



### 6/21/24 Goblin Dice Hoard Featured Spotlight: Chessex

Goblins, coupled with the generous Chessex Lab Dice™ 8 Giveaway, the owner and founder of Chessex, Donald Reents, was gracious enough to give us his time and answer a few questions for the Goblin Dice Hoard Featured Spotlight!

Thank you Chessex for taking the time to answer these questions! And it's not too late to submit your entry for the Lab Dice™ 8 Giveaway (linked below)! Comment your favorite Lab Dice™ 8 color now for a chance to win one of these six sets!

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/GoblinDiceHoard/posts/3857214837901310/>

✦ Dice Makers/Businesses, want to be featured in one of our future bi-monthly Goblin Dice Hoard Featured Spotlights? DM the modmin team at Goblin Dice Hoard Fanpage today for an application!

#### Read on below for the Chessex Spotlight!!!

**1. What is your name and position in Chessex?** Donald Reents, Owner and Founder of the company Chessex.

**2. What is the Chessex origin story?** The origins of starting Chessex begins in 1980 with the opening of a gaming store named Games of Berkeley out in Berkeley, California. As a store owner, I noticed a lot of companies that made gaming products were not gamers themselves. I felt that I could really do a lot of good things if I were a publisher because I knew what would make these products a little bit better. One of the first products I released was a chessboard vinyl mat that I released in February of 1981. This later inspired the grid mat design of the Battlemats™ for RPG players. I released this product in May of 1981 and Chessex still sells Battlemats™, Megamats®, and even Mondomats® to this day!

In 1986, I started to make a lot more gaming equipment. I bought a company called Pacific Game Company when my friend Jerry retired. Some of the products Jerry sold that I acquired in the purchase of the company were 12mm casino dice and the clear crystal packaging containers we use today for the Chessex Dice sets. I have always really liked the clear crystal packaging because those containers also worked really well for storing minifigures! I started Berkeley Game Distribution in addition to running my store.

One challenge I faced as a distributor and store owner is that it was very hard to find quality dice. It was even harder to keep good-looking dice in stock at my store. The fill ratio was rarely 100% when my orders were delivered. The companies I would buy dice from would package each die individually. It would take them weeks to ship my orders to me! What's worse is I would only receive a partial order of dice. They didn't communicate that they were out of stock in a certain shape or color, so then I would have to wait even longer for them to send those pieces in a separate shipment. It was so annoying! Again, this was the 80's so I couldn't send an email to these companies. I would have to call them and hope someone would answer. Some of these places only had one person answering the phone and they didn't have voicemail either.

In 1987, I started Chessex Manufacturing. I began to sell all sorts of gaming equipment. I sold my dice as a pre-assembled set of seven which was much more convenient. We became a very reliable supplier on the west coast. I then started Chessex Distribution East in the same year so that I could sell to distributors on the east coast too. A couple of years later someone wanted to buy Chessex East, and I moved on to Chessex Midwest. Our current headquarters today is in Fort Wayne, Indiana.

In 1992, Magic: The Gathering and other trading card games were released, and sales took off for us. These games helped us triple our sales. One of the biggest challenges I faced was not having enough time to do everything I wanted to do. I had to choose one area to focus on. In 1994, I sold my store, which was a hard decision. Chessex continued to grow exponentially. We grew too fast, and we couldn't maintain our size for long. In 1996 there was a crash in the popularity of RPGs and TCGs. At the time, I had 144 staff members and seven locations across North America and Europe. Suddenly, distributors were closing or filing for bankruptcy left and right. Chessex had to downsize to stay in business. About that time, I would drive my merchandise to game conventions by myself and sleep in my vehicle to save money and stay afloat.

In 1998, I merged with a distributor called the Armory. Together we founded Alliance Game Distribution. We shared a warehouse for a while, but eventually Armory moved on to another location. This worked out as I needed more space because Chessex was growing steadily again. From that point on I decided to focus on what we did best. I made more dice! At this point, I really didn't have much going for me. I was starting my business over. I wanted to continue making interesting colors and styles for dice that no one else was doing. Our Speckled® dice were some of the earliest of Chessex's dice successes. Since then, we've created other popular styles like Borealis®, Festive®, Gemini®, etc.

