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Editorial.



Andreas Becker at his new workplace – right now, investigating a case in **CRIME CITY**. He looks forward to his new task at spielbox, and, beyond that, to an end to the social distancing restrictions in order to be allowed to meet more people again for game-playing – and to finally get an appointment at the barbershop.

Dear reader,

Turning your hobby into a profession sounds appealing. Work that no longer feels like work, but always a bit like leisure also. Can you say no to something like that?

In October 2018, I was asked whether I could imagine this. That happened, of course, at the SPIEL in Essen – where else? The time was just right for me: A major murder trial, probably the biggest one in German history after WWII, was the next job I had to cover for my employer at that moment. After that, I thought that nothing would come that would captivate me more than that. I had written about so many elections, political controversies, insolvencies, and art exhibitions that it was time for a change. So, for me, my job search ended before it had even started.

However, my beginning also meant that something else ended. For 19 years, it was Matthias Hardel who welcomed you here. Now he has retired and taken his leave pretty quietly – just in the way he wanted it; therefore, we respected his wish.

Let us talk about another long period of time: More than 14 years ago, spielbox had its previous major makeover. Therefore, we thought it might be time to bring some fresh air to the magazine. You have certainly already noticed one of the greatest advancements when you took this issue into your hands: From now on, spielbox will be printed on paper with the maximum recycled content. In 2021, it seems anything but topical to have the magazine printed on high-gloss paper. A visible sign of our environmental commitment is the FSC logo on the cover. FSC stands for Forest Stewardship Council,

an organization located in Bonn (Germany) that certifies sustainable forest management.

We made some changes regarding the visual appearance and the structure as well. For instance, we now want to always give you our ratings for each reviewed game, for expansions and our „At a Glance“ section. This is supposed to make it more consistent; for this reason, we merged the previous three rating systems, to allow you to orient yourself in an optimal way. As far as the makeover is concerned, we have just begun and will implement more ideas bit by bit. Let yourself be surprised.

In terms of content, we will continue to focus on reviewing and presenting as many games as possible. You will still benefit as usual from the extensive and experienced spielbox team that has a sense of at least 875 years of combined playing experience. Only spielbox provides that much knowledge about games. Apropos: The team has grown as well, so you will see new names in addition to the familiar ones.

We hope, of course, that you will like the alterations. We are happy about praise and open to criticism and any suggestions; send us an email at redaktion@spielbox.de. But now: Have fun reading the new issue!

Yours,

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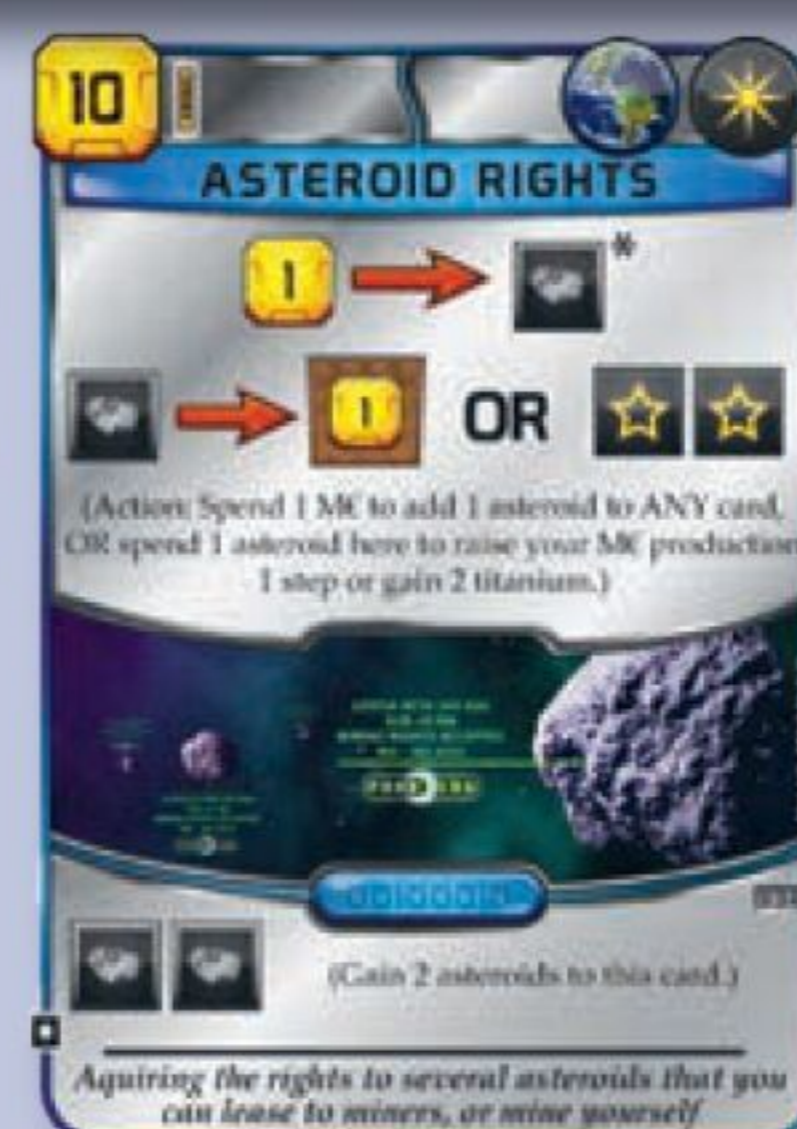
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Supplement note



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The Tascini Affair

A commentary by **ANDREAS BECKER**



He said it. Or, more precisely, wrote it. He said that he doesn't call his friends blacks, but that he calls them *ne-gros*, as one says in Italian. And none of these friends have ever been irked by this.

The guy who posted this on Facebook and thus triggered a debate about everyday racism was Daniele Tascini, the author of such great games as *THE VOYAGES OF MARCO POLO* and *TZOLK'IN*. His post was picked up by American YouTuber Jeremy Howard ("Man vs. Meeple"), an African-American, who could not believe what one of his favorite game authors had written. According to internet translation programs, *negro* is the N-word, and even Italians had confirmed this to him, as Howard explained. But there were also native speakers who would have translated the word differently. Howard took up the issue on January 16th.

As a consequence, Tascini backpedaled, but rather hesitantly. This caused several companies to dissociate themselves from him and/or attach conditions to continuing the collaboration with him. Board & Dice was the first of these companies, Hans im Glück and also Giant Roc followed. Only if Tascini credibly assured them that he would change his attitude would they think about a possible cooperation in the future.

In late January, Tascini wrote a second apology. It reads as if the storm that raged over him has initiated a process of reflection. In addition, Tascini wrote that he intends to donate 15 percent of the royalties he will get for his next game, *TABANNUSI – BUILDERS OF UR*, to an organization that advocates and fights for the rights of people of color.

This reaction caused a counter-reaction, claiming that first, the published quote was taken out of context, and second, *negro* still seems to be a pretty common word in Italian – a word that, however, has been mistranslated into English (and also into German) by the usual online tools and thus came with an unfortunate, now racist turn of phrase. Of course, *negro* could also be translated as black person.

Yes, it can be translated this way. But whoever argues like this accuses the companies that have taken a public stance against

the white everyday racism represented by Tascini of not having thought about their actions for five seconds and not having informed themselves beyond a Facebook discussion.

In this context, by the way, Sebastian Wenzel needs to be given credit for presenting Tascini's text to two certified Italian translators for his website, *kulturgutspiel.de* – with an unambiguous outcome. A third translator declined the small job, though, with reference to the missing context.

On top of that, Tascini himself has refuted his lawyers: He amplified that he would never call Africans "blacks," since they are not black, and then blathered something about complexions from a light beige to a dark brown tone. So, defending him with the argument that *negro* could also mean "black person" would be a futile argument.

It requires a lot of empathy to understand the core of the problem.

After all, a white Central European is not exposed to everyday racism. Nobody looks at him with disapproval when he enters a store, and he never has to fight against prejudices just because of his visual appearance. But even if Tascini has not acted with vicious racist intent but just thoughtlessly, his conduct was problematic. This very thoughtlessness is the reason why everyday racism carries on.

A WHITE CENTRAL EUROPEAN IS NOT EXPOSED TO EVERYDAY RACISM

Given this background, the companies didn't do anything wrong by making their attitude towards Tascini's statements public. If somebody wants to initiate social debates, he simply can't do this in a confidential meeting but has to intervene in the discourse. And he has to bear up against the justifiable counter-discourse. But this further confrontation with the subject alone has an impact, since it forces us to determine the standards of our social interactions.

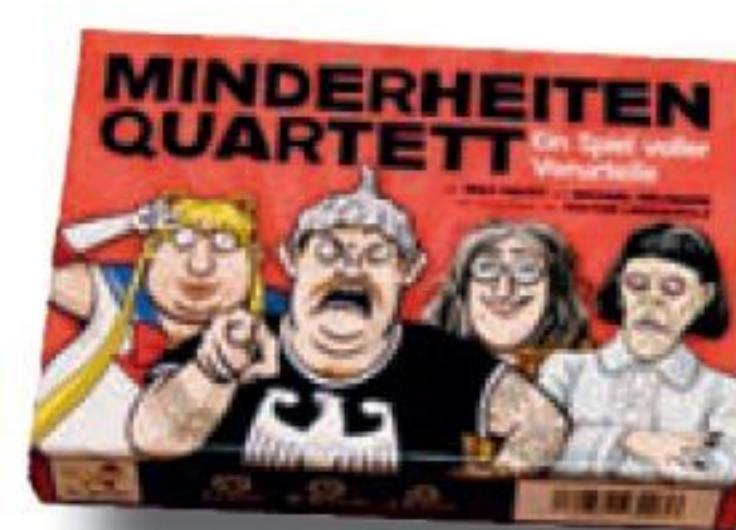
Language reflects thought, to say it in a simplified way. What we say also determines our actions. Or can make some people, stimulated or even incited by racist statements, take on ways of thinking and acting that entail that people from Africa, for example, can't go through everyday life as easily as white Central Europeans. A more sensitive choice of words – one that doesn't degrade or insult other people – also increases our own empathy. A more considerate, more insightful verbal behavior improves our dealings with one another overall. (sbw)

Politically Semi-correct

THE MINDERHEITEN QUARTETT (literally, Minority Quartet) has been published by the Leipziger Spielverlag. The previous, more than ten-year old version has been revised. Due to the changes in the socio-political debate, there are now "chemtrailers," or refugees represented in the game. The authors, Max Haupt and Michael Neumann, set

the satirical focus on the self-perception and self-presentation of such minorities. Whereas the objective in the old game was to collect as many minorities as possible, now a player wins as soon as he has acquired all four members of a category, such as "do-gooders" or "LBGTQ+." The game principle is based on the concept of trick-taking quartet. In one of the two

variants, everybody laments about his suffering, with the intention to be considered the most affected victim of discrimination; in the other variant, players have to ask smart yes-no questions in order to figure out the secretly assigned minority role. It is intended for two to six players and available at *leipzigerspiele.de* for about 20 Euro. CC/(swb)



7 Games for Life. Michael Kiesling



Photo: Björn Hake/WESER-KURIER

Favorite games? Sure, everyone has these. But let's face it: Most of the time, what we like to play is – in a completely unromantic way – the current hotness. It's the cult of the new that many people are pursuing. And enjoying, no doubt about it. And there is always another title. Sounds familiar, right? But we wanted to find out: What are the games of life? The ones with stories associated to them? Those games that have always kept the passion burning? We asked designer Michael Kiesling about the games that inspired him.

1 It would be kind of weird not to mention **AZUL**. Even though I received the "Spiel des Jahres" award twice before, in 1999 and 2000, together with Wolfgang Kramer, for **TIKAL** and **TORRES**. Both titles also sold many copies at the time, but the demand for **AZUL** is going through the roof. It is – there is no other way to put it – sheer madness; the game is a global success. It's my crowning achievement. And I was tremendously lucky.

2 **DOPPELKOPF** was one of the first games that accompanied me. Many Germans of my generation probably know card games like **SKAT** or **DOPPELKOPF** from home. Our family also often played **CANASTA**. But at school, during breaks and in free periods, we played **DOPPELKOPF** with a fixed round. The stakes were high for us: 10 pfennigs and more had to be paid up, depending on how badly you lost. Sometimes you could win as much as 50 pfennigs. In the 1970s, that was a lot of money. Back then, it would buy you two packs of chocolate milk ...

3 I have a very special memory associated with a game, but I don't really know if it fits here, **TIPP-KICK**. For a long time, I played regularly with my father when he came home during his lunch break. Back then, I built a life-like little stadium, complete with advertising boards. I think it is moments like these that play a very important role in igniting that flame of passion for games in a person.

4 If you don't have this game in your collection, you're missing out, I'd say: **DAS GROSSE UND DAS KLEINE A** ("The large and the small A") by Wolfgang Kramer. I used to play it with my colleagues in our lunch break, and we even took out the small A. It's perfect for six, seven or eight people. A game takes about six minutes. We used to have little tournaments.

5 Maybe **TIKAL** is an obvious choice, because it was the first time that Wolfgang and I won the game of the year. I played it again last year, after quite a long time, in the new edition by Super Meeple with the three-dimensional pyramids. And I have to say: It's still a good game, in my eyes. Something I cannot say, after a some years, about that many games I used to play a lot in the 70s or 80s.

6 Okay, another title by Wolfgang and myself comes to mind: **HASTE WORTE** (literally, "Do you have words")? It was one of the first games we developed together. It also has a special significance to me, because before that I had tried to sell games with my own publishing company and failed, a story that has been told often enough. Afterwards, I got in touch with Wolfgang Kramer. **HASTE WORTE?** is available today, people are still playing it.

7 For me personally, this last game is very important, even though I can't even remember its name. In the mid-1980s, when I was still studying, I developed a prototype and submitted it to Ravensburger. A game about manufacturing goods and then delivering them. Ravensburger turned it down. A short time after that, Wolfgang Kramer published **AUF ACHSE** and it became "Spiel des Jahres", by the way. Somehow Kramer had got everything right, better than me. Which is why I lost all motivation to pursue the project. What I meant to say is, I started developing games already back then.

What happened to ... Andreas Mutschke



Andreas Mutschke, as today's game and toy archaeologist – and back in 1991.

Photos: meierpress Ralf Meier/Mutschke

I still read online regularly, and I'm glad the Fairplay magazine, the trade magazine about board games I co-founded, is still around. I check up on it all, but I am no longer emotionally involved.

And what about contemporary games?

I am not so much into new releases anymore. When I am reading the rules, I can still imagine how the game will play, similar to a conductor who hears the melody on reading the score. But I have fewer opportunities to play these days. Imagine if I joined a regular group: I would then be sitting next to the others, an old man with 40 years of gaming experience. This would create a situation where, quite unintentionally, there would always be some kind of respectful distance.

Did you know that it's now been exactly 20 years since you left the "Spiel des Jahres" jury, together with Edwin Ruschitzka and Michael Knopf?

Really? Twenty years? No, I had no idea.

One of the controversies at the time was the entanglement of the „Spiel des Jahres“ (game of the year award) with the Marburger Spielearchiv (Marburg games archive). A few years later, this connection was cut. Afterwards did you regret having left?

Regret is the wrong word; I felt sorry about it. The fact that three people left at the same time was supposed to create a sensation. It was an important signal and it really made an impression. Back then, a small game like **6 NIMMT!** would never have made „Spiel des Jahres“. It was clear, implicitly, that if we made it game of the year, three people in the Marburg archive would have to be laid off. It's not good to have this kind of inner censor. But in a way, that's water under the bridge. I met great people back then and I have wonderful memories. I still tell everyone with pride that I was on „Spiel des Jahres“ one time.

Interview by UDO BARTSCH/cs

“No Longer Emotionally”

You engaged with new games for many years, and now with old ones. How did this change come about?

Andreas Mutschke: In the 90's, I found an old game of **SCHWARZER PETER** [“Black Peter” = **OLD MAID**, *the editor*] at a rummage sale, very greasy, with bent cards. I was fascinated and imagined how many rounds the owners must have enjoyed playing it. That was the beginning of my interest in the history of games. Today, I spend time with them in a different way than in the past; yet it is more intense and satisfying. I restore them, and in this way conserve games.

As a collector, how easy do you find it to part with items?

A collector is also a hunter – there is that satisfaction of capturing prey. I am happy to now be handling some rarities occasionally. I no longer need to own them.

Have you kept a connection to the board gaming scene?



Andreas Mutschke (62) from Spenke near Bielefeld was a game reviewer from 1987 to 2010. He co-founded the trade magazine Fairplay and was a member of the “Spiel des Jahres” jury from 1992 to 2001. Furthermore, he was chairman of the Bielefeld association Spielwiese e. V. and helped launch the Spielwelt gaming event in the city in 1995. Since 2015, he has been running the online store Vintique Toys for historical toys.



Tobias Rietze is one of the best **DOMINION** players worldwide.

Photo: privat

Programming. And Balancing Out

Hundreds of thousands? Millions? Nobody knows in how many **DOMINION** games "Kapitän Tobias" (Captain Tobias) has so far participated. Probably even more than Tobias Rietze – and that guy racked up tens of thousands. Tobias Rietze actually is "Kapitän Tobias." As the winner of the 2018 German **DOMINION** Championship, the 27-year-old Berlin software developer was awarded his own character promo card – a unique distinction, and a first. For many years now, the married father of two sons has been one of the best players in the world.

Interview by **DOMINION-lightweight UDO BARTSCH**

How did you become a **DOMINION** player?

Tobias Rietze: I received the game as a Christmas gift in 2010 from my parents and was immediately hooked. **DOMINION** drew me back into the world of board games because it's much more about strategy. I feel like I can control the game with my skills. And then there were the many, many cards! I really wanted more of these, so badly. And bought the first expansion in January.

How did you then go on to become a top player?

I started to play Dominion more and more online, where the game is much faster. I also discovered that it was possible to be a much stronger player in the virtual game. And I felt the great urge to get better at it. I read articles on strategy and entered tournaments. And as time went by, I just won more and more often.

What qualities do you bring to the table that make it easier for you to play at your level?

Well, I'd say you need a good logical mind for **DOMINION**, to plan your deck based on the Kingdom cards. And how best to get there. It's almost like programming – and programming is my thing. So you program your deck to make your moves increasingly better. But then you can never be absolutely sure you are going to draw the cards you need. Even the best plans can go wrong.

So would you say you are still creative when you are playing? Or just replaying certain patterns?

That's right: Over time, you develop basic patterns. For example, there's the engine strategy, where you try to use successive moves to get an ever stronger hand. In many ways, this is the most successful strategy. But the question remains: How do you get there? You have to balance out your deck quite well. You gain nothing by buying "Laboratories" all the time. Then you end up with all these cards in your hand – but still only seven Coppers.

Are there specific types of players who play more aggressively or defensively?

That's certainly the case in a casual game of **DOMINION** with hobby gamers. But from a definite level, all types tend to

become similar, which is when subtleties kick in. Players differ most in how early or how late in the game they buy Provinces. And things gets really interesting when two opponents have different opinions about how to interpret the cards.

Do you sit down to analyze any new expansion as soon as it comes out?

Of course I first read all the cards to assess their abilities. But even then I can never be sure: How useful is that going to be in a game? Can you employ these benefits often? How does the card interplay with others? I usually don't analyze much. At the beginning of each game, I take a minute to check out the cards on display, and then I start playing. Something might come up in the course of a game that gets me thinking: Ah, that card might work really well right now.



"Tragic Hero" and the "Villa" are two of Tobias Rietze's favorite cards, whereas "Possession" is on his ban list. The „Kapitän Tobias" card (previous page) even delights him; this card is called „Captain" in the English edition.

Photos: Udo Bartsch

The expansions change the structure of the game and proven strategies may no longer work. Does that bother you?

Quite the opposite. I find it deeply fascinating how the new cards interact with the others. I think that very few **DOMINI-**

ON players are obsessed enough to always want to be on top of things with their knowledge. The idea is not to stand still, otherwise the others will overtake. For example, about eight years ago "Rebuild" from **DARK AGES** was widely frowned upon and considered overpowered. Today, the consensus is that in 80 percent of all games you can safely ignore it, as it is just too slow.

When DOMINION was published in 2008, the money strategy quickly gained a reputation for being unbeatable.

This is a common beginner's trap. The money strategy is very easy to execute as you cannot make mistakes. But if your opponent uses their action cards really well, you stand no chance of winning by just buying money all the time.

What would you still like to see in DOMINION?

I am very happy with the game as it is. The expansions are heading in a good direction. It would be great if certain cards from **ALCHEMY**, **SEASIDE** and **PROSPERITY** received an update. Some have simply turned out to be useless. In online games, such updates are customary now. But Donald Vaccarino is very strict about that. His priority is still the physical product. He doesn't want some players to have outdated cards and others new cards with a text variation.

EMPIRES: One of the Best Expansions

Victory points and, more recently, toilet paper: You just cannot get enough of them. While the soft, white paper stuff will hopefully remain a temporary trend item about which we will soon give a shit, a more steady performance can be predicted for victory points. This also makes **EMPIRES** a tip from futurologists and investment consultants alike. Hardly any **DOMINION** expansion pumps more victory points into a game.

Responsible for this is a new card type called "Landmark". Landmarks do not go into the player decks. Up to two of them are drawn initially and they state additional victory point conditions. The "Fountain", for example, scores 15 points if you have at least ten Coppers. The "Basilica" rewards you with two points for letting money expire in the buy phase.

These Landmarks kingdombuilderize **DOMINION**, so to say. In a good way. Normally, there would be zero reasons to own ten Coppers. Rather, there would be ten reasons to own zero Coppers. But 15 points can be quite convincing when it comes to thoroughly question your familiar routines and adapt your game.

Debt markers are the second major new feature. Nowadays, accumulating debts is almost considered statesmanlike. So it was about time players could also finally buy some very expensive cards on credit. But beware the trap: Unlike in real life, debts have to be repaid. Whether that makes it all worthwhile remains to be seen. **EMPIRES** has already shown it is worthwhile. This box full of variety for experienced players is one of the best **DOMINION** expansions.

UDO BARTSCH/cs



Donald X. Vaccarino: **Dominion: Empires** (Rio Grande Games), illustrations: Matthias Catrein, Martin Hoffmann und Claus Stephan; for 2-4 players, about 13+ years; duration: about 60 minutes, price: about 40 Euros.

Reviewer	Playing Appeal
Udo Bartsch	8

Udo Bartsch discussed the **SEASIDE** expansion in spielbox 3/10 and said it was a could buy, not a must, and the least essential of the boxes published up to that point.

Tom Felber reached an ambivalent verdict about **ALCHEMY** in spielbox 6/10: With two players, you could play it, but with three and four it proved useless. Stefan Ducksch reviewed the **PROSPERITY** expansion in spielbox 5/11 and drew the conclusion that it was a real hit and a must for **DOMINION** fans. Udo Bartsch looked at the **DARK AGES** expansion in spielbox 5/13 and concluded that it was the best of the could-buy expansions so far.

By the way: „Captain (Tobias)" was supplemented German spielbox 6/20.

Cover Story. Dominion

What are your favorite cards?

There are quite a few. For example, I like "Tragic Hero" from **NOCTURNE**. It gains you three cards, but you have to discard it if you then have eight. In exchange, you get a money card. Initially, it was thought that you should avoid discarding it. But that depends on the situation. Sometimes it is better to discard it for a Gold. I also like the "Villa" from **EMPIRES**. It takes you from the buy phase back to the action phase. You can use it to do a lot of tricks. Or the "Fortune", also from **EMPIRES**. You get a pile of money, but you have to pay it all back. It's an interesting balancing act to decide how much to spend in order to not sink into debt.

All of them are not exactly common cards ...

There are cards that are intrinsically great. But I particularly like the interesting and ambiguous ones, which require you to make new decisions every time you play them. I really dislike cards like the "Mountebank" or the "Swindler" that increase the luck factor. And "Possession" I have put on my ban list in the online game.

What is it like for you to play **DOMINION** and suddenly encounter yourself as "Captain Tobias"?

It makes me happy every time. But in a game, it's a card like any other. It is rather powerful – sure, for six money – and whoever can buy it early on often has an advantage. But if I get defeated by "Captain Tobias", I can never get really mad. (cs)

DOMINION LEAGUE

It was not as easy a task as it sounded for ASS Altenburger to take over the **DOMINION** distribution in German-speaking countries in 2013: Because on the one hand, publishing work has to be economically targeted at reaching new audiences. On the other hand, **DOMINION** has a devoted fan base with high expectations. Can the two be successfully married?

The **DOMINION** League, which will enter its third season in 2021, is an attempt to do exactly that. League here not in the sense of everyone playing against everyone else, like in soccer; that would be impossible. The league accumulates results from tournaments and even private rounds. A scoring system known as Glicko 2 then uses this data to create an online ranking. And this much can be revealed: Glicko 2 is way smarter than all those people who hope to climb to the top by entering dozens of fictional games against their teddy bear.

1,000 participants at the end of the year, that is the goal. Which is a long way off considering the second season ended with 114. Surely this was also down to the Corona pandemic. "In the beginning, we still relied heavily on analog tournaments and game rounds",

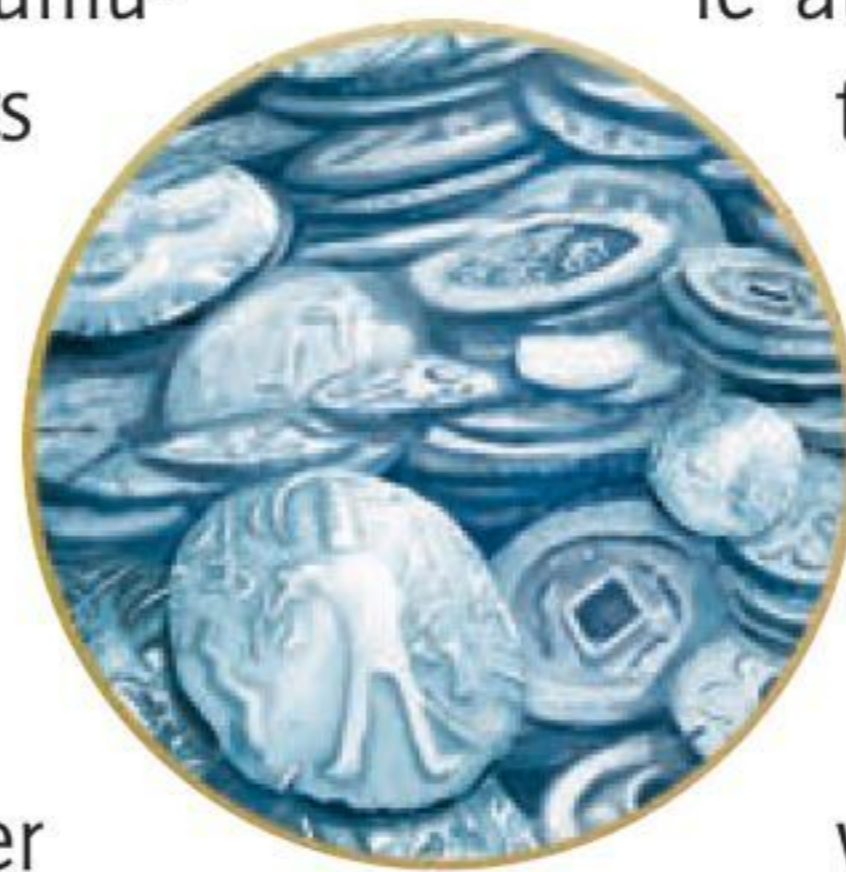
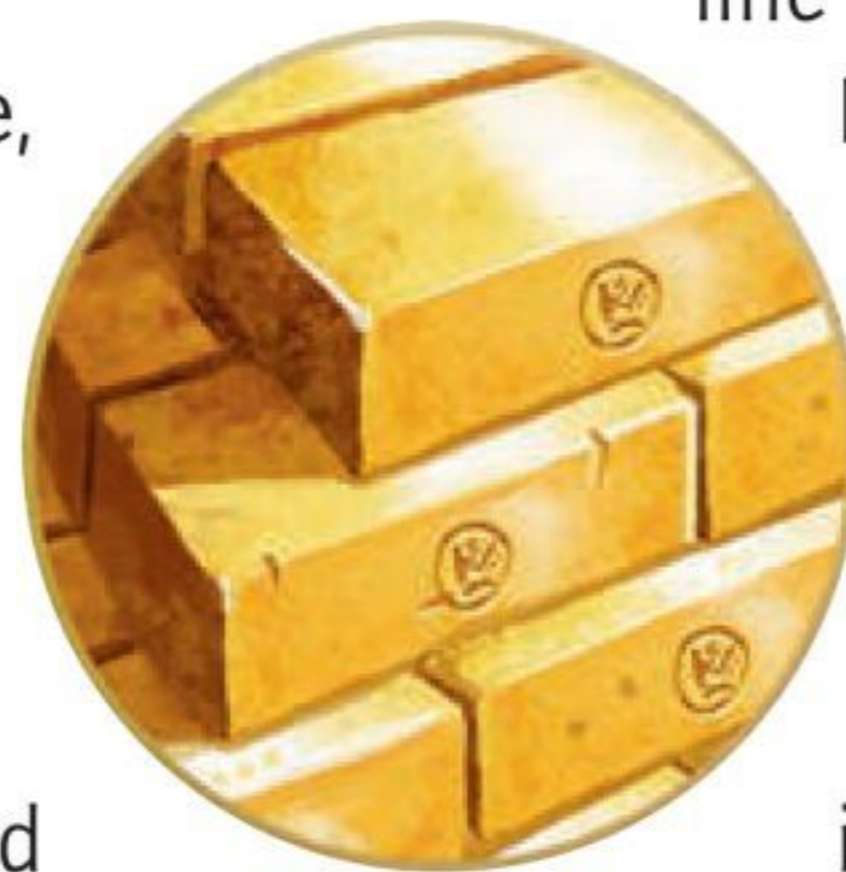
says Katrin Schlegel, Marketing & Distribution Program Manager at ASS Altenburger. But **DOMINION** can be very conveniently played online and allows players to find many new opponents – though for a monthly fee.

A new concept was needed. "We are in talks. Our cooperation with Dominion Games, the provider of the online version, is to become closer", Katrin Schlegel reveals. Two tournaments a month on Dominion Online are already scheduled. Participants will receive free codes.

Also new: The champion is not simply read off a table at the end in mid-year. Instead the best players enter a play-off round. In order to match participants with similar skill levels, there will now be divisions from "Copper" to "Platinum" (see pictures). And while ASS Altenburger is mainly interested in people taking part and not just in them winning, a large number of prizes will be awarded on a regular basis.

By the way, Tobias Rietze aka RTT has also left his mark in the German league. He finished the second season as champion. In the first season, SNER came first, behind which is Jens P. from a place near Kaiserslautern.

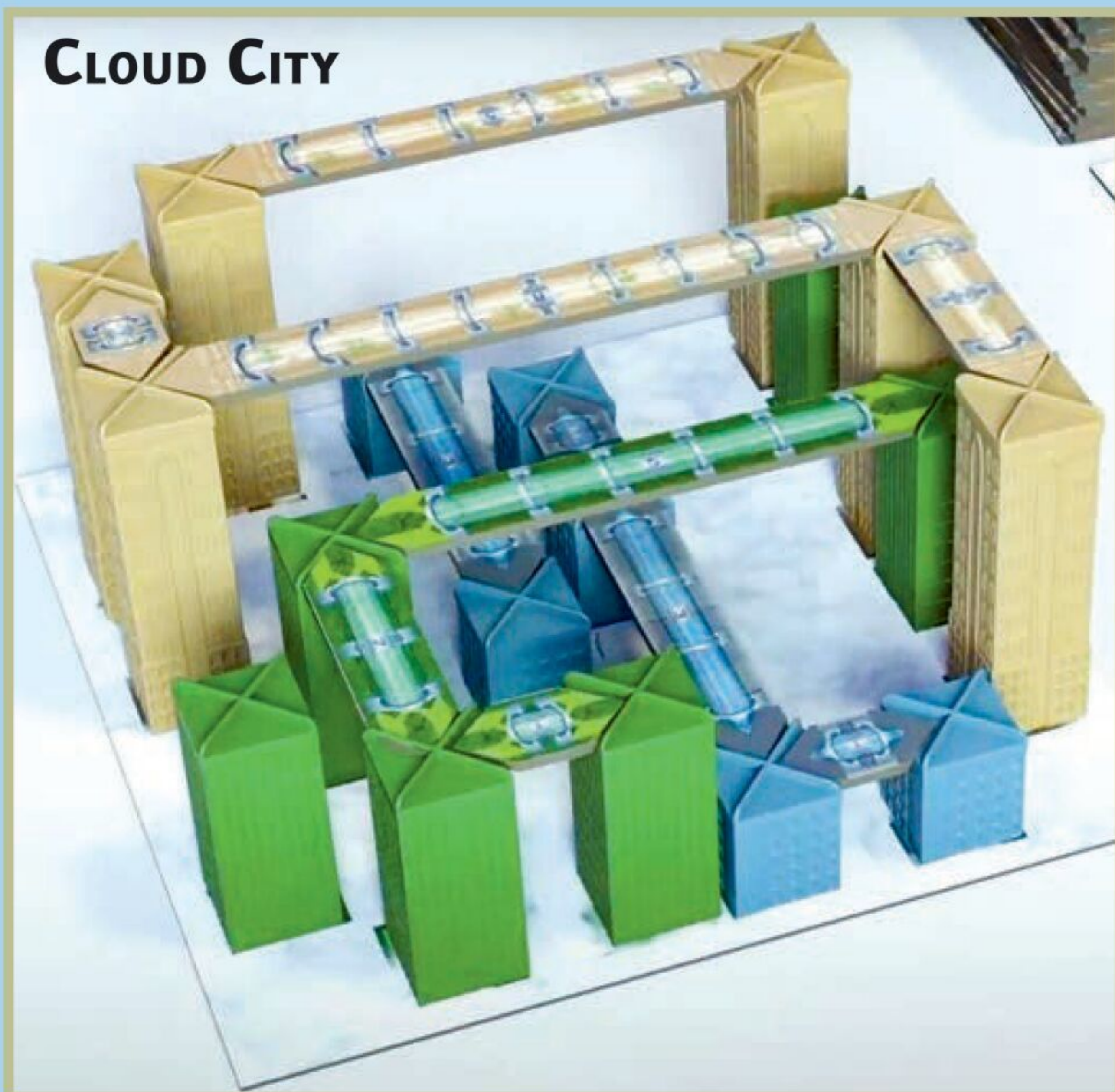
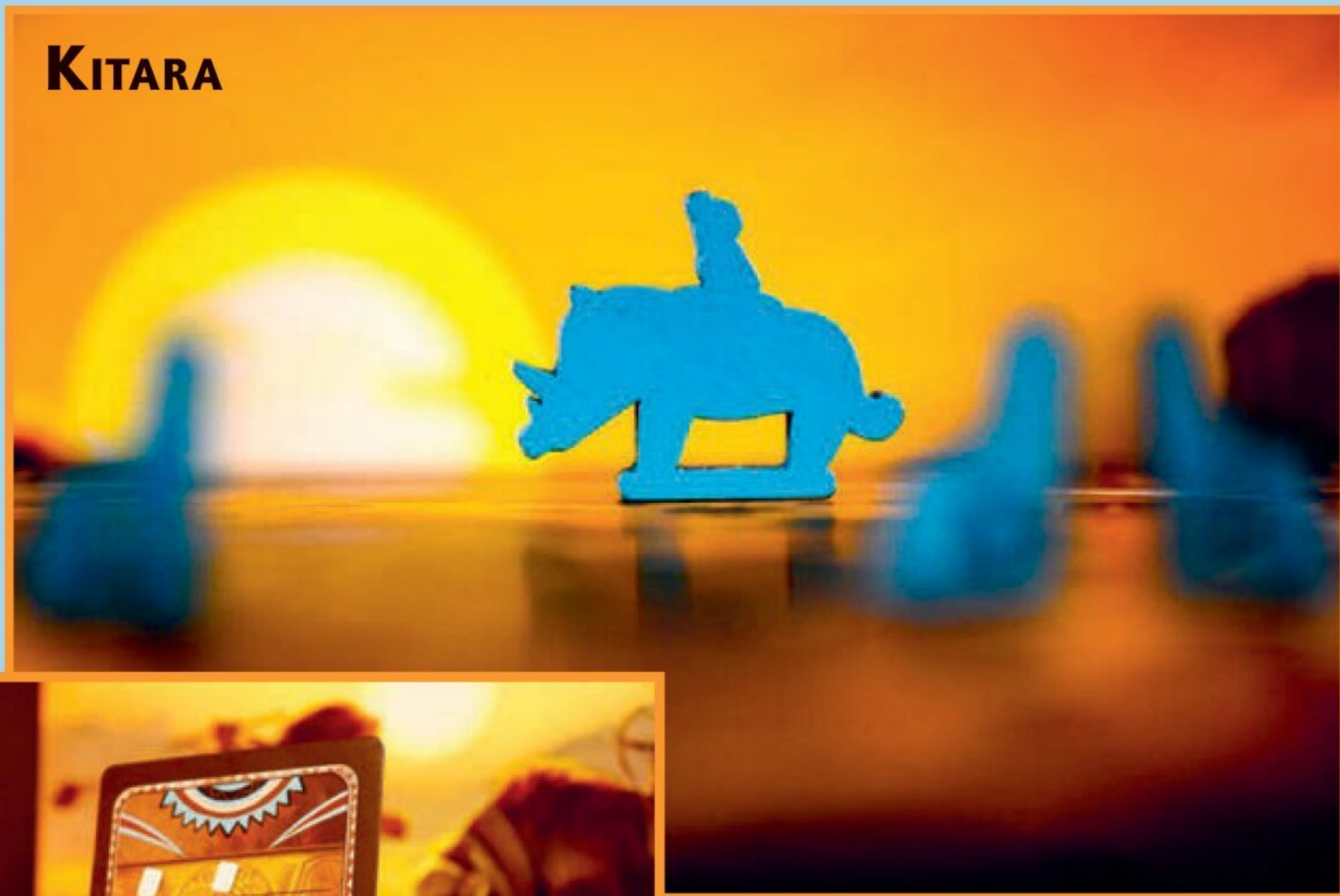
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Pegasus Spiele



I 1 More Time Games



After a successful Kickstarter campaign, the debut title from the Austrian publisher 1 More Time Games

is now on store shelves. In the card duel **RIFTFORCE**, each player selects four guilds out of ten available. The guild leaders determine the abilities you will have in your card decks. On your turn, you either place elementals at the five locations on the table, or activate them to destroy your opponent's cards. This earns you Riftforce points. Option three is to replenish your hand. Here too, you get points as long as there are no elementals opposing your cards at that location. The designer of the game is none other than **MEMOARRR!** designer Carlo Bortolini, and the graphics are by Miguel Coimbra. Release date: probably March.

