

EnOLA HOLMES

Finder Of Lost Souls THE BOARDGAME



Phil Yates takes you behind the scenes of Gale Force Nines latest game, **Enola Holmes: Finder Of Lost Souls**.



I really enjoyed the Enola Holmes movie, and I had a concept for a Sherlock Holmes game already on the back burner. So, unsurprisingly, I was excited when we got the licence for Enola Holmes. My design goal was to bridge the space between a family game for fans of the movie and something that would grab and hold the attention of experienced gamers — something challenging and immersive, yet easy to grasp and with lots of replayability.

Where to start?

When I was originally thinking about a Sherlock Holmes game, I wanted players to become brilliant detectives, using logic and deduction to solve puzzling crimes. At the same time, I realised that most of us aren't up to the level of Sherlock (or his even more brilliant sister Enola). Deciphering the puzzles had to be doable, while still giving a suitable challenge and sense of intellectual achievement. As a kid, I played endless games of Mastermind with my sister, where you had to deduce the hidden code with coloured pegs (similar in a way to the latest craze, Wordle). That gave me the sort of experience I was looking for, but I needed more theme and flavour.

How then, to turn this into the game that I wanted?

The answer came from the movie, where the Holmes family and their friends travel around London and its environs, gathering clues, running into dead ends, solving puzzles, and finally catching the criminal.

The crime is encoded in the language of flowers



In the game, the players alternate between seeking out clues and attempting to deduce the crime. If they can do so in four rounds, they win. If the criminal's dastardly plot (which is encoded as a bouquet of flowers using the secret 'language of flowers' employed by Victorian women) proved too clever for them, they lose.

Like many designs, playtesting quickly revealed the need to simplify things, cutting them back to their essence and tightening up the design. After playtesting with our usual suspects, we took the show on the road, finding teenage Enola Holmes fans to try it out. This was encouraging, in that it verified that we had something that suited that side of the target audience, and at the same time showed up some areas for further work. A Sunday of playtesting various deduction schemes with my wife nailed down the last bits and it was ready to go.

Where's the balance?

Because the game is one-on-one or all-against-one, the game is always challenging, with both criminals and detectives developing new strategies to outsmart each other. At the same time, it's easy for an adult in a family situation to help younger players while they are trying to find clues, and guide the deductions.

Finder of Lost Souls is designed as a family game for fans of Enola Holmes.

The basic gameplay is easy for younger fans to pick up, while the interaction is challenging enough to keep experienced gamers interested.

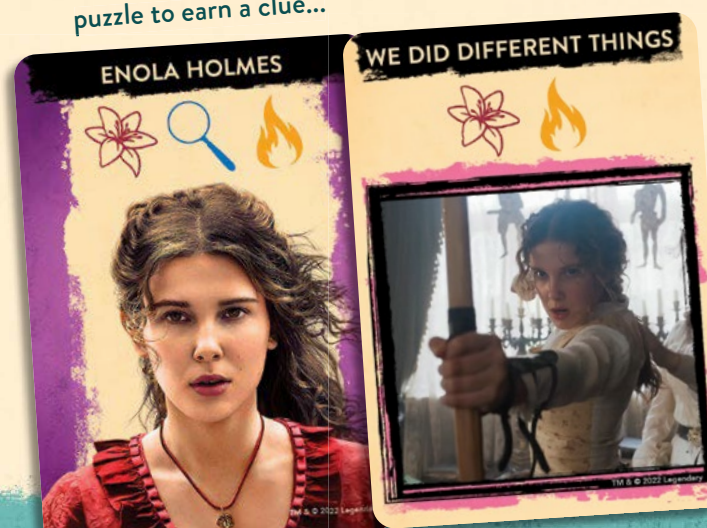
It's a game of deduction where you can short-circuit the process by traveling around London to solve puzzles and find clues.

So, how does it work?

The key to the deduction side of the game is two sets of identical cards. The criminal selects their crime from one set, placing cards from the other set on the board's locations as clues. The detectives are trying to deduce the cards making up the crime, but can only make four deductions, and the criminal only tells them how many cards they got right, nothing else. That's tough, but doable if you are both lucky and clever, but it's the clue cards that will take the detectives over the edge.

The clue cards are hidden beneath puzzles that change depending on the location. Each round the detectives choose a puzzle and use their talents and their hand of cards to match the puzzle, while the criminal plays cards to make things harder. Solve the puzzle and the detectives get the clue and reveal part of the crime. Fail and the detective skulks off home, while the criminal is that much closer to victory.

The Detectives play their 'On The Case' cards to try and match the symbols that make up the puzzle to earn a clue...



At the end of each round, the detectives announce their deduction as to what cards make up the crime. The criminal laughs maniacally, and tells them how close they are. At the end of the four rounds, if the detectives haven't deduced the crime, the criminal wins.

For me, the best thing about the whole process has been playing with the Enola Holmes fans, their delight in recalling favourite parts of the movie, their excitement at discovering the challenges of the game, and their cheerful determination to defeat their friends in a battle of wits. That and hearing both new and experienced players say, 'That was fun, can we play again!'



...while the criminal plays their 'Making Trouble' cards to make the puzzle more difficult.