

## Spiel '05

The Spiel games fair is a big event each year in the world of board games. Even more so as it becomes increasingly international and attracts games publishers from all around the world. This year's event was attended by some 144,000 visitors across the four days. They saw 400 new products from 723 exhibitors from 30 different countries. As always, there is far too much to see – and certainly far too much to be able to play everything. My report reflects just a fraction of the show, concentrating on the stuff that interests me.

I shall be adding to this report as time allows – and I play more of the games. This is the second published version: 30th December 2005.

Designer Friedemann Friese is always noticeable at Spiel. It may have something to do with the green hair! This year's game from his imprint, 2F Spiele, is *Fiese Freunde Fette Feten* (Mean Friends, Hot Parties). This was designed by Friedemann with Marcel-André Casasola Merkle – best known for his card games. The game itself can best be described as a realistic, modern *Careers* laced with Friedemann's sense of humour and outlook on life. Players each have a board showing their standing in a number of factors: how much they smoke, drink, use drugs, are knowledgeable, are spiritual and so on. There is also space to show friends, love and marriage. And break-ups and divorce.



FFFF at an early stage – no friends, but loads of knowledge

At the start of the game, each player gets five life goals, no friends and doesn't smoke, drink etc. Then they go through puberty. This is the first opportunity for players to progress towards their life goals. By taking cards from the table, players build up their rankings. When they match the requirements of a life goal, the goal is achieved and can be played.

This is probably more comprehensible with an example. So, let's say one of my life goals is becoming a games designer (with suspiciously green hair). The icons on the card show, for example, that I need some drink, some knowledge and at least four friends, but must not be in love. So I will look to get experience that will give me that: picking up friends while fighting shy of romance.

And so it goes. Additional cards that provide more experiences for players are auctioned and the first person to achieve all their goals wins. This is less a game, more an experience. The game mechanics work fine, but there's not a lot to them. The fun is all in taking part and that's how I prefer to play the game? Never mind winning, how much fun can I have along the way. Thus being able to pick the 'Green Hair Dye' card on the way to achieving my goal of becoming a games designer is hugely satisfying. And there aren't many games that will bring people across the room to see what's happening. Great fun and one of my favourite games at this year's Spiel.

As always, card game specialist Adlung Spiele had a crop of new games at Spiel. The most interesting of these was *Helden & Zaubersprüche* (Heroes and Spells), designed by Jochen Schwinghammer. However, this is just an expansion of Schwinghammer's *Zauberschwert & Drachenei* (Magic Sword and Dragon Egg) from 2003. The game is a fantasy-themed quest to defeat monsters and claim magical artefacts. The expansion adds new monsters and terrain and gives the heroes more options. *Rotundo* (designed by Jodi Soares) also looks like it might be interesting. In this game players compete in auctions and swaps to make the best collection of marbles. However, like all the Adlung selection, it seems to be aimed at children.

The prototype new game from alea was *Um Ru(h)m und Ehre* (whose punning title translates as *For Rum/Renown and Honour*), designed by Stefan Feld. Opportunities to try this out were pretty limited and I didn't get the chance to play it. The game will include nice pirate figures for players to move around the board – nine pieces with multiple configurations. The aim is to collect – as the title suggests – rum and renown (by winning 'competitions'). This is one of alea's smaller-boxed games (like *Louis XIV* and *Wyatt Earp*), but I'll wait to play the game before pronouncing on it.



The new *Oltre Mare*

Amigo had the new edition of *Oltre Mare*, first published last year by Italian outfit Mind the Move. Given the full production treatment by a major German publisher, this version of the game looks absolutely terrific. It certainly makes Emanuele Ornella's cracking game accessible to more people. Watch out for the English language edition from Rio Grande. Also from Amigo (and Rio Grande) is *Drachenreiter* (Dragon-

riders), a race game by Klaus-Jürgen Wrede and Jean de Poël. The game has some good-looking dragon pieces that players race around one of the tracks that can be made from the board segments.

Amigo's new games include *Wir sind schwanger* ("We are pregnant"), a new card game from Uwe Rosenberg. This is about expectant mothers (and fathers) deciding on names for their soon-to-be offspring. An intriguing premise for a game, but it's basically a word game and isn't readily accessible to non-German speakers. And Amigo is also publishing a new edition of Reiner Knizia's *Quo Vadis*. This is a clever game where winning depends on the ability to negotiate with the other players. Mayfair is producing the English language edition.

Angelo Porazzi Games has a new game, *Tatata*, designed by the eponymous Angelo Porazzi. As the game is about First World War-style warplanes, the name reflects what happens if your plane ends up in front of one of your opponent's. The game is actually a race; a race with machine guns. It's a fairly simple card game and looks like good fun.

Argentum Verlag were showing off their three quirky games, but had nothing new for us.

Essen-based AZA Spiele had a new edition of their motor racing game, *MotorChamp*. A new edition of their first game, *Turfmaster*, plus a second expansion of extra tracks for it are due for publication early in 2006.

The new game from Bambus was the amusingly titled *Socks in the City*. This is a light, two-player game about all those socks that disappear in the wash leaving an estranged partner behind. Designer Günter Cornett's game aims to help people come to terms with 'lost sock syndrome'. Two pairs of socks are separated and placed at random on a representation of the Berlin Metro system. It's then up to the players to re-connect the two socks of their colour. The game is undemanding, but you do need to have some spatial awareness.

BeWitched and Andrea Meyer had *Wordwild* for us. This is a "word association game". The mechanics defy easy explanation, but players have to find words that begin and end with certain letters, scoring points for speed and being on-topic. That's a 'red' round. Then you play a 'yellow' round, against the clock. Except the clock is one of the players sorting cards into alphabetical order. ... No, you've got to play this game yourself to make sense of it! This is a clever game, but I think it needs players who like word games.

