

# A game of zero percent luck

## Board game

This week, with the holiday season almost upon us, Lucas Brouwers discusses board games. Today: *Captains of the Golden Age*

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Photo: NRC

Weigh anchor, hoist the sails! In the *Captains of the Golden Age* board game you get to sail the seven seas like a seventeenth-century captain. At our house we can't get enough of all the plundering and the beautiful briny. Yes, *Captains* is a keeper.

*Captains of the Golden Age* was created and produced by Dutch game makers Niek Jansma and Dick Severs. They scraped together funding for the production and distribution through a Kickstarter crowdfunding campaign that netted 25,000 euros.

The objective of the game is to ship pepper from 'the Orient' on one side of the circular board to an unspecified, orange-coloured 'republic' on the other. Along the route are islands where cargos of rum, wood, linen and copper can be loaded on board.

The Orient and the republic are the game's safe havens. At these locations you're immune from attack and you can upgrade your ship. Add more cannons or crew members, extra sails or more hold capacity. Each addition renders your vessel faster, more dangerous or larger.

Out at sea, danger lurks. Competitors can board your ship and steal your cargo or they can attack you with cannon fire. Tension reaches fever pitch whenever anyone is loading up a cargo of pepper. Butter wouldn't melt in the mouths of even the most brazen pirates when they're shipping pepper. Could I possibly trouble you to pass through, sir, *please*?

The design of the board is pretty sophisticated. At first we didn't see the point of the peripheral sea spaces, until someone transported a cargo of pepper at top speed beyond the reach of everyone else's shipping routes. Aha!

Captains is an honest game. Or, as its creators say, a game of "zero percent luck". In other words, a game without the arbitrariness of dice or a deck of cards. It's an absolute delight for smart, strategic minds who like to plan ahead.

They are aided by the game's deceptively simple rules. If your sails are shot to smithereens it's only because your opponent has more cannons than you. And if your cargo gets stolen, that's just due to your opponent's numerical advantage in terms of crew (one stolen cargo for each crew member).

No one in our house has discovered a foolproof strategy yet. In our most exciting game so far, the captain with the fastest ship initially took the lead. Halfway through, however, the captains with the most cannons took charge. And ultimately the winner was the captain who had chosen the most hold capacity.

*Lucas Brouwers*