

Alberta powers up its game

The quest for limitless clean power has led a family in Edmonton to design a fusion element in their new board game. Fusion power is considered the holy grail for providing the world with massive amounts of energy within a few decades, and it is now available in Geopowr.

Fusion is what powers the sun and is considered a safe and abundant source of energy. This has led to a global effort to build working fusion reactors. Canadian-backed General Fusion Inc. is part of a group that is promising to launch commercial systems by 2030, and Alberta needs to get into the game.

Geopowr already appeals to Alberta's strengths and the growing global need for energy diversification. The board game already features oil derricks, wind farms, solar arrays, geothermal plants and hydroelectric stations that dot the countryside.

Maintaining Alberta's unique position as Canada's energy province involves engaging people in decisions about energy that create a more balanced and secure future according to Michael Overduin, who invented the game and is also a biochemist at the University of Alberta.

Although the context is energy, the primary aim was to develop a fun game for anyone to play and enjoy. The game is unusual in being three dimensional, with players earning points as they grow construction sites into towering plants of power over an expanding field of tiles.

Dynamics between players are encouraged. People can work together cooperatively to build power plants faster for the entire world. Or they can block each other or steal energy tiles in their personal quest for power for their own continent. Being both altruistic and competitive usually wins the day.

The game is intended to be elegant. Players simply lay tiles to connect quadrants into sets of five in order to win energy cubes. The tiles form a mathematically complete set, thus creating an intriguing puzzle with a universe of possible ways to connect tiles and maximize power points.

This allows people to pick up math skills in a fun way - they can readily find out how many power points have been generated by counting their cubes, which are worth 5 points each. The cubes are made of real wood and are stacked into tall towers, giving a rewarding tactile feel. Connecting colourful quadrants into patterns is visually enticing, and the tiles also use symbolic icons that can readily be recognized by anyone independent of age or language.

To make the game personal, each player gets a mission card such as the Oil Baron, Wind Farmer, Geothermalina, Hydroelectrica or Solar Goddess and the latest addition: Fusion Man. These depicts hand-drawn Anime figures and awards points for the biggest tower or area. To reward energy security the Green Queen and Well Digger and Diversification Dude give out further bonuses.

The standard game for 1-3 players plays in about 30 minutes, while the expanded version allows up to 6 players to represent 6 continents and takes about 50 minutes. The construction of the physical game is environmentally friendly with no plastic parts, and it fits into a conveniently travel-sized box that can easily be taken along and played anywhere.

Overduin teamed up with game designer J.P. Eekels, who has worked on digital games such as the Unreal series and came up with the graphics for Geopowr.

The Geopowr inventors will be demo'ing their game at conventions in Edmonton including [EPOC](#) from March 22-24, [GOBfest](#) from April 12-14, and [PressAToStart](#) on April 20, as well as at the [Solar Trade Show](#) on April 6. Anyone is welcome to come along and try a round.

You can order Geopowr online and at local stores including [Mission: Fun and Games](#), where a Geopowr demo is being held on Saturday March 2 from 3 to 5pm.

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