Cahoona Isle was a new name on me and they had one game, *Banana Republika*, from designer Michael Heitkamp. I didn't get the chance to try the game, but it's apparently an amusing card game that takes the mickey out of party politics. The publishers categorise it as a satirical, role-playing card game for ages 16+.

Cardchess International had the odd-looking – and even more oddly named – *H:Olland*. Designed by Richard van Vugt and Jeff Widderich, the game has the players as farmers building up their farms. Each turn follows the pattern of the seasons. Players plant their crops and then harvest them. These provide the raw materials to build windmills, farms and dykes and to plant new fields. The combination of windmills and dykes allow new areas of land to be drained of the water covering them. This is a very tactical game that gives players lots of clever things to do to get an edge over their opponents.

The ultimate goal of the game is to plant fields with tulips and cash in on tulipmania (think dot com boom with flowers). While there is some opportunity to do this during the game, the main activity happens at the end. Suddenly everybody is tearing out their crops and planting tulips (assuming you've bought plenty of bulbs). The winner of the game is decided in a final



*H2Olland* – look at those windmills!

race to claim the tulip fields. Strangely, this phase seems to owe little to the build-up that has gone before. When I tried the game, I did badly for six turns, but won the game as my farms turned out to be strategically placed for the end game.

*H:Olland* is an intriguing game. It looks good – the model windmills are something else – and plays well. But there seems to be little connection between the final, game-winning turn and what's gone before. Of course, this being Spiel, there's every chance that we didn't get the rules right. So it will bear further investigation – and was certainly enough fun that I'll happily play it again. Worth taking a look at.

*König Salomons Schatzkammer* (King Solomon's Treasure Chamber) was the title of an interesting looking game on the Clementoni stand. Designed by Alessandro Saragoza, the game is about an archaeological dig stumbling on the eponymous chamber. This is represented by the 'board' – a grid of squares holding tiles. Turning over the tiles will reveal treasures – or curses. Some of the items found will help players excavate or protect them from curses. As you'd expect, the most treasure at the end will win the game. This seems to be a family game, but has some interesting tactical elements (you score points for having the most curses at the end, for example) that make it potentially interesting for gamers. And the original design placed second in the 'Premio Archimede' game design competition. One to try.

Stephan "Old Town" Riedel has one new title from his outfit, Clicker Spiele. This is *Ostfriesenlauf* (called Gotham Race in English – there's a little story that amusingly explains the name), a boxed edition of a game that was previously

available in a diy form. This is a neat race game as the East Frisians (Ostfriesen) compete to find out who's fastest. The basic mechanics are straightforward: the player's pawns are moved around the track according to the cards played. First to cross the finish line wins.

What makes this more tricky is that the cards move a pawn in a particular position in the race: "third place moves 2 spaces forward," for example. And all players choose their cards before any of them is played. So you may try to move your pawn, which is in third place, only to find it's been overtaken before your card takes effect. The last player is the first to play a card, so s/he will have more control and should be able to catch up. And then lose control again. This is one of those simple games that's much harder to play. It isn't particularly deep – a game doesn't last more than 30 minutes – but it is good fun and offers a bit of a challenge. Good stuff.

Cwali had two new games from main man Corné van Moorsel. *Ahoy* is a card game where players race across the sea with the help of various creatures. There is a strong memory element and it appears to be very much aimed at children. *Aloha* looks a more challenging game on the theme of island exploration. It's a tile-laying game in which players try to find prime locations for holiday resorts and has some significant tactical elements. I didn't have time to try either, but both looked good.

Italian publisher da Vinci had several new titles for us – including a new expansion for *Bang!*. The one I tried is a card game designed by Alessandro Zucchini. *Lucca Città* aims to reproduce the palaces of the eponymous Italian city. Each card (with a few exceptions) shows a storey of a palace in a particular colour. Players build up palaces with matching cards, each choosing a set of cards from those face up on the table. Cards that don't fit can also be turned over as part of the city walls. Each card shows some windows, which are the points scored when the palace is completed. They also show some shields, which are used to decide the order of play. So completing a palace can mean you take your turn later, making it more difficult to get the cards you want. Ties are broken by the house numbers on the doors to unfinished palaces. So that's three things to think about on each card.

Players can also score points by 'opening' their completed palaces. As the points tally here depends on what other people have in play, there are plenty of tactical options to consider. After a set number of turns, the game ends. Players gain further points from city walls and Towers (the cards that aren't parts of a palace) – provided the player has enough shields in unfinished palaces to support them. This gives players lots to weigh up when making their decisions. It's a quick-playing (20 minutes says the box), clever card game. An English language edition is available from Mayfair. Excellent stuff and another of my favourites.

Korean publisher Dagoy Games had a couple of new games for us. *Lexio* is a version of a traditional Chinese game using Mah-Jongg style blocks (in a very classy black) rather than cards. *Lineage II: the board game* is a simple wargame in a fantasy setting. The five races (Humans, Elves, Dwarves, Orcs and Dark Elves) fight it out

for domination of the land. Presumably this is a tie-in with the online game (which I know nothing about). I didn't have time to investigate further.

Days of Wonder had lots of expansions to *Memoir '44* and one for this year's hit, *Shadows over Camelot*. *A Company of Knights* is a set of painted figures for the game. They certainly add to the look of the thing. The *Memoir '44* expansions take the game to the deserts of North Africa and the snows of Russia. Excellent stuff!

New publisher Dice Boxx was on PMS Games (otherwise known by the name of their terrific motor racing game, *Das Motorsportspiel*) with their first game, *Taxi and the City*. This seems to be along the lines of most taxi games: earn money collecting and delivering fares around a city. Wiesbaden in this case, with different cities in the pipeline. It looked to have similar mechanics for moving the cars as *Das Motorsportspiel*, so it's likely to be a tactical game with a large luck element. It looks good, but it probably won't travel well.