I Boardcubator



The puzzle game **PROJECT L** was first presented at SPIEL back in 2019, but is only now being released. This

game seems very impressive in terms of materials and graphics, with classy art by Jaroslav Jurica and Pavel Richter. Each player gets ordinary Tetris pieces and task cards. Completing these tasks gets you access to better tiles. Every round, each puzzle solver performs three actions from five possible, such as taking a tile, upgrading a tile, choosing a new task, or completing a given task (after which the pieces return to the player). The game is over when the last black puzzle has been drawn, so the game lasts about half an hour. The designers are Michal Mikeš, Jan Soukal and Adam Spanel. Release date: probably May or June.

I Edition Spielwiese



Trick-taking game **SPACE DRAGONS** has players fly around the dragon galaxy with their spaceship. In this dragon hunt, invented by Richi

Haarhoff and illustrated by Florian Biege, players need to be careful not to damage their own ship too much. You play seven rounds, and during your turn each round, you play one of your nine crew cards (with values ranging from 1 to 80). The highest card wins the dragon. The cards can also trigger special actions such as firing at the player who won trick. The cards are also worth points and feature symbols that affect the final tally, represent tools for repairs, or represent shields. You can also play the family variant: in this version the crew cards are drafted beforehand. Confirmed release date: in April.

Diving for Pearls in a Virtual Ocean

COVID-19 has directly affected the board game industry in many ways: sales figures rose sharply in 2020, manufacturers worked at full capacity, and those who had manufacturing operations in Asia don't know when the goods will arrive; leading trade fairs were canceled. But that hasn't stopped spielbox from taking a look at what promising new titles are coming out.

By **STEFAN DUCKSCH**

I Blue Orange



CLOUD CITY takes place above the clouds. The players build skyscrapers, the higher the better. To do

this, players take turns slowly assembling their city on a three-by-three grid featuring markers of three different colors, on which skyscrapers of matching colors are placed. If you succeed in positioning them in such a way that the skyscrapers are at a suitable distance from a building of the same color, then you can place a pedestrian bridge between them, which earns you victory points. This creates a small 3D city. There are also several variants with different building regulations or special victory points. Regardless, this family game takes only half an hour. The designer is Phil Walker-Harding, the artist Fabrice ROS. Release date: probably June or July.

I Borderline Editions



In **DIG YOUR WAY OUT**, players try to shorten their life-sentence at Blackgate Correctional Facility by digging

an escape tunnel. It's a race, because as soon as someone makes it out, an alarm goes off and everyone else is stuck inside. So you snag a spoon in the cafeteria or head to the recreation room to trade cigarettes for a pickax. Unfortunately, the other convicts have similar plans. When you encounter them, it can lead to a fight, and whoever has more knives can steal from the loser. Only the inmate who makes it back to his cell with the tool gets out. This "biker gang behind bars" theme was lovingly illustrated by Mihajlo Dimitrievski, and the game itself was designed by David Simide. It is his premiere as a boardgame designer. The game is already released.

I Frosted Games



This Berlin-based company is releasing a German-language version of six micro-games – so called wallet games – from the New Jersey-based small board game publisher Button

Shy. Each game contains only 25 cards, generally 18 for the basic game and the rest for variants. All titles are designed as solo or two-player games. The themes and tasks are very different. In **SPRAWLOPOLIS** you build a city by laying it out, and in **CIRCLE THE WAGONS** you explore the Wild West. Both games were dreamed up by Steven Aramini, Danny Devine and Paul Kluka. The artwork is made by Danny Devine (**SPRAWLOPOLIS**) respectively Beth Sobel. In **TUSSIE MUSSIE**, by **WINGSPAN** designer Elizabeth Hargrave, you arrange bouquets of flowers. The German version is the work of artist Klemens Franz (by the way, Beth Sobel worked on the original



The virtual game trade fare was, well, let's say "in need of improvement."

Screenshot: Becker

Nuremberg Scavenger Hunt

STEFAN DUCKSCH about gathering information during a pandemic

First Essen in October 2020 and then Nuremberg in January 2021. Within only four months the Spielwarenmesse, the second most important event for analog games, was canceled. However, back in January 2020, the toy industry still met in Nuremberg. The dark shadow of COVID-19 was already in people's minds, even though it was more of a scary story than anything else at the time. Then, in mid-March, came the first big lockdown. You would think that after almost eleven months of restrictions, the participants would have found ways and means to present themselves in a lockdown-compatible manner. But the search for new products still resembles a treasure hunt.

Nonetheless, conditions are actually great. Instead of paying the equivalent of a month's rent per night and a 30 percent surcharge for food, you now stay at home in front of your monitor. But there's no chance to (literally) grasp things such as, for example, the Game Factory's field hockey game – which is „cheaper than **KLASK**“; or **ESPRESSO DOPPIO** from Huch, which consists of three different colored and even „dishwasher-safe“ espresso sets. You only really experience something like that if you've held it in your hand.

All right, gaming sessions are indeed few and far between at Nuremberg; at most, there's something on the table in the evenings at publisher events. And

unlike Essen, the Nuremberg fair is only open to trade visitors. As a rule, people don't play games at the booths, but rather explain things, and many new products are only nicer trade samples in the early part of the year. But even with that rather passive consumerism, I miss the individual conversation and the possibility to ask questions.

Thus the good old press release takes on more importance in 2021. Not all publishers used the trade show's „Brand New“ page. At the beginning, there were also problems with accessibility and the programming suffered from teething problems. If you searched for „Lookout“ or „Asmodee“, nothing came up. That's because publishers only put out English texts. So if you searched via the German-language page, you didn't get any hits. All this really made me appreciate even more what Merz-Verlag put together for SPIEL.digital last October.

Surprisingly, some publishers – even when asked – did not provide any information at all about new products. Others were slow to deliver. Why? Because without trade shows, there are no deadlines. Some were quite blunt about the fact that when new games will arrive remained uncertain.

Others, however, did not let themselves be put off by the fair being postponed to summer. In December, Kosmos got people excited to play **THE ADVENTURES OF ROBIN**

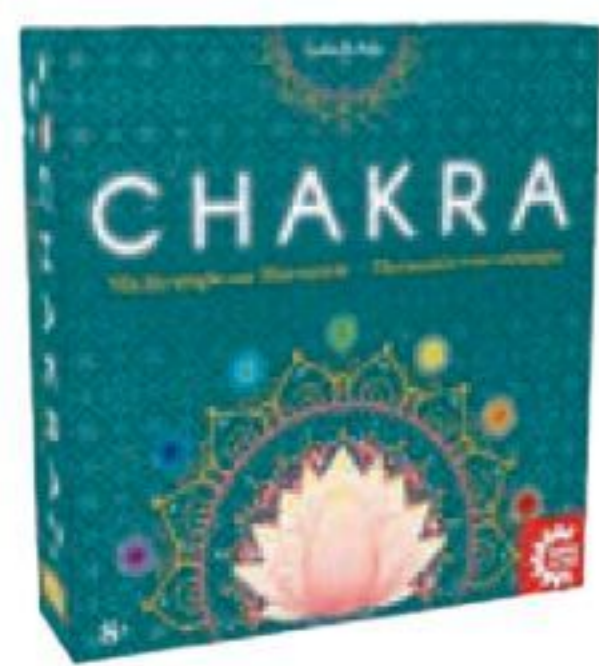
Hood. Amigo, a well-known early starter, delivered its new games in January. Many publishers used services like Teams, Zoom, or YouTube, and Ravensburger sent out the link to a video. Asmodee and Pegasus tried to manage their traditional flood of titles through colorful events on the web that lasted several hours. They even sent catering packages to the participants beforehand so that they wouldn't starve in front of their monitors.

I was grateful for every first impression. Especially when publishers invited participants to a long-distance duel. My team, Keltenfürst, failed epically in the Pegasus show: for the Deep Print novelty game **RORSCHACH**, a vote was to be held on how the inkblots inspired the moderator. After six rounds, team „Elvis“ won 2-0.

The new way of communicating also brings two groups of people closer together: journalists and bloggers. Journalists, with their professional need for information, and dedicated bloggers, who also enjoy digital get-togethers. Some enjoyed this gathering so much that they were constantly chatting during a presentation. One participant posted thoughts on the web up to three times a minute on average while several publishers were speaking, only to ask again about the release date of a game shortly after it was presented. The blogger must have missed it because of all the chatting. But no matter, it was still entertaining. (tw)

version). In **LIBERATION**, by Jon Simantov, freedom fighters sabotage cities belonging to the Dynasty, which is in turn trying to destroy the fighters' secret base of operations. It is illustrated by Sara Beauvais. In John du Bois' **AVIGNON** (art by Fabrice Weiss), two opponents fight to be the true pope, and in **THE PERFECT MOMENT** by Michael Brown, players try to use the features of the two-sided cards to their advantage. Jonathan Fisher is responsible for the art on this one. Release date: March.

I Game Factory



"Meditate on your strategy" is the motto of **CHAKRA**. Whether the race for the highest score in this family game actually contributes to relaxation remains to be seen. Some of you may already be familiar with it, because the original version of this game by Luka Krleža, with dreamy art by Claire Conan, is already available in Germany through the French publisher Blam. You move different-colored energy stones through the eight chakras on the board. The goal is to gather three energies of the same color on one chakra. The energies are controlled by spending inspiration stones, which triggers one of eight moves on your own board, thus guiding the energies to the right place. If you „meditate" instead, then you get the inspiration back and may look under meditation chips to see how many points a finished chakra of a color brings. Release date: February.

I Gigamic



In the worker placement game **QUETZAL**, everyone rolls their meeples on the table at the start of the round. How the meeples land determines whether they will be an archaeologist or adventurer, but if you manage to roll a meeple into the standing position, then you also get money for it. Next, each player in turn deploys the meeples to the old temples or villages in order to collect artifacts. Whoever successfully delivers the artifacts to the harbor collects victory points. This family game by Alexandre Garcia (with art by Nastya Lehn) takes

about fifteen minutes per player for up to five participants. Release date: probably March or April.

I Huch



This cooperative two-person game, **ROMEO AND JULIET**, comes in a box that looks like a treasure chest. The point of this game – as in the great Shakespearean tragedy – is to bring Romeo and Juliet together. The players have three acts to do this, but they are not allowed to speak to each other. First, they must communicate via messages to determine whether they can meet somewhere in Verona. Then, choosing a card from their respective deck, they both move their figure – together with their chaperone – through Verona; if possible, avoiding places where members of these hostile families could bump into each other. If the passion indicator reaches the maximum, you win the game. If, on the other hand, hatred becomes too great, the game is lost. Designers Julien Prothière and Jean Philippe Sahut make life difficult and varied for the lovers over nine chapters, the romantic artwork is painted by David Cochard. After **DREAMSCAPE** it is the second cooperation between German publisher Huch and French publisher Sylex Games. Release date: February.

I Iello



In **KITARA**, players battle to rule this fabled African kingdom located in present-day Uganda. In this game by Eric B. Vogel (brilliantly translated into images by Miguel Coimbra), we add cards to our deck to improve our action options. Then, we place our pawns and move them around the board. If you move to an opponent's square using superior force, you expel that player. And if a hero is involved in this attack, you get extra points. Each card represents the population of your empire, and the people want to be fed after their hard and dangerous work is done, which is why you fight over the fertile savanna land. A brisk game that takes only seven to nine turns. Actually announced by Iello for SPIEL.digital last October, the new release date is: March.

Will Scarlet had learned to survive. Outlawed for years, he was condemned to hide in the Sherwood Forest. Will had already become so much part of his environment that many a traveller thought he saw a forest spirit, when seeing Will strolling through the twilight of the trees.

THE ADVENTURES OF ROBIN HOOD

March 2021

For more information:
the-adventures-of-robin-hood.com

Current. Digital Toy Fair Nuremberg 2021

I Kobold



FURNACE is an economic game set in the 19th century at the time of industrialization. Players buy factories at auction and optimize their production. At the beginning of each of the four rounds, you can bid on four of the available plants using bidding discs. Whoever places the highest bid receives the card, all others receive compensation equal to the value of their bid. In the following production phase, the factories produce raw materials and process them further. Experienced players can add new factories to existing ones to form a production chain. After four rounds, the player who built the most factories wins. The designer is Ivan Lashin, while the illustrators could form their own volleyball team: Sergey Dulin, Marta Ivanova, Ilya Konovalov, Vadim Poluboyarov, Oleg Yurkov and Egor Zharkov. Release date: probably June.

I Kosmos

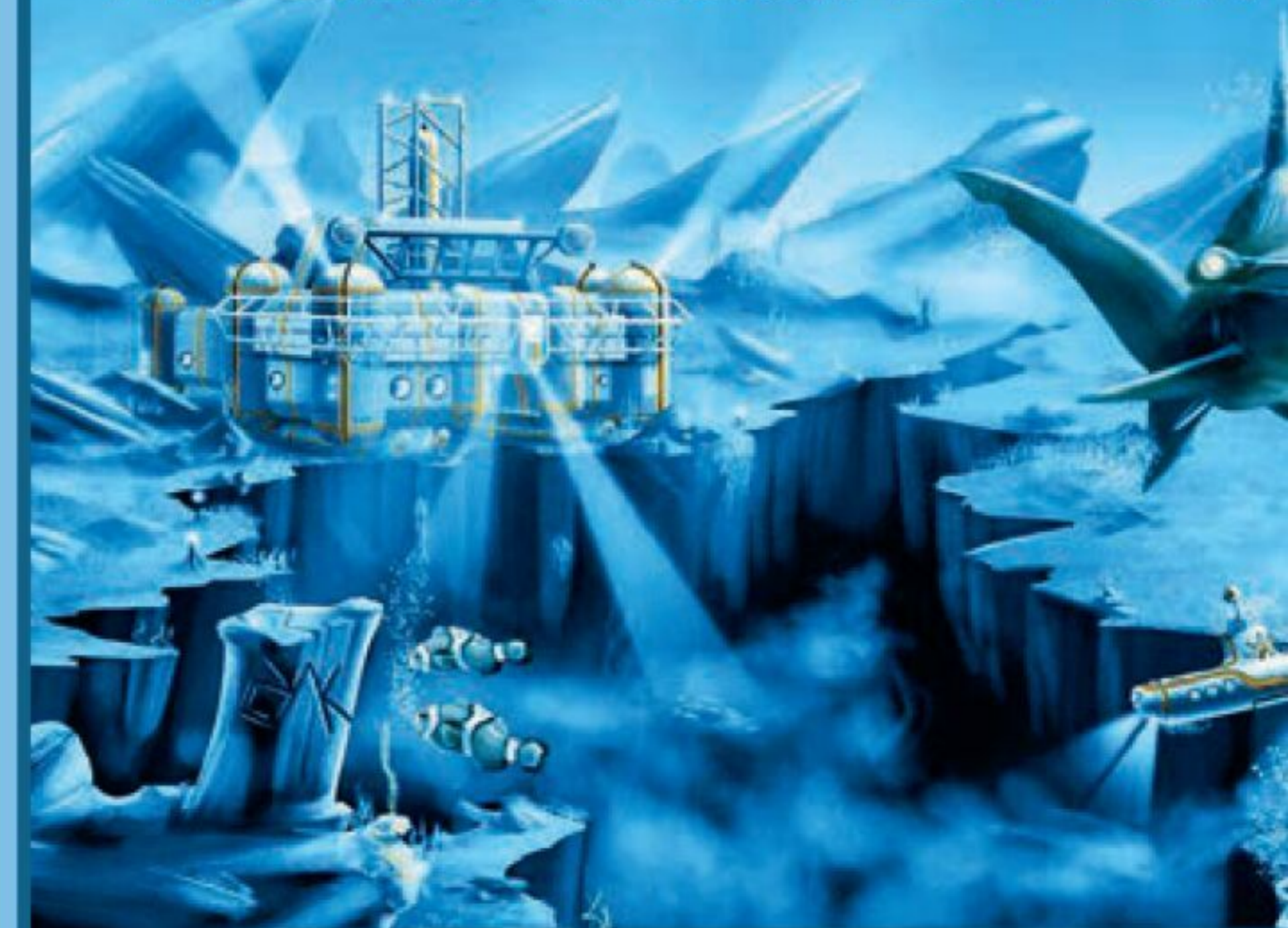


We finally have a sequel for **THE CREW**, the cooperative trick-taking game for which Thomas Sing won the 2020 „Kennerspiel des Jahres“ award – which is something like an equivalent to a license to sequel. The novelty in this standalone game is that you don't travel to the ninth planet in outer space anymore; now you have a completely independent mission. **THE CREW: MISSION DEEP SEA** takes place underwater, where communication is as difficult as in the vastness of space. This underwater world looks great thanks to the illustrations by Marco Armbruster. A new feature is that the logbook shows mission difficulty levels. In line with this, you have to draw from the 96 task cards so that their total points match the difficulty level. The task cards are more than playing cards that the mission members must win by taking tricks, they also have conditions that must be met, such as „I must win more yellow cards than blue cards.“ Another new feature is that members of the dive crew can now pass on their turn instead of taking a task card. The remaining cards are then distributed among the other divers. Release date: probably in March.

CUBITOS



THE CREW: MISSION DEEP SEA



DIVE



I Pegasus

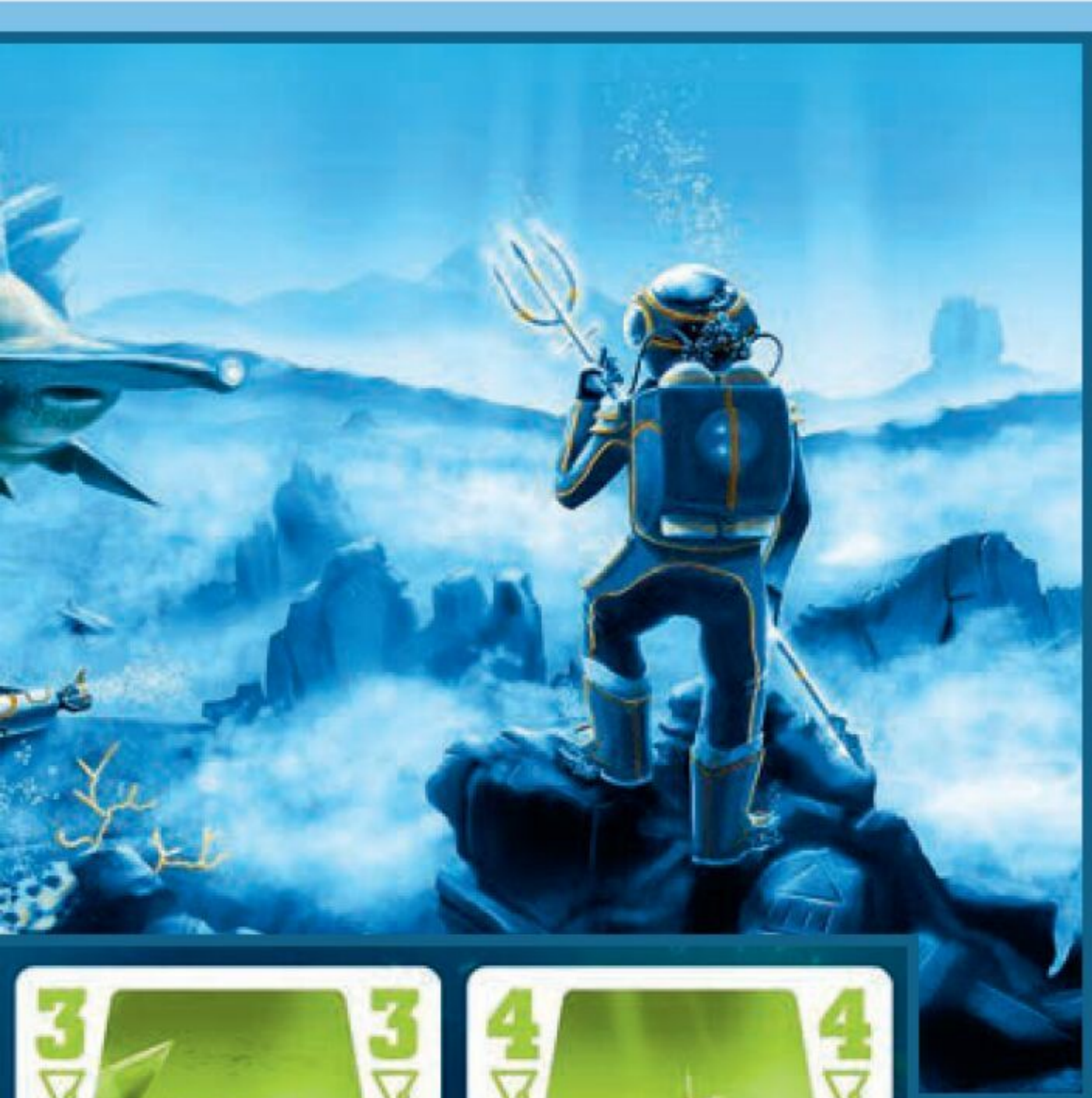


DIVE is a real eye-catcher, with the ocean nicely framed in the center of the table. This game consists of 36 large, transparent, square cards showing the many things divers will discover. And to do this, the players all look into the water from above and try to estimate how deep they want to dive. Your diver has air for no more than the five uppermost cards. Manta rays and sea turtles help the players, but only if you spend your highest air token value on the depth level where they are. Sharks, on the other hand, should be avoided at all cost. The levels are evaluated, one after the other, and the player who dives more cleverly than the others is the first to reach the

sacred stone of the village. Romain Caterdjian and Anthony Perone came up with the idea for **DIVE**, and Alexandre Bonvalot provides the mood with his artwork. Release date: probably March.



The **CUBITOS** dice racing game by John D. Clair contains 120 colorful six-sided dice, and these are what give the figures their legs. In each race, new abilities are assigned to the eight dice colors and eight card colors, with seven different cards per color. So there is plenty of variety for the competitions on the different tracks. The symbols on the dice indicate whether you can move along the track or whether you can use abilities such as, for example, buying better dice. Special fields on the race track and ad-

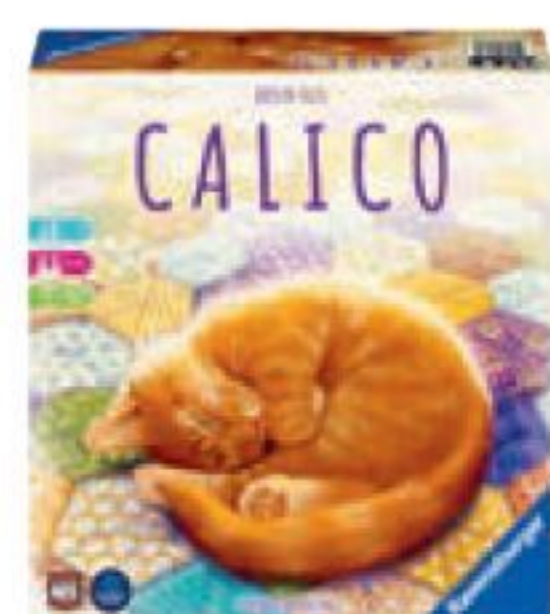


MISSION ISS



vantages on the adjacent fan track bring even more variations into the game. This team of five created the artwork: Banu Andaru, Felicia Cano, Jacqui Davis, Kali Fitzgerald and Ryan Iler. Release date: probably March or April.

Ravensburger



You'll get cats snuggling on quilts in **CALICO**, the new tile laying game that Ravensburger proudly announced as their spring novelty at SPIEL.digital. **CALICO** has players place one of the two hex-shaped tiles from their hand onto their quilt. The goal is to arrange the tiles, which come in six colors and six patterns, in such a way as to complete tasks, win buttons, and finally attract cats that de-

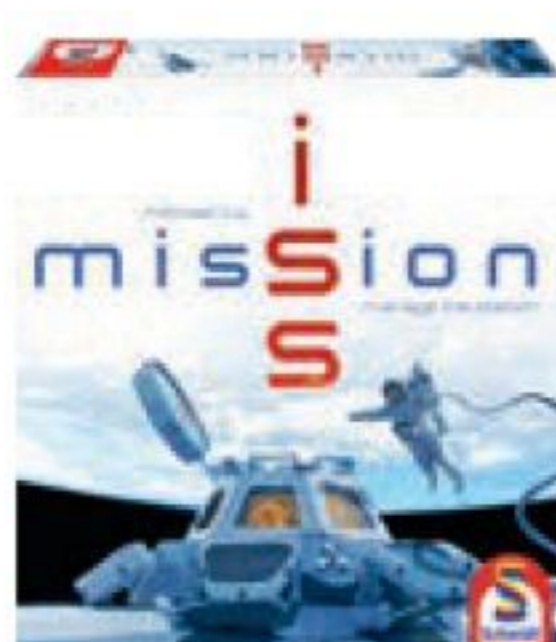
mand specific patterns on neighboring tiles for their napping spot. The game ends after 22 moves. There is an advanced variant with tougher challenges, which can be used to increase the difficulty. Indeed, cats are demanding. Designer of **CALICO** is Kevin Russ, the artwork is provided by Beth Sobel. Release date: probably March.

Repos Production



François Romain's cooperative word association game **So CLOVER!** gets its name from the cloverleaf-shaped boards onto which players first attach four square word tiles. Then everyone individually thinks up a common term for the two outer words on each board. For example, „fire department“ and „house“ – in this case you might think „guard.“ Players write this word down on the cloverleaf. Later, the players have to correctly associate these terms in pairs with the word cards (which have been shuffled beforehand). To make sure it's not too easy, an interference card is added. If you immediately guess correctly, you get lots of points, if not, the wrong cards are removed and you try again. Release date: probably May or June.

Schmidt



In the cooperative **MISSION ISS**, players recreate the International Space Station. This is no place for slackers, after all, progress must be made and modules must be connected on time. Actions are performed with command cards: one from your own deck and one from another player's deck. If someone is out of face-up cards, time moves forward. That is why the group has to ensure that all players' cards are used evenly. You give orders to all the astronauts, who can be trained to move, research, or build. The difficulty of the tasks varies with each mission, and „incidents“ can put the crew at risk. Young designer Michael Luu developed the game in cooperation with the German Aerospace Center (DLR) to provide an authentic insight into life on the space station. Artists on this mission are Martin Hoffmann and Claus Stephan. Release date: February. (tw)

Marian was anything but an ordinary novice. And so it didn't come as a surprise to any of the nuns, that Marian one day, apparently without any reason, ran away and left the cloister to Staffordshire, behind her for good. Soon afterwards, she arrived at Sherwood Forest.

THE ADVENTURES OF ROBIN HOOD

March 2021

For more information:
the-adventures-of-robin-hood.com

All's Well That Ends Well

Something with hops, something with barley. More details? Shhh! We don't want other countries to guess the secret recipe of our national drink and start brewing their own beer. Oh, they are already doing that? Treason! Whoever couldn't keep their mouth shut, it definitely was not the game author.

By UDO BARTSCH



Your own Community Center board with house plan (above), field board (right) and stable board (below), as well as the jewel box tile and a lot of cards: gateway, farmyard, bonus, and point cards.

Photos: Bartsch



In both, **FÜRSTENFELD** (Friese, 2010) and **HEAVEN & ALE** (Kiesling and Schmidt, 2017) there were resources called hops, barley, and water. However, these were crafty cover names. In those games, we built palaces and puzzle around barns. Anyone expecting beer would be just as disappointed as the customer who buys a pack of sliced cheese on the unrealistic assumption that the serving tray shown must also be included.

In **HALLERTAU**, Uwe Rosenberg joins the big misinformation campaign around beer. In his exemplary pretense of the very secret brewing process, we push barn-like buildings through our gardens. Apart from that, there is something with workers, something with harvesting.

I Sheep? Of course, there are also sheep again!

You want more specifics? All right. We have fields, we have crops. Something new is that used fields lose productivity, but fallow ground regenerates itself. There are also sheep. When shearing, they provide wool but, even if they don't do anything, they still give milk every round. What's new is that they do not multiply but they die if you don't prevent it. And, of course, there are workers. First six, later up to twelve. Occupied action spaces are not used up, but simply require one more worker than the previous player. The publisher calls this "Progressives Worker Placement". And what's new about that? Not much!

HALLERTAU mixes the farm and harvest world made famous by **AGRICOLA** with the prosperity mechanism from **AT THE GATES OF LOYANG**: in order to gain points, you have to pay. The costs increase each round. Points purchased early on are enticingly cheap, but they make you give up things that you could have multiplied later in the game. This creates a similar dilemma like games in which you have to feed your workers. Gaining food costs productivity, the alternative costs points. Unlike **AGRICOLA**, **HALLERTAU** gives



What makes the worker placement special is that spaces don't get blocked by opponents when occupied but initially just increase usage cost.

Photo: Bartsch

us a certain amount of freedom: I don't have to pay my contributions right away or even regularly, I can divide it up as I wish – but consistency and haste are rewarded.

REYKHOLT dealt with the same dilemma but was more limited, while **HALLERTAU** draws from abundance with hides, flax, meat, barley, hops, land, clay, milk, rye, sheep, jewelry, tools, and wool as tradable resources. And just like in **AGRICOLA**, there are cards, lots of cards. So many cards. They basically yell at you: fulfill this, gain that! "This" would be for example pay three jewelry tokens, own two hops fields, or fully occupy an action space on the board. And "that" are either one-time benefits, recurring income, or a bunch of points. In order to tell the four types of cards apart, they all carry symbols. However, they have been chosen so inconclusively, that it is difficult to distinguish between them. Gotcha! Camouflage and deceive. It's a game about beer after all.

Some cards you own right from the beginning, others you gain by using workers. In my experience, the corresponding spaces are not fought over much. Farmers rather battle over "Sow four times". Here

you know what you get: four resources can be multiplied. With the cards you never know. For the dumbest farmer, the completion of one immediately triggers the condition of the next and even allows for drawing an additional card. In the meantime, the envious neighbour only gets contradictory ballast that does not want to fit together.

This fatefulness stands in contrast to the rigour and predictability of the rest of the game. Brewery progress costs one barley in the first round, two in the second round, and in the third one either three barley or two plus hops. What resources will be needed in what quantity is completely predictable. In order to play halfway error free, I would have to make a chart balancing what I need to gain in the income phase and what possible alternatives I might have. Even better would be if a computer can calculate it for me. Being short a silly bottle of milk could cost me progress in the cooling house. In the next round, I would then only have eight workers instead of the anticipated nine, which will probably cost me an action, which in turn will cost me something else and so on.

I Even playing by gut goes well

HALLERTAU also works well for those that play from the gut. The game can thank the cards for that. Of course, Uwe Rosenberg created several decks for us so that nobody starts to get bored after 30, 40, or 50 hours of game play. They tempt you with their planned economy: I should spend my wool to progress, but if I keep it and even gain some more, my

While **FÜRSTENFELD** didn't excite our critics too much (score 6,3), **HEAVEN & ALE** did one point better with 7,3. All of Uwe Rosenberg's agriculture games were reviewed in the spielbox. Undefeated at the top with a score of 8,75 is **AGRICOLA** (issue 1/08). The other games mentioned in this article follow with **REYKHOLT** (score: 7; issue 7/18) ahead of **AT THE GATES OF LOYANG** (score: 6,5; issue 6/10).

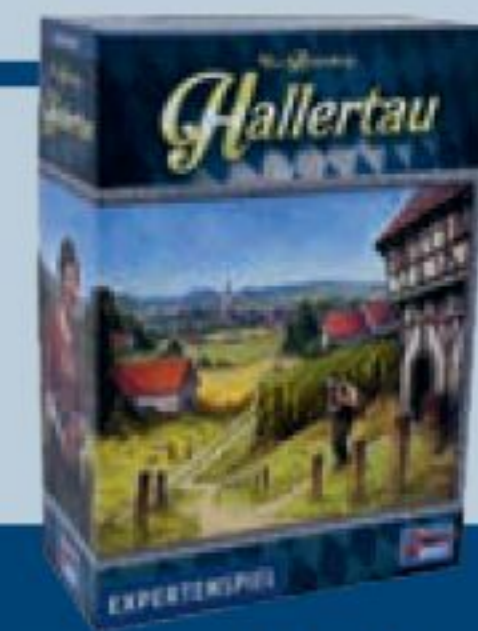
Only very few knew the equerry of Sir Walter Fitzgerald by his real name. It was a name from his past. And of course, no one would have dared to call this giant "little". But in his hometown Dalkeith, south of Edinburgh, every child knew who Little John was.

THE ADVENTURES OF ROBIN HOOD

March 2021

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Review. Hallertau



Uwe Rosenberg: Hallertau (Lookout Spiele), illustrations: Lukas Siegmon; for 1-4 players, about 12+ years; duration: about 30 minutes per person; price: about 70 Euros.

Reviewer	Playing appeal
Udo Bartsch	7
Andreas Becker*	7
Stefan Ducksch**	8
Wieland Herold***	8
Stephan Kessler****	6
Gerald Rüscher	7
Christoph Schlewinski	8

* If you are able to play cascades of cards, you have good reason to laugh. But it can also happen that you are stricken by poor card luck and thus lag behind quickly. And even though the progress phase becomes increasingly laborious and involves more and more pondering from round to round, this is another good optimization task by Uwe Rosenberg.

** An appealing task with lots of material to try out. Beginners should know that it is important to play cards that give them more cards. This way, the quite considerable luck factor can be balanced out. Calculating the materials and the exchange rates for the advancement of the craft workshops is time-consuming and causes some downtime. But if everybody calculates simultaneously and on his own without being controlled, HALLERTAU is prone to errors. Therefore, I like the two- or three-player game the best; with four players, my rating drops by 1.

*** A typical Rosenberg, a complex, variable worker-placement game that I like a lot. This time, even buildings are able to wander.

**** Fulfilling the card requirements is delightful, the rest feels familiar.

With hides, flax, meat, barley, hops, clay, milk, rye, sheep, and wool HALLERTAU draws from the abundance of meeplesn.

Photo: Udo Bartsch

do? It would be nice to be able to shear the sheep before heading to the butchery. But I also need crops, which means I have to visit the Nursery or Small Trade. If others get there before me and, therefore, make the action more expensive, the detour to get wool wouldn't have been worth it.

All options are good, but not all can be realized. HALLERTAU is a rewarding, not a punishing game. It is mainly tactical. The winners are not those that specialize, but those that can juggle the available options best. HALLERTAU also works because it unites a lot of Rosenberg from past years. The game feels like a lid on a completed decade. Like the last chapter of a long story. Last chapters don't introduce new conflicts. They summarize, they round off. HALLERTAU is completed by its excellent components, the perfect rule book, beautiful illustrations and graphics that support the game play in a way that makes sense. (dm)

card will give me a sheep. Typically, three sheep should be enough, they will die soon anyway. But if I had a fourth, the reward of the next card would be even more attractive.

In this way HALLERTAU leaves us constantly torn inside. Sowing crops and digging for clay are standard moves, which I try to fit into every turn using the least amount of workers. But what else can I

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The spielbox playing appeal ratings

The ratings range from 1 to 10, whereas 1 is the worst and 10 the best rating. Ratings of 1, 2, 3 are grades of poor games, ratings of 4, 5,

6 stand for mediocre games, and games with ratings of 7, 8, 9 can be regarded as good. The rating of 10 is reserved for exceptionally good games, and is to be seen rarely. The average

rating of the reviewed games in spielbox is well above the to be expected value of 5.5 since we focus on recommending games and disregard really poor ones for review purposes.

1, 2, 19, 4, Clap



By HARALD SCHRAPERS

Cheers to the Governor" or "21" is the name of a drinking game, in which a group of funny people counts from 1 to 21 with each player saying one number in turn. However, number 7 and 14 are switched. Whoever is seventh has to say 14 and the next person continues with 8. This is not quite as easy as it sounds when intoxicated. Especially because every time the 21 is reached, one has to come up with a rule for another number, for example: When you get to 11, stand up!

At student parties that are more mathematically ambitious, there may be even challenges like "Clap at every prime number." There are no such tasks in **Biss 20**, but we find a low threshold entry to this game idea because, here, we don't have to come up with the rules ourselves, we take them from the instructions. There are 40 tasks ranging from "Stick out your tongue" to the relatively difficult "Remain silent." How and when do I continue counting when my neighbour doesn't say anything?

Which tasks and numbers are combined is decided at random by card draw. Just as in other memory games like "Mother went shopping" or "I'm going on a trip and taking ... with me," the game gets harder as it advances. A good memory and concentration are helpful.

Appropriate for the low age advisory, **Biss 20** does not come with a vodka bottle. Instead, there is a bag full of purple gems in the box. If someone says a wrong number or hesitates too long, you won't have to take a drink, but your group loses a gem. As soon as no gems are left, you see how well you've done in this co-operative game. The hard to reach optimum would be to have assigned a task to each of the 20 numbers.

Biss 20 proves successfully that drinking games can be fun even without alcohol and, especially in larger groups, can be a blast. Even in a video conference setting, which adds extra challenges, this great idea works. Without father and daughter Burkhardt developing this game, I probably would have never known of it. (dm)



Günter Burkhardt, Lena Burkhardt: Biss 20 (Drei Magier), illustrations: Rolf Vogt; for 2 - 8 players, about 7+ years, duration: about 20 minutes, price: about 12 Euros.

Reviewer	Playing appeal
Harald Schrapers	8
Andreas Becker*	7
Stefan Ducksch**	7
Wieland Herold***	7

* Funny little treat.
 ** Popular, but simply good. And pretty funny. Definitely try the cooperative variant.
 *** It has never been so difficult yet funny to count to 20.

Robin freed his wrists from the chains. A part of him would have surrendered into his fate without a fight. After all, he had disobeyed the order of his king. But for some time, there was this voice in his head. A familiar voice. And that voice was calling him home.

THE ADVENTURES OF ROBIN HOOD

March 2021

For more information:
the-adventures-of-robin-hood.com

Review. Pandemic Legacy Season 0

2015. Medical experts are sounding the alarm. They have identified a new virus. A particularly resistant virus. It is quickly spreading over all continents – and there is only one objective left: to save humankind.

2086. The pandemic prevailed, most people are dead. We are living at sea in floating stations called „havens“ and supply a few cities ashore with food. But what about the rest of the world? Is there any reason for hope? We will send out an exploration team in order to answer this question.

1962. The peak of the Cold War. The nuclear threat is omnipresent. And we get the very troubling information that the Soviets are undertaking research on a biological weapon, a pathogen of unknown origin. We must stop them.

