

Shmanners 520: Game Night

Published on June 26th, 2026

[Listen here on Maximum Fun](#)

["Shmanners Theme" by brentalfloss plays]

Travis: Hello, internet! I'm your husband host, Travis McElroy.

Teresa: And I'm your wife host, Teresa McElroy.

Travis: And you're listening to Shmanners.

Teresa: It's extraordinary etiquette.

Travis: For ordinary occasions! Hello, my dove!

Teresa: Hello, dear!

Travis: How are you?

Teresa: All right.

Travis: You have a great ponytail.

Teresa: Thank you.

Travis: A real top-notch ponytail.

Teresa: So, you know, things are going great. [laughs]

Travis: Listen, you know, you gotta find the wins where they are. Don't play the beats. You know, we had a bad day out there, but we're gonna focus on the fundamentals. And we're not gonna let this get us down. You know, tomorrow's another game. And yeah, you know, I'm real proud of how we all played out there.

Teresa: Thanks for everyone for attending our World Cup game. [chuckles]

Travis: Yeah, everyone gave it their all. We lost.

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: To the mascot team, which was unexpected. But yeah, you know, we just gotta get back out there. Another question.

Teresa: [chuckles] Okay. Hey, so...

Travis: Yeah?

Teresa: Can you believe it that we have never done an episode on game nights?

Travis: I mean, can I believe it spiritually? No. Can I believe it factually? Yes, because we're doing it now.

Teresa: We are doing it now.

Travis: So I can believe that, unless this was all a trick?

Teresa: [chuckles] No.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: We've done, I think we've done several like adjacent things, like trivia, right? And parties. And party games.

Travis: But I would say that at game night, as someone who takes game nights very seriously, a wildly different beast.

Teresa: You haven't had a game night in a long time.

Travis: Yeah, I had kids.

Teresa: Mm-hm.

Travis: So, I won the game of life.

Teresa: Ah?

Travis: Yeah. In case they're listening.

Teresa: [chuckles]

Travis: But no, I mean... you know, I would say, youngins listening, treasure the times when getting together for games was easy, breezy, beautiful Cover Girl.

Teresa: [chuckles]

Travis: Because there comes a time where you're like, well, I got to sit down with my friends like three times this year! And it's very exciting.

Teresa: It's very exciting. I never really play—like, I remember having a handful of games growing up, but always the—like the very short ones, like Candyland

Travis: You are the least competitive human being I've ever met—

Teresa: It's true.

Travis: In my life. Like, you won't go to mini golf because it stresses you out because it's too—like you're like, "I just don't care. I don't want to do it." Like, we've done it before. And Bebe and I, unsurprisingly, are like, this is it. This is—we gotta win this. It's the Masters.

Teresa: [chuckles]

Travis: And you're like, you and Dot are both kind of dancing in a corner or whatever.

Teresa: [chuckles]

Travis: And we're like, okay...

Teresa: But I do remember playing Sorry with my sisters and them getting—us all getting very upset, because part of that game involves treachery.

Travis: Well, yeah, it's right there in the name. It's not called Not Sorry.

Teresa: Exactly.

Travis: And I have played many board games with you, table games, now in our relationship. And I don't know if it's your non-competitive nature or the fact that you are very clever, but you tend to win and not seem to be trying in a way that I find charmingly infuriating.

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: I have seen you—

Teresa: It doesn't happen—

Travis: Dominate—

Teresa: It doesn't happen every time.

Travis: No! But like I've seen you, like I remember once playing with like I think you and me and our friend Charlie, or like Maggie and Justin or something. And we were playing Ticket to Ride, right? Where you kind of tally up everything at the end.

Teresa: Mm-hm.

Travis: And Justin and I were taking it very seriously. And Maggie was, as well. And you were just like, "Ah." And so like, the three of us were like, they're the ones to wa—gotta watch this one. And then like we did the tally at the end and we're like, "Oh! Teresa won by 20 points. Okay, great. Terrific."

Teresa: [in a baby voice] Sorry?

Travis: No, you're not!

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: And is that how you said it when you played with your sisters? Because that might have been what made everybody so mad, if you kept 'sawi.'

Teresa: [laughs] No, I don't think so.

Travis: No...

Teresa: Okay. First, let's go through a little bit of board game history. Surprising no one, board games are very old.

Travis: Yeah, man. They played in ancient Egypt, ancient Africa, ancient China.

Teresa: Mm-hm.

Travis: Ancient everywhere.

Teresa: Mm-hm. Board games are even older than written language.

Travis: Well, yeah! Because you had pieces?

Teresa: Yeah!

Travis: You didn't need language!

Teresa: That's right.

Travis: Right? You could play like Mancala. That's the one where it's just like the beads or stones in the wooden board with like the divots in it. Chess is quite old.

Teresa: Is very old. People were playing dice games as far back as 5000 BCE, making pieces by carving and painting stones. Dice specifically have

been found all over the ancient world, made of wood, knuckle bones, painted shells, or even by painting the—like a single side of a flat stick.

Travis: A single side of a flat stick, that's more of... a pencil, no?

Teresa: Well, so—

Travis: Like you flip it?

Teresa: So it's like you throw it up, and if the paint is up, that's one. And if the paint is down, that's different.

Travis: Oh, so it's like a binary game.

