Gloom

Gloom Preview 1: Killing with Kindness

I came up with *Gloom* on my tenth wedding anniversary.

That doesn't make my marriage sound very happy, does it? Actually, little could be further from the truth. I made *Gloom* because I wanted a game that my wife Ellen and I could play together. Ellen has one problem: she's too nice. Many great games -- *Lunch Money, Nuclear War, Family Business,* and most CCGs, to name just a few -- are based on the simple principle of kicking your opponents around the block until you're the last one standing. Ellen doesn't do well with these kinds of games, because she just doesn't enjoy pimp slapping a friend. So the question was how we could have a game that suited my desire for direct competition and her dislike of hurting her friends.

The answer was *Gloom* -- a game in which you don't want to hurt your opponents, you want to help them. In *Gloom*, you don't want to be the last one standing, you want to be the first one down. You control an eccentric family, and you want your characters to suffer the most terrible tragedies possible before dying untimely deaths. Meanwhile, you keep your opponents happy and healthy. So, instead of foiling your opponent with a chain to the head, you're ruining her plans with a well-placed happy marriage and unexpected inheritance. For Ellen, this makes all the difference; even if her opponent doesn't want to become the toast of the town, Ellen doesn't have to feel bad about heaping good fortune on her enemy.

With all of this said, there are a few strategies in *Gloom* that are not immediately obvious. The basic mechanic of *Gloom* is simple. Modifiers add positive or negative points to a character. If a character has a negative score, you can play an Untimely Death on her. When someone loses his last character, add up the Self-Worth scores of all dead characters, and the family with the lowest score wins. So as a general rule, you want to play unpleasant things on your own characters and good things on your opponents. However, many cards have side effects that target the person they're played upon. So the modifier Was Wondrously Well Wed has a positive score, but it also increases the victim's draw limit, which can be quite useful. At the start of the game, you may want to play this on one of your characters, leaving him in peace while heaping troubles on the others. On the other hand, Was Shunned by Society has a tremendous negative score -- but causes the victim to miss a turn. Early in the game, this might not be a terrible sacrifice to make in exchange for the points. But if an opponent is about to kill his last character and win, taking him out of play for a round may give you the time you need to turn the tables.

So, if you're ready for a little dark humor, pick up your copy of Edward Gorey's *The Gashlycrumb Tinies*, put *The Addams Family* on the TV, pull out *Gloom*, and let the miserable times roll!

Keith Baker
Designer of *Gloom*