

LOCAL NEWS



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Clearview man's board game will test your ethics

Clearview designer's Smugglers tests players' ethical resolve

By Scott Pesznecker
Herald Writer

CLEARVIEW -- Forget pushing buttons on a video game controller.

Phil Tasto, 30, has always preferred pushing game pieces across flat, colorful boards.

As a lifelong fan of board games -- he owns dozens at his home in Clearview -- Tasto recently fulfilled his childhood dream of producing a board game to be sold in stores.

"This is my dream to do this," said Tasto, who works as an accountant in downtown Everett. "I've always wanted to do this, for sure, it's really been a dream come true."

The premise of his game, called Smugglers, was loosely inspired by the drug trafficking that occurs on I-5 between the United States and Canada, Tasto said.

In his game, players navigate a network of highways and oceans to make deliveries around the country and overseas. After a player makes a certain number of deliveries, the game ends and whoever has the most points wins.

But there's a catch -- players can risk their points for smuggling illegal goods in their trucks and boats. Successful smugglers get double the points.

"This started out as a game about decisions between good and evil," said Tasto, who designed Smugglers in 1998 during a philosophy class at University of Washington. "From there, it evolved into a fun game."

The game is being sold for \$35.95 at Games Plus in Woodinville, The Inside Scoop ice cream shop in Mill Creek and Shiraz Specialty Pharmacy in Everett. Tasto has already sold about 250 copies of Smugglers, and he needs to sell roughly 600 copies before he recoups the \$20,000 he spent producing the game, he said.

Ralph Gilcreest, owner of the The Inside Scoop, has known Tasto, his accountant, for more than five years. Tasto kept Gilcreest updated as he worked to have the game produced.

"I think it's very important to him," Gilcreest said. "It's one of those dreams he's had for a number of years, and he's brought it to fruition. How many of us have dreams that we never do anything with, and they probably die with us?"



Suzanne Schmid / The Herald (click to enlarge)

Board game enthusiast Phil Tasto of Clearview invented Smugglers, a game that hit the retail market about a month ago. In his game, players are truck drivers who must make deliveries, choosing whether or not to smuggle illegal goods.

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Tasto grew up in Eastern Washington playing Risk, Monopoly and chess with his two brothers and his younger sister. Using markers, poster board and rulers, he made scores of board games over the years -- often variations of existing games, he said -- which he'd sit down and play with his siblings.

He said he called his first board game "farm monopoly." It was like Monopoly, but the idea was to buy farms and grocery stores on the game board. The trick to winning was owning both farm and store properties.

"I always liked to dream up the strategies, what would make a board game fun," Tasto said. "It couldn't always be that one person won, but it couldn't be all luck, either."

Tasto has started a new company, Fantasto Games. If Smugglers is successful, he plans to design more board games to put on the market.

"I've always had an aversion to violence, and I really like things that bring people together and bring families together," he said. "In board games, you get the best of both worlds. It's fun having a little competition, but you are also interacting with other people."

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