Kris Burm's Don & Co had the latest and final part of his *GIPF* series of two-player abstract strategy games. *PÜNCT* is a connection game played on a hexagonal board with overlapping tiles and there will be an English language edition from Rio Grande Games. Not the kind of thing I like, but those of you who do can find out more at [www.gipf.com](http://www.gipf.com).

A new game from Doris and Frank (Spiele von Doris & Frank) is an event. *Arche Opti Mix* is a card game of getting animals into the Ark (which is the title of Rio Grande's English edition). This is the usual combination of clever mechanics from Frank Nestel and excellent and amusing graphics from Doris Matthäus. The game is about managing the animals and foodstuffs going on to the Ark so that nothing eats anything else and the Ark doesn't tip over. I haven't played the game yet, but it looks fun.



Frank Nestel poses with *Arche Opti Mix*

Eagle Games were showing off their new, big box games. I was most interested in the new version of *Railroad Tycoon – The Boardgame*. Credited to Martin Wallace and Glenn Drover, this uses a further development of the *Age of Steam/ Lancashire Railways/Volldampf* system. That is, moving cubes of 'goods' to destination cities to increase income to your company, which is financed by issuing shares in the short term. The big plus to this has to be the Eagle Games production, which means lots of good-looking components in a big box. Identifying any differences in the game will have to wait on an opportunity to play it.

Other games from Eagle included a new edition of *Conquest of the Empire*, originally published by Hasbro in 1984. The game includes the original rules by Larry Harris (with additional work by Glenn Drover) plus a new version “designed by Glenn Drover, inspired by a design by Martin Wallace”. *Sid Meier’s Pirates! – The Boardgame*, designed by Glenn Drover, is one of Eagle’s usual board game adaptations of a computer game. On the other hand *Wench!* is a card game of forfeits and penalties designed by MYNDzei Games.

After discovering *Neuland* last year, I was keen to see the two new games from Eggertspiele – though neither was designed by Peter Eggert. *Antike* (Antiquity) was designed by Mac Gerdts. The double-sided board shows the eastern Mediterranean and Near East on one side and the whole of the Med on the other. This immediately provokes comparisons with *Civilization*, but *Antike* is a very different game. The aim is to get cards representing major figures of antiquity – Plato, Alexander, you get the idea. These come in five different groups and are gained for achieving different things on the board. The first player to get enough cards – depending on how many people are playing – wins the game.

The really clever thing is the mechanism that decides what a player can do each turn. It’s a circular track of eight spaces, around which each player moves a pawn. At the start of a turn, the player can move three spaces for free or pay to move further. Then they can do the action they’ve landed on. Three of the actions generate one of the three commodities used in the game. Another three actions allow players to spend each commodity. Marble builds temples (which enhance the province they’re in), iron builds armies and navies (I don’t think they need explaining) and gold improves knowledge (which provides bonuses like moving further). The actions of acquiring and expending a commodity are, of course, opposite each other. The remaining two actions allow the player to move their pieces on the board – this is how territory is gained, allowing players to produce more.

This means it takes time to do anything. A player can’t simply build a big army and attack. S/he has to get the iron, then the armies and, finally, move. It’s just as difficult to respond to a threat, which puts the advantage with the aggressor. However, the game is not just about territory on the board. This is only one way of gaining the personalities needed to win. And there isn’t enough territory to be able to win just by conquering the world. As with many other games, the trick is to do things that other players aren’t doing. And if you can take them by surprise, so much the better. Terrific stuff and one of my favourite games of the show.

The other game from Eggertspiele is *Die Dolmengötter*, designed by Thomas Odenhoven. This is a more abstract game played on a board of interconnected octagons, hexagons and squares. These represent stone circles. Players place stones on the corners as they move, slowly building up the circles. Once anyone has a majority of a circle, they get to place a scoring stone. Further scoring stones are added as other people take over the majority. The final score depends on the value of the stone and its position in the stack. Clever stuff, but not my kind of game.

After the success of *Leapfrog* last year, Scotsmen Fraser and Gordon Lamont (alias Fragor Games) were back with another animal-themed game, *Shear Panic*. Despite the cute sheep models, this is a strategy game of getting your sheep in the right place at the right time. It sold out almost as soon as the fair began, due to advance orders and the popularity of *Leapfrog*.

It's been a while since I've noticed anything from Franjos Spieleverlag, but they definitely had a couple of new games this year. *Friesen-Törn* is a dinghy sailing game (designed by Herbert Schützdeller) in which players score points for ramming each other. I don't know what the Yacht Club would say, but it makes for a fun game – more dodgems than Cowes Week.



*Friesen-Törn*

The trick is to make the most of your movement cards. The game is fairly abstract, played on a small board, but has rather nice playing pieces. *Zodiak* is even more abstract, being played with cylindrical pawns on a pattern of dots. It's a two-player game designed by Torsten Marold. The aim is to use the pawns to create the layout of the constellations on your cards. The pawns are double-ended so you need to get them the right way up! Nice enough, but not my sort of thing.

Fun Factory Games come from Singapore and had brought two games with them, both designed by Nikki Lim. *Dividends* is a share dealing game with five companies. The aim is to maximise your wealth through dividends and share value. As fluctuations are governed by rolling dice, you have to gamble rather than plan. *Giza* is a card game, also aimed at a family audience and based around the great pyramids. The aim is to get three pyramids finished – and interfere with what the other players are up to. It's a fairly simple game, but has a strong fun element in stitching up your opponents.

