



From dice to bytes

200 years of Finnish gaming

This exhibition depicts the development of Finnish games over three centuries. It puts games, players, game paraphernalia and game memories into the spotlight. The displays feature historical board games from the 19th century, rare computer enthusiast magazines from the 1980s as well as a video providing an overview of Finnish video game streaming. Visitors can also try out some of the board and computer games.

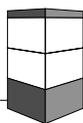
Games are always a product of their times. Changes in society are reflected in the development of games. Board games brought current events from war to the living room tables of people at home. As the middle class began to rise, computers became household appliances, sparking an entirely new era in the history of games.

The social status of games and gaming has also

changed over the centuries. Gaming has not always been socially accepted, but over time, what was once a marginal hobby has now grown into the largest individual segment of the global entertainment industry. Games have made their way from the backwoods to convention halls.

The content of the exhibition is primarily comprised of material submitted to the National Library's National Collection as legal deposit copies, as well as the Brummeriana collection, accumulated and donated to the National Library by Professor Markus Brummer-Korvenkontio. The exhibition also features pieces on loan from individuals as well as photographs from museum collections.

Games and paraphernalia connected to them are an important part of the cultural heritage that the National Library aims to protect.



Travelling with dice

More than a hundred years ago, travelling was an arduous pursuit. At the time, travelling was as exotic a topic for games as space wars are for the gamers of today. The photos and illustrations depicting other cities or distant lands on the game board were like magical windows into other worlds.

In terms of mechanics, the old travelling games were simple and based on throwing dice, which dictated how players would progress on their journey or move through the story. Many games had a monetary award system, gratuitous to the game mechanics themselves, which was intended to imbue a sense of high stakes and hard-earned victory that was characteristic of gambling.

Until about WWI, board games were typically sold in envelopes. The game board would be paper or thin cardboard. The games were played with dice, and any small household objects could serve as game pieces. The game envelope could also include a game piece sheet from which players could make their own pieces and paraphernalia with the help of scissors and glue. Until the late 19th century, many board games played in Finland were manufactured in Sweden and consequently featured text in Swedish.

Some of the board games in Brummeriana have never been played, and there are even games in the digitised collection that still have their intact game piece sheets. The online repository Doria (doria.fi) has printable versions of Vapaussota (Minerva, 1918), a game about the Finnish civil war, and Korsupeli (Kuvataide, 1944), a game where players defend their dugouts, for users to download and play.



A game and a nation

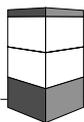
Around the time Finland gained her independence, nationalism and wars entered the realm of games. In board games, players would draw national borders and bolster the ideal of national unity. The illustrations for board games depicted ideas that were typical of the times, occasionally lapsing into themes that might have been censored, had they been printed in the newspapers.

The most common games of the day dealt with the news and were published at a dizzying pace: Finnish soldiers played the *Taistelu Karjalasta* game about the battle for Karelia in the dugouts of the front, several games about the Finnish civil war were released immediately after the war ended, and *Maailmansota läntisellä sotanäyttämöllä*, a game about the Western Front, received an expansion as soon as Russia joined the First World War.

War brought new game mechanics to board games. *Stratego*, which would go on to become a true classic, was originally just one of several strategy games with similar systems of play, but many games also experimented with entirely new mechanics. However, game testing and game rules writing were in their infancy, and most games were impossible to play without the players separately agreeing on how to interpret the rules.

After the first decades of the 20th century, games began to move from envelopes into folders and boxes. A game that could be folded like a map was easy to carry, and could transport game pieces and dice as well, while a box could house veritable armies of game pieces.

The publication repository Doria (doria.fi) hosts a large quantity of Swedish and Finnish board games from the 19th century onwards, digitised by the National Library. They can be freely downloaded to play and study at home.



Games for children

After the world wars, games turned to safer and more educational topics. Instead of propaganda, the children's games for the post-war generation covered issues such as the consumer society, fire prevention or traffic safety.

