

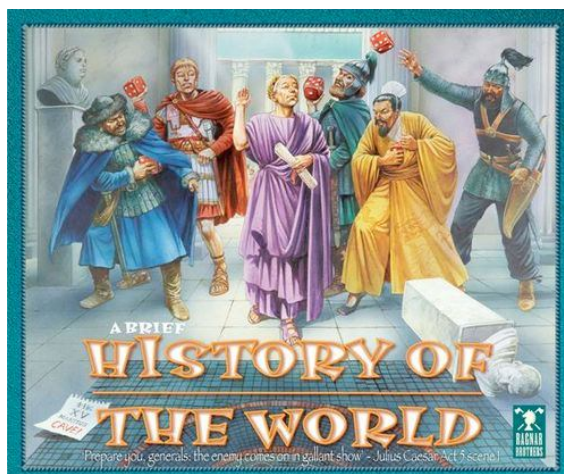
Spiel '09

Pevans reports from the annual games fair

Nowadays my time at the Spiel games fair is as much about business as anything else. My JKLM commitments kept me busy for most of the four days of the show. I didn't have time to play many games at Spiel, so initially I'll just be giving a flavour of the games. I will add to and expand this report as I get to play the games. This is the third version, completed 15th December 2009.

Let me start with the stuff I know most about—what was on the JKLM stand. As last year, JKLM organised a cooperative stand with several other small UK publishers. These included Leo Marshall and his neat word game, *LeCardo*, Gavin Birnbaum and *Cubiko* (a mix of dexterity game and noughts and crosses) and Shaun Derrick with the fifth and final expansion for his *World Cup Game*.

However, I was most interested in the brand new Ragnar Brothers' game, *A Brief History of the World*—their latest development of their terrific *History of the World*. Spiel '09 was its launch. The game remains essentially the same as the original, played over a series of Epochs in world history. In each Epoch, players get to start and expand an 'Empire' in a region of the world. They score points according to the regions they have pieces in—from their current and previous Empires. Part of the game's tactics is in the Empires you play: their positions on the board and in the turn order.



The most obvious change in the new game is that the regions of the board are divided into fewer areas. Following on from this, Empires have fewer pieces, but can still occupy the territory they did historically (Alexander can get to India). This in itself speeds up the game. The simple combat system has been re-jigged, reducing the potential for a lot of die rolling to resolve one attack. The end result is a game that feels and plays much like the original, but can be completed in a much shorter time. Beginners will need longer, though, so I suggest keeping the numbers down when beginners are involved. For more about the game and the Ragnars, see their website at www.ragnarbrothers.co.uk.



LeCardo is a simple card game. Unlike most word games, you do not have a bunch of letters from which you make words. You have a collection of words from which you make compound words and phrases. Each word is worth points and the most points will win the game. However, I find the game is one to play for fun, rather than

for points. The question is, what will other players let you get away with? Bad puns are my favourite... This is even a game I'll pull out for my own amusement. Find out more at www.lecardo.com.

I first saw *Cubiko* at the UK Games Expo (see *TWJO* 97) where Gavin had a large version of the game. The 'board' is a cloth square on a wooden frame a few centimetres high. The frame is divided into nine squares and the object is get three of your wooden cubes in a line on the grid. The tricky part is how you get them there. You bounce a rubber ball on the table to land on top of the frame and place a cube in the square it ends up on, removing anyone else's there. It sounds easy, but it's surprisingly difficult to get the ball onto the frame, let alone into a specific square. Watching Gavin in action, it's clear that there's a knack to it. Okay, it's not a gamers' game, but it is fun and it comes in a nice wooden box. The game's website is at www.cubiko.webs.com



The wooden version of *Cubiko*
(photo by Gavin Birnbaum)

The fifth expansion for *The World Cup Game* covers the 1954, 1970 and 1998 World Cups in Switzerland, Mexico and France, respectively. With this addition, the game now covers every World Cup tournament to date. Shaun is not resting on his laurels, though. He is working on an adaptation of the system for the Rugby World Cup, which should launch next year. And he has a completely new strategy game in the works. See his website for details: www.gamesfortheworld.co.uk.