By **ANDREAS BECKER**

John Cooper was sitting in his office, rereading the operation report of his new agents. He groaned and rubbed his eyes that were burning with weariness. It had gotten dark outside, and the April rain had temporarily stopped. Cooper, called „Coop“ by everyone, grabbed the limp tuna sandwich he had gotten that afternoon at the canteen. Without much enthusiasm, he took a mouthful and washed it down with a big gulp of cold, bitter coffee.

He had to stop the operation. He couldn't let his young agents rush headlong into disaster with their eyes wide open. Once before, he had pushed his luck and lost Agent Sabik because of it.

Charles Sabik, one of the best minds they ever had in Langley. But even he had been captured by the „Reds,“ as Coop used to mockingly call the Soviets. It seemed as if the Russians could no longer be stopped. There was every



A Virus Sent from MOSCOW



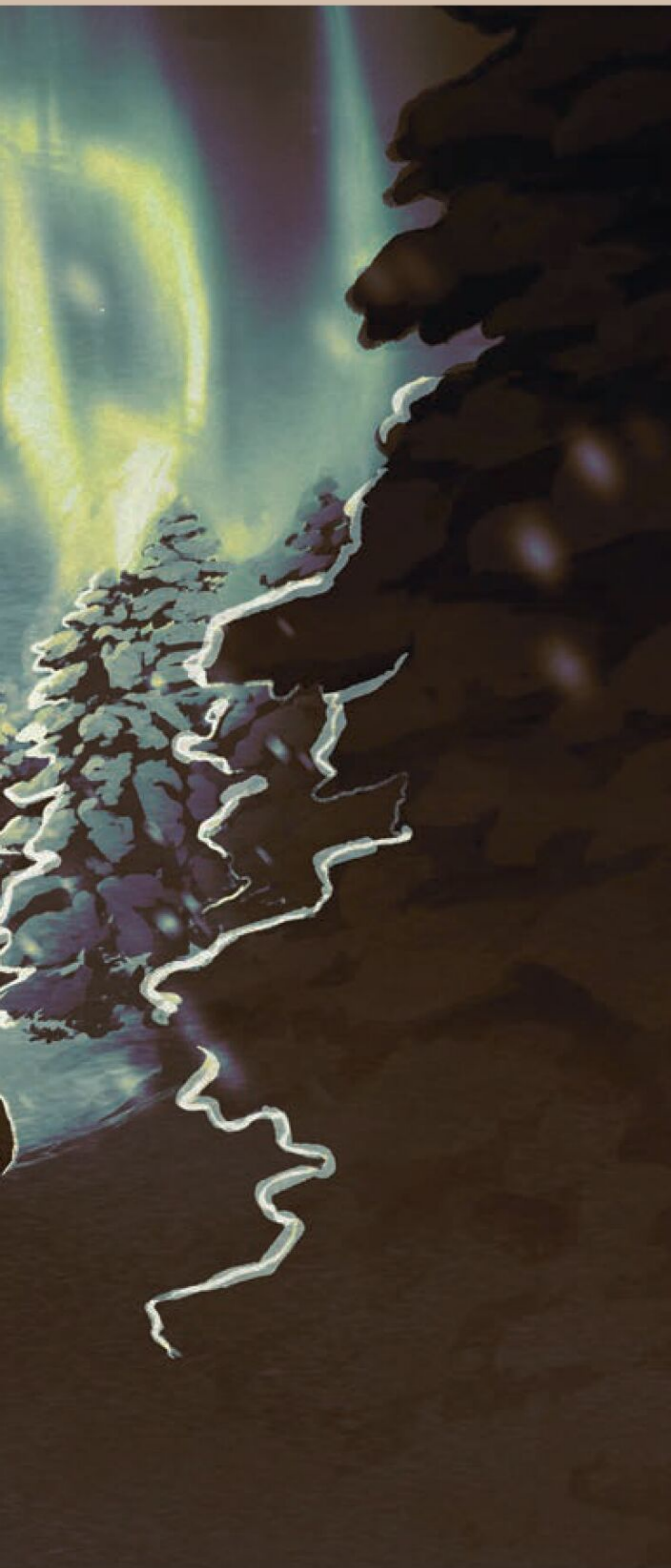
indication the CIA would be helpless in thwarting „Project Medusa“ – especially not with a pack of greenhorns who had only just completed their training at Camp Swampy. Where is this all going to end?

On the other hand, they'd already done better than Coop had expected. They had managed to get their hands on a sample of Medusa. They had tracked down and interrogated key Russian contact persons. They had taken up Sabik's trail, who had probably defected to the Soviets, just as Coop thought he would. And at considerable personal risk, they had forestalled the Red's field trials of the new pathogen. No, he couldn't stop this mission any more. He could just pray for his team's success.

Cooper went to his window and gazed out at the Potomac. He thought of whether he should go home. But that

would only mean an argument with Agnes – once again, he had been at the office for too long. And, once again, he hadn't attended the kids' school production. So he would spend the night on the hard sofa in his office and wake up tomorrow morning with a stiff neck and a stubborn headache.

Cooper sighed again. He heard a sound from the hallway in front of his office. Who could that be at this late hour? After all, the cleaning crew was gone, left quite a while ago. Cooper shouted, „Hello? Peter, is that you?“ and went to the door. Maybe it was Peter Carnigle, one of the analysts, uncomfortably waiting in front of the office, since he didn't dare to enter the room without a spoken invitation. Cooper stepped out into the hallway. The last thing he saw was a shadow on the wall, somewhere on the right. Then everything around him went black.



The new game comes as an espionage thriller in which players impersonate young CIA spies trying to prevent the Soviets from developing a biological weapon. It is the third and last part of the great **PANDEMIC** saga. Again, the authors, Matt Leacock and Rob Daviau, managed to do more than just rehash the umpteenth variant with the same ingredients. **PANDEMIC LEGACY SEASON 0** feels novel and fresh and good, even though you can find some very familiar

Several titles of the **PANDEMIC** family were already reviewed in *spielbox*. The basic game got an average rating of 7.73 (issue 1/09). The first expansion, **ON THE BRINK**, was rated by Harald Schrapers as „moderate“ (issue 1/10). Within the Legacy series, only season 1 was reviewed in detail; average rating: 7.8 (issue 3/16).



What are the Soviets planning at this research facility? We have to figure it out. But that's dangerous – Agent Charles Sabik (pictured at the bottom) has already disappeared. CMO John Cooper is concerned.

Illustrations: Z-Man Games/Asmodee

elements in this new season, of course; but this helps you quickly get back into the game.

Season 1 was set in the present time of the particular game group, so to speak, and primarily added many variants to the story of the virus rapidly spreading worldwide, as known from the basic game; with this, the development of a vaccine grew into an extraordinary adventure. But then, in season 2, we learned that the fight was lost in the end. Season 2 began in a dystopian future, and what made it particularly strong was that players had to discover the world anew.

Now we return to the origin of the whole story: the virus as a child of the Cold War, a major military complex's demonic development that, once unleashed, can never be controlled again.

Indeed, Leacock and Daviau have managed to use the well-known mechanisms for weaving new narrative threads. Instead of numerous pandemic hotspots popping up, this time Soviet agents band together in the cities. If there are too many of them in one place, an incident occurs. Such incidents are handled in a new, creative fashion – and, in the best case, won't have any negative effects on the young (and certainly also totally likable) CIA investigators. But sometimes, these incidents are simply a curse. The virus, however, plays only a secondary role

– how important this role will actually become depends a lot on how well the players fulfill their missions, by the way.

What used to be the cure in the fight against the virus is now the operations teams, for which you have to give up five cards. They are mobile task forces that are not fussy about clearing out the red agents (actually called „mopping up“ in the instructions) and that are mainly needed for completing an operation. We, the executive agents, then just need to go to the first telephone booth available and utter „Go!“ into the phone.

The prequel makes up for many things that were missing in seasons 1 and 2. Of course, I don't want to give away too much. But you don't necessarily have to play a month for a second time if you haven't fulfilled all the tasks. And if you do, there are sometimes things to do that are different than in the first half of the month; this makes it worthwhile and therefore good. Another great idea is the passports that allow you to assume cover identities, which are a precondition for operating in certain regions; and besides this, they are also a nice toy for establishing the aliases.

PANDEMIC was and still is awesome. My rating should be seen as an acknowledgment of the entire trilogy that has given me countless hours of most wonderful entertainment for many years. (sbw)



Rob Daviau, Matt Leacock: **Pandemic Legacy Season 0** (Z-Man Games), illustrations: Kanaani, Monica Helland, for 2–4 players, about 14+ years, duration: about 60–90 minutes per game; price: about 65 Euros.

Reviewer	Playing Appeal
Andreas Becker	10
Udo Bartsch	8
Stephan Kessler*	7

* Excellent new interpretation of the **PANDEMIC** concept as a spy thriller; wastes some potential here and there, though.

„It Was a Bit of a Marathon“

The timeline went from the present to a post-apocalyptic future and now back to the period of Cold War: With their PANDEMIC LEGACY series, Matt Leacock and Rob Daviau have created an epic work. Now, after part three, the series is supposed to end. So it is time to pass the creative process in review and to have a look out of the window, at the real pandemic.

By ANDREAS BECKER

How did you come up with the idea of jumping back to the 1960s in the story of Pandemic?

Matt Leacock: Since Season 2 takes place in a post apocalyptic world already, we didn't think it made sense to set its sequel after that. So we thought we might turn to the past and do a prequel or origins story.

Rob Daviau: We wanted to do a different genre than 'action' or 'post-apocalyptic'. We thought that a spy thriller would be interesting and different. We could tell an origin story of the other two games. After some discussion we settled on the height of the cold war. It has a lot of familiar tropes we could lean on.

Was it more difficult to design the third part because you didn't want to repeat yourselves or did you still have enough ideas in the drawer?

Matt Leacock: I don't think we had a lot of ideas left over from the first two seasons. Some aspects of the design were easier – we had the 12-month structure, the funding system for balancing difficulty, and some ideas for how characters evolve. But in some respects the design was harder since we didn't want the game to simply repeat the storyline of the other seasons and wanted it to stand on its own with its own ideas and mechanisms.

Rob Daviau: Each season is a little harder than the one before. As we went, we had to come up with new ideas so we didn't repeat ourselves. We also had feedback from the first two games of what we did well and what we did wrong. So we wanted to make sure we did a better job. Finally we had a story that we had to stick to. In the first season, we could do anything. In Season 2 we had to be

true to Season 1. With this one, the story comes first so it had to make sense leading into the other two seasons.

The passports with the three identities are highly acclaimed: Why is it that you forgo different protagonists in Season 0, from which you choose one at the beginning of the game like in the two Seasons before? Was it because of the story or because of the experience that players tend to choose the same characters over and over again?

Matt Leacock: Season 1 more or less picks up the classic characters that come with the PANDEMIC base game and expansions. For Season 2, we started the players as everyday people who didn't know much about the world so the players could drop into their shoes and experience the world through their eyes. As such, they started out a bit less powerful. We came up with the idea for the passports fairly early on in the development of Season 0. They seemed like a great fit for the spy theme and they gave players a way to develop their characters even further. We also knew that players did form



Matt Leacock and Rob Daviau have created three seasons of Pandemic Legacy together. But **SEASON 0** is supposed to be the last one. Right: A scene from **SEASON 0**. Photos: Becker

attachments to their characters and often liked to play the same ones repeatedly because of this. Given the characters multiple facets let players explore new abilities without giving up their favorite character.

Medusa play rather a supporting role in Season 0, field tests have to be stopped and the outbreaks are comparatively moderate. Is that a coincidence or did you change this mechanic at the end of 2019 with the start of the Corona pandemic in China?

Matt Leacock: No, the design for Season 0 was done long before the outbreak of COVID-19. I won't go into the design rationale as it spoils the story a bit.

Rob Daviau: Yep. Just coincidence.

Since when and how for long did you work on this part?

Rob Daviau: We started in November of 2016 and finished in summer of 2019. So almost three years. We knew we had time so we didn't rush it. But it still would've taken longer than the other two. The first season was 13 months, the second was 16 months. This would've been at least two years no matter how much we rushed.

Matt Leacock: It was a bit of a marathon and the longest I worked on any single game that's gone to print other than the original Pandemic.

You say Season 0 is supposed to be the last part. Why do you think the story is finished?

Matt Leacock: Rob and I have tried to come up with something fresh each time and I think it'd be difficult to come up

with a new direction for a fourth game – we've already tackled the past, present, and future!

Rob Daviau: We've been trained to think in trilogies. We think we did a good trilogy. History shows that expanding beyond that often doesn't result in a good movie or game or book, etc.

Hand on heart: Is Season 0 really the last chapter – isn't there more to come?

Matt Leacock: Never say never, but I don't see a full legacy game with a 12-month campaign happening anytime in the near future.

Rob Daviau: The last chapter.

How do you look as the designer of PANDEMIC upon the Corona pandemic? Is it more frightening or – on the other hand – rather fascinating how close the games are to reality?

Matt Leacock: Experiencing it was a bit disorienting, surreal, and scary at first. My wife Donna came down with it in February. But then watching it unfold over the year was sad and then really frustrating. I had imagined there would have been more good faith on the part of the world's governments – especially the US – in response to this sort of crisis. There have been oddly some striking parallels, however. For example, in **PANDEMIC LEGACY: SEASON 1**, the disease makes its appearance in January and then rages over the course of the year until the world is presumed saved in December by the discovery of a vaccine.

Have reactions to the PANDEMIC franchise changed as a result of the experience in 2020? Have there been increasing sales? Or have players showed irritation that there is a game on such a topic? Is there maybe more criticism nowadays than in former times that you made something entertaining in terms of infection and death rates in real life?

Matt Leacock: The game is obviously more topical and has gotten more attention as a result of the pandemic. Players tend to break down into two camps: those who would rather play something else – they're living the pandemic alrea-



dy and would prefer an escape –, and a surprising number of players who find the game therapeutic. It gives them an opportunity to talk about what's going on in the world and take control of the situation – even if it's only in the game. The coverage has been overwhelmingly positive. I think it helps that the players work together to fight against the disease. It would probably be a different case if the roles were reversed!





Review. The Isle of Cats

The Fine Art of Feline Rescue

When in doubt, go with cats. That's just science. I'm pretty sure the Internet was invented just so we humans could sweeten our days with cat videos on YouTube. It's also why we immediately step up when **THE ISLE OF CATS**, with its wise, wild, and above all playful cats, is threatened. Vesh Darkhand is coming with his armies and a plan to destroy not only the island, but also the rest of the world. Obviously, decades spent in dark caves haven't treated him well.

By **MARIE POENISCH**

We can't ponder Vesh's psyche for long. And the rest of the world will have to wait, too, because our first concern is saving these noble creatures with velvet paws. We swing ourselves onto boats docked in Squall's End and sail off. The trick is that, on our rescue mission, we not only trying to bring cats to safety, but also to recover treasures. Completely unselfishly, of course.

We have five days until Vesh arrives and burns everything down. Each day starts out the same: we collect our nets and rods and go fishing. The fish help in all aspects of life: from playing cards to attracting cats. Yes, that's right, we need fish to lure cats out of their hiding places and onto our boat. Hopefully there'll be some tuna, as that catches any cat in a pinch. In addition, we definitely need baskets. You'll only try carrying a cat on your arm for a long distance once, trust me. Some baskets prove to be sturdier than others and can be used multiple times.

Additional baskets and other helpful items can be claimed when we draft cards at the beginning of each round. As

we do, we're spoiled for choice: should we try to save more cats or focus on lesson cards? But we could put all of them to good use, so why are we only allowed to keep two cards at a time? Lessons offer points for a variety of things at the end of the game. That could mean having big cat families or visible rats on the deck of our ship, which otherwise reduce the ambience considerably and so score minus points. Additionally, there are cards that attract the rare Oshax cats or provide treasure. It's a matter of finding that fishy balance between buying cards and taking rescue actions.

Duty calls before we get to the part where we can actually rescue cats: we have to play lesson cards. There are secret personal goals as well as public ones that everyone benefits from. Then, finally, it starts: we fight for the best starting position by sprinting towards the island, giving us early access to the cats. Or are we just trying to avoid having our fish spoil in the sun? Whichever it is, each of us is allowed, in turn, to rescue exactly one cat at a time. They can be found on two fields on the island.

Bringing cats to safety is less boring than it appears at first glance. First, you have to be hardy, in case the cat is not so grateful to be rescued after all. The noble creatures also like to cuddle together in families of at least three cats of one color on your boat by the end of the game. Then there's the fact that cats on the west of the island can be lured with three fish but you have to sacrifice five fish for the shy specimens in the east. Each investment needs to be carefully thought out. And, of course, there are always other players who may snatch the perfect cat out from under your nose.

The first cat on your boat is free to choose its place, but all other tiles need to be puzzled into adjacent spaces. If you manage to cover a treasure icon on your boat with a cat of the same color, you get a treasure. These tiles can be useful for filling gaps between the four-legged friends chilling on the deck. There are also anytime cards that players can use to get bonuses like new cards, baskets, or fish at, well, any time.

Our boats are divided into different rooms. Each room that is not completely

The Teruvian, the Crystal Garmin, the Starry Vandermil, and the Orange Mhoxite (from left) are six of the cat species living on the isle of cats.





Vesh Darkhand is heading for the island (bottom left) from where we bring the cats on board of our ship (bottom), with the help of sundry hand cards (left).

Photos: Poenisch

filled at the end of the game will score five minus points. This deterrent leads newcomers, especially, to focus on carefully completing their puzzles without gaps. They are often unaware that you can score a lot of points with a half-empty boat and the right combination of lesson cards. Penalty points for unfilled spaces can be easily made up in this way.

When the baskets and fish are used up, or where there are simply no cats left to save, we can still place rare treasures and the mystical-looking Oshax cats on deck, before the day draws to a close. The next morning the cycle starts all over again, until Vesh's black ship arrives to end the game.

The wooden cats are lovingly designed and the specially developed cuddle target for an actual four-legged friend in the box lid is exceedingly charming, even if this luxurious berth is happily ignored by the typical house cat. However, the rooms on our ships could be a bit more clearly distinguished from each other, and the last box on Vesh's ship route doesn't stand out enough visually. This tends to make

you think you're about to start another round, even though it's actually time for final scoring.

THE ISLE OF CATS is essentially a puzzle game, but the card drafting and the payment mechanics give it a significantly different feel than other games of this type. We make a lot of small decisions, and the random tile display throws many a strategy out of whack. Every game is a little different. It's a matter of making the best of one's possibilities, and that's what makes it so appealing. To be sure, the lesson cards are very powerful and have so far decided victory or defeat in each of my games. Especially with two or three players, **THE ISLE OF CATS** moves along briskly and fluffily. With a full table, it can take a while.

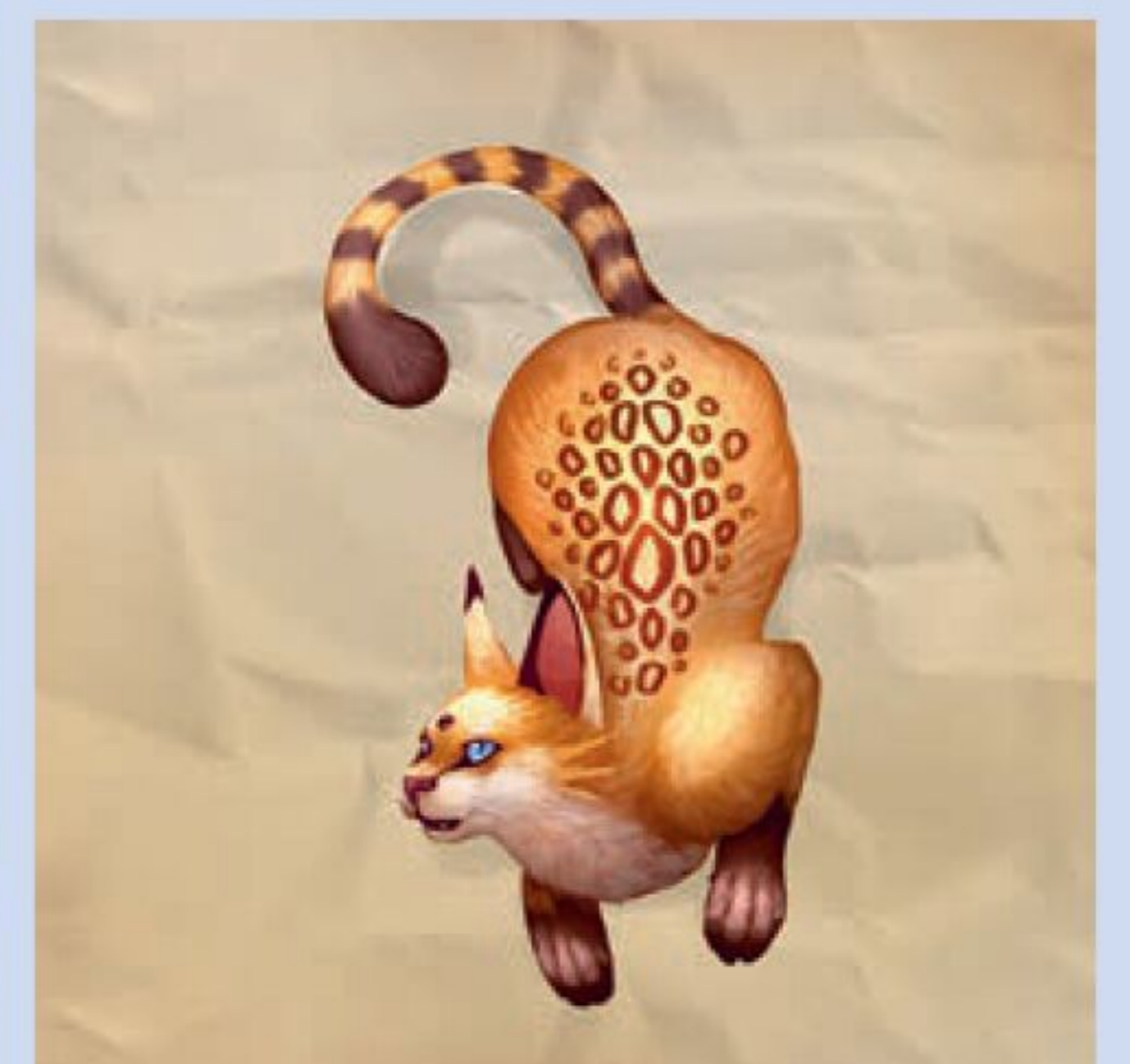
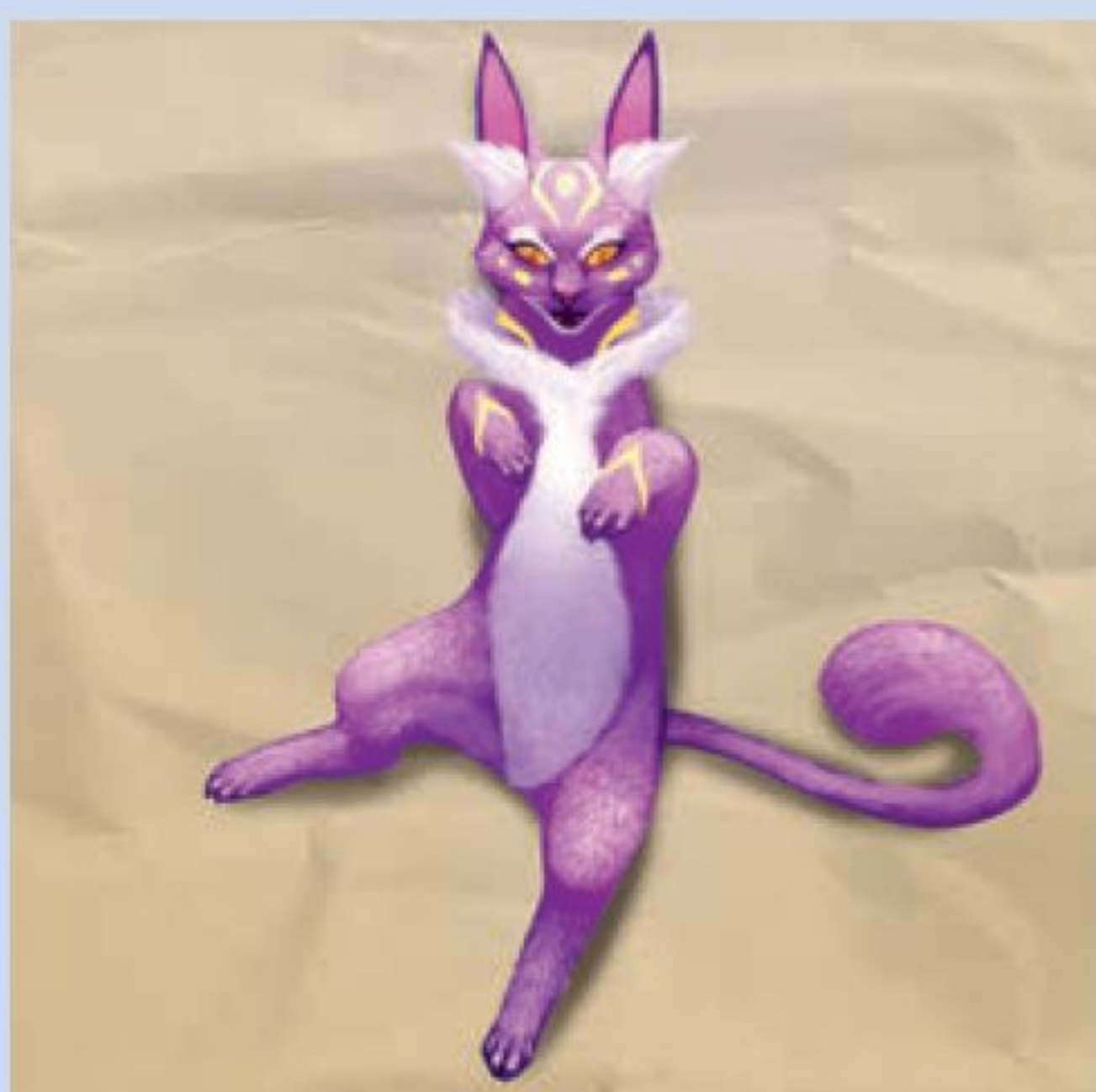
The family version is greatly simplified, doing away with the fish and some fussy parts. This works very well with children, but offers little for adults compared to other tile-laying games. The full gamer's version, on the other hand, blows in like a refreshing breeze through the world of puzzlers and provides a lot of joy even for non-cat fans. (sb)



Frank West: **The Isle of Cats** (Skellig Games), illustrations: Dragolisco; for 1-4 players, about 8+ years, duration: about 30 minutes (family mode), about 30 minutes per player; price: about 50 Euros.

Reviewer	Playing Appeal
Marie Poenisch	8
Udo Bartsch*	5
Andreas Becker**	7
Christwart Conrad***	7
L.U. Dikus****	7
Stefan Ducksch*****	7
Wieland Herold*****	8
Christoph Schlewinski***** ..	8

* The rulebook and graphics are weak.
 ** Amazingly good family variant.
 *** The family game is short and crisp and – freed of procedural ballast – described in an impressively compact fashion, on one double page. It has been better received by us than the more demanding standard version.
 **** Strong game, weak rules.
 ***** Successful puzzle game, and the basic version gives beginners a challenge. When playing with all components, even connoisseurs have their work cut out for them.
 ***** Not just another puzzle game, this one offers sophisticated card management.
 ***** But only the variant for advanced players, please.



Memorizing With Mia & Co.

The most equitable games that adults can play with children are those with a memory element; here, parents don't need to lose voluntarily but have to be in mental top form in order to keep up with their offspring.

But why are children that good in memo games? Educational psychologists

have found out that children have better spatial-visual memory skills; in the short run, they have a greater recollection of details, but they forget a lot yet in the medium term. Grown-ups are less detail-oriented, and their memory works rather at an abstract level. Game ideas with memory aspects are meanwhile far from the

classic search for pairs: Four of the five titles we have chosen show what modern memorizing means. The games are about a criminal case, a sliding maze, a visit to Noah's Ark, and the catching of thieves. Last but not least, we are quite dreamy and present a game about the correct estimation of sizes.

Mia Chases Scoundrels

MIA LONDON: When you look at the investigation file of the successful detective Mia London, you should pay careful attention to details, since the suspects' top hats, glasses, beards, and bowties hardly differ. A simple flap mechanism in the small investigation ring binder brings up 625 different scoundrels – and each time, the question is: Who committed the crime this time?

Besides the flap file that the young detectives get, Antoine Bauza and Corentin Lebrat just needed to come up with 40 accessory cards for the identification of a culprit. Each feature – top hat, glasses, mustache, and bowtie – exists twice in the game. One card is drawn from each of the piles for the four accessory types and put in the box, and this leads to the characterization of the culprit you have to single out.

In terms of the mnemonic technique, the two authors constantly raise the chal-

lenges of the investigative work – for instance, by having the nine remaining hat cards, one after another, turned over (and some of them, covered) in rows of four; this makes it pretty easy to remember which hat is missing. The hat that the children have seen only once is the one they record in their investigation booklet. Figuring out the right glasses is a bit more difficult, since the cards are laid out in three piles. The mustache cards are put on only two piles, and there is even just one pile of bowtie cards.

In the end, all players open their flap binders and compare the results with the picked-out accessory cards. The player who has the most matches wins **MIA LONDON** after a fast five minutes.

Preschoolers and first-graders love the flap booklet and the challenge. The investigation file makes them almost real detectives. A nifty element is to increase the



challenge by means of an accelerating covering mechanism, which is especially difficult when it comes to the bowtie. Parents are able to keep up amazingly well in solving this task – after all, nine cards are easier to manage than more than 50 pairs of images.

WIELAND HEROLD/sbw

Antoine Bauza, Corentin Lebrat: Mia London (Le Scorpion Masqué), illustrations: Nikao; for 2-4 children, about 5+ years, duration: about 10 minutes, price: about 22 Euros.

Wet Feet and Soggy Suitcases

CRITTER CRUISE: Antje Gleichmann leads players back to biblical times: to Noah, the animal savior. The rain has already started falling, the ground is soggy, and there are still animals running up a ramp into the rescuing ark. Haba even provides a three-dimensional boat inside the box and ten little wooden animals for this inexpensive bring-along game.

CRITTER CRUISE is a cooperative memory game where players do not look for animal pairs but for matching suitcases for the animals waiting in front of the rescuing boat. The children's problem is that there are considerably more suitcases than animals, and those that cannot be assigned to an animal are soaking wet. According to the water spots shown on the suitcases, players have to turn over

a number of path tiles on the way to the ark, so that the animals standing there wade through the water. Noah, who comes as a wooden figure as well, accepts wet feet, but if all ten tiles have been turned over and some animals are still on their way to the ark, Noah thinks the situation is too dangerous: In this case, he puts his boat out to sea, and all children lose together.

To be continued on page 28

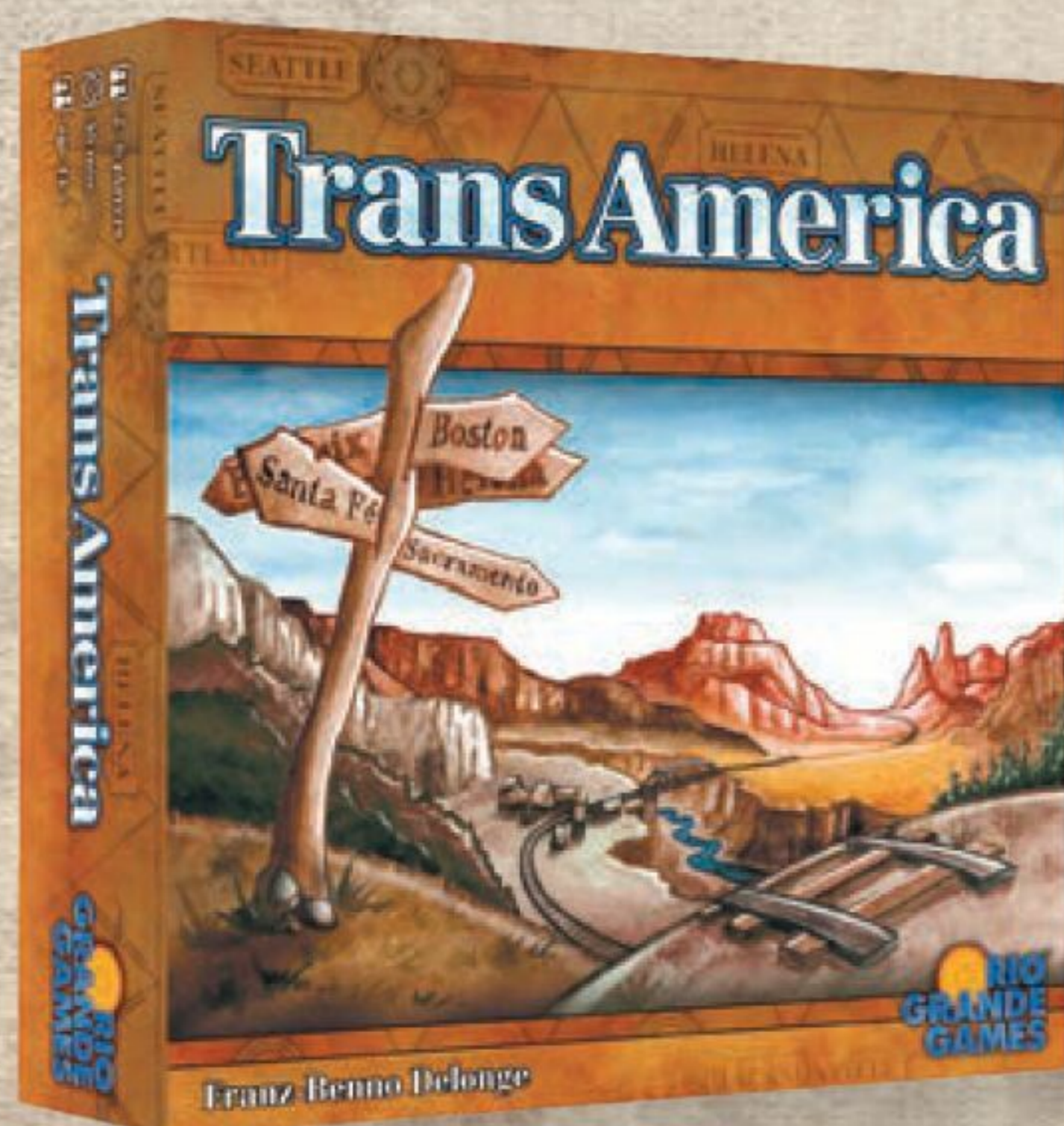
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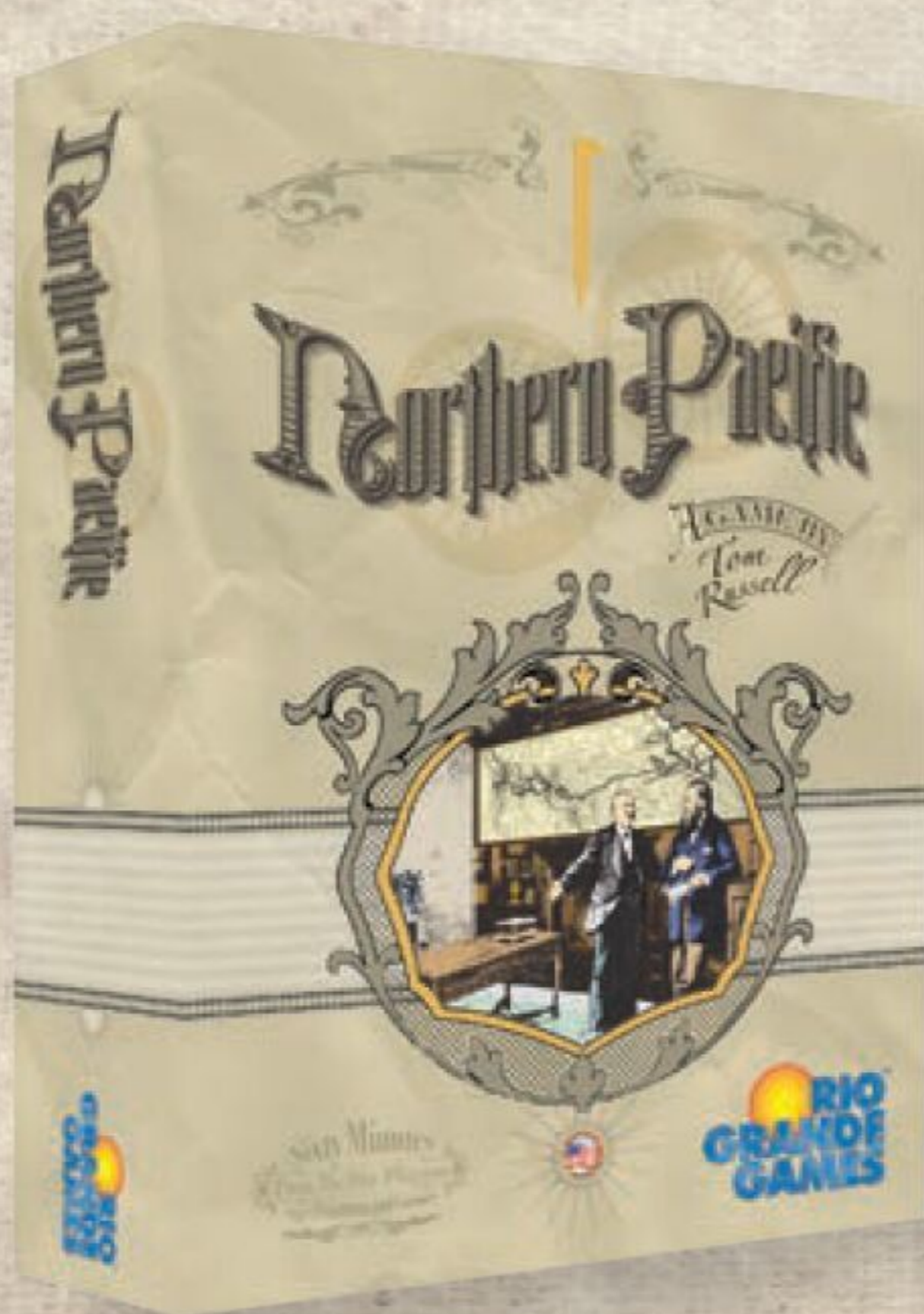
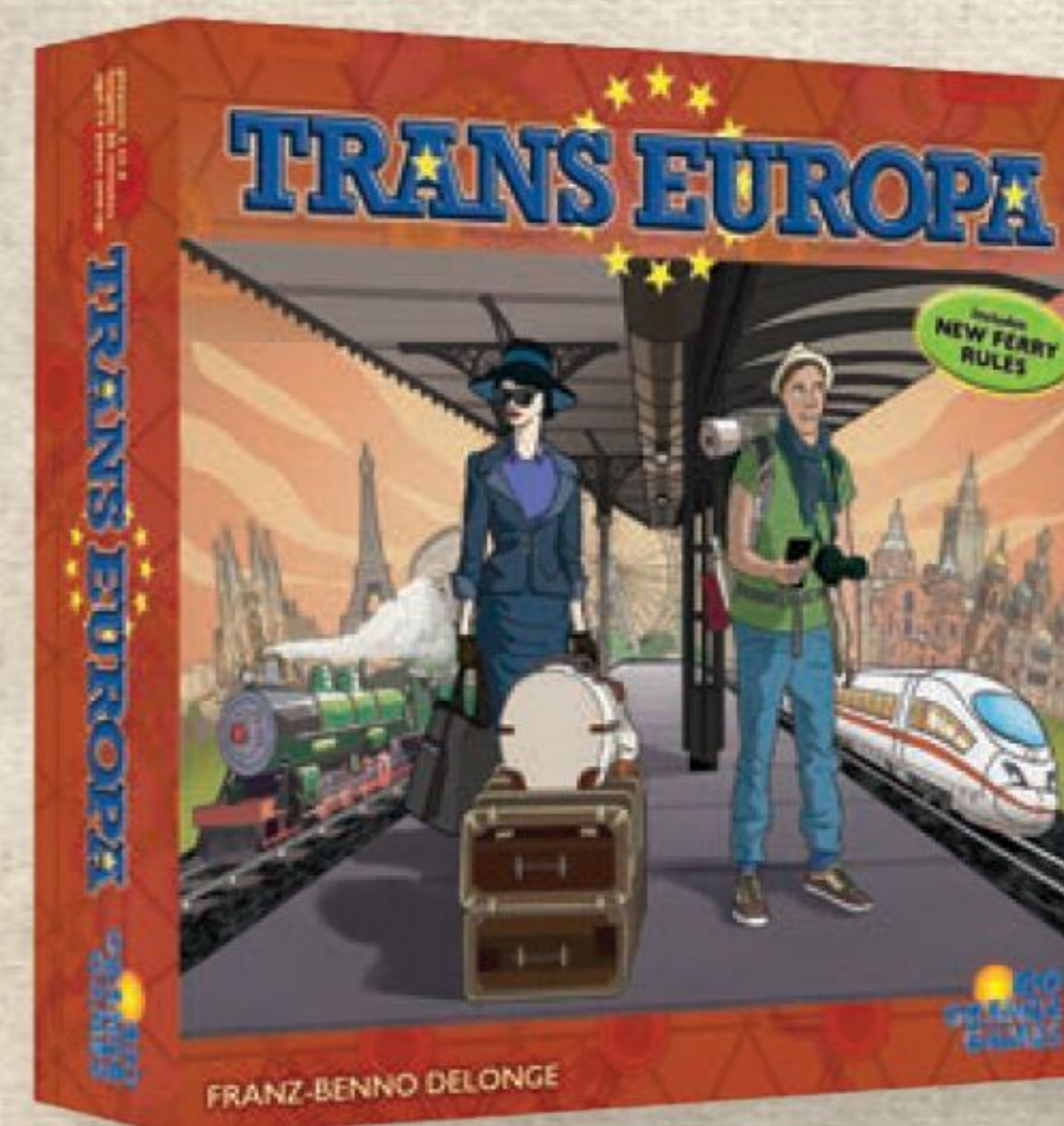
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in 30 minutes



