

Upfront



Phil Reed, CEO
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STEVE JACKSON GAMES

For the Fans

Steve Jackson Games focuses on expansions and licensed products for the Munchkin card game series while it revives tried-and-true fan favorites. **BY STEPHANIE CRETS**



SteveJacksonGamesbelieves
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forjustabouteverytypeoffan.

If you have a warped sense of humor and enjoy tabletop and card games, odds are you'll enjoy the slate of games offered by Steve Jackson Games. The company has roughly 20 games and more than 100 titles in its current catalog. That can change every year as some games go out of print, while new ones are created and old ones are brought back. But its classic game series is Munchkin.

"Part of the reason Munchkins has been so successful for us is embracing that sense of humor and running off on crazy tangents and having lots of fun with it," CEO Phil Reed says. "The silliness and the cartooning style really excite the fans."

Steve Jackson Games keeps the excitement brewing by constantly announcing new cards or expansions for the Munchkin series, such as Mars Attacks, Judge Dredd and zombie and holiday-themed expansions. "We try to turn the game around to shock and surprise the players," Reed notes.

Along with that surprise, Munchkin never loses its sense of humor and ability to poke fun at anything and everything. "It can be a broad parody of everything out there," Reed says. "Anything you can poke fun at, we've found ways to translate it into a game and have a good time." For example, Steve Jackson Games just released an expansion called Grimm Tidings, a Walgreen's exclusive that pokes fun at classic fairytales, while Amazon has an exclusive called Munchkin Oz Guest Artist Edition, parodying Wizard of Oz.

"There's a Munchkin game for almost everyone," he continues. "Even new people have a good time playing it be-

For licensing, contact Elan Freedman of

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SUPER MUNCHKIN

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cause you have a handful of silly cards, which keeps people engaged, playing the game and as brutal and aggressive as other players.”

Munchkin fans can look forward to a revamped version of their favorite card game. Usually, it requires three to six players, but Steve Jackson Games plans to release a two-player experience next summer. “Just like Munchkin is designed as a parody for fantasy role-playing games, the collectable card game is a parody of card games,” Reed says. “It’s designed by two talented game designers, Eric Lang and Kevin Wilson, who have a lot of experience.

“It’s, at its core, a very strong game engine, but then it pokes fun at collectable card games. It’s gone from an idea to something that’s looking phenomenal and I can’t wait to watch players get it next summer.”

Game Revivals

Munchkin has been so successful that it can sometimes deter Steve Jackson Games from focusing on some of its other titles. Reed says this is a hard challenge to reconcile, considering a lesser-known title might generate only a fraction of the profits of a new Munchkin title. Therefore, the company must decide if it should continue spending its efforts on a game that might not be as successful. “We’re trying to balance that by making new games but keeping the Munchkin audience happy,” he notes.

Steve Jackson Games is reviving interest in a title originally published in 1986: the GURPS roleplaying game. The game has been continuously in print since its publication date, but now the company is developing a new GURPS game.

It ran a successful Kickstarter program for the new game, raising \$176,450 of its \$100,000 goal with 1,587 backers. “It allowed that audience to show us and tell us, ‘Yes, we really want this,’” Reed adds. “We’re definitely going to look at Kickstarter as a way to support older titles that have an audience.”

Another game revival is Car Wars, first published in 1981. It was Steve Jackson Games’ first big hit, and the company has spent the last few years building a new edition that will streamline gameplay, along with redesigning the plastic models that players use in the game. Car Wars’ new edition is set to come out next summer, and Steve Jackson Games already has 40 supplementary releases prepared for it. With a game like Car Wars, players need regular releases for models so they can continue to expand their game.

“It’s easy to devote all your attention to the game with getting it out there, and then not having the support in place,” Reed explains.

“You can have a really big launch with a game but then interest wanes when the player can’t get anything else for it. So we have the first year of releases done, and we’ll hit new expansions for the game every month. I’m most excited about this game



because it’s one I played in junior high and high school. Now I’m working on a new edition and building a catalog for it, which is a treat.”

Next year is the 40th anniversary of Ogre, which was Steve Jackson’s first game. To celebrate this milestone, the company is prepared to do a big push with new products, including new plastic mini figures, and a Kickstarter project for the fans. “Fans have wanted it for a long time,” Reed says.

More than Games

Steve Jackson Games’ partners at Surge Licensing have helped grow the brand even further. Surge positioned the company with companies such as Funko, Boom Comics and We Love Fine to bring Munchkin to life. Now, fans can purchase Munchkin toys, comic books, coloring books and apparel to celebrate their favorite card game even more.

“I’m proud of how much we’ve grown the Munchkin sales and reach over the last six years,” Reed says. “You could find us at comic book and game stores, but now you can walk into Walgreens or Target and find Munchkin games. The one time when I really understood what we’d done was when I was getting an eye exam. I started explaining my job, and the doctor said, ‘Oh, we love Munchkin!’ My eye doctor is a player. It has a lot more reach and more hands than even a year ago.”