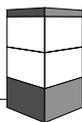
In the beginning of the century, children and adults still moved in the same realm of games. As a distinct children's culture emerged, games started to be geared primarily towards children. Rules and game mechanics were simplified, and multiplayer games became the norm. At the same time, there was an intense focus on the appearance of the games: the boxes for board games in the 1950s were sturdy in construction and impressive in illustration. Kari Mannerla's *Afrikan tähti* (1951), a board game dealing with treasure-hunting in Africa, became the unofficial national game of Finland.

In the 1960s and 70s, games intended for whole-family entertainment entered the market from Sweden. The number of different components in these games was considerable: games would often come with money, markers, special cards, houses, boats and dice. These games of the baby boomer generation created an image of games that would endure for decades. Games were thought of as children's play. The same attitude was also apparent in video games for a long time.

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Have you forgotten the name of the board game you used to play as a child?

Look for lost games in the old catalogues of Finnish board game publishers, digitised and entered into Doria (doria.fi).



Towards the mainstream

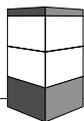
Starting in the 1980s, the new wave of board games came with topics from fantasy literature. A typical example of the times was *HeroQuest* (Milton Bradley, 1989), a UK-published board game which tried to strike a balance between game enthusiasts and the general public: for some, it was "roleplaying for the lazy", and for others, "too complicated for people used to simple family games". The popularity of the modern adult board games which arrived in Finland around this time led to an upsurge in games as a hobby and gave birth to the associated specialist stores.

The most iconic example of the new board game renaissance which began in the late 1990s is probably *Carcassonne*, a game designed by Klaus-Jürgen Wrede (Hans im Glück 2000, Lautapelit.fi 2004). The defining features of the new adult board games were carefully tested game mechanics and unambiguously written rules. A milestone in the development of a serious board game culture in Finland was the establishment of the Finnish Board Game Society in 2004.

In the new millennium, games are available on almost every imaginable topic. There is also considerable range in terms of game mechanics, with popular genres including games based on deck-building and worker placement. Finnish board game design and publishing have also enjoyed a boost during the past few years. Currently, the most successful Finnish game is Touko Tahkokallio's *Eclipse* (Lautapelit.fi, 2011, 2nd edition 2019).

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The Act on Collecting and Preserving Cultural Material dictates that the National Library archives all board games published in Finland into its collections. The National Library does not lend them out to players, but visitors can submit a request to study them in the reading room.



Hobbyist magazines

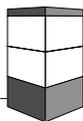
The early days of computer hobbyists in Finland were the golden age of the enthusiast press. The hobbyist magazines were creating a language with which to discuss this completely new phenomenon: for example, Finnish had no term for a “home computer” in the early 1980s.

Games and gaming soon became a central focus of the magazines, alongside the assembly of computers and other IT devices. Non-profit, self-published magazines such as *Micropost* created the criteria for what constituted a good home computer game. In the beginning, games were largely reviewed based on how technically proficient their coding was. The ultimate game experience was not playing games someone else had created, but making one yourself.

The world was a very different place before the internet. It can be difficult to understand just how little information was available in the 1980s. Gamers eagerly awaited each new issue of the computer magazines, and when one was finally delivered, the whole gang would come together to pore over the latest news.

There were few games available in stores, and the ones that were, were quite expensive. As it was impossible to download games from the web, the command lists printed in the home computer magazines became popular. For many future coders, these lists were the only Finnish-language coding instruction they had available to them as children.

The National Library also collects deposit copies of self-published magazines. Did you make a home computer magazine with your neighbours or computer club? The National Library will gladly accept donations of publications that have not yet been included in the National Collection.



Early Finnish games

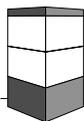
In the 1980s, Finland had no game studios developing games independently. Inspired by the tremendous success of the Commodore 64, several traditional publishers in Finland tried their hand in the new industry by translating games, but Amersoft was the first company to truly begin publishing games in Finland. Amersoft had a significant role in the creation of the Finnish game industry.

