


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 issue, we rev up the engines and start the races. I look at 8 different racing games from different eras and with varying mechanics.

Welcome along the journey. You can find all Roll the Zine issues from zine.hamatti.org. You can subscribe via RSS to get new issues fresh to your reader.

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by Juhis <<hamatti.org>>

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ROLL THE ZINE

#4



**FIRST PAST THE
CHECKERED LINE**

Gamers, start your engines!

Welcome to the races! This month's Roll the Zine waxes skis, greases bike chains, assembles robots and feeds the camels. Following the theme of Of Dice and Meeples, this month's zine is all about racing games.

On a surface level, racing as theme can seem one-dimensional but as this zine explores, the only commonality is that the winner is whoever is first past the checkered line.

As a kid, one of my earliest memories of board games was Nestori (pg. 3), a cross-country skiing game that I would play all over again just by myself. Over the years, I've found more games with more polished and interesting mechanics.

Racing games are a challenging genre to design for.

A simple "roll dice and move pieces" doesn't get you very far but adding too many mechanics can feel gimmicky and make the game lose the charm and excitement of a race.

I love them but I often find that finding a group to play them with can be challenging. If the idea of a race doesn't excite you, it's really difficult to keep you engaged for a duration of a longer gaming session.

Some games have succeeded in that and in this zine, I'm exploring the racing games that have defined my childhood, teenage years, university and the more recent board game enthusiasm years.

Finish line icon on cover: Delapouite under CC BY 3.0 (game-icons.net)



When I was starting to write this zine, I was visiting my childhood home. I asked my father if Nestori (pg 3) was still in the board game cabinet so I could take some pictures for the zine.

I wasn't expecting that to turn into a bonding moment for me and my father around this zine. Excitedly, he rummaged through crowded shelves and proudly pulled out a worn out box of **Suomi-Rally**.

It's a racing game from 1960 and one that my father told stories of him playing it as a child. That's why it deserves a spot in this zine.

In Suomi-Rally, players race to drive from Helsinki to Rovaniemi and back. Each player will start with a

random route they must follow and midway, they'll pick up new cards that add to their route.

Already in the '60s, the game used a gear system similar to Formula D (pg 5) and Heat (pg 8) where higher gear gives you extra speed.

I found this game's rules and mechanics to be way ahead of its time. It doesn't quite hold up against the other modern games in this zine but at least it tried to do more than just roll and move.

The game also encourages making your own routes! If Board Game Geek were around in the 60s, they would have had a field day with this one.

Hero image by me.



Robo Rally

2-6 players

BGG: 381327



Nestori

2-4 players

BGG: 451207

Another way to add interesting mechanics to a racing game is to make outcomes of decisions unpredictable. That's the secret fun sauce of **Robo Rally**.

Robo Rally does that by making players program their robots and then unleashing them to the same battlefield. You need to make all your decisions up front and then see the havoc unfold as your well-crafted plans turn upside down.

Robots can be programmed to move and turn on the battlefield and shoot and push each other. The field itself is full of conveyor belts and pits that can accelerate the chaos — or put you into even more advantageous position.

The goal of the game is to visit each checkpoint in the field in order before everyone else does. Equally important is to try to prevent your opponents from achieving the same.

Over the course of the game, you get to upgrade your robot with new parts like new weapons and movement improvements. Picking up the right upgrades at the right times can turn the game into your favour.

The best way to enjoy Robo Rally is to play with as many people as you can and to embrace the chaos. The least fun sessions are those when everything goes according to your plans.

Hero image by Thomas Haver / Board Game Geek.

Let's get one thing out of the way right away: this is not a game recommendation. In 2026, **Nestori** offers nothing for a board gamer. It does however hold a very special place in my heart as one of the first board games I can remember from my childhood.

As a kid, I played the game over and over again — mostly alone. My imagination filled in the gaps: I wasn't rolling a die and moving plastic meeples on a card board. No no, I was spectating a fierce race between the biggest cross-country skiing heroes of the 90s.

