

THE GAME IS ON

Author Neil Strauss chronicled the controversial world of ‘pick-up artists’ in the best-selling *The Game*. Now, one enterprising board game designer is using it to explore the social party scene

Party games have been around since the days of playing *Charades*, *Spin the Bottle* or *Truth or Dare* as kids and even the most sophisticated of adult gatherings can often be relied upon to break out a round of *Pictionary* or *Trivial Pursuit*. However, it was a collaboration between Strauss and ex-Hasbro designer Adam Kornblum that has led to the creation of a social

party game expressly designed to break the ice with potential partners. A social experiment with cards, rules and the possibility of forging closer bonds with players you may not even have met before you started.

Most of *Who's Got Game?* is based on concepts from Strauss' book, featuring personality tests, conspiracies, mind games, handwriting analysis, hidden secret revelations, storytelling, dance-offs and even palm reading across a series of cards that force players to engage in a group dynamic with often very revealing results into their psyche.

We caught up with Kornblum to ask how it came together and what *WGG?* and his previous game, *Charge Large*, can teach us about our social habits...



What was the reasoning behind *Who's Got Game?*'s creation?

I created a board game before *Who's Got Game?* and sold it to game giant Hasbro. Here's the backstory. I was driving to Hasbro one day and since its headquarters is about four hours

THE SOCIAL PARTY SCENE IS REALLY TAKING TO THE IDEA OF ACTUALLY PLAYING THE GAME. WHO DOESN'T LOVE A GOOD PERSONALITY TEST?



MONDAY 13TH

- After more reports of appalling working conditions at Foxconn, Apple now begins an inspection of its factories in Shenzhen and Chengdu, China. Products Foxconn manufacture include the iPad, Wii, Xbox 360 and PS3.

TUESDAY 14TH

- *Redemption*, a live-action film related to Bioware's *Dragon Age* is released on DVD.
- *Closure* by Eyebrow Interactive, wins the DICE Summit 2012 Indie Games Challenge.
- Blizzard and board games manufacturer USAopoly reveal *World of Warcraft Monopoly*. A Facebook vote will decide what tokens will be included in the game. A *Starcraft*-themed *Risk* is also on the cards.

WEDNESDAY 15TH

- Sony's new handheld, the PlayStation Vita, launches in North America. Sales will exceed 1.2 million units by the end of the month.

THURSDAY 16TH

- Brian Fargo, co-creator of the 1980's RPG *Wasteland*, also declares his intention to create a crowd-funded game, hoping to raise \$1m for a sequel.

FRIDAY 17TH

- *Angry Birds* developer Rovio sets March 22nd as the release date for *Angry Birds Space*.

SATURDAY 18TH

- Following *Indie Game: The Movie*, a new documentary on independent games is announced. *Us and the Game Industry* is set for a winter 2012 release.

SUNDAY 19TH

- Amy Hennig wins the Writer's Guild of America award in the videogames category for her work on *Uncharted 3*.
- The Polish-American inventor of the two-flipper pinball machine, Steve Kordek, dies aged 100.

MONDAY 20TH

- A report from McMaster University in Canada suggests that playing first-person shooters can help to correct some forms of visual impairment.

Facebook and one thing led to another from there.

How has response been so far?

WGG? launched about three months ago and the response has been good so far. Game reviewers are saying great things, *Who's Got Game?*'s

YouTube videos have over 550,000 views (which has helped us pick up additional distribution), Neil wrote an Op-Ed in the *Huffington Post* about it, and based on the high demand – we are creating a *Who's Got Game?* app.

How are you finding the social party scene has taken to the idea of playing an actual game as opposed to just playing 'The Game'?

The social party scene is really taking to the idea of actually playing the game. Truth be told, everyone is always playing The Game. We simply set the stage to play it right and maximize the enjoyment factor of each interaction with *Who's Got Game?* After all, who doesn't love a good personality test, loaded question, physical challenges, secret mission

from where I was located, my sister was nice enough to let me sleep in her sorority house to avoid spending most of the day/night in the car driving.

As I've always been the 'good friend' to women, I decided to take everything I've read (from personality tests to handwriting analysis to kino escalation [physical contact]) and turn it into a game. This way I could more or less step outside of myself and be 'better'. In my own head I was now playing for points which removed some of that unwarranted stress that some guys (like myself) feel when trying to approach, keep a conversation interesting, or attempting to go kino with women.

That being said, after play testing it, I contacted Neil [Strauss] on



from Neil, or a conspiracy adventure!

I've received a bunch of Facebook messages (on *Who's Got Game?*'s Facebook page) from people who have specifically said that they can't believe how the handwriting analysis cards are so easy, fun, and applicable to use.

Who's Got Game? had a lengthy creation period between yourself and Strauss. How receptive to the idea was he and how well did the collaboration process between the two of you work?

