

A Game of Thrones: The Board Game review – by Craig Pearson

In A Game of Thrones: The Board Game, each player takes on the role of one of the six main houses: Stark, Greyjoy, Baratheon, Lannister, Martell and Tyrell. From here, players begin the game with control over predetermined regions, military units, family member cards and positions on the three influence tracks. The positions of influence offer different benefits to the player who exerts control over them, affecting the player's turn order, order manipulation, combat bonus, amongst a few other things.

The game lasts for a maximum of eight turns, with each being divided into three main phases: the Westeros Phase, the Planning Phase, and the Action Phase. Within the Action Phase is the Combat Sub-Phase, which takes place immediately when units of two rival houses enter the same region and battle is joined. The game ends when a player controls seven strongholds and/or castles, or the most of these upon the completion of the eighth turn.

The Westeros Phase begins by drawing one event card from each of the three Westeros Decks. Each has an in-game effect, which include allowing players the opportunity to bid for control of the influence tracks, mustering new units, but also restricting the selection of certain orders for the turn. During this phase the Wildlings also begin to gather their strength and will occasionally attack The Wall. Here players are able to offer power tokens to bolster the Knights Watch and thwart an invasion attempt. Failure to do so can result in negative effects to the players.

Following this is the planning phase. Players now begin to place orders (face down) in each area under their control, in which they have a military presence. These are divided into military orders, including raid, march, support and defend, and the ability to consolidate power through the collection of power tokens. Once each region has an order assigned to it all tokens are then revealed. At this point the player with influence over the Messenger Raven track has the opportunity to swap one of his orders for another as desired. The game then moves to the Action Phase.

During the Action Phase, each of the orders is resolved in order, beginning with raids, then march orders, and finally consolidate power orders. Each order is resolved in turn sequence, beginning with the player who controls the Iron Throne influence track. Raid orders allow a player to remove another's raid, support or consolidate power orders in an adjacent region, essentially disrupting their plans. March orders follow this, allowing players to invade adjacent territory and join battle. I will go into this more in the next paragraph. Finally, the Action Phase concludes with the gathering of power tokens. These are added to a player's pool to allow them to bid on the influence tracks and help defend against future Wildling attacks.

As mentioned, when one player invades a region controlled by another, the game enters the Combat Sub-Phase. Upon moving the desired units into battle, either player can then call for support from neighbouring players who control adjacent regions (and with support orders at their disposal). This adds to the political dimension of the game. Once completed, each player's combat strength is calculated. This is the total of the units involved, bonuses from the order tokens themselves, and the Valyrian Steel influence track. The next step is for each player to decide if they wish to use one of their family cards to help influence the battle. Each card represents a family

member from the books and possesses unique abilities, be them offensive, defensive, and/or political. Then a card is drawn by each player from the Combat Deck, randomly adding to their combat total. These factors are all taken into account to determine the winner of the battle. Units destroyed or forced to retreat are moved accordingly and the game returns to the resolution of the next march order of the Action Phase.

A Game of Thrones is an excellent board game. The gaming board, tokens, cards and units are produced to a high quality and there are so many aspects to the game that no two are the same. The only downside is that to get the best from this game, it really needs six players. Games can be played with as few as four, but the political element to the game requires more. For any fan of the books/show, this game can't come with a higher recommendation.