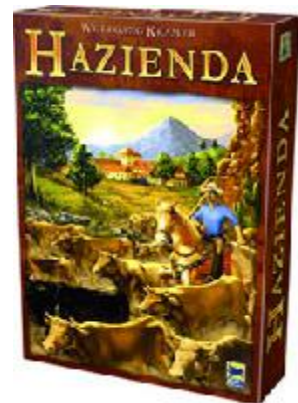
Gigantoskop brought us a Russian Roulette last year in the shape of *Kablamo*. This year they have *Badaboom*, a card game of bomb-making. Players are goblins testing bombs for "The High Necromancer". They tinker with each bomb in turn until it goes off. The survivors (!) earn gold – and enough gold will win the game (by bribing the guards so that you can escape!). With lots of tactical options and opportunities to put a spoke in other players' wheels this looks to be a fast-moving, fun game and I look forward to trying it.

I've already seen Goldsieber's strategy game for this year, *Kreta* (from Stefan Dorra), but their card game was new to me. *Pecunia Non Olet* (Money Doesn't Stink) has the players as proprietors of public toilets in Ancient Rome. Each has a queue



of customers (cards), who will take varying amounts of time to 'do their business' and pay varying amounts of money. Clearly a customer who occupies a seat for 1 turn and pays 4 gold is preferable to one who's there for 4 turns and pays 1 gold. However, the only way to manipulate the queue is by playing action cards. Action cards also let you move cards to, from or around other players' queues – or even their toilet. And you can play several cards a turn, so chaos is the name of the game. First player to the target amount of money wins the game. The theme may be a bit of poo (sorry), but this is quite a fun game – fans of *Family Business* and *Guillotine* will certainly appreciate it.

The big new game from Hans im Glück was *Hazienda*, designed by Wolfgang Kramer. The pedigree makes this a must try game, but I didn't get a chance at Spiel. The game is about territory and development as players expand their farms ("Haciendas") and livestock. It's also about ending the game at the right point – when you're winning! I look forward to trying it – probably in the English language version from Rio Grande.



There were four new games from JKLM Games, all of which look very interesting. I didn't bother trying them at Spiel as I'm sure there'll be plenty of opportunity to do so back in the UK. The games are: *Celtic Quest*, by Nigel Buckle, card game *Fruit Bandits* by Ian Vincent, *Kings Progress* by Steve Kingsbury and *Third World Debt* by Dave Thorby.

Kosmos had the usual array of new games. This year's addition to the *Settlers of Catan* family is *Elasund: der Erste Stadt* (called *Elasund: the First City of Catan* in the English language version from Mayfair Games), designed, of course, by Klaus Teuber. This uses some of the *Settlers* mechanisms as players compete and co-operate to build the eponymous city. Kosmos also had *Beowulf – die Legende* by Reiner Knizia (with an English language edition from Fighting Fantasy Games as *Beowulf – the Legend*). This looks rather like a co-operative game re-telling Beowulf's story – like *The Lord of the Rings*. However, the game seems to be more competitive than that as players score points by helping Beowulf in his quests. Thus there are a winner and losers, rather than players winning or losing as a group. Another one that's certainly worth trying.

Unlike, as far as I'm concerned anyway, Kosmos's take on a Sudoku board game and *Tooor!* (Gooooal!). The latter is a development by Oliver Abendroth of his card game *Finale* from a few years back. I just said no! That leaves *Zauberstauber* (Magic Duster) by Heinrich Glumpler – the English language edition from Rio Grande is *Techno Witches*. This is a race game for modern witches – the kind who ride vacuum cleaners rather than brooms (eat your heart out, Harry Potter!). There's also a programming element as players decide what spells to cast (or moves to make) in advance. This appears to be a rather clever and original game and I'm looking forward to trying it properly.

The nutters at Krimsus Krimskramskiste had two new games for us (leaving aside the role-playing stuff). Both are card games with an Ancient Egypt theme. *Die Baumeister des Krimsutep* (The Architects of Krimsutep) is about building on the banks of the Nile. The playing area is a grid, in which cards can be played, with the Nile running through the middle. At its heart, the game is about taking tricks. As well as scoring points for cards won, players also get to add buildings to the grid. There are various restrictions on building placement (like *Alhambra*), so who ends up building what where depends on the outcome of the tricks. More points are scored for placing buildings and there are further bonuses at the end of the game. I'm not a big fan of trick-taking games, but in this game the trick-taking is only part of the story. And winning tricks is not always the goal. This is one I definitely want to try, but the jury's out at the moment.

The second game is *Die Pyramide des Krimsutep* (The Pyramid of Krimsutep) and is about exploring the eponymous pyramid. And grabbing the treasure, of course. Play starts with a grid of square tiles face down and the players' pawns waiting to enter the pyramid. Players now move around the pyramid, turning over the tiles as they explore. They are looking for the 'canopic jars' of Krimsutep. Getting one of these back to base allows the player to place a treasure in the pyramid. And the first player to retrieve a treasure wins the game. But – and there's always a but – the first jar discovered wakes Krimsutep's mummy. Now players can also manoeuvre the mummy to block their opponents. There are various restrictions on players' movements around the pyramid – not least the passageways shown on the tiles! This means there's a planning and calculation element to the game as well as the plain fun. Another one I definitely want to put through its paces.

Another pleasant surprise from last year's games was *Das Zepter von Zavandor* from Lookout Games. So I was intrigued to see what they had for us this year. The company's big board game for 2005 is *Das Ende des Triumvirats* (The End of the



*Das Ende des Triumvirats*

Triumvirate). Designed by Johannes Ackva and Max Gabrian, the setting is the civil wars that marked the end of Rome as a republic (and led to the Empire). Interestingly, the game is designed specifically for three players: Crassus, Pompey and Caesar. The aim is to dominate the fledgling empire, by political control, by military conquest or by getting the people of Rome on your side. With three different ways of winning, there are plenty of options – which means a need to make decisions and to keep a careful eye on your opponents.