With the release of Dungeons & Dragons third edition and 3.5 edition in the early 2000's came another resurgence of dice popularity. There was suddenly a huge demand again! Dice have remained consistently popular ever since and Chessex has continued to expand our dice selection while maintaining a price point that is affordable for gamers.

**3. Where did the name Chessex come from?** I used to compete in chess tournaments when I was a young man. I went to a few national competitions. I'm really not a good chess player though. When I started to make things, most of the items I made were chess accessories like game pieces. I also made accessories for other classic games like backgammon and dominoes. I put the two words "chess" and "classics" together to get Chessics, except I didn't like the -ics spelling at the end. I changed it to an -ex because I thought this spelling was more interesting. Over time, I became less interested in making chess pieces and I fell into dice manufacturing because they were what sold well for us. I met good people and I partnered with manufacturers

in Europe that helped us create unique colors for dice. People loved our dice products and began to recognize Chessex as a dice company. It felt unnecessary to change it because people seemed to like our name.

#### **4. Which TTRPGs had influence on Chessex in the beginning? We want to know everything!**

I'd say Chessex really took off with the increasing popularity of Dungeons & Dragons. I carried a lot of TTRPGs in my store. Traveler by GDW in 1977 was popular and one of my favorites. In the 80's there were a lot of Superhero themed RPGs. Champions in 1981 by Hero Games was good. FGU published a lot of good RPGs. Vampire the Masquerade by White Wolf is a good one. Tunnels & Trolls by Ken St. Andre.

#### **5. What can you share about the creative process for coming up with new ideas for dice?**

When we choose new colors for Chessex dice, I look through samples of colors that my manufacturers have come up with that they want me to review. I pick out a couple of the samples that interest me and then I must decide what color they will be inked with. The final step is giving this new color a good name! It's very fun.

During my time of being a distributor and a store owner that would sell dice, I would experience firsthand how frustrating it was when there weren't very good colors to sell. Some companies I worked with would sell me really ugly colors like their leftover yellow, orange, and brown supply. They would be out of stock of nice colors that people really wanted like red, purple, or blue. When I began manufacturing gaming equipment, I wanted better colors and I also really wanted to improve product designs to make gameplay better for gamers.

I have an interesting story of when I created the modern percentile die design in independent concurrence with another creator. It was 1990 when Lou Zocchi from GameScience released his double digit d10 die. I saw him showing everyone this new product at the GAMA Expo at the Tropicana and I was completely crestfallen. I pulled Lou aside to show him my prototype of the same product and I told him, "Listen, I want to let you know that I didn't copy you." I explained to him that I had my manufacturing molds made and that my inventory for these dice was arriving in two weeks! Lou agreed that there was no way I could have copied his design. It would have been impossible for me to have the molds and the product made in two weeks if I hadn't already been working on it. The weird thing was neither of us shared our idea with anyone! It was a weird coincidence. Lou told me later that when he saw my d10 percentile design he was crestfallen too. He said he thought my number sequence looked better! You see, Lou had two little numbers on the face of his d10, while my manufacturer was the one that had the idea to make a larger digit and a smaller digit that filled more of that space.

This isn't widely known, but I believe I was the first person to manufacture the modern tetrahedron d4 with the numbers placed at the top of the die. The original d4 used with the D&D dice from the 70s had the number along the bottom of the die. We used to manufacture d4s with that design too up until about 1999 or so. There were other d4 designs that had the number in the center of the face and your roll would be facing down. I didn't like that design at all! I re-designed my d4s and I put the numbers on the point, that way your rolled number was facing up for the player to see. This made much more sense and everyone must have agreed because many manufacturers followed suit shortly after.. I regret not getting a patent for that d4 design, although maybe the fact that more manufacturers are adopting this design is what contributed to the popularity of the new look for the d4.

**6. How often do you release new series/designs/colorways?** I usually try to release six to twelve new colorways per year.

**7. What is the process of deciding which new colors go into Lab Dice™ set production?** We have so many samples and colors of dice that we like and it can be hard to choose what should be a main color to manufacture long term. The Lab Dice™ are colors I choose because they are very unique, and I don't know if they will sell, but I want to give them a chance. With Lab Dice™ we allow our customers to decide which colors we should release. When a Lab Dice™ set sells exceptionally well, we add that colorway to our main product line.

