Heeeere's Hugo!

Midnight Party reviewed by Pevans

Midnight Party, designed by Wolfgang Kramer and published by Ravensburger (distributed by Fisher-Price) is a delightful, simple, fun game for 8 year olds and above. I can certainly vouch for it being enjoyable for thirty-somethings – especially after four pints…

The game consists of a board, a selection of playing pieces and a modified die. The board depicts the gallery of Mansion (home of Hugo the ghost), the rooms leading off it and the steps doom to the wine cellar (Hugo's lair). Each player has a number of guests at the party (from 6 each for 2 players to 2 each for 8 – the number of guests is always between 12 and 16), represented by playing pieces (men and women in evening dress) of one colour. In each player's turn he or she rolls the die and moves one of his/her guests that number of squares round the gallery.

However, two faces of the die have a picture of Hugo rather than a number (they're the 3 and 6, to be accurate). If a player rolls this, he/she doesn't move any pieces but moves Hugo instead. Hugo always moves three squares and starts from the wine cellar at the bottom of the stairs. There being 8 stairs, after Hugo has been moved three times he emerges onto the gallery This is when the fun starts.

Every time Hugo is moved now any guests on the squares he passes through (or ends up or) are captured and placed on the stairs, starting at the bottom in the order they are caught (if two or more guests are caught on the same square, they end up on the same step). However, guests are now free to move off the gallery into the rooms, where they are safe from Hugo – though there's a maximum of one guest per room (they are assumed to shut and lock the door to stop anyone else getting in!). Guests don't need an exact roll on the die to get into a room – except for two particular rooms which score points for the player(s) whose guests are in there at the end of the round.

Once all guests are safe or captured (or all the rooms are full) the round ends and the scores are totted up. Any guest on the bottom stair scores that player -10 points. On the second stair they score -9 and so on (if the stairs fill up, any extra guests go into the wine cellar and score -2 each). A couple of the rooms are special (there's a little ghost in each) and score -1 and the two bonus rooms score +3 – other uncaptured guests score nothing. Having done that, Hugo returns to the wine cellar, those guests who were in rooms come out of them and the captured guests are replaced on the gallery, starting with those on the bottom step and working up. After three rounds (or as many rounds as there are players) the game ends and the player with the highest (least low?!) score wins. Pretty simple, eh?

I find it difficult to explain rationally why this game is such fun: it just is! It is undoubtedly very simple and depends heavily on luck, but has scope for tactics:- nipping into rooms to deny them to other players (especially the Dommett!); hanging on in the face of an advancing Hugo to roll the exact number needed.to get into a bonus room; and

positioning pieces carefully at the start of a round. But all these tactics fall apart in the face of lucky (or unlucky) die rolls, especially if Hugo takes longer than expected to emerge from the stairs. The fun lies in seeing other people being captured, knowing that you're going to roll Hugo when it's your turn and he's only two spaces behind your last piece, watching everybody scramble madly for the safety of the rooms when Hugo first appears and so on.

The board is nicely illustrated with pictures of the goings-on of the other party guests in the rooms and the contents of the rooms themselves. The guest playing pieces themselves are fine, but the number of pieces in each colour restricts you to a specific mix of colours depending on how many are playing. As some of the colours look similar, depending on the light conditions, this can be a nuisance (burgundy and red and light blue and green were our problems) - a dab of paint soon solves it, however, and it probably wouldn't matter in daylight. The Hugo piece is a hollow ghost figure, carefully moulded to sit over a guest! The design of the game system is good allowing scope for tactical play (you just have to play the odds) as well as luck. The variable number of pieces per player is a good balancing mechanism, too: with 8 players Hugo moves fast, but you've only got two guests to save; while with two players Hugo is far slower, but you've got six pieces to worry about!

As it is a children's game, I particularly liked the explanation of the game given in the rules:- it's Hugo's birthday party and he likes to play hide and seek with his guests. A pleasant contrast with the chaos, death and spiky bits (not forgetting the orcs-with-everything) approach. Despite being aimed at children, I can see this being popular with the games hobby, particularly as a game to play in the bar at conventions (fast, fun and lots of players).

This review was first published in the *Small Furry Creatures Press* issue 42, May 1990. It has been edited slightly, mainly with the addition of this paragraph. Since 1990, *Midnight Party* has been revamped and republished under many titles – notably as *Ghost Party* and *Hugo*.