One clever mechanism limits the game to a maximum of four turns, so it doesn't drag on. This is the election of a Consul. One of the players must be elected Consul at the end of each turn. Being elected Consul twice gives the player a political victory. So turn 4 will always be the decider. There's a lot more to commend in this game, including excellent production (in the same, dark style as *Zepter*), and I look forward impatiently to trying it out.

Other games from Lookout include a planned new edition of *World Cup Tournament Football*. No doubt this will tie in to some football thing that's happening next year.

After the success of *Oltre Mare* last year, Italian publisher Mind the Move had *Il Principe* from the same designer, Emmanuela Ornella. As this was a limited edition it wasn't surprising that it sold out quickly. Taking its inspiration (and title!) from Machiavelli, the game is about conquering and holding territory in medieval Italy. The English language version is from Z-man Games and is eagerly awaited.

Phalanx Games had a new version of Günter Cornett's *Pingvinas* called *Packeis am Pol*. The English language version – *Hey! That's My Fish!* – is published by Mayfair and was well-received by the British and American contingents at Spiel. It's a quick strategy game in which players grab fish with their penguin pieces. This produces gaps in the ice field and the game finishes when penguins can't move any further. It's a nice little game and I think a bit of a departure for Phalanx, whose usual fare is big wargame-like strategy games. Such as *Mesopotamia*, designed by Klaus-Jürgen Wrede. Players expand across the territory of the game, building up their tribe in competition with the others. At the same time, the players must co-operate to build a temple to the Gods – and then make offerings. This game has also been well received and I look forward to playing it.

Playme.de is, I believe, mainly a retailer, but they do have a few publications to their name. This year's game, *Big Kini*, by Guido Eckhof, created quite a buzz at Spiel, so I had to give it a try. The game is played over a board of hexagonal tiles, which start face-down. When explored and turned face-up, each tile shows an atoll of three islands. Each island produces something – cash, goods – or allows actions – moving to another island, placing new pieces. In order to do the action, though, players have to have control of the island, or a pair of neighbouring islands or the whole atoll. These positions are worth victory points too.

As well as having control, players need to get the opportunity to use the action. There are six actions, shown on a board. Players take their turns by placing a pawn

on the action they want and then doing it. But there are limited opportunities for each action, so being in last place in a round can be a real pain. This is particularly true of getting money. Players need money to do other things, so getting money is a high priority, but only two players a turn can do this.

The game is thus one of planning your expansion carefully and choosing the ways you want to score victory points. As there are several ways of doing this, it pays not to compete with other players. The advanced game changes things by adding action cards into the game, but I haven't played the game with these yet. *Big Kini* is an interesting game with plenty to recommend it, but not one of my favourites.

I finally caught up with *Jenseits von Theben* at the Prinz Spiele stand. This was the second edition of Peter Prinz's game and it quickly sold out – mainly to US visitors with orders for several copies as far as I could make out. The game has some clever mechanics. To start with, doing anything takes time (in weeks), which is shown by moving your pawn along the track round the outside of the board. Initial actions are about doing research and collecting equipment and expertise for your archaeological expedition(s). Then you go on an expedition (moving takes time, too). Depending on how much time you want to spend and how much research you've done (modified by your equipment and experts), you take a number of cards from the location and see what you've found. The decks start as a mixture of rubbish and treasures. The more expeditions, the fewer



*Jenseits von Theben* in play

treasures will be left, of course, putting time pressure on the players. The game ends after three years (three times round the track) and players tot up their points and bonuses to see who's won. This is a terrific little game and I'm just sorry it's sold out. Twice! Hopefully a larger publisher will take it up – or Prinz will be able to finance a third edition.

An extended stay at the Queen stand gave me the chance to play several of their new games. Traditionally, one of these is a Dirk Henn-designed game, re-worked from the original version published by db-spiele. This year, the game was *Timbuktu*. This is a clever game of transporting laden camels across the desert. It's actually a deduction game. The camels travel across a number of board sections. Thieves strike in each section, picking camels in specific positions and stealing specific goods.

The thieving is determined by cards and, each turn, each player gets to see another set of the cards for this section of the board. From this information, and from what the other players are doing, players decide which of their camels to move where.

However, the value of the different goods at the end of the game depends on how many have been stolen. The more that have been taken, the rarer it is and the more it's worth. So the ideal situation is to keep all of a good while all the other players have theirs stolen. Naturally, this is not going to happen!

Playing the game, I had the feeling that I should have been able to work things out and avoid all but a few losses. In practice it's rather harder. And it's surprisingly easy to get it wrong! This is a clever game that repays a bit of thinking and a bit of 'headology'. It's good stuff, and fairly entertaining too.



Camels advance towards *Timbuktu*

At first glance, *Aqua Romana* (designed by Martin Schlegel) looks like *Metro* played with Roman aqueducts. In fact it's a rather different game. Each player starts with the beginnings of four aqueducts and scores points according to their length when they reach an end. Each turn, they place a square tile on the board to extend one of their aqueducts. However, a player can only place a tile where the end of their aqueduct is on the same line (up, down, left, right) as one of the wooden blocks round the edge of the board. What's more, the block defines the piece of aqueduct that can be laid (straight, curve, crossover etc).

What really makes the game is that, once a player's placed a tile, s/he moves the block involved further round the board. So, players are trying to manoeuvre the blocks to get them into the right positions to extend their aqueducts in the right way. This adds a whole other dimension to the game and gives players a lot to think about. Having said that, a lot of the time the choices are fairly obvious. This means the game doesn't bog down as the next player works through all the ramifications of the next few turns. Another good game.