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Build across the continent
in 30 minutes

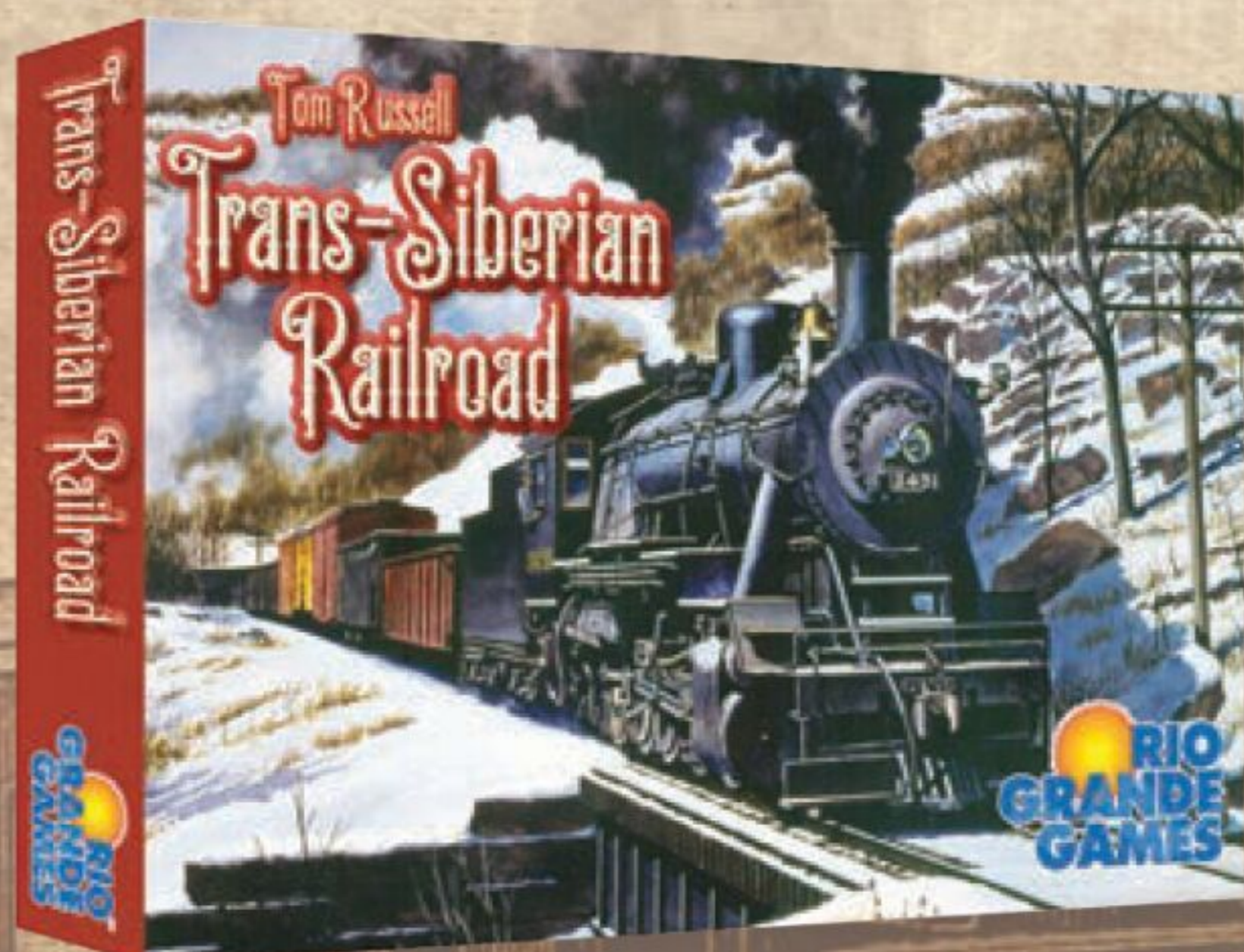


Northern Pacific

Track building in
the Great Northwest

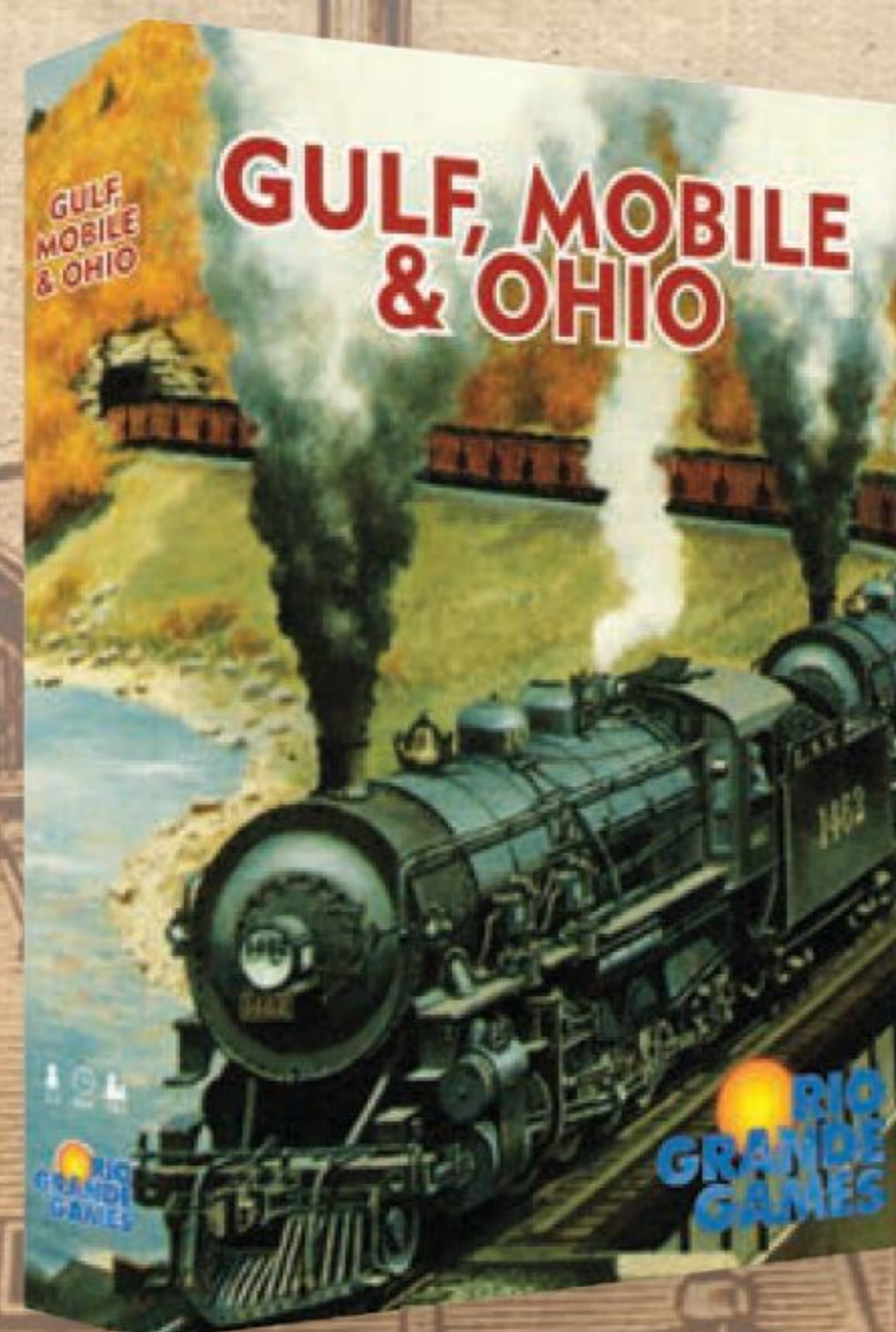
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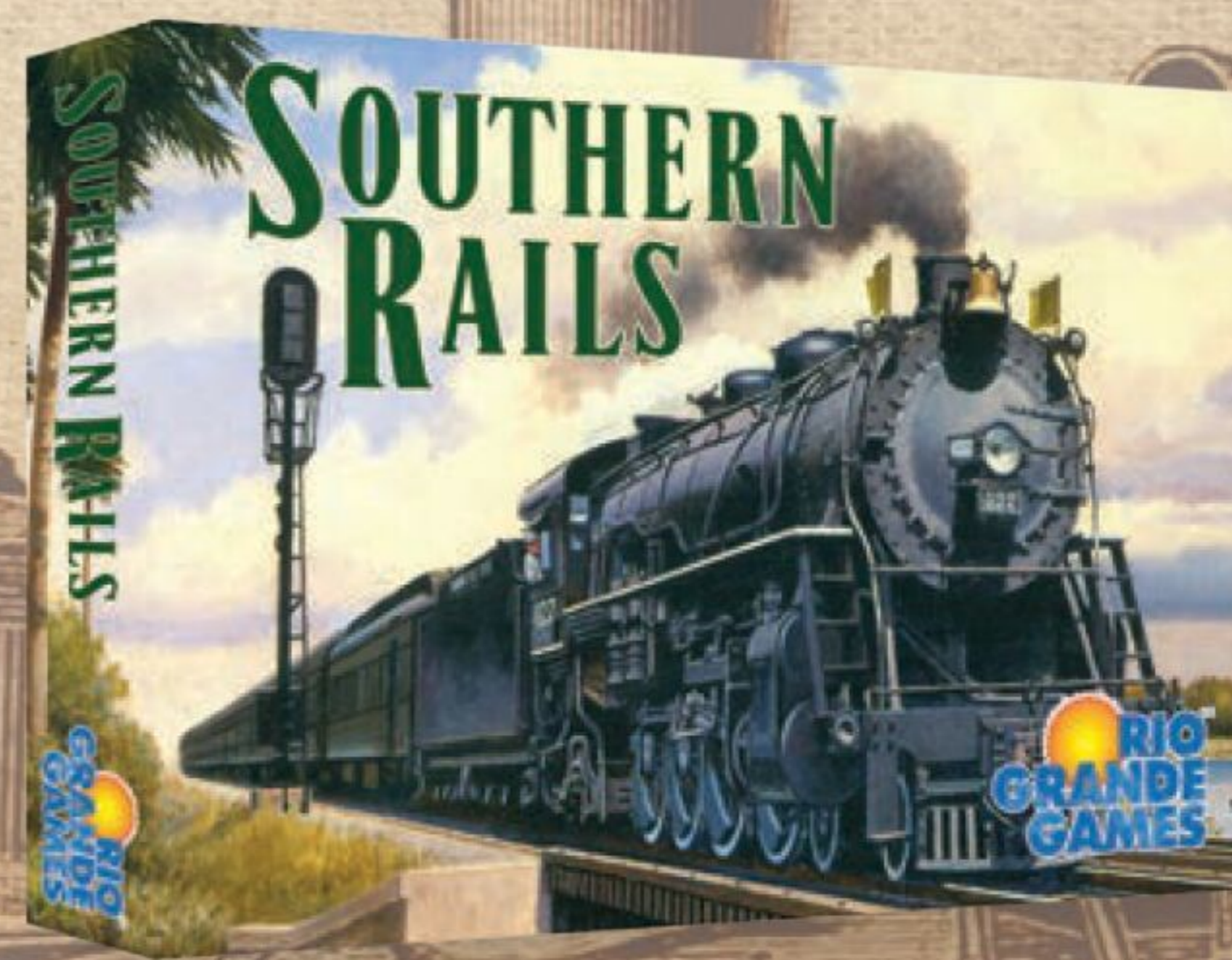
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In terms of its game mechanisms, **CRITTER CRUISE** basically is a traditional memory game. The Noah figure determines which animal gets onto the ark. Players try to find the right piece of luggage by turning over a suitcase tile. If the suitcase matches the animal, the animal walks up the ramp onto the boat. If the suitcase belongs to a different animal, the children need to memorize the position and move Noah to this animal as soon as possible. And it is even more important that they keep the positions of the

five soggy suitcases in mind – if one of these is revealed a second time, the chances of winning decrease significantly.

The game idea contains known elements, but the three-dimensional implementation inside the box and the joint solving of the task make the animal rescue exciting for children at the age of three or four years. They are interested in the story, they like the challenge of play; and after the game, they still enjoy playing with the boat, the wooden animals and Noah.

WIELAND HEROLD/*sbw*

Antje Gleichmann: Critter Cruise (Haba), illustrations: Benjamin Petzold; for 2-4 children, about 3+ years, duration: about 15 minutes; price: about 10 Euros.

Treasure Hunt with Lighting Effects

WALD DER LICHTER: WALD DER LICHTER is much more demanding than **MIA LONDON** or **CRITTER CRUISE** and provides great winning chances for young ones. In this visually appealing game, Anna Oppolzer and Stefan Kloß send two to four treasure seekers into the enchanted Forest of Lights. Ethelred the Seventh, the dwarves' king, has become a victim of theft. The thief, during the escape, hid the treasures in the forest, and players now have to find these precious items.

For this search, Oppolzer and Kloß let the children set out into a maze. The 16 round forest spaces are lit up through a simple trick: Each player can slide one tile, which has a white surface in its center, into the maze and thus make the transparent treasures shine.

One of the 16 treasure tiles is revealed; this treasure has to be found first by the treasure hunters. To this end, you slide your light tile into one of the eight entrances of the forest. You always have to predict which of the numerous treasures you expect to find. To begin with, all players are in the dark and will probably name the wanted treasure. The further you move your light into

Stefan Kloß, Anna Oppolzer: Wald der Lichter (Drei Magier), illustrations: Rolf Vogt; for 2-4 children, about 5+ years, duration: about 20 minutes; price: about 32 Euros.



the forest by pushing new dark forest tiles through the entrances into the woods, the more new treasures you'll come across. If your light tile illuminates the wanted treasure, you'll get it. This applies also when the tiles in the maze are moved and another player's light illuminates the wanted treasure; in this case, the owner of this light obtains the treasure. The

search ends as soon as one child has found enough treasures (5 in the 2- or 3-player game, 4 with 4 players).

The fascination of illuminating the treasures just by means of a white cardboard disk is initially enormous. This is a simple effect with a great outcome. The continually increasing mental task is demanding, since players should memorize the positions of all 16 treasures – even already-found ones, since their path spaces will be repeatedly passed later on. **WALD DER LICHTER** is the typical memory challenge that gives parents hardly any chance against their children. All players are involved in each turn, since there are always new treasures to be found, at least at the beginning. A challenging game, with an impressive graphic design by Rolf Vogt.

I would be fully content if the sliding mechanism didn't cause any problems for children's hands; however, the tiles sometimes tilt. And it is important that the children don't lean over the forest map a bit too often. That's because the treasures can unfortunately be seen through the film (there are 3 different ones to choose from) if you look from above in good light. Provided that such cheating is not accepted and that parents help to solve sliding blockades, the trips into the Forest of Lights are fun time and again.

WIELAND HEROLD/*sbw*

Thief of Dreams

DREAM CATCHER: Oh my God, it's a nightmare!!! What can overcome this? Quite clearly, grabbing a cuddly toy and dunking your face in it. Everything loses its horror in this protecting fluffiness. In **DREAM CATCHER**, children don't press their faces into the game, of course, but they actually cover nightmares.

Each round, one nightmare card is revealed and placed in the middle of the table, surrounded by cuddly toy disks in different sizes, made of thick cardboard. Then all dreamers, in turn, pick a cuddly toy and, one after another, put it on the nightmare card.

Is your cuddly friend able to cover the evildoer completely – without anything still sticking out? Yes? In this case, you draw as many victory chips out of the pillow bag as there are stars on the cuddly toy you have chosen, and put it on top of your so-called comfy board in the shape

of a dream cloud. The first player to completely fill a comfy board wins.

DREAM CATCHER fits perfectly in the age range of children from four years on, and all game components convey a dreamy feel, from the fantastic illustrations to the sturdy and easy-to-grip materials, including the bag for the victory chips that is actually a soft little pillow.

Children like to examine and touch everything, since it just looks like a perfect dream.

And this is also how it plays. It is a game about the right estimation of sizes. But it is also a game that allows children to talk about the victory chips, which are nicely illustrated dream tokens. These tokens stand

for the sweet dreams that you get into after chasing away the nightmare with your cuddly toy. The combination of these two elements makes a truly interesting children's game that can be unconditionally recommended.

CHRISTOPH SCHLEWINSKI/*sbw*



Laurent Escoffier, David Franck: Traumfänger (Space Cow), illustrations: Maud Chalmel; for 2-4 children, about 4+ years, duration: about 15 minutes, price: about 20 Euros.

Burglars in Our House



Romarc Galonnier, Laurent Toulouse: Tapikékoï? (Djeco), illustrations: Sébastien Chebret; for 2-4 children, about 5+ years, duration: about 15 minutes, price: about 20 Euros.

TAPIKÉKOÏ?: Who is sneaking through the house? Thieves, of course. The house consists of four room boards: living room, bedroom, kitchen, and garden. Each room holds little objects in the form of round tokens, and these items attract the burglars.

Each round, one of the children takes on the role of the homeowner, and the others represent the thieves. The homeowner closes his/her eyes – and now the thieves become active: Each of them steals one object and keeps it hidden. Then the homeowner opens his/her eyes and has to say what has been stolen. If right, the homeowner gets the corresponding token back from the respective thief. If wrong, the round ends immediately; the thieves keep what they took, and the next child becomes the homeowner, placing new tokens and closes his/her eyes. Once there are not enough tokens left for refilling, the game is over, and the child with the most tokens wins.

Thanks to its presentation, components, and theme, **TAPIKÉKOÏ?** creates a very special experience for children. The graphic design is refreshingly different: not typically child-like and yet beautiful; unadorned, but playful.

Then, the closing of the eyes: well-received and very thrilling for children. What are the thieves stealing? Has the homeowner memorized everything well? On the other side, the thieves are afraid of whether the owner has kept all the objects in mind ...

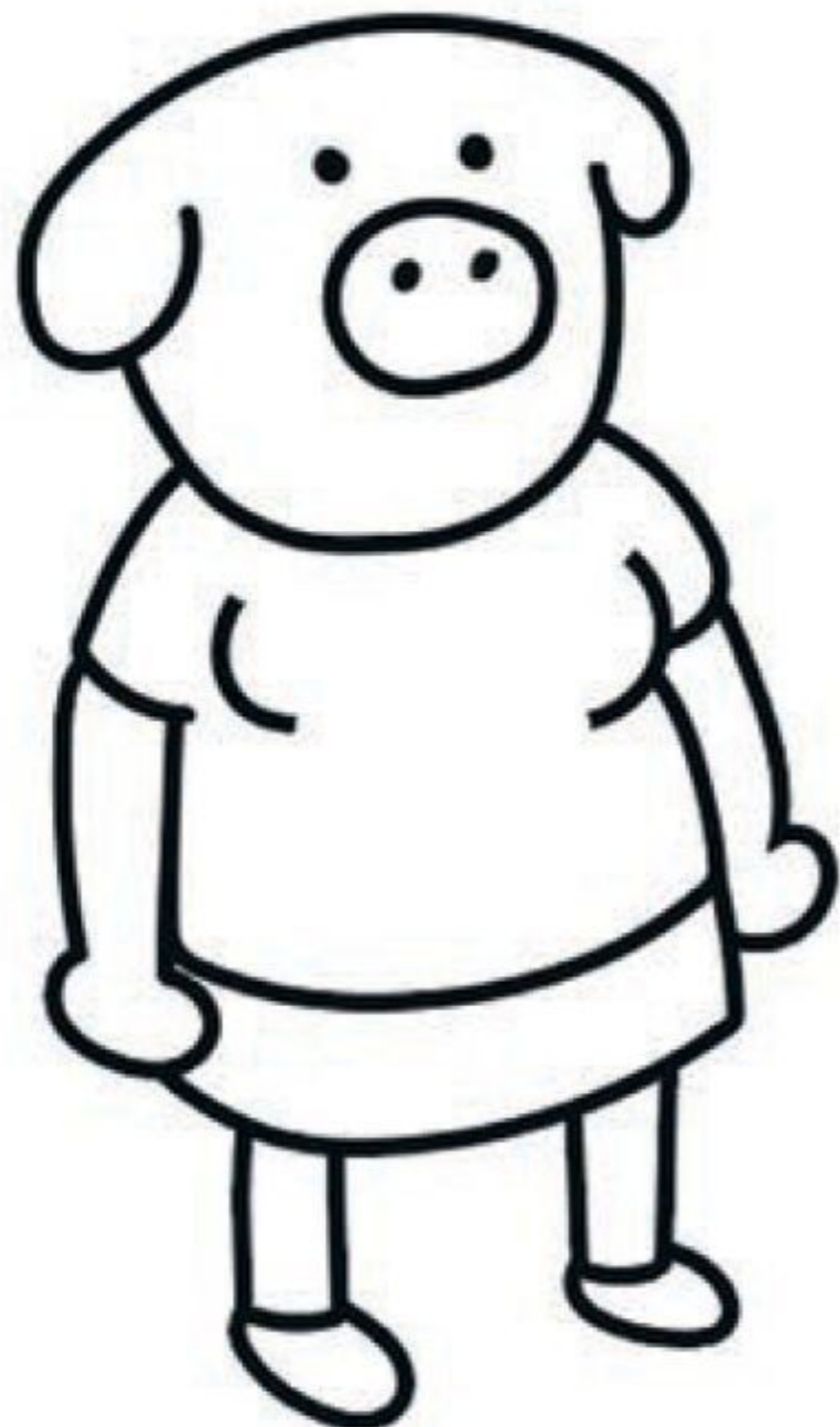
Djeco is in France what Haba is in Germany: a market giant in the sector of children's games; and like Haba, Djeco manages consistently to get children to the game table, thanks to unusual mechanisms and great designs. **TAPIKÉKOÏ?** is an excellent example of this. Perfectly tailored to the needs of children, this game simply is fun again and again. Commendable without reservation.

CHRISTOPH SCHLEWINSKI/*sbw*

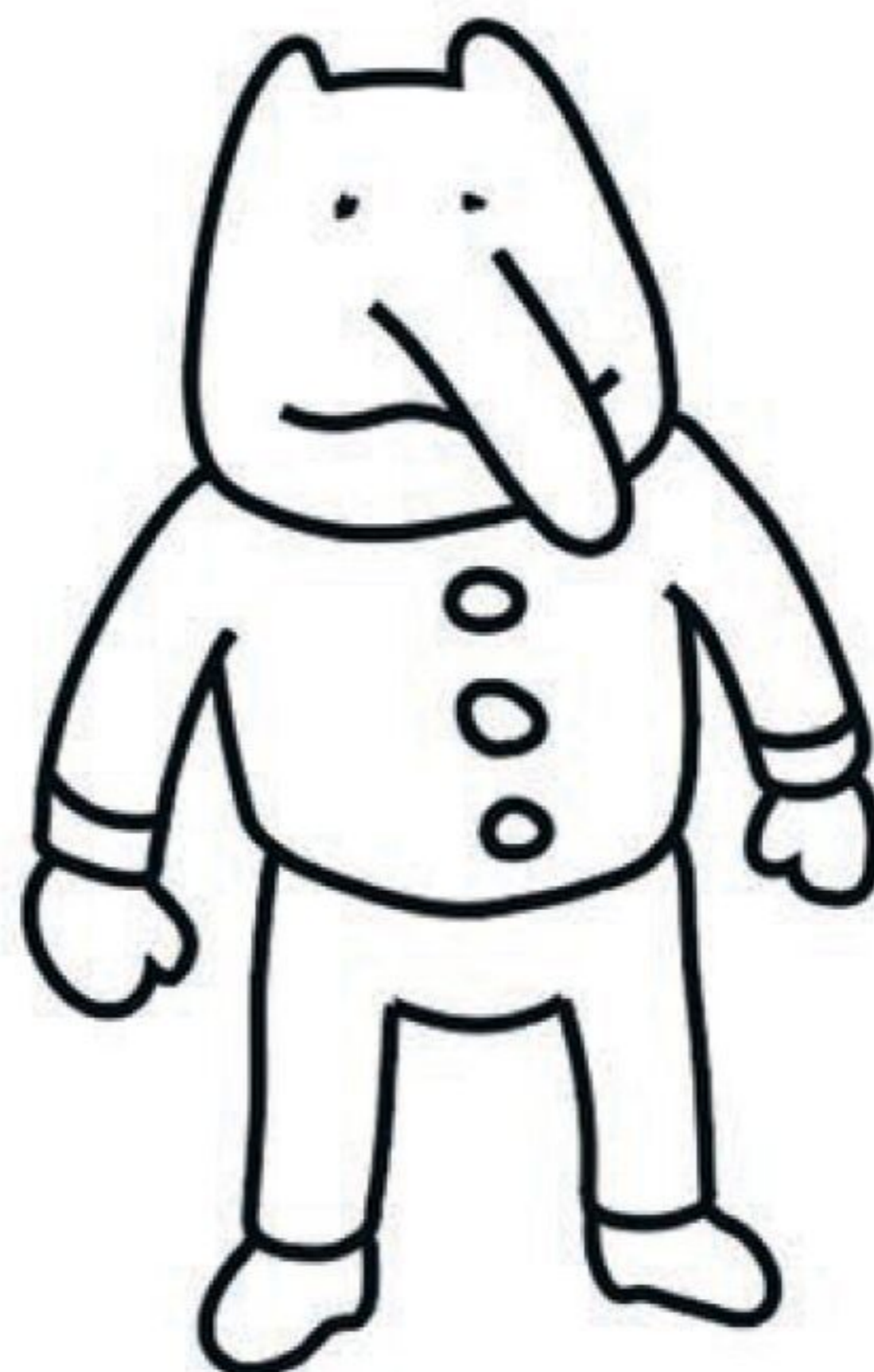
The Florist of Death

Quick note: This story is not a case from **MICROMACRO CRIME CITY**. It contains no spoilers, but it was inspired by cases in the game. The dialogues are fictional and are not part of the game itself.

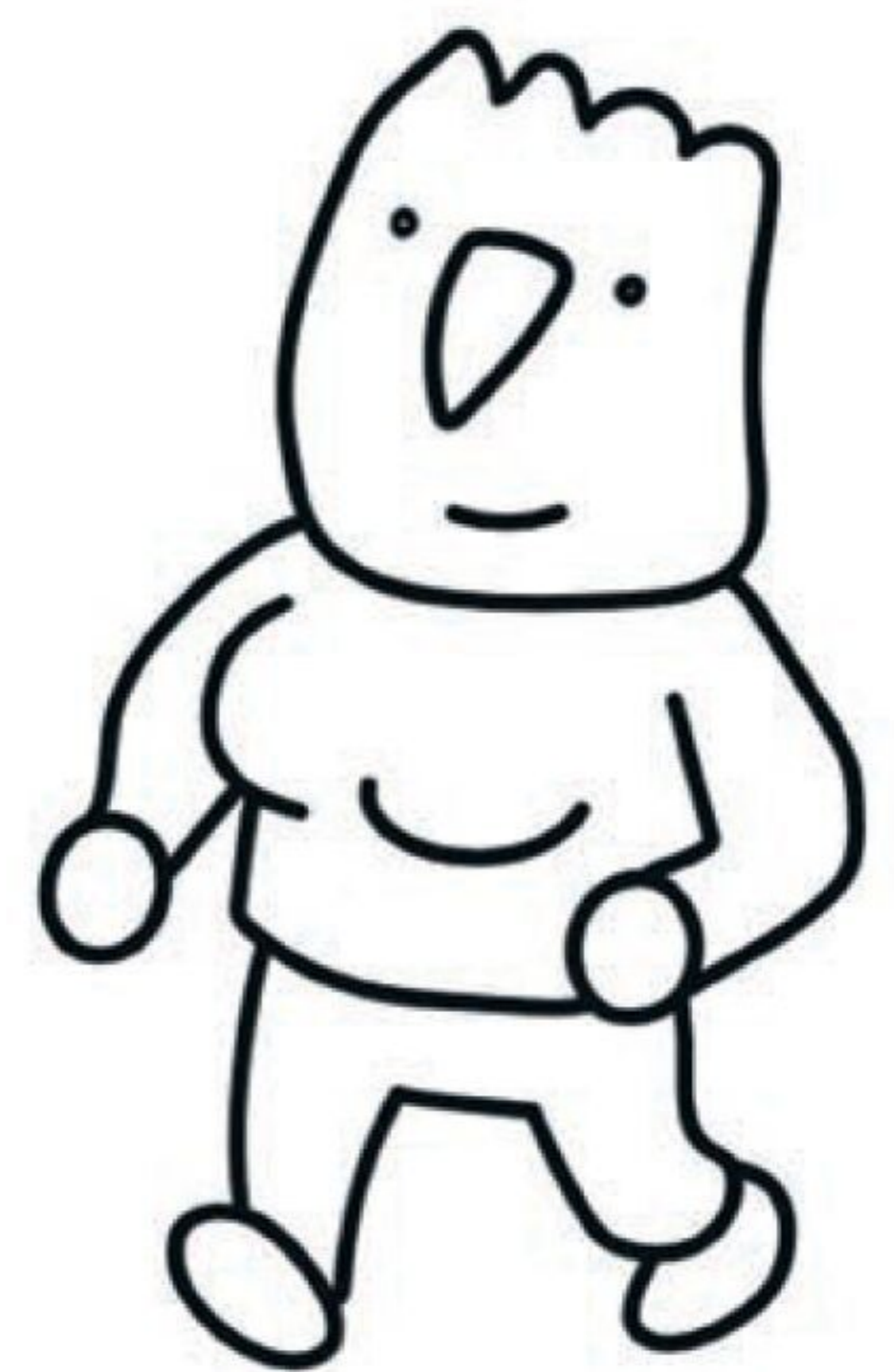
Script: CHRISTOPH SCHLEWINSKI



Veronika Ferkels
as
Gitti Grabowski



Richard Gier
as
Hubert Hirsch



Jennifär Lorentz
as
Babsi Bergmann

OUTSIDE – INTERSECTION – DAY

5:32 PM. A busy intersection, characters swarm around as they go about their daily business. Suddenly there's a loud noise, causing passers-by to scream and run away. A car has run a red light and crashed into a public bus. The driver of the car, HUBERT HIRSCH, lies dead in his car.

OUTSIDE – HIRSCH HOMESTEAD – DAY

3:11 PM. The players follow Hubert's earlier path from the accident scene to his home and see that Hubert is sitting in the building. They then discover a WOMAN (GITTI GRABOWSKI) lying under Hubert's car – a „do it yourself car repair“ magazine beside her – deftly working on one of the tires. The players' eyes dart over to:

OUTSIDE – INTERSECTION – DAY

5:32 PM. They spot Gitti Grabowski sitting in her car near the accident, watching the scene with a satisfied smile. The players look back:

OUTSIDE – HIRSCH HOMESTEAD – DAY.

3:11 PM. From there they follow Gitti's path to:

OUTSIDE – KIOSK – DAY

2:51 PM. Gitti resolutely leaves a kiosk, magazine in hand. The players follow Gitti's path further back to:

INSIDE – LAWYER'S OFFICE – DAY

2:01 PM. Gitti sits across from WERNER WIESEL and looks at him, stunned.

GITTI
But ... he can't do that ...

Wiesel shakes his head regretfully and slides a bundle of paper, a contract, to Gitti.

WIESEL
Unfortunately, yes, Mrs. Grabowski. From a legal point of view, there is nothing I can do for you. It's all written here in black and white, although I must admit it's quite cryptic. And you did sign ...

With a pale face, Gitti stares at the contract and then at Wiesel, struggling to hold back tears.

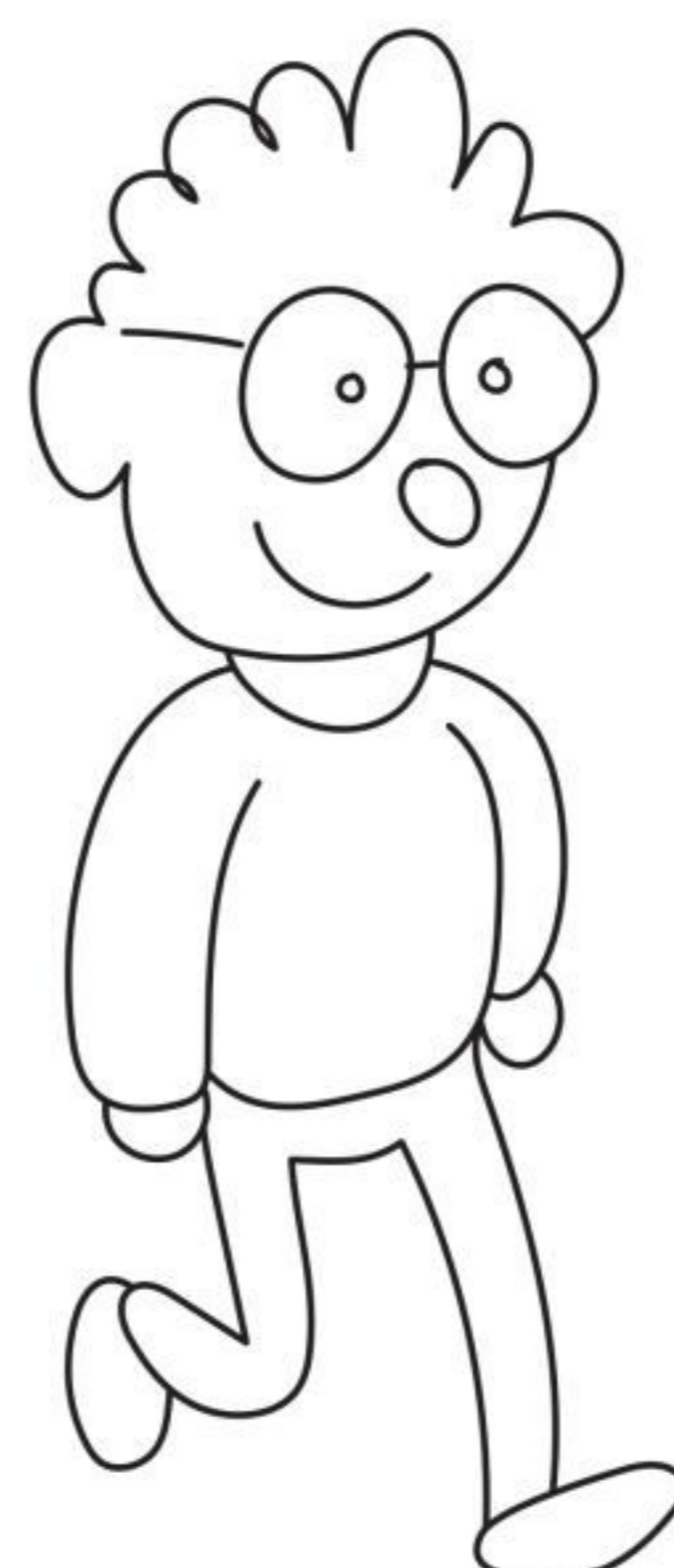
GITTI
(stammers) And ... and ... now what?

WIESEL
Talk to Mr. Hirsch again. Maybe you can change his mind.

GITTI
(In monotone) I've already tried that ...

