Be A Metagaming Designer

If you have a game you've been fiddling with you just might get it published. Metagaming evaluates a large number of games each year. Most of them are from gamers like you.

This year five of our games are from first time designers. Our view is that gamers who like to game for fun are a good source of new ideas. We can't expect to have all the good ideas with an in house staff. Many of the new concepts come from gamers who put in hours of gaming. Their strong interest in games often leads them to novel, fun design.

Usually, a first time designer should try for a Microgame sized effort. It is easier to begin with a limited package and learn to make that work than starting with a larger concept. We will look at larger efforts. But, we know it's less likely for a first time designer to satisfactorily do a larger game.

Metagaming has a set procedure for evaluating designs. First, it must be submitted with the form reproduced with this article. We only consider games submitted with this form.

The form offers the design to Metagaming. We can not consider a game that is offered simultaneously to others. We need to know that we can acquire games that go through evaluation should the evaluation be positive.

1.) Type rules double-spaced. Include a table of contents. At least a two level numbered paragraph structure will be needed for most of the rules.

2.) Prepare any play map ready for play-testing. Be sure to put an explaination of all map symbols and terrain in the rules.

3.) Prepare play counters ready to play-test. Also, include a count by type of counters, ie a unit manifest. It is also a good idea to include a very brief description of unique creatures, vehicles or such.

4.) Prepare any other components in play testable form.

5.) Prepare a brief description of the game. This be the kind of material you think might help sell the game if used on the back of the box.

6.) It is a good idea to send the game to us by certified mail, return reciept requested. Some mail does get lost.

7.) Include the form.

All game submissions go through an initial screening read. If the game is deemed not of interest at that point you will get it back in three to six weeks. If you don't hear something by then it is good to drop us a card asking about the game. There is always a chance that it was lost in mailing or that it has gotten shuffled to the bottom of a stack somewhere.

A game will be screened out for several general reasons. First, we feel the designer hasn't, done an adequate job of writing the rules, and isn't likely to. Second, we feel the game lacks an interesting theme or play value, making it not a particularly fun game to play. Or, third, we feel the game simply isn't suitable in Metagaming's line or is something we'd be ashamed to have our name on.

If your design is screened out without a playtest it means any future submission will have to be pretty much different in a least one of the areas mentioned in order to be considered.

Games that pass screening will go to play testing. This can take from four to six months. A written evaluation is generated as a basis for Metagaming's decision. You will get a copy.

Our decision based on play test can be one of several.

1.) We may reject the design. This means that even a rewrite would probably not change our opinion.

2.) We may express an interest in the design if it is very heavily revised along the lines suggested in the evaluation. This means you've got a lot of work ahead of you to get a publishable game.

3.) We may accept the design, dependent on a smaller list of revisions to be done to our satisfaction. This means we do like your game but feel it can benefit from another round of changes and improvements. This is a good sign for you. You're most of the way to having a publishable game and we want that extra bit of effort from you to get your best.

4.) We may accept the design and not ask for changes. This usually means you've done a very good job on the game in all respects. Or, it may mean the game is very interesting to us, we think it will give gamers a lot of fun, but we don't think you can complete it. Any changes will be done by Metagaming staff.

FORMAT

MICROGAMES: These need to be stand alone games. Maps may be 2,4 or 6 4X7 inch panels - plan for no more than two colors (including black). Counters are limited to 84 (preffered) or 126 - plan for no more than two colors on counters. Rules should be no more than 4,000 to 8,000 words.

MICROQUESTS: These are unique little adventures based on MELEE and WIZARD, ADVANCED MELEE and WIZARD, or the UNDEREARTH series. These may be programmed or small adventures not in a programmed format. Rules should run 10-16,000 words. Maps should be no more than 2 to 4 4X7 inch panels with no more than two colors. Allow for one 4X7 inch sheet of the strip cut counters usually found with TFT Microquests.

