

## Spiel '11

### Pevans reports from Essen

It's been a few years since I flew to Spiel and I was surprised how little had changed. I flew into Düsseldorf airport, trekked to the far end of the terminal to get the 'Skytrain' monorail/cable car to the stations and caught a train to Essen. The 'regional transport' trains have great double-decker carriages and only take 20-odd minutes to do the trip. This is good, as these trains are always packed solid and it's standing room only! I toyed with the idea of getting the stopping train. Yes, it takes over 40 minutes and the seats are hard, but at least you get to sit down and travel in some comfort.

Be that as it may, I'd better explain what I'm talking about. The Spiel games fair is the biggest board games event in the world and is held at the Messe (exhibition centre) in Essen for four days towards the end of October each year. Spiel '11 took place on 20th-23rd October and I was there for all four days. What makes Spiel special is that, although plenty of business gets done, it's a public fair and the emphasis is on playing the games. Most of the publishers' stands are spaces with tables and chairs for people to sit and play.

I was there as a punter this year, which was very pleasant, and so I'm writing here about the new games I saw. I must give you a few disclaimers first. Despite being



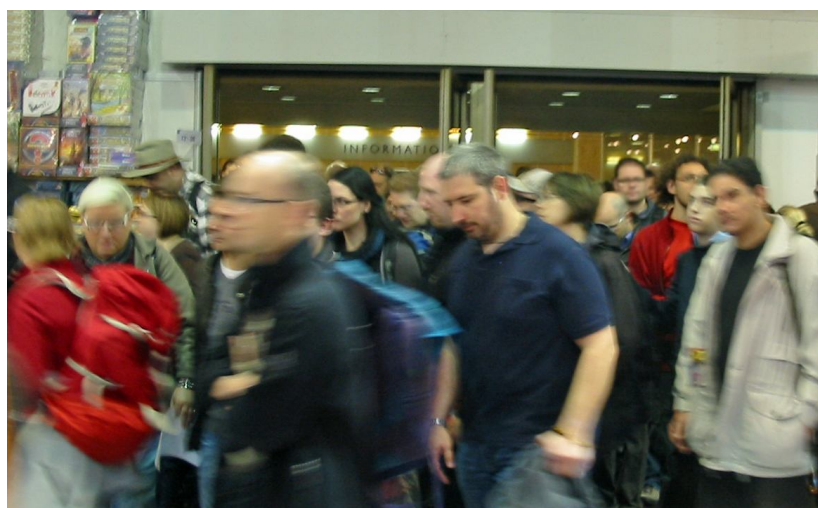
...as the Asmodee team finishes setting up...



The crowd waits for 10 am...

four days long, Spiel is not long enough to play all the new games. If, like me, you want to have a look at everything, there isn't time to play **many** of the new games! So my initial report is based on a first look at

each game (though I have tried a few). I will be adding to and updating the online version of the report as I play more of the games and much of this will appear in *To Win Just Once*. I must also point out that when I say a new game is like—or in the style of—an older one, I am not suggesting that it is a copy, this is



...and in they come!  
just a bit of shorthand description for those who are familiar with the older game.

### Hall 12—the beginning

The other problem is how to organise my report. Well, Spiel takes up several halls at the Messe, so let me start at the main entrance and go round hall by hall. Confronting you as you come in (to hall 12) is the large stand occupied by international distributor Asmodee. They are based in France and their stand is a showcase for several French publishers. Repos is the most obvious—as their guys all wear sombreros—but Ystari is there as well. Their new game, *Olympos*, is designed by the man who gave us *Vinci* and *Evo*, Philippe Keyaerts. It's also one of the games in this year's EuropeMasters tournament, so I'm quite familiar with it.

The main board shows Ancient Greece, mainland and islands and extending to areas that represent the mythical Atlantis. Players bring their pieces on at the top



(northern) edge of the board and migrate south. The areas they hold provide resources and there can be some squabbling over these. The main use of resources is to buy 'discoveries' and 'wonders' which are laid out on the second board. Discoveries provide advantages to players (such as military power to give them the advantage in those territorial squabbles) and are worth points at the end. Wonders (there aren't many of them) are just worth points, lots of points.

Each turn, players will either move a piece on the map board or



buy something from the other board. Whatever they do will cost a certain amount of time, which is marked on the track round the outside of the board. The player in last place on this track then gets a turn—take quick actions and you can get several turns in a row. As time progresses, the Gods will interfere, helping or hindering the players. One aspect of the game is thus trying to make sure you get the benefits of this—or at least avoid the penalties. When players reach the end of the track they score up and the player with the most points win. I'm very taken with *Olympos* and am playing it with my games group. It gets an initial 9/10 on my subjective scale.



