

Review: Horrified is a terrific family-friendly monster-themed board game



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Some folks use “family game” as a pejorative. Not me. For one thing, I happen to like my family. More importantly, as a player and critic of board games, it is my holy duty to introduce as many games as possible to my family. In the cardboard eschaton, all games shall be family games, because

families will play anything and everything together.

With that very important disclaimer out of the way, it's now time to announce that Prospero Hall's *Horrificed* is my favorite family game of the year.

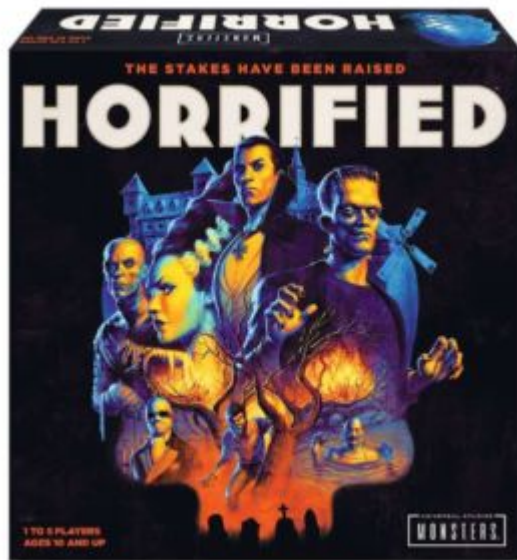
Better than *Pandemic*?

Let me rag on a game that I happen to respect for a minute.

My hang-up with the popular co-op disease-fighting game *Pandemic* is that it's always making things harder for its players. To some degree, that's a surefire formula for a cooperative game, and *Pandemic* should know; it set the standard for the genre. Every turn you can fix one problem, maybe two, but three new problems spill onto the board. Before long, the game board can look like an overwhelming pile of disease cubes.

But *Horrificed* takes that formula by the neck and gives it a good wringing. The result feels familiar—but the game rewards its players rather than constantly punishing them. In *Horrificed*, you're the cure, not merely the treatment.

Welcome to the world's most unfortunate town



Imagine living in a town that's already hemorrhaging citizens to Dracula when the Creature from the Black Lagoon wades up and starts snacking on picnickers. Also, the Invisible Man is peeping on everybody's significant other, Frankenstein's Monster keeps strangling bystanders, the Wolf Man has been fetching femurs that are still attached to their owners, and the Mummy is smashing records for biggest box office flops.

That's *Horrorified* in a nutshell. Two or three classic monsters are all terrorizing your town at the same time, and it's your task to defeat, seal away, or cure them before they murder too many of your neighbors. It's a bad, bad place to live—but at least houses are affordable.

The turn-by-turn procedure here will be familiar to anyone who's played a cooperative game in the vein of *Pandemic*. Everyone has their own character, complete with some minor power that defines how they play, like teleporting to a friend's location or gathering objects from afar. With only a handful of actions, you move about town, collecting items and ushering bystanders safely to their destinations. The danger is that nearby monsters might activate in between each player's turn. Rather than being inevitable, these appearances are governed by a separate deck. Sometimes a monster will remain stationary, dormant but dangerous. Other times it will

sprint across multiple spaces to maul somebody—or even spring special abilities on you.

These monsters are what make *Horrificed* special. They're each billed as unique, with their own behaviors and means of defeat. In practice, though, some of their traits are closer than they ought to be; expect to see plenty of goals that require you to spend matching items in the monster's space. But for every disappointing objective, there are two made of sterner stuff. In the midst of gathering items and fleeing from the shadows, you might take a detour to hunt through the swamp to solve a hieroglyphic puzzle at the museum or to prevent Frankenstein's Monster from reuniting with his Bride, at least until you've prepared the perfect first date. The real test is when these challenges are combined. Breaking all of Dracula's coffins isn't hard, but braving those hidden vampire lairs while you're being robbed blind by the Invisible Man and staying far away from the Wolf Man? That's when things get interesting.

- Don't let her die!
Dan Thurot
- Behold the over-the-top monster poses.
Dan Thurot
- Dan Thurot
- Dan Thurot

A campy horror yarn for the whole family

The appeal of *Horrificed* is that it's every bit as easy to explain to newcomers as what I've written above. Easier, really. Among experienced players, it might even seem too simple, with only a handful of actions to select from. But everything about it, from its crisp interface to the transparency of its board state, is designed to lure in the

unsuspecting.

Consider how campy it is. Rather than shooting for horror, it's "scary" the way a bad throwback movie is scary, with unconvincing rubber body suits and stilted acting by performers who plainly believe they're cut out for Broadway instead of this moving picture fad. The colors are bright, and the monster miniatures are posed with exaggerated goofiness. But it's a trick. Twenty minutes later, you're sweating the proximity of the Creature to some pedestrians and wondering if you can return those scrolls to the museum in time.

In other words, this game is entirely possible to lose. All those deaths gradually add up, whether they are your own or those of the cardboard townsfolk cowering on the table. Lose too many people and the monsters win. But each loss feels more immediate than a disease cube could ever be. That masticated villager wasn't a statistic; he was Fritz the Hunchback, at home in the tower but trying to reach the institute for safety. I didn't quite grasp this until my sister smacked the table in frustration when we lost a villager we'd been guiding across town. By giving those cardboard cutouts a name and a goal, Prospero Hall has made them a little bit more human. Our brains are weird like that.

Not that I should be surprised. Prospero Hall has been doing some great work these past few years, including the board game adaptation of *Jaws* from earlier this year, and each release only grows more assured and more personal. *Horrificed* continues that tradition. It's the sort of game you can take to dinner with your extended family. Better yet, it's one of those rare games everyone will be able to dig into.

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