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: So the earliest gaming pieces ever found were uncovered at a 5000-year-old burial mound in southeast Turkey, but similar pieces have been found in Syria, Iraq, and other parts of the Fertile Crescent. Peter Attia—

Travis: They found a little silver race car, a little silver top hat—

Teresa: Ah, we'll get to that.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: We'll get to that. Peter Atiyah, who is the writer who penned an article entitled The Full History of Board Games, for Medium, said—

Travis: Well, there you go.

Teresa: Said that—

Travis: I mean, it's right there in the title, isn't it?

Teresa: Yeah. The same region that invented booze, papyrus, breath mints and calendars, all of which, I guess, are required for playing your game night.

Travis: I... booze, calendars, breath mints, yeah! Papyrus, paper, yeah.

Teresa: Yeah, totally.

Travis: All that.

Teresa: All that.

Travis: They invented Doritos, Mountain Dew.

Teresa: No...

Travis: Hot Pockets?

Teresa: No, they didn't. One place, like you mentioned, that they found enormous popularity of board games was Ancient Egypt. The game of Senet, which is played on a rectangular board where you attempt to move your pieces around the path, while avoiding hazards, has been compared to Backgammon, right?

Travis: Mm-hm.

Teresa: And—

Travis: Shoots and Ladders.

Teresa: Well, that... a little different.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: A little different. But it's also been—

Travis: It was probably called Shoots and Asps.

Teresa: [chuckles] Maybe. But—

Travis: Snakes and no Asps on... ah, I blew it. I blew it.

Teresa: Do you wanna run that back—

Travis: Asps and—

Teresa: Or—

Travis: Asps and Ladders would have been better. But anyways, go on.

Teresa: It has also kind of been compared to chess, so it was very popular. It has shown up in several pre-Dynastic and First Dynasty burials. Which means that Egyptians loved the game so much, they wanted to play it in the afterlife.

Travis: Well, yeah! You get bored in eternity. You need something to do! Some travel games. You know, a little thing of Uno or Baggo with you wouldn't hurt. Go a long way.

Teresa: And in fact, it was so popular to be buried with your game that it became known as a symbol of the Journey of the Dead, right? So—

Travis: Oh?

Teresa: Some archaeologists still refer to Senet as the Game of the Dead.

Travis: I bet that there were people who like just won a decisive victory against like a sibling or like a rival or something—

Teresa: As a trophy.

Travis: And they were like, "Don't touch the pieces. I want to be buried with it just like this."

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: "I want everyone—I want someone to find this in 2000 years and know how bad I beat this guy."

Teresa: We know from seeing the board games that the ancient Egyptians were buried with that luck and fate are very important to them, because those are the important parts of the game, right? So if someone was particularly gifted at the game, the consensus was they must be within the favor of the gods, right?

Travis: Yeah! It's kind of the big separator of like chess and dice-based games, or something like that, right? Where chess is not really luck involved. It's strategy, top to bottom, right? But if you play something, you know, like Sorry or Uno or, you know, Monopoly, right? It's definitely a different classifica—you can have strategies while you're doing it.

Teresa: Absolutely.

Travis: But how the cards are dealt, how the dice roll is going to change it.

Teresa: There are several educated guesses from historians how exactly to play that game, but different game companies have made their own Senate sets that they sell today. So if you're interested, there's some available at Target, Walmart and Amazon. [chuckles]

Travis: Just like the Egyptians intended.

Teresa: Exactly. Games do require an element of leisure time, right? Because you had to be done doing your things like farming and, you know, building and doing that kind of stuff.

Travis: War.

Teresa: War. So—

Travis: "Honey! I can't! I've got war today!"

Teresa: I know—

Travis: "I've got to go to war!"

Teresa: So—

Travis: "I won't be home 'till 7:30!"

Teresa: And then it'll be—

Travis: Sometimes—

Teresa: Too dark to play games.

Travis: Yeah! Sometimes war keeps me long. You know what I mean? My boss is like, "You've got extra war to do today." And I'm like, ah, man...

Teresa: So—

Travis: "Can you do war on Saturdays?" But that's my day off!

Teresa: So royalty and the aristocrats were probably the first people to really play games, right? But—

Travis: Oh, it's similar to like when we talked about tennis.

Teresa: Right.

Travis: Right? In that same way. Like farmers weren't like, "Ooh, another day harvesting. To the courts." You know?

Teresa: Mm-hm. But the working class of ancient Egypt started with another game, Mehen, which was named after a deity of ancient Egypt, often pictured as a huge serpent wrapped around the sun god Ra. So, due to the popularity of the game, the god Mehen and the board game named kind of like which came first. We're not sure if it was the god that was named after the game, or the game that was named after the god. It's so intertwined.

Travis: Like a snake wrapped around somebody.

Teresa: I guess so. Romans got in on the game a little later, right? We mentioned Backgammon, which is—

Travis: I bet they gambled a lot too! I bet they were throwing dice. Romans seemed like—

Teresa: Oh, certainly.

Travis: They'd be throwing dice in the, you know, the agora. Was that a place the Romans went? I don't know.

Teresa: I don't remember. Which translates—

Travis: Parthenon?

Teresa: To the game of 12 markings. It was called a little different back then, right? But like the rules are pretty much the same. The board has 24 points, 12 on each side, and each player uses 15 checkers and dice to play.

