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Cue me in

The Games Gang, Ltd is a board game publisher that has kind of been forgotten to time. The publisher was most prevalent in the 1980s before likely going out of business in the early 1990s. During their existence the company made a little over 20 different games with some being pretty popular while others were forgotten. The company is probably most known for making one of the first editions of both Pictionary and Balderdash before they were picked up by a major publisher. Today I am looking at Cue Me! a game that I can honestly say that I had never heard of before finding it at a thrift store. Despite this I was intrigued by the game because the premise sounded really interesting. Cue Me! has some interesting ideas for the word game genre leading to it being kind of a hidden gem.How to Play | My Thoughts | Should You Buy? | CommentsHow to Play Cue Me!SetupThe players will divide into teams of two.Each team chooses a color pawn and places it on the start space. Each team is also given a Board Moves card.Players choose which deck of cards they will use. Level 1 cards (green) are easier and should challenge most players. Level 2 cards (purple) are for players that want a real challenge. Players can also choose to use a mix of cards from both levels. Place the chosen deck face down on the table.Place the gameboard in the middle of the table.Roll the number die to determine which team will start the game. The * symbol is considered the high roll. Play will move clockwise throughout the game.Each team will choose which player will be the Sender and Receiver on their first turn. The Sender will give a clue and the Receiver will try to guess the answer. In their second turn the roles will swap and so on throughout the game.Playing the GameGiving A ClueOn a team's turn the Sender will draw the top card from the deck. They will then roll the number dice. The number rolled will determine the message for the round.This player rolled a two so they will have to give clues to their partner to get them to guess "movie theater".If the player rolls a * they can choose any of the top four messages or they can choose the Bonus Message which will earn them more spaces if they get it right.This player has rolled the *. They can either choose one of the first four messages or they can try for the bonus message (Lucille Ball) which could earn them more spaces.The Sender will tell the Receiver the number of words in the message, the category and whether it is a proper name (marked PN). The categories in the game are as follows:Person: A type of person or the proper name of a real or fictitious person.Place: A type of place or the proper name of a real or fictitious place.Thing: An object, plant, animal, substance, intangible thing, or concept.Event: A type of occasion, incident or activity, or a proper name of an occasion or event.The Sender then shows the card to all of the players besides the Receiver that they are giving the clue to. The player will roll the letter dice and then turn over the timer.After rolling the dice the Sender will try to create a phrase or set of words to describe the message. When devising their clue they can only use the letters that were rolled. They can only use each letter once. The player can use any number of the dice as they don't have to use all of the letters. If the J/K or Q/Z side are rolled they can use either or both letters. If a * is rolled you can use any letter in its place. When giving clues the following rules must be followed:You can never use a part or a version of the secret message in your clue.You can use foreign words, proper names and slang for your clue.You may add endings such as "ized", "er", "ish", etc to words that you normally couldn't add them to.For this round the Sender is trying to get their partner to guess movie theater. Based on the letters they rolled one clue that the player can give is "watch films" as their partner already knows it is a two word place.Guessing the MessageAfter the Sender gives the clue the Receiver tries to decipher the message. The player has two minutes and up to three guesses in order to get the message. Each time the Receiver makes a guess it will count as one of the guesses. If the Sender wants to give another clue they can reroll all four dice and give a new clue. The new clue and the corresponding response counts as one of the three guesses.If a Receiver correctly guesses the message they will earn spaces for their team as follows:Guessed the message on their first attempt: 4 spacesGuessed the message on their second attempt: 3 spacesGuessed the message on their third attempt: 2 spacesGuessed correctly utilizing a One-On-One. A One-On-One is when a player gives a one word clue for their first clue and the Receiver guesses correctly.: 8 spacesFor this round the Sender has to get their partner to guess Santa Claus. As their partner already knows that the message is a person that is two words and is a proper noun. The Sender decides to use the clue "Christmas". As their partner guessed correctly on their first guess and the clue only featured one word, they have completed a One-On-One.Bonus Message (chose to play the Bonus Message): +2 spaces to the number of spaces you would normally receiveWinning a Free-For-All (see below) Sender's Team: 8 spacesWinning a Free-For-All (see below) Other Teams: 4 spacesThe current team will move their playing piece forward the corresponding number of spaces.The pink team guessed their message on their second attempt so they earned three spaces.If the Receiver doesn't guess the message the team will gain no spaces. In either case the card is moved to the bottom of the deck and play passes to the next team clockwise.Free-For-AllWhen a team lands on a space featuring a "F" they will immediately play a Free-For-All round.The white team has landed on a Free-For-All Space. They will immediately play a Free-For-All round.In this round all of the players except the Sender will play. The round is mostly played the same except that all of the players can guess and keep guessing without penalty. The Sender can roll the dice up to three times and give three different clues. If no one guesses the message before time runs out play will return to normal with play passing to the next team.If a team guesses correctly they will earn spaces as shown above. If a team lands on a "F" space from these spaces they will not get to take a Free-For-All round.Winning the GameThe first team to reach the Finish space wins the game. The instructions don't say whether this has to be done by exact count.The pink team has reached the finish space so they have won the game.For a team on a * space to win they need to score a One-On-One in order to win.For the orange team to win the game they will have to score a One-On-One.Variant RulesThree Player GameIn a three player game the players take turns as the Sender. The other two players will compete in a Free-For-All round. The player who guesses correctly and the Sender will earn spaces based on the roll of the number die. The * counts for five spaces.Challenge PlayWhen a team lands on a Free-For-All space (on a regular turn) they have the option of playing a challenge. If they choose to play the challenge they will choose a card and roll the letter dice like normal. They will then show the card to the upcoming Senders as well. Starting with the team that landed on the space each sender will give a clue using one of the four letters. If their partner doesn't guess the message play will pass to the next team. If