**8. Why did you choose these 6 colorways for the Lab Dice™ 8 release?** We've done Lab Dice™ as a series of only six Translucent colors or mostly Nebula® colors in the past. This time I tried to have a good variety of styles. I try to focus on what people want and what would sell. I like to make colors that I haven't seen done before.

Out of this recent Lab Dice™ release, the Nebula® Fluorite™ is quite nice. I also really like Gemini® Red-Steel. The red and steel are a simple and classic combination that I believe a lot of players will like.

**9. What is your favorite set of dice/colorway/series that you have created and why?** The coolest or the neatest was Borealis® Aquerple™. I like the Vortex® Green with gold, Borealis® Icicle™ is very nice, and I like our Scarab® colors, especially Scarab® Jade. I really like a few of our Speckled® dice too. Out of the Speckled® dice we've made I like Arctic Camo™ the best.

**10. Is there a particular series, design, colorway, that you feel is the most representative of the Chessex brand?** We were the first company to make Speckled® dice. That has become a very recognizable style from Chessex that people like. We've always tried to create new colors that no one else was doing. People seem to really enjoy our Borealis®, Nebula®, and Gemini® dice styles a lot. I also think the Luminary™ and Blacklight effect dice are very neat!

**11. What is your favorite out of print colorway? Why is it out of print?** Obviously, Borealis® Aquerple™. Unfortunately, we cannot get the same glitter material anymore. I liked Speckled® Loot, but it wasn't a very popular one. I did like the Vortex® Brown, but it didn't sell well either because it had yellow ink. We tried Vortex® Brown with white ink, but it wasn't exciting. One of the worst colors we ever had was Speckled® Invaders. It was so ugly. Yuck!

**12. What has been the most significant change in dice manufacturing since Chessex was founded. How has the company adapted to those changes?** As far as manufacturing, there hasn't been much change in the process of making dice. We had to find a new material to replace the old Borealis® unfortunately. We've made connections with new manufacturing companies that helped us create Nebula® dice and material for Luminary™ particles. The manufacturing side of this business is more about making connections and trying new things.

**13. The original Borealis® Glitter has fondly become known as the "illegal glitter" in the community and is the most loved version of glitter for dice. What can you tell us about the history of changing the glitter type?** We worked with a company that used to produce this glitter for our original Borealis® dice and they started using this same material in the Euro currency notes. This resource was prioritized by the European Union; therefore it became a limited resource and they could no longer supply it for our dice. We were never able to recreate anything close to that original glitter with any other material which is too bad.

**14. Speckled and Borealis sets are some of the top fan favorite series by Chessex. Is there anything you can share about the inspirations or maybe potential remakes of older sets? We're eager to know if any of our old favorites are coming back!** There has been some

discussion of bringing back some discontinued Chessex colors in the future. You'll have to wait and see.

**15. The goblins want to know, what would a Goblin inspired Chessex dice set look like?**

Goblins are usually green. I think our Gemini® Plasma Green-Teal would be a good goblin color.

**16. Is there anything you would like the Chessex fans to know about your brand or any specific message you may have for your fans?**

When I was young, I didn't think I was particularly good at anything really. I played a lot of chess, but I realized early on that I would never be a pro. I've played matches with chess players that were way better than I could ever be. Occasionally, I would play with those better opponents, and I would win. It's because I never felt nervous when I was competing. For them, they would be so stressed out about winning that they would end up making a mistake. All I really wanted to do was have fun. Later in life, I realized that how you look or the stuff you're good at or not good at isn't all that important. Who you are as a person is what matters.

I've learned so much over the years about this industry through my experiences running my store, becoming a distributor, and starting Chessex Manufacturing. I didn't get into this business to make a lot of money, I simply did it because I liked games. I decided I wanted to be involved in this industry because it would be something worthwhile to do. I sincerely want to say thank you to all the Chessex fans. It's because of you that Chessex has become what it is today. I wouldn't have been able to make dice for so long if you didn't like them.