

# Kids Rule!

## YOU KNOW WHO YOU ARE

by Keely Parrack

What's your favorite game? Monopoly? Chutes and Ladders? Clue? Each year brings a stack of new board games. Some are good for one play, others become classics.

Where do all these games come from and how do they get here? Keely Parrack spoke to two successful inventors to find out.

Richard Tait, the Scotland-born cofounder of Cranium, got the idea for the first Cranium game after an evening of playing board games with friends. He won the first game, but lost the second.

Both games focused on one skill - the first one on drawing and the second one on spelling. (Mr. Tait is a terrible speller.) This got him thinking about a game where everyone has a chance to shine.

He persuaded his friend, Whit Alexander, that this was a winning idea. Together they wrote a 22-page plan for their proposed new game, and Cranium was born.

The company was named after the first game. Now each product invented at Cranium goes through the same process as the original game.

### The eureka! moment

"Every game or experience we create is about a moment in someone's life," Mr. Tait says. Its aim is to bring people together to

have a relaxed, fun evening.

Cariboo, a preschool game, came from a moment during a rainy day that Mr. Tait had with his 2-year-old. As his son seemed about ready to tear the house apart, Mr. Tait recognized the need to have something fun and engaging to play with him.

Once he or other employees have identified the moment, they think about the experience - "how to create [a game] which is fun, engaging, and enlightening," he says.

Generally, they end up with three or four solid game ideas from each session.

Mr. Tait recommends making a prototype - a model of the game - as quickly as possible after you get the ideas for it. Then you can test it. Cranium games are tested more than a hundred times.

"In the early days, Whit and I would be hiding behind a couch in somebody's house watching them play the game," Mr. Tait says.

Nowadays, people come to their headquarters in Seattle to test out possible new games, and Cranium gives games to people to play at home for a few weeks.

During this time, they particularly look at rules, content, and activities, as well as feedback

- players' likes and dislikes.

They use this information to tweak the games and make the rules clearer. Then they review and start again.

Every Cranium game must pass the CHIFF checklist. That means clever, high quality, innovative, friendly, and fun.

When they were testing the Cariboo game, the treasure chest "opened at such a pace it would make your eyes come out on stalks, like boing!" Mr. Tait says. Twenty different spring tensions and 10 lubricants later, they got it just right.

He receives more than 200 e-mails every day from his customers. He reads every single one before he goes to bed at night. He uses this feedback to make small changes. For instance, in Cadoo, a preschool game, kids would get so excited, they would rip the box open to get to the game.

The problem was solved by replacing the Velcro closures with magnets. Now, "kids love that the box can close by itself," Mr. Tait says.

He uses the same stages of development when he's playing with his children - building a carwash out of a box or creating board games with his 7-year-old twin girls and their classmates. "From scratch in an hour, we make a fully playable game," he says.

In a job where he gets to play all day, Mr. Tait says that his only regret is: "all the ideas that didn't make it to the game stage."

**First-grader invents a game**



Kylie Copenhagen didn't plan to invent a best-selling game. She was just doing a school project. "I was in Mrs. Ditto's first-grade class," she says. "We had to choose which insect to make a game around, so I did the ladybug."

Afterward, she took the game home. Her family played it for the next two years, until one day her dad said, "This is a really cool game, we should try to do something with it."

He e-mailed an old friend, Randy Horn, who owns the games company Zobmondo.

Mr. Horn asked them to come down to Los Angeles to see him. "We drove down [from their home in Pleasanton, Calif.], me and my dad," Kylie says. "I got to look at the [road] maps, and we stayed in a hotel."

They took a small prototype of Kylie's game with them. While she and her dad played the game, Mr. Horn timed them and discussed what the game could look like.

"He wanted to use a spinner instead of cards," Kylie says, "but I didn't like spinners, they always land on the line."

Kylie's ladybug board game impressed Mr. Horn and he wanted to take it to the international toy fair in February, only six weeks away. That would introduce the game to buyers who might order it to sell in their retail stores. So Mr. Horn quickly hired an artist to do a mock-up of the game.

The feedback from the toy fair was great. The game was picked up by Barnes and Noble to sell nationwide. They requested that the box's shape be changed from rectangular to square to fit better on their shelves.

Now the Ladybug Game is

available in many different stores in cities across the country and has received a Parents Choice Approved Award.

Although Kylie is now in middle school, she still stays in touch with Mrs. Ditto, her former first-grade teacher at Walnut Grove Elementary. Kylie has continued her work with the school's Hands Across the Water project, donating a box containing school supplies and copies of the Ladybug Game to children in Liberia.

Kylie has no plans to create more games, but she loves to play them. She used to play Monopoly for days, and now she's into the Game of Life.

With the incredible success of the Ladybug Game, it looks as though she's already won.

**How old is your favorite game?**

**1934 - Monopoly** was initially rejected by Parker Brothers because of 52 "design flaws." The inventor, Charles B. Darrow, handmade 5,000 copies and sold them at a Philadelphia department store. They sold out so fast that officials at Parker Brothers changed their minds. It then became the top-selling game of the year. It's now estimated that more than 500 million people have played Monopoly. The longest game on record went on for 1,680 hours, which is 70 days!

**1944 - Clue.** Anthony Pratt, a solicitor's clerk in Britain, got the idea for this game. After years of perfecting the layout and rules, he took it to Waddington's Games in Leeds, England. It was launched in 1949. Later, Parker Brothers picked it up for the US market, and it's been a bestseller even since.

**1949 - Scrabble** was invented by Alfred Mosher Butts. He made

2,400 sets and lost \$450 on them. But once the president of Macy's found out about his new word game, it became a must-have item. Now it is found in one of every three homes in the US. The word "scrabble" means to grope frantically, an apt name since there are about 120,000 possible words that can be made.

**1949 - Candyland.** Eleanor Abbott invented Candyland while she was recovering from a long illness. She thought this sweet game would be something fun for other sick children to play, too. Milton Bradley liked her idea and sold the first games for \$1 each.

**1957 - Risk** was created in France by Albert Lamorisse - a French film director best known for the movie "The Red Balloon" - and Michael Levin. Its original name was La Conquete du Monde, the Conquest of the World. When Parker Brothers brought the game to the US, the company changed its name to Risk. Over the years, special editions of the game have been released, including Castle Risk,

with a European map, and many versions of Risk computer games.

**1959 - The Game of Life.** Milton Bradley wanted a special game to celebrate the company's 100th anniversary. Reuben Klamer was given the task. He came up with the Game of Life, which was an updated version of the Checkered Game of Life, a game originally invented by Mr. Bradley in 1860. It was the game that put Milton Bradley in business.

In 1992, the Game of Life was updated to include Life Tiles, which reward players for various life skills such as learning CPR, recycling, and saying no to drugs.

**1966 - Twister** was designed by Charles Foley and Neil Rabens. After Johnny Carson played it with Eva Gabor on the "Tonight Show," it became extremely popular. In 1987, students at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, set a world record for the largest game of Twister with 4,160 people playing.

Sources: [www.scrabble-assoc.com](http://www.scrabble-assoc.com);  
[www.hasbro.com](http://www.hasbro.com); [www.drtoy.com](http://www.drtoy.com); [www.hasbro.com/candyland](http://www.hasbro.com/candyland);  
[www.monopoly.com](http://www.monopoly.com); [www.mattelscrabble.com](http://www.mattelscrabble.com); [www.about.com](http://www.about.com)

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 games  
 banish  
 boredom**



THEN AND NOW: When in first grade, Kylie Copenhagen created a game that became a commercial success.