Travis: I have no idea how Backgammon is played. I've never played it in my entire life.

Teresa: I have watched my dad play it, but I do not know how to play it.

Travis: It is a complete naps—and you know what's funny? I'm only realizing right now that I know zero about it. Not like I would have told you I knew a lot about Backgammon before this. I just think I've never thought about it before in my entire life until this moment. And I'm like, yeah, I don't even know—like you're describing the board and I'm like, I don't know if I've ever seen that board!

[both chuckle]

Teresa: So we've talked a little bit about dice games and like moving pieces games. Next comes strategy games.

Travis: Well, I'm going to pause real quick, because I realized an important thing we haven't gotten out of the way here. What's your favorite like board game?

Teresa: Hm... I really like, what's that one color game that you got?

Travis: Hues and Cues. I knew you were going to say that, yeah—

Teresa: I really like—

Travis: It's fun.

Teresa: That game. It's about like you pick a color and you kind of describe the color?

Travis: Yeah, yeah, you, the—round one is you get one word clue to give players. Like you know, if like—

Teresa: It's a board—

Travis: Like a light blue—

Teresa: Covered in colors.

Travis: You might say like, I don't know, what's a light blue?

Teresa: Sky.

Travis: Sky, right? But then on round two, you can give a two word clue if you want people to get closer to it. And there's like scoring based on if they're close to it, but nobody got it exactly right. It's a whole thing. It's great. Hues and Cues.

Teresa: Yeah. I really like that game. What's your favorite?

Travis: I really like, there's a game called Masterminds, where one person arranges colored pegs in an order, right? I think it's five. And then the other person has so many guesses to put down pegs to try to figure out what that

is by them telling if you ha—like a red peg for like if you got, you know, five of them wrong, you get five red pegs. If you got like two right and three in the wrong place or whatever, you would get like three red pegs and two white pegs. Until eventually you figure out by like moving it, if you can figure out the order of the pegs behind the guard.

Teresa: Mm-hm!

Travis: And I'm very good at it, and I—that's one of the—one of the deciding factors for me of if I like a game or not is, how good am I at it?

Teresa: [chuckles] Well, that's not uncommon. Okay, so a strategy game—

Travis: I also really like, we said Ticket to Ride. Anything—

Teresa: Yeah, that's a—that's a good one.

Travis: No, I'm tr—I was trying to pick one that you wouldn't think of, but Ticket to Ride. The Game of Thrones board game is so good. I really liked that one because it's basically a lot of backstabbing and... yeah.

Teresa: That's a very strategic game, I imagine.

Travis: So strategic. And it really makes you feel like you're setting your friends up for execution. It's great! Be on the same page.

Teresa: There's a two player strategy board game known as Ludus Latrunculorum, I think—

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: Which is said to resemble chess, but reconstructing the exact rules have been difficult. It was heavily influenced by a large number of wars that took place—

Travis: Peace of mind?

Teresa: In the Roman Empire—

Travis: Something like that? Or peace—

Teresa: I'm not sure.

Travis: I'm trying to think what 'luddus' would be, because I—trunculorum, right? Probably has something to do with like tranquility.

Teresa: Latrunculorum.

Travis: Oh, well, that's not it at all. I have no idea then.

Teresa: No...

Travis: It means the elephant game, I've decided, because trunk is in there.

Teresa: [chuckles] Trunk is in it. So it's almost like—

Travis: So backgammon and Latin. [chuckles] I know nothing about them! We're just keeping a list as the episode goes on.

Teresa: It's almost like it's reminiscent of like planning a battle.

Travis: So... maybe it is about elephants. Mounted combat.

Teresa: I don't know. There's the board, which is referred to as the city, and the pieces, called dogs, and each are made of different colors. You take your opponent's pieces by enclosing them between two of yours. Which is interesting, because not unlike chess, there's like the movements of the pieces. So they think that maybe it had a kind of influence on it.

Travis: Mm-hm!

Teresa: We don't know. The next game, we've got—

Travis: I think it's bold if somebody was like, "I'm making the next chess and it's going to be even better." [chuckles]

Teresa: I guess so.

Travis: That's a pretty bold person to make that claim! There's a reason that chess has pretty much stayed the same and other people are like—

Teresa: Well—

Travis: "I've made a chess-like game."

Teresa: Chess hasn't actually really stayed the same.

Travis: Get out.

Teresa: First, I want to talk about two things from China. In 400 BCE, Lee-Bubu was created. It's hypothesized that this two-player game involved moving six game pieces around a square board, determining each move by throwing a set of sticks that stand in for dice, right? And then it was almost wiped off the map by the game Go.

Travis: Uh-huh. Yes.

Teresa: When we get to chess, it's almost like...

Travis: Checkers, but harder.

Teresa: Well, no, no, no. What I want to say is, India is credited with creating chess as we know it today. But there are different strategy games like chess—

Travis: Uh-huh.

Teresa: That were played all over the world.

Travis: Okay, that doesn't surprise me.

Teresa: So like, we think about chess today and it kind of is the result of a convergence of a bunch of different similar games from all the corners.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: You know what I mean?

Travis: Yes, I do.

Teresa: And so, it's almost—it's not impossible. But it really feels like there was room for this game, and a lot of people kind of converged on the idea of the game. You know what I mean?