Peter Burley couldn't make it to Spiel this year, despite having booked a stand to launch his new game, *Take it Higher!*. So JKLM added Burley Games to their little collective and *Take it Higher!* to the demo tables. The game is jointly credited to Peter Burley and Reiner Knizia and is a further development of Peter's classic *Take it Easy!*. The core of the game is the same, with players laying tiles to try and make continuous lines of the same colour/points value. However, this version uses octagonal tiles, rather than the hexagons of the original. Players get bonus points for various completing lines with the same symbol. And they get bonuses by 'launching' rockets from the row on their

board through playing specific tiles. It looks a clever variation on a classic game. Burley Games's website is at www.burleygames.com, but there's no information on *Take it Higher!* on there yet.

This leaves me with the games that JKLM was showing. *Tulipmania 1637* was launched at UK Games Expo earlier in the year, but this was its debut at Spiel. It's a strange game that has taken me a while to get to grips with. The basics are straightforward: players trade in several varieties of tulip, aiming to sell out as the price hits its peak and the bubble bursts. The game tends to start slowly as players buy and sell, gradually pushing the prices up and generating cash for themselves. When the first price bursts, the fun really starts. There's now a lot more cash in the game, so everything speeds up. Prices climb and burst and the game is over.



Sector 41 ready for play—with *Race for the Summit* lurking at the back

The mechanics of the game are just the start, though. One player on their own doesn't have enough influence on the course of the game to be sure things will come out in their favour. Hence, what the other players do is crucial, which makes reading the other players the key to the game. Personally, I find this difficult, which makes *Tulipmania 1637* a really challenging game for me. I've written a full review of the game and this is available on my website: www.pevans.co.uk/Reviews.

Also making their first appearance at Spiel were the JKLM-produced first edition of Stratamax's *Days of Steam* and *Sector 41* from US publisher Scimitar Games—see my report from the 2009 UK Games Expo for more about these. Scimitar also provided a few preview copies of their new game, *Race for the Summit*. This is a card game of climbers ascending a mountain. The bulk of the cards show the holds available to the climbers. Depending on the individual climber, these will cost them more or less 'fatigue'. Overtax your self and you fall, but hopefully have belayed yourself to prevent this being catastrophic.

Players choose from a number of climbers—with names like Gym Kirk and Bluffy Summers—with different strengths and weaknesses. In a neat touch, each climber is represented by a clear plastic overlay. Placing these on the cards shows the climbers on the mountain. At first glance, the game seems a simple, clever simulation, with a strong competitive and tactical element as players race for the summit. See www.scimitargames.com for more information about both games.

JKLM's second edition of *Tinners' Trail* arrived just in time to get copies ready for Spiel (not to mention sending some to the Dutch and French partners). This provided a big draw, particularly as it's available in half a dozen languages. The game remains the same as the first edition, with the same wooden components. However, the box and board have different artwork to distinguish it from the first (limited) edition.



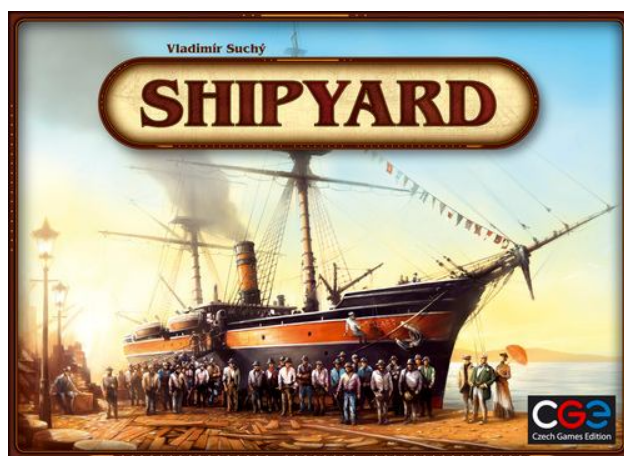
The *Chelsea* board
(courtesy of Prime Games)

Prime Games's *Chelsea* cut it even finer, with the first copies arriving from the printer on Wednesday morning. Anyone who saw me on Wednesday waving a large hairdryer over a table full of games, was watching the final stage of the shrink-wrapping process. *Chelsea* is a family-orientated game from designer John Ede, who has a range of children's games to his credit. However, *Chelsea* has enough tactical opportunities to interest gamers as well.