Behind Asmodee I found a company new to me, Mayday Games from the USA. They're best known for their card sleeves, but they were showing several new games. *Toc Toc Woodman* originates in Korea (designed by Justin Oh and published by Gemblo) and is a fun dexterity game—a kind of reverse-*Jenga*. The players build up a plastic tree, each layer consisting of a central 'trunk' with four pieces of 'bark' on the outside. Then they use the little plastic axe to try to knock off pieces of bark. You get a point for each piece of bark, but lose points if you knock the trunk off!

Knocking the tree down is a complete loss, of course. A trivial game, but one that's great fun—especially after the application of beer. 8/10 on my highly subjective scale and much appreciated by my nephews (without the beer!).

Nearly as silly is *Get Bit!*, a game of robot-eating sharks designed by Dave Chalker. Yes, robots being eaten by a shark! Each player has a model robot with detachable limbs and a set of cards. The robots are placed in a line with the shark at the back. Players then choose a card secretly. When revealed, players move their robot to the front in card order. Except for those who've played the same number, who don't move. The robot at the back loses a limb to the shark, *Maneater*-style. Once all four limbs have gone, you're out and the player in front when there are only two left wins. Wonderfully silly, it gets 7/10 on my highly subjective scale.



Then we have *Eaten by Zombies*—or perhaps it should be “The Walking Dead—the card game”? Yes, it's a game of trying to survive in a zombie-infested world. Designed by Max Holliday, this is a *Dominion*-like game where players each have their own deck of cards. Each turn they play cards from their hand, draw more cards and re-cycle what they've played when their deck runs out. There's also a deck of zombie cards and players must decide whether to fight or flee the current zombie, depending on the cards available to them.

Success means buying useful cards that go into your hand for the next turn, failure means losing cards. However, defeated zombies also go into players' discard piles and gradually turn up in their hands where they can be used to make things worse

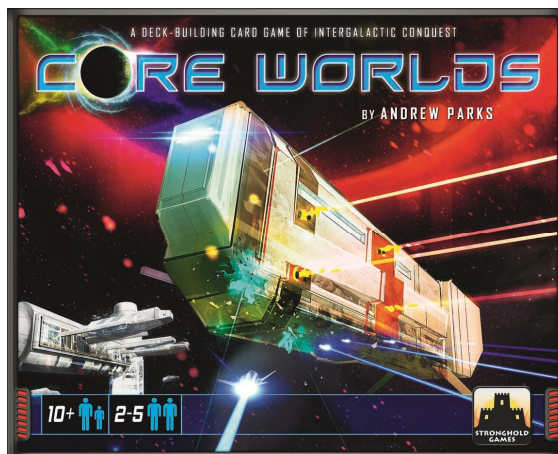
for the other players! It is possible for the players to win, jointly, by killing off all the zombies. However, the expectation is that the players will gradually succumb, leaving the last man standing as the winner. My problem is that I just don't get the whole zombie thing. Why are they so popular in games, books, films and TV? *Eaten by Zombies* is a perfectly decent game, but the theme has no appeal for me and I don't care for knock-out games, so it just gets 5/10 on my highly subjective scale.



This leaves *King's Vineyard*, designed by David Haslam and Sandeep Kharkar. While this comes in a decent-sized box, it's essentially a card game using two different sizes of card. Players plant the large grapevine cards from their hands, subject to certain restrictions. Each turn these then grow, using the smaller vine cards, until the grapes ripen and the vine starts to wither. Players must harvest their grapes to be able to plant more, but they also want ripe grapes still on the vine to score points.

Several 'King' cards are shuffled into the deck of grape cards and trigger a scoring when drawn (the King inspects his vineyards). Players score points for their ripe grapes in various different ways. So the trick to the game is getting your timing right: you want lots of grapes that ripen just before a King card is drawn. The stuff you've already planted, ripened and harvested just gets in the way. A neat mechanism that makes this rather more than the straightforward game it initially appears to be. Okay, it's a lightweight, but it has enough appeal that I give it an initial 7/10 on my highly subjective scale.

