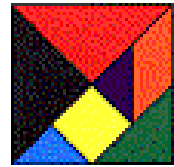


Spiel '06

**Pevans's report from the games fair
(Version I – 24th November 2006)**



As you may know, the Spiel games fair is the largest games event in the world. According to the organisers, Friedhelm Merz Verlag, this year's event had 730 exhibitors from 31 different countries presenting more than 350 new games. It attracted over 150,000 visitors over the four days, including 738 journalists (including yours truly!) from 18 countries. Okay, some of those were there for the "Comic Action" part of the show, but that's still an awful lot of people.

Of necessity, I couldn't cover the whole show, so this is very much a personal report. It covers the highlights of what I saw at the show, picking out the games I particularly liked. I'll post the report on my website (www.pevans.co.uk/Reviews) and will add to it as I play more of the new games.

My favourite green-haired games designer (Friedemann Friese, the man behind 2F Spiele) had several things to show this year. *Fiji* (also in an English language edition from Rio Grande) is an auction game set on the eponymous island. In keeping with Friedemann's sense of humour, players are collecting shrunken heads! This looks like fun, but is only second string to *Fürchterliche Feinde* (*Formidable Foes* in the English language edition from Rio Grande), Friedemann's large game this year. I was a bit surprised to find that this is a 'dungeon' game. Players are characters defeating monsters and building up their powers to take on stronger monsters. I expect a big element of humour in this and look forward to giving it a go. As well as these, 2F had a new expansion for *Funkenschlag* (and Rio Grande for *Power Grid*): boards for Central Europe and Benelux. 2F is also joint publisher – with BeWitched Spiele and Casasola – of *MonsterMaler*. It's clearly been a busy year.

Manimals is one of this year's crop of neat card games from Adlung Spiele. Designed by Bernhard Nägele, it is intended for children (aged 6+), but provides a nifty filler for adults. Each card shows an animal and has lots of information about the animal. In particular, many of its characteristics (such as horned, mammal, winged, four-footed and so on) are listed in the form of icons on the back of the card. An array of the cards is spread out and players have to take the animals they think match a particular characteristic: lays eggs, for example. When everybody's got all the cards they think are relevant, they turn them over to see how many of them are actually egg-layers (or whatever the characteristic is). Net off correct choices against wrong ones and whoever has the most keeps a couple of cards as their points. The other cards go back down, a few more cards are added and a new characteristic is drawn. It's quick, fun and clever – and educational, though most players won't notice this! Good stuff and 8/10 on my highly subjective scale. I'm not sure about the title though...



Seenot im Rettungsboot is a new edition of Ronald Wethering's classic *Rette sich wer Kann* (also known as *Lifeboats*, which is the title of the English language edition from Z-Man Games). This is a terrific game for getting those grudges out of your system! Players have pawns in a number of wooden lifeboats fleeing a shipwreck. But the boats have leaks, so the players in each boat have to decide who to throw overboard to save the boat. Sometimes the boat sinks anyway! The winner is whoever gets the most of their pawns to safety. This is a terrific game and full marks to Argentum for bringing it back into print. 10/10 on my highly seaworthy scale.

Argentum also has a new card game this year: *Top oder Flop* (Top or Flop). This is a clever card game of film production designed by Martin Schlegel. Players can use cards to increase or decrease the value of the films in production. Or they can use the cards to establish their own influence over the film. Once the dust settles, the player with the most influence in a

film, scores the value of the film – hopefully it's positive! Second place gets half the points and the highest total score wins the game. Nothing too taxing, but good fun and plenty of bluff and counter-bluff. 8/10 on my highly cinematic scale.

Peter Burley is best known as the man who created *Take it Easy*. Now he has a new game, *Take it to the Limit!*, which is an 'advanced' version of the earlier game. Published by Burley Games, it proved to be something of a hit at the show. In the original game, players placed hexagonal tiles in a hexagonal grid, aiming to get lines of the same number along the three axes through each hexagon. *Take it to the Limit!* has a double-sided board for each player. One side, the 'Nexus' board, has the same hexagonal grid that we're used to, but bigger. And there are more tiles. Players also have a 'scrapyard' where they can park tiles they don't want to place on the main grid. At the end of the game, the Scrapyard can score a bonus or a penalty and players can also get bonuses for using tiles with particular symbols on.

The 'Orchid' board uses half the tiles and no Scrapyard and is a quicker game. It has its own wrinkles, too, as here the grid has three gaps in the middle of the edges. The gaps can just be ignored, or filled in (with the right tile) for extra points. The two games are clever variations on the original and provide a quicker game and a much more challenging game. A must for anyone who likes *Take it Easy* and wants something more demanding. Personally, I find *Take it Easy* frustrating, though I appreciate its cleverness. The new game seems to offer some new tactical options and I'll be interested to see if these make it a more interesting game. 7/10 on my highly subjective scale.