Travis: Yeah! I mean, the thing is, is like, I can see where two people, some sort of grid or like laid out maybe in lines or whatever.

Teresa: Mm-hm.

Travis: And you move pieces against each other and try to counter each other.

Teresa: Mm-hm.

Travis: Is a pretty like, if that's all you said about it, right? That's a pretty wide parameter that could encompass a lot of similar ideas, right?

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: So when you get into the specifics of chess and you're like, this piece moves like this, this piece moves like this, the goal is this, this does thi—right? Where that's where the specifics come in. But like if I said you move pieces against each other on a grid, it's chess or checkers even now, right?

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: So like, there is a wide parameter of that. And I could see where one of the reasons I think chess is so timeless as a game is taking ideas from a bunch of different iterations of it, from a bunch of different societies, and kind of being like, "Ooh, I like that. Ooh, I like that."

Teresa: Mm-hm.

Travis: "Oh, I'll take that. Yes, please."

Teresa: We do know where the name chess is from. It was adopted in Persia, in the 7th century, because the Persian word shah, meaning king, and then checkmate comes from the word shahmat, which means the king is helpless.

Travis: Well, boom, there you go.

Teresa: Exactly.

Travis: It does what it says right there on the tin.

Teresa: The king is helpless?

Travis: The king is helpless. Yeah. One, that's true throughout the entire game. If all you've got left is your king, good luck. But it also is like, you're in checkmate, the king literally can't move anywhere without being captured. The king, he is helpless. Is there a version of it that's like, and the queen is powerful?

Teresa: I don't—I don't think so. Chess has been the center of history as far as like the popular game that the kings played, that the—

Travis: It's how they show people are smart in movies even now, right?

Teresa: I mean, yeah.

Travis: If you want to be like, look how educated and look how clever and look ha—like to the point where they will cut away from what's actually happening in a scene, to show the two people playing like imaginary chess against each other in a mindscape somewhere. To demonstrate like, we want to make it clear to you guys that these people are on another level. These aren't just two people arguing. They're so smart and so clever and so brilliant, that it's like they're playing chess with each other!

Teresa: And people did kind of wax poetic about it. For example, Benjamin Franklin—

Travis: I've heard of him, yeah.

Teresa: Wrote, "The game of chess is not merely an idle amusement. Several very valuable quantities of the mind, useful in the course of human life, are to be acquired and strengthened by it so as to become habits ready on all occasions. For life is a kind of chess in which we have often points to gain and competitors or adversaries to contend with. In which there is a vast variety of good and ill events that are in some degree the effect of prudence or the want of it. By playing at chess, then we may learn." That was three sentences, by the way—

Travis: Yeah—

Teresa: Because that's the way that—

Travis: That's a lot of words!

Teresa: Benjamin Franklin—

Travis: That's—

Teresa: Writes.

Travis: That's what he does. You know...

Teresa: [chuckles]

Travis: There are many things that I am not good at. That I will sit there and be like, eh, it's fine. I'm not bothered that I'm not good at it. I'm not... Like I underst—I know how to play chess. I don't know how to *play* chess. You know, I don't know how to win chess.

Teresa: I see.

Travis: Right?

Teresa: Yes, yes.

Travis: And the thing that always boggles my mind is the people who really know chess, who are able to look at a thing and be like, "Okay, in 12 moves, I'm going to do this." And be like, how can you know that?! [chuckles] It's like they can see the future to me. They might as well be—

Teresa: That's awesome.

Travis: Like psychic. And I'm like, how?! That's incredible! And I just don't—I don't know how they do it. But speaking of seeing the future, I am seeing the future now. There is a word from another Max Fun show coming up.

[theme music plays]

Ella: All right, we're over 70 episodes into our show, Let's Learn Everything. So let's do a quick progress check. Have we learned about quantum physics?

Tom: Yes, episode 59.

Ella: We haven't learned about the history of gossip yet, have we?

Caroline: Yes, we have. Same episode, actually.

Ella: Have we talked to Tom Scott about his love of roller coasters?

Tom and Caroline: Episode 64.

Ella: So, how close are we to learning everything?

Caroline: Bad news, we still haven't learned everything yet.

Ella: Ah...

Tom: We're ruined!

Ella: No, no, it's good news as well! There is still a lot to learn!

Caroline: Whoo!

Ella: I'm Dr. Ella Hubber.

Tom: I'm regular Tom Lum.

Caroline: I'm Caroline Roper. And on Let's Learn Everything, we learn about science, and a bit of everything else too!

Ella: And although we haven't learned everything yet, I've got a pretty good feeling about this next episode.

Tom: Join us every other Thursday on Maximum Fun.

[break]

Drea: If you want to know what's going on in the world of movies, you should be listening to Maximum Film, so we can tell you all about it!

Kevin: Okay, but what if you already know what's going on in the world of movies? What if you're kind of obsessed with movies, like maybe you have a problem?

Alonso: Well, then you should definitely be listening to Maximum Film! Because we, too, have that problem, and it's important you know you're not alone.

Drea: We're talking indies you'll want to seek out!

Kevin: Blockbusters and blockbusting wannabes.

Alonso: Classics we can't get enough of.

Kevin: I'm comedian and writer, Kevin Avery.

Alonso: I'm film critic, Alonzo Duralde.

