

Legendary: A Marvel Deck Building Game – a Game Review

A universe where no one dies!

By Craig Dungleison

I can still remember waking up as a young boy on a Saturday morning and rushing to the new colour television and watching my comic book heroes like the Hulk or Iron man come out of the pages of the comic book to my television. Though, the television images were just extracts from comic books with a very poor and corny voice over. But it was great.

Now with the explosion of the Marvel cinematic universe my wonderment and love of the marvel universe is back. To me there has not been a poor movie yet – a true fan boy. And we will miss the genius of Stan Lee.



With all that said I will get to the game. It is a card deck building game. The gaming system is called Legendary and my favourite version is Marvel. There are others version based upon the story line of that genre such as Buffy the Vampire Slayer, X Files, Aliens, Predators and Firefly and I believe there is a rumour that James Bond is coming. They all basically use the same mechanism with some minor but sometimes telling changes to apply the “fluff” and from their relevant universe to the cards and mechanism used in the game. All games can be played solitaire or with up to 5 players in a cooperative approach. There is a game mechanism that can be used to determine a winner in the cooperative game, if just beating the game system as a group was not enough.

In the Marvel version there are 2 main games. The standard game called “Legendary: A Marvel Deck Building Game” and the second is called “Legendary Villains: A Marvel Deck Building Game.” There are currently 16 maybe 17 expansions with 6 big box expansions (has more cards than the small box expansion) and 10 plus smaller box expansions. The games and expansions are produced by Upper Deck Entertainment. See the end of the review for net links.



The main game box has everything you need to play the game which is the rules, 500 cards and the game board. In this game you play as good superhero against the game system (an evil Mastermind) and try and stop the evil Mastermind's Scheme from coming to fruition. With “Legendary Villains: A Marvel Deck Building Game” you play as evil superheroes against the good Commander trying to stop the Commander's Plot from being completed. The good superheroes who are run by the system in similar fashion as in Marvel Legendary.

The main two boxes give you a large range of heroes and villains to play with. But there are many and many heroes and villains in the Marvel Universes so the expansions just keep providing additional heroes, evil Masterminds and Schemes and some additional mechanism (or key words) to boost the game flavour.

My favourite expansion is the small box expansion based upon the Fantastic Four and Galactus but I imagine you will have your own favourite(s). Who does not like superheroes?

I will explain the game mechanism for *Legendary: A Marvel Deck Building Game* as it is the same for the Villain's version basically and roughly similar to the other games.

To win the game you as the players / good guys have to defeat the Mastermind in combat or foil the Mastermind completing his evil Scheme.

There are 8 decks in the game:

- Player's Starting Deck: 12 cards – 4 S.H.I.E.L.D. Troopers (attack cards) & 8 S.H.I.E.L.D. Officers (recruit / purchase cards);
- Mastermind Deck – 5 cards, 1 providing information & 4 Masterminds (versions);
- Hero Deck – up to 70 cards made up of 5 smaller Heroes decks;
- Villain Deck – up to 100 cards consisting of Villains and Henchmen (goons that every Mastermind has) decks based upon the Scheme and number of players. Also contains 5 Master Strike Cards (cards that initiate an attack from the Mastermind), a number of Scheme Twist cards (how the Mastermind Scheme advances), a number of Bystander Cards (based upon the number of players and or the Scheme instructions) and it may contain some other cards depending upon the Scheme's directions;
- S.H.I.E.L.D. Officers Deck – 30 cards that can provide additional purchasing power;
- Bystanders Deck – 30 cards who can be captured by the Villains or rescued by the Heroes and may either aid in the advancement of the scheme and/or provide victory points to players in help deciding who is the individual winner;
- Wounds Deck – 30 cards that Heroes acquire and that can slow them down – remember no one dies in this universe!
- Sidekicks – 14 cards (at present) that provide little boosts; maybe; to Heroes, and every Hero needs a goofy sidekick.

To play the game you select a Mastermind and a Scheme. Masterminds can be any villain from the Marvel universe such as King Pin, Dr. Doom, Magneto, Loki, Ultron, Red Skull, the list goes on. So much choice / re-play-ability! The game recommends that all selections are random but this is truly optional.



The Mastermind deck consists of 5 cards. One card provides the directions for when a Master Strike card is drawn. A Master Strike card is when the Mastermind attacks or “plays” with the players. The other 4 cards are variations of the Mastermind and you must defeat all 4.