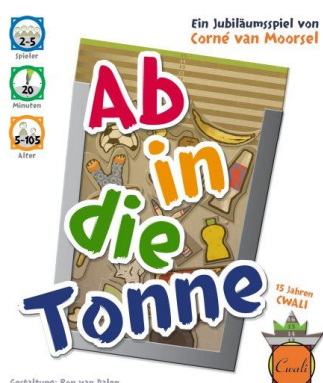
A couple of aisles across was another US publisher, Stronghold Games, who caught my attention last year with a new edition of *Escape from Atlantis*. The company aims to re-publish older classics alongside new games and this year's classics are *Crude: the Oil Game* (better known—to me at least—as *McMulti*) and *Outpost*. The new games include *Core Worlds*, one of the games I did get to play at the show, designed by Andrew Parks. This is a *Dominion*-style card game of galactic domination, with the winner being the player with the highest value of conquered worlds at the end of the game's ten turns.



Each turn, cards are laid out: tactics and equipment for players to draft and planets for them to conquer. Players can draft a card (into their discard pile), use a card (from hand), deploy military units (from hand) or use deployed forces to take a

planet: one action at a time. Whatever they do will cost energy and action points and a player's turn is over when they run out of either (though they can pick up extra energy during their turn).

In the last couple of turns, the cards available provide bonuses for holding certain things (lots of spaceships, for example). These provide some goals for players to build towards during the game—and to watch out for what the others are up to. Apart from this, there's no interaction between players, so the game is very much about building up your own empire. It should be my sort of game, but I was distinctly underwhelmed on playing it for the first time. I definitely want to try it again and it gets 7/10 for the time being on my highly subjective scale.



Moving through the hall, there's a row of smaller companies along the wall between the halls. One of these is Cwali, the imprint of Dutch designer Corné van Moorsel, who had several new games on show. I will skip past *Champions 2020* as it's a two-player football (soccer) game. *Ab in die Tonne* (In the Bin) looks like good fun, though. Each player has a laminated board propped up to make a slide. They also have a set of objects, laminated cardboard shapes, to go into their bin.

The first player chooses an object, the others must follow suit and they all let it slide down their ramp. Then it's the next player's turn to choose. Once everything's been put in the bin, players get penalty points depending on how high up their slide the objects come. Brilliant! There are a few twists, so you play the game three times with different scoring options. This is one I really want to play with my nephews and it gets 7/10 for the time being.

The game I really liked the look of was *Meltdown 2020*. Well, I say that, but the pastel colouring of the 'board' does look rather odd. It's actually made up of a number of boards, divided into hexagonal areas, that fit together to give different layouts. They show seven nuclear reactors, two airfields and the starting positions of players' pawns. The players also have a set of three vehicles, each of which is made of a thick cardboard strip that folds up and interlocks to make a neat playing piece. I think





Corné's missed a trick here: given the current popularity of 3-D, he could have billed this as a 3-D game. ☺

The aim of the game is to rescue your pawns as the reactors melt down. A roll of the die causes an increase or decrease in the radiation from one reactor. Then players move a vehicle, collecting and/or dropping off pawns as they go, but subject to the vehicle's movement and capacity limits. Once each type of vehicle has moved, radiation affects the pawns that are close enough to a reactor that's radiating. In another '3-D' touch, they are laid on their side if ill (one dose of radiation) and onto their backs if very ill (two doses).

Pawns moved to an airfield are flown to safety, as vehicles can be, too. The game ends when a reactor goes critical or the board is cleared. Players get a point for each pawn or vehicle saved with their condition being a tie-breaker. It's a neat game, if rather lighter than I was expecting. On my first play, we had some very fortunate die-rolls and nobody lost more than one pawn! I'm sure it's usually tougher than that and I look forward to a stiffer challenge next time round. I'll give it 7/10 on my highly subjective scale for the time being.

### Halls 11 and 10—the big boys (and others)



This brings us into the next halls: 11 and 10 merge into one and have high ceilings with skylights that make them very light and airy—especially in comparison to hall 12. I don't seem to have spent much time in these halls, though. In one corner is 2F Spiele, Friedemann Friese's label. As well as the expected expansion for *Funkenschlag/Power Grid*, Friedemann had two new games. *Freitag/Friday* is the one I haven't played. It's a solitaire game where the player is Man Friday, helping Robinson Crusoe survive, no doubt with Friedemann's touches of (black, usually) humour.

The other game is *Funkenschlag: Die Ersten Funken (Power Grid: The First Sparks* in English, which edition comes from Rio Grande). Despite the name, this is not an expansion for *Power Grid*. Instead, the name emphasises that Friedemann has taken mechanisms from that game. What he's done is develop them into something rather different, that will still have some familiarity for fans of *Power Grid*.