none of the teams guess the message based on the one word clue each Sender gets to create a clue using as many of the letter dice as they want. The scoring for this round is the same as a normal Free-For-All round.My Thoughts on Cue Me!In the past I have looked at quite a few different word games. I wouldn't say it is my favorite genre, but I have enjoyed most games from the genre as they usually find the right balance between being easy to play and yet still relying on quite a bit of skill. The problem with a lot of word games is that many of them don't drastically differ from one another. For example many word games rely on laying letter tiles in a crossword fashion in order to score points. Because of this I enjoy word games that ultimately try to do something original. In many ways Cue Me! succeeds at this task.In Cue Me! the gameplay is built around one player giving their teammate a clue about a secret message hoping that they can guess it based on just that clue. This on the surface doesn't sound all that unique as there are a number of other games that have the same basic premise. What is different about Cue Me! is that you are limited in what clues that you can give. The clue giver will roll letter dice which will determine what letters the player can use while giving a clue. The player can only use each letter once and can choose whether they use all or just some of the letters. Using these limited letters the player has to get their partner to guess the message before they run out of time.Before I started playing the game I was really intrigued by this concept. Having limits placed on what words you can give in your clue seemed like an interesting idea. For the most part I actually thought it worked pretty well. To do well in Cue Me! you need to really think and give clever clues. As a fan of games that force you to give clever clues I thought this was actually quite fun. You can sometimes luck into getting your partner to guess the message correctly, but usually you need to give good clues in order to succeed. Before playing the game I was a little concerned that it would be really hard to give good clues with the letter restrictions. This does come into play at times, but you really feel a sense of accomplishment when you are able to give a good clue despite the limitations. There is real skill to the game. Those with better vocabularies that can think out of the box quickly will do really well in the game.As for the game's difficulty I would say that it is on the easier side. The game has a few rules that you have to keep in mind, but the actual rules are really straightforward. The rules can be taught in just a couple minutes and players should then not really have any troubles with the game. The game is probably a little more difficult than a game like Scrabble, but fans of the word game genre shouldn't have any troubles with it. I could see children younger than twelve playing the game. I am guessing the main reason for the age recommendation is that younger children probably don't have a strong enough vocabulary to do well in the game.I would say that the biggest issue that I had with Cue Me! was the fact that the game relies on quite a bit of luck. Cue Me! is one of the rare games that I would say relies both on a lot of skill as well as luck. I knew the game would rely on a decent amount of luck just from the fact that the game relies on rolling dice. Yet the reliance on luck goes a little too far at times. Luck in the game comes from a couple different factors. First the card you draw for the turn and what word you have to provide clues for plays a pretty big role in how well you do. Some words are quite easy to give clues for where you have many options. Others can be quite difficult where there are pretty specific letters that you have to roll. The letters you roll can have an even bigger role in how well you will do. You can have the perfect clue set up, but there is nothing that you can do if you don't roll the necessary letters. Some message/letter combinations just don't work well together. Good players can sometimes work around bad letters, but in some situations there is nothing that you can do. If you get a bad roll you will either score less points or miss the message entirely.Other than the reliance on luck the other main problem that I had with the game is that it can take a little longer than necessary to finish the game. Even with only two teams the game is likely to take at least an hour. With more teams it will take even longer. While I enjoyed Cue Me! that is too long in my opinion. I think this is mostly due to the gameboard being too long. The gameboard has a total of 48 spaces. With these many spaces it takes twelve correct first guesses in order to reach the end. Getting a few One-On-Ones or Free-For-Alls will help, but your team is unlikely to correctly guess the message on your first guess every turn. Therefore each team will have to take quite a few turns before they can reach the finish. The length is not helped by the fact that the other team(s) have little to do while they are waiting for the current team outside of Free-For-All rounds. I personally would recommend only playing through part of the board to cut down the time some. Instead of an hour plus I think the game would have been more enjoyable at 30-45 minutes.As for Cue Me!'s components there are some things that I really enjoyed and others that I think could have been better. On the positive side the game actually comes with quite a few cards. The game has a total of 400 message cards broken down into two difficulties. I like the two levels of difficulty as you can adjust the game based on the skill of the players. Otherwise the components are basically what you would expect from a 1990 board game made by a smaller publisher. The dice, cards and gameboard are of a pretty standard quality. The game's artwork is pretty basic as the game gets right to the point. While it is expected for a game from this era I am not a huge fan of the sand timer. This is mostly because some of the rounds end pretty quickly where you are forced to sit and wait for the two minute timer to run out.Should You Buy Cue Me!?Cue Me! is not a perfect game but I was honestly a little surprised by it. I would actually say that the game was kind of a hidden gem. The premise behind the game is that you have to describe messages, that range from one to a couple words, based on letter dice that you roll. The words for your clues can only begin with the letters that you end up rolling. In practice this is a pretty cool mechanic and is pretty different than a lot of the word games that I have played. The game is quite easy to learn and play, and yet there is a surprising amount of strategy to the game. You need to be quick on your feet, be able to think outside the box, and have a strong vocabulary to come up with good clues to help your teammate. It is really satisfying when you are able to come up with a really clever clue that works. At the same time though the game does rely on a decent amount of luck as the cards you draw and the letters that you roll do play a pretty big role in how well you do. Cue Me! can last a little longer than it probably should at times as well.My recommendation for Cue Me! depends on your opinion of word games and the overall premise of the game. If neither really interest you the game probably won't be for you. Those that think Cue Me! sounds interesting though should enjoy it and consider picking it up.Buy Cue Me! online: Amazon, eBay

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