There were two more games from Queen. Rüdiger Dorn's *Raub Ritter* is a tile-laying game. Players build up a landscape by placing tiles. They then lay claim to the territory by placing and moving their 'knights'. The final owner of a tile is the player whose knight is on top and they score points according to what the tile is. It sounds interesting and, given Herr Dorn's track record, I will certainly give it a try. And, finally, there is *Gold der Inka*. This is a labyrinth game in the style of *The Amazing Labyrinth*. Here the challenge is to move pawns around the board and/or move bits of the board around. The aim is to gather the pieces in your colour. This will probably appeal to anyone who likes *Ricochet Robot*, but it left me cold.

Repos Production is a new (to me, anyway) Belgian outfit and their game is *Cash 'n Guns*. Think *Reservoir Dogs*. The players are robbers sharing out the loot from a

job. The question is whether (and when) to shoot one of the others – so that they don't get a share – or not. So, everybody plays a card and points their gun (a foam rubber silhouette) at their target. The targets have the opportunity to duck, which puts them out of the divvy-up. Then the cards are revealed to see who's actually fired a shot (each player only has a few shots). This is just a very silly game that is huge fun! Add in special powers for each player and the option of including an undercover cop (which gets us to the *Reservoir Dogs* scenario) and this is a terrific game. My favourite silly game of Spiel '05.



Look what's in the box!

Australian publisher Sagacity Games had a new game from proprietor Don Bone. *Freya's Folly* has its roots in Norse legend. The title refers to the Brisingamen, the necklace of amber and gold that Freya had wrought by the Dwarven smiths, paying them with her favours. In this game the players are those Dwarven smiths. Each player has a team of Dwarves, who dig precious gems from the mines (collect cubes of different colours from the board) and make jewellery from them (match sets of cubes to cards). Ordinary jewellery is worth points at the end of the game. Unless it's incomplete, when the owner pays a penalty. (Taking a jewellery card to prevent someone else completing it is a useful tactic, but backfires if you can't complete it.)

As well as the ordinary gems and jewellery, players may collect pieces of amber and use them to complete sections of the Brisingamen. This brings the player rewards from Freya: tokens that can be traded in to take extra actions each turn. They are also worth points at the end of the game – and twice as much if the Brisingamen is complete. The game ends either when the Brisingamen is finished or if one player has made jewellery with all his Dwarves (they take the jewellery to market and don't come back – probably because they're in the pub). This makes the end of the game unpredictable. But, at the same time, something players can influence.

This is a fascinating tactical game. Just moving your Dwarves through the mines is a little game in its own right. And players have to choose whether to go for the smaller, shallower stashes, make cheaper jewellery quickly and hope to end the game before the others notice. Or to go deep, pick up lots of gems and amber and either go for expensive jewellery or parts of the Brisingamen – should they appear. Much of the game is controlled by the appearance of cards, so you also have to ride your luck. An excellent, challenging game that only misses being one of my favourites at the show because I didn't play it until I was back home.

Strangely we continue the theme of digging gems out of mines with *Diamant* by Alan Moon and Bruno Faidutti. Published by Schmidt, this is a fun game along

*Can't Stop* lines as players decide how far to push their luck – as mentioned in *TWJO* 54. *Angkor* was new to me, though. Designed by Knut Happel, this looks like another in the *Tikal* family. However, this is a game about building temples, not digging them up. Though the distinction may be moot as the players have to stop the jungle encroaching on their buildings during construction. The tactics of this don't seem to be too deep. You play tiles onto the board or other tiles to expand your temple complex or diminish your opponents'. Worth a try.

Sphinx Spieleverlag is the vehicle for Henning Pöhl's neat little games. This year we have *Spinnentwist* (Spidertwist), a two-player mating game. But not with each other. Each player has a team of male spiders that they are trying to manoeuvre towards the (larger) female spider in the middle of the web. However, each time a male spider moves, the female moves towards him. If she lands on a male spider, she just eats him (-1 point). The male spider has to land on the female to mate successfully (+2 points). Most points wins, of course. This is a neat little game, if a bit abstract for me. The board is double-sided, showing the web in winter (harder) and summer (easier). Well worth a look.



A big board and lots of bits for *Indonesia*

*Totentanz* (Dance of the Dead) is a two-player card game. This looks terrific – the cards are double-sized and illustrated in an engraving style – but I didn't get the chance to try the game.

Dutch publisher Splotter Spellens is well-known for its big, gamers' games and this year's title is no exception. The chunky box for *Indonesia* suggests it will take 3-4 hours to play. Inside is a large board, showing the islands and other territories of Indonesia. Despite being largely in shades of brown, this looks terrific. The game, designed by Joris Wiersinga and Jeroen Doumen, is about the economic development of the region – and the player's businesses. As I expect from these guys, gameplay is complex as players establish plantations and markets and connect them with shipping. A must for anyone who likes big games – like me. However, I don't know enough about the game to be able to say more than that. Yet.

Sunriver Games is a new US publisher and they have one game: *Havoc: the Hundred Years War*. This is a bidding card game with some interesting features. The game is played over a series of battles (from the appropriate period, so

Agincourt features) and players score points according to the best bid for each battle. Some battles will give points to first, second and third, for others it's winner takes all. Players bid to win the battle by playing cards from their hand. Play goes round with players adding more cards to their bid (to a maximum of six) or dropping out. Once only one player is left in the bidding, the hands are evaluated.

Hands are ranked Poker style. As a player may have six cards, there is some extension to this – six of a kind, two threes, three pairs and so on. Players discard all cards played and pick up the appropriate number of points. The next battle is now the focus of play. Players draft cards in turn to expand their hands until someone decides to start the fight. And there is a penalty if the battle doesn't start quickly enough. Once all the battles have been resolved, the game is over and the player with the most points wins.

Not a very deep game, but there are some nice tactical ploys in the battles. Not to mention the 'Dogs of War'. These cards are worth zero, but may be used after a battle to retrieve cards back into your hand. A good, solid little game.