The story of the game is that the players are Stone Age tribes doing their hunter-gatherer thing. The aim is to have the largest tribe on the board when at least one tribe reaches the critical number. The board—built up of tiles, the number depending on the number of players—shows different food sources for the tribesmen. However, they also need the right tools to get the food (spears to bag a mammoth, for example). The tools—and technologies, such as fire—are available for purchase at the beginning of each round (like the power stations in *Power Grid*, but they're not auctioned off, just bought, which speeds things up a bit).



The food is needed first to feed the existing tribe members and then to expand the tribe further. However, players need to work this out carefully. Expand too fast and you won't be able to feed your people. What's more, the turn sequence is very important in this game and it depends on how many pieces players have on the board. The best approach may well be to loiter

at the back and make a surge at just the right time—though that's hard when everybody's trying to do the same.

If you know *Power Grid*, you will find a lot that is familiar in *First Sparks*. However, beware: a lot is different and some things are the reverse of what you're used to. There is enough different here that *First Sparks* stands on its own. It is a bit lighter than its predecessor and provides a different challenge for both those who know *Power Grid* and those who don't. I give it 8/10 on first acquaintance.

Further down the same row is veteran publisher Hans im Glück. Alongside expansions for their staples—*Carcassonne*, *Dominion* and *Stone Age*—were two new games: *Hawaii* and *Pantheon*. I played *Pantheon* earlier in the year and my comments are in *To Win Just Once* 116. *Hawaii* looks interesting, but I haven't played it yet.



## Hall 9—smaller publishers (part 1)

Heading down the stairs at the back of hall 10 takes you into number 9. This is a good place to find more of the small, independent publishers. It's also where several of the larger companies have extra playing space. The first to get my attention was the Czech Board Games crew, who hauled me off the aisle to look at the new games from their collective.

First up was *Infarkt*. Yes, a game about heart attacks! The game is designed by Vladimir Brunner and gives each player a board with six health indicators (blood pressure, depression etc). They decide what to do each 'day', but everything they do affects their health. The best thing to







do is throw a party—and get the other players to drink, eat and wreck their own health. Sooner or later someone will have a heart attack. Then someone else ... and another ... and the last person standing wins the game. What a wonderfully sick idea for a game! Played in the right way with the right people, this sounds like fun, but it's probably not an ideal family game. I give it an initial 7/10 on my highly subjective scale.

Attracting more attention was *Speedway Champions* with its chunky models of speedway drivers on their bikes. The models have two poses, either driving straight or slewing the bike, setting the direction to move. The players jostle for the racing line, which is prominent on the oval track and the key to the race. However, the first thing players have to do is configure their bikes for the race. They also need a bit of luck as each move is dependent on the roll of 1-3 dice—players choose how many to roll. *Speedway Champions* is designed by Jan Jaluvka and published by Stragoo Games, who are very proud of having kept the retail price down to €40. I do like race games, so I'm looking forward to trying it.

Ammonit Spieleverlag is a new name to me and they have a new game from Stefan Feld. *Trajan* is set in ancient Rome. The board shows various aspects of the Roman Empire: the provinces, trade, the forum and the Senate. The aim is to advance your own faction while keeping the populace happy with a spot of bread and circuses. As you'd expect from a Stefan Feld game, there are lots of ways of scoring points, so





players have to work out what's the best way for them to get more points than their opponents. Out-performing the others is the way to win as there's no direct conflict between players.

Publisher Rüdiger Beyer recommends players mix their tactics, rather than specialising too much. However, they first have to master the Mancala-style mechanism for selecting an action each turn: moving pawns around a ring of bowls. The pawns from one bowl are moved around the ring, leaving one pawn in each bowl. The player gets the action next to the last bowl they leave a pawn in. However, this also advances 'time' by the

number of pawns, so players must balance the action they want with how much time that uses up. The game is full of subtleties like this, making it a demanding challenge. It's one I look forward to taking on.

PD Verlag is the publisher for Mac Gerdts's games—I reviewed their 2010 game, *Navegador* in issue 118 of *To Win Just Once*. Their new game, *Casus Belli*, is essentially a two-player variant of Gerdts's first game, *Antike*. The game has been overhauled and adapted for two players. In particular, the emphasis of the different elements of the game has been changed for two players.