Drea: I'm festival programmer and producer, Drea Clark!

Alonso: Together, we're Maximum Film. Smart about movies in Hollywood, so you don't have to be.

Kevin: But if you already are, that's also great. And hey, we see you.

Drea: New episodes every week, on maximumfun.org!

[break]

Travis: See? I told you, I was right.

Teresa: Yeah, you did it. You did it. Let's take—

Travis: Chess isn't a good—

Teresa: [chuckles]

Travis: Party game, by the way.

Teresa: No.

Travis: In case anyone's wondering, don't invite friends over—I guess it would be friend over.

Teresa: One friend.

Travis: I mean, if you guys want to play chess together, that's fine. But it's not, that's not party. Unless you're like, "And there'll be 20 friends watching us." Which if that's what your friends get into, man—

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: That's a whole other level. And I'm here for it.

Teresa: We're going to fast way forward to the 1840s.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: When board games began to be more mass produced. Before, it was something where your community or like a family member might make a game, right?

Travis: Mm-hm.

Teresa: Or it could be passed down. This is where board games start being mass produced, not supe—like by machine, right?

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: But by like printing press, printed on boards and pieces cast and things like that.

Travis: Mm-hm.

Teresa: And they are made as toys for children.

Travis: Mm-hm!

Teresa: So a long time ago, you might have thought—

Travis: That does seem like, yeah, that's a big jump, isn't it?

Teresa: Yeah, that's a big jump. Like where these were for like the adults to show how smart they were. And now these games are teaching devices for children.

Travis: Do you think it's that like, we know for years when you have these like hand-carved, handmade antiques, your kids have been begging you to let them play or teach them and you're like, "No way, dude! This is like 200 year old marble that your like great, great grandfather carved." Right? And now it's like, now you can buy 'em a cheap version that they can play with.

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: Right, and that's kind of how it starts?

Teresa: I think so. I think you're right. What we have centered around these games is morality. We're teaching the children the things that they should—like the things that we value in our society.

Travis: Like saying sorry.

Teresa: Maybe? I don't know when Sorry was made.

Travis: No, that's not what...

Teresa: So—

Travis: Like the—like the importance of a Pop-O-Matic bubble.

Teresa: [chuckles] I loved that.

Travis: Was that in trouble?

Teresa: That was trouble.

Travis: Oh, it was trouble, yeah, with the Pop-O-Matic bubble.

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: Like I remember as a kid hearing that phrase and being like, ooh! Fancy!

Teresa: Pop-O-Matic—

Travis: Whoa! Ooh! Futuristic!

Teresa: And I'll tell you a little bit about that mechanic in a minute. One of the first games that we have a wide-reaching example of this morality is called The Mansion of Happiness.

Travis: Okay?

Teresa: Created in 1845.

Travis: Feels a little bit like a precursor to the Game of Life, but go on.

Teresa: Sure, a little bit. 67 space board game coils into the center of the board. You have free spaces, virtue spaces and vice spaces.

Travis: Oh, and vice is probably bad, right? Not fun.

Teresa: Not fun. So you're trying to get to the center of The Mansion of Happiness, but to do that, you want to land on the good spaces, piety, charity, humility, because then you get to move forward six spaces. But if you land on the vice spaces, like ingratitude and idleness and drunkenness—

Travis: You get to be cool.

Teresa: You have to go back to the very beginning.

Travis: But there's no control over that! Where's the choice?! Also, you know what I bet that is based on, is the like Bible thing of in my father's house there are many rooms. That idea of a like a—

Teresa: Oh!

Travis: Mansion in the sky—

Teresa: Interesting.

Travis: Kind of deal. I bet that was the inspiration for that.

Teresa: And so, here is one of the ways that they also programmed morality into the games. No dice. Because dice were associated with gambling, right?

Travis: So I just chose where to land?

Teresa: Spinners.

Travis: Ah...

Teresa: This is where the spinners come from. And the bubble that you talk about in Trouble is another way of getting around throwing or touching the dice.

Travis: Okay. That's where it gets a little stick—you know?

Teresa: I'm just saying?

Travis: Like when people say 'heck' instead of, you know, they say the, whatev—I'm trying to remember there's a word for it, of like the like soft versions of "swear words." As if like a deity is going to be like, "Ah! Okay! Oh, got me on a technicality! [chuckles] All right."

Teresa: But it's very Victorian, isn't it? Like the idea of like, ooh, this is—this thing is amoral, but let's find this little way to skirt around it.

Travis: Yeah!

Teresa: So, I'm not actually touching the dice.

Travis: Oh, yeah, like the games that we talked about, like where it's like you're blindfolded and it's like, oh! Who's, you know, kissing you or whatever. And it's like, all right, guys, we know what you were doing. And it's like, "No, it's not about that! It's a mystery game." Like, all right, man.

Teresa: After the Civil War, we start getting games that are a little more like fun. The games started to be like more colorful, started to have lots of—

Travis: Candyland! You know?

Teresa: Different printings. I don't know when Candyland—

Travis: No, probably not like 1880.

Teresa: Was—

Travis: I don't think they were doing Candyland at that point.

Teresa: But the next touchstone that we have is in 1904. Lizzie Magie created something that would take the gaming world by storm. It was called The Landlord Game.

Travis: Now, hold on. This is Monopoly.