Wiesel folds his hands apologetically.

WIESEL
As much as I would like to, I'm afraid I can't help you.



Continued on page 33

„I Wanted a Story-driven Game Where I Really Felt Like a Detective on a Case“

Johannes Sich, mastermind behind **MICROMACRO CRIME CITY**, recounts in this interview how a hidden-object picture was turned into a board game and what he and his partners in crime, Daniel Goll and Tobias Jochinke, are now up to.

By HARALD SCHRAPERS

Who took the lead in developing MICROMACRO – author or illustrator?

Johannes Sich: That's a good question, but difficult to answer. I am, after all, also the game's illustrator. So far, I have designed all the cases and also the drawings for them. The city map as a whole was a collaboration with Tobias Jochinke and Daniel Goll. With the game mechanics so closely tied in with the illustrations and the graphic design, it's all teamwork, really. We are currently figuring out how we can also team up for the next installments. The idea is to create a series, as people are already clamoring for more. A children's version is also in the works. So in an effort to speed things up, it would be wise to share the load.

What gave you the idea to offer the CRIME CITY hidden-object picture to a board game publisher, rather than publishing it, say, as a large-format book?

The main thing was to have a huge picture. When you are telling longer stories, there's no way around that. A person has to be able to walk through the city from bottom right to top left. Initially the game board was even larger. Something like that would never fit into a book. And then I had already published a game called **COSA NOSTRA**. So I had some previous experience in the gaming industry and felt that **MICROMACRO** could work as a board game.

A board game without pawns, but with playing

cards. Did the team develop these because they wanted to include some typical gaming elements?

No, not at all. In the beginning, we had envisioned this as a poster with the questions printed on it. The detailed answers were added only later. We were planning to stick something like index cards to the wall, showing the suspects, motives, crime weapons, and so on. But why not use cards that players can hold in their

hands? With this in mind, everything else suddenly fell into place.

Hidden-object books usually show little stories experienced by individual characters. And their plot is continued on the following pages. By contrast, the CRIME CITY picture is not only huge; it also spans all time levels simultaneously.

We wanted to link a macro level with the tiny details of a micro level. In order to achieve this, we tried different printing techniques which allowed us to depict these minute details, some of which can only be spotted with a magnifying glass. Quite similar to a banknote, actually, with its small information hardly visible to the naked eye. The game was supposed to be a giant, very detailed picture with tiny snippets of information in numerous spots, and these created puzzles that players needed to solve. From this arose the concept of a story being told as a time-delayed sequence – a means of showing the same points in time in the same picture, which was the solution to the question "How do I make this into a game?".

MICROMACRO is quite unique. Could you mention a game that inspired you?

Not really. We had this idea and realized after the first playtesting rounds that it was fun. And then we pushed through. In the graphic design area we took a lot of inspiration from hidden-object pictures as well as innovative artists and their highly



Johannes Sich designed all the **MICROMACRO** cases and also their pictures.

Photo: Alexander Lahn

Interview. Johannes Sich



The team behind **CRIME CITY** (from left): Edition Spielwiese publisher Michael Schmitt, Johannes Sich, Tobias Jochinke and Daniel Goll. Photo: Langkamp

detailed works of art. But there was no guidance for gameplay, no.

So what was the basic idea that made you go in this direction in the first place?

I have always wanted to create a detective game where you really have to solve criminal cases. I like Escape Rooms and **EXIT Games** – but they often involve puzzles that have little to do with the actual story. I wanted my game to be story-driven; I wanted to feel like a detective on a case. You have to remember that three years ago, when we were first starting on **MICROMACRO**, there was no such thing as today's boom in detective games.

If designers fall back on tried and tested gameplay elements, they can see far more clearly how a game is going to work out in the end. You and your team had no such guidance.

That's right. We had an idea about what we wanted to make. It wasn't until we playtested it that we realized how well it worked and how much fun it was. People wanted to play more cases, even after trying only the first, extremely crude prototypes. At the time we didn't even know this was turning into a board game. It could have become a video game on a screen. But it turns out it is so much more fun to solve the cases sitting around a table together.

MICROMACRO reminds some people of a popular cell phone video game ...

„Hidden Folks“, yeah, it looks similar at first glance, because it's also in black and white. But that is an animated hidden-object game where players are searching for things. Every now and then they have to figure something out. It's really great and very innovative, but at the end of the day it's still just a search game. It has nothing to do with the continuous story line unravelling in our game.

Why is MICROMACRO not as colorful as the other hidden-object pictures in books normally are?

For efficiency reasons, we had kept it black and white at first, so we could start playtesting it right away. Then people really liked that look, and so did we. It is still in the back of our minds to bring color in. But we would have to try and see whether that plays just as well, whether it would become more or less difficult that way. After all, coloring everything in would be extremely complex, especially without knowing if it works at all. Now, with everything black on white, a line is just a line. Printed in color, there are suddenly four layers on top of each other, so to speak. That might make it hard to see all the details.

It is crucial for the cases that all characters involved are easily distinguishable, even as a rather basic black and white drawing. Did you set up a table to document details such as head shapes or ear lengths?

No, not really. At the time I drew the cha-

racters the way I liked them. But for the test rounds two characters often looked too similar. Then I had to revise them or swap entire heads. Funny you should ask, actually. I just recently started an Excel spreadsheet with all the existing characters. As far as I know the city already has about 80 different ones.

You come from Velbert in North Rhine-Westphalia and are now living in Berlin. Which city provided the model for the houses and streets in CRIME CITY?

It's a mix, with a bit of Duesseldorf and Cologne thrown in for good measure, as this region was my adopted home before Berlin. Tobi and Daniel, both based in Duesseldorf, are still claiming that you can see from the drawings of my historic buildings that I now live in Berlin.

You want MICROMACRO to grow into a series. Are there already plans to develop the game's rules as well?

Our notebooks are filled to the brim. We have so many ideas, almost too many actually, right up to a digital implementation. That's why we condensed matters during the development of **CRIME CITY** – we were planning to use some of the stuff in later editions, provided the game was a success. For now, we like to focus on the essentials. In order to move forward and deliver something soon, the next edition will have a similar scale to the first game. There will be a few additions to the storytelling, without changing gameplay too much. (cs)

Review. MicroMacro Crime City

Gitti needs a moment to digest this sentence. She forces out a smile, crumples the contract into her handbag, and stands up ...

GITTI

Thank you, I ... I know, I think, what I have to do ...

... and then quickly leaves the office. The players look for where she came from and find her in:

OUTSIDE – GITTI'S GARDEN STORE – DAY

12:05 PM. A big, beautiful, busy store. The main room is teeming with characters milling around, and in the next room, Gitti stands across from Hubert, stunned. Due to the noise of the surroundings, their conversation can barely be perceived. Gitti pleads with Hubert, but he shakes his head firmly. He shoves a contract at her

and leaves the store. Gitti looks after him, her face flushed. The players can't find Gitti anymore, but they spot Hubert walking down the street to Gitti's garden store in a good mood. They track his path backwards and end up at ...

INSIDE – BABSI'S FLOWER SHOP – DAY

10:30 AM. A small, dingy flower store with no customers. BABSI BERGMANN, a big-chested, good-looking woman, falls around Hubert's neck. A cry of joy is heard, and Hubert lasciviously presses Babsi against him. On the counter is a photo of Gitti's garden store inside an opened present.

INSIDE – GAME ROOM – EVENING

Now the players know everything: Hubert is having an affair with Babsi and wants to give her Gitti's garden store as a present, as well as let Gitti know. Gitti, her livelihood threatened, has no other choice but to get him out of the way. The players lean back in satisfaction. But one of them is already reaching into the game box to pull out an envelope with the next case.

INSIDE – CHRISTOPH'S WORKPLACE – DAY

Christoph sits at his computer and types this sentence. A narrator can be heard (*spoken in English by Morgan Freeman*).

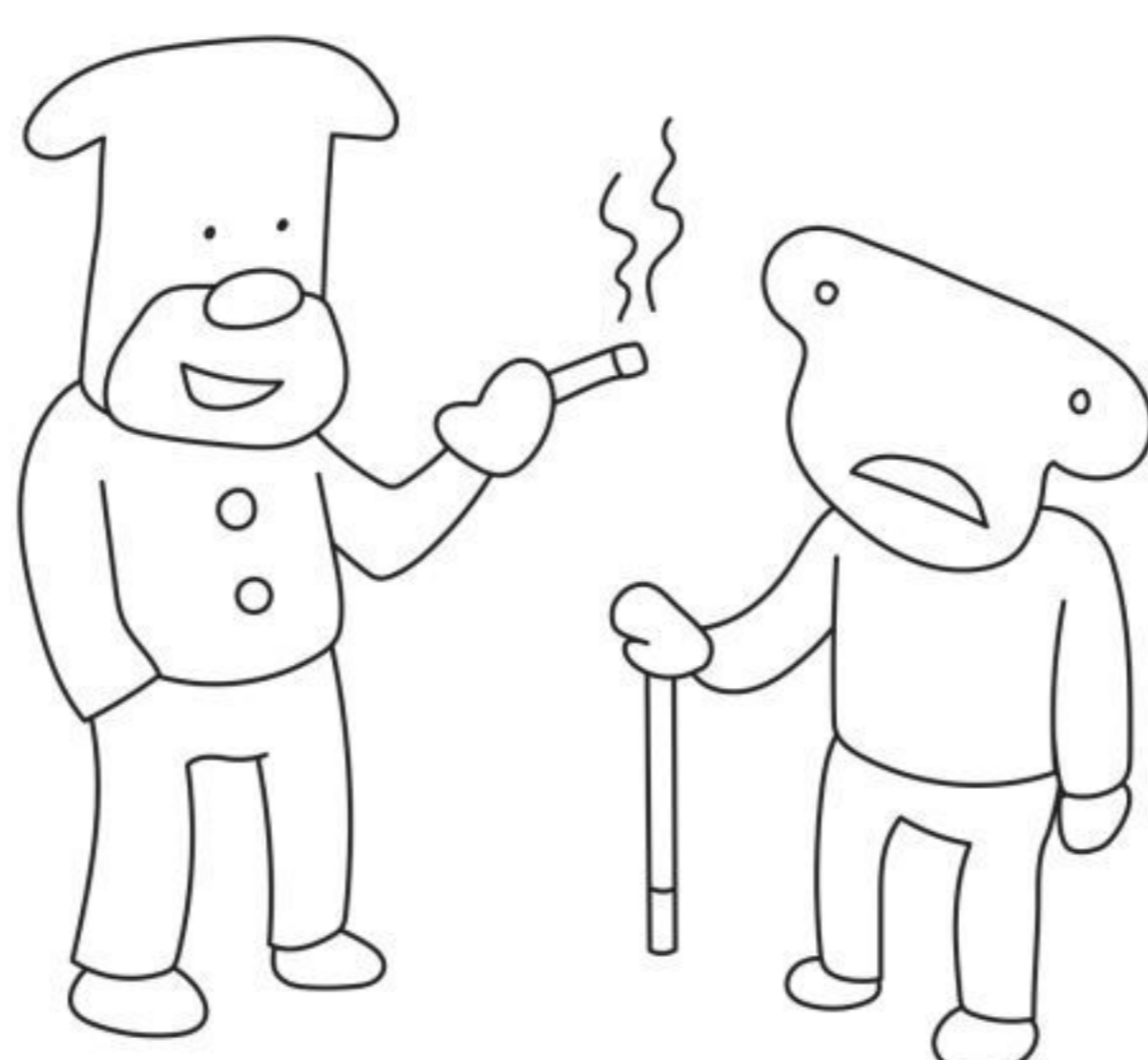
NARRATOR

Christoph wonders if he was able to convey the mechanics of the game. After all, he didn't mention that there are clue cards that direct players to specific areas of the city or aspects of the case, which they work through piece by piece. But since – according to the rules – there's a difficult variant where you're supposed to solve the case without cards, he thinks that's okay. But what does he think of this game?

Christoph rolls a cigarette and lights it. Before he takes a drag, he puts it in the ashtray. A thought needs to be written down (as well as these two sentences).

NARRATOR

Christoph already thinks that **MICROMACRO CRIME CITY** is extraordinary. (*laughs*) He nods. And there are several reasons for that. First and foremost: it's incredibly easy to teach. There's even a sample case on the outside of the game box, and once you've solved it, you know how to play. No more than two minutes have passed and you've already gotten a sense of achievement! This makes **MICROMACRO CRIME CITY** a game you can, or COULD, put in front of EVERYONE. The simplicity makes it a great family game, but the themes involved pack a punch. I wonder if he'd play it with eight-year-olds when it involves prostitution, fetish parties and, again and again, murder?

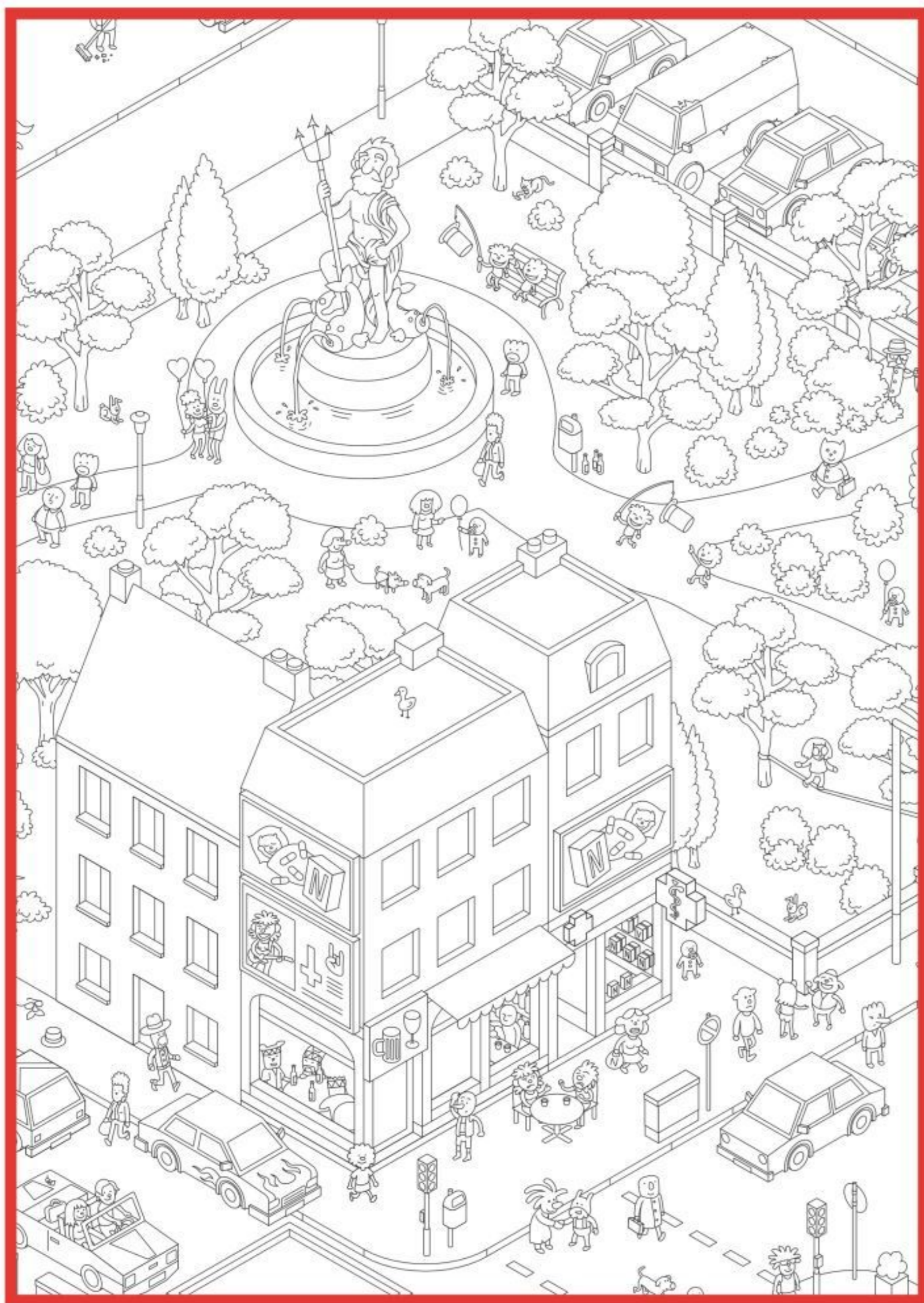


THE KING'S DILEMMA



Luma





Review. MicroMacro Crime City

Christoph leans back and stares thoughtfully at his monitor. He absently takes the smoking cigarette from the ashtray, then immediately puts it down. A thought occurs.

NARRATOR

He wouldn't. Christoph thinks that it should say "Ages 12+" on the box. At least that was the age of the children in the family with whom he last played the game. In response to his usual question as to whether they liked the game, he

only got thumbs up of approval. The round they played was a bit unlucky, because all the cases that were randomly pulled out of the box had something to do with poison attacks. So he loaned the game to this family, and they completely played their way through it within a week. They hung the giant pictures up on the wall and solved one case at a time. Since then, they've been pretty hot for new crimes to solve. Maybe that's a problem, Christoph thinks. Once you've caught the bug, the cases in the box can be handled in no time ... Oh, he's made a mistake there ...

Christoph inspects the text, deletes something, wants to reach for a cigarette, but types instead.

NARRATOR
... the cases in the box can be solved in no time. But at least there are 16 of them in the box ... Christoph thinks about what to write to summarize the game.

Christoph takes the cigarette, brings it to his mouth, but it is only a bar of ash – and it crumbles onto the keyboard. Christoph, annoyed, puts the stub in the ashtray, blows the keyboard clean, coughs briefly, and then starts writing again.

NARRATOR

He thinks this conclusion is appropriate: **MIRCOMACRO CRIME CITY** is unique thanks to its combination of a huge drawing with hidden objects, a detective mindset and a two-minute explanation time. This fact also forgives the game's redundancy, both in terms of theme and approach to cases. Yet it's still fascinating, even if it can be a bit monotonous in the long run. (sb)

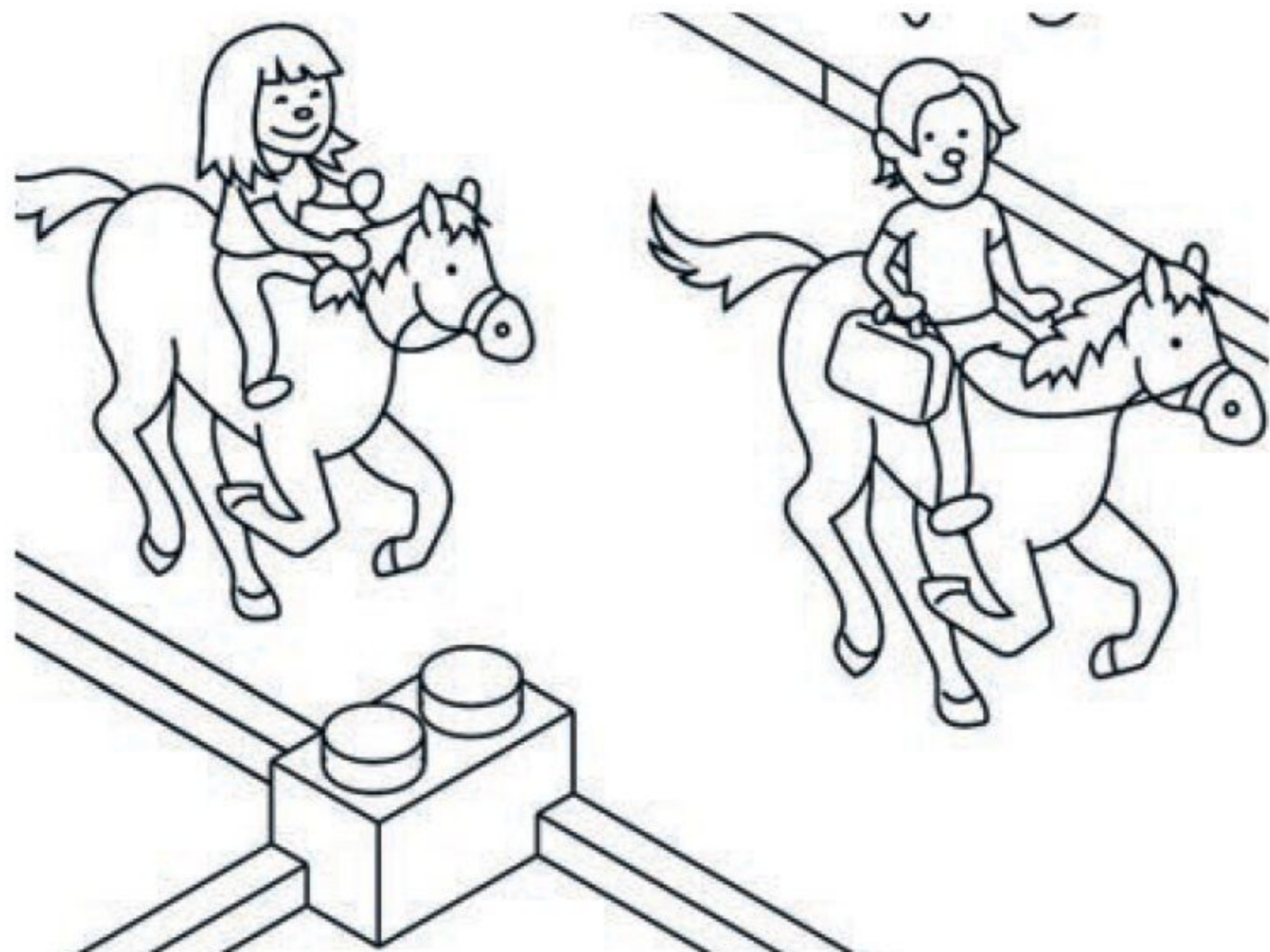


Johannes Sich: **MicroMacro Crime City** (Edition Spielwiese), illustrations: Johannes Sich, Daniel Goll, Tobias Jochinke; for 1–4 players, about 8+ years, duration: about 15–45 Minuten (depending on the case), price: about 25 Euro.



INFAMOUS GANGSTERS

So far, exactly one of the **MICROMACRO** team has also been immortalized as a protagonist in the game: Tobias Jochinke. Together with his wife, by the way. (A warning: the bit that follows here does contain spoilers!). Tobias and Linda are the robber couple in „Bank Heist,“ which came about this way, as



Johannes Sich reports: "Tobi and Linda got married while we were working together on **MICROMACRO CRIME CITY** in the early stages. As a gift, I included a case in the city in which the two of them are the protagonists. Tobi and Linda both like to ride horses, hence the part about 'stealing horses together.' At their wedding, we put up a giant poster where the guests could play the case. Of course, that was a huge surprise."

Since the case worked very well, it was moved to **CRIME CITY**, modified a bit in terms of content. The names were changed, and Tobias and Linda became "the infamous gangster couple Jessy & James".
AB/sb

Reviewer	Playing Appeal
Christoph Schlewinski	8
Udo Bartsch	7
Andreas Becker*	8
L.U. Dikus**	8
Stefan Ducksch***	8
Wieland Herold****	8
Stephan Kessler*****	8
Marie Poenisch*****	9
Harald Schrapers*****	9

* The narrative power inherent in each case is grandiose. Each group automatically writes a script about the case they are investigating. An extremely communicative hidden object game.

** When seen in the light: highly original and delightful!

*** Great game idea, more of them please! Effectively, however, only playable in pairs, because too many players can block your view of the picture.

**** Similar to Brand's **EXIT** games, Johannes Sich's **MICROMACRO** approach should have what it takes to become a long-running hit.

***** Unfold and go on a journey of discovery. Highly stimulating even for newcomers.

***** A great and innovative game. Prefer it with two.

***** A brilliant idea for two: a giant city map with playing cards is far from an actual board game, but it is an engaging in-between activity.

Programming With Coins

Nowadays, six-sided dice are the classic random generators in our cultural area. More recent variants modified the print faces on the dice and the number of sides. The latter came up with fantasy role-playing games. But as early as many centuries ago, people already used to throw a number of shells or conches and assign a result to this, depending on how many of these landed with their openings face up or face down. Based on the same principle, several coins can also be used to lead to a specific result.

By **CHRISTWART CONRAD**

In **YIN YANG**, the so-called Divination throw, done with six metal coins with a square hole in the middle, defines the resources and actions that are available depending on the situation. Players are supposed to shake the coins inside the Divination shell, a turtle shell made of metal – a heavy gimmick, without doubt, that causes considerable noise. If you don't pay attention to carefully covering the opening, you might have to pick up some of the coins from the floor.

Opinions differ a lot as to how much the Divination shell spits out the coins evenhandedly or just more or less in the same order in which they were put in there. And since which side of the coin faces up is hardly recognizable from a distance (even though the Yang side has a small white adhesive point and the Yin side has a black one on it), some of my player groups simply decided to shake **OTHELLO** disks in a dice cup instead.

On a gameboard showing a map of ancient China, players move their figure along a road network across the provin-



ces, collect plastic gems that represent goods, and erect temples. All this can't be done just like that, since you need the appropriate action tiles and, most of all, specific coin-tossing results.

To begin with, you use the six coin sides you have thrown to form two groups of three coins each, which gets you one action tile for the rest of the game and one immediate action. In the next phase, you arrange the six coins in three pairs. Two white sides, for example, stand for one step along the land route, whereas a mixed pair allows you to either collect a good or build a temple.

It goes without saying that reasonably well-shuffled Divination coins give you a wide scope for decision-making. You puzzle things over and keep moving the coins on your player board until you are satisfied with the outcome. But your options are accordingly poor if (almost) all coins have landed on the same side. If you have repeatedly been ill-treated by the Gods in such a way, you can forget about winning the race for victory. You can turn unusable actions into a chance for another goods token, but this is only kind of a stopgap. In the worst case, you can re-throw the coins, provided you tear down one of your temples.



The turtle shell has an attractive look, but it is only of limited suitability as a „coin cup.“ According to the coin results, you choose actions on the Tai Ji board (illustrations left, top right), program them on your player board, and execute them on the main board with its provinces (top). Photos: Conrad

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Review. Yin Yang

YIN YANG-VARIANTS FOR REDUCING FRUSTRATION

The travelers through China are subjected strongly to Lady Luck's influence. But just a few minor modifications can lessen the bad-luck potential.

First: When taking an action tile from the Upper Divination section in the „Interpreting a Divination“ part of phase 2, do not block the applicable space with a black Gods' Will token. This way, the subsequent players still have access to all action tiles (except for the tile that has been blocked since the beginning of the round).

Second: After shaking your coins out of the shell in the Divination phase,

Number of card functions used	4	3	2	1	0
4 player	0	4	3	2	0
3 player	-	0	4	2	0
2 player	-	-	0	2	0

you don't let any points on the Yin and Yang tracks go to waste; instead, you advance the respective value indicator onto space 8, then move it back to space 0 and take a good from the Tai Ji board. After that, record the remaining Yin values or Yang values on the tracks.

Third: Instead of randomly drawing two out of your four Divine Intervention cards during the set-up, you keep all four and also may use all of them during the game. At the end of the game, however, you no longer simply score two points for every unused card; now the number of points depends on how often the respective function has been used by the

other players. If, for instance, three players in a four-player game have used „Ride with the Clouds,“ the player who has passed on this card scores four points. CC/swb

In the end, players score for temple majorities in the provinces. In addition, you score for the goods you collected and arranged in your personal 4-x-4 grid. Each complete line of four tokens is scored and rewards you for certain goods or achievements, up to a maximum of ten different scores.

YIN YANG distinguishes itself by a random throwing mechanism that precedes a traditional logistical challenge in combination with a majority principle. Basically, this offers two different ways to play. After all players, in turn, have thrown the Divination coins, they start pondering their next move, even if it isn't that player's turn yet. You observe the other players' turn only marginally. Once you begin your turn and you realize that the conditions have changed (for instance, because temple sites have been occupied or goods have been taken), you

readjust – which can take some time in an extreme case, especially in the last round.

If you play this way, the playing time almost keeps within the limits suggested on the game box. Or players play strictly one after another, observing the other players' actions, and only get started when their own turn begin. It goes without saying that this can easily double the playing time, depending on the number of participants. After all, the actual way of playing is a matter of taste and a choice between a solitary feel at a reasonable duration or a time-consuming involvement. But in either case, this game (unlike **ROBO RALLY**) is not about programming your move without knowing the other players' actions, although the storage areas of your personal board suggest this.

I Better keep a safe distance

Players don't necessarily get in each other's way on the board. I experienced several games with hardly any contact of the figures. The reason might be that otherwise things could go pretty badly for the next player, so that players would be well advised to either progress up in the order or to keep a safe distance.

ROBO RALLY didn't convince all spielbox reviewers either, by the way: In spielbox issue 1/00, the average rating was 6.6. And even the Greater Devil from **IN TEUFELS KÜCHE** was not completely convincing: In the end, the game was rated 6.5 in spielbox issue 4/93.



One of many luck factors in **YIN YANG**: the Divine Intervention cards.

Many little parameters, as well as entrance and access restrictions, don't contribute much to the depth of play, but generate frustration and make the entire game unnecessarily cumbersome. Numerous fortuities, such as an inequitable allocation of the unevenly strong Divine Intervention cards, leave players with an insipid feeling. The variable distribution of the ten scoring tiles is not worth the effort. And the seemingly deliberate layout of the goods spaces is eventually irrelevant for thought-out turns.

le steps. You are lucky if you get hold of a plentiful number of goods tokens. And the random blocking of a tile at the beginning of each round also has a considerably weaker effect than an arbitrary allocation of tiles to spaces at the beginning of the game.

Such accessories are an embellishment rather than tactical aspiration. But those players who perceive them as an expression of an artistic work might be fond of **YIN YANG**. Its visual and material presentation (especially the atmospheric cover picture) attract attention. Some of the equipment, however, doesn't meet expectations. One of my fellow players, for example, first didn't want to believe that the game uses ordinary wooden cubes to represent temples: a stylistic inconsistency. And in terms of its mechanisms, the game is kind of piecemeal. On top of that, players with strategic ambitions are unfortunately thwarted time and again; consequently, the game mainly qualifies for the target group of occasional players, if they have the rules explained to them. (sbw)



DuGuWei: Yin Yang (BGNations), illustrations: Carton; for 1-4 players, about 12+ years, duration: about 60-90 minutes, price: about 65 Euros.

Reviewer	Playing Appeal
Christwart Conrad	5
Andreas Becker*	6
Stefan Ducksch**	7
Gerald Rüscher	5

* A typical case of overproduction. The turtle shell as a cup for shaking and throwing the coins doesn't work well. Besides this, the luck factor is extremely high: If you are the last to have your turn, you can be hit hard. And it is more lucrative to focus on collecting goods and not to be too ambitious about the majority scorings for the provinces. The bottom line is that **YIN YANG** contains good ideas, but lacks fine-tuning.

** **ROBO RALLY** in China: Visually appealing majority game with a programming task. Great materials, but the turtle shell is impractical as a „coin cup.“ The balance of the Divine Intervention cards is critical, and the removal of an opponent's temple is too strong.

A POLEMIC FOR MORE FUNCTIONALITY IN THE GAME (USING THE EXAMPLE YIN YANG)

It is understandable that you might be impressed by the visual appearance of a game before you yet know its construction and way of playing. A cover picture that bears comparison with a painting can be appreciated right away, and photos of the material inside the box add to that first impression.

When you then unpack the box and are eager to start playing, you often need to overcome a number of hurdles. This begins with the instruction to put the board on the table according to the number of players – no word about how to identify the appropriate side. But I want to give you a hint: At the bottom right on the four-player side, the two sequences of numbers are labeled „1st“ and „2nd,“ whereas both labels are written in both rows in the corresponding position on the other side.

The circular array of the legend for the Upper Divination section also raises questions – especially as to where the bottom section and where the upper section are. Even though a little footnote, an example in the instructions, and a mini-text on the

Tai Ji board itself answer this question clearly, this doesn't spare the players the trouble of rearranging all the three-part codes (printed in different orientations) in their mind so that these become compatible with their own board.

And finally, the gimmick has to get its come-uppance. What showpiece has there been in a game that incited players to look at it, listen to it, or touch it, but furthermore actually had an effective function in terms of play? What comes to my mind right away is the Greater Devil from Alex Randolph's **IN TEUFELS KÜCHE** (F.X. Schmid 1993) – that became the benchmark of all gimmicks. But the shell of a turtle that leaves so little space between its abdominal wall and its back that the coins you have thrown in there can hardly be turned around and mixed – that is not convincing.

The two sides of the metal coins are not so easy to memorize either – at least not for people from the western world. Again, players are confronted with the

problem that they twice need to assign three (graphic) characters/symbols to one another: the actual coin side (two Chinese characters or 24 bars arranged in a circle and sometimes in a broken line), its name (Yin or Yang) and its color (black or white). To begin with, the instructions don't go into details about this: Aha, Yin tokens and Yang tokens are in the game. Black tokens and white ones.



Sometimes, **YIN YANG** actually seems like a searching game to me. Even after the tenth game, there are still things to discover. Players can take it with humor that the preparation of the first game took some time, but they all understand the game by now and can go shopping in ancient China. But how about simply lowering the initial hurdles a bit, so that the mind stays all the more awake for delving deeply into the game concept?

CHRISTWART CONRAD/sbw



Digital Stopgaps

The pandemic also pushes analog board gamers into virtual worlds

Corona forces us all into isolation. At a time when large groups sitting around a table are simply not an option, the virtual world provides an alternative. After years as niche activities, digital board gaming platforms have now become well established and offer attractive opportunities for enthusiastic gamers. We had a go and gave them a try.

By **GERALD RÜSCHER**

The lineup can be divided into two categories: On the one hand, there are app implementations of individual games. For 5 to 20 dollars, users can download professional programs that allow them to compete against other players or an artificial intelligence (AI). Far more interesting, however, are the large board gaming platforms. Like a kind of digital board game collection, they offer a whole world of titles: Brettspielwelt, Yucata, Board Game Arena, Tabletopia and Tabletop Simulator. We took a look at their game selection, costs, requirements, the platform type, and the quality of the implementation.

When talking about digital gaming platforms, there are a couple of terms we need to clarify first, the most essential one being "type." There are two basic approaches to making games available in a digital format: app or virtual table. Platforms that implement games in an app depict gameplay in a slightly ab-

stract way. Components are simplified and operated by all sorts of buttons. The app knows all the rules of the game and makes sure you all play correctly.

Virtual tables take a different approach. They display components in a three-dimensional way, just as they would appear on a real table. Players can move all the material back and forth with their mouse, roll dice, draw cards, and move pawns. And they are responsible for following the rules. Virtual tables require higher end devices. Tablets are often unsuitable; instead, a PC or laptop is required, preferably with an HD monitor and an inexpensive graphics card. The learning curve is steeper here, as users first have to familiarize themselves with all the controls. This is where some experience with video games comes in handy. Which approach you like better depends on your preferences: Apps are quick and easy, while the virtual table allows you to engage with the game and think for yourself.

A second feature is "play time": In real-time games, all participants are sitting in front of their devices at the same time and play simultaneously, meaning a game usually lasts about as long as it would at an actual table. In contrast, the participants in turn-based games do not necessarily act simultaneously, but can each make a move and then log out. This allows them to play multiple games at the same time. Depending on how fast they make their moves, a game can be over in an hour – or sometimes take days.

Finally, users may have to pay: Some platforms are free to play, others require a one-off payment, and others offer subscriptions or in-app purchases. For a monthly fee, premium subscriptions unlock additional games or game modes. Once the subscription expires, these features are no longer available. In-app purchases usually offer particularly well-implemented games that remain permanently in your possession.

While Brettspielwelt (right) cannot fully convince, Tabletop Simulator, Board Game Arena, Tabletopia, and Yucata (left side, from top left clockwise) get better ratings.

Screenshots: Rüscher



I Brettspielwelt

Brettspielwelt (BSW) is the dinosaur among the digital gaming platforms. Launched in 2001, it used to be top dog for quite some time. BSW is a free web portal where, after registering, you can play nearly 70 games as apps in real-time mode. I used to be a regular on BSW for many years, but then lost interest. Unfortunately, the platform has become very outdated, and the most recent update was somewhat disappointing regarding user-friendliness. The range of games has been fairly limited for quite a while now, and there are only two titles from the current season: **THE CASTLES OF TUSCANY** and **CLEVER CUBED** (see also page 50). While the games themselves are implemented quite handily, starting new rounds has become painfully confusing. My test rounds sometimes spent longer organizing a game than actually playing it. The rule is: If you get in, it's fun. But like I said: if ...

I Yucata

The web portal Yucata, which started as a one-man project, has been online for just under 20 years as well. Around 160 games are offered free of charge as apps, and these are played turn-based. You can register or play as an anonymous guest. Yucata has remained true to its roots. The user interface is solid, the starting of new games is straightforward and without frills. Real-time gaming is possible here, if a bit cumbersome. But the platform shows its true strength in the running of several turn-based games at once. Like in simul chess, it allows you to play multiple games at a time – as if you were in some kind of digital training camp. Regrettably, Yucata is also not very up-to-date. New or very recent titles are quite rare.

I Board Game Arena

Board Game Arena (BGA), which has been around since 2010 and has just been bought by Asmodee, is also a web

portal. Around 270 games are presented as apps, and can be played either real-time or turn-based. However, not all of them are free of charge: Around 30 popular titles, such as **ROLL FOR THE GALAXY** or **TERRA MYSTICA**, are only available as premium content. Which in BGA's case means that at least one player must have a premium subscription. This is on offer for the amount of 2 to 4 dollars per month, depending on the package. BGA manages to impress above all with its huge, international player base. The intros to new games is clear, and the games are well-designed. Particularly nice: BGA logs player moves in a side panel, so players can track each other's moves at any time.

I Tabletopia

Tabletopia is one of the two platforms that emulate a virtual gaming table. Since no rules need to be programmed for this approach, implementing new games is a lot easier than on the portals outli-

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Report. Test of Digital Gaming Worlds

	Brettspielwelt	Yucata	Board Game Arena	Tabletopia	Tabletop Simulator
Type	Apps	Apps	Apps	Virtual table	Virtual table
Real-time	Yes	–	Yes	Yes	Yes
Turn-based	–	Yes	–	Yes	–
Number of games	66	164	271	1,551	>20,000
of these premium	–	–	33	60	42
Purchasing price	–	–	–	–	\$ 7–20
Subscription	–	–	\$ 2–4/month	\$ 5–10/month	–
Premium games	–	–	–	about \$ 5/game	about \$ 7/game
Devices	Tablet/PC	Tablet/PC	Tablet/PC	PC	PC

Ratings

Starting a game	4	8	8	8	7
Playing a game	8	8	8	6	7
Game selection	4	5	7	9	10
Up-to-dateness	5	4	6	10	10
Price	10	10	8	7	8
Overall rating	6	7	8	7	9

ned above. As a result, Tabletopia offers more than 1,500 titles that can be played either in a browser or in a separate application. In its basic version, Tabletopia is free of charge and thus ideal if you like to familiarize yourself with virtual tables. It also offers around 60 premium games, for example **WINGSPAN** or **ORLÉANS**, which can be unlocked by a subscription of 5 to 10 dollars a month or purchased with a one-off payment.