Unfortunately, the game wasn't ready in time for the show. However, Peter Dörsam and the rest of the team at PD were able to demonstrate the game using the upgrade kits they've prepared. Packed in a tube, these provide the amended map and rules for *Casus Belli* along with action cards (which can also be used with *Antike*). A limited number of these were on sale, each with a discount voucher for the final version of the game. I look forward to seeing the finished version.



## Hall 8—Comic Action

At the back of hall 9 we get the beginning of Spiel's companion show, Comic Action. The comics-related stands continue into hall 8, taking up the available space there. For the first time this year, part of hall 7 was opened up and several games companies were exhibiting in this space. (The organisers made a big thing about

this in their publicity, but it was noticeable that the show did not use the whole of hall 8.) A left turn at the back of hall 8 takes us into number 7.

## Hall 7—mostly newbies

Prominent at the entrance was Cardboard Island Games, a new publisher from Singapore. Their game, *Dash!*, is a race around Singapore with terrific artwork that captures the feel of city, I'm told. The game is played over three races on different tracks. Players move by playing cards from their own hand—the best combination moves furthest. Players have to decide which cards they're prepared to sacrifice in the first two races as these just give the winners bonuses. It's the last race that decides the winner, but will those bonuses beat someone who's saved their best cards? It's an interesting race game and Cardboard Island were taking advance orders for the production run expected soon.



I couldn't resist a company called Gung Ho Games, especially as they had a pirate game to show me. Even though it was in pre-production form, I had to sit down and gave it a go. *Pirates of Nassau*, designed by Richard Glazer, Tom Merri-gan and Gabrio Tolentino, has the players as pirates, each with their own ship. Each turn they roll their dice and choose where to move on the abstracted board of the

Caribbean. Depending on the dice rolls, they can attack merchant ships or visit other islands (to smuggle or sack!), playing cards from their own set (each player has the same values available) to ensure victory. Either of these actions will provide treasure in different types of goods or cash, then they have to evade or fight the Royal Navy to return to Nassau.

Once they're back in port, players can buy additional crew and equipment or even upgrade their ship. In a clever piece of design, players' ships are constructed of cardboard sections that can be extended (with an extra mast and gun ports) by adding a new piece into the middle. The artwork is good enough that you have to look to see the join! Once you've gone through the deck, the game's over and players score for their relative positions in the various attributes: notoriety, ship, crew and treasure. I thoroughly enjoyed the game (well, I did win!) and give it an initial 8/10 on my subjective scale. *Pirates of Nassau* should be available before Christmas.



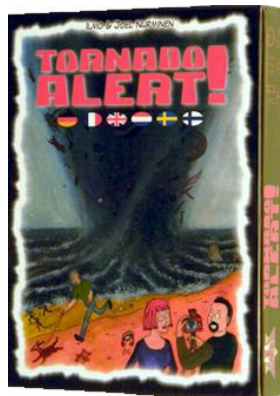
## Hall 6—role-play and wargames

A left turn again from hall 7 takes us into hall 6, which is like entering a different world. This is where the role-players hang out! The hall is stuffed full of stands selling costumes, (plastic) weapons and other games paraphernalia (rules seem to be down the list a bit). There are some fantastic costumes to be seen and some people are in full prosthetics—I enjoy soaking up the atmosphere—but there's little to be seen in the way of board games. Having said that, this is also the hall with the wargames publishers. A right turn at the far end takes us into hall 4 (hmm, slight numbering hiccup here).



Just one of the costumes on display

## Hall 4—smaller publishers (part 2)



The first stand I came to was a group of small publishers from Finland: Dragon Dawn Productions, Hyptic and Myrrysmiehet, all part of the 'Arctic Union' of Nordic games publishers. Dragon Dawn had an expansion, *Mostly Harmless*, for their game of trading in space, *The Phantom League*, that was published last year. Myrrysmiehet publishes role-playing games, but has branched out slightly with *Hounds of the Sea*. This is a light-hearted story-telling game of "pirates, voodoo and damsels in distress". Sounds like fun, but I didn't get a closer look. Hyptic's new game is *Tornado Alert!*, a card game of storm chasing. The aim

is to get the best pictures of tornadoes, but players can hinder each other as well as advancing their own cause. They also had *Shroom Boom*, a memory game of 'shroom tasting'. The twist is that players can trade information about the locations of specific plants. Players gain (and lose) points from their tasting. The most points wins the game, while anyone with negative points is definitely ill.

