

PARTING SHOT FROM JOSHUA BESSEX

A weekly snapshot from The Daily Astorian and Chinook Observer photographers



The sun sets over Willapa Bay on Monday.

ODDITY

Pick a card

Made just for his kids, professor's card game is now taking flight

By COLLIN BINKLEY
Associated Press

BOSTON — When Darren Kisgen decided to make a game, his only goal was to entertain his family. But over the past few months, the finance professor at Boston College has seen his game selling thousands of copies around the world and winning a big prize.

"I'm surprised by all of this," said Kisgen, a former Wall Street investment banker who now lives outside Boston. "Frankly, it's been a lot of fun."

Called Dragonwood, the game borrows ideas from poker and rummy but blends them into a fantasy world of dragons and goblins. By drawing a strong hand, players can boost their chances of "capturing" mythical creatures in a fictional forest, which helps them win the game. It's advertised for anyone 8 years old and up.

The idea struck Kisgen two years ago after he found that most fantasy games were too complicated or violent for his two children, who were 5 and 7 at the time.

"I felt like I was missing a game that I would want to play with them, so I decided to try to come up with that game myself," he said.

Dragons, trolls and ogres

He called it Forest Quest, built with ordinary playing cards and dice. But over time, Kisgen thought it would be more fun with colorful cards illustrating the dragons, trolls and ogres. So he sent a prototype to a nearby game publisher, Gamewright, which provided art for the cards and began selling it as Dragonwood earlier this year.

The game has sold more than 20,000 copies since summer, Gamewright said, making it one of the top-selling games from the Massachusetts publisher.

It also won a top gaming prize from Mensa, a society for people with high IQs. Once a year, members of Mensa meet for a weekend to test dozens of new board games and recognize those seen as original, challenging and well-designed. This year, Kisgen's game was one of five winners out of more than 60 they tested.

Greg Webster, the event's chief judge, praised Dragonwood for its simplicity but said it also lets players employ a variety of strategies that can lead to victory.

"It makes it interesting to play when you've got different options and you're not locked in," he said.

In recent years, Webster added, it has become more common to see popular games that started out as a casual idea in someone's living room.

"They say this is the golden age of board gaming, and I think that's true," he said. "There are so many ways for someone who has an idea for a board game to pull it together."

An educational tool

The game is also winning nods as an educational tool that can teach kids about arithmetic, number patterns and probability.

Kisgen, who grew up in Omaha, Nebraska, said he remembers devising games for his brother and sister as a kid. But there's little overlap between gaming and his finance career.


"To design a game takes some logic, takes understanding strategy, and this game has a lot of numbers in it," he said. "But that's where it ends."

After hearing feedback from players around the world, Kisgen said he's already thinking of ways to expand the game but not too much. He still wants to keep it simple.




Steven Senne/AP Photo

Boston College professor Darren Kisgen sits for a portrait Monday in his office with the game he created called "Dragonwood." Kisgen designed the board game purely to entertain his kids, but suddenly the finance professor's creation is winning awards from Mensa and other groups, and gaining a global following.




**COLUMBIA
MEMORIAL
HOSPITAL**

Columbia Memorial Hospital
2111 Exchange St., Astoria
(503) 325-4321
www.columbiamemorial.org



**Lower Columbia
Hospice**
A COLUMBIA MEMORIAL HOSPITAL AFFILIATE



**Hearts
for Hospice**

Dedicate a
Handmade Heart Ornament

Honor or remember a loved one. Help a Clatsop County neighbor in need.

For a \$10 donation, we will place a handmade heart ornament on a tree in memory or honor of the person you choose.

Sponsored by Thrivent Financial

In Memory of

In Honor of

Name on ornament:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Send acknowledgment to:
Name and address

Your name: _____

Address: _____

City/State/Zip: _____

Please mark location of the tree you wish to decorate:

Columbia Memorial Hospital, Astoria

Providence Seaside Hospital

Bob Chisholm Community Center

TAX DEDUCTIBLE: Make checks payable to Lower Columbia Hospice at Columbia Memorial Hospital.

Mail form and donation to: Hearts for Hospice, c/o Lower Columbia Hospice, 2111 Exchange St., Astoria, Oregon 97103