The colourful board shows a street in Chelsea with brightly-coloured houses and garages, each with parking spaces

for cars and a van (just right for taking a stack of games to Essen ... but that may be me). Players are well-off families looking to set up their offspring in their own homes (I wish!). Being picky, the children will only move into a house that has at least three elements of the same colour— as long as it's not the same colour as them. Then they need a partner, which requires four bits of the same colour, different from both the players' colours. The down side to that is that both players score the points. This and the various restrictions on what players can do make for some real tactical elements to the game. Find out more at www.primegamesuk.com.

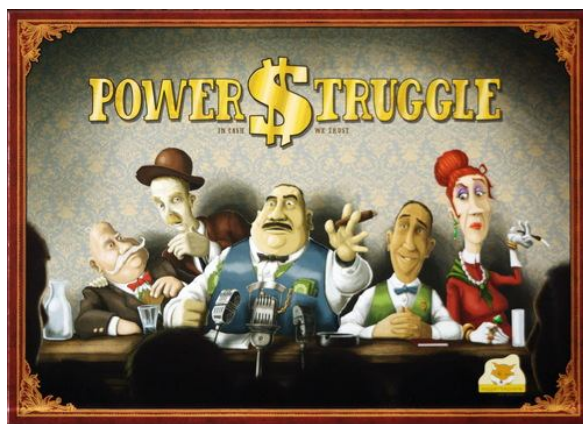
One game I have played, if only once, is Vladimir Suchy's latest for Czech Games Edition, *Shipyards* (published in English by Rio Grande Games). There's an awful lot going on in the game. Players are building ships from sections of hull, to which they add equipment (such as masts, funnels and guns) and crew. Once complete, they take the ship on a shakedown cruise and score points for it. A variety of actions are available to players to enable them to collect the ship sections and everything else. Other actions let them acquire and trade goods as another way of getting what they need.



The heart of the game is a track on which players move their pawn to select an action. In this game, though, the actions are tiles that move round the track as well. And the sequence of the players' pawns makes a difference, too. Hence the choices facing the players are different each turn. Each action taken means moving a pawn on the track for that action, which then shows precisely what you get for the action. The timing of when you take an action makes a difference too. As I said, there's an awful lot going on. I suspect this is a game that rewards 'efficient' play—it'll probably take a while to work that out. There's more on all their games at czechgames.com.

As well as *Sherwood Forest*, which I mentioned in *To Win Just Once* issue 95 (see www.pevans.co.uk/TWJO), Eggertspiele had two new games for us to see this year. *Havana* is a Reinhard Staupe game that looks like it is related to *Cuba*, but that's just the artwork. The theme of this game is constructing buildings in the Cuban capital. Players each have a set of action cards and play two a turn. The numbers on the chosen cards give the order in which players take their actions. These generally involve getting workers, cash or raw materials. You use these to buy buildings cards from the selection available. Building cards provide the victory points needed to win the game.

For the next turn, players replace one of their cards with another, changing the turn order, but retaining one action. At first glance, this seems a straightforward game with lots of tactical options. Players also have to make the best use of their limited set of actions—and don't get their cards back until they've used (nearly) all of them—and react to what the other players are up to. A game that's definitely worth trying.