Behind them I found Amalgam, a new publisher from Croatia. Their first game is *Uskoci*, a card game about Croatian pirates. The aim of the game is to be the first to collect 25 points-worth of treasure. Game play is pretty straightforward (the rules only take up three pages). The cards are divided into suits and each is numbered. You play one card a turn, along with any action card(s). The cards played set the first player for next turn and the direction of play. The heart of the game is in the interplay between players—and their grudges! The designer's advice is to "play like a pirate!"



Further up the hall was Black Dove, another new publisher and another from Singapore. They had two games with them and a third in pre-production form, all with three-word, alliterative titles, abbreviated as *D3*, *F3* and *M3*. *Dive! Diver! Die!*,



published last year, was the one I didn't get to see. It's a dice game that mixes elements of co-operative games—players pool their oxygen—and push-your-luck games as players can risk staying running out of oxygen on their dive to get more treasure.

*For Fame & Fortune* is the new game. It's a card game played with a five-suit deck where the aim is to get the highest-scoring Poker-style hand after several rounds of passing cards between players. Players can also play cards as their 'bet' on winning the hand. This reduces the number of cards passed, but the cards

played also act as a Poker-style 'flop'—cards that can be used by any player as part of their hand. It's a neat idea that combines several aspects of other games in a novel way.

*Murder! Mystery! Mastermind!* is the pre-production game. It's a whodunit where the players are rivals (detectives, CSI, reporter etc) investigating a crime. Their aim is to get a successful prosecution by presenting their evidence for motive, means and opportunity in court. For those who want more of a challenge, the game can be played with one of the players secretly the criminal mastermind behind it all. They try to throw the others off the track—without being too obvious! The game is played over a board showing key locations as well as spaces for the various types of evidence. The competition between the players should make this rather more challenging than simply finding out whodunit and I look forward to seeing the finished game.

A couple of stands further along the aisle was FryxGames, where three of the Fryxelius brothers were showing two games. Luckily, I was able to distinguish between them as each had a different style of facial hair. ☺ Their first game, *Space Station*, is a card game of building space stations. Players use the cards in their hand to add modules to their station, expanding it turn by turn.

They also have some crew available and manning a module provides a benefit. Players can also use event cards to affect their opponents, who may then be busy repairing their station. Players have to make the best use of the cards and crew available to them, scoring points each round for the modules on their space station. The rules are





only a couple of pages long as the complexity of the game comes from the cards. It sounds like my kind of game and I look forward to trying it.

By contrast, *Wilderness* is a board game in which the players fight to survive. While there is a race element to the game—the first to get home wins—the main fight is with the game system. Players suffer from thirst, hunger and exhaustion, each marked on a track. Of course, being hungry and thirsty makes you more exhausted. Hunting for food and water is also tiring, but holds out the possibility of improving things if you find some. However, it also takes up time. And there is the ever-present threat of predators and the hazards of different terrain. Players have to decide what to risk as they strive to win the game. Clever stuff and a game that lends itself to story-telling. It was not surprising that *Wilderness* sold out at the fair.



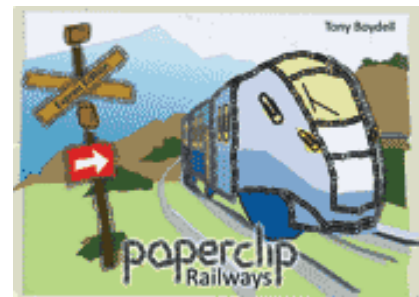
Immediately behind FryxGames was another space game. *Space Maze* from Wacky Works is a game of exploring an alien spaceship. The ship is made up of compartments with doors between them—tiles on the board. Players have three explorers in secondary colours (green, orange and purple) while the doors on each tile are primary colours. An exploring pawn can pass through a doorway if the primary colours combine to make their secondary colour. That is, an orange pawn can go through a red + yellow doorway.



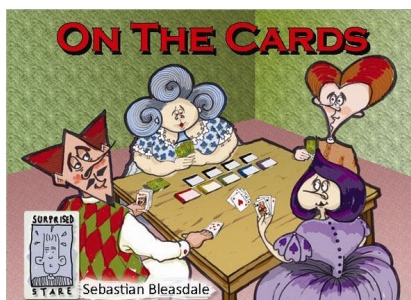
Of course, there aren't too many red/yellow combinations on the board, so players turn tiles to make usable doorways before moving. However, this will change other doorways as well, possibly making things easier for an opponent or harder for your other pawns! It's a simple idea that is quite fiendish to work out—I could feel my brain overheating as I looked at the board. The aim is to be first to get the 'relic' from the alien ship and get it back to your own ship, docked at the edge of the board. Designer Michel Baudoin has come up

with a very clever, but simple game. Its appeal is further enhanced with some appealing artwork to make an attractive package.