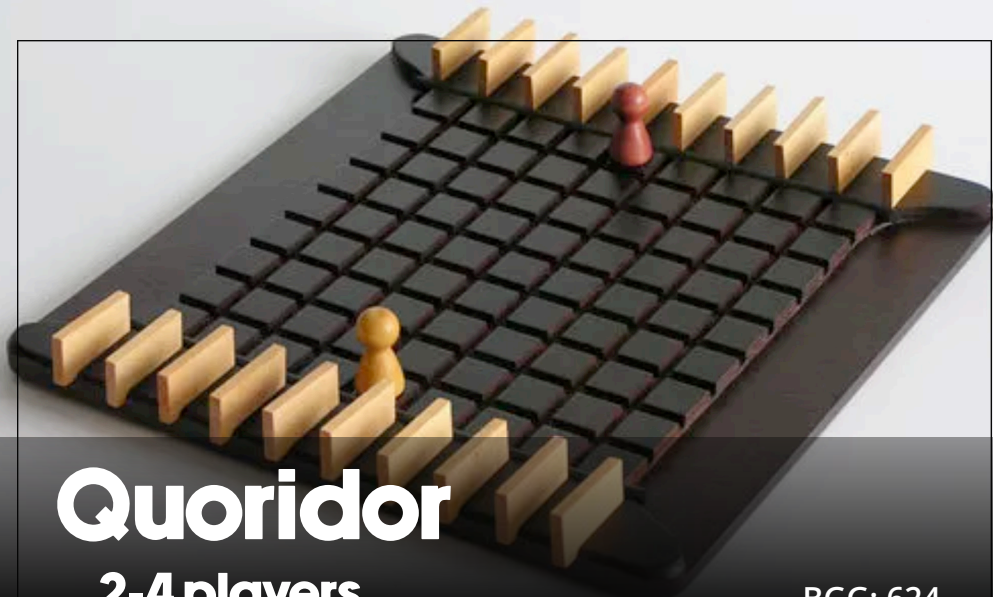
Nestori was published in 1989 for FIS Nordic World Ski Championships in Lahti, Finland. Its strongest asset is its lovely art style.

As a board game, it's a very simple roll and move game with zero agency. There are some spots marked with red numbers and landing on those will lead to special events.

Many of them are quite brutal: skip a turn, skip two turns or start over (!?!) while others provide benefits like extra turns or extra movement.

For a lot of people, especially of my generation, this is what they think of when they think of board games. Rolling dice and moving. While Nestori has had a significant impact on my childhood, I'm very glad modern games offer way more.

Let's continue our race to find out what!



Quoridor

2-4 players

BGG: 624

Quoridor is a direct head-to-head competition where the obstacle course is built as the game goes on.

The goal of a player is to reach the other end of the board before their opponent achieves the same goal.

On each turn, player can either move their pawn one square forward, backward or sideways or place one of the walls into the field between squares.

Quoridor shines in its simplicity of rules and mechanics but offers a lot of depth in strategy and decision making.



I have a tiny 3D printed version of it where everything fits into a photo case and I can close it mid-game and continue later.

It is a wonderful travel companion. Playing a game (or two) on a long train ride makes time fly and there's no worry of dropping or losing pieces.

3D printing has truly revolutionised my small game collection.

Hero image by Ola Bażyńska / Board Game Geek. Article image by me.



Camel Up

2-8 players

BGG: 153938

Often in racing games, the goal is for your piece to reach the goal line first. In **Camel Up**, we move from the race tracks to the betting booths and let the camels do all the hard work.

In Camel Up, five colourful camels race on a track around a pyramid and two crazy camels (black and white) run around in the opposite direction. The goal of the players is to bet at who will do well.

Each turn, plays can either make bets or move a randomly selected camel along the track. My favourite mechanic is that the camels stack up. If one camel ends up in a space already occupied by a fellow camel, it climbs on top and they form a stack.

Whenever a camel in a stack would move, it moves itself and everything

on top of it and a camel in the highest position is considered to be leading.

Camel Up is a whimsical take on race betting with its colourful pieces and quirky mechanics. You are constantly making different types of bets hoping they will profit you but there's so much randomness that you can never be sure you have the winning ticket.

Hero image by MC Games / Board Game Geek



Heat: Pedal to the Metal

1-6 players

BGG: 366013

Formula D

2-10 players

BGG: 37904

Heat: Pedal to the Metal is a formula style racing game by the designer of *Flamme Rouge* (pg 7-8). It combines the best parts of *Formula D* (pg 5) and *Flamme Rouge* and becomes more than the sum of its parts.