Teresa: It is Monopoly. But this track, right, the track around the outside of the board, consisted of four railroads, two utilities, a jail, and a corner named Labor Upon Mother Earth Produces Wages, where you get \$100.

Travis: So go.

Teresa: Yes.

Travis: That's where you pass go.

Teresa: Yes. But the idea that she's talking about is that it's supposed to be a teaching moment, because Magie was a Georgist. Georgism is a system proposed by political economist Henry George.

Travis: Makes sense.

Teresa: Who believed that land was a natural resource and all people should have equal access to its benefits. He believed—

Travis: *Oh!*

Teresa: He believed the value of land comes from the community. So therefore, the value should be shared equally among all members of society. So—

Travis: The point she was making was, it's the labor that makes something valuable. Of like, yes, we move through and that's the labor and you've done your work.

Teresa: Yes. So, this game was trying to show that land grabbing systems, currently enacted by the robber barons, were enriching property owners while impoverishing tenants.

Travis: Ah, so it was kind of satirical! A little bit. Because there's railroads, but you weren't owning the property.

Teresa: Right. It was—

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: It was intended as an anti-capitalist game.

Travis: And somebody took that and made it capitalist?

Teresa: Yes.

Travis: Who'da thunk it!

Teresa: She had hoped that people who played the game would be affected by the utter unfairness of it. And carry—

Travis: Yeah! I will say—

Teresa: Their understanding into adulthood.

Travis: Even like a century later, people who play Monopoly—

Teresa: Yes.

Travis: Are struck by the unfairness of it.

Teresa: Indeed—

Travis: I don't know anybody that when you're like, what's your favorite game to play when people get together? Who are like, Monopoly. If someone says that to you, rethink their personality.

Teresa: [chuckles]

Travis: I'm not saying that that person's bad! I'm just saying that that is a moment where you should be like, hm, what do I really know about this person?

Teresa: Yes.

Travis: It is the kind of game you play where it's like, "Hey, we haven't had a good fight in a while. And maybe there's stuff—"

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: "We need to get out in the open. And a good gateway for that is going to be Monopoly. We're going to have four beers each and play Monopoly, and really just get into some deep, down dark stuff."

Teresa: [chuckles] "Really learn why we hate each other."

Travis: Yeah! "We just haven't vented, we haven't aired it all out in a while. And we need a good opening to do that. We can't just start a fight for no reason. So, I've brought Monopoly over."

Teresa: Lizzie Magie sold her patent to Parker Brothers for \$500. They rebranded it as Monopoly. And then they were able to produce Risk and Sorry and Trivial Pursuit and countless others, right? That you can get at any well-worn store today, right? About Chutes and Ladders. This is a game that England, "Discovered in India."

Travis: Uh-huh. Uh-huh.

Teresa: Mm-hm. Mm-hm.

Travis: Unless it was in the middle of a mountain.

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: And it was naturally occurring. I don't think that's true.

Teresa: But it became popular at this time, and it was called Snakes and Ladders at the time.

Travis: Mm-hm.

Teresa: But they rebranded it Chutes and Ladders.

Travis: So as not to scare children.

Teresa: I guess so? So what happens is—

Travis: Or maybe just to avoid questi—because if right now we walked up to our kids and said, "We're gonna play a game about ladders and snakes," they would be like, "Okay, wait, before we do that, can we have a 90-minute Q&A about all of that?"

Teresa: So you roll the dice and you move to a space that either gives you a ladder to slide forward or a chute or snake that moves you backwards.

Travis: That also doesn't make sense. Chutes or slides makes way more sense because people aren't out here like, "Ah, there's a snake, I'm gonna slide down it."

Teresa: I don't know, man. But the way that the English rebranded this, right? Is the idea that you maybe would use an action and a consequence to illustrate the chute or the ladder. So for example, for a ladder space might show someone working in a kitchen, and the ladder upward, you would see them smiling with a cake in their hands, right?

Travis: Oh, okay.

Teresa: And then if you did the chute, it would be a child running around in wet clothes, and then you would—you would go backward on the shoot, and it would show the child's stick.

Travis: Ugh! Okay, we get it. Man! Really taking that fun out of a lot of stuff, you know what I mean?

Teresa: Those Victorians, they love doing that.

Travis: Oh my god!

Teresa: I know.

Travis: It's like if every time they played chess, you also then had to listen to them talk about like parliamentary voting or whatever. Like everyt— here's how the monarchy works. "No, we'll move in a second, honey, but first let me tell you how a bill becomes a law." Or whatever. *Ugh. Gross.*

Teresa: But the interesting thing about chutes and ladders, or originally snakes and ladders, is that across the cultures that have changed and adapted, it takes zero skill to play, right? So you move forward on the game based on dice or spinners, or whatever it is, right? And that's the purpose. Because when it was originally created in India, the randomness of your path through the chutes and ladders is meant to teach you to embrace the concept of fate.

Travis: I love that.

Teresa: I think that's pretty cool. Okay—

Travis: Okay! So let's get to—

Teresa: Yes.

Travis: Modern day game night etiquette.

Teresa: I have one more game that I would be remiss if I didn't say.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: Settlers of Catan.

Travis: Oh, well, yeah!

Teresa: Yes.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: Yes.

Travis: Yeah!

Teresa: Yes.

