

Here are the five designers in the running for the Board Game Designer of the Year award at Lucca Comics & Games.

Finalists announced for the Board Game Designer of the Year Award, the prestigious recognition celebrating the creative excellence of both Italian and international game designers.

Lucca, June 25, 2025 — **Only five of the most active and prolific board game designers** in the world are selected each year as finalists for the Board Game Designer of the Year award, an initiative organized by Lucca Crea, the company behind Lucca Comics & Games, in collaboration with SAZ Italia. This year, eight designers were initially nominated by the jury and the organization, from which five finalists were ultimately chosen.

The winner will be announced and awarded during the official ceremony at the Teatro del Giglio Giacomo Puccini, as part of the festival taking place from October 29 to November 2.

For the 2025 edition, the jury is composed of President **Fabio Cambiaghi** and members **Paolo Cupola** (former President of the Game of the Year award), **Harald Schrapers** (President of Spiel des Jahres), **Flaminia Brasini** (delegate of SAZ Italia), and **Simone Luciani**, the inaugural winner of the award.

The five finalists (in alphabetical order) are:



Matthew Dunstan With his rigorous and analytical approach to design, Dunstan has established himself as an important figure in the board game world, thanks to his elegant and well-structured designs, successfully blending innovative mechanics with notable strategic depth. A versatile and eclectic game designer, he has demonstrated the ability to tackle various genres and levels of complexity, skillfully using the language of board games with intelligence, rhythm, and inspiration. Notable games during the reference period are: *52 Realms: Adventures* (2024); *Next Station: Paris* (2024); *Happy Home* (2024); *Waypoints* (2023); *Pioneer Rails* (2023); *Perspectives* (2023); *Prey Another Day* (2023).



Grégory Grard An active member of the Bureau des Auteurs Rouennais, Grard has shown a strong aptitude for fruitful collaboration, offering a fresh, creative, and impressively mature perspective in today's game design landscape. His games display a subtle balance between simplicity and depth, being accessible yet consistently surprising to players. He has been praised for his ability to innovate without adding unnecessary complexity, enabling his works to reach a broad audience. Notable games during the reference period: *Zenith* (2025); *Castle Combo* (2024); *Festival* (2024); *In the Footsteps of Darwin* (2023); *Cross Clues: Sample Pack* (2023).



Tomáš Holek Tomáš Holek, an emerging talent in the board game world, has stood out for his ability to design games that combine strategic depth, player interaction, and high replayability. He has successfully integrated well-established mechanics with a coherent and well-crafted narrative, demonstrating a strong command of Euro-style game structures. In a particularly productive period, he has emerged as one of the most promising voices of a new generation of designers, capable of creating engaging gameplay with meaningful choices. Notable games during the reference period: *Tea Garden* (2024); *SETI: Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence* (2024); *Galileo Galilei* (2024).



Ryan Laukat is a visionary designer who, in recent years, has created original and coherent game worlds, showcasing a narrative sensitivity that captivates and engages players. His epic adventures have intuitive, elegant mechanics and are complemented by his own distinctive artwork. As the designer, illustrator, and developer of his games, Laukat embodies a complete vision of what it means to be a game author, offering evocative, accessible, and memorable gaming experiences.. Notable games during the reference period: *Creature Caravan* (2024); *Sleeping Gods: Distant Skies* (2023).



Paolo Mori Already an established name in the board game industry, Mori reaffirms his versatility, comfortably ranging from accessible titles to more complex games. He has demonstrated excellence in originality and innovation, with bold mechanisms and strong thematic coherence, often paired with historical accuracy. Equally noteworthy are his market acumen, ability to identify strategic trends, and collaborative spirit, which make him a reliable and stimulating creative partner, enriching every project with clear ideas and brilliant solutions. Notable games during the reference period: *Battlefields of the Napoleonic Wars* (2025); *Battalion: War of the Ancients* (2024); *Captain Flip* (2024); *Altay: Dawn of Civilization* (2024); *Match of the Century* (2023); *Archeos Society* (2023).

The Jury and the organizing committee congratulate the finalists and invite all enthusiasts to attend Lucca Comics & Games 2025 to discover the winner of the Board Game Designer of the Year 2025.

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First awarded in 2024, the **Board Game Designer of the Year** prize is organized by Lucca Crea, the company responsible for Lucca Comics & Games, in collaboration with SAZ Italia. The award was established to **celebrate the creative excellence of board game authors** both in Italy and abroad. Members of the jury are selected among prominent figures, professionals, and scholars involved in tabletop gaming awards or members of the SAZ Association. The judges of the Board Game Designer of the Year award assess candidates according to three main criteria: Originality and Innovation, Sensitivity and Timeliness, Productivity and Versatility.