

Divorce Genoese Style

Once again we are transported back to Renaissance Italy. This time we land at the port of Genoa. Each of us is the head of a noble Genoese family tasked with seeking suitable wives for our eligible sons. Of course there is more to the game than that as the objective is to acquire influence and become the Doge and head of the most powerful family in the city.

Genoa is divided into five boroughs or neighborhoods. The number of players determines how many of them are active. They are chosen randomly, although the port area is always "in play".

The citizens of Genoa are each represented by a tile and at the start of the game, a Lord, two Brides-in-waiting and a small deck of Commoners are placed in each active borough.

As the head of one of the noble families, you will have a small band of Loyal followers. On your turn, these can be deployed as delegates within the city or to Distant Colonies which are represented on the game board by four galleons anchored outside the port. Reinforce your influence in a borough where you have a delegate by placing up to two additional tiles there. Gain favor with

the Doge by discarding a character and so improving your turn order and tie-breaker position.

Once everyone has placed their tiles or passed, we move to the Resolution phase. Character tiles placed in Distant Colonies will enable you to purchase the all-important workers. The boroughs are activated one at a time. Each player appoints one of their characters in the borough as the leader, or as the rule-book describes them, guides. The remaining tiles are kept in your hand.

So what can you do? Your leader could marry one of the brides but must seek permission from the local Lord. This will only be granted if the Persuasion Value of your Loyal character at least equals that of the Lord. Similarly the bride will only agree if the character's Charm Value is equal to or higher than hers. Of course you can always overcome any deficiencies in those areas with a bit of bribery.

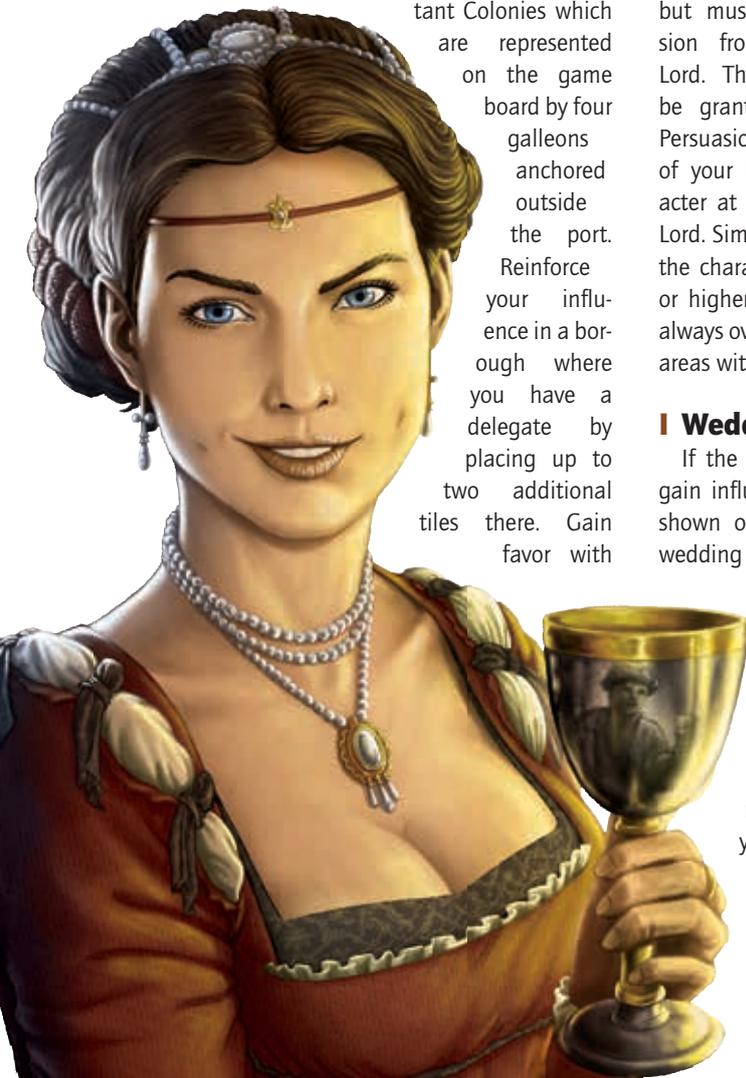
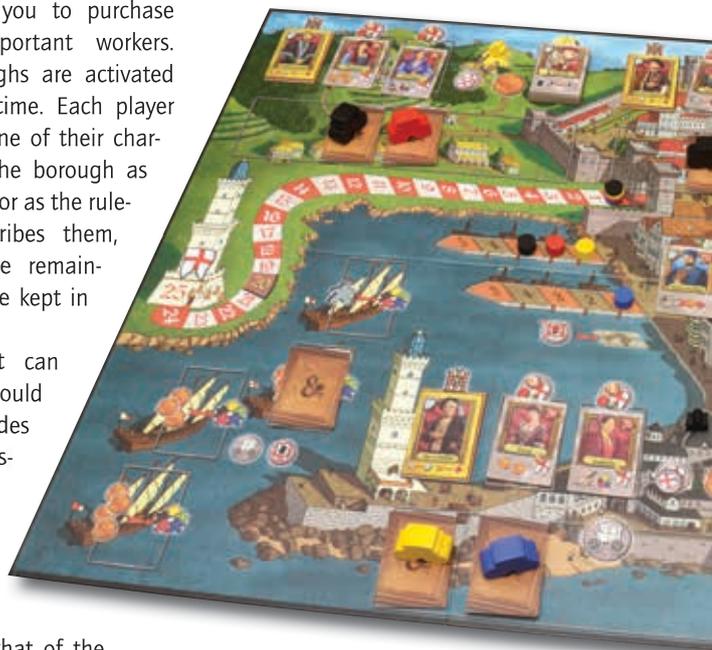
I Wedding or workers

If the marriage is successful you will gain influence points and the dowry as shown on the Bride tile. Instead of a wedding you could take all the workers in that borough or take the Commoner tile from the borough or collect the available influence tokens or simply take a coin from the supply.