In 1983, PCI-Data, the company importing the Commodore into Finland, organised a game programming competition entitled Tulin, tein, voitoin (“I came, I made, I won”). Simo Ojaniemi’s *Mehun pullotusohjelma* (“Juice Bottling Program”) received a shared first place, and Amersoft published the game as *Mehulinja* (“Juice Line”) in 1984. *Mehulinja* was one of the first commercially published games in Finland. Amersoft would go on to publish the first-ever Finnish licensed game, a version of our “national board game” *Afrikan tähti* (1985), as well as the first game based on a Finnish film, *Uuno Turhapuro muuttaa maalle* (1986).

It would be a few years before Finnish programmers would see their games published abroad. The first big names in Finnish games were Stavros Fasoulas, Pasi Hytönen and Jukka Tapanimäki.

The National Collection features a very interesting selection of games from the early stages of Finnish games publishing.

Visitors can play Finnish classics on a Commodore 64 in the exhibition’s game room.



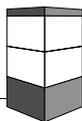
The computer of the people

In Finland, plug-and-play games, or consoles attached to the television, were not yet a mainstream success in the late 1970s. Finnish game culture was still in its infancy, far behind many other parts of the world. However, home computers, which replaced the simple TV games such as Pong, could be marketed to Finnish parents for their practical aspects. In reality, their popularity rode upon the extent of their selection of games.

The Commodore 64 rose to the top of the Finnish home computer heap thanks to an ingenious, fortunate and aggressive marketing campaign riding on a sense of patriotism: the C64, as it was known, was sold with an ad campaign featuring Finnish flags and a pixel version of a classic Finnish painting, the *Fighting Capercailties* by Ferdinand von Wright. With approximately 200,000 units sold, the Commodore 64 has played a role in the lives of nearly all Finns. In Finland, more of the Commodore computers were sold per capita than in any other country in the world. “Tasavallan tietokone”, “the computer of the republic”, the slogan dreamt up by the advertising agency Kimalainen, became a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Joysticks were overwhelmingly popular as a method of playing games. C64 enthusiasts were active and curious, and would also modify the available joysticks to better suit their needs. However, they were not particularly sturdy in terms of construction. The gamepad controllers, later popularised by Nintendo, were more durable, but they would not be available to gamers until some time after the Commodore 64 era.

The National Library does not collect or store game consoles, but such devices are on display, for example, at the Finnish Museum of Games in Tampere. Game publications distributed in Finland fall within the scope of the National Collection.



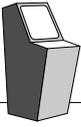
Geared for games

The Nintendo Entertainment System, or NES, arrived in Finland just as the second wave of console gaming was sweeping the world. In Finland, video gaming culture emerged around the home computer, but the booming economy of the 1980s meant that consumers had enough disposable income to go looking for other forms of electronic entertainment as well. Marketed as a toy for children, the NES did not have to be presented as a useful tool to sell it.

The import company Funente helped NES to make its Finnish breakthrough by touring the country on a Nintendo bus to show off the new console, and by opening Nintendo sections in the Puuhamaa amusement park in Tervakoski and the indoor amusement park Planet Funfun in Kerava. Nintendo's marketing, with its aggressive focus on the game characters, was a good strategy for selling the product to children. Mario the plumber, the most iconic Nintendo character, ventured from Nintendo's games to adorn clothes, toys, comics, animations and even board games.

The console's popularity was helped along by its accessibility: much like video recorders at the time, it was also possible to rent consoles and games to try them out at home. Consumers could go to most convenience stores and even some gas stations around the country to rent the black leather case housing the NES for a weekend, and were able to choose nearly any game published in Finland to play with it. The rental business also left its mark in the press, e.g., the Finnish Nintendo magazine published a list of Finland's most-rented games.

The National Library's collections feature Nintendo's console games published in or after 2008, which is when video games were added to the list of material to be recorded according to the Act on Collecting and Preserving Cultural Material.



The board game table and the game computer

The game table of the exhibition features a sampling of the board games in the National Collection. Most of these are travelling games played with dice, with themes ranging from popular novels to educational topics taken from daily life.

