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Roll the Zine is a board and card game focused zine and a love letter to creativity, gaming and DIY culture. It's an exploration of media, imperfection and putting something out there.

In this second issue, I write about my favourite worker placement games. In these games, you manage a limited amount of workers that are used to perform various actions on the board.

Welcome along the journey. You can find this and potential future issues from zine.hamatti.org.

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by Juhis «hamatti.org»

ROLL
THE
ZINE #2

Worker Placement Edition

STONE AGE

2-4 players

60-90 min

Bernd Brunnhofer

If I'd have to choose one game to use as an introductory, gateway game into worker placement board games, I'd pick Stone Age.

It's a delightful and such well designed board game that can teach you all the main mechanics of the genre without being overwhelming. It goes way beyond just a teaching game though: it has interesting decisions, bit of push your luck aspect and a wonderful theme.

In Stone Age, your goal is to make your tribe thrive by gathering resources (like stone and wood) to build huts, hunt food to keep your people fed, reproduce to grow your tribe and research tools and agricultural knowledge to make it easier to reach your goals.

One common trait in worker placement games is that there's limited amount of space for players to take specific actions. In that regard, Stone Age is very kind: there are only a couple of spots where you're limited to just one spot — which is more common in other games of the genre.

Once everyone has placed their workers for the round, the fun begins. For each resource you're gathering, you roll one die per each worker there and gain resources based on your roll.

Stone Age is a fun game for new and experienced worker placement game enthusiasts alike.

by Chris Norwood
at boardgamegeek.com

THE ARTEMIS PROJECT

1-5 players

60-75 min

Daryl Chow & Daniel Rocchi

The Artemis Project takes players to an arctic exploration to Jupiter's Europa moon. It introduces a really interesting input randomness mechanic to the worker placement genre.

Each round (of 6), players roll their five d6 dice that then function as your workers to place on action spaces. The dice values then affect how the actions are taken. For example, to complete expeditions, players need to place enough dice on it (one at a time) to match its required value.

To gain resources, players place dice on a track and the lower pip counts get to go first but you only gain as many resources as the value of the dice. So placing a 1-die will get you pick first but you only get one of that resource.

There's always a chance that you place dice somewhere only to lose to other players' dice and not get anything from that space. This adds an interesting and varying mechanic to the worker placement phase.

I really like the dice mechanic of this game. They are used in different ways on different action spaces and affect your decision round by round. For those players who enjoy less randomness, it's probably not the best suited mechanic but I'm always up for the randomness to challenge my decision-making in games.



CRISIS

1-5 players

45-120 min

Pantelis Bouboulis &
Sotirios Tsantilas

Crisis brings gloom and doom of industrialism to your board game table. The land of Axia is in economic, social and political crisis and the players need to keep it up and running while extracting the most personal benefit from it.

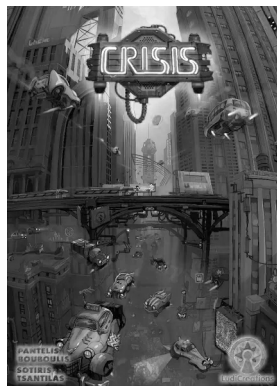
Players employ workers, farmers, engineers and bankers — both domestic and foreign — to run different companies to generate resources they need to reach financial success.

The current status of the game world affects for example how expensive it is to hire workers and how severe the random events are.

The game has a lot going on in it but the one quite unique aspect is that there's a shared crisis meter that all players share and if it falls to zero, **everyone loses**. So you need to figure out a way to keep everything up and running, preferably so that others do the shared positive things while you focus on your own benefits.

It's a beautiful game with a lot of cards and tokens and one of the few in my collection that doesn't fit into a pocket.

If economical engine building and worker placement games sounds good to you, give Crisis a go!



AGRICOLA

1-5 players

30-150 min

Uwe Rosenberg



Agricola is a classic within the genre. It's a game about building a farm: growing food, building pens for animals and thriving in the 17th century post-famine world.

You start with a couple living in a small hut and over 14 rounds of gameplay — split into 6 stages —, must expand your family and home to be able to take more actions. At the end of each stage is **the harvest** during which the players pick up food from their fields, feed their families (or lose points!) and breed animals.

One of the mechanics I really like in Agricola is that the action spaces become available each stage and there's some randomness to which actions will be available. This makes the early game easier to approach and adds more flexibility towards the late game.

Agricola is one of the top 100 games all-time in Board Game Geek which speaks volumes for its quality and how it has stood time since its release in 2007.

Into the worker placement game mechanic

What are "worker placement games" anyway?

The essential game mechanic is that every player starts with a limited amount of workers and each turn they can place one or more of those tokens into "action spaces" on the board or cards to perform an action.

Often — but not always — these action spaces have limited occupancy so the strategies and decision-making revolves around balancing and prioritizing which actions to take and when to maximize the benefits. This makes going first in a round very powerful and thus there often is a space where the only benefit of the action is to go first the following turn.

That's pretty much where the similarities end though. It's more of a mechanic than a full genre itself as it's usually combined with other mechanics. There are so many worker placement games that approach the game in different ways and I've collected my favourites in this zine.

I really like the mechanic because it forces players to think on their feet: if the optimal move becomes blocked by another player, you need to adapt your strategy. This also means there's a lot of mind games — another favourite "mechanic" of mine. It's not just the actualized moves that affect your decision making but also the potential ones. With a bit of bluffing, you can make a fellow player make a suboptimal move without you having to actually waste your move to block them.

Worker placement games are also a great introduction to more complex board games to those whose experience of board games is limited to games like Monopoly or Trivial Pursuit. Especially Stone Age (pg. 2) is a wonderful introduction game.

I love board games for their tangibility in general and with these games, there's a level of intentionality in your decisions through the placement of those workers that excites me. It's one thing to make abstract actions and whole another ball game to make those decisions by moving pieces around.

The mechanic is abstract enough on its own to really fit different game themes. You can build a farm in one game like Agricola (pg. 3), manage a society amidst economical crisis in Crisis (pg. 6) or recruit vikings to fight trolls in Champions of Midgard. All of them have a very different vibe from each other and yet they all share the same underlying mechanic.

This also means that once you fall in love with the mechanic, there will be so many great games awaiting for your to discover. I can only touch on the tip of the iceberg in this zine but I hope it'll offer new games to check out both for the beginners and those who already enjoy the mechanic.

Board Game Geek lists an impressive 4 499 different games across its two worker placement mechanic tags. There's something for everyone there for sure.



Other good games not included in this zine are: Everdell, Mint Works, Champions of Midgard and Lords of Waterdeep and Wingspan that I wrote about in the first edition.

A great place to learn more about these games is searching for them in boardgamegeek.com.