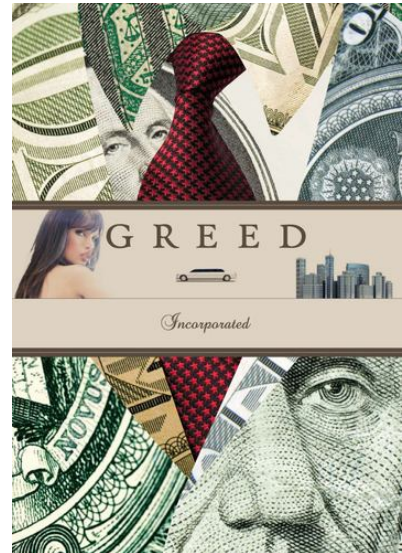


The second game is *Power Struggle* (*MachtSpiele* is the German title), where players claw their way to the top of the corporate structure. In fact, players are looking to be the first to get four of six objectives. They do this by deploying their team of managers, recruiting employees and working their way to the top of departments and divisions. The ultimate goal is the board of directors and the position of chairman. This is a surprisingly intricate game. The game's designers have clearly taken some pains to reproduce the structure and skulduggery of a large corporation. It looks very interesting and I look forward to finding out how it works in practice. There's more on all the Eggert games at www.eggertspiele.de.

Chairman of the Board clearly has a similar theme, but appears a much simpler game. It comes from Peca Games in Ireland and is definitely aimed at the family market. Players have to work their way through successive rings of the organisation until they stand alone at the centre of the board. The key to this is trading in

company shares, but players also need to cut deals with their opponents—and each has a veto that they can use once in the game. It doesn't look particularly demanding, but there are clearly some tactical options for players to take advantage of. Find more at www.pecagames.com.

The Dutch gamers at Splotter had a new business game for us. *Greed, Incorporated* is another lengthy, complex game by Jerouen Doumen and Joris Wiersinga. Players start as chief executives, each running a company. This is interesting enough in itself. Players bid for production assets for their company. Once installed, these produce goods the company can sell. Some of the assets will take basic products and combine them to make more valuable goods. Add in changes in market value and you already have a business game.



However, the point of *Greed* is to get fired. This brings the player a pay-off from the company, so the more money in there, the better. They can use this to start a new company. Or buy themselves some nice executive toys. A nice yacht, perhaps, or maybe a Learjet. These are the only source of victory points in the game, so that's what you're aiming for. It's clearly a game for our times! The trick to success seems to be cashing in quickly and moving on—players will generally run several companies through the game.

Ted Alspach introduced me to his new game at Bezier Games's stand. *Beer & Pretzels* is one of Ted's light-hearted creations—as opposed to his *Age of Steam* expansions. Each player has a set of what are, effectively, beer mats. Most of these show the points they are worth—one of them is a 'x2' and one is a blank napkin. Players delineate a target area with the cord provided in the game, take a step back and take turns to chuck their beer mats at the target. Points score if the beer mat is



inside or touching the cord and they are not obscured by other beer mats: most points wins. That's it. Simple, fun, but requiring a bit of dexterity—Ted thrashed me quite easily. Find out about all Ted's games at www.beziergames.com.

Over the years Karl-Heinz Schmiel has produced some great games as *Moskito-Spiele*—and some really fun

ones as well. In the latter group is *A la Carte*, which re-appeared this year in a new edition. It's a game about cooking. Players have to put together dishes using the correct combination of ingredients, cooking and seasoning. I have always enjoyed the physical element of this game. Seasonings are wooden chips in little jars, which have to be shaken over your pan. The trick is to avoid getting too many white (salt) chips as well. I'm very pleased to see a new version of the game—and amused to see Karl-Heinz in a chef's hat.

Uwe Rosenberg's new game is published by H@LL Games, a new publisher and spin-off from online magazine and retailer H@LL 9000. The game's full title is *At the Gates of Loyang*, though it seems to be abbreviated to *Loyang* most of the time. It is another intricate game the centres on planting, harvesting and selling things—think *Bohnanza* on steroids or *Agricola* without all the farm development. It's set in China, where the players are all small farmers. They plant vegetables in their fields, harvest what they grow and trade (swap) with market stalls.