The Scheme cards provide the story line for the game and information to help construct the Villain deck. Also provides the crucial information on how to win or not win the game both for the good and bad superheroes.

Example of Scheme titles are: Epic Superheroes - Civil War, Replace Earth's Leaders with Kill Bots, Massive Earthquake Generator, The Legacy Virus, and Organised Crime Wave, etc. There is a Scheme for everyone. I currently have 26 with several unopened expansion boxes waiting.

Associated with the Scheme card are cards called Scheme Twists. There are number of Scheme Twists placed into the Villains deck. Generally 8 are included, though this number can vary depending upon the Scheme / mechanism to win or lose. When a Scheme Twist is drawn the Scheme Card itself will explain what is to occur.

You then construct the Villain deck which is made up of Villains – evil superheroes and/or the lesser Henchmen – the Mastermind's goons. Depending upon the number of player there can be 2 or more sets with 6 plus cards in each set

For the good guys you select 5 superheroes (6 if playing with 5 players) which make up the Hero Deck. This is where you can select randomly or a group such as all X-men or The Avengers or a group of heroes you would like to fight together considering the Mastermind and/or his Scheme.

The very large game board has 2 main areas – see the picture at the end of this review. These areas are the HQ and the City. The HQ is where the good superheroes hang out and is marked with a lovely drawing of the flying aircraft carrier, which everyone should have one. There are always 5 cards in the HQ unless a Scheme directs otherwise. The City Area consists of 5 spaces and named from right to left Sewers, Bank, Rooftops, Streets and Bridge.

Playing the game the players start with their starting deck of S.H.I.E.L.D Troopers and Agents and carry out the following steps.

Step 1. At the start of each turn a Player will play a card from the Villain deck into City Area, generally into the Sewers. If there is a Villain in the Sewer, then this Villain will be pushed to the next City space, i.e. Bank. The playing of a Villain card at the start of every player's turn can cause this pushing action to continue as new Villains are played. Eventually a Villain could be pushed out of the City. This Villain has escaped which is not good for the good superheroes as they lose Heroes from the City and possibly cards from their hands. The Players can successfully attack and remove a Villain which will halt temporarily the pushing of Villains across the City. If the Villain deck runs out, then the Players lose. If the Hero Deck runs out, then the Players cannot draw more Heroes as there will be no Heroes left in the HQ possibly.



Other cards that can come from the Villain deck are:

Scheme Twist: If this card is revealed then the Player refers back the Scheme card which will provide directions on actions to be taken such as marking this card as the first successful step has been taken in the Mastermind's evil Scheme, or remove some Heroes from the HQ, or play another card from the Villain deck, or add Bystanders to the Villains cards in the City and if X number Bystanders escape then the Heroes could lose.

Master Strike: If this card is played, then the Player refers to the Mastermind card which will provide directions on the form that the attack from the Mastermind will take. This could be stripping cards from the player's hand, making the Mastermind and or evil superheroes, and or Villains / Goons tougher to attack.

Bystander: These cards generally slide under the right most Villain in the City or even the Mastermind if there are no Villains in the City. Which could boost the Villain and/or Mastermind or aid the Mastermind in completing his Scheme if they escape with their Villain from the left end of the City. No superhero would stand by to see an innocent Bystander to be molested by an evil superhero or his Goons.

Step 2. Players draw 6 cards from their deck. Players play every card in their hand every turn and refill their hand fully at the end of the turn. Once played, cards are placed in the Player's discard pile. When the Players deck is exhausted, that is all the cards are in the discard pile, the Player shuffles the discard pile and this become the Player's deck.

Player cards will either provide Recruit (purchase) points or Attack points. The initial S.H.I.E.L.D. Troopers (attack) and Officers (recruit / purchase) cards only provide 1 point of each. Purchased Superheroes cards from the HQ will provide greater purchasing and/or attack values / powers and/or permit combinations thereof. All cards that can be purchased have a purchase value on them, ranging from 1 to 8 generally. Players can attack Villains in the City or the Mastermind. Villains have an Attack value on them and the players must play cards totalling that value to defeat the Villain and therefore remove that Villain from the City (creating a vacant space) thus temporarily halting the "pushing movement of the Villains across the City Area. The Mastermind, who generally has attack value greater than that of the Villains, can be attacked by the Players also and they must do this four separate times successfully to win the game.