This time, the gear you're on doesn't give you a different die but determines how many cards you can play. It reduces the luck factor of a die roll by giving you more choice and agency but it doesn't make decisions any easier.

Heat uses the same formula as *Flamme Rouge* where decisions are made simultaneously by all players and then resolved one at a time.

Where *Flamme Rouge* uses exhaust cards as a tool to force you

into more balanced strategies, *Heat* hones the mechanic further with heat cards that give you bonuses when played initially but clog up your hand on later turns and requires you to cooldown to get rid of extra heat.

If you've tried *Formula D* and/or *Flamme Rouge* and want something similar, *Heat: Pedal to the Metal* is not gonna leave you unsatisfied. I personally prefer the cycling theme more than race cars but if you strip out the theme and focus on the mechanics and rules, *Heat* does improve on *Flamme Rouge* in a nice way.

Hero image by Mathias N / BGG

While *Nestori* was my first foray into the racing games in the early 1990s, **Formula D** was when I truly understood the magic of the genre. I was introduced to the game on a summer camp where we gathered together in a cottage and ran our cars around the Monaco track long into the night.

After that, simple roll and move racing games weren't that interesting anymore. In the core of *Formula D* is your gear box: at the start of your turn you can switch gears either one up or down and the gear you are in defines which die you can roll. The higher the gear, the bigger upside of a die.

To avoid everyone going up once every turn, the track has corners where you must stop minimum given

times. You can push your luck by staying in a higher gear and hoping for a small roll. But if you don't hit it, your car will overshoot and take damage or even spin out.

That's where one of the biggest downsides of this game comes in. If you push too hard, you can be completely eliminated from the race. As a single race can take an hour to finish, being eliminated from play is rough.

In general, I don't prefer games that completely eliminate a player unless a single session finishes in a relatively short time and they can come back for the next one.

Hero image by Craig A / BGG



Flamme Rouge

2-4 players (base) / 1-12 (with expansions) BGG: 199478

If I were to name one racing game that best captures the essence of racing while also being a great modern board game, I'd choose **Flamme Rouge** by Asger Aleksandrov Granerud.

In Flamme Rouge, you're controlling a team of two cyclists racing against other competitors in various tracks. Each turn, all players simultaneously choose a card for each of their cyclists. These cards are then simultaneously revealed and cyclists move along the track.

It's such a simple mechanic and yet, they've managed to design such interesting choices, mind games and bit of luck into it that no two games are ever the same.

Each of the cyclists have slightly different decks but they are same across the board. Every player starts with the same opportunities and it's down to individual choices,

positioning in the track and luck of the draw that turns the games quickly into everything but same for everyone.

If you finish a turn without anyone directly in front of you, you gain exhaustion — a card with a value of measly 2. But if you finish a turn with just a single space between you and another cyclist, you slipstream and catch up that empty space.

Uphills limit your speed and downhill offer an opportunity to get rid of your exhaustion cards without losing momentum.

Flamme Rouge holds a very special place in my game shelf in that it's a racing game that almost everyone wants to return to. Many others I can only dream of playing often enough but Flamme Rouge gets repeatedly requested and I'm more than happy to oblige.

Controlling two cyclists in your team offers the ability to strategise without relying on other players. But those pesky other cyclists are also in the streets and they more often than not spoil your plans.

A track (most of the time) has two slots side-by-side and if you'd land on a spot where both slots are full, you have to stop behind them, effectively losing one — sometimes even two or three — movement from the card you played.

You don't ever get your played cards back during a race so spending your high movement cards in the right time becomes crucial. You often want to keep some of your best cards for the last few turns but if you let your competitors skip too far ahead early, it might be too late.

The decision to use an ever diminishing deck of cards instead of rolling dice is such a brilliant one.

Each turn you have two decisions to make and for each decision, you have four options randomly drawn from your deck. It reduces the problem space per turn which makes the game run smoother.

Flamme Rouge also has a good selection of expansions that all provide something new to the game: **Peloton** brings in new track tiles and expands the player count all the way to 12. **Meteo** adds random weather conditions to different parts of a track, increasing the replayability factor even further. **Grand Tour** brings in an official ruleset for running multirace tours.

While I normally enjoy my games in small packages, Flamme Rouge is one of the big box games that I'm always happy to bring with me to a game night.

Hero image by Oliver Schawrz / BGG