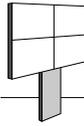
Robinson Crusoe (K. E. Holm, 1902) and *Münchhausen* (Kuvataide, 1950) are of course based on the world-famous characters developed by writers Daniel Defoe and Rudolf Erich Raspe, respectively. Both games use the story and characters from the books as the basis of the game board. Another example is *Vänrikki Stool* (Artko, 1950s), based on the classic poem by Johan Ludvig Runeberg, which has players throw dice to move the protagonist of the story from one battle to the next.

Some games used real historical people as characters in the game. *Cristo Columbus* (Kuvataide, 1940s) is based on the travels of Christopher Columbus. Players proceed through the events on Columbus' journeys around the world, ultimately returning to Spain.

The oldest of the games which can be played at the exhibition, *Vaellus lyyran saantiin* (F. Tilgmann, 1872), is an exception, as its events take place in the imagined past of the school years of the players themselves. The goal is to graduate from upper-secondary school, marked in Finnish tradition with the white student cap adorned with a golden lyre (the lyra in the title), by avoiding worldly vices and poor academic performance without squandering all the game money earned during the studies.

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More information on the Commodore games available to visitors is available on the screen of the game computer.



Let's watch!

Digital games have made great strides – not just in terms of their function or appearance. New technology has also enabled players to share their games. Where gamers of old would have to invite their friends over to watch a single screen, today a player can share their game performance to the whole world with just the touch of a button.

With the tremendous popularity of games, gaming YouTubers and streamers have become national celebrities hosting their own entertainment empires. Competitive gamers play in sports arenas to huge live audiences, while cameras record the games for the viewing pleasure of millions more. The game industry has become the most profitable segment of the entertainment industry.

However, the main feature of game videos is not competition – it's community and fun. In the videos, gamers have fun with the games, beat them in unexpected ways, connect with their friends and help other players. Sharing videos and watching others play have become a part of the game experience.

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The National Library also collects material on games in its online archive. For example, in 2015 the National Library, together with game industry institutions and game researchers, combed the internet for Finnish game culture websites, gaming videos and game community forums.

A total of 3,960 videos, or approximately 254 gigabytes of data, were collected, along with 1.3 terabytes of websites.

The videos

- **Roni Back**, *Playing Minecraft with Antero Mertaranta*, 2015
- **Nes-Retku**, *Perkele! Finland 100 years (NES)*, 2017
- **Lakko**, *Persu-Ismo | Skate 3*, 2014
- **Deliwien**, *Playing GTA V Online with anski – ep. 1*, 2015
- **V2.fi**, *Let's play: MSX2 – the better edition*, 2018
- **neddeplay**, *The Sims 4 - LIVE STREAM / I play, you decide – Let's build a new home for granny!*, 2018
- **Kaja**, *HOW TO *WIN* THE GAME / Fortnite Battle Royale*, 2018
- **JHZER**, *Rocket League in Finnish / Finland vs Sweden (Subtitles)*, 2016
- **Pagpa**, *Let's play My Summer Car / MY SUMMER CAR PILEUP*, 2016