Travis: Yeah!

Teresa: 1995, the European board game became one of the very first tabletop games to explode in popularity outside of its continental boundaries. Catan hopped across the pond to the States, where over 45 million copies have been sold. And it's been translated into 40 languages, and it has been dubbed the board game of our time—

Travis: I would agree—

Teresa: By the Washington Post.

Travis: With that! And it also has had expansions, it's had branded iterations.

Teresa: Mm-hm.

Travis: You know, I don't know if this exists, but like Simpson's Settlers of Catan, Bluey's Settlers of Catan. I think that one is coming out.

Teresa: Oh, really?

Travis: Yeah, I think so. There's a Bluey one.

Teresa: Interesting.

Travis: It's a wonderful game.

Teresa: It has a lot of different elements about resources and about like, there's the longest road part, right? And—

Travis: And biggest army.

Teresa: And biggest army, so like—

Travis: The thing that's brilliant about it, if you've never played, is the replayability of it. Because the board is put together new every time, because it's hexagons—

Teresa: Mm-hm.

Travis: That fit together. And so it's like you have the border, but then the order of what resource is where, which is the different hexagons represent different resources, is different every time. So even if you're a new player and someone's played before, they might know the mechanics of it, but they haven't been able to like strategize where to build things, because it's different every time you play it.

Teresa: Right. So, now we can do some board game night—

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: Etiquette. Whether you're gonna play Catan, or let's say hues and, what's the name?

Travis: Hues and Cues.

Teresa: Hues and Cues. Really depends on the vibe.

Travis: Oh yeah.

Teresa: Right? The vibe of your players. Not every board game is created equal, right? There's some games that you can learn very quickly or rely on, like we said, like luck or fate or whatever. And then there are some board games that require like intricate rules and strategy. And like you said, replayability is important, but also like if you're a chess master, you already

know 12 moves ahead. So like playing those kinds of games, it has to have a certain vibe in the room, right?

Travis: I will say, for the record, I'm of the opinion that games like Ticket to Ride and Settlers of Catan are a really great middle ground for that, where they feel very strategic.

Teresa: Mm-hm.

Travis: Right? But the learning curve isn't incredibly steep for people.

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: So, as long as the person is interested in playing a game, which is an a—I'm just—I'm going to say there's a rule before we even get to the vibe check rule. Which is if you want to have a game night, you need to brand it as a game night—

Teresa: Yes.

Travis: When you invite people over. The—

Teresa: No ambushing.

Travis: There's no surprise game night, right? Where they thought they were just coming to hang over for like a cocktail party or whatever, and you're like, "Here's a stack of games and a table with eight seats! And that's actually what we're doing!"

Teresa: Yeah, everybody should know what they're getting into. And at least one person should already know the rules of the game. Because if we all go in on a brand-new game all together, that is just a way to make it so that like we're all—it's the blind leading the blind—

Travis: Now—

Teresa: Right?

Travis: I will say there are circumstances where it's like the purpose of what we are doing tonight is I just got this new game, and I would like the four of us to play it, so we can learn to play it.

Teresa: Okay.

Travis: Which I would say is different—

Teresa: Yes.

Travis: From like a game night party, right?

Teresa: Yes.

Travis: Because this is like the reason we're getting together is to learn this new game. So it's a very much like a practice feeling—

Teresa: Mm-hm.

Travis: Thing. And not like, "Hey, thanks for coming to game night! So, I've got this new complicated board game and I'm just opening it now for the first time."

Teresa: [chuckles] Exactly. Exactly. Keep things small, right? Especially applies if you're doing a game involving like role-playing or a game master, right? You wanna make sure that you have a tighter group, because the more people that there are, the more complicated inevitably it gets. A lot of games have recommendation for size. I would say try and keep it on the smaller side of those.

Travis: I would also say along with the vibe check thing—

Teresa: Yeah?

Travis: There are certain games that require a level of like backstabbing and treachery—

Teresa: Mm-hm.

Travis: As a mechanic of the game.

Teresa: Which are games that I do not play.

Travis: That Teresa does not care for. But like hidden role games, you know, like Werewolf or like Coup, or games like Munchkin or games like—

Teresa: What's that one with the apples?

Travis: Oh, the Sheriff of Nottingham?

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: Yeah! I think it's just called Nottingham maybe, but anyways. If the game necessitates like lying to each other or tricking each other or, you know, betraying each other... listen, I'm the type of person, I love those games, right? I think that's a fun kind of strategy. You need to make sure that the people you invite to play those games with you, one, know the nature of the games you want to play. Two, are people you think could like get into that mindset and separate like, this is in the game we're doing this. There is no personal feelings about this whatsoever.

Teresa: Yeah. Yeah. It's always a good idea to start with a practice round or an open hand, especially if several people are new to the game so that you can all kind of like get in the groove together. You can make that part of like the first game, or you can do like, okay, we're gonna spend the next 15 minutes just playing no stakes. And then after that, we'll restart the game and that will be when we'll like take score or whatever.

Travis: I also think I have found a lot of success in game nights of, one, letting people mingle and like have a drink or snacks or whatever before you start.

Teresa: So that nobody is hungry or thirsty.

Travis: And it gives everybody a chance to get like idle chat out of the way, right?

Teresa: Mm-hm.