I have to mention *Space Dealer* even though I haven't looked at it in detail as it is so innovative. The game itself is a straightforward trading game with a spaceship theme (and some clever pieces of cardboard that manage to look like spaceships). Players have two actions at a time. And two sandtimers. Each time the player starts an action, they turn over a timer. When the timer runs out, the action is complete and they can start another one. The game is played in real time, taking just 30 minutes to reach a conclusion. Tobias Stapelfeldt has designed something rather special here and the game is jointly published by Eggertspiele and JKLM Games. 9/10 on my three-minute scale just for the idea.



The big game from Eggertspiele is the new one from “Mac” Gerdts, designer of *Antike*. This is *Imperial*, which has some interesting share-dealing elements around a game of early twentieth century European Empires. Players generate money and points from their shareholdings in the half a dozen empires. However, each empire is controlled by whoever has the most shares in it and they'll be making the most of it – asset-stripping is a feasible tactic. Like *Antike*, this uses a roundel to limit what each empire can do in its turn, which gives the players tactical options and limitations – and some decisions to make. It's a game that needs to be played once or twice to get to grips with it. After playing it once, it gets a provisional 10/10 on my world domination scale.

Genesis is a new Reiner Knizia-designed game published by Face 2 Face Games. It is set in the distant past when the Earth's land was concentrated in a single continent, Pangæa (I always thought it was called Gondwanaland, but apparently that's the name of the southern supercontinent formed when Pangæa broke in two). The players are different species struggling to establish their place in the changing ecology as Pangæa breaks up. This they do by playing tiles that represent their creature in different environments. However, the different environments must be contiguous. At the end, players score for having the largest herd in a particular environment. It sounds like another simple but clever design from Reiner Knizia, with some overtones of *Euphrat & Tigris*. I look forward to trying it. A provisional 8/10 on my highly subjective scale.



Dutch publisher The Game Master publishes an interesting selection of games, which is enhanced by this year's game, *Section X*. Players are prisoners on an island jail who try to escape by building tunnels to

the mainland. Or just using someone else's tunnel – after all, why go to all that hard work when you can let someone else do it? Designed by Chislaine van den Bulk, *Section X* appears to be interesting mixture of labyrinth-building and out-psyching your opponents. A provisional 8/10 on my highly subjective scale.

Another innovative game is *Bolide* from Italian publisher Ghenos Games and designer Alfredo Genovese. It's a car racing game that uses no dice – for movement anyway. As well as a car, each player has a pawn of the same colour. After moving their car, the pawn makes the same move (e.g. 3 squares forward and 2 to the left) from the car's final position. The car's next move must be to a position (cars and pawns go on the corners, not in the squares) within two squares of the pawn (limiting acceleration and deceleration to two squares a turn). The pawn then makes the same move as the car just did, starting from the car's final position. The effect is to conserve momentum, making cornering tricky: cars have to slow down or they'll just shoot off the track (and possibly out of the game). In play, it gets even trickier as other cars will get in the way.

Players each have a set number of 'Sharp braking' moves that allow them to break the usual movement rules for one turn. These are very useful for getting round the sharper corners. It's a bit worrying when they run out, but a pitstop will restore them. There are rules for slipstreaming, colliding with other cars and for taking risks by exceeding what the car can normally do (this is where the die comes in, it's used to find the result of the manoeuvre on the various tables). Advanced rules provide for the effects of weather, different tyres and different fuel loads. The game comes with two, fictional, tracks – one on either side of the board – and there's an expansion set of another two tracks. Despite having played it once, I haven't got the hang of it yet. 9/10 on my vroom, vroom scale.

GiftTrap is an interesting 'party' game. From the selection of gifts available (cards showing presents that range from the prosaic – a tie, say – to the exotic – a safari by hot air balloon) players decide which of the other players they would give them to. Then everybody indicates which gifts they'd love to get and which they'd hate. Reveal the choices and start the fighting! A game that should be played in a spirit of fun, obviously. And fun is what it sounds like. Points are scored for getting the giving and getting right and the winner is the person to get across the board in both categories. Production is excellent with the board folding down to fit into the cube-shaped box. Each player's pieces – one is a model of a wrapped box, the other an opened one – comes in a little 'goody bag'. All in all, it's a nice package. But not really my kind of thing: 5/10 on my very subjective scale.