METAGAMES: These also need to be stand alone games. Maps may be 4, 6 or 8 panels at 5 1/2 by 8 1/2 inches per panel. Counters may be 120 or 240 in number. Rules may run 5,000 to 15,000 words. You may consider including another printed component or two.

NOTE: When we speak of map panels and component sizes you can see what we mean from any Microgame, Microquest or Metagame. For example, a Micro map might be 8X14, 8X21 or 14X12.

QUESTIONS

The above is the usual data I give people in seminars at conventions. At this point I get a few questions that usually run as follows.

Q. Does Metagaming ever pay any royalties?

A. No, we don't. We buy a game design outright. This is the only way we can guarantee proper development for a game, especially if sequels are desirable. We've tried royalty arrangements and learned they don't work for us.

Q. Should I copyright my game before sending it in?

A. You can, but it takes some time and money and isn't necessary. You are already protected under pre-publication provisions of the copyright laws.

Q. My idea is so brilliant and new that I don't want to show you my game for fear you'll steal the idea. Can't I just give you an idea of it and then you can tell me how much you'll pay me, it's really neat, honest? (Or words to that effect.)

A. We have to see a complete game. Most ideas we hear about are neat sounding. It's doing a good game that's the hard part.

Q. Do you have any full-time game design staff positions?

A. No. All of our staff have other functions in addition to any game design tasks. Also, you'd have to be someone we'd previously published and knew well to even be considered.

Q. Your form lists a $500 price for a game. Is that for all games, no matter how big?

A. $500 is the minimum we pay. Legally, we have to have a specific number on the form to have an agreement that can protect Metagaming. We've paid up to $1,500 for a Microgame. For a designer we usually pay $500 for his first Micro, $750 for the second and $1,000 for the third. We'd pay up to $2,500 for a Metagame, though $750 to $1,500 is more realistic for a Meta.

The better the game is the more we pay. If it is a sequel or in

some way dependent on another game, like a Microquest or TFT supplement it is worth a bit less - the hard part of rules has already been done.

Count on $500. It may go up from there depending on your writing skill and the game.

Q. I want to make a living from designing games. How hard is that to do?

A. Very hard in adventure gam-

ing. Only a few companies pay much more than Metagaming. Some pay what seem to be large royalties. In the long run these royalties don't add up to many dollars and/or that company is weak because they overpay designers. There is a limit to what our small industry can pay for designs. The 'out-of-business' rate is high.

Q. Where is the Unicorn hidden?

A. No Comment.

I am submitting my game design titled   .
This form explains the conditions under which Metagaming agrees to examine and evaluate your game. We can not evaluate your game unless you agree to these conditions, in consideration for evaluation:

1. Metagaming will not receive any submitted material in confidence, and we will not establish a confidential relationship with you in respect to such materials.

2. You must suppy to us a complete game suitable for evalution including rules, playing map and play counters.

3. Metagaming will evaluate the game and inform you of the results of the evaluation.

4. If, at Metagaming's sole discretion, Metagaming wishes after evaluation to purchase the game, you will sell all rights, title, interest, including copyright and trademark rights to the game for Five Hundred Dollars ($500.00).

5. You must not concurrently submit this game for any purpose to any other manufacturer or publisher.

6. You must be willing to make any design and editorial changes specified by Metagaming including modification of rules, playing map and play counters.

7. If Metagaming does not purchase your game, we will return all materials provided by you within six (6) months of receipt.

8. Metagaming has the right, if we purchase the game, to modify it in any way we wish.

9. You must own all rights to the submitted materials and you must not have done any act inconsistent with selling all rights in the game to Metagaming.

10. You must be willing to prepare a magazine article about your game for Metagaming if we accept your game for publication. The article will be submitted to Metagaming no later than four months from the date of the game's acceptance for publication.

In return for the agreement by Metagaming to consider my game design, I agree to the conditions contained in this form.

Name

Address

DO NOT SIGN UNLESS YOU HAVE READ AND UNDERSTOOD THIS AGREEMENT