Creating *Who's Got Game?* with Neil was incredible. When I reached out to him on Facebook, his assistant at the time, Monique, got back to me and really helped turn this on. Monique eventually put me in touch with Neil and we started collaborating from there.

Neil's amazing. He's really sincere and he's super creative. Here's something cool. When Neil and I started working together he had just launched his latest *New York Times* bestselling book *Everyone Loves You When Your Dead*. This really put things into perspective for me... Here I'm reading unpublished excerpts from Neil's interviews with people like Tom Cruise, Paul McCartney, Lady Gaga, Paris Hilton, and more... and at the time I was just like... is this really happening?

How much did the game's design and mechanics change from your initial approach?

They went through a lot of testing so as you can imagine a lot was tweaked along the way. However, the focus and goal of the game which is for a



group of people to connect on a deeper level and have a fun time has remained the same. Neil, for example, sent out an email to his list around Valentine's Day (when we launched *Who's Got Game?*). It said "One tip that's not in the rules for those who have it already: Hand one SECRET CARD to each player before starting the game".

So the aspects are constantly evolving. The app will also get a few different twists that people should really enjoy.

Charge Large was your first game. How has that worked out in the long run?

It's actually a really cool new *Monopoly*. I'll paint the picture of *Charge Large* for you quickly. If you can clear your mind for a second and imagine *Monopoly* with credit cards, then imagine those credit cards look like American Express Gold, Platinum, and Black cards...

Now, each player starts with a gold credit card and cash. As they buy properties/companies, obtain a certain amount of cash, use their credit card (any amount can be charged) and pay it off, each player becomes eligible to upgrade to the Platinum credit card and then the elite status Black card. Rewards and benefits follow as players upgrade to higher level credit cards. Just like in real life.

We had a really cool social media marketing/PR campaign, which was based on a fictitious billionaire playboy named Charlie Large. Charlie Large was the face of the game and got so popular on Facebook (and across the internet) that the CEO of Hasbro reached out on Facebook, invited us in, and acquired the rights to the game. Wild, right?

Both *Who's Got Game?* and *Charge Large* are obviously games with strong (if wildly different) social messages.

How well do you see games being able to reflect and inform public awareness of matters of importance as well as simply being fun things to do?

You are so on point. Both games do have strong social messages. I added credit cards to *Monopoly* when I was about nine years old and the idea came back to me when I was a senior in college (about to graduate). I suppose I created *Charge Large* to escape facing the 'real world' as I hoped I would become a Black card member. With *Who's Got Game?*, I initially created it for my own personal use and when it really worked and I saw people having a blast with it, I thought, I have to make this happen.

When it comes to games, there's just something special about opening up a game box, taking out the cards, and then transporting into a fantasy world that feels real with a group of people.

What's next in terms of game ideas?

Let's see... next game ideas. We have the *WGG?* app set to launch early-to-mid summer. I'm also in talks to collaborate with two other international bestselling authors. I foresee one of these being a strategy game since the author is utterly famous for his books that advise on strategy, war, and power. ☺

You can check out *Who's Got Game?*'s official website at: www.neilstrausspartygame.com, visit the Facebook page at: www.facebook.com/neilstrausspartygame, and catch the latest updates on Twitter at: www.twitter.com/neilstraussgame.

WEDNESDAY 22ND

- UK high street retailer GAME shows more signs of struggling. After closing 35 stores, the chain also finds itself unable to stock many new titles.

THURSDAY 23RD

- Antoine Bauza's latest game *Takenoko* is announced as the 2012 As d'Or – France's Game of the Year. Other prizes handed out include the Grand Prix for *Olympus*, while best children's game went to *Zwerg Riese*.

FRIDAY 24TH

- As part of the marketing campaign for *Mass Effect 3*, early 'Space' copies of the game are launched into the high atmosphere on GPS-tracked weather balloons.

SATURDAY 25TH

- Former Bungie co-founder Alex Seropian and ex-Dreamworks Vice President Brent Pease form the mobile gaming studio Industrial Toys.

SUNDAY 26TH

- Industry site ICv2 reveals the top selling hobby games in the US in 2011, with *Settlers of Catan* and *Ticket to Ride* taking the top spots. *Game of Thrones*, *Mage Knight* and *Eclipse* round out the five, while the most popular card games are revealed as *Dominion*, *Munchkin* and *7 Wonders*.

MONDAY 27TH

- A report by HIS Screen Digest Media Research confirms many suspicions, declaring the number of Facebook users playing games has dropped by half.

TUESDAY 28TH

- HBO announces HBO Go, its streaming service, will be brought to the Xbox 360 by April 1st.

WEDNESDAY 29TH

- After six years of development, the Raspberry Pi is released. The \$25 single-board minicomputer has been designed to help with the teaching of computer science and programming skills. Reports claim over two million pre-orders.
- Leaked concept art confirms that *SimCity* developer Maxis is working on a fifth title in the long-running city-building series.