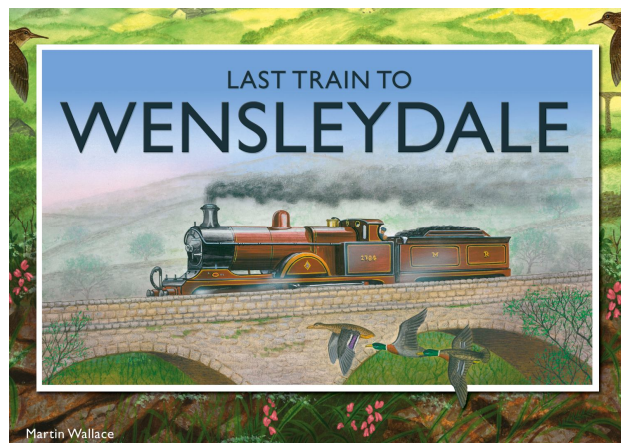
The main object is to sell your vegetables to customers. Regular customers need to be supplied each turn—and there are penalties for missing a delivery—while occasional customers will wait for the right combination to arrive. These provide the money that's needed to buy victory points—which get increasingly expensive as the game goes on. Each turn players get a couple of new cards, which can include 'helpers' who provide a one-off bonus, discount or something else special. *At the Gates of Loyang* is a clever game that will need a bit of practice to get right. H@LL Games's website is at www.hallgames.de.

The Warfrog team (though we should probably start calling them Treefrog) had three new games. *Steam Barons* is an expansion for Martin Wallace's *Steam* with maps for Eastern USA and Northern England. It also introduces a stock market



Playing *Loyang* at MidCon—fields at the top, special cards on the left of the T, customers on the right and veg and cash in the space

option to the game, allowing players to trade in shares as well as build railways. As *Steam* is published by Mayfair, they are co-producing the expansion. *God's Playground* is Treefrog's second three-player game. It is set in Poland over three centuries. The players are noble families combining to fight over external enemies while competing with each other for the upper hand in Poland itself.



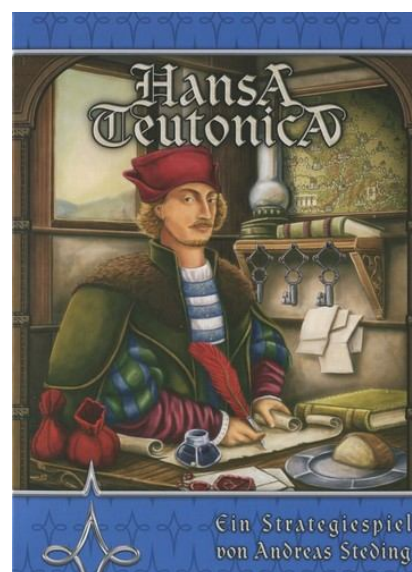
The first of the games that I've played is *Last Train to Wensleydale*, about short-lived railway companies in the Yorkshire Dales. At first glance, I thought the board showed a partially dissected monkey brain, but the gaudy colour scheme is actually landscape. The livid red lobes are the hills of the Dales themselves. The bilious yellow bits between are the valleys and the lurid green is the surrounding pasture land. The hills provide stone and the

pasture Wensleydale cheese, both of which need to be taken to the markets. Also looking for transport are the 'passengers' scattered across the board.

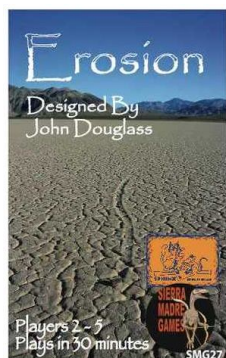
Players build short railway lines, connecting to the major companies on the edges of the board, to collect the cheese and stone. However, first they have to bid for the various types of influence that will enable them to acquire rolling stock and counter objections to their construction. Most importantly, though, some influence will allow them to sell off their loss-making railways to the major companies. *Last Train to Wensleydale* is another clever game from Martin Wallace. Interestingly, there is no long strategy in this game—in the long run, these railway companies face ruin. So the game is all about making a fast buck and getting out. Ingenious and a game I shall be playing for a while. There's more about the Warfrog games at www.warfroggames.com.

