

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.

To celebrate Finncon, this issue is dedicated to my favourite scifi themed board games, exploring the vast universe through companionship, power, money and war.

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»

JULY 2026

ROLL THE ZINE

**TO BOLDLY PLAY
WHERE NO ONE HAS
PLAYED BEFORE**

FINNCON SPECIAL

#5

TO INFINITY AND BEYOND!

I've been a science fiction nerd for as long as I can remember. I saw A New Hope when I was a young kid and Darth Vader's entrance to Leia's ship in the beginning left me with an ever-lasting impression.

Being a weird kid, I found a lot of solace from the infinite possibilities that scifi offered. Nothing was weird in space and the technology present in these stories kept feeding my imagination that lead me to a career in tech and a hobby in writing.

This edition of Roll the Zine is a special edition for **Finncon**, the Finnish science fiction and fantasy convention that's been organised since 1986. I'm at the event speaking about making zines so I felt it was only appropriate I'd make a zine to celebrate the science fiction in board games.

To snowclone Red Hot Chili Peppers: "Space may be the final frontier but it's explored at a local game store." Scifi has been a popular theme in board games for decades and some of the all time great board games take place in epic intergalactic adventures and space wars.

As a genre it is as vast as the universe it depicts in its stories. It's a setting where fun and wacky comedies, serious societal dramas, epic heroic adventures and massive generational wars all can find home.

One of the games I didn't include in this edition is Crisis which I wrote about in Roll the Zine #2 (zine.hamatti.org) when I discussed worker placement games. You should check that out as well!

Galaxy photo on the cover: Shot by Cerqueira, Unsplash License



For Small Creatures Such As We 1player

<https://www.blackwellwriter.com/>

"She had studied the universe all her life, but had overlooked its clearest message: For small creatures such as we the vastness is bearable only through love." - Carl Sagan

For Small Creatures Such As We by Anna Blackwell is a wonderful solo tabletop roleplaying game that focuses on space exploration and the relationships between crewmates.

All you need to explore the galaxy is the book, a deck of regular playing cards, a d6 and something to write down your journeys in.

Where many of the other games in this zine focus on large scale conflicts, settling on new planets or space economy, FSCSAW — as its known among explorers — is a more

chill adventure and exploration.

It gives a lot of space for your own imagination and encourages expanding the story you go through rather than just drawing the cards and following the rules and mechanics of the game.

Anna has also published three expansions to the game: War, Guide to Fauna and Love & Lust.

You can find the game at <https://www.blackwellwriter.com/> both in digital and print versions. The digital is wonderful for gaming on the go but the printed book is so well made that I highly recommend it.

Hero image by Blackwell Writer.



Terraforming Mars

1-5 players

BGG: 167791

Even space cannot escape capitalism and corporate greed. **Terraforming Mars** launches us into the 2400s where multiple corps are competing on terraforming Mars.

To make Mars habitable for humankind, the players need to work together to increase the temperature, oxygen levels and ocean coverage to support human life.

But they can't win together: only one corporation can be the true winner by gathering victory points through improving your terraform rating and completing projects.

I really enjoy the use of these global targets (temp, oxygen, oceans) that all players affect together while

still competing for personal victory. In Roll the Zine #2, I wrote about Crisis that I complimented for the same reason.

Digital adaption of board games generally cover a wide spectrum from absolute garbage to really good ones. Artefacts Studio's Terraforming Mars is on the better side of that scale and it's a good way to practice the game through its single player mode.

Out of all the games in this zine, Terraforming Mars is definitely the one I'm worst at but I still enjoy returning to it every now and then — either in physical or digital format.

Hero image by Thomas Haver / Board Game Geek.



Star Fluxx

2-6 players

BGG: 102104

Star Fluxx is fan service to all sci-fi fans out there. It's a sci-fi themed version of the base game Fluxx where the rules are always changing — kinda like Calvinball.