The photographs

- **Hilda Octavia Palmén and Helmi Julia Järnefelt playing tiddlywinks**, 1885–1890, the Finnish Heritage Agency, Historical Picture Collection, Johan Axel Palmén's collection
- **Jägaren (“The Hunter”)**, artist's draft, 1896, National Library of Finland, National Collection
- **Christmas in Turku**, 20th century, the Finnish Heritage Agency, Historical Picture Collection
- **Talwi (“Winter”)**, artist's draft, 1871, National Library of Finland, National Collection
- **Boys playing with a reindeer's ankle bones**, Karl Nickul, Lapland, 1933, the Finnish Heritage Agency, Finno-Ugric Picture Collection
- **Handwritten point situation note from an old board game box**, National Library of Finland, National Collection
- **Taistelu Karjalasta (“The Battle for Karelia”) was a popular game in the dugouts of the front line**. Second Lieutenant K. Kuoppala taking his turn. A military runner is closely observing the game, Military Officer M. Persson, 1942, Finnish Wartime Photograph Archive
- **Taistelu Karjalasta**, Koulutarpeiden keskusliike, 1942, National Library of Finland, Brummeriana
- **Children playing Afrikan tähti on a table**. Siblings Marja, Tuomo, Saila and Maritta are playing Afrikan tähti at their home in Helsinki's Pitkäsillanranta, 1953–1954, Finnish Toy Museum Hevosenkenkä
- **Afrikan tähti**, F. Tilgmann, 1951, the National Library of Finland, Brummeriana
- **Boys playing dice in the yard**, Teuvo Kanerva, 1957–1961, the Finnish Heritage Agency, Historical Picture Collection
- **Autokilpailupeli / Biltävlingsspelet**, Kuvataide, 1935, National Library of Finland, Brummeriana

- **A game-themed birthday party**, where boys aged between 15 and 16 are playing the tabletop strategy game *Panzergruppe* Guderian, Hannu-Henrik Kuittinen, Nokia, 1988, Vapriikki Photo Archives
- **A Winter War**, Game Research Design Texas, 1992, National Library of Finland, Brummeriana
- **Playing the collectable card game Magic the Gathering**. The players are dressed in the colours of the cards in their collected decks, Jenni Hanén, Oitti, 1994, Jenni Hanén's personal archive
- **Avaruuspelejä Polarisi**, Kuvataide, 1960–1970, the National Library of Finland, Brummeriana
- **Children playing the board game HeroQuest**, Tampere, 1995–1999, Vapriikki Photo Archives
- **HeroQuest**, 1989, on loan from Marko Oja
- **Board game players at the Lautapelaa-maan 2018 convention at Helsinki**, Marko Oja, 2018, Picture Collection of the National Library of Finland
- **Eclipse**, Lautapelit.fi, 2011, National Library of Finland, National Collection
- **Playing on the computer**, Matti Nykänen, Punkaharju, 1986, Vapriikki Photo Archives
- **Afrikan tähti**, Amersoft, 1985, National Library of Finland, National Collection
- **Young boys playing on a computer**, Raija Saari, 1985, Vapriikki Photo Archives
- **Mehulinja**, Amersoft, 1984, National Library of Finland, National Collection
- **Playing on the computer at Christmas**, 1987, Vapriikki Photo Archives
- **Game cassettes from the 1980s**, National Library of Finland, National Collection
- **A boy with a Commodore 64 computer**, Merja Niemi-Pynttäre, Petäjävesi, 1993, Vapriikki Photo Archives
- **Command list for a programme in Mikro-BITTI magazine from the 1980s**, National Library of Finland, National Collection
- **Game-themed birthday party**, where participants are playing the sports game *Winter Olympiad 88* on an Amiga 500 computer, Hannu-Henrik Kuittinen, Nokia, 1988, Vapriikki Photo Archives
- **Classified ads for microcomputers in Keltainen Pörssi magazine**, c. 1987, National Library of Finland, National Collection
- **Children with a Nintendo console they have rented in Helsinki**, Pekka Elomaa, Helsinki, 1990, Vapriikki Photo Archives
- **An ad for Nintendo games and consoles available for rent at R-kioski convenience stores**, National Library of Finland, National Collection
- **Juho Heinola plays Nintendo**, Olli Heinola, Nokia, 1993, Juho Heinola's personal archive
- **Super Mario Bros. 3**, 1991, on loan from Juho Heinola
- **The protagonist from Amersoft's game Uno Turhapuro muuttaa maalle** (1986), screenshot from the game, National Library of Finland, National Collection
- **The board game Realm of Wonder (2014)**, developed by the Finnish company Mindwarrior Games, being played at Ropecon in 2018, Marko Oja, Helsinki, 2018, the Picture Collection of the National Library of Finland
- **A screenshot from a game video of the Finnish computer game My Summer Car (2016)**, 2018, Finnish Web Archive