Somehow I contrived to miss Tilsit Editions, despite them being in Hall 12. They had a new edition of Emanuele Ornella's *Fantasy Pub*, previously published by Mind the Move, and an expansion (up to six players) for *Himalaya*. Of more interest was *Key Largo*, originally devised by the late Paul "Pirate's Cove" Randles and completed by Bruno Faidutti and Mike Selinker. This is a family game of deep sea divers searching for treasure in sunken wrecks. A kind of sequel to *Pirate's Cove*. Worth a look. Tilsit also had *Caramba!* from Michael Schacht. The setting is early 20th century Mexico where the players compete to gather gold, guns and dynamite. This is a bidding and bluffing card game that also sounds worth a look.

Veteran designer Francis Tresham had his usual corner of the Mayfair Games stand to show the latest from Tresham Games. This was *1829 Mainline*, which comes in a fetching powder blue box. As you can tell from the name, this is an 18xx game, which means a combination of railway-building and stock markets. Since Francis designed it, the emphasis is more on railway-building than manipulating stock. The board is a cunningly skewed map of (most of) the British mainland that allows London to be at one end and Glasgow at the other. The game is intended to encourage players to build big networks and run fast trains along long routes. This means some of the tactical details have been taken out. And, to mix things up, each player is dealt a hand of share certificates at the start. Initially, these are the only shares they can buy. This should make it rather different from other 18xx games and I look forward to trying it out.

The name may sound Dutch, but Van der Veer Games come from Singapore. They had a set of four games on show at Spiel, all aimed at family play and all designed by Jacques Deul. *Blackmail* is a roll-the-dice-and-move-the-dobber board game. There is a twist in that you set up surveillance cameras to get the opportunity to 'blackmail' the other players. *Hollywood Players* is a card game in which players draw or 'poach' cards. The aim is to build up the best hand of Actor, Actress and



Director and win awards. It seems simple stuff. *Trading Routes* is also a card game. Here players build up a map of jungle paths, ruins and tribal villages. The player whose route connects the most of these will win.

The fourth game is *Mob City*. In this, the players are mobsters trying to take over the family as the new Don. It appears to be significantly more complex than Van der Veer's other games and thus provides more of a challenge. Players have to build up a crew – but they cost money – and use this to take over businesses. And rub out their opponents. Not having played it, I don't know the quality of the game, but it certainly sounds appealing.

Warfrog was in their usual position and had several things for us. First up was expansion number four for *Age of Steam: France/Italy*. The two boards can be laid in a rectangle to give a map of France or in line (the other way up) for Italy. Additional rules for the two boards give them both a different flavour. And then there was the new Martin Wallace design, *Byzantium*. This puts the players in the position of the factions defending the last remnant of the Roman Empire – the city of Byzantium – from the barbarian hordes. At the same time, players also have control of some of the hostile forces – an opportunity to do down the other factions in Byzantium. This looks like another clever game and another that I'm looking forward to playing.

Wassertal Games had a revised version of *Railroad Dice* for us. Called *Railroad Dice 2*, the game has been modified sufficiently by designer Jens Kappe to make it a different game. I didn't get to try it, but removing the stock market element makes for a faster, simpler game, focussed on railroad building. I rather liked the original, so I'll have to be convinced this is better. Certainly worth trying, though.



*Railroad Dice 2*

I managed to miss the Winning Moves stand this year – partly because I recoiled when I saw their *Sudoku – the board game* game. The only thing I seem to have missed is *Trans Europa*. This is a new version of *Trans America* with a map of Europe for the board, rather than the USA. I understand designer Franz-Benno Delonge has tweaked the rules a bit, making the game more tactical and less lucky. Rio Grande is publishing it in English.

The small selection available from Winsome Games (if you'd ordered them before the show) included a set of *Age of Steam* expansions. These are the Winsome style of cardstock rather than the mounted boards from Warfrog, but they play just the same. The small Austria map is a two-player version, which means some big

changes to the rules. The slightly larger Netherlands map comes with a “Demand Display”. This shows the cubes demanded in the various cities, rather than the colours of the cities on the board. With substantial additional rules, this looks like another different variant. The Switzerland map is more the usual size and had minimal changes to the rules, making it pretty standard.

The new game from Winsome was *Robber Barons*, designed by Dieter Danziger. This is a fast and rather different railway game and comes with maps of Germany and the USA. Players get points for grabbing routes and placing pawns. The big points come from linking things together in networks, however. And the bigger the network, the more points scored. This is clearly different from other railways games, so it's difficult to make comparisons. I look forward to trying it out.

Ystari Games had a hit last year with *Ys*. This year designer Cyril Demaegd gives us an expansion for the game, *Ys+*. This allows the game to be played with five, rather than the original 3-4. Ystari has also produced *Caylus*, designed by William Attia. This is a 2-5 player, 2-hour game of developing a medieval town. At first glance, it reminded me a bit of *Keydom*. In the same way, players place pawns to bring in the raw materials to do the other actions with the ultimate aim being building the castle. However, *Caylus* offers far more options than that. An important one being constructing more buildings to expand the town and provide more options for next turn.



*Caylus* in play

Each turn, players place their pawns (‘workers’) on the various buildings in the town – or the castle. Then each building’s action is resolved, giving the players raw materials, cash, discounts or other benefits and letting them use their raw materials, cash and so on. A neat little mechanism means that as soon as players start dropping out of the turn, it gets more expensive for the remainder to do anything else. This tends to bring each turn to a rapid conclusion. Except that control of one building allows a player to continue paying the minimum cost, which can be very useful. Then players with workers in the castle can add further bits to the castle, which brings in some useful rewards itself.

