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TTGDA CALLS ON AWARDS CURATORS, CONTENT CREATORS, AND PUBLISHERS TO ATTRIBUTE GAME AUTHORSHIP FULLY AND ACCURATELY

Several recent announcements in the tabletop games industry have failed to identify creators of the games being discussed or described those games as being “by” their publishers without naming the individual designers. The TTGDA finds this practice unacceptable and calls on awards organizations, content creators, publishers, and sales platforms to accurately identify designers when discussing games. “You would never recommend *The Widow* as the latest book by Doubleday. It’s by John Grisham,” said TTGDA Treasurer Elizabeth Hargrave. “The same should go for tabletop games.”

Common Ways Designers Are Not Properly Credited

- Designers not receiving clear and specific credit in published products.
- Publishers failing to name designers in solicitations and marketing text.
- Sales platforms not including designers in their listings for products.
- Awards not promoting creators as prominently as publishers in ceremonies and PR.
- Influencers and games journalists covering a work’s publisher but not also its creators.
- Publishers identifying themselves as “creators” in marketing text or as “authors” or “designers” in sales platform listings.
- Derivative products not identifying individual source designers and works.

Specific examples of these issues exist across our market. TTGDA has been actively working with both GAMA on the Origins Awards and Mensa on their Select winners to correct problems with their promotions, which have failed to include designers across multiple years. TTGDA has also had success working with Barnes & Noble to add designer names to their listings. Amazon, on the other hand, has resisted calls to properly make game designers part of their listings even though they have the ability to identify musicians and book authors in ways that make them searchable and connect them to their creations.

TTGDA would also like to emphasize that while we see many instances where designers are not properly or accurately credited, there is also widespread support for designers in the

industry. Some recent examples include the designer-focused Spiel des Jahres awards and the BoardGameGeek convention coverage, such as the currently active Gen Con and SPIEL Essen lists.

Games Are Created by Designers

While games can follow many paths before reaching the public, the most common one is for a designer to have an idea that they work on for months or years before pitching it to a publisher or deciding to self-publish. The polishing and product design work a publisher does—while definitely important—does not override the designer’s authorship of the game. Even for works that are created by an employee of a publisher, the designer is not the publisher itself but the individual doing the actual creative labor. They deserve to be credited by name.

“Accurate and prominent name credit should be a given in all aspects of game publishing and promotion,” notes TTGDA board member James Lowder, an author and RPG designer with more than 35 years’ experience. “Those credits have clear commercial and personal value for every creator. The industry must do a better job acknowledging the people who imagine the works and worlds that underpin everything we do.”

Designers’ Names Are Readily Available

In 1988, a group of board game designers organized by Reinhold Wittig banded together and signed a proclamation stating, “None of us gives a game to a company if our name is not written on the box cover!” That proclamation has led to great improvements for creator visibility. Even for people outside a publisher’s inner circles, game designers’ names are now readily available not only on the covers of some games themselves but in comprehensive online resources such as BoardGameGeek.com.

“The games industry has largely agreed that designers’ names belong on their games for over 30 years. Now we are calling on the industry to carry that over into how we talk about games,” said TTGDA President Geoff Engelstein.

Best Practices

TTGDA recommends these best practices for talking about tabletop games and creators:

- If you mention the publisher, also mention the designers. This doesn’t mean every person working on a multi-designer project needs to be listed every time, but at least mention the leads. When notable elements such as innovative mechanisms are promoted, credit their creators. If art is used in the PR, credit the artist.
- Words matter: A game is “by” its designer or designers, and “published by” or “presented by” the publisher. The “creator” of a game is the designer, not the publisher.

- If you don't want to take the time in a review video or awards ceremony to read a list of names, consider a text overlay. This gives the opportunity to also highlight key facts in your presentation such as play time and player count.
- Consent matters: Publishers, awards, and events should coordinate with designers on the use and presentation of their names. If a designer doesn't wish to be connected to something, they should be able to remove their name. As a best practice, this encourages designers to participate more actively in promotions where their name appears by consent.
- Integrate clear, creator-friendly terms for designer credits and consent for name use into all game publishing and industry-related contracts.

The Tabletop Game Designers Association is committed to working with any publisher, influencer, news platform, awards organization, and sales platform to encourage these best practices and continue to stress that fair treatment of creators is both the right thing to do and good for long-term business.

About the Tabletop Game Designers Association

The Tabletop Game Designers Association is a 501(c)(6) nonprofit organization dedicated to supporting designers of all types of tabletop games, including board games, role playing games, card games, miniature games, and others, whether mass market, specialty, or hobby. Learn more about us at www.ttgda.org.

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