

# A Hidden Fun-Filled World of Games for All Ages

By Tina McDuffie

Lurking 'round the corner just out of sight is a fun-filled world of games where player interaction or cooperation reign and good strategy beats luck every time. It's a techno-color world of cool bits, amazing adventure, silly fun and historical themes. This is the world of designer games. Designer games, so called for their prominent display of the game designer's name on the box – like an author's name on a book – are a special class of games that emphasize player interaction and strategy over adversarial-ness and dumb luck. Designer games are often characterized by cool bits (the playing pieces used in the game), beautiful artwork, interesting themes, and varied mechanics. In the world of designer games, players can be anything: bean farmers, railroad tycoons, zoo keepers, killer bunnies, cathedral builders, hungry beetles...

Game clubs around the world have tapped this hidden world of recreation for years, while the general public remains largely unaware of these sporting treasures. Perhaps that's because you can't find these gems at Target, Walmart, or even Toys R Us. The elusive designer game is much more comfortable in its natural habitat: independent game stores and hobby shops. There knowledgeable gamers can introduce him to the right players and let him show off his colors at Game Night.

The themes and mechanics of designer games, sometimes called Euro Games, Family Strategy Games or German-style Games, run the gamut. From games designed for young kids that they can play alone or with adults (often winning against the adults) to heavy-duty three-hour serious "gamer game" fare, and everything in between. Here's a tiny taste of what you can find in the world of designer games:

## Bohnanza

In this highly interactive card game, you take on the role of bean farmers. You start with two bean fields on the table in front of you; you can plant only one variety of bean in each field. Your goal: to cultivate and sell for a profit. The farmer with the most gold at the end of the game wins. Each season (turn), you'll have to plant at least one bean. If the bean you next have to plant is a different variety than those currently planted in your fields, you'll have to harvest and sell one of your current crops, possibly before it reaches maximum yield or even at no profit, in order to plant the new bean. Only savvy trading with other farmers (players) – lots of fun interaction here - and prudent planning can save your crops so you can reap the rewards of bountiful harvests.

## Chicken Cha Cha Cha

In this concentration-ish memory game for the younger set, players take on the role of yard chickens. Players turn over hexagon-shaped tiles in search of a match to the next egg-shaped stepping stone in order to dance around the randomly generated track. Remembering what's under each tile is the key to moving around the track. The goal: pass your fellow chickens so you can win their tail feathers. The heavy-duty wooden chickens and thick, sturdy tiles make this a durable and adorable game for chickadees of all ages. Don't be surprised if your 4 year-old excels at this game and leaves your tail featherless in the dust.

*About the author: Tina McDuffie is co-owner of Here Be Books & Games, a used book store in Summerville that also stocks new board games, card games, and playing cards. She is an avid gamer and book lover who loves to teach others how to play. Tina and her husband, Tim, host Game Nights at their store the first Saturday of every month. For more information, visit their web site at [www.herebebooks.com](http://www.herebebooks.com).*