Several game designers and publishers use Tabletopia for playtesting and showcasing, so new and brand-new games are always on offer. The entry portal is excellently designed: For each game there is a detailed description including links and a discussion forum; access to new games is quick and easy. However, the quality of the games themselves varies, depending on how much effort has been invested

in their implementation. Also, there are some annoying details, such as the missing keyboard shortcuts. Especially irritating is the fact that moving the view and picking up components is done with the same mouse button. One wrong click – and your viewing angle has shifted. This could do with a bit of fine-tuning.

I Tabletop Simulator

Tabletop Simulator (TTS), featured in detail in spielbox 1/20, also offers a virtual table. The interface is very similar to Tabletopia, but more sophisticated and flexible. TTS needs to be purchased and installed once for 7 to 20 dollars and then offers players maximum freedom: dice, cards, pawns can be manipulated, spawned or deleted at will. Stacking pawns, flicking discs, applying house rules, grabbing components from other games, moving backwards or forwards in time – all of this is possible without any hitches.

In addition, TTS offers a huge number of games: 42 premium titles such as **SCYTHE** or **ZOMBICIDE** as well as far more than 20,000 free games, although many of them prove to be duplicates or even triplicates. This is because TTS makes it so easy to create new games or customize variants. **PULSAR 2849** with “Star Trek” characters? **SECRET HITLER** with Donald Trump? No problem on TTS, because the games are implemented by a large, very active community in their leisure time.

In the past, TTS has been repeatedly criticized for alleged copyright infringements. And indeed, there are quite a few games whose lawful status is at least doubtful. But TTS is not a legal vacuum, for Valve, the operator of the TTS gaming workshop, is now removing titles from the site quickly and unbureaucratically at the request of their copyright holders. In my opinion, publishers should be smarter and make use of all this creative energy from countless fan projects. Nowhere else are they likely to source digital implementations as cheaply as on TTS. Either way, once players know their way around, the range of TTS is outstanding.

I Conclusion

Which platform you choose, depends of course on your own preferences. Some players base their choice on the availability of their favorite games. For easy access to games with an eye on the correct rules being enforced, Board Game Arena has become the platform of choice. Not least because of the huge player community.

If you prefer virtual tables, there is really no alternative to TTS. While the entry threshold is significantly higher than with BGA and the platform works best with a regular round, once you get the hang of it, you will be rewarded with a gaming experience that is closer to a real games table than any other system. (cs)

Main menu of Tabletop Simulator.



Creating Synergies in Your Hand



Typical **FANTASY REALMS** interconnection: the War Dirigible is worth a lot of points, but only with an army; Knights are weaker without a leader. The Princess, however, grants rewards for each army. There is also an app for this game.

Photos: Schrapers

By HARALD SCHRAPERS

You start the game with a hand of seven cards, draw one, then discard one. That's it, that's **FANTASY REALMS**. The only unusual thing about this game is that discards are spread face up on the table. Players can choose between drawing from these discarded cards or from the deck. If players frequently draw from the discards, the game will last a bit longer because, as soon as the discard pile reaches ten cards, the game ends. Once the game is over it's time to total the score of your seven cards; whoever has the most points wins.

Although the design of the cards is reminiscent of games like **MAGIC**, there is no sophisticated mechanism such as deck building. Despite the light mechanics, **FANTASY REALMS** should not be dismissed as trite. Each card has a different bonus and/or penalty, and this quickly gets your brain buzzing. Almost every one of the 53 cards has interactions with other cards.

Let's take a closer look. The War Dirigible I have is worth 35 points, but it's blanked, which means it gives me zero points unless I have an army. So I grab the Knights, but they incur an eight-point penalty if I don't have a leader. That's where the Princess comes in handy, she even gives out an eight-point bonus per army. Now I draw the army card Rangers, which fits perfectly with the Princess.

The first time you play this game, you won't be able to enjoy this interplay. That will come with a bit of experience. You still have to stay focused, because the



penalties, bonuses and blanks aren't grasped intuitively. However, you learn quickly that cards with a low base value promise high bonuses, while a high base value is either tied to prerequisites or results in penalties. But it's so much fun when you get a lot of synergies.

On the other hand, cards like Collector and Gem of Order, which respectively reward multiples and runs with up to 150 points, seem like outliers in **FANTASY REALMS**. Actually, this card game is about recognizing connections despite apparent chaos, it's not about arranging cards.

Only after using the scoring pad, which has up to 25 item lines per player, do I know if I have won. This gives you an idea of how many elements you need to keep in mind during the game. An alternative to the score pad is the excellent Fantasy Realms app from Wizkids. Although you can't show off your success and the greatest card combos as easily, it is much faster. And it guarantees that this bookkeeping challenge will run reasonably briskly for up to four players. **FANTASY REALMS** is also recommended for two players, because there's a drafting variant. (tw)



Bruce Glassco: Fantasy Realms (Wizkids), illustrations: Octographics.net; for 2–6 players, about 10+ years, duration: about 20 minutes, price: about 20 Euros.

Reviewer	Playing appeal
Harald Schrapers	8
Andreas Becker*	8
Stefan Ducksch**	6
Wieland Herold***	8
Marie Poenisch****	9
Gerald Rüscher	6

* Great closer, short and crisp, and highly luck-dependent – but that makes it so entertaining. Cool app.
 ** Plays quickly and scoring is easy to understand. Be sure to use the scoring app! As a nightcap okay, but won't captivate for long.
 *** It's contagious. Glassco's game is well suited for COVID-19 restriction, because I find it works best in small groups of two and three.
 **** Chasing the high score is addictive.



With Deductions to the B-movie Score



By **STEPHAN KESSLER**

Thrillers are not without reason a popular film genre. Emotions are directly transported. Shivers run down the neck when the protagonist enters the room with the killer. We hold our breath only to release the tension with a deep sigh.

Fifteen years ago in the Crafton Family Mansion, five people became the victim of a killer who afterwards disappeared without a trace. After the traumatic event, the children of the victims were split up into different adoptive families. Only now, years later, they dare to return to the original home after receiving a mysterious invitation. We are the children. Therefore, we are either siblings or cousins. A family tree is enclosed so that we can clarify the intricate family relationships at any time. And these are relevant, because one parent was apparently able to escape ...

The creators of the "ESCAPE ROOM" games promise not more and not less than a thriller with **NIGHTMARE HORROR ADVENTURES**, they want to carry the emotions of the genre from the screen to a game. And they do it in an extremely sophisticated way. This also includes the described mysterious beginning scenario.

Ideally, five people with strong nerves would dive into this creepy adventure. If necessary, someone can take two characters. The personal profiles contain background information which reveal premonitions to certain places. More can't be said at this point as to not spoil anything, but more instructions can be found.

Twists and surprises are part of the program like in any good B-movie. Each game group can live out the role-playing aspect to a greater or lesser extent, depending on their preference. For example, the introductory text must be read either enthusiastically or arrogantly.

A web app accompanies the game. It guides the user through the experience in



a technically appealing way, while it acts pleasantly in the background. It triggers specific actions. Otherwise, the game consists of discovering the mansion and deciphering its background story. What happened really? Who is hiding what?

We start in front of the Estate and decide which room to explore. The mansion is represented by initially face-down place tiles which are gradually turned over. The corners of the tiles can be searched if the group agrees to it. A different deck describes what has been found. Often this causes individual characters to remember experiences from their childhood. Fragments of these memories combined with the pieces of the story gradually lead to the veil being lifted. We understand more and more what must have taken place. However, the actions to explore the mansion are limited. A clock in the app has to be pressed after every action – and sometimes there is a power outage.

Then the players get up and put on eye masks. This recurring element leads to moments that remain unforgettable. No other game has made me this paranoid. It's dead silent around the table and I count

the seconds until something happens. Did I hear something rustling next to me? Did something just brush against the back of my neck?

This game is special and can deliver on its bold promise: thrills in their purest form! But even beyond that, the game elements allow for exciting discussions that lead to surprising discoveries and a brilliant finale. The story itself is ultimately very contrived and not exactly realistic. This makes **NIGHTMARE** also polarizing. It's definitely not for people that like listing the plot holes after a movie. Instead, the focus is on the experience as a whole. And it is like an independent film that creates something unique through extraordinary ideas, even if there are deductions to the score.

NIGHTMARE can only be played once, but there are instructions on the homepage on how to reset the game. It therefore virtually cries out for a second part. However, it is doubtful that this form of uniqueness can be repeated. But one is still allowed to dream: **NIGHTMARE** itself is in any case not a nightmare. (dm)



Team Identity Games: Nightmare Horror Adventures. Welcome to Crafton Mansion (Noris); for 4 - 5 players (best with 5), about 16+ years, duration: about 120 - 240 minutes, price: about 25 Euros.

Reviewer	Playing appeal
Stephan Kessler	8

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Lots of Fun in Shallow Waters



Globetrotter tip for this harbour: definitely visit the “Shady Turtle” and order a Mockturtle. This is one example of the story book, beautifully illustrated by Nadezhda Tikhomirova and Anton Fadeev.

I want to wipe out a whole family. That’s what it says in my biography. But before I can achieve that, I will first have to get to the edge of the ocean – and further. I do a lot for my crew, but for myself just a tiny little bit more. **FORGOTTEN WATERS** is great, cooperative pirate fun.

By **MAREN HOFFMANN**

Already as children we learn Robbery, Murder, and Manslaughter are pretty bad, but somehow it makes it a bit more okay when you have a nice ship and wear an eye patch. Later, once you are finally allowed to watch “Pirates of the Caribbean”, it reinforces the notion that pirates are the cooler gang than naval officers. And who wouldn’t want to be a part of something when it’s all about rum and honour – pardon me, glory and honour, magic, treasure and big secrets?

Objectively, the mechanics of **FORGOTTEN WATERS** are excruciatingly simple. You

place your character on an action space, roll the dice, get lucky or unlucky, and then move on. Sounds horrible, doesn’t it? But sometimes it’s like in the kitchen, simplicity can yield great results. Potatoes with butter and salt are a wonderful meal when you use first class ingredients, have beautiful surroundings, and the company around the table is inspiring.

But back on board, where we’d rather have moldy rusk and rough company, the crew has to go hungry more often than not and in every port you ask yourself whether it should be a new tattoo, a new

lover, or rather a fine tuning of the guns. The magic word is immersion – and it goes far beyond thematic involvement. The authors have created an epic game world in which you are completely immersed.

This is an art that owes itself, above all, to the power of language. The story is simply extremely well written. Every round, we were laughing our heads off. Too complex of rules would be a hindrance, therefore, all game instructions fit on four pages with small print and they hardly leave any questions.



Review. Forgotten Waters

The campaign contains seven chapters and keeps three to seven players 14 years or older busy for two to four hours per game. The age recommendation is not so much due to the (lack of) complexity, but to the partially savoury texts full of pop culture innuendos, violence, and other X-rated passages. In spite of the sometimes heavily adolescent humour, it is pleasant to note that the whole thing is not sexist.

The game breaks lustfully with traditional gender roles. Arm wrestling is against a waitress, a hostile captain is attracted to both genders, and rowdy we all are, men and women alike. It's playful without being pushy, and if you have enough imagination to picture scary sea monsters and magical artifacts, you should be fine with a mixed crew.

I Not new, but excellently implemented

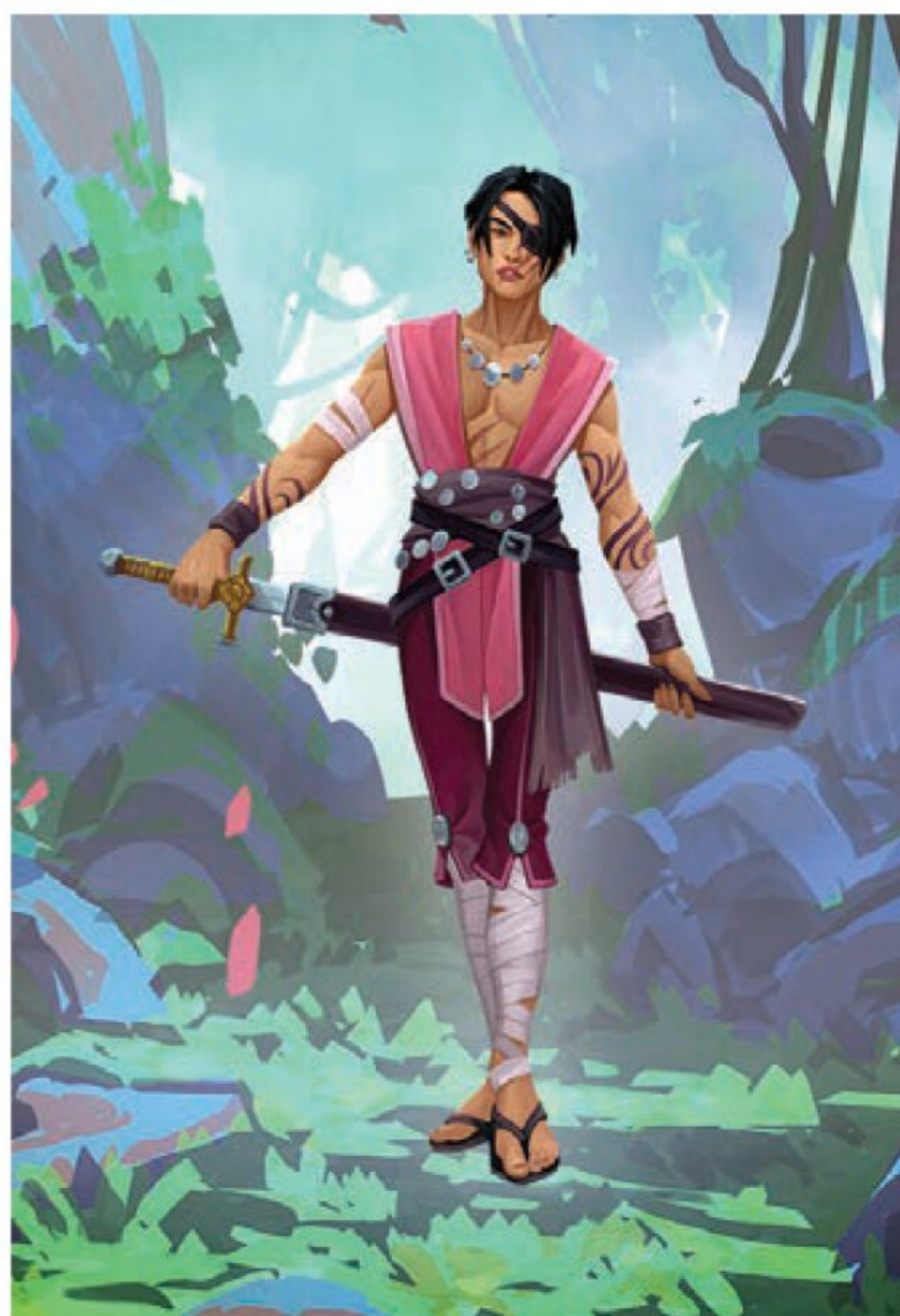
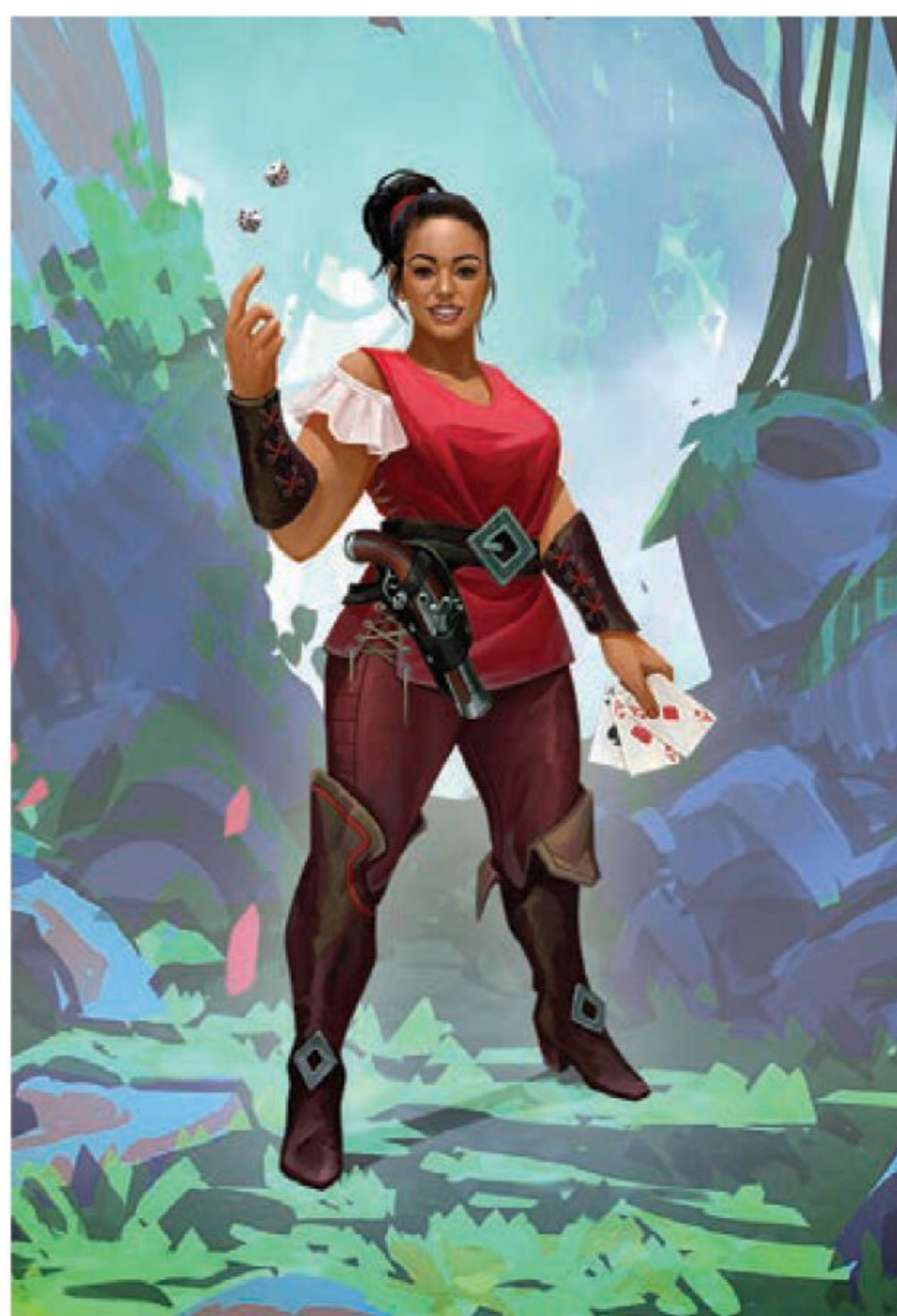
Plaid Hat Games has a lot of experience with story-heavy adventures, which are summarized there under the term "Crossroad Games": Games in which the players are repeatedly confronted with game-relevant decisions. The mechanism isn't new, but excellently implemented. The author trio is part of the publisher's core group: Isaac Vega created **DEAD OF WINTER** as well as **CITY OF REMNANTS** and **ASHES REBORN: RISE OF THE PHOENIXBORN**. Mr. Bistro devised **DUNGEON RUN** and J. Arthur Ellis **REXXON** and **CRYSTAL CLANS**.

FORGOTTEN WATERS is the fifth Crossroad Game by Plaid Hat and the first with a web app that is needed to play the game. There are many opinions about such hybrids; in this case, however, the concept is well-developed, successful, and contributes a lot to the atmosphere.

But first, in the classic way, you need a pen and some imagination. Before we can set sail on the straightforward hex board, each player gets their own character sheet with story blanks sections.

You first have to come up with a battle name (or generate one with the help of the name generator chart

Of all the Plaid Hat Games titles **DEAD OF WINTER** was reviewed in the spielbox (issue 4/15). The zombie game was liked, with an average score of 7,2.



and a dice roll) and five words, such as "a fictitious torture method", the name of the family who are supposed to kill, "something disgusting", or "a round fruit" and then can study your character sheet more closely.

Whoosh, in a blink you already have the material for the blank sections and as you start reading aloud the journey begins and you dive deep into the story before the game even begins. Throughout the game, you can improve skills like Exploration, Brawn, or Infamy in a straightforward way and earn stars to fill out in your constellation. Depending on how many stars you filled in at the end of the game, you will either, abandoned and ridiculed, draw your last breath in a filthy dungeon hole or live elevated to golden social heights.

I A star for me – or food for the crew?

You can also fulfill objective cards, which help your character advance and reward you with a fun section of text on your character sheet. The small, but ever present conflict between self-interest and common good adds oomph to the game play. You can steal treasure from other players and have to decide repeatedly if you take a star for yourself, or rather food and other goodies for the whole crew.

The journey leads through an 80 page story book, beautifully illustrated by Nadezhda Tikhomirova and Anton Fadeev. On the left there is always a panorama and on the right a worker placement tableau with seven options, some of which can only be selected individually, others only jointly. Should I have a drink at the "Shady Turtle", embark on a tour to the mysterious caves, or rather do the captain a favour? The player with the highest Infamy score gets to decide first where he or she will go.

An hourglass helps to speed up the learning process for those with a tendency for analysis paralysis. If it runs out before everyone has decided on an action on the respective book page, discontentment rises. This is not a way to become popular. However, it does not harm the game if you



simply remove this stressor. The game can also be played with two, although it says the minimum number of players is three. If each player controls two pirates, the semi-cooperative element becomes even more important, because each player lets their pirates take advantage of each other, preferring to steal treasures from the opponent.

Until everyone has chosen their spot, you should keep the resolution covered up. For this, we deduce from the score. It would have been easy to create a stunning illustrated cardboard cover sheet in order to make the game even more beautiful, but this way you have to make do with a plain piece of paper or, har har, a dried fish.

Once everyone has placed their standee, we resolve. In most cases, this involves a skill test with the twelve-sided dice and it often will give a chance to increase ones abilities. Sometimes you have to make a choice and then you have to enter the three-digit number into the app that brings up the corresponding story section. Treasures and story cards that can be found (and once again buried) along the way, add additional appeal to the game. Objective cards reveal the next task and notes in the log book document what was accomplished along the way.

Boredom buster: Book keeping for all

In order for everyone to have something to do and to remain involved with the action, the roles relevant for the game mechanics are divided up among the players, each of whom gets the corresponding boards. The Gunner controls five location dials and cannon slots; the Boatswain

watches over the strength of the boat hull, the Cooper the supplies, the Quartermaster Infamy level of the crew members which decides the turn order; the First Mate controls the number of the crew and its discontentment, the Lookout watches for threats. There are plenty of strategic choices to make. The

hull strength has to be considered carefully, a sinking ship leads to a shameful game end just as much as a crew driven to mutiny by hunger.

The texts are brilliantly written and the German translation also works really well. If you understand English well, you should choose it as the language in the app menu as only then you can enjoy having some of the long text passages read to you by a rough voiced pirate. Thanks to the free Remote-App (remote.fwcrossroads.com) the game can be played digitally and Corona safe – only one of the players has to own a physical copy of the game. The note section for saving the game by recording the progress between chapters is exemplarily done.

At the end of the chapter, it is decided how well each pirate performed – one last set of story blanks explains what happened to them. I'm itching to quote a few "Best of's", but I know if you spill the beans you risk getting keelhauled. Therefore, better not.

Small deductions have to be made for the material that is even more scarce than the provisions on board. Not only the cover sheet is missing, out of the box the game comes with only a regret-



Plenty of material, but few rules: FORGOTTEN WATERS lives less from the savvy mechanics, but from the immersion, while we set sail to explore some forgotten waters. However, the treasure chest (bottom) is not part of the standard equipment.

Photos: Asmodee/Hoffmann

tably thin pad of player sheets, also the logbook could use a few more pages. Replacements can be easily downloaded and printed from the company website, but really, there should be enough material for a whole campaign in the box. It's a little unfortunate that the crew changes from chapter to chapter and you can't keep your character, who has grown on you a little bit, and develop them further. But thanks to its good story and the well-oiled mechanisms adventuring into the **FORGOTTEN WATERS** is nevertheless an unforgettable experience, which wears out surprisingly little even after many games.



Mr. Bistro, J. Arthur Ellis, Isaac Vega: **Forgotten Waters** (Plaid Hat Games), illustrations: Nadezhda Tikhomirova, Anton Fadeev; for 3-7 players, about 14+ years, duration: depending on scenario 120-240 minutes, price: about 50 Euros.

Previewer	Playing appeal
Maren Hoffmann	8
Andreas Becker*	7
Stephan Kessler**	6

* Cool stories, great immersion, but the play time could have been a bit shorter.
** I feel more like a stowaway than a member of the crew. Much more atmospheric in the English version with audio recordings.



Out of the Way!

Wow, does this sound unsexy. Collect goods in Paris, Amsterdam, Nuremberg and Berlin, put them on trains and move them to Marseille. Once they're all delivered, you've collectively won the game. Sounds like the most boring pick-up-and-deliver experience ever. But first impressions can be deceptive. **SWITCH & SIGNAL** is a high-performance logistics game that plays like a thriller.

By **ANDREAS BECKER**

This could have been called „Model Train: The Great Board Game.“ Admittedly, that still wouldn't exactly have whetted anyone's appetite for more, other than HO and N fans who enjoy measuring rail gauges in their spare time. But, well, that's exactly what author David Thompson wanted to capture: memories of his model train in his childhood home, translated into board game form. His father put down the tracks and built the landscapes, David played with the trains and kept them rolling.

„I wanted to create a game where you have to set the switches yourself, and see

if the trains will keep moving through the landscape,“ Thompson told spielbox in an interview.

He has achieved his goal. The players actually do set the switch points, we change red signals to green to clear the way for the trains and let the black, brown and gray locomotives plod their way through Europe or, optionally, North America.

The rules framework for this cooperative railroad adventure is lean and mean. First, you reveal a new transportation card – effectively, the current regulations from the railroad – which must then be followed at all costs. They dictate which trains come into play and which trains are moved. Then the game becomes a matter of analyzing the situation on the tracks in detail and taking action using the cards in your hand. Switches and signals are set or changed, trains make special trips, goods are loaded. Draw five cards. Rinse and repeat.

But hold on. Doesn't that all sound a bit too much like the basement hobby

with papier-mâché mountains covered in artificial plants? If you wouldn't mind explaining, what makes **SWITCH & SIGNAL** a figurative bullet train of a game, one with nostalgia-laden steam locomotives being pushed along the tracks? Well, in a nutshell: luck. Luck dominates everything. We roll dice constantly. We are always drawing cards. And it is precisely these randomizers that, together, conjure up an almost indescribable level of stress that would make any Deutsche Bahn dispatcher think of early retirement options if this is how things were done on the rails of the Federal Republic of Germany.

It all starts with the fact that we never put new trains where they should go, strategically. Oh, we have to transport goods from Amsterdam to Marseille in the final few rounds? Great, then it would be useful if the train started in Bremen. But the location is decided by two dice. And while a seven would indeed start the train in Bremen, the two d6s roll an eleven just to spite us. That puts the train in Graz. Naturally. Our chances of victory have shrunk to zero.

You have to be able to cope with situations like this in **SWITCH & SIGNAL**. As smart as you may be, as much as you may have played with model trains as a child, nobody can defend themselves against the randomness in this game. It's frustrating at times, because it can become apparent early on that you're going to lose. But the still challenge pulls you in, making you want to try again. You want to beat it, you want to overcome the challenge.

It doesn't always work out this way. The same randomness that ratchets up the tension can make things boring and ensure that only a few trains move and the game feels very relaxed, more like „My First Model Railroad: Museum Edition.“ Yes, it can be tedious. But it can also happen that the board is bursting with locomotives. And then things get going. That fact that different colored



RULES CHANGES AND CLARIFICATIONS

Starting a game of **SWITCH & SIGNAL** can be rough if the players have really bad luck with the dice. The rules of the second edition will include the following:

„It may happen that **in the first turn** of the game only one train will be placed, causing players to immediately lose four time tokens. This is not so bad, because it means they have less pressure and can save cards for later. But it can feel unsatisfying for.

Therefore, on the first turn there is an exception: „If a rolled starting location is occupied, the active player rolls again until they roll an unoccupied starting location.“ You do not lose time tokens for this.“

In addition, there were some rules ambiguities. Frequent questions were asked about what happens when a transportation card calls for rolling a particular color train, but there is no locomotive of that color on the map. Kosmos explains, „If **all trains of a color are in the depot**, those trains are not moved.“ Ergo, there is no penalty.

And what happens if there is only one transportation card left and the players have to discard the last time token because of a penalty? „If a transportation card has to be removed **on the last turn**, the players lose immediately without being able to complete the turn.“ This can be tough, especially in a nail-biter finale. AB/sb



Trains in black, brown and gray must be sent over the tracks necessarily without accidents, but preferably not without freight

Photo: Becker

trains travel at different speeds is nice. Black is fast, gray is slow and brown is in the middle. You want to see a lot of black locomotives running because they get the goods to France quickly.

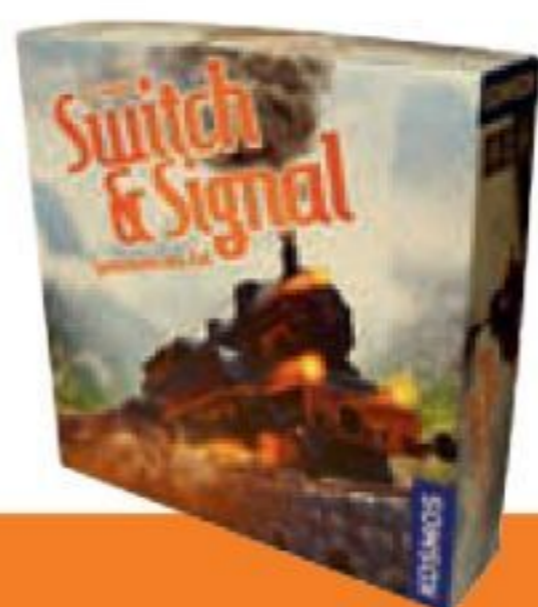
But with many locomotives, and especially with many fast locomotives, every round becomes a game of Vabanque – do you go „all in“? – as you figure out if all the points can be switched in time and all the signals are green. If that doesn't work, a train has to brake. For every movement point lost in this way, we have to pay a penalty in the form of time tokens. If the supply is exhausted, the team loses a transportation card. If the cards run out before all the goods are delivered, the game ends in defeat.

It's an unpleasant surprise when a locomotive turns unexpectedly because it is going faster than you thought or an important switch was overlooked in the planning stage. Now two trains are racing head-on towards each other. A collision means you lose more than time tokens; you lose one train as well.

In order to prevent such tragedies, spirited debates start up almost every turn about what all needs to be done. The switch at Luxembourg absolutely has to be set. And the signal before Berlin is wrong. Damn, it's about to get tight near Venice, Le Havre and Parchim. But we don't have enough cards in hand to do everything. We're full of hope and worry!

SWITCH & SIGNAL has enough to be captivating for many plays, some of which, as I said, might be boring. It's mostly exciting, though, even though the attraction fades away at some point,

after you've defeated Lady Luck enough times. This could perhaps be solved by a few new maps with special rules. (sb)



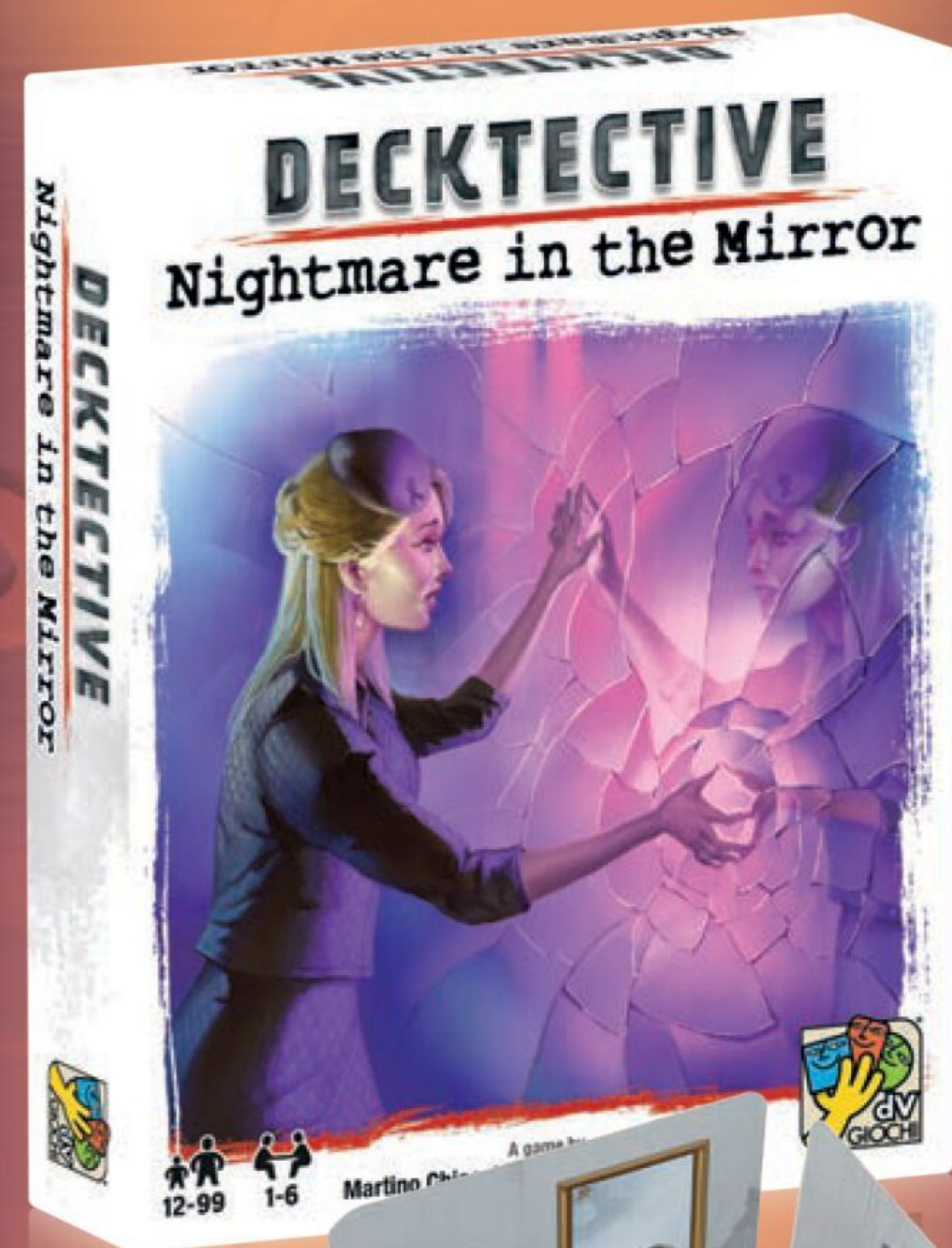
David Thompson: *Switch & Signal* (Kosmos), illustrations: Claus Stephan; for 2-4 players, about 10+ years, duration: about 45 minutes, price: about 35 Euros.

Reviewer	Playing appeal
Andreas Becker	7
Udo Bartsch*	6
L.U. Dikus**	7
Stefan Ducksch***	7
Wieland Herold****	7
Stephan Kessler*****	7
Marie Poenisch	7
Gerald Rüscher	5
Christoph Schlewinski	8
Harald Schrapers*****	7

* Model trains as a board game.
 ** It is hard work setting switches. Too many dispatchers jam up the rails.
 *** Successful cooperative tinkering can control the luck factor of the dice. However, losing time tokens when rolling in new trains is simply annoying.
 **** A cooperative approach to the classically competitive railroad game genre. **SWITCH & SIGNAL** is a challenging game that's perhaps too similar to the *Deutsche Bundesbahn*: the trains never arrive on time.
 ***** Original concept due to the switches, but the starting positions are too random.
 ***** An exciting, communal brain-teaser if all players at the table have the same understanding of the optimal way the locomotives should run. In other settings, the game is much less fun.

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And for My Third Trick ...

By **CHRISTOPH SCHLEWINSKI**

Not everyone can become a board game superstar in one fell swoop. Wolfgang Warsch did, though, getting three games on the award nomination lists for „Game of the Year“ in 2018. One was **THAT'S PRETTY CLEVER!**, which elicited both agony and rapture from the gaming world.

Confession time: I was one of the latter voices. I've had to get new score pads and have played the follow-up game – **TWICE AS CLEVER** – to pieces both on the app and on the tabletop. The third game in the series is now finally available.

Since nothing drastic has been changed, you'll recognize the basics and feel right at home as soon as you open the box. To play, you roll the dice, choose one and put any dice with lower numbers on the silver tray. Then, other players can choose one of these dice for themselves. Deciding which die to set aside and which of its options you then mark on your own score sheet is just as tough a call in the third game as before, and I mean that in a positive sense.



The new colors for this season are: Turquoise and Brown.



For the yellow die, the corresponding number can be marked in one of three rows. But, depending on if you've chosen it as your first, second or third die for the turn, it can only be used in the first, second or third row. When two adjacent squares in one column are crossed off, you get a bonus.



The number on the turquoise die can be marked anywhere in its column. The trick is that if you already selected another die with that number this round, you can cross out extra numbers instead.



Blue and white are used together to build a string of numbers, starting from a seven in the middle. Moving left you count down to the two, to the right you go up to twelve, always only with consecutive numbers. However, a seven can be noted at any time to reset the count, so to speak.



You need the exact number to cross out the brown spaces. How practical. The twist here is that you can skip spaces whenever you want. But, because you can only cross out numbers to the right of what you've done before, any numbers you skip will never be X-ed out.



With the pink die, you simply enter the result, either multiplied by one, two or three. Alternately, you can decide to divide the roll result in half, as that's the only way to get the corresponding bonus.

That means: Decisions, decisions, decisions. What is true for the first two games is thrice as true for **CLEVER CUBED**. Once again, you have to adjust how you play. Once again, you're surprised by all the possible ways to chain bonuses. It's fascinating how much each game stands on its own, how they're all independent and new, yet still familiar.