All items taken are placed on your play mat which is also your family residence.

Before taking any action, you must

announce your intention, and it is at this point that the game becomes interesting, exciting or downright vicious, depending upon your point of view. Because now, the other players who have a presence in that borough could, in turn, use the abilities of one of their tiles to prevent or alter your declared action. You could counter this intervention by playing the ability of one of your tiles if appropriate. The player could then



make another attack and so on until the "battle" is resolved. In the end, however, you must carry out your action even if it has been severely modified. If, for example, the player on your right announces that his loyal follower Taddeo Foglietta with a charm value of 4 intends to marry Orietta with a charm value of 5 he must buy an additional charm value to equal that of the bride. However, you could play your Damsel tile which increases the charm value of the prospective bride by 3, thus preventing the marriage unless Foglietta can up his charm value to match. Alternatively you could play your Lover so that you receive the dowry of poison and a worker instead of the husband. As all tiles are placed face down in the boroughs, you can only make educated guesses as to what



your opponents have placed, so have little idea how your intended action will be responded to by the other families.

This is where you can bluff your opponents by simply placing tiles which may not be of use to you but can keep the others wondering what you have up your sleeve.

At the end of each round you will receive income from your workers but must pay wages to your Commoners. This is also when

will enable you to increase the charm value of your leader by four, which is very helpful when wooing a bride.

Probably the most obnoxious but nevertheless useful Common character is the Assassin, who can be employed to kill anyone you wish to get rid of. Once a Loyal character marries, he is virtually out of the game as long as the marriage lasts. As the rules do not allow for divorce, the only way to free up your Loyal member is either to poison the bride or command the assassin to murder her.

The game ends after six rounds or when one player reaches 20 or 25 influence points, depending on the number of players. The player with the most influence points is proclaimed the Doge of Genoa.

BRIDES & BRIBES contains almost everything that makes a good game; strategy and tactics, bluffing and conflict, interaction and decision making. The most important of the latter happens in the tile-placing phase. You must decide whether to try and gain assets or prevent others from doing so, because with just three tiles to place in each borough, you are unlikely to succeed with both objectives.

It is also important to become acquainted with which Commoner is in each borough and what benefits each character and object will bring you as this will help in your decision making. This information is provided in the rulebook appendices.

An ambitious project

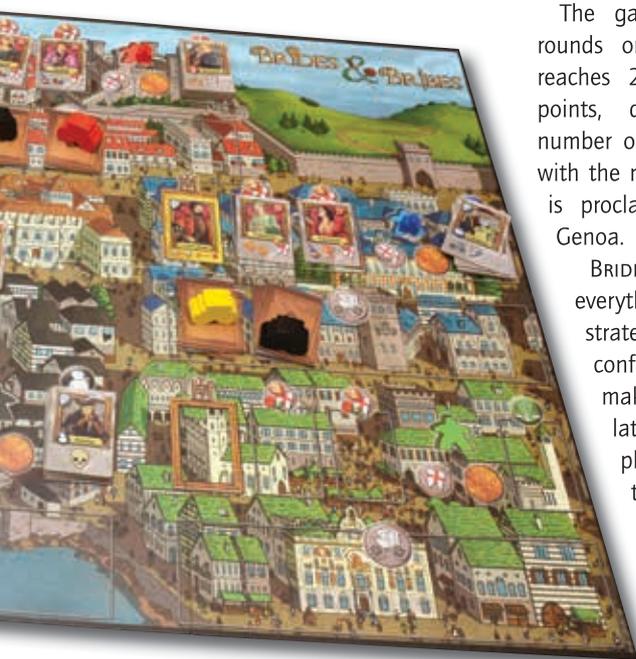
Because of the opportunities to interact during other players' turns, the downtime does not impede the flow of the game. However, it plays best with three or four players rather than the maximum of five.

This is an ambitious project for the

three first-time designers, two of whom are also the publishers. As we are aware, rules writing is an acquired skill which the designers or publishers, resp., have not quite achieved. The rule book includes a comprehensive example which should be undertaken before attempting to play the game. This example takes place midway through a game and requires considerable setting up and I believe some knowledge of the game. In my humble opinion such an example would be more valuable if it had been confined to the first or second round of play.

BRIDES & BRIBES is my sort of game and all the ones that I have played so far have been close at the finish with no runaway leader. If you are not sure whether or not this is a game for you, the print and play version is available on the publisher's web site.

John Humphries



you can purchase one of the six different workshops. The cost is paid with appropriately-colored workers. Workshops will not only give you influence points but provide you with an object tile, each of which has a useful ability. One workshop which is well worth buying is the Jewellery at a cost of one green, one blue and one red worker and which will provide you with a Ring tile which in turn



Title: Brides & Bribes
 Publisher: Spaceballoon Games
 Designer: A. Gallazzi, E. Lenardi, P. Navarotto
 Artist: Alan D'Amico
 Players: 3-5
 Age: about 12+ years
 Duration: about 90 minutes
 Price: about 55 €

Reviewer Playing appeal
 John Humphries 8
 Matthias Hardel* 6

* Learning the game from the instructions can be a real challenge. Even if you succeed, you might still be helplessly confronted with manifold options. If you want to have fun, you need to tap the enormous potential of interaction; but its very mean possibilities don't make everybody laugh. Especially the primary target - usually the initiator of the game session - is in danger of frustration.