Across the other side of the hall was Surprised Stare Games, who had two new games to show us. The first, from regular designer Tony Boydell, was the second *Paperclip Railways* game—subtitled “the railway game where the trains are stationery”. Yes, players are building railways from chains of paper clips! They do this to connect together cards that represent towns, spending cards from their hand to ‘buy’ the paper clips they need. They get points for the towns they connect and the length of the chain used. Hence, building long chains scores more, but also costs more and players must balance cost and benefit.



On top of this, players must cope with obstacles and each other's railways, reducing their points for making links. They are limited, too, in how many players can connect to a town, but towns may also give players a bonus. The game ends when the cards run out and players then score various bonuses. *Paperclip Railways* is a clever little game that makes good use of an odd game component. *Paperclip Railways: Express Edition* was a limited edition of 300 copies and sold out at Spiel. I look forward to the next in the series—maybe I'll actually get a copy!



The second game was a card game from Sebastian Bleasdale, designer of *On the Underground* and former regular at Swiggers games club, as I am. *On the Cards* contains two decks of cards. One is a standard, 52-card, 4-suit pack of playing cards. The other is rather different. Sebastian has divided the rules of trick-taking card games into four elements: the deal, the aim, card play and winning the trick.

Instead of four suits, the second pack has a set of cards for each element. Taking one card from each set gives the rules for a particular game.

The game starts with the four sets shuffled. The top cards give the rules for the first round. The players play this game and score: the winner takes a rule card. This, of course, reveals a different card, giving a slightly different set of rules for the next round! The first player to get a set number of cards wins. What a clever idea. It takes the variability generated by a game like *Fluxx*, but sets it in a structure. This means the game is both more challenging and more rewarding than the randomness of *Fluxx*.

In case this isn't enough, a fifth, optional set of cards provides a 'twist' for the round. The rules provide an introductory game to give players the idea and additional options for making the game trickier. I can see this being a big hit with fans of trick-taking games as it gives them the opportunity to test their skills against the rules variations. *On the Cards* gets a provisional 8/10 on my highly subjective scale.



Right behind Surprised Stare was a Romanian publisher, NSKN Legendary Games, with their debut game, *Warriors & Traders*. As the name suggests, this is a game of war and commerce. It's played out on a board showing part of western Europe (or eastern Europe if you play on the other side!). Players all start with the same resources and there are no random elements in the game as they develop their economies, build up their armies and seek to dominate Europe.



As you'd expect, the game has a substantial rulebook. However, it doesn't go on for ever as it's limited to just 10 turns (though a lot can happen in a turn). And it can finish sooner if one player is running away with it. Players get points from military success, from provinces and for money and the most points wins the game. Clearly, there will be lots of ways of approaching this game and I look forward to trying them out. Not least because the game is well produced with attractive artwork.

Across the aisle from NSKN was Flatlined Games, another publisher new to me, though it has been going for a few years now. My attention was immediately caught by the name Lewis Pulsipher on one of their games. A game from the designer of *Britannia* has to be worth a look. It turns out that *Dragon Rage* was originally published in the early 1980s. This edition has all new artwork and modern production quality, but is essentially the same game. Flatlined Games's main man, Eric Hanuise, described it as "an entry-level, two-player wargame" in a fantasy setting.



One player represents the human inhabitants of the town of Esirien and defends the town against two attacking dragons, which the other player controls. While the dragons are very powerful, there are only two of them. Individually, the humans are puny (that's the traditional description), but there are lots of them and they have weapons. Hence the game is an interesting example of asymmetric warfare. The humans must wear down the dragons without

losing too many people. The dragons can wreak havoc, but must guard against being pinned down and having their strength whittled away.



Rumble in the House

Other scenarios pit the unfortunate inhabitants of Esirien against other attackers with different strengths and weaknesses: giants, orcs, dinosaurs and others. Or players can flip over the board and defend an orc village against human attackers (or any of the others). Optional rules allow players to add more into the game or to play a campaign or tournament.

I have to say that I didn't come across *Dragon Rage* in its first incarnation and there is a definite retro feel to the game (or maybe it's just my age). It does look an interesting and fun challenge though—along the lines of one game I remember fondly, *The Creature that Ate Sheboygan*. I don't play many wargames these days, but this is certainly one I'd like to try.