Each groups of colored spaces on the score sheet is a small universe of points that needs to be understood on its own, while also functioning within a larger context. You think moves over, you hope for the right roll and, once again, the situation can look hopeless. There are a lot of emotions in **CLEVER CUBED**.

To produce a series of games with this kind of quality is something special. Who knows, maybe some day there will be a **CLEVER** game where I say, „Nah, nobody needs that one.“ Maybe. But by then I'll have to admit that these games captivated me for years. And which other dice-rolling series can claim that? (sb)



Wolfgang Warsch: Clever Cubed (Schmidt Spiele), graphics: Leon Schiffer; for 1-4 players, about 10+ years, duration: about 10 minutes per person, price: about 12,50 Euros.

Reviewer	Playing Appeal
Christoph Schlewinski	8
Udo Bartsch*	7
Andreas Becker**	8
Stefan Ducksch***	8
Wieland Herold****	7
Harald Schrapers*****	7

* Even as we get a third version, the outstanding basic concept has not worn off.

** Not better than parts 1 or 2, but a bit more fiddly. It offers a lot of variety compared to its older brothers. At the moment, that's enough for me to enthusiastically try again and again to get a new high score (which I still can't manage as well as with the other two).

*** The third success in the series, again with new challenges. The unusual rule for using more dice in the turquoise scoring area, however, always leads to questions. My rating applies to solitaire play (via app) or with two players. With more players, it gets deductions for long down time between turns. With three: 7, with four: 6.

**** If you thought **THAT'S PRETTY CLEVER!** couldn't be improved, you're wrong for the second time. Especially good as an app and with two.

***** It's actually quite good, but doesn't manage to get anything additional out of the basic **CLEVER** structure, which I've found lacking so far.

A Chaining Addiction



We only have five spaceships, each of which allows you to take two actions (left). Using the available actions, we have to hire as strong a crew as possible. It's tricky ... and very fun.

Photos: Poenisch

By **MARIE POENISCH**

Animals in space? Well, that's certainly thematic. In the space race, monkeys, dogs and even fruit flies got a peek into the infinite expanse of the universe well before humans did. Therefore, it is only logical that in the future, crews of space-faring animals will pioneer new galaxies. Dogs don't seem to be part of the alliance, but other than that, an amazing number of different animals are represented, from rhinoceroses to giant octopuses.

Of course, coordinating spaceships requires a commander who can plot the correct course. But even the best commander can't win a simple potted plant without a good crew. So we set out to recruit new members and explore the unknown.

At the start of the game, we can only visit two planets. The more cards we play, the more destinations become available. Maybe the warp drive doesn't function with a small crew, or perhaps being in the engine room and on the bridge at the same time is a difficult task for even the most seasoned astronaut.

Each planet is divided into two sections, each with its own area to explore. You don't have to worry about where other players land, just keep in mind that you can't put two of your own spaceships in the same sector.

Collect sets of different or of the same animals, they said. Fulfill missions with envoys, they said. Sure, but how? Each player has only ten moves total, with which we either land one of our five ships on a planet or explore one, followed by taking the listed effect. Often we have to discard cards or fulfill a specific condition in order to draw new cards to hand or to place cards in front of us. How are we supposed to play more than a few cards?

Well, the questions that perplex you at the beginning are the ones that provide an „aha!“ effect by, at the latest, the end of the first game. Suddenly everything makes sense: you could first play the botanist, then immediately follow it up with a mechanical rhino, then discard a card and then add a robot. Not only will that score points at the end of the game, but it also gets us three cards from the draw pile or the face-up display pool. Boom! And away we go.

Wait, is the game over already? Let's play again. Chaining actions is incredibly fascinating and the game encourages you to try and do better next time. To do so, you have to adapt to the cards. In one round, you might be collecting sets of animals and leveling up your captain's veteran token, in the next round it might be worthwhile to collect a horde of robots and a few lucrative mission cards. The variable layout of the planets helps keep things fresh.

That is, to be sure, a certain amount of luck involved here. Sometimes the cards you draw don't really gel or maybe the card pool just doesn't have what you want. That's when you have to make the best of your situation and hope that your fellow players are affected in the same manner. Still, with a playing time of 30 minutes, revenge is always an option, so it doesn't really matter.

But that attitude comes with a word of warning: **WILD SPACE** is addictive. Before you know it, it's half past one in the morning and you've played three games more than thought you would. (sb)



Joachim Thôme: Wild Space (Board Game Circus), illustrations: Amélie Guinet; for 1-5 players, about 10+ years, duration: about 30 minutes, price: about 25 Euros.

Reviewer	Playing appeal
Marie Poenisch	9
Andreas Becker*	8
Christwart Conrad**	6
Wieland Herold***	7

* Short and fun. Beastly fun.
 ** It's nice and quick, but also a bit messy. Chaining moves is fun, when it works. The way the requirements work on the planets is well-designed.
 *** With only ten actions, you're reliant on decent combos. Solid solo mode.

Game Siblings



Author Uwe Rosenberg seems to be entering a new creative phase. After having recently published games that use puzzle-y piece placement with several publishers, he seems to have found a passion for placing colored tiles.



By STEFAN DUCKSCH

Last May, Rosenberg was nominated for the Spiel des Jahres 2020 for his game, **NOVA LUNA**. In the fall, the obviously related game, **SAGANI**, was published by Skellig Games. There are many similarities, including the fact that both use the same sized box. Rosenberg was also able to get illustrator Lukas Siegmon to create art for both titles.

Even though **NOVA LUNA** and **SAGANI** are siblings, or maybe cousins, the new game is different enough to be a stand-alone offering. Still, it only really makes sense to review the new game by comparing the two family members.

You can't deny it: even at first glance it's clear there is a close kinship between Sagani (this page) and Nova Luna. Of course, this is not surprising in a game by Uwe Rosenberg, the master of extended game families.

Photos: Ducksch/Bartsch

The main similarity is that, in both cases, each player is building their own grid of tiles in four colors. Each tile requires having other tiles of specific colors nearby. When a tile's request is fulfilled, the player moves a few points closer to winning the game. It's also important in both games to choose the right tile on your turn, which is not always easy since the number of options keep decreasing. That's about it for the parallels. But the two games present clear differences right from the way tiles are chosen. In **SAGANI**, you pick one tile from up to five choices in a constantly shrinking display. In **NOVA LUNA**, the choice was limited to three tiles, and you had to pay for them using time. To do this, a player's token was advanced on the Moon Wheel according to the value of the chosen tile, and whoever was furthest back on the track took the next turn. In **SAGANI**, everyone plays their turn in a clockwise direction.

There are also differences when it comes to placing a tile. **NOVA LUNA** wanted matching colors to be directly adjacent, or connected through tiles of the same color, to complete the task. In **SAGANI**, it is possible for the required tile to be several spaces away, i.e. on the other side of differently colored tiles, and still complete the task. **SAGANI** tiles have little arrows that indicate in which direction a particular color should appear.

Once you've completed a task, that arrow is covered with a small disc. Once all of the arrows

(up to four per tile) have been covered, the tile is considered complete and points are awarded on the „Harmony Bar,” or scoring track. The winner is the first player to reach a certain

amount of points, which changes depending on the number of players. Your wooden discs are returned to you after you score and the tile is turned over. In **NOVA LUNA**, the race played out differently: the winner was the player who managed to place all of their discs on tiles because those tasks had been fulfilled. The discs remained there until the end of the game.

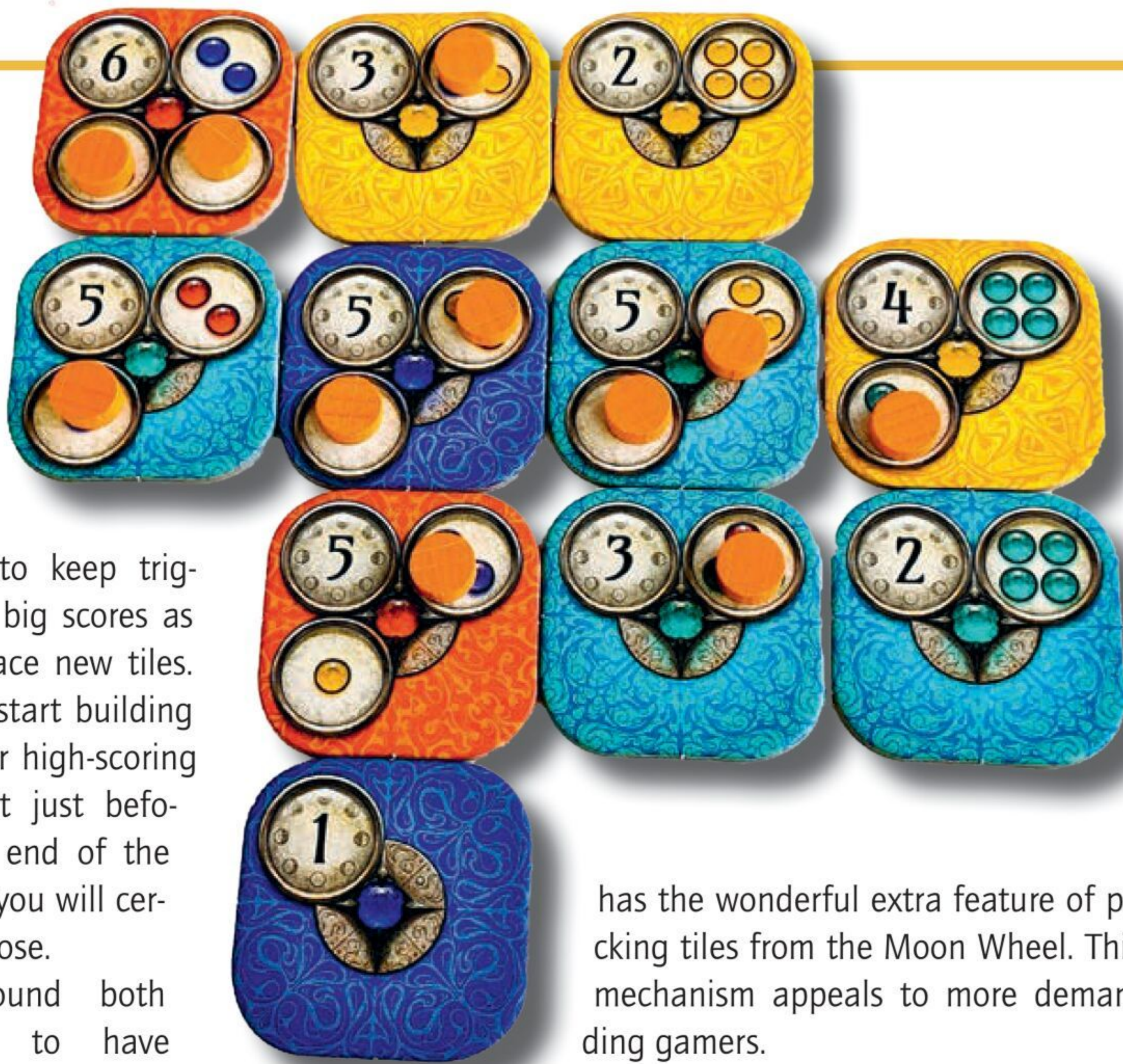
There are other differences as well. In **SAGANI**, you can freely rotate tiles when placing them. This offers more options and more of a challenge than **NOVA LUNA**. Finally, in the younger sibling, some arrows point to diagonal spaces or – in the case of the valuable 10-point tiles – to several spaces at the same time. You should carefully consider how a tile will be placed in your own grid before you decide which one to choose, but at least the rules allow you to physically try out placements before confirming a move. Of course, in a four-player game, this also increases the waiting time.

Another new feature in **SAGANI** is that we have to keep an eye on our wooden discs. After placing a tile, we have to put the corresponding number of discs on it. If we don't have enough in our supply, we receive red „Cacophony” discs, which immediately cost us two points, but then become our property. Avoiding them is a fun brainteaser.

Finally, **SAGANI** also has a so-called intermezzo. This happens when four tiles are placed above the main board. They find their way there when someone rejects the last of the initial five face-up tiles and instead chooses a face-down one from the draw pile. During the intermezzo, each player may choose one of the bonus tiles and place it, starting with the person with the lowest score and continuing in order to the person with the highest score.

The challenge of **SAGANI** is managing your supply of wooden discs. Only by succeeding at this puzzle will you have enough options in the main phase of the





game to keep triggering big scores as you place new tiles. If you start building another high-scoring attempt just before the end of the game, you will certainly lose.

I found both games to have attractive aspects.

SAGANI is more intuitive, and the variable placement of tiles makes it particularly successful and ideal for families. **NOVA LUNA**, on the other hand,

NOVA LUNA was reviewed in *spielbox* 1/20. Turns out, we liked it and gave it an average score of: 7.33.

has the wonderful extra feature of picking tiles from the Moon Wheel. This mechanism appeals to more demanding gamers.

The art is always a matter of taste, but I personally find **NOVA LUNA**'s look more dignified. **SAGANI** deals with finding harmony so that nature spirits can emerge from the vessels they live in and reveal their full forms, but the theme is obviously tacked on in both of these abstract games and can be definitely ignored. (sb)



Uwe Rosenberg: Sagani (Skellig Games), illustrations: Lukas Siegmon; for 1-4 players, about 8+ years, duration: about 45 minutes, price: about 30 Euros.

Reviewer	Playing appeal
Stefan Ducksch.....	7
Andreas Becker*.....	6
Wieland Herold**.....	7
Marie Poenisch***.....	7
Gerald Rüscher****.....	7

* Not bad, but doesn't come close to the elegance of **NOVA LUNA**.

** Close to Rosenberg's **NOVA LUNA**, even the same illustrator is involved. In the race for my affection, **SAGANI** lags a bit behind – as it did when it was first announced.

*** Interesting **NOVA LUNA** variant with nice graphics. The diagonals are sometimes hard to see. It's also not very forgiving if you run out of discs.

**** My rating only applies to the two-player game.

A reason to celebrate!





Fotos: Ducksch/Becker

Ancient Socialism

Friedemann Friese likes to vary known mechanisms or serves, like in **504**, an experiment box with ideas. In **FAIYUM**, Friese once again takes deck building and combines it with the wonderful market mechanism from **POWER GRID**. The end result: a great game.

By **STEFAN DUCKSCH**

I had not heard of Faiyum yet. But playing makes you smart and now I know that almost 4000 years ago, this oasis-like basin in Ancient Egypt was drained and the land utilized. For a good two hours, we recreate this with great excitement. We build roads, send the crocodiles that linger in the swamps packing, and erect an infrastructure with businesses and settlements. A little bit of ancient socialism shines through: everything that we build onto the initially empty board becomes common property at the moment of creation. Everything we do, we do to honour the Pharaoh. Everyone can use everything, nobody charges a toll.

POWER GRID has been discussed twice in the spielbox before. Edition 1/02 rewarded the first issue with a 7 on average, the professional new release got an 8 score in issue 5/04.

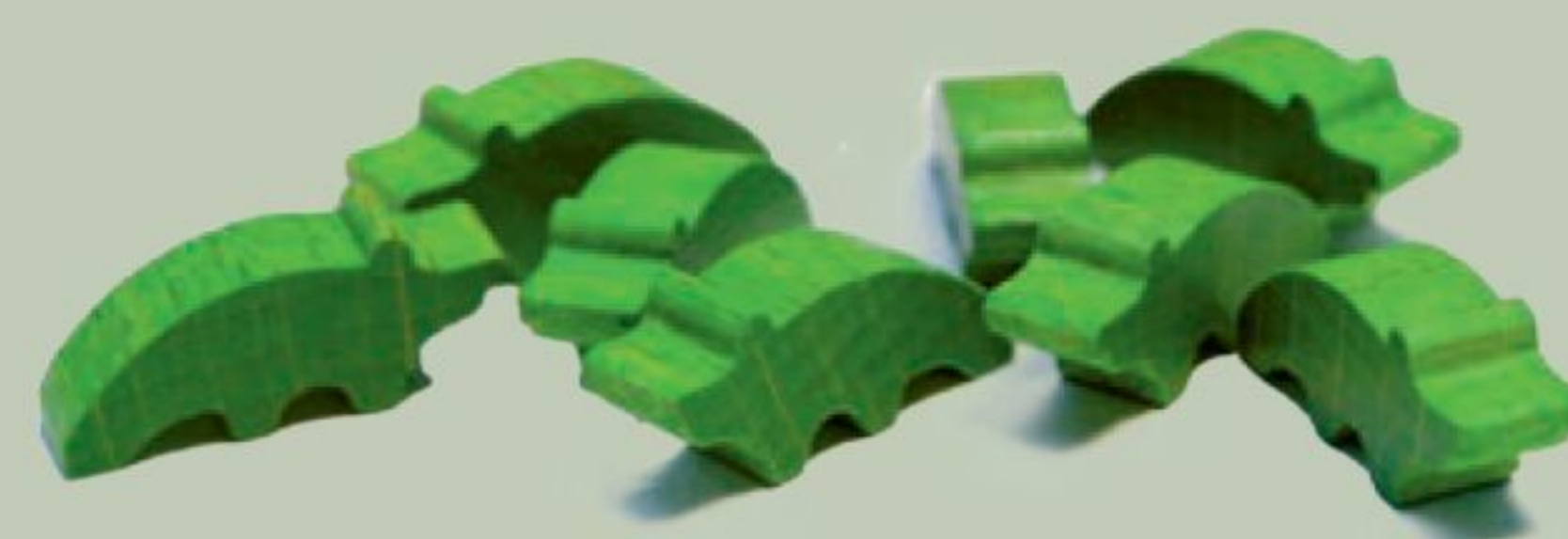
We are rewarded for our structures with money and, especially, with reputation tokens that later determine the winner.

Similarly clear are the turns: you place a card from your hand onto your discard pile, for example, in order to build a road or harvest resources. Or you buy a card from the market and add it to your own hand. Or you carry out administration: during this action, you take the three top cards from your discard pile (without changing the card order) back into your hand. You can take more, but additional cards will cost you money.

This reverse dilemma motivates planning the order in which we play our cards precisely. Weak action cards can be put way down in the pile in order to avoid having to pick them up again. With the better ones, we work to create a smaller, effective rotation. Whoever can create a Perpetuum mobile of resource supply, re-

venue stream, and point earnings has a shot at winning.

But we don't get good cards for free. Everyone starts only with Farmers, who harvest resources from fields and chase away crocodiles, as well as road workers, who pave the first pathways and gain a few points. The powerful cards will have to be bought from the market, bit by bit. The market works just like in **POWER GRID**, with four cards available for immediate purchase and four more that might become available later. All are numbered in ascending order. If a card is purchased, then another is drawn and added into the market according to their number.





This twenty year old principle appears in **FAIYUM** as fresh as a daisy.

The new cards let us construct new buildings: vineyards, quarries, or farms. Now we can have people work there, which leads to more income and reputation. Settlements draw traders that give us more resources for a worker than a farmer can harvest in the field. The cards get stronger, the options for actions more numerous. But when is it worth investing in a new and better card?

I No vineyard, not a good time for vintners

The exciting thing is that the infrastructure develops differently in each game. Which is why the offerings in the market should get analyzed carefully. If there is no vineyard in Faiyum, then I shouldn't hire a vintner as, for now, the card is useless. In turn, if almost all the farms are built, it is no longer worth spending money on a vineyard. Of course you can gamble, hold on to promising cards, and hope for the future. But if cards can't be played because the corresponding buildings are missing, they only clog the hand. During the administrative action, we receive a financial bonus for having fewer cards remaining in hand. Those who used up all their cards, receive three money tokens, which effectively get you three new cards. This is very nicely thought out.

Furthermore, Frieze came up with a system with which to infuriate one's opponents: the use of workers. These are sometimes farmers, vintners, or tax collectors. But, if a space is occupied by a worker, it becomes unavailable until further notice. At the beginning of the game, workers are only removed when so-

Friedemann Frieze: Faiyum (2F-Spiele), illustrations: Harald Lieske; for 1-5 players, about 12+ years, duration: about 120 minutes; price: about 55 Euros.

Reviewer	Playing Appeal
Stefan Ducksch.....	8
Andreas Becker*.....	8
Christwart Conrad**.....	6
Wieland Herold***.....	8
Gerald Rüscher.....	6
Christoph Schlewinski****.....	7

* The best complex Frieze in a long time. Great in which way each game develops a completely different dynamic.

** Appealing realization – for instance, crocodiles as blockades. Unfortunately, the topology is given relatively little importance; the space one chooses for use often is pretty arbitrary. Once you have started pursuing a strategy, you can't simply change it, so that it is quite possible that the final score is already clear several rounds before the end of the game. On the other hand, sometimes a player can catch up (even after all other players have quit) by playing a triumphant solo with a full card hand.

*** Frieze's games have never been visually appealing, but in regards to game play, the author from Bremen ties into his best days.

**** For the solo variant, I would give a playing appeal rating of 9.

meone takes the administrative action. Then up to two can be removed – and of course you would choose the spaces for which you have useful actions.

But that's not all. Inconveniently, some cards disappear from the game unused. Every time the administrative action is taken, the cheapest card is removed from the market. As you wait your turn, you might see your dream

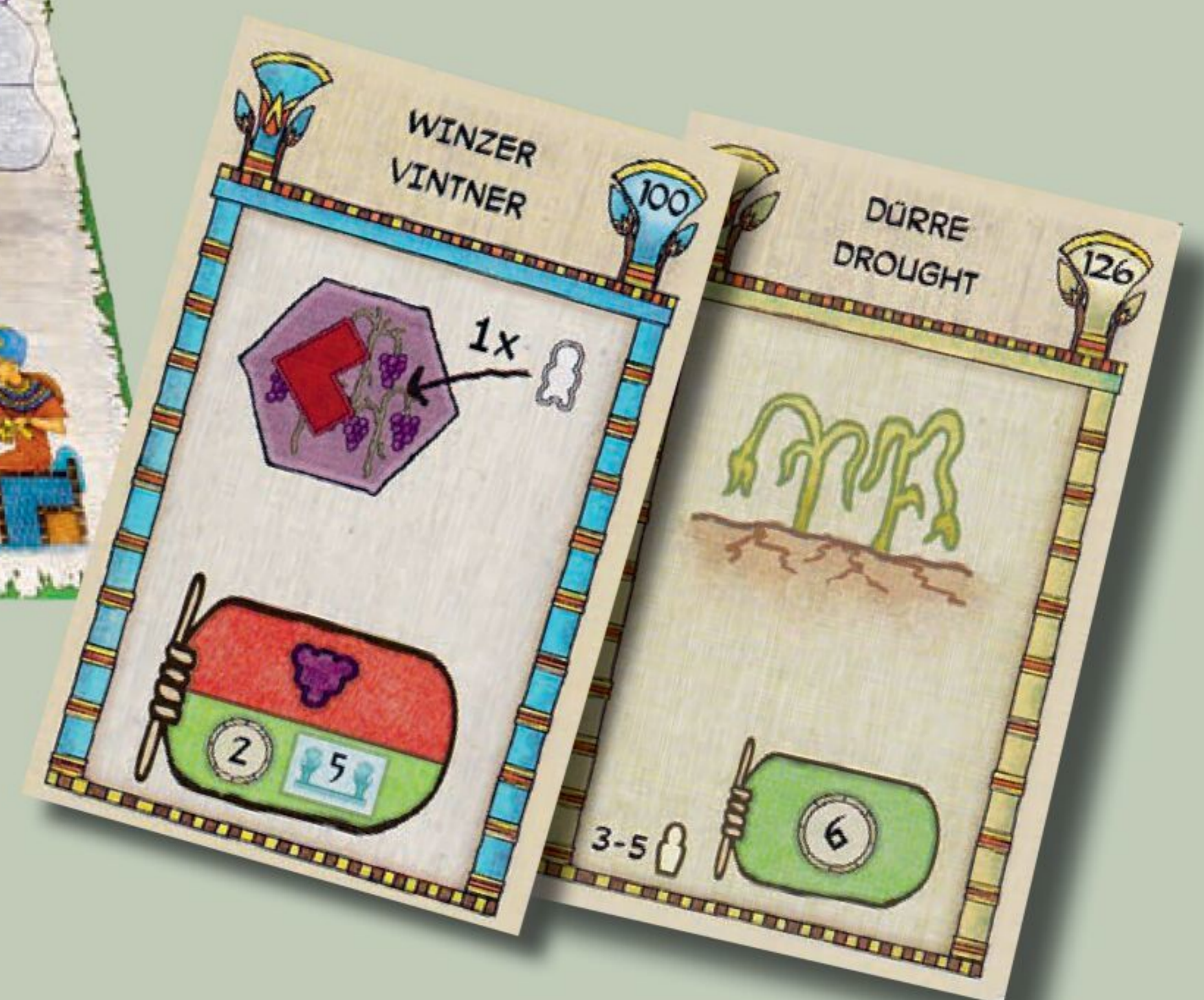
card appear and quickly disappear from the market again, especially if your opponents pay attention. All cards are described in a well-made glossary, therefore, they can be explained as they enter the market. This way you can get started quickly with **FAIYUM**.

The end is also hidden in the deck of cards. The most powerful cards appear that give you a lot of points and on which effects you can gamble early – without knowing whether you will actually end up getting them. It is also questionable how often you might end up using them at all. The stack contains four natural disasters. Once the fourth is revealed, you can no longer take the administrative action. Therefore, timing is everything all the way up until the end, when it is crucial to fill up your hand in order to have lots of extra turns available.

FAIYUM seems abstract at first, the story unfolds, through the cards, in our heads. There is a permanent sense of coming up short, no matter if you play with two or five players. Once the intuitive symbolism on the cards is understood, the game moves forward quickly. The deck building variation is very appealing, and also the solo version keeps one entertained.

Contrary to **POWER GRID**, there are no time consuming bidding phases – you just purchase the card you desire. There is also no more calculating for city and pipeline construction, as well as no fiddly refilling of the resource market. Twenty years offer a lot of time for developments and **FAIYUM** shows what is possible. Game play is faster, more direct, and equally as exciting as the classic, which is one of my favourite games. Nevertheless, I will tend to choose **FAIYUM** more in the future. (dm)

Faiyum looks rather drab. But the simplicity helps to keep track when a lot has been built.



From Washboards to Gameboards

Ludwig Gerhards transfers his games manufactory to new hands

In the southern part of the German Westerwald region, Ludwig Gerhards ran a small but fine wood manufactory – and this as a family business in its third generation. Under the label Gerhards Spiel und Design, he has manufactured games of the highest quality standards for more than 20 years. Now the family tradition has come to an end.

By **EDWIN RUSCHITZKA**

They are called **TRIANGOLI**, **RUKUNI**, **PALETTA** or **FIANCO**. And what they have in common is more than just an unusual name – a name that at first doesn't allow one to draw many conclusions as to what might be behind it: All these games are made of premium domestic wood, and many of them are intended for two players who are keen on tactical duels. For more than 20 years, Ludwig Gerhards has established a good name in this segment.

Despite this solid reputation, the search for a successor took Gerhards several years. Now he has finally found one: Sascha Schauf, 52 years old, resident of Gelsenkirchen, a city in the Ruhr area particularly well known to soccer fans because of its long-standing but currently relegation-threatened club, FC Schalke 04.

Sascha Schauf is a trained landscape architect with a planning office of his own as well as a gardening and landscaping enterprise. By assuming ownership of the Gerhards company, a long-desired wish has come true. He is fond of playing games, especially **CHES**, and also has already invented two games himself, published years ago under the names **CARGO** and **RAUPENRALLYE**. The latter, a joint venture with his wife, Elke, was re-released under the same name by Gerhards in 2019.

However, this was already Sascha

Schauf's second try at getting a game into the product line of the games manufactory. The first attempt failed six years ago, as he says. His game with marbles and cards didn't quite fit into Gerhards' portfolio. But Gerhards and Schauf became acquainted on this occasion, and in their conversations, Gerhards revealed his intention to take a step back and sell his company.

„I mulled over all this for quite a while," Schauf says. In 2019, at the SPIEL in Essen, they intensified their talks, and Schauf had a look at the company location in Ransbach-Baumbach. Half a year later, during the Toy Fair in Nuremberg, the decision was made; and in November last year, the transition took place: The change of ownership was wrapped up, and all employees were taken over. The two men remain silent about the money

that exchanged hands for the property, the company building, the machinery pool, and the rights to published titles. Gerhards says that the amount was „moderate," since „I am glad to have found a successor."

The company will keep running under its old name. „Mercedes-Benz wouldn't change its name either," Schauf says. He chose this comparison deliberately: For him, Gerhards also stands for high quality; he thinks that the name has a unique selling point, and this was the deciding factor for him to make the deal.

This distinguishing feature is something that Ludwig Gerhards and his team worked on and refined over many years. The production of games started with popular games from all over the world. This ran alongside the production of picture frames and of wooden lids for the

ceramic industry. Ransbach-Baumbach is located in the so-called Kannenbäckerland („land of pottery") region known for its ceramic and clay products. The history of the company goes back to the 1930s, to Gerhards' grandfather who founded the enterprise and mainly manufactured sundry wooden articles of daily utility, including washboards.

The company's first author's game was published in 1998. It was called **NASCA** and was invented by Corné van Moorsel. Its



PALETTA (top left) is the best-selling game; **C-CROSS** (top right) is Gerhards' favorite. **URBINO** (bottom left) and **MIXTOUR** both were awarded the MinD game prize.

Photos: Ruschitzka (2)/Gerhards Spiel und Design



Ludwig Gerhards with his successor, Sascha Schauf, found after several years of searching.

Foto: Gerhards Spiel und Design

name refers to a small Peruvian town with mysterious lines carved into the desert sand that became a World Heritage site. **NASCA**, however, already shaped the path that Ludwig Gerhards wanted to pursue from then on: His choice was to manufacture high-quality games, made of local beechwood boards treated with protective oils. These boards are cut into shape in a computer-operated procedure at his wood manufactory. A glued gameboard consists of two to six slats. Finally, the gameboards are smoothed and polished by hand.

More than 70 author's games followed up to the present. The initial print run was pretty small: 50 to 500 copies. But depending on the success, he produces additional copies. **LASS DIE KIRCHE IM DORF!**, for example, a game by Dieter Stein commissioned by the Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, reached about 12,000 copies. But this was even topped by **PALETTA**, a true little masterpiece, again invented by Dieter Stein, who is something like an „in-house“ author for Gerhards: On each turn, you may take pieces of the same color off the board – but only if they are freely

accessible from two sides and if all the other playing pieces remain connected at a right angle. Once one of the players has five pieces of the same color, things get really exciting: How can the other player(s) prompt their opponent to take only very few pieces? Or induce him to take a specific piece in a specific color? The first player to collect six pieces of one color wins. The game is still part of the product line; that means it has been a real long runner since 2012.

Several titles of the Gerhards product line have received awards. **MIXTOUR**, also

**„MERCEDES-BENZ
WOULDN'T CHANGE
ITS NAME EITHER.“**

SASCHA SCHAUF

invented by Dieter Stein, made it onto the recommendation list of the „Spiel des Jahres“ jury in 2013 and the same year accorded him the MinD Game Award, the prize sponsored by Mensa Germany, the organization for people with a high intelligence quotient. With **URBINO**, authored by Dieter Stein, of course, Gerhards won the MinD Game Award for the second time, in 2019.

Ludwig Gerhards' favorite title in his portfolio is a different one, though: **C-**

Cross, by Ludovic Gimet. Cutting the recesses into the wooden board and making the C-shaped tiles was a real challenge, Gerhards says. The tactical two-player game itself is a challenge, too.

Meanwhile, the brain-twisters from the Westerwald are well known. Most of the game copies are sold through game retailers; about 30 percent are brought out to the players through media, such as the „Bild der Wissenschaft“ magazine. At present, business is booming, also due to COVID-19. Last year, Gerhards sold about 50 percent more games than in the years before.

The fact that the games are so successful is also attributable to Hildegard Wiedenmann. She is in charge of the contacts with authors, she does the editorial work for the games, and she attends fairs in order to present the games to the public. Therefore, she'll certainly be indispensable for Gerhards' successor as well.

Sascha Schauf takes on a well-functioning business. And his predecessor won't leave him completely yet. For the time being, he wants to support the „new guy“ in word and deed; but for the future, he plans to take more hiking tours and e-bike trips. Schauf, for his part, is thinking about moving from the Ruhr area to the Westerwald region. But since his daughter still has to attend school, he will commute for now and spend the weekends in Gelsenkirchen – but not in order to cheer for FC Schalke 04, since soccer is not quite his thing. (sbw)

PALETTA was reviewed in the „At a Glance“ section of spielbox 6/11; Edwin Ruschitzka's rating: „good.“ In the „At a Glance“ section of spielbox 1/00, Robert Uri reviewed **NASCA**; his rating: „super.“

MIXTOUR was reviewed by Edwin Ruschitzka in the „At a Glance“ section of spielbox 7/12; his rating: „good.“

Akin to THAT'S LIFE!



Those who don't want to calculate can take animals – each of these tiles scores 5 points in the end.
Photo: Herold

By WIELAND HEROLD

A LLE NEUNE: If you think this title is a bowling game, you are totally wrong ("Alle Neune" – literally, "all nine(s)" – is a bowling term that stands for „strike"). And you might wonder why the box doesn't name Wolfgang Kramer and Michael Kiesling as the authors of the game, since **ALLE NEUNE** is a **THAT'S LIFE!** derivative with calculation elements. These elements probably come from Uwe Rapp and Bernhard Lach, the authors' duo that invented **AUSGERECHNET BUXTEHUDE**. In **ALLE NEUNE**, these



Wolfgang Kramer, Bernhard Lach, Uwe Rapp: Alle Neune (Moses), graphics: Kreativbunker; for 2 - 5 players, about 8+ years; duration about 30 minutes; price: about 17 Euros.

Reviewer	Playing Appeal
Wieland Herold.....	6
Andreas Becker*.....	5
Stefan Ducksch**.....	6
Marie Poenisch***.....	6
Harald Schrapers****.....	8

* The calculating makes it dry. I'd rather play **THAT'S LIFE!**.

** Nice variant of **THAT'S LIFE!**, but doesn't measure up to the straightforwardness of that game.

*** Nice calculation task for younger elementary school kids, but doesn't live up to **THAT'S LIFE!**.

**** At first view, the game seems old-fashioned. But this appearance is deceptive: After a slow start, this dice game develops a lot of suspense with 4 or 5 players.

two authors are listed as Kramer's partners. I'm just wondering what the inspiration was that Michael Kiesling contributed to the **THAT'S LIFE!** games.

Similar to the original, two to five players roll a die and move their pawns along a running track that has been assembled with number tiles. What's new is the

cactus tiles; the cactus tiles divide the track into segments. Once you reach a new section, you have to take an empty tile lying somewhere behind the just-crossed cactus. The last player to move past a cactus additionally gets the cactus tile he crossed.

The collecting procedure actually only serves the accumulation of a total of exactly nine points („all nine," in keeping with the title) with the third tile, at the latest. If you succeed, you may put the used tiles aside, face down. If you fail, you add one tile, face up, to your personal stock. As soon as all pawns have reached the end of the track, the final scoring takes place. The values of all face-up tiles count as minus points, whereas each face-down tile – numbers and/or animals – is worth five plus points.

ALLE NEUNE doesn't come up to the casual playing appeal of **THAT'S LIFE!**. Holding out on the point-potent spaces, and the fear of coming in last – these tingly feelings are missing. Here, it makes more sense to surge ahead and collect tiles on a calculable basis; those who are lagging behind are often left with unproductive, low-value tiles.

The authors keep the players' frustration level within limits. The tiles only have values from 1 to 6, so that many combinations are possible to achieve the right result. **ALLE NEUNE** doesn't bowl all race game and collecting game predecessors off the track, but it is good for playing with children, since it improves their mathematical skills. (sbw)

By the way, when **THAT'S LIFE!** came out, it was also received only modestly by the spielbox reviewers: The average rating was 6.3 (issue 5/05).

Towering Up

By CHRISTWART CONRAD

VOLTERRA: The light-colored and the dark-colored square wooden blocks in the small, compact and brimful box have a double function: They serve not only as spaces of a playing area that shrinks over the course of the game, but also as playing pieces that the two players use for building towers. To this end, you move your pawn onto an adjacent space of your own color. Before or after that, you move the top one or two blocks onto a different neighboring tower. The objective is to have the tallest tower in the end. The color of the block on top determines ownership.

The quickly-increasing strategic variety is amazing. And it is particularly nice that a seemingly uncontested lead often doesn't last for long. Since you are constantly forced to move and have to leave your space in any case, it is not so easy to secure a high tower. Even if your opponent is watching you closely, you can counter any proposed threat, for instance, by restricting his access to building materials.

