Coalition Game Studios, LLC

3441 Mission Bay blvd, apt 339
Orlando, FL 32817
(407) 717-0155
info@coalitiongames.com

COALITION
GAME STUDIOS

Critical Evaluation Report

CG-X-047 - Ganymede, by **

What is the Critical Evaluation Report?

This report contains your consultant's subjective evaluation of your game across the Coalition Game Studios Six Pillars of Game Design. The evaluation is based on our impartial judgement and observations gathered during focus group testing.

We consider industry standard to be good/satisfactory or better in each individual area. If your game does not meet this threshold, it is our recommendation that you reapproach your design before pursuing publication or crowdfunding.

If you have any questions or concerns, or you wish to clarify the contents of this report, do not hesitate to contact your consultant, or reach out to us directly at info@coalitiongames.com.

Mechanical Patency

An assessment of a game's systems, and their ability to facilitate its experience

| Poor | **Fair** | Good | Great | Excellent |

Negotiation games are tricky to pull off, and negotiation games with little hidden information are even trickier. Ganymede largely succeeds at creating an environment that is conducive to wheeling and dealing, but a few imbalances in certain cards and subsystems prevents it from fully achieving its goals. Once those imbalances are addressed, Ganymede is likely to create its intended core experience as a freewheeling negotiation game with a nasty streak.

Ganymede creates the promised play experience across most player counts (i.e., it scales well) with the exception of the two-player game. The two-player game suffers from the intersection of two things: zero-sum interactions, and a lack of hidden information. If one of the two players is able to complete a contract, they have very little incentive to help their opponent complete either contract. And if no player is able to complete a contract, the two players are able to calculate the precise value of striking a deal, in which case neither player gains an advantage over the other.

Returning players typically find that their grasp of Ganymede's systems gives them an advantage over first-time players. As a general rule, this is a good thing. However, in a negotiation game, better knowledge of the game's systems and the values of its resources can sometimes lead to experienced players taking advantage of the newcomers. That said, in Ganymede players often rely significantly on other players to accomplish their goals, making it difficult for one player to continuously dominate negotiations.

The area in greatest need of balancing is the secret objectives. Some regularly resulted in significantly more endgame points than others. Their unbounded nature means there is a significantly greater upside for players with objectives that reward them for easier-to-obtain items. Some, such as the one that rewards the player for hoarding resource tokens, encourage players to disengage from the game's core activities of jostling to complete jobs and instead reward stasis. The players who won Ganymede tended to have a lower opinion of it, perhaps because those players frequently won by exploiting unbalanced secret objectives.

All games suffer when one player refuses to play "in the spirit of the game." In a negotiation game, such behavior can be even more frustrating for the other players. In Ganymede, a player who refuses to engage in negotiations can occasionally dispirit the other players. However, these instances are rare, and they can often be overcome by other players working out a separate deal to their mutual benefit.

Thematic Index

A measure of a game's context as compared to its intended experience

| Poor | Fair | **Good** | Great | Excellent |

Many players enjoyed Ganymede's "space contractors" theme and found that it meshed well with the game's mechanisms. Others found it somewhat thin. None objected to it or said that it hindered their experience.

Aside from the "space" aspect, the thematic elements of hiring assets, bidding for contracts, subcontracting assets, etc. all do a good job of representing their real-world analogue.

While each of Ganymede's elements adequately express the theme individually, we suspect that the turn/phase structure prevents it from delivering a vibrantly thematic experience. Progression from Development, to Asset, to Negotiation Phase feels like a change of theater, damaging the narrative's continuity. This is perfectly acceptable, but will likely prevent the game from truly resonating with audiences looking for immersion.

Time Index

A measure of a game's actual/perceived length as compared to its experience

Poor | Fair | Good | **Great** | Excellent

One of the biggest, and least appreciated, culprits behind a poor time index is a sense of sameness--a lack of variability that can lull players into a pattern of repetition. Ganymede avoids this feeling by alternating between periods of "real-time play" and standard time play. The game's negotiation phase thus serves to shake up the way players experience time during the game, with the result of making the game feel shorter than it actually is.

Players were generally very satisfied with the game's length despite it lasting longer (sometimes substantially longer) than the estimated 60 minutes. Indeed, this question received a higher average score than any other category, according to the Survey Spreadsheet.

Ganymede's steady progression of more difficult jobs pairs well with the steady accumulation of new assets to complete those jobs. The six-round structure gives players enough time to execute their plans and even change course if needed.

Having a set number of rounds serves the dual purposes of giving players who are enjoying the experience a deadline under which they must work, and of reassuring players who aren't enjoying themselves as much that there's an end in sight.

Replay and Value

An assessment of a game's ability to provide consumer satisfaction

Poor	Fair	**Good**	Great	Excellent

When considering repeated play of the same game, the sweet spot for most gamers comes after they have a grasp on the game's systems, and before they have mastered them. In line with this expectation, the players who enjoyed Ganymede the most tended to be those that played it the most. This suggests that the game has enough depth to reward mastery of its systems.

Social dynamics also can vary the experience of Ganymede from play to play. Some groups are freer with their money than others. Some skate on the edge of needing to take out a loan, while others maintain a good cash cushion. This is a plus for the game's replayability.

In contrast to many other negotiating games, Ganymede has a relative lack of hidden information, which often puts the focus on confrontation: It is often a good idea to help one opponent compete against another because, regardless of the outcome, at least one of your opponents is in a worse position than they otherwise would be.

This phenomenon is one of the game's strengths when it surfaces in gameplay. It also works against the meta-gaming tactic of avoiding certain players for non-game reasons such as trust, because players have "nothing to hide" and nearly everything being negotiated has a value that can be calculated, or at least estimated. The two-player game, of course, cannot have this phenomenon, and this is one area where that player count suffers.

Density Index

An assessment of a game's depth, and how it compares to its weight

Poor	Fair	**Good**	Great	Excellent

One sign of a good density index is a complexity curve that is gradual enough for first-time players but long enough for experienced players. For a first play of Ganymede, there's enough complexity to make for a mental challenge, but not so much as to be discouraging. And, as noted above, Ganymede also has enough depth to reward repeat plays.

Ganymede also allows for multiple high-level strategies. Contracts generally incentivize players to generate a variety of resource types, but a player also can do well by cornering the market for a particular resource and then strong-arming the other players into beneficial deals.

Some players found that the complexity of certain aspects of the game was a little too high relative to their function within the game. The dials used for bidding are one such aspect. They were universally seen as clever, but some players felt that a simpler method could accomplish many of the same goals.

Originality

The measure of a game's "hook," or ability to offer a distinct experience

Unsatisfactory **Satisfactory** Outstanding

Negotiation strategy games are an underexplored area, so Ganymede has few peers against which to make comparisons. But Ganymede fares well against its limited competition.

Subcontracting is an effective mechanical way of pushing players toward negotiations. With the exception of the two-player game, Ganymede offers a consistently engaging experience.

The biggest caveat is that a significant percentage of gamers are turned off by cutthroat negotiation games, and these players' opinions of the genre are unlikely to be changed by this example of it.