

Calico - cosy quilt making with differing difficulty levels

Calico is a properly cosy pattern-making game with plenty of options to ratchet the difficulty level up or down.

The theme is so harmless and gentle that anyone can get onboard - you're making a lovely quilt to attract cats. And then sew on some buttons for decorations. The more cats and more buttons you get, the more points. Simple.

While the theme is utterly inoffensive, the gameplay *can* be fairly taxing. Different cats have different pattern-building conditions you need to meet - some of which are dastardly - and there are a lot of different ways you can score, with different scoring mechanisms at conflict with each other, leading to tough choices.

But what makes this a great family game is the options you have to simplify. For beginners - or younger family members - one scoring mechanism can be removed entirely, and your basic 'starter' cats are pretty easy to satisfy and settle on your quilt.

Let's Summon Demons - one for sinister families

A great game for slightly older - and more sinister - children. This one comes with a content warning. Essentially, in Let's Summon Demons you're tempting children and animals to come and join you, so you can then sacrifice them to summon a demon.

Probably not one to play with younger kids or the religiously sensitive!

But, if your family members are old enough and wicked enough to think that sacrificing (amongst others) Rotten Donnie (a fast-food munching blonde child with more than a passing resemblance to a former US President), Sweet Alice (as in, in Wonderland) or even Sweet Jesus (yes, you can sacrifice him) is a lark - then this game is a wickedly good fun.

It's a dice game where each player takes it in turn to roll the dice and - in almost all cases - if you hold a card that matches the number on the roll, you get to do stuff. Great for the easily restless, as you're rarely just sitting around waiting for someone else's turn to be over. The die get passed around quickly, and each roll matters to each player.

The cards themselves all reference characters from history, religion or popular culture (from Steve Irwin to Louis Armstrong) and you can combine your cards to create a useful little evil engine to quickly amass cards, souls (the currency in the game) and ultimately summon three powerful demons to win.

Cockroach Poker - bluffs bluffs and more bluffs

Cockroach Poker is a silly game. A very silly game.

Deal out a deck of 64 cards. Each card displays one of eight animals (toad, bat, rat, stink bug, cockroach, scorpion, spider, fly). All you do is pass a card to another opponent around the table, face down.

As you pass you tell them what the card is and they have to decide if you're lying or telling the truth. If the receiver catches you out, you take the card back and play it face up in front of you. If they call it wrong, they play the card face up in front of them. Or, alternatively the receiver can peek at the card, then pass it on to a different player, either sticking with the original player's claim, or making a new claim of their own.

Play continues until one player has four of the same card in front of them, and then ends. It's that simple.

While the mechanism is easy, the gameplay is fun, allowing for bluffs, double-bluffs and plenty of time eyeballing family members to decide if what they're claiming is a bat, is really a rat. And in no time at all - if your family is anything like my family - 'no, *this* is a toad' will become a household catch phrase.

Cat Days - quick two player fun with a good heart

Created to help raise funds for an animal shelter, Cat Days is a quick two player game all about (you guessed it) cats.

It's easy to teach (the rules fit on a playing card), quick to play (you won't be going more than 15 minutes) and blends some simple solo playing with the occasional chance to scupper and annoy your opponent (and who doesn't like annoying their family members from time-to-time?).

The gameplay is simple - each player needs to play a cat on each day of the week. But some cats come with restrictions or effects that happen when you play them. For example, the Nervous Cat - while a high scorer - can't be played next to another cat and - in contrast - the feral cat scares off the cats on adjacent days.

For big chunks of the game you just get on and do your own thing, but some cards allow you to tempt cats over from your opponents (the cardboard box), discard a cat (laser pointer) or just reduce a cat's score to zero (by playing the charming grumpy cat on top of it).

A great one for cat lovers to pass a little time on a rainy spring day.