

The Card Game Morff

- by Ramón Bannister

Product: Morff,¹ a card game by Eureka Ranch® Games

Retail Price: \$4.99

Rating: Good

Before I get into the actual review, I'll try to explain how to play the game.

Brief Product Description

Morff is similar to both Uno® and bridge whereby 4 players (two teams of two) take turns playing cards of the same suit. In the case of Morff, the suits are actually colors - yellow, blue, black, green and red, numbered 1-8. The dealer turns a card over from a separate pile of "trump" cards which dictate the (trump) color that has the highest value. However, the dealer can play a card of a color different from the trump card, realizing of course that if someone puts down a card of the trump color, that player has the upper hand in that round.

Example

The cards are dealt and the dealer turns over a card from the trump pile revealing that the trump suit is blue. The dealer decides that she's not going to play a blue card and instead plays a red card with the number 5. Each player in turn, as the rules stipulate, is required to play a red card *unless* that player does *not* have a red card. In that case, the player can either 1) play a blue "trump" card or 2) discard any other card. Let's say the second player does have a red card. He plays a red card as required, and the number of the card is 7. At that point, if every other player plays a red card that's less than 7, the second player wins that round. However, in this scenario the third player does not have a red card at all. So, he plays a blue "trump" card with the number 3 instead, because he aims to win the round. In this case, the third player has just beaten both the second player and the dealer. Now, it's all up to the fourth player. It turns out that the fourth player does not have a red card either, and so also plays a blue "trump" card, and the number of the card is 8. The fourth player then wins the round, because he played a trump card (the highest value color-suit of that round) and the number of the card was the highest of all the trump cards played. The points are allotted, and the dealer then turns over another card. One interesting facet of the game is that the trump card may require you to trade hands with the person to your left, or right, or instructs everyone to trade hands. Play continues until one player reaches 500 points (10 points per round, 30 points for the last "trick").

Review

That was the game in a nutshell, minus a few details. I bought the game, oddly enough, in the grocery store chain Market Basket, known in Massachusetts as one of the least expensive grocery stores in the state. (An idea of another review is buying items at Market Basket and buying the same items at a competing store). I wasn't expecting to see a game much less buy a game there, but it was strategically placed on an endcap (end of aisle) near a high-traffic area. Besides, I play the standard board games with my family all the time and figured this would be an interesting and fun addition to our repertoire. The company that manufactures Morff apparently targets people who play Uno®. The statement at the top

of the box says that “89% of Uno® players surveyed recommend you buy MORFF!” And they also claim that “7 out of 10 board and card game lovers surveyed recommend MORFF!” I of course knew that it's pretty hard to make a game as fun as the classics: gin rummy, Scrabble, Clue, Risk, chess, and all the other games I play. But I decided to try it with my family anyway – it was only \$5 bucks.

The Test

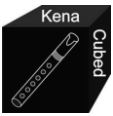
I've always said that board game manufacturers should pay certain people in my family to test their games before taking those games to market. Game rules are surely important, but giving clear and precise directions on *how to play* can make or break a game. And the directions for Morff are no exception – they lack clear instructions on various key points. I am constantly surprised at how many products in the market do lack clear instructions. Like when you buy a TV and the manual was obviously translated from Chinese or some other totally different language. Or, when you buy a piece of furniture and the picture of the screw you have to use could either be the screw that's ½” long or 5/8” long.

So, I started reading the box and the directions for Morff with my family and immediately the questions began flying by my head like I'm dodging bullets. To the statement that “7 out of 10 board and card game lovers surveyed recommend MORFF!” someone replied, “I bet they only interviewed 10 people.” And when I started reading, Step #1: “...The Morff cards are dealt to the players...” I'm interrupted by someone asking, “How many cards does the dealer pass out?” Sure enough I look at the directions and realize there are no explicit directions about *how many* cards each player should have. I decide and state that it is all cards from the two 51-card decks provided.

“How do you know?” another person asked. “I don't, I'm just guessing,” I responded as I requested that one of them passes out the cards. “But isn't this too many cards?” another inquired. I answered as I always do, “Let's just try it and see what happens.” Since no one could prove either way from the directions provided, they agreed. We started playing a hand when someone again had a question. “What if there's a tie? Who wins?” It turns out that if you use both decks, there could be a tie. Two people could play a card with the same color and number on it. We looked at each other in confusion. Finally, one of them suggested we separate the cards into the two 51-card decks. We agreed and separated the decks, leaving one of them out and only playing with one deck.

Things went a little more smoothly from that point on, but every once in a while there would be another question. For instance, when we finished the first round someone asked, “Who's the dealer now?” According to the directions, “deal then moves to the left with each hand.” But what does “hand” mean? Does the deal move to the left after *each particular round*? Or, does the dealer change when *all cards are played after multiple rounds* which forces the dealing of new cards? Another question about a term came up with scoring. “The team that wins the LAST TRICK gets 30 bonus points.” That's fine and dandy, but what's a “trick?”

All of these terms are used as if the reader knows exactly what the writers are talking about. If there's one thing I learned in high school, that would be in the engineering/shop class when the teacher said, “Whenever you write instructions or an instruction manual on how to put something together, you have to write it as if the person is 5 years old.” In other words, describe things in intricate detail. Assume that the person doesn't know what a screwdriver is. That's exactly why many manuals for putting together furniture have detailed pictures rather than words. A lot more can be said and figured out through pictures. That must be why the card game company included a video on the internet so you can learn how to play.



Ironically, the internet is the last place I go when I want to learn how to do something. Question about XHTML code? I check my *HTML 4 for Dummies* book (Yes, I know this book is obsolete now, but the code still works). I check previous code for other websites that I designed. I even have a SparkCharts HTML cheat sheet published in 2003. If I have a home improvement question I go to my local hardware store or ask people who have done that particular job in their homes. I check all those sources when it often would be easier to do a Google search for my particular question. My family is the same way. Suffice it to say that we never did check that internet site to learn how to play. Perhaps we should have. However, our philosophy is that a game should have clear instructions; we shouldn't have to waste time going on the internet just because the instructions were badly written.

With that said, I checked the Morff website² where I found a video and a comment forum. It turns out that other people have had the same problems. The biggest issues about which people complained were 1) the fact that the instructions don't say to *not* use both decks, and 2) what to do in the case of a tie *if both decks are used*. I recommend visiting the website before opening the box. The video explains the game more clearly, and the comment forum explains the rest. As to what to do in the case of a tie – the last player to play the card that produces the tie wins the round. So, if a person puts down a green 5 and a second person plays a green 5, the second person wins. One curious side note: the website says that the game is distributed exclusively with Walmart. But I bought it at Market Basket...

I give this game a rating of Good, which is really the bare minimum that any product should meet. The game wasn't exciting, but it was good enough for me to want to play it again. Maybe my family and I will enjoy it more the second time.

¹ <http://www.morff.com>

² Ibid.