Mr. Jack is a good-looking two-player deduction game from new Swiss publisher, Hurrican. Designed by Bruno Cathala and Ludovic Maublanc, it was published last year in a limited edition as *Un Ombre sur Whitechapel* (A Shadow over Whitechapel). The game has one player as



Jack the Ripper, the other as the police. As you'd expect, the police have to catch "Mr Jack", while he tries to escape. Game play centres around the eight suspects on the board, one of whom will have been secretly and randomly identified as Jack at the start of the game. Both players can move the suspects, leaving them revealed in the light of the streetlamps or hidden in the dark. The police player gets to find out which group Jack is in. Thus s/he gradually eliminates suspects until only one is left. Then Jack can be arrested. However, if Jack can get off the board, he wins regardless. There are lots of things players can do – lighting streetlamps, for example – making this a subtle and challenging game. The rather dark theme is enlivened by some great, light-hearted artwork – even if the bearded Sherlock Holmes has attracted some flak from Holmes fans! It gets 8/10 on my highly deductive scale.

I have to put in a quick plug for *On The Underground*, designed by my gaming buddy, Sebastian Bleasdale, and published by JKLM Games (and Rio Grande). It's a clever game of building Underground lines across London. Apart from connecting stations, players are aiming to provide the lines that 'the passenger' wants to use. It's a tightly fought tactical game that balances the various ways of scoring points. Excellent stuff and 9/10 on my Oyster card.

Das Grosse Turnier (The Big Tournament) is a new edition of Australian Design Group's *World Cup Tournament Football Game* from Lookout Games. Players play cards to influence the results of the matches through the group and knock-out stages of the tournament. The aim is to get their team to win, of course, and ownership of the teams is secret. It's fun, but it is rather long-winded for what it is. 7/10 on my highly subjective scale.



You don't find many games that include time travel, but *Khronos* is one of them. Designed by Arnaud Urbon and Ludovic Violla and published in France by Matagot. The board shows the same territory in three time periods. Players use their time travellers to build towns in the first two. Towns 'ripple' through time, appearing in subsequent periods if they are big enough – which can have interesting effects. Players score points for the other types of buildings in each conurbation if they have the biggest building of the ruling type in each time period: military in the first, religious in the second and civil in the third. It's clever stuff and gets a provisional 9/10 on my once and future scale.

Mind the Move's *Hermagor* was one of the hits of the show (although the game is multi-lingual, there is an English language version from Rio Grande). Designed by Emanuele Ornella, it's a clever trading game. Play starts in a grid representing the

marketplace where players pay to place their pawns to get the supplies they need – or bonuses. Then players go on the road, selling goods to establish trading posts in the towns along the roads round the board. It also costs money to move, so routes need to be planned to make sure you're making a profit – and the goods you need should be planned as well. Trading posts bring in extra income and there are bonuses for getting all the towns in an area. This is definitely my kind of game, though it took me a couple of turns to work out what I should be doing. A provisional 10/10 on my highly mercantile scale.

Pro Ludo had their various new games on display, including the belated *Tempus*, which we originally expected last year. The new *Ave Caesar* was there too. The playing pieces are the same as – and just as nice as – the original game, but the jury's out on the new race tracks on the board in this edition. *Spiel der Türme* (The Game of Towers, but *Ramparts* in the English language edition from Café Games) is another re-release, this time of a clever multi-player abstract game from Rudi Hoffman. The new edition retains the use of solid wooden pieces, which gives the game a nice tactile quality. The aim is to stack up blocks with the same symbol and get them into the best scoring positions.

Shogun is a re-working by Dirk Henn of his earlier game, *Wallenstein*, for Japan rather than medieval Germany. Both are published by Queen Games. I rather enjoyed *Wallenstein*, so I expect this to be good too – particularly as the designer has apparently taken the opportunity to tweak the game system a bit.

Fowl Play! is Richard Breese's new game and is much simpler than his games usually are, but is still published by R&D Games in a limited edition. Players first get to move some of the fowl around the board and then move their fox. As you'd expect, it's all over for the bird if a fox catches one. As well as the different types of bird, each counter is a different colour and shape. Apart from just catching birds, players are looking for sets and score points for survivors with



particular characteristics. The scoring is complicated, which makes players have a bit of a job working out just what they are after. Unusually for Richard's games, this feels very abstract: it's all about working out the positions and the moves of the pieces. It's clever, but it didn't grab me on first playing. A provisional 6/10 on my chicken-eating scale.

Richard also had an expansion set for *Reef Encounter* – *Reef Encounters of the Second Kind*. It adds some extra creatures, which give players more tactical options. A must for any fan of the game – that means me!

Die Schatztaucher (The Treasure Divers) is an interesting little Reiner Knizia game published by Schmidt. Players are looking for undersea treasure – tiles laid out on the board. The twist is that the players have the use of an ultra-violet light to illuminate one tile at a turn. This reveals a design that indicates what is on the other side of the tile. As players are looking for specific sets, this is a good indication of what they want to pick up – though the UV picture doesn't tell the whole story. With the usual clever scoring system, this is another neat game from Reiner, despite being aimed at children (6+). For gamers it makes a decent filler: 7/10 on my highly innovative scale.

