

Violence as a lack of imagination

By [Carol Howard Merritt](#)

July 30, 2013

[Spoiler alert: we talk about the ending of *Man of Steel*.]

It's been a few weeks since [UNCO East](#). Now that we're heading into UNCO West, new ministry ideas and resources are percolating and forming from our gathering. For instance, right now, Nick Larson, Aric Clark and Doug Hagler (aka, [Two Friars and a Fool](#)) are putting together a [Kickstarter campaign](#) for ploughshare games that nurture non-violence.

Yesterday I talked with Nick, Aric, and Doug, who are parents, pastors, authors and game developers. They noticed a trend in movies and games—**there seemed to be a lack of creativity when it came to resolving conflict**. Violence seemed to be the only resolution and when the killing occurred, that was the end of the story. There was no wrestling with the consequences or struggling with the moral injury.

“Now you have the hero who tries everything else, then when nothing works, the hero kills the villain,” Aric said as he recalled [Man of Steel](#), the most recent Superman movie. “Superman has always refused to kill people, that was the whole point of his character. But this Superman movie was different because he *did* kill--even though there were many different options in the story, many ways that the writers could have resolved the conflict. They had a complete lack of imagination.”

“Yeah,” Doug agreed. “The good guy became the good guy because he was *stronger*, not because he was *different*.”

“Do we want superheroes who are merely stronger than the villains? Or do we want them to hold to another belief system?” Aric asked.

Because this apparent lack of imagination creeps up in a lot of our entertainment, the three men wanted to do something about it. They decided to create board games that were fun, engaging, and allowed us to stretch our vision. “With every game,” Doug explained, “There are restrictions and a goal. With card games in particular, you have to use creativity to engage with it, or else the cards just sit

there.”

Then once the landscape and characters are set up, Aric explains that “playing the games allows us to edge our way into difficult ideas, like privilege and conflict resolution. People make alliances, social dynamic emerge, and we imagine parallels through history.” So what happens when war or killing isn't the only way to win in a conflict?

Nick talked about how he would use the games with his youth group. They know how to develop fun games, and the more entertaining it is, the more people can associate the strategies with life. There's also an evangelistic element to entertaining games, as we talk about them and make converts.

I'll keep you updated on the Kickstarter campaign, as I learn more information. Meanwhile, we would love for you to join us at [UNCO West](#) at San Francisco Theological Seminary on October 21-23, where more interesting discussions and projects will surely emerge!