

email

I have a new email address (see below). AOL finally angered me off enough for me to jump ship¹. As it turns out, unfortunately, Altavista ceased its free ISP service, so I still have to use my wife's AOL account for access (xenonazine on AIM), but I am keeping the Altavista email account.

ta yü

Over a year after I was given this game as a birthday present, I finally convinced someone to play it with me. Linda, my 15 year-old stepdaughter, is very moody when it comes to playing games – sometimes she really wants to play and other times you could not pay her to play. Luckily, I caught her in a good mood.

The game consists of a 19x19 grid and 112 high-quality, domino-like tiles. Each 3x1 tile has a branching section of river. The goal is to place tiles on the board such that you connect two opposite ends of the board. One player plays east-west; the other plays north-south. In the three-player version, the third player, chosen by bidding, attempts to prevent either player from scoring over a threshold determined by the winning low bid. With four-players, you play in two teams of two players each.

Ta Yü is a wonderful game that really is appropriate for all ages. It is almost completely visual with simple multiplication for scoring. Because of the tile design and placement rules, you are rarely out of the game until the very end². Except near the end when the board becomes very crowded, most tile placements do not completely stop your opponent, but only serve to divert and delay. When playing with younger players, you can even skew your own tile placements that help your opponent without overtly hurting your own position³. I have not played the three- or four-player version, but I can see it as a very good family game.

The game ends when a player cannot place a tile. The endgame sometimes feels more like an

¹ And in a final show of incompetence, they screwed up my cancellation order and charged me for an extra month.

² Since each tile has three exits and you have to connect the tiles such that river does not dead-end (though it may loop back upon itself), closing off one route often opens one or even two routes.

³ Not that I have ever had to do this as most of the games have been close-scoring affairs. Though we have not kept an official tally of the wins and losses, Linda has the edge.

interesting jigsaw puzzle than a competitive game. Even so, we have had games when one of us has been able to hang in and exploit the smallest of openings to make a come-back.

While mostly a tactical game of "what is the best play at this moment," there is a strong strategic balance of offensive versus defensive play. Plus, you have to balance your connections on both sides of the board to maximize your score. Also look for giving your opponent small-scoring connections to avoid larger scoring opportunities. Though there is a luck element in which tiles you draw, when I lose I know it was because of good play by my opponent and bad play on my part.

Ta Yü is elegant without being dry, abstract without being overly cerebral. It works well as an opener or a closer to a gaming night. Fans of serious abstract games may find Ta Yü too light but non-gamers will find it very approachable.

comments

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molly bennett

Welcome and please feel free to contribute as often as you want – hopefully that will be a lot. :)

Personally, I doubt *Pop Goes the Weasel* will make much of a stir against roleplaying. I do find it odd that a d20 is used; a deck of cards (playing cards, tarot, EW vision cards, etc.) seems more appropriate. The earliest d20s were numbered 0-9 twice and players had to color the die or use a second die to get the full 1-20 range, so this might explain the lack of double-digit numbers.

doc cross

I liked *Red Planet* a lot at the beginning. My opinion went down hill with each successive plot element. The science was better than most, which made the bad science that much more jarring. The space craft was very believable, complete with two rotating sections, so why did it use artificial gravity? Or rather, if it had artificial gravity, why bother with the rotating bits?

I am very interested in your PBeM idea. Drop me a line when you are ready to start.

lee gold

I very much appreciate you getting A&E out before Thanksgiving as it arrived just in time to take on my week-long trip to Canada (five days giving telecom technology training lectures in Ottawa, Montreal, Toronto, Calgary, and Vancouver).

richard iorio ii

Last month, you lifted us up only to bring a depressing tale this month. Thanks a lot. :P Why did you not jump in and encourage the kids in the way you wanted the counter jockey to do?

rene a louviere jr

The Learning Channel just showed those episodes of *Junkyard Wars* with land yachts and efficiency vehicles and should have shown even newer episodes by the time this sees print.

paul mason

While standards are a requirement for technology like telecommunications to move forward, I do not see much use for them in art and roleplaying games. They are, however, a nice marketing tool. Assuming standards are good, is d20 a good standard?

mark nemeth

Thank you for the Burning of Zozobra. I can never think of these types of cultural elements to add to roleplaying settings, so keep them coming, please. The complexity and diversity of real life culture never ceases to amaze me and makes fictional settings appear bland and unimaginative.

I imagine one's opinion of inheritance taxes is directly related to one's opinion of taxes and particularly taxes on wealth (as opposed to goods and services). If my father gives me a house (or cash), I have to pay (income) taxes on it. What difference does it make if the gift is posthumous? I would use this same argument against 100% inheritance taxes.

jonathan nicholas

The intensity of light is a function of the number of photons, not the speed of the photons. Light dims passing through matter not because it is slowed down (though it is), but because of absorption, refraction, and reflection of the light wave as it passes through the material. After passing through glass, for example, the speed of light is unchanged (it sped up again when it re-entered air), but the intensity has dropped (reflection at both glass-air interfaces drops the intensity by 4% or so).

The excited quantum states within a laser (or maser) do not anticipate an approaching photon. Rather, the presence of a photon stimulates the quantum state to move down to a lower energy state; the release in energy comes in the form of a photon. Where we had one photon, now we have two and have doubled the intensity of the beam. Lasers are a quantum-effect that you cannot explain using classical, wave-based electromagnetic properties.

matt stevens

Read and enjoyed *The Simple Art of Murder*. It stimulated some thoughts on how I might readdress the current murder-based plot I am developing. The television show *Law & Order* is a good source for mining ideas on murder motives and plots.

jonathan tweet

Are you familiar with the popularity of The Powerpuff Girls⁴ among young girls? PPG, like Pokemon and Sailor Moon (see Iorio's Preamble last issue), demonstrates that girls like to kick ass too and has the potential to cross gender boundaries. The PPG board game, targeted at young girls, is just an exercise in moving around the board, rolling dice, and beating up villains (and how different is this from Talisman or HeroQuest, really?)

Warren Ellis was discussing the various problems with the current state of the comic book industry. He pointed out that one cannot buy PPG comics in Warner Brother stores where you can buy the PPG dolls and other toys. PPG is licensed by the Cartoon Network and published by DC Comics, both part of the Time Warner megacorp.

Similar problems exist in the rpg industry. We need to place the rpgs based on licensed material (Sailor Moon, Marvel Superheroes, etc.) next to the toys of the same, not in some game store or bookstore where kids will never find them. At a local Walmart, I saw plenty of Hasbro's Pokémon-based games, including Monopoly and Sorry, but I did not see WotC's Pokémon Jr. Adventure Game.

WotC really needs to step up to the plate and use the Hasbro distribution machine to support rpgs. WotC distributed booster packs for the Pokémon movies. What promotional campaigns were planned for the *Dungeons & Dragons* movie?

Changing topics, I agree that most people probably do not question their own perceptions. But what are you supposed to do as a roleplayer when all your character's perceptions come from the GM? As a player how do you know when to question your PC's perceptions? Which ones do you question? What criteria do you use? The GM has to provide clues that the perceptions may be incorrect and give the player a reason to question the character's perceptions. For example, a detect alignment spell says "lawful good" when the NPC's actions are obviously neither lawful nor good. I am not implying you did not do this, but unless handled with the utmost skill, the subverted aura was most definitely unfair.

⁴ Factoid: The original name of PPG was "The Whoop-Ass Girls" and they were created when Professor Utonium mixed in three cans of whoop-ass into his concoction.