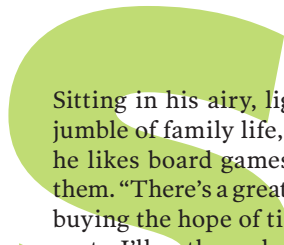


Your move, Tommy Dean

When he's not cracking up audiences, this funnyman is likely to be daydreaming about tumbling dice, as **Hazel Flynn** discovered

PHOTOGRAPHED BY JEREMY PARK



Sitting in his airy, light-filled Sydney home, surrounded by the cosy jumble of family life, comedian Tommy Dean is trying to explain why he likes board games enough to have amassed a collection of 200 of them. “There’s a great quote in gaming that when you buy a game, you’re buying the hope of time to play it. That’s a lot of what I think it represents. I’ll go through phases where I don’t have time to play, but at night I’ll rotate through the games, pull one out, read through the rules, have a look and think, *If I was playing, I would do things like this...*”

Dean, 41, grew up in Arizona, and moved to Australia in 1992, swept up on the wave of a romance. Now happily married to Anita and father to Asher, seven, and twins Ava and Zara, five, he is one of the country’s busiest stand-up comics. But it’s his role with the not-for-profit promotional organisation, Boardgames Australia, that has led him to open up his home, and show off his games to Reader’s Digest today. It’s also prompted him to make a confession about Zara’s name.





Ground rules

- If Tommy Dean's wife, Anita, has free time to play a game, she'd rather garden. "So I'm trying to invent a gardening game," he jokes.
- His collection is well used, not kept pristine, says Dean. "A game is to be played and enjoyed. If it gets destroyed, we'll get a new one."
- Dean shares his love of board games with players met online, many still known to him only by their user name. "One night I had a bunch over and I introduced them to my wife: 'Honey, this is John, this is Richard, this is Andy and this is DeathLord 9000. We just call him DL.'"

We were a motley crew. There was a girl who had some kind of epilepsy, a half-blind guy and a bunch of others. At recess times we would go into our special room, because we couldn't go run, and we would play games." He pauses. "There's this idea that gamers are seen as being outside the norm, which I've never understood; I always thought it's what people do."

By the time he emigrated, his game-playing had mostly fallen away, although his love of speciality suppliers was still strong. In 1994, walking into one such store, he made a discovery that reignited his passion. "I was on tour and walked into a game shop in Mackay, and they were literally pulling

the new Blood Bowl out of the cases. That's where it started." The theme of the game is American football, but players are goblins, dwarves and elves. "It plays out like chess, but with dice. At any moment a bad dice roll makes it all fall apart. I love that. I like the chaos. Chess is all too logical."

In the year that followed, Dean taught the game to a couple of friends, met others who played, and found himself a competitor in the first Australian Blood Bowl tournament. Indeed, at one point he was national champion. Through the tournaments he found the website BoardGameGeek, "which has this outrageously huge database of every board game ever invented and forums that discuss every game ever invented".

The site led Dean to the online world of second-hand games, where he acquired his first bulk lot: ten games for \$100. (It included Arkham Horror, an adventure game that became his favourite.) "I got the bug. I was convinced I was a player, not a collector, but the more the games stacked up and the less I played, the more I had to admit it was collecting."

While Anita rolls her eyes as his collection creeps from the large spare-room wardrobe to Asher's bedroom, she is tolerant, despite not sharing his passion. "It's been years, but she's slowly coming around," he says. "She would never think, *I want to play all weekend*, but one game after dinner, with a glass of wine, at a polite-conversation level? Sure."

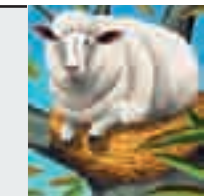
So how much has he spent on games? "My wife will read this article – say about thirty bucks. Oh, OK, it would be thousands. But I don't imagine it's more than \$5000, over many years. The retail value would be a lot more, but I get discounts, do swaps, and lots are gifts. I sometimes think, quietly, of all the things that men my age tend to get up to in their mid-life. A box of cardboard in the closet isn't really a big deal." ■

For your chance to win a game pack comprising Word Power, Great New Zealand Road Trip, Great Australian Road Trip, and First Around the World, valued at \$239.88, tell us which board game you like playing most – or least – and why, in 25 words or less.
readersdigest.com.au/contests

WHY TEACHERS NEED LONG HOLIDAYS

The topic of our science class was Dolly, the sheep cloned in Scotland several years ago. We discussed how scientists removed the nucleus from the sheep egg cell and replaced it with the nucleus from the parent cell. The students were fascinated – one in particular.

"Amazing," she said. "I had no idea sheep laid eggs."



Aimee Caruso