The deck consists of a few types of cards to play with: **Keepers** are characters, ships, planets and such that you play on your game area and if you have the ones matching the current goal, you win! Some Keepers also have abilities that you can activate.

Goals are cards that change the target required to win. **Rules** change the rules of the game: how many cards to draw and play, what the hand limit is and some wacky ones that make the game fun chaos.

Actions are one-off cards that do what it says on the card. They might let you steal a card or draw extra cards, for example.

All the cards are pop culture references to various sci-fi franchises from Star Trek and Star Wars to Hitchhiker's Guide to Galaxy and Doctor Who. *Similar but legally distinctive*, some might say.

Star Fluxx is a game anyone can pick up in minutes and have a good time playing. Everything is chaos all the time so there's very little strategic advantage from playing experience.

Hero image by me / CC BY-SA



Star Realms

2 players

BGG: 147020

How much of galactic business and warfare can one fit into a deck of about 150 cards? Surprisingly much.

Star Realms is a two-player deckbuilding game (that can be expanded to more players by purchasing more decks) where you play cards to gain trade and attack, purchase new ships and bases to improve your deck and deal damage to your opponent to whittle down their Authority (life points) to win the war.

The gameplay loop is simple but effective. You draw 5 cards, play all of them and do what the cards say. Base cards give you money or attack but once you start to purchase more powerful starships, you can draw more, gain Authority, disrupt your opponent's hand and so on.

At the core of Star Realms is its four factions: blue Trade Federation, green Blobs, yellow Star Empire and red Machine Cult. If you play more than one card of each faction on your turn, you can trigger their Ally abilities.

These Ally abilities make or break your strategy as they offer the competitive advantage over random collection of cards.

Star Realms is a deckbuilding game and what cards you have available change every game so you cannot go into a war with a pre-planned strategy.

You need to adapt, improvise and overcome the situation to take over the galaxy.

Hero image by me / CC BY-SA



Eclipse: New Dawn for the Galaxy

2-6 players

BGG: 72125

Tensions in the galaxy are growing between different Terran factions, Eridani Empire, Hydran Progress, Planta, Descendants of Draco, Mechanema and Orion Hegemony. An all-out war is inevitable.

Eclipse: New Dawn for the Galaxy is the crown jewel of large scale interstellar warfare board games. While the fact that it's played on hexagons (remember kids, hexagons are the bestagons) contributes to it, there's more that makes Eclipse an epic game.

Gather your three or five best friends, clear your calendar for a Friday evening or start early on a day off and prepare for a long battle.

Everything starts peaceful in the galaxy. Everyone explores the space

around their civilisation but despite the vastness of space, eventually you'll encounter others. It's up to you to figure out whether diplomacy or *aggressive negotiations* is the way you want to deal with it.

Eclipse is a challenging game due to its complexity and the amount of available options on every step. It's a game that deserves its own session with focus and intention.

There's also a newer, 2020 version **Eclipse: Second Dawn for the Galaxy** which is a "a revised and upgraded version" of the original so today, it might make sense to go for it but I have not played the newer version yet.

Hero image by Lemon / BGG / CC BY-SA



Galaxy Trucker

2-4 players

BGG: 31481

Not all that happens in space is war and famine. Sometimes, it's also business. In the chaotic fun of **Galaxy Trucker** you assume the position of the intergalactic delivery business to build ships and cross the vast space between galaxies to deliver the goods.

The space is a dangerous place though. There are meteor showers to dodge and space pirates to defend against on your way to the financial glory.

Galaxy Trucker is a ton of fun even if you don't want to become the richest person in the galaxy.

The game play is split into two different but connected phases. On each round, you start by building your ship in the most chaotic sprint

to finishing first seen in space games. All the potential ship pieces are face-down in the middle and everyone is competing for the pieces at the same time.

You often end up with ships that have exposed pieces or forget to install guns and depending on the luck of the deck and dice, you might get through the next run.

