a game with 20+ pages of rules. Having someone teach you games is tremendously helpful. Also never bring a game to the table unless you have made some attempt at learning it, it's painful for all. Know how you learn best, videos, reading, hands on and spend some time learning particularly when trying to introduce a game to non-gamers.

**(End of Interview)**