You repeat Steps 1 and 2 until you win or lose. The overall game mechanism is fairly simple; it is interplay of the wording of the cards that is the involved component. I had to say it – easy to learn but challenging to play

Playing the game solo I select a Scheme and Mastermind either randomly or with a particular scenario in mind which may be from a recently read comic or as part of my campaign (more information later). The Mastermind, Scheme and the approach you wish to achieve guides the Villains and Henchmen that are chosen. The Good Superheroes are selected by the previously mentioned mechanisms or just your choice.

I then usually play a single deck game initially and see how the Scheme works out. I then and frequently play a 2 and then a 3 and then a 4 and finally a 5 decks game. You just play each Player's deck in sequence. There is some interaction between the decks, but it is not generally game altering.

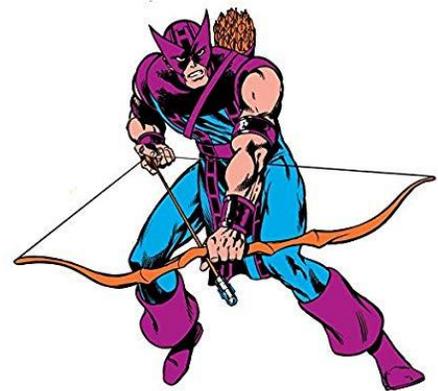
I would also like to say that at the 1 and 2 decks/players level the scenario is generally easier to win. At the 3 deck/player level it is 50/50. At the 4 and 5 deck/player level the game is generally a lot harder to win. The game mechanics run this way. The Villains/Henchman just keep coming and with 1 deck/player it is one Villain for one Hero.

In that the Villain gains a card and a deck gains a card. With a 5 deck/player game there are 5 Villains play but each deck/player only gains 1 card to each deck. It is the potency of the individual deck that permits the player(s) to win. But this just makes the game so much better.

As mentioned previously, the game uses keywords to describe a mechanism, such as if the word “Bribe” appears on a Mastermind/Villain/Henchman card, the Player can use Recruit (purchase) points as attack points and combine all Recruit and Attack points to Attack the bad guy.

There are currently according to my count 36 keywords. These keywords bring the Marvel superhero feeling/mechanisms to the game. For example “Size-Changing” which superheroes like Ant-Man have and permits Ant-man to reduce the Attack points need to successfully attack a Bad Guy or purchase a superhero. Other keywords are: Abomination, Berserk, Burrow, Danger Sense, Demolish, Dodge, Excessive Violence, Feast, Focus, Fortify, Light Show, Patrol, Pierce Energy, Phasing, Smash, Soaring Flight, Teleport, Wall Crawl, and Wounded Fury. I am sure you can put each of these keywords to a Marvel Superhero! It is just GREAT.

This game is very popular and has a strong fan base on BoardGameGeek – see link below. And these fans have created many variants and many extra cards of all types. I have made up many and use them in my games. A very handy set is a set that can increase or decrease or changes the difficulty of the game by a wide range of game mechanisms and I highly recommend that you track these down.



Of the other games in this line I own (and have played) Aliens, Predator and Villains. A converted friend of mine has Buffy and X Files.

With Aliens there is a wonderful mechanism where out of the Villain deck comes a card called “Face Hugger” and yep, you are right – straight out of the movies. If this card is drawn the player who draws it wears it. If he or the next player cannot successfully attack and destroy the card, then the drawer replaces this card with a card called “Chest-Buster” which is shuffled back into this Player’s deck. And if the “Chest-Buster” is drawn, then the card does what we all know happens! Let me just say that, that Player is out of the game. So cool!! All the other games have similar mechanism that clearly come from their universes.



Conclusion

In conclusion, I find this game simply fabulous. It is easy to learn and has an endless variety of playing options and a number of levels of difficulty. Well worth a look for a solo player who loves the Marvel superheroes universes.

As with any game with a large number of expansions, I would buy the basic game and give it a go and if you like it, then buy an expansion and work your way up slowly.

Better still, if you have a friend or a member of a club which makes the game available, then try before you buy – this is always a good thing.

But this game will not let you down!

Relevant Internet Pages:

BoardGame Geek Page – providing game description and almost additional supporting information:

<https://boardgamegeek.com/boardgame/129437/legendary-marvel-deck-building-game>

Upper Deck Entertainment – product page

<https://upperdeckstore.com/games-collectibles/legendary.html>

Legendary Board