Travis: Like especially if you're the type of person who's like, "Hey, I'm trying to explain the game to you and you're not paying attention." Let 'em get their wiggles out. Two, build time in for breaks.

Teresa: Absolutely.

Travis: Right? Like for example, in the Game of Thrones board game, there's like I think like nine rounds or whatever. So when I would play it I'd be like, we a—we're gonna take 15 minutes breaks between round three and round four, and between round six and round seven. And those are times, because it's a long game, to like grab a snack or the bathroom or whatever. But also a great time to whisper with someone in the corner about like plans that you have to like turn against another person or whatever. Which also *really* amps up that feeling of like—

Teresa: [chuckles]

Travis: Whispering in the halls of the castle, right?

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: So like, but building that kind of thing in lets people know like, if you're starting to get antsy, there's a break coming up, right? So nobody is like, "Oh, how long has it been? Should we take a break now?" Right. Let everybody know that there are breaks planned. There, no—we're not gonna be stuck at the table all night.

Teresa: Mm-hm.

Travis: It's gonna help everybody vibe a lot more.

Teresa: Absolutely. I would say that snacks and drinks was a great idea. Also—

Travis: Keep drinks away from the table, though.

Teresa: Yes. Yes. Drinks and phones should be someplace else, not on the actual game table, that was I gonna say. Like because spills with like popcorn or whatever, no problem. But if you spill your drink all over the board, that's the end. [chuckles]

Travis: You also—

Teresa: You're not playing anymore. [chuckles]

Travis: Anytime like if there's snacks or something at the table and people are reaching over, you're just asking for stuff to get knocked o—you know, pieces to get knocked over, the board to get messed up or whatever. Ugh.

Teresa: Absolutely.

Travis: When you get up for a break, take a picture of the board, by the way, so that if it gets knocked over—

Teresa: Ooh! That's a good idea.

Travis: Or things get knocked over, you remember where everything is. Because that's the time people sitting back down at the table or standing up from the table is like... prime time for the table getting bumped or whatever.

Teresa: Mm-hm.

Travis: Take a picture before you get up.

Teresa: Another etiquette, don't be a sore winner or a sore loser, because you won't probably get invited back again.

Travis: Yeah! You know, I think that there is a level of celebration and a level of disappointment that is satisfying and appropriate. You know what I mean?

Teresa: Yes.

Travis: Like I don't want someone to win and be like, meh, you know what I mean? I want them to be excited. And if I win, I don't want the people being like, "I didn't really care about it anyways." You know what I mean? Like—

Teresa: Right.

Travis: I want a certain amount of like, [yells out] "Ah! The—aah! You g—ah, good game!" You know what I mean?

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: That kind of thing is what I would say we're looking for.

Teresa: I mean, we want to be able to do like the good game tunnel or whatever after.

Travis: Oh! Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Teresa: [chuckles]

Travis: Especially since, man, one of my favorite—

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: Like parts of a game night, especially in like a strategy, is a game is like talking about it afterwards like, "Oh! Yeah. Oh, man, like I was trying to do the—ah! I was so close." And like if you're a sore loser or a sore winner, I don't want to talk to you about it afterwards, right? I don't want to have that like debrief of what we liked about the game.

Teresa: And we should all remember that it is just a game. So don't take it too seriously, but have a great time.

Travis: Well, when you play the Game of Thrones board game, you win or you don't. And that's fine! It's okay.

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: It's okay! Either way is fine.

Teresa: Either way is fine.

Travis: You know what I mean? It's fine! We'd like to say thank you to our researcher, Alexx, without whom we could not do the episodes. We'd like to say thank you to our editors, Gino and Rachel, without whom we could not make the show. And we'd like to say thank you to you for listening! You're like our little pawns on the board that we move. And it's stra—I don't know what this means. But thank you!

Teresa: I don't know either.

Travis: Yeah, I don't know either.

Teresa: I like the thimble though. That's my favorite.

Travis: You seem like a thimble.

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: I'm the Scottie dog. all day long. I'm the Scottie dog. Sometimes the top hat, if we're playing with like a child and they take the dog, it's fine. I'll be the top hat or the race car. But I'm a Scottie dog, you know what I mean? I'm a Scottie dog thim—like Scottie dog top hat rising.

Teresa: Uh-huh.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: Okay. [chuckles] I'd be interested to find what that means about our personalities, but anyway!

Travis: Nothing at all. The answer is nothing at all.

Teresa: Anyway.

Travis: What a we—what am I forgetting, Teresa?

Teresa: We always thank Brent 'brentalfloss' Black for writing our theme music, which is available as a ringtone where those are found. Also thank you to Bruja Betty Pin-Up Photography for the cover picture of our fan-run Facebook group, Shmanners Fanners! If you love to give and get excellent advice from other fans, go ahead and join that group today. And as always, we are taking topic submissions, questions, idioms, all sorts of things. Send them to shmannerscast@gmail.com, and say hi to Alexx, because she reads every single one.

Travis: And that's going to do it for us, so join us again next week.

Teresa: No RSVP required.

Travis: You've been listening to Shmanners.

Teresa: Manners... shmanners... get it?

Travis: Sawi.

Teresa: [chuckles]

["Shmanners Theme" by brentalfloss plays]

Maximum Fun.

A worker-owned network...

Of artists-owned shows...

Supported directly by you.