

and Their Captors as Workers.” A compelling observation in chapter 5 is “The Walt Disney Corporation’s portrayal of bears and other wild animals points to the complications and contradictions involved in our understanding of how designers labor so that we can work as tourists who witness bears as unwitting performers” (p. 99). In American history, performance, spectacle, and space, as with the toys, games, and dolls that they inspire, often prove problematic. Chapter 3, “Out of Hibernation and into Children’s Literature” discusses treasured bears like Winnie the Pooh, Paddington Bear, and The Berenstain Bears.

Researchers interested in play and material culture will consider the discussion in Chapter 6, “Teddy Bear Another One Quickly Disappears and Frequently Reappears” valuable. The American legend of the teddy bear involves President Theodore Roosevelt (Teddy, to some) and his 1902 hunting trip. The story goes that one of his companions cornered a large black bear, tied it to a tree, and encouraged the president to shoot it. Roosevelt declined and reportedly said he would not be proud to shoot a tired, worn-out bear. Clifford Berryman, a political cartoonist, satirized the president’s refusal to shoot the bear in his cartoon “Drawing the Line in Mississippi,” which was featured in the *Washington Post* on November 16, 1902. Inspired by the cartoon, Rose and Morris Michtom, Russian Jewish immigrants and Brooklyn candy shop owners, created a cuddly stuffed toy and dubbed it Teddy’s Bear. The toy was available for sale by Christmas 1903. Horowitz draws the conclusion that “the actual bear quickly disappears and then prolifically and almost immediately reappears. If the actual bear

died, it lived on in so many versions that it is no exaggeration to say the story of TR and teddy bears marks a major point in the history of bearmania” (p. 129). Horowitz questions the story’s authority and provides thought-provoking insights into the obscured history of the first teddy bears. He credits Donna Varga for sending him “on the road to understanding how Teddy Roosevelt’s adventure led to the creation and then popularization of teddy bears in ways that challenge the oft-told tales” (p. 136). As with the origin stories of many toys, the legend of the teddy bear is blurry and entangles intricacies relevant to adulthood and not childhood play. At the end of the chapter, Horowitz writes “seeing teddy bears as huggable should remind us of the tension between cuteness, vulnerability, and the potential for violence” (p. 148). Some scholars have explored these ideas within the context of dolls and girlhood, and I would have liked to see Horowitz expand on the topic.

*Bear with Me* is engaging overall, but a bit niche. Researchers across disciplines may find areas of interest as Horowitz covers the subject over a vast landscape. However, the book might not prove as accessible to individuals interested in teddy bears as a commodity of play.

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—Michelle Parnett-Dwyer, *The Strong National Museum of Play, Rochester, NY*

## Unsettling Catan

*J. Rey Lee*

Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2025. List of figures, credits, note to the reader, introduction, glossary, note on game editions, notes, references, and

index. 220 pp. \$24.95, paper.  
ISBN: 9780472039982

*Unsettling Catan* is the first in the Tabletop Games book series. Each book presents a deep dive into a board game that has had lasting impact on the genre and an examination of some of the issues that surround it. As an opening piece in this series, *Unsettling Catan* sets the tone for future entries and gives us an idea of how the collection aims to address contemporary debates in board game studies.

First published in 1995, Klaus Teuber's *Catan* is a founding title in the modern revival of board games. Its continued popularity has been coupled with different versions, a name change, and a comprehensive overhaul of the exterior art. Yet despite this, the base game remains relatively unchanged, and its popularity remains evergreen in both board gaming and more general player communities. In the United Kingdom, *Catan* is widely available beyond dedicated board game shops, often prominently displayed in bookshops and other large stores. It is also the subject of a more than six-hundred-page LitRPG title (currently glowering, unread, on my bookcase), many fannish customizations of the board, the pieces, and the artwork, and several pieces of extremely impressive cosplay. All of this continued attention demonstrates that *Catan* remains both commercially popular and beloved, having an active fan base that engages strongly with the themes and visual motifs of the game.

J. Rey Lee's thoughtful discussion of *Catan* deals directly with its longstanding position at the center of board gaming culture and highlights why this means that it is also an excellent representative for

critical tension within the genre. *Unsettling Catan* does a lot of heavy lifting regarding our collective approaches to board game play, situating *Catan* within a framework that does not always lie easy in terms of its thematic and ludic mechanics. Lee argues that we should be unsettled by the unconscious art, ethics, play, and thematic tone of board games, even when it is far easier to simply play without paying attention to the concerns of colonialism, settlement, and worker placement that often underpin games like *Catan*. This means that their discussion moves beyond *Catan* to give a much-needed examination of how context and play inform each other during board game play. Lee's work therefore considers how our attitudes toward play must be addressed in order to avoid blame-dodging interpretations of board games, and why this is important to the wider context of gaming critique. By breaking this down into sections that mimic the language of the rules (e.g. chapters called "How to Play," "Placing Hexes," and "Robbing and Trading"), the author makes a conscious effort to bring readers into direct contact with implications of playing *Catan*, and he is able to reassess players' positions as colonizers, settlers, robbers, and warriors.

This is a strong work to start the series, reaching far beyond *Catan*, but always considering how social and cultural change can affect our broader understanding of play. It also demonstrates a true love of the game, and of board game play itself, without losing sight of the fact that critical attention should not avoid difficult questions or changing perspectives.

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—Esther MacCallum-Stewart, *The University of Staffordshire, Stoke-on-Trent, UK*