One game that has been gathering acclaim is Andreas Steding's *Hansa Teutonica* from Argentum. This is no relation to Michael Schacht's 2004 game, *Hansa*, published by Abacus. Having said that, both games are set around the medieval Hanseatic League of trading cities in northern Europe. So, indeed, is Andreas's earlier game, *Kogge*. However, *Hansa* and *Kogge* centre on the Baltic Sea, while *Hansa Teutonica* is based around a network of cities on land—mainly in what is now Germany.

Each player has a board that shows the limits of what they can do on several tracks. One of the important parts of the game is improving these, removing pieces to show the next value—while also making these



pieces available to play. Pieces are placed on the roads between cities to create trade routes. When they have a complete route, players can use a piece to establish an office in the city at either end, taking the others back. Certain cities allow players to improve an ability instead of placing an office. The offices are the main way of scoring points, so players have to decide whether to go for points from the start or build up their abilities first. *Hansa Teutonica* is a clever, intricate game, if a little dry. See www.argentum-verlag.de for more about all Argentum's games.

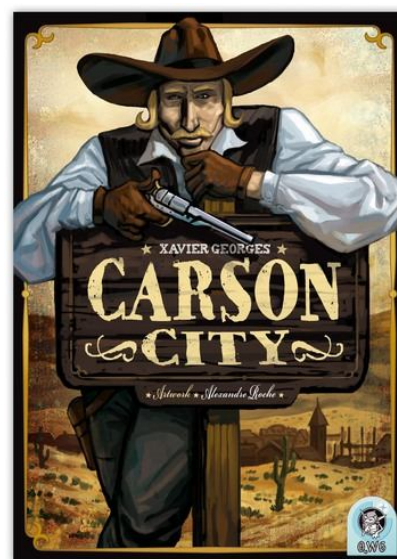


Sierra Madre's games are often about prehistory, but the latest, *Erosion*, is a card game about geology. It has its origins in a teaching aid created at Arizona State University. Sierra Madre main man Phil Eklund turned it into a game—though it's still used for teaching geology. Each card has two uses. First off, it shows a particular type of rock and represents a 500 metre layer. Players start with a 'mountain' made up of several layers. These will be weathered, swept into the river and, with luck, end up in your 'delta' where they're worth the most points.

The cards are divided into three types for their other use. One deck is 'Weathering', which starts the process of eroding the mountains—players shift cards to one side to show that they've been weathered. 'Hillsloping' cards then remove weathered layers, putting them into the 'river'. Rocks can be retrieved from here using 'Fluvial' cards. Each turn players play cards and draw new ones into their hands. Any in excess of the hand limit are used to 'uplift' their mountain. When the cards run out, players score points for their mountain and rocks in their delta with a bonus for any fossils exposed in weathered rock layers. Key to the game is managing the cards in your hand—and everywhere else! Sierra Madre's website is www.sierramadregames.com

Dutch publisher QWG fitted out their demonstrators with cowboy hats to draw attention to their new game, *Carson City*. Designed by Xavier Georges, the game has just about everything you'd expect from a Wild West setting. It centres around the development of the eponymous town. Players buy plots of land and establish buildings on them. These produce income, depending on what they are adjacent to. Ranches need empty space, mines need mountains, town buildings need houses and so on.

While buildings are worth points at the end of the game, players can turn money into points during the game. Of course this deprives them of the funds to buy land and buildings, so players have to weigh up their options. One of these is to use their guns to get a share of the money from other people's buildings. Yes, robbing the bank is definitely an option. Especially if you've chosen the gunslinger character for the turn. Each character gives the player some advantage and also sets the turn order. The game has bags of



atmosphere and is a lot of fun. There's more about QWG on their website: www.qwggames.nl

As always, Spiel was huge fun and it was great to see so many people enjoying the games. The organisers, Friedhelm Merz Verlag, did a great job, as always. Next year's event is scheduled for 21st-24th October 2010 at Essen's Messe and I'll be there. For more information keep an eye on the website: www.internationalespieltage.de.

Box artwork from the games is courtesy of the respective publishers. Pevans took the photos (except where noted) and played with Photoshop.

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