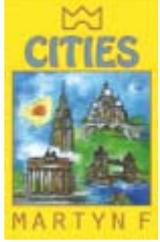


- **Ciao, Ciao** was an Alex Randolph game from 1997 that was all about bluffing. Ironically I sat out from the Poker Tournament at BGG.CON because I have no poker face and everyone at the table can always figure out exactly how good my hand of cards is, so what do I play in the board game room while the Poker Tournament is going on? Of course it just had to be Ciao, Ciao. This was the first in a series of odd and obscure games that Morgan Dontanville brought to the table, followed by Mago Magino, Eselsrennen, and later by Fruttirelli and Tumba. He certainly has a knack for bringing out games that I haven't heard of before, which is remarkable considering how much time I spend on BoardGameGeek learning about every conceivable board game. Anyway, you can imagine that Ciao, Ciao was not my cup of tea given my gross ineptitude at bluffing, which is essentially the sole mechanic of this game. Players take turns secretly rolling a die and then telling their fellow players what the die shows or lying about what it shows. The reasons to lie are twofold. First, two faces of the die show an "X" which forces you to lie about what number it shows. Second, you move your pawn across a bridge the number of spaces that you say the die shows, which creates an incentive to say a higher number even if the die shows a number that you could be honest about, such as a 1. Getting caught lying means knocking your existing piece off the bridge and starting from scratch with a new pawn, of which you have a limited supply. It's a quick and inoffensive game, but based entirely on a concept that I don't particularly enjoy.
- **Cities** is the cross between Carcassonne and Take It Easy that everyone says it is. It's a 20-minute tile-laying game where everyone places tiles in their own area to build their own little city (a la Alhambra and the separate building of palaces). The hook though is that everyone uses an identical set of tiles, which eliminates much of the luck from the game. You place meeples throughout the restaurants, parks, and other attractions of your city in order to score points at the end of the game, which comes quickly enough since it only lasts until everyone has placed 16 tiles in their city (forming a 4 by 4 grid of tiles). The scoring is the only obtuse part of the game because meeples score differently depending on which feature of your city they are standing in (i.e., which color, whether it's a red restaurant, a green park, or a yellow attraction). The scoring is actually somewhat thematic once you wrap your head around it, but it's the one part of the game that players are likely to mix up during the game, resulting in potentially misplaced tiles or meeples. It's a fairly engaging and quick game that serves its purpose beautifully. Cities does a good job accomplishing its goal and filling the niche it aims to fill, but I'm not convinced that I need another 20-minute tile-laying game in my collection. I must say that it *is* tempting as the gameplay of Cities feels surprisingly innovative despite borrowing so heavily from prior games, but it's not a game that I feel a *need* to add to my collection.


- **Code 777** is an old Jumbo game from 1986 that is getting harder to track down these days, which is why I took the opportunity to try it out at BGG.CON. I coerced the unsuspecting Brian and Lisa to try it out with me. It was certainly very different from anything else I played at BGG.CON, which made it a very nice change of pace and makes it tempting to hunt down a copy. It's a deduction game where each player has a rack of 3 numbers that faces away from them so that everyone else can see it but you can't see your own numbers. The goal of the game is to figure out what numbers are on your rack. Each turn a player answers a question on a randomly drawn card about the numbers they can see, such as whether they see more even or odd numbers. This allows players to slowly gather information about their own set of numbers and hopefully be the first person to announce that they've determined their numbers. It's really a neat little deduction game that plays quickly and provides plenty of "lightbulb moments" where you make a breakthrough, but also plenty of head scratching moments where you learn a bit of information that contradicts everything you thought you knew.
- **Duck Dealer** is not a bad game by any means and I've only played it once so I haven't nearly explored its depths, but I didn't feel the same sort of eagerness to play again and again that I felt with Antiquity and Roads & Boats (previous Splotter offerings by Jeroen Doumen and Joris Wiersinga). Antiquity is in my [Top 50](#) and Roads & Boats in my [Top 50](#), so saying that Duck Dealer doesn't measure up is no criticism. There are plenty of **great** games that pale in comparison to those prior Splotter games. Duck Dealer demands an immense amount of advance planning by players. Antiquity and Roads & Boats are no walk in the park, but Duck Dealer takes the cake when it comes to requiring the careful mapping out of your turns an hour or two hence. Basically Duck Dealer consists of players spending most of their turns collecting energy (like the collection of train cards in Ticket to Ride). So most turns are very quick as players simply collect the energy discs that their ship's crew can collect, which comes in three flavors: red (movement), blue (trade), and yellow (build). Eventually, someone decides that they've collected enough energy and decides to take an "actual turn," which involves spending as much energy as they feel like to fly around the board, gathering resources, converting them into more valuable resources using the game's technology tree, building factories, and selling their wares for victory points. The most novel and intriguing part of the game is the fact that it ends after 23 of these "actual turns." But those 23 turns can be divided among the players in any way. You can build up an enormous number of energy discs and take only a very small number of major turns, or take more frequent, but smaller turns. In our game of four players, one player took only 4 turns, while another took 8 turns. But it's not about how many turns you take, but rather how efficiently you spend your energy since everyone will gather roughly the same amount of energy. The key to the game comes in trying to plan where you're going to fly your ship, what resources you're going to gather, and where you're going to build factories and sell your resources. This is the kind of game that could take 90 minutes with a quick group, but could easily take over 3 hours with a different sort of group. As with Chess, you could play for the moment, simply making moves that are easy to see, or you could try to plan many turns in advance, mapping out a long-term path. I suppose both games require flexibility to changed circumstances,