If you have the upper hand, you want to constrain your opponent, since the game ends immediately as soon as one player can no longer carry out the two parts of



RULE CLARIFICATIONS

Page 3

Play: On your turn, you carry out the following two actions. You may freely choose the order of the actions – **but only if this allows you to execute both actions.**

Choose a tower of your own color that is adjacent to your pawn and has at least one free side, and move it onto a different tower **that is adjacent to your own pawn.**

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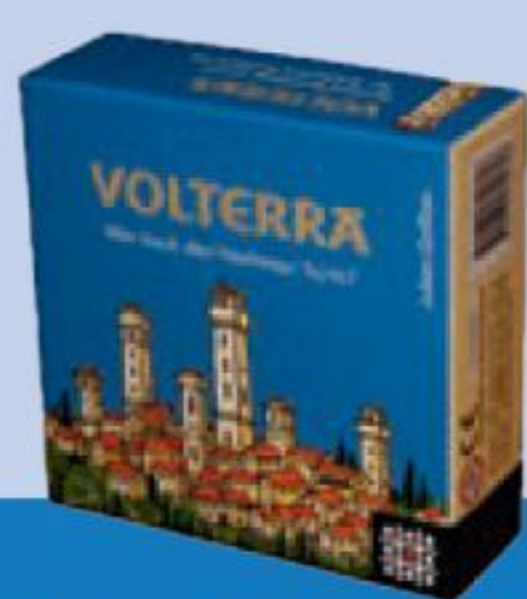
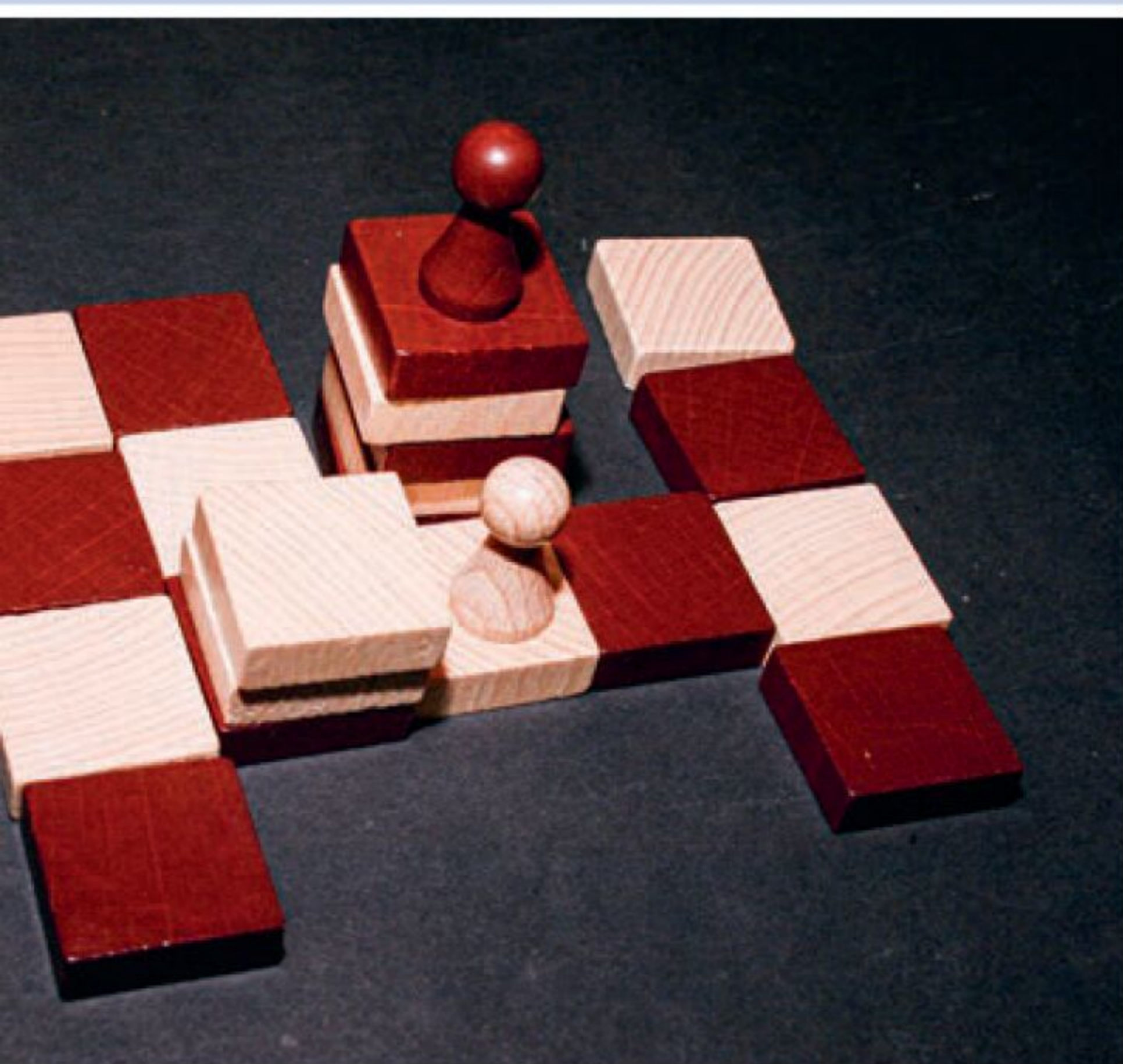
As soon as one of the players can no longer carry out both actions in a single turn, **he or she doesn't execute any action**, and the game ends. CC/swb

At a Glance. Silencio

his move. And you can even try to deliberately run out of chances to move; in this situation, the non-leading player is forced to make sure that his opponent has enough options for action remaining.

Sometimes, the playing area is even separated into two halves. Woe to the player who then has to make do with a tiny area. Even the standard set-up provides enough variety. On top of that, there is a variant included that allows for a modular set-up of the playing area.

The materials and the body of rules are of minimalist elegance, but this applies to the latter only in theory: The ambiguous wording of a vital side rule is misleading. The publisher has promised to amend this rule. And this short and crisp tactical gem definitely deserves it! (sbw)



Julien Griffon: *Volterra* (Steffen Spiele), graphics: Steffen Mühlhäuser; for 2 players, about 8+ years; duration: about 10 to 20 minutes; price: about 14 Euros.

Reviewer	Playing Appeal
Christwart Conrad	8
L.U. Dikus*	8
Stefan Ducksch**	6
Wieland Herold***	7

* A down-to earth title that performs properly, with an increasing arc of suspense.

** Given the limited amount of material, the game has a surprising depth of play. Unfortunately, it's over too soon or already decided after only one mistake.

*** A nifty little tower-building game in a compact area – *SANTORINI* light, set in Tuscany.

Convoluting Silence

By WIELAND HEROLD

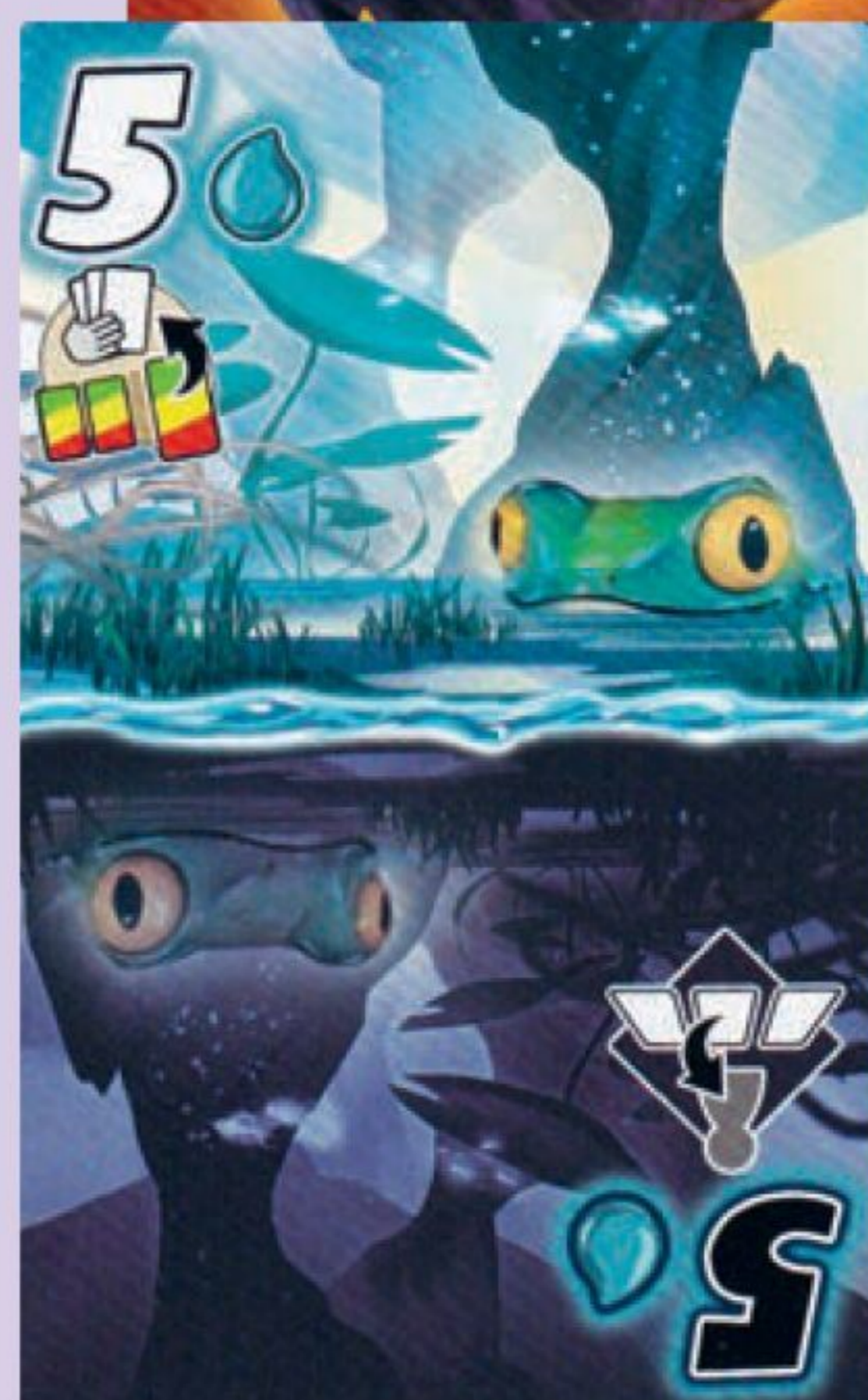
SILENCIO: In many games, playing means communicative cooperation or competition. Ever since **THE MIND**, if not earlier, players take a vow of silence. Some players like the intuitive procedures, but others are disturbed by such a social experiment.

With **SILENCIO**, by César Gómez Bernadino, Zoch presents another game in this genre. Again, players have to lay out number cards in ascending order, without saying a word about their own hand cards. „Together. Silent“ is the meaningful subtitle of **SILENCIO**. Of course, Bernadino doesn't want to copy Wolfgang „THE MIND“ Warsch; therefore, his game comes with several travel routes through landscapes of the four elements with number values from 1 to 13 that come into play depending on the number of players.

Initially, players pass one card to their left neighbor, so that everybody has only one piece of information about his neighbor's hand, plus some knowledge thanks to a few face-up oracle cards. After that, in turn, players place cards in ascending order in color rows. What's crucial when you play cards is the card effects: mainly negative ones, if the number on the new card directly follows the rank of the previous card, or optional positive ones, if the number doesn't directly follow. The positive effects of the starting cards can be used once for each color.

These special effects make **SILENCIO** particularly appealing and make Bernadino's idea quite autonomous. Positive fire cards, for example, annul negative card effects, but that applies also the other way around, unfortunately. The most dangerous cards are the yellow ones: If they are played in direct sequence – that is, one number higher than the previous one in that row – the next player has to play a random hand card. This makes **SILENCIO** incalculable.

The afore-mentioned **THE MIND**, by Wolfgang Warsch, didn't convince everybody, but it did convince the spielbox reviewers. The average rating for that game was 8.17 (issue 2/18).



The additional effects don't necessarily make **SILENCIO** better, but it becomes less predictable.

Scans: Becker

The game ends once all players have passed: A perfect outcome wherein nobody has any hand cards left is hard to achieve. Including the tavern card makes this easier, since this card allows for a certain degree of communication.

THE MIND was convincing because of its simple intuitiveness. Bernadino convolutes the non-verbal card-laying game through positive and negative card effects that become instinctive only over time. (sbw)



César Gómez Bernadino: *Silencio* (Zoch), illustrations: Sébastien Caiveau; for 2-4 players, about 10+ years, duration: about 15 minutes, price: about 8 Euros.

Reviewer	Playing Appeal
Wieland Herold	6

Well Done

By ANDREAS BECKER

ADVENTURE GAMES: A grand hotel that has clearly seen better days. Shady guests, suspicious staff, and then this green glimmer in one of the tower rooms. Something must be wrong. But what that is, exactly, is what players have to figure out during the three chapters of „Grand Hotel Abaddon.“ The **ADVENTURE GAMES** series works like a point-and-click adventure. Collect items and combine them with one another or with locations, and solve (relatively shallow) puzzles. The major part of the spectacle is not just to read a story but to experience it yourself. That is simple, but it is also as entertaining as a proper movie. Well, you might think that the puzzles could be more elaborate; but other than that, this case is the best made so far. The game series has become better and better: The story is consistent, the surprises are well measured, construction errors from previous cases have been eliminated, and the story is properly read out through an app. Even though there is not much of a game in it, I'm already looking forward a lot to part five. (sbw)



Two of the guests of the „Grand Hotel Abaddon“: Jack Keening, the aspiring chef, and the retired historian Dr. Susan Pendergast.

Photos: Becker

Matthew Dunstan, Phil Walker-Harding, Ute Wielandt: Adventure Games. Grand Hotel Abaddon (Kosmos); illustrations: Erkan Karagöz, Christina Kraus, Johanna Rupprecht; for 1-4 players, about 12+ years, duration: about 300 minutes; price: about 15 Euros.

Reviewer	Playing Appeal
Andreas Becker	7
Udo Bartsch*	6
Stefan Ducksch**	7
Wieland Herold***	7
Stephan Kessler****	7

* At times, more of an audio play than a game.

** A bit long, but you definitely want to know and therefore play all three chapters in a row, which speaks for the suspense. So far, the best game in the series.

*** The series can compete with **EXIT**. Great reader for the app.

**** Better balanced than its predecessors. The dynamic story development is attractive.

Unexpected Twists

By NICOLA BALKENHOL

DECKTECTIVE: The second case on the basis of the game principle of **DECKTECTIVE** combines the Middle Ages, early Modern Age, and the Present in an astounding way. The 62 cards develop a story that begins with the fear of a guard at a private museum in Edinburgh. What might first look like the theft of a painting soon grows into a murder case that one to six detectives try to solve.

The cards develop the case step by step. A few cards show the crime scene, the museum; and since these cards are stuck into the space between the bottom and the lid of the box, they create a three-dimensional impression with views from the inside and the outside (see picture). After this room has been set up, a few more cards explain what the players are supposed to do: pick up face-down hand cards, read them, and then – one after another – either place a card face up on the table or face down into the archive (aka the discard pile). After that, players refill their card hand.

At the beginning, each detective is anxiously wondering whether everything might be important, and therefore doesn't want to put any card into the archive. Some hand cards may be placed face up only when a certain number of cards is already lying on the discard pile. The cards that are put into the archive should be memorized, since they also contain clues that might play a role for the final solution. There are five unexpected twists during the course of the game: A card with an immediate effect advances the story or messes it up, depending on the players' perspective.

The detectives pay attention to details on the cards, discuss what might be relevant, and puzzle over the significance of changing locations and timelines. Once all cards have been played, the detectives' team reflects on what exactly happened. Finally, they have to answer five questions with predefined options. Only then may they together read the correct answers. The more right answers they have given, the more the detectives are commended in the end.



Of course, we overlooked something and therefore aren't „great detectives.“ Instead, the case is „filed away,“ and the evaluation attests us: „You can do better.“ We had a long discussion about the essential details we had overlooked, and we can disclose (without spoiling the playing fun for other detectives' teams) that we underestimated the percentage of real-time needed for the solution.

The **DECKTECTIVE** game principle is innovative and works very well, also in this second case. This ranks it pretty high in the category of mystery games. (sbw)



Martino Chiacchiera, Silvano Sorrentino: Decktective. The Gaze of the Ghost (Abacus), illustrations: Alberto Besi; for 1-6 players, about 12+ years, duration: about 60 minutes, price: about 10 Euros.

Reviewer	Playing Appeal
Nicola Balkenhol	8
Stefan Ducksch*	5

* After the auspicious start of the series, with „Bloody-Red Roses,“ the new game is a disillusioning experience. During the game and also at the solution, we were able to follow the story only partially. The idea of rebuilding the components of the panorama view is nice and effortful at the same time; due to the frequent mounting, we unfortunately overlooked some graphic details. If this were the first game of the series, I would pass on it immediately. But because of part 1, I give the series another chance – with the demand to look even more closely.

Photos: Balkenhol/Becker

The Empire Joins the Puzzling

By **ANDREAS BECKER**

STAR WARS UNLOCK: I have to declare myself biased: I like „Star Wars.“ As soon as I see something with Master Yoda or R2-D2 or the like on it or in it, it gets my attention. I admit that I didn't quite warm up to the first season of „The Mandalorian,“ but meanwhile, I'm hooked.

And yes, I am a big Escape fan. When a new part of the **UNLOCK** series came out, I couldn't resist – and then I binge-played the three cases. To begin with, I was sceptical because of the app, but meanwhile, I like the thing.

Therefore it doesn't require a university degree in psychology to get an idea of what the combination of „Star Wars“ and **UNLOCK** has triggered. Which isn't always the best precondition, since you will feel disappointed if the game doesn't turn out to be as brilliant as you have hoped for in your teenage dreams.

And actually, this **UNLOCK** box isn't quite as great as it sounds. But it proves better than secretly feared – after all, the

euphoria always implies a dark foreboding that it might turn into an enormous disappointment.

The three cases are door openers. They provide „Star Wars“ fans with so many familiar elements that they are sucked into the story. When „Escape from Hoth“ was put on the table, I felt directly transported into the setting of „The Empire Strikes Back“: the battle against the AT-ATs, the Tauntauns, the Wampa. The other two cases are more loosely connected. In „An Unforeseen Delay,“ players represent smugglers who try to escape from a cell at a star destroyer. In „Secret Mission on Jedha,“ players change sides by taking on the role of imperial spies searching for Kyber crystals.

This knack of not always being on the side of the rebels or Jedi is dramaturgically smart. With this, the cases certainly score in narrative terms. When it comes to the puzzles, this doesn't apply to the same extent. Especially the first two cases are quickly snacked away – something like Escape fast food. The enclosed solution booklet is great, but the advantage cards

are not needed, at least not by **UNLOCK**-experienced players. It was entertaining to experience the stories – they warmed my „Star Wars“-**UNLOCK** heart. (sbw)



Space Cowboys, Jason Little: Star Wars. Unlock (Space Cowboys), graphics: Ariel Brooks, Mercedes Opheim; for 1–6 players (better 2–4), about 10+ years, duration: about 45–60 minutes; price: about 34 Euros.

Reviewer	Playing Appeal
Andreas Becker	7
Stephan Kessler*	7
Marie Poenisch**	7
Harald Schrapers***	8

* For beginners, a good introduction to the world of **UNLOCK**. Players with some more experience will get through the deck quickly.

** Relatively easy, but great for beginners and (younger) Star Wars fans.

*** Rarely has an Escape scenario feel more realistic: If you feel at home in the world of Star Wars, you'll be captivated by the three cases. The only thing that dampens the good mood is that you have to fight on the side of the Empire on Jedha.

Exitlent

By **ANDREAS BECKER**

EXIT: An ancient map shows us the way – through a narrow canyon to the entrance of a well-hidden cave. And there it is: the mysterious gate. While we are examining it, we realize that we can move the metal rings, and – bingo – we are traveling through space and time until we finally land in an ocean on a foreign planet.

Well, what the heck – the story hasn't been the strong suit of the **EXIT** series so far and probably will never be. The core of these games is the puzzles, and that is something that Inka and Markus Brand and their congenial colleague, Kosmos editor Ralph Querfurth, master like nobody else. This becomes evident again in the 19th case of the series, „The Gate Between Worlds.“ Meanwhile, the huge ama-

zement fails to happen, since there has already been so much to be amazed at. Nevertheless, the quality remains as high as ever, and one at least has the impression that the Brands never copy themselves – even though they might have been inspired by other Escape Room games.

In the final analysis, it is highly fascinating what can be done just through texts – provided players know how to read them. Particularly appealing to me was the puzzle in the hovering world; the visit to the Minecraft-type planet Bloxx felt somewhat quaint (albeit very conventional puzzle-wise). And the final puzzle (the one in order to put the space-time continuum back on track) has existed somewhere before in a similar form – but you nevertheless experience a great aha effect, a fantastic finale of this case. Simply good. (sbw)



Inka Brand, Markus Brand, Ralph Querfurth: Exit. The Gate Between Worlds (Kosmos), illustrations: Martin Hoffmann; for 1–4 players, about 12+ years, duration: about 60–90 minutes, price: about 15 Euros.

Reviewer	Playing Appeal
Andreas Becker	8
Stefan Ducksch*	8
Wieland Herold**	8
Stephan Kessler***	7

* **EXIT** remains the model in the field of Escape games. Again, a well-done box with a nice variation of the decoder disk and a surprising idea for the finale.

** Not a completely typical case, lacking puzzle cards, but poster worlds instead. The Brands and Ralph Querfurth surprise us again.

*** The same high quality as usual. Fits in perfectly with the previous cases.



Smart Rocks

By WIELAND HEROLD

ARE YOU DUMBER THAN A BOX OF ROCKS? Ages ago, Socrates already knew: „I know that I know nothing.“ That was long before a stone oracle tried to show us that it sometimes is smarter than we are, with our textbook knowledge and worldly wisdom.

With **ARE YOU DUMBER THAN A BOX OF ROCKS?**, the HCM Kinzel company and the two brothers Joe and Dave Herbert prove that it isn't that easy to defeat rocks in a quiz. What does it take to pull off such a crazy idea? An important element is the well-researched quiz questions. The Herbert brothers only allow answers within a limited range,

that is, 0, 1 or 2. This knack is owed to the rock-solid competition, since the three rocks, two of which are marked with a white stripe on one side, are in a rattle box and allow for exactly these solutions, depending on how the box is shaken. Of course, the stone oracle tends to end up with a 1, and this is even considered and supported by the questions. Consequently, well-cooperating players would have better chances if they always answered „1“; but often enough, there is one player in the group who thinks he knows something – or who actually does. Either the human team or the oracle wins with four victory points. The rocks prevail relatively rarely, but they do have a chance.

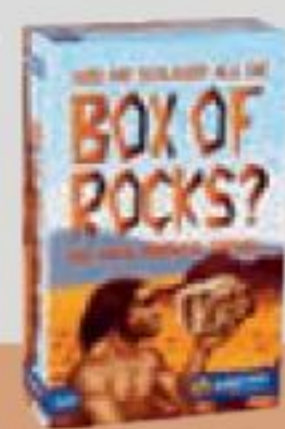
ARE YOU DUMBER THAN A BOX OF ROCKS? is a not-too-serious party fun game that is entertaining for occasional players and, often enough, gives equal chances to supposedly unequal opponents mainly due to the questions, most of which seem to come from the „Useless Knowledge“ category. Who knows, for example, how many Swiss soldiers died in WWI?

As it is, the answers sometimes increase your knowledge, since the explanatory texts are informative. The editorial revision of some of the questions for the German market has lessened the chances for the rocks. A few of the new tasks are pretty easy to solve, for instance, when the question is about women holding the office of EU Commission Presidents. It's not written in the rules, but if players want to do so, they can use the questions for a competition, especially in a larger group; in this case, the fist and stretched-out fingers suffice for an answer. (sbw)



Are rocks smarter than humans? Most likely not.

Photos: Herold/HCM Kinzel



Dave Herbert, Joe Herbert: Are You Dumber Than a Box of Rocks? (HCM Kinzel); for 1 to several players, about 12+ years, duration: about 10 minutes, price: about 18 Euros.

Reviewer	Playing Appeal
Wieland Herold.....	6
Stefan Ducksch*.....	4
Harald Schrapers**.....	4

* Assessment game for non-players and all-and-everything googlers who find the idea funny that rocks might be smarter than they themselves are. Others will have had enough after winning one game, given the simple tasks.

** To begin with, the idea of rocks being smarter than you is funny – but after just a few minutes, you realize that the substance of play is minimal.

For Magnet

By HARALD SCHRAPERS

MAGNEFIX: „Magformers. With 20 original standard parts“ is written on the box. What's that? Magformers are magnetic plastic frames that players can use to construct something – they are said to be popular in kindergartens. But the children I played **MAGNEFIX** with didn't know them either; maybe their time at the nursery was too long ago.

Each magnet magnate gets a set of five of these square construction pieces in different colors. One challenge card is revealed; it shows how players have to arrange their five Magformers. They do this simultaneously. When somebody thinks he's done, he slaps his hand on the challenge card, and if he has recreated the image correctly, he receives this card as a reward. If a player has constructed it incorrectly in the frenzy of the game, the construction of the second fastest player is checked. And so on.

This is not a real reaction game, even though it reads otherwise on the box cover. After all, players don't have to bang on a card or bell at an unexpected moment all at the same time – with occasional collateral damage to their fingers. The only thing that matters in **MAGNEFIX** is to build quickly under stress, and it's lots of fun to do this with the Magformers, regardless

The construction specifications for the magnets are varied. The rule is: Colors that are not represented on a card need to be concealed underneath other parts.

Photos: Schrapers/Becker



Magnates

of whether it is brought to the table as a family game or something else.

The magnetism sometimes creates a very special challenge, even if you just want to detach the parts. And, of course, this applies all the more to the assembling of the Magformers, especially since the constructions are not exclusively two-dimensional but can also be three-dimensional. The challenge cards always show the perspective from above. Construction parts in colors that are not depicted on the card need to be concealed underneath the others.

The playing time written on the box is 15 minutes – which is impossible to accomplish, given the 55 challenge cards that have to be completed. The variant mentioned at the end of the instructions suggests reducing the cards to 40 or 30, which might be recommendable. In most cases, the outcome of the game is determined pretty early, since the more talented players are almost always successful. All the others might consider it a nice accomplishment if they gain a challenge card every now and then. (sbw)



Roberto Fraga: Magnefix (Amigo), graphics: Oliver Freudenreich; for 2-4 players, about 7+ years, duration: about 15-30 minutes, price: about 35 Euros.

Reviewer	Playing Appeal
Harald Schrapers	8
Andreas Becker*	6
L.U. Dikus**	6
Stefan Ducksch***	6
Wieland Herold****	6
Marie Poenisch	6
Christoph Schlewinski	7

* Funny muddle for in-between.

** The magnets are considerably stronger than the replayability appeal.

*** Nice-looking materials and an interesting game challenge, but one which burns itself out very soon, especially for older players.

**** Magnets always attract attention. Children like it. But they need to accept that the winner often is determined before the game actually ends.

Potter-Patience

By UDO BARTSCH

HARRY POTTER. HOGWARTS BATTLE. THE MONSTER BOX OF MONSTERS EXPANSION: A game with too many cards cries out for – what? For even more cards, of course! Contrary to previous assumptions, less is not at all more. More is more. **MAGIC, DOMINION**, and at least 90 percent of all crowdfunding projects depend on the idea that we think we need what we actually don't need. Therefore, **THE MONSTER BOX OF MONSTERS** also adds another 152 too many cards to the already too many 252 cards of the basic game.

This ensures that the strategy pursued in the basic game can be consistently continued. But from one scenario to the next, the game doesn't become more elaborate, but more extensive, more tiresome, more repetitious, more difficult. To work your way through the fourth and last adventure of the box requires a tremendous amount of luck or a tremendous number of attempts or a tremendously high level of cheating.

Luna Lovegood is a new starting character; and the villains are joined now by monsters that don't respond to bashing but have allergic reactions to monetary payments. And as if you hadn't enough on your plate already, there are now three „encounters“ per scenario in the game; these encounters cause disadvantages until somebody can finally play or buy certain cards, or roll certain symbols. Ha! And promptly, the next (and guaranteed even worse) encounter is unlocked!

Instead of surprising ideas, there is now – in keeping with the typical deckbuilding assembly kit – also the equivalent to the curse cards in **DOMINION** flooding the game: a card type called „Detention!“ that is terribly annoying and can



Forrest-Prizan Creative: Harry Potter. Hogwarts Battle: The Monster Box of Monsters Expansion (Kosmos); for 2-4 players, about 11+ years, duration: about 120 minutes; price: about 30 Euro.

Reviewer **Udo Bartsch** Playing Appeal **6**

The basic game of **HARRY POTTER. HOGWARTS BATTLE** was reviewed in spielbox 7/19 and got an average rating of 7.



The expansion promises more of the same: new locations, new items, new creatures, and a new team member, Luna Lovegood. Photos: Bartsch/Becker

be overcome only with the „banishing“ action, which is new as well. But, like so many things in **HARRY POTTER. HOGWARTS BATTLE**, it is purely coincidental whether there are banishment cards available for purchase in the market at the right time.

Alas, the game gives so many reasons for complaining about the mediocre game design. However, it is coherent and entertaining, it is loads of fun, and it captivates you. Fatefulness and cooperative deck-building suck you in. You are just eager to succeed. Besides tactics and luck, this is also a matter of patience – as in a solitaire card game of **PATIENCE** that you can't accomplish for quite a while. (sbw)

E-PAPER

Starting with issue 1-2021, subscribers to spielbox have the option of viewing the digital issues of the current year in the premium area on spielbox.de. However, the epaper can neither be down-loaded nor printed out there. The issues will be available there on the day the print edition is sent out. (BN)

New Rules for Tuscany



Why have you changed the rules for THE CASTLES OF TUSCANY?

Stefan Feld: We received feedback from a not inconsiderable number of players

that people mainly chose the bonus tile at the beginning of the game, which allows one additional card.

With the „+1 card“ bonus tile, a player now draw four cards instead of three, so they have more than anyone trying a different strategy.

Previously, the bonus tile was „worth“ half an action. With the new rule, it's only one third of an action.

Why didn't this problem come up in the development of the game?

I think it's because we didn't see the card bonus assessment solidifying too quickly in certain groups of players and nothing else being tried.

You wrote, „the supposedly too strong bonus tile“ ...

The old rules are quite well balanced. And I receive this feedback, too, of skilled players being competitive with the other bonus tiles. Of course, I don't want to hide the fact that the „+1 card“ bonus brings more security.

Do you yourself have a favorite bonus tile to start with?

Even if no one believes it, I like to play with the cards, they can give a boost in the important first round. AB/th

A Lesson in Energy Saving

Board and card games are regularly used as promotional giveaways for customers or business partners on special occasions. Over many years, Ravensburger has even maintained a dedicated business division exclusively for this purpose, offering classic games with individual designs as well as new games. Because these usually come as limited editions, they make for interesting collector's items, as seen on the website of the "Europäische Spielesammler Gilde" (European game collectors' guild) under e-s-g.eu/collecting-areas/themes/promotion.

Stromnetz Berlin GmbH, the Berlin power grid operator, is targeting a completely different group of people, high school students grade 10 and up, to play **HERTZSCHLAG** and learn about the German energy transition. In class, mind you. To this end, schools can order five copies free of charge, along with educational material for teachers to prepare lessons.

HERTZSCHLAG explicitly avoids boring its three to five players with facts and instead aims to let them experience the specific interplay of various aspects of energy production and consumption themselves. In the role of private consumers, they not only make decisions about their energy consumption, but can also invest in new power plants and exert in-

fluence on political resolutions about the power grid. And although everyone is out to score victory points with a hidden objective, they must also cooperate to prevent the grid's collapse.

In larger groups, it becomes more difficult to reach consensus, especially since agreements are not binding. Cards are played face-down at the same time and then executed one after the other. Not only can the cards increase costs or generate income, but they can also affect the reliability and consistency of the power grid. If it ever leaves the green zone, players have only two more chances to intervene with money.

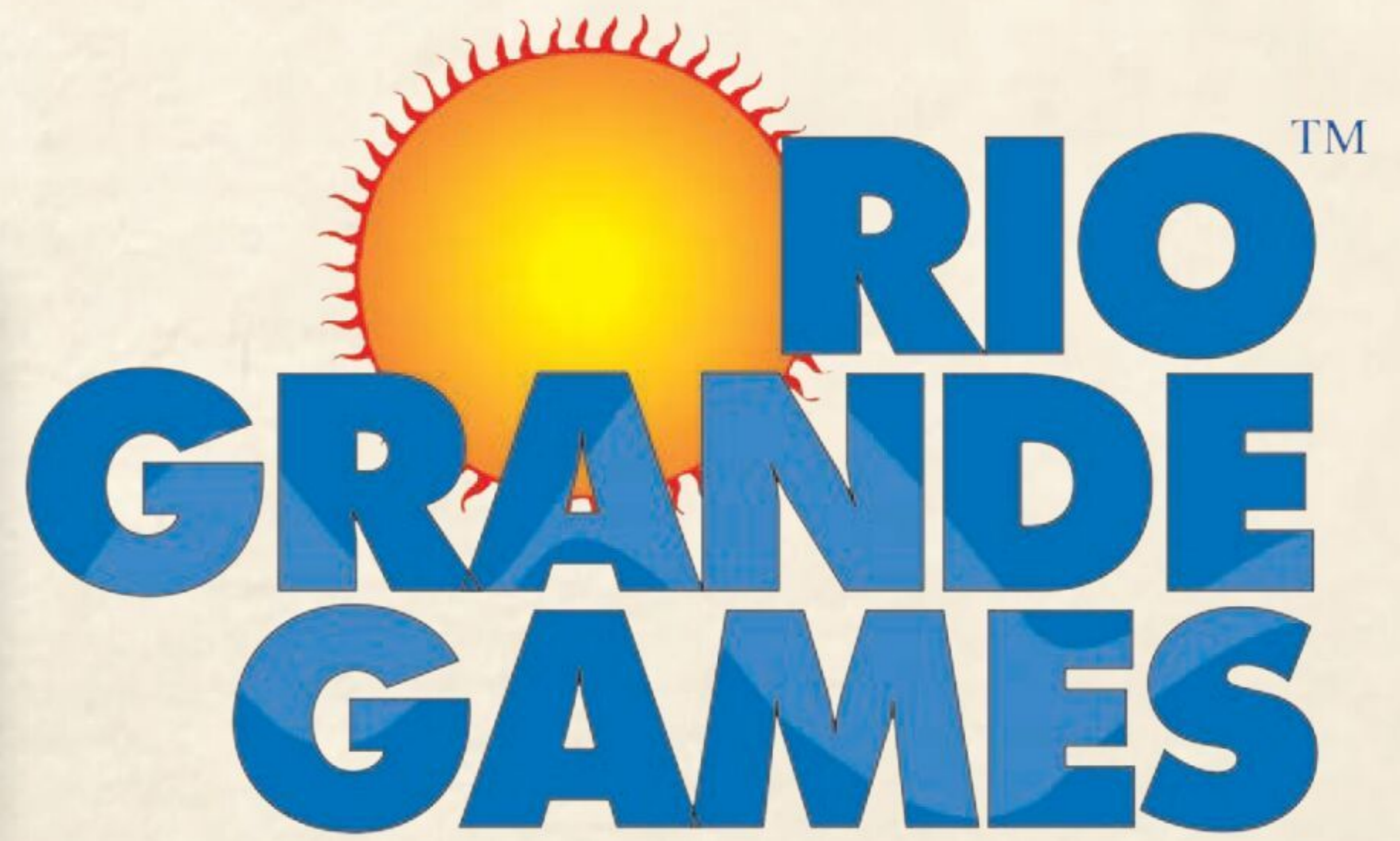
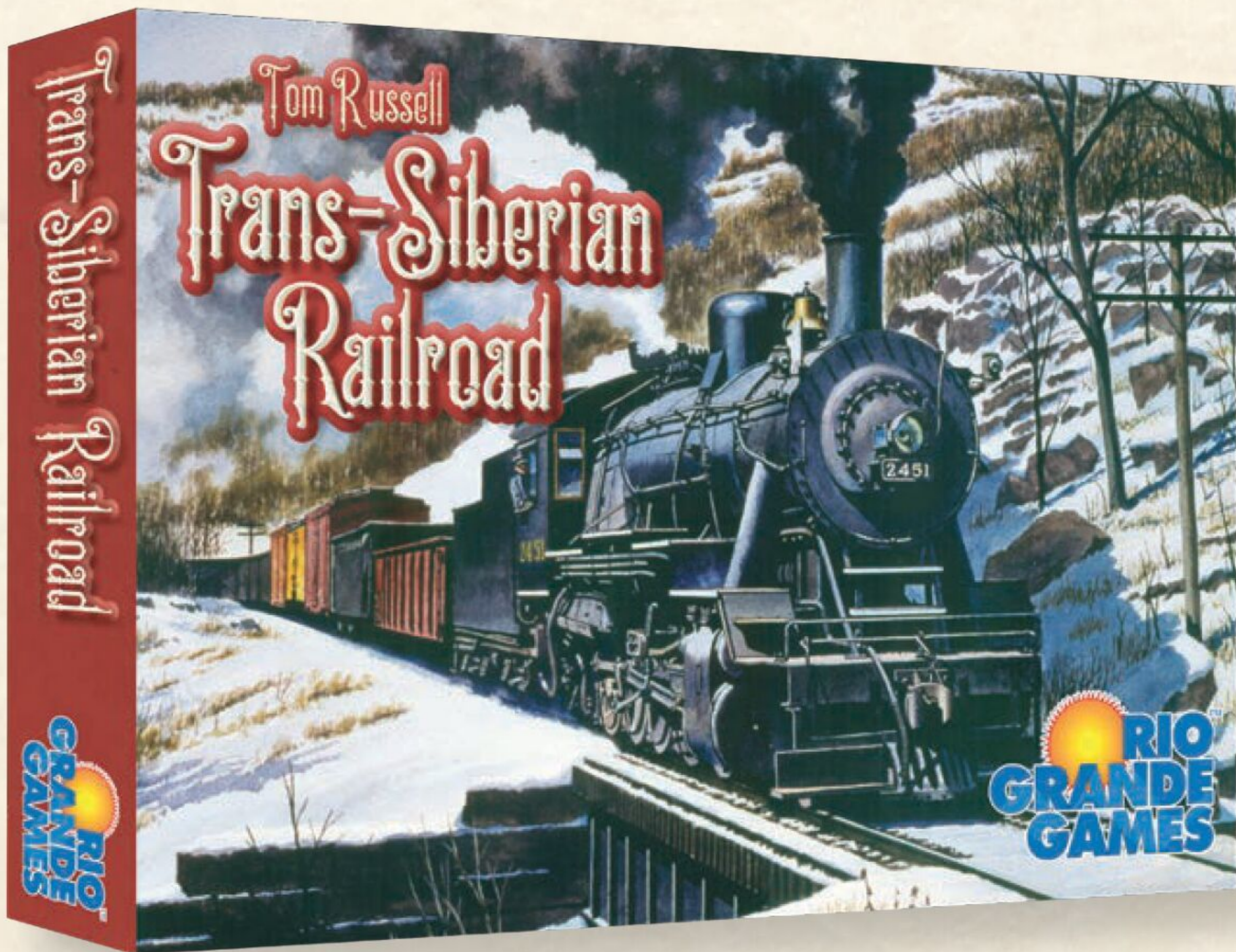
HERTZSCHLAG (Karma Games) was designed by publisher and game designer Juma Al-Joujou with the help of a teacher and his class from Berlin. Like **CLANS OF CALEDONIA** – which is highly rated on Boardgamegeek – Al-Joujou achieved an interesting mix of familiar game mechanics. Out of the 3000 copies, 500 will go on sale in the publisher's web shop, for around 30 euros plus shipping.

L.U. DIKUS/cs

Developed together with students and their teacher: **HERTZSCHLAG**, a game about the German energy transition. Photo: Dikus



Photo of Stefan Feld: Susanne Feld



In the late 19th century, the Russian government commissioned a project to build a railroad that would connect Moscow in the west with Vladivostok in the east. Players in *Trans-Siberian Railroad* are competing to start railroads, build track and earn income all while extending their track network farther and farther east across the great expanse of Russia. They must be careful that they keep the government happy. The Tsar is not above taking over control of any railroad that falls too far behind!



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