The second phase takes you to space. You race to finish first, gather most valuable cargo and try to keep your ship in one piece to reach the destination.

It's like History Channel's Ice Road Truckers but in space and enjoyed with friends.

Hero image by Gary James / BGG / CC BY-SA



Tiny Epic Galaxies

2-5 players

BGG: 163967

"Solar system is so humongous big, right?" - Ilya Bryzgalov

Space, solar system and galaxies can be so big it's hard to comprehend. **Tiny Epic Galaxies** fits into a pocket and is very quick to learn though while still providing a deep gaming experience.

In Tiny Epic Galaxies, players represent different galactic empires fighting for control over planets.

You roll special dice that give you different options: flying a ship to a planet, acquiring resources, advancing colonisation of planets and utilising colonies.

Different planets need different things to colonise: you need to roll either diplomacy or economy with

your dice to match the requirements of the planets you're aiming to colonise.

Colonising a planet is a race between all the empires there: whoever reaches the end of the track first gets the planet and everyone else gets nothing.

On other players' turns, you can copy their actions by using culture point you've acquired and you can upgrade your empire by spending energy and culture to gain more starships and dice.

I've designed a 3D printed insert for the game to use with photo boxes: hamatti.org/tiny-epic-galaxies.

Hero image by Daniel Thuort / BGG / CC BY-SA

A top-down view of the Battlestar Galactica board game components. The board is a grid of squares with various colored tiles. There are several cards, including character cards with portraits, and many small metal tokens. A large, stylized starship is visible in the upper right corner.

Battlestar Galactica

3-6 players

BGG: 37111

Battlestar Galactica: The Board Game from 2008 is the best scifi board game. If I could choose only one scifi game to play for the rest of my life, I wouldn't hesitate for a moment.

The 00s is not generally an era where games based on licensed IPs were particularly great. A lot of sloppy board and video games were made in hunt for a quick cash in.

Battlestar Galactica is not one of those games. It's a collaborative game with a traitor mechanic: just like in the TV series it's based on, you all start working on the common goal of survival of human kind but some of you are secretly Cylons.

It solves the "play by committee" problem of co-op games by not allowing you to trust any of your fellow crewmates on the battlestar. You need to make your own decisions and always be sceptical of

others.

At the same time, you need to keep an eye on your own goals and your alignment. If you're a Cylon, you want to every so subtly sabotage the human's mission without exposing yourself.

And the extra twist is that midway through the game, more humans may discover they are actually Cylons which increases the odds as previous actions can no longer be used to justify someone's alignment in the late game.

Not only are the game mechanics well designed on their own, it is one of the best thematic adaptations in board game history. Humans are constantly at a disadvantage trying to survive and the tension between players are always at high — just like in the series.

To make humans' efforts even harder, every turn a Crisis must be resolved by playing Skill cards from hand in secret matching requirements of the Crisis cards.

This offers Cylons an opportunity to cause chaos and poor humans end up in difficult spots if they cannot play the right types of cards from their hand, thus making others suspicious of their loyalty.

I love social bluffing games and BSG adds a lot of extra mechanics around the core that makes it enjoyable. I tend to be a kind and honest person in real life so getting the ability to manipulate, bluff and betray people in board games gives me a safe space to explore those skills in non-harmful environment.

Reading people through their actions, explanations and discourse is very enjoyable and this game offers so much of it. Board Game

Geek lists the gameplay time between 2 and 3 hours per session and with some of the expansions and a particularly invested play group it can go even further than that.

And yet, it never feels like it's dragging on. The tension and excitement keeps you immersed with the game from the very beginning until the end — either a successful escape by humans or the demolition of human race by the Cylons.

Battlestar Galactica is a massive game: it has lots of bits and bobs, it takes an entire evening and the rulebook is dense. It takes a while to learn but every session offers an excellent experience to those who enjoy a great intersection of scifi and board games.

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