Another clever mechanism controls the expansion of the town and the end of the game. Players can influence this – if they can afford it – either to speed things up, slow them down or deprive other players of some actions (often a popular choice!). All the way through, there are opportunities to gain ‘prestige’ (score victory points). Players have to weigh up when to take points (and how many) versus continuing to build up their position. As is often the case, taking advantage of things other people aren’t doing (building the castle, for example) can bring in big rewards. This is a cracking game, which I enjoyed a lot and is one of my favourite games from this year’s show. Look out for the English language edition from Rio Grande.

Almost at the end of the alphabet comes Zoch, a publisher of some renown. Not least for their dexterity games. This year they had *San Ta Si*, in which players have to obscure a wooden rod by stacking up metal cylinders of varying sizes and colours. Less a dexterity game than a spatial awareness game. I’ll be intrigued to try it. *Heckmeck am Bratwurmeck* is an interesting little Reiner Knizia game. It’s a bit of a Shut-the-Box variant with Mah-Jongg-like tiles as the prizes. Apart from clearing them off the table, you can snaffle them from other players. As you’d expect from a Knizia game, it’s clever, quick and clean. The more accessible title for Rio Grande’s English language version is *Pickomino*.

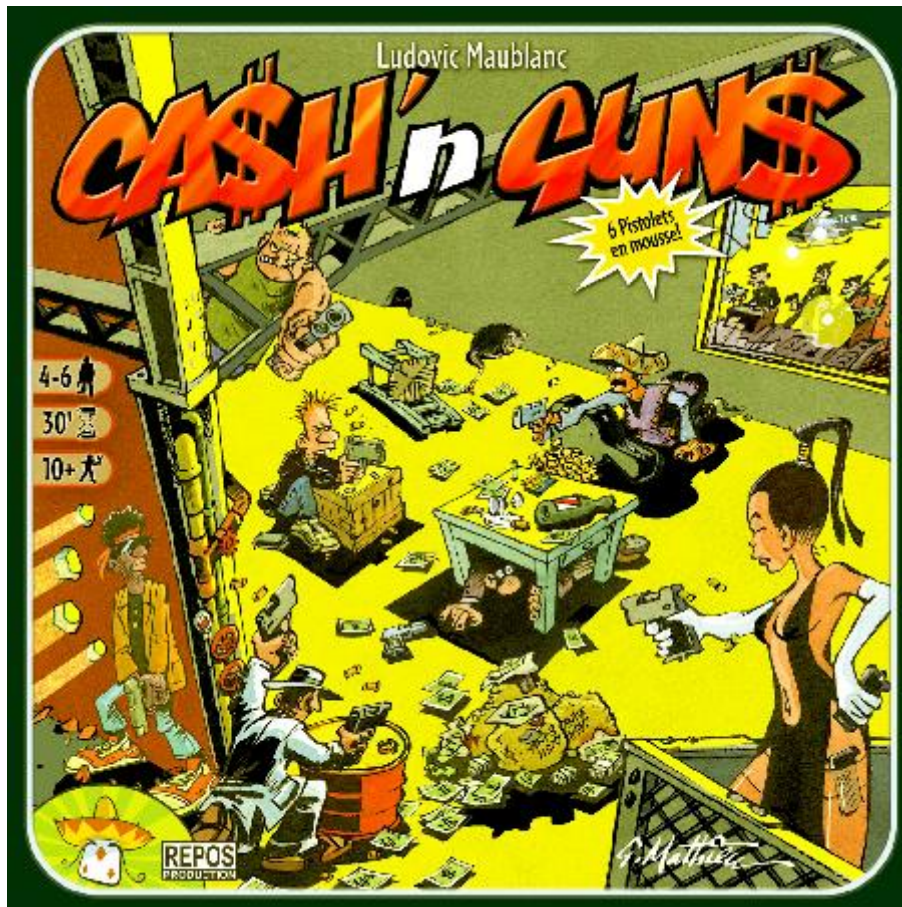
I’ve already talked about *Manila* (in *TWJO* 54), which is a Franz-Benno Delonge design and Zoch’s board game this year. *Frische Luft für die Gruft* is an expansion (“Fresh Air”) for *Dicke Luft in der Gruft* (*Dawn Under* in the English version, but there’s no sign Rio Grande is picking up the expansion). *Diamond Joe* is an expansion for the prize-winning *Niagara*. This is a neutral boat that adds further mayhem to the game. Designer Thomas Liesching’s new game for Zoch is *Dschamál*. This has players simultaneously trying to pull the wooden piece each needs out of an opaque bag. Sounds like a recipe for mayhem to me! And more of a manual strength game than manual dexterity.

The very last publisher (alphabetically) on the list is Zugames, who made their first appearance at Spiel last year with *Feudo*. This year’s game, *Siena*, was also designed by Mario Papini. It’s not about horse racing; it’s a game of social climbing. Players start as peasants, tilling the ground and selling their crops. The aim is to better oneself, climbing, perhaps, to the giddy heights of the town’s ruling council. Unless tempted by the many distractions available to those with money. It sounds a fascinating game, but I wasn’t particularly taken with *Feudo*, so this is one I shall approach circumspectly. Z-Man Games is due to produce an English language version, which may be more accessible (non parlo l’Italiano!).



Cards from *Siena*

So my selection of the games I played at the show is: *Antike* and *Caylus* for substantial strategy board games; *Fiese Freunde Fette Feten* for the experience; *Cash 'n Guns* for sheer fun and *Lucca Città* as an intriguing card game. And finally, I ought to mention *Sudoku – the board game*. There were 5 or 6 games with this title from various publishers at Spiel. And I've seen another, different one since I returned. I wonder how many of them will still be around next year? My advice is: Sudoku – just say no!



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Thanks to Repos Production for the Cash'n Guns artwork. *Hazienda* picture courtesy of Hans im Glück. *Siena* cards courtesy of Mario Papini. All other photos by Pevans.