Singlish Mopping is the bizarre name (their logo is an 'English' muffin, so it may be some sort of pun...) of a new German publisher, whose first game is *Paaren* (Couples in English). The large cards show nice pastel caricatures of men and women, whose faces you will probably recognise – though not under those names! Other cards are places and all three have icons to show their affinities. There are also influence cards that affect game play. The aim is to match up couples in appropriate places while preventing the other players from doing so. First to a set number of couples wins. Nice stuff, good looking game: I give it a provisional 8/10 on my match-making scale.

Another entertaining game is *Sport ist Mord* (Sport is Murder) from Sphinx Spieleverlag and designed by Henning Poehl. This is another card game, but the theme is getting fit by playing sport. Players compete with each other to do best by practising, hiring trainers and taking drugs! But they are also running risks and the question is whether they'll stay fit enough. It looks fun, but I haven't played it yet, so I have to reserve judgement on it for the time being.



Metromania gave me a bit of a headache. Players use triangular tiles with a track along one edge to build a network of tram lines across the town represented on the board. The aim is to connect different buildings with a minimum of stations along the way. As players are responsible for placing most of the buildings on the board, there are lots of tactical options. Plus the

need to get your head round what the triangular tiles let you do. Clever and challenging, this is an excellent start for designer Jean-Michel Maman and first time publisher, Spiel-ou-Face. I give it 9/10 on my headachingly subjective scale.

24/7 - The Game is something of an oddity from Sunriver Games and Carey Grayson. Players lay number tiles on the board, aiming to make sets, runs or totals of 7 or 24 in different directions – without exceeding 24 in any direction. Squares that can't be played on any more are filled with glass stones. It's neat enough, but

doesn't interest me. The game is nicely produced with domino-style tiles: 5/10 on my highly subjective scale.

Surprised Stare Games is a British publisher that has produced some quirky card games. Their first strategy board game is *Tara – Seat of Kings*, designed by Alan Paull. This is played over a map of ancient Ireland, divided into four kingdoms. To become High King – and win the game – players have to be King of two kingdoms. This is achieved by getting a piece on the top of the triangle of positions in each kingdom. Pieces get onto the board by playing cards that show 1 or 2 positions in the triangle and there's a neat mechanism that can see control ripple up the triangle. Added to this, some of the actions cost money, so players also need to establish positions to maximise their income. Clever stuff and a provisional 8/10 on my Kelly green scale.



If you're a fan of cynical games about politics, then *Die Macher* is the game for you. Designed by Karl-Heinz Schmiel, the veteran game is back in a new edition from Canadian publisher Valley Games. Players manipulate the public and their policies to gain income and win elections in the German regions with the ultimate aim of dominating the national Parliament. The party that can get the most money tends to win – just like real life!? It's a deep (and lengthy) game that I heartily recommend: 10/10 on my highly bribable scale.

Martin Wallace's new game for Warfrog (now published by Esdevium Games in an interesting move for a distributor) is *Perikles*. This is something of a wargame, but with the Wallace twist. The players compete for political influence in Ancient Greek city states. The winner gets to be leader and has command of the city's forces in the battles of the Peloponnesian war. Winning a battle gets the player victory points. Losing a battle reduces the points the player will get (at the end of the game) for being leader. The game lasts just three turns, so it's highly contained. And being frozen out of the elections doesn't put a player out of the battles: they get control of the Persian forces. It's a nicely balanced game that gives players tough decisions to make and plenty of tactical options. 9/10 on my Ancient Greek scale.

The new game from Ystari is *Yspahan* (published in English by Rio Grande). Designed by Sébastien Pauchon, this is a dice-based game that is lighter than *Caylus* and more on a par with *Ys* to my mind. The theme is camel caravans in the medieval capital of Persia. The game is limited to 21 turns (grouped into three weeks), which gives the players a bit of time pressure. The actions – and the value



of the actions – available to players each turn are governed by rolling a set of dice. Players use the actions to establish points-scoring positions on the various sections of the board or to develop their own special abilities. Points are scored at the end of each week and the main board is cleared. My first impression is an ingenious, tactical game that provides lots of opportunities and, thus, decisions. An initial 8/10 on my camel scale.

As always Spiel was great fun, with more games than anyone can look at in four days. Plus all the other things around – I particularly like all the live role-playing accessories: weapons, armour and costumes. My thanks to Friedhelm Merz Verlag for another highly successful feat of organisation. I look forward to Spiel '07 on 18th-21st October 2007.

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