The second game was very different. *Rumble in the House* is a party game of clearing monsters out of a house. No, really. It looks great when it's set up with the monsters occupying the various rooms of the house (the game board).

Players get two secret markers, each indicating a monster, and will score points according to when their monsters are ejected from the house. In turn, players either move a monster from one room to another or take one out of the house from a room with more than one monster.

When there's only one monster left in the house, players reveal their markers and score points according to how late they were removed from the house. After three rounds, the player with the most points wins. This is a really simple game that will be huge fun to play—rather on the lines of the classic *Midnight Party*.

Portuguese publisher MESA Board Games was a bit further up the hall and had two new games on display, as well as last year's *Caravelas*, all designed by Gil d'Orey. *Agua: the Water Cycle* is the simpler game, aimed at children. The board shows the cycle of water evaporating from the sea into clouds, descending over land as rain and flowing back to the sea as rivers. Each turn





players move one of their cubes, representing some water, along one step of the cycle. They gain points by supplying water to the population, more points the later in the row of people they place their cube.

The populace gradually expands, making more points available as the game goes on. However, players need to keep their cubes moving if they are to have plenty of options for their next move. Not being able to move a cube will lose you a point. This is a clever little game: not particularly demanding, but good fun.

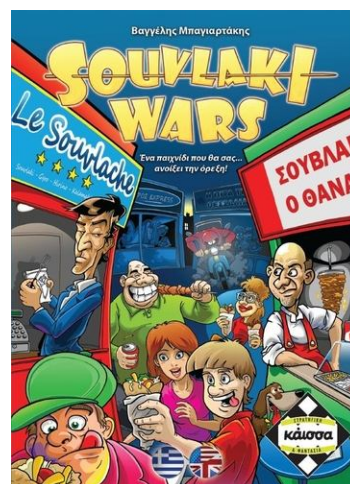
The second game, *Vintage*, is a lot more complex. It's all about making—and selling—Port in Portugal's Douro valley. Players must acquire estates, plant vineyards and harvest their grapes to make wine and brandy—the brandy, of course, being used to fortify the wine and turn it into Port. They must then ship their Port—Ruby or Tawny—down river to their cellars to age. Finally, players can sell their Port, gaining points for the quality of the wine. The game ends after seven turns when players get additional points for their holdings.

Each turn players use their markers and cards to take actions. Actions are more expensive if you are duplicating what someone else has already done—and you only have a limited number of markers. This is a detailed and intricate game that reproduces the way Port is produced in quite some detail. Players need to plan carefully to get their production right and keeping an eye on what the others are up to is also recommended. *Vintage* is an engrossing game and I very much look forward to giving it a go. It gets a preliminary 8/10 on my highly subjective scale.



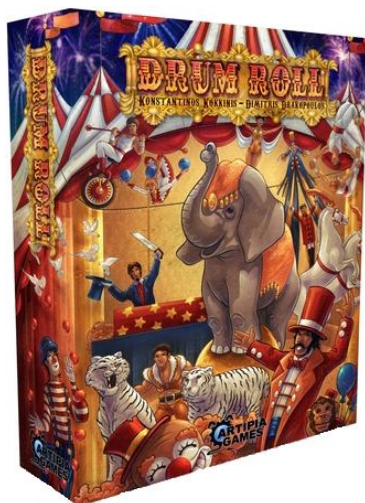
*Vintage* on display at Spiel '11

Kaissa Chess & Games has been around for some time as a retailer, distributor and publisher in Greece and their stand was a couple of aisles across. They were showing the gloriously named card game, *Souvlaki Wars*, designed by Vangelis Bagiartakis. As the name suggests, the game is about battling restaurant owners. Players win by getting the most reputation and money. The cards show potential customers with their order, telephone orders and, of course, the food that will be served to meet these orders (fingers crossed!). There are also event cards and each owner has their own character.



Players draft customers from those available, but can't refuse them even if they don't have the right items to serve them with. Those they can serve pay for their food and increase the restaurant's reputation. The money is required to pay expenses and buy in fresh supplies. Customers that haven't been served get "a bit anxious". If they aren't served the following turn they leave, reducing the restaurant's reputation by double their value. I'm sure there can be tactical reasons for not serving a particular customer, but they'd better be a low reputation value!

To add to the fun, players can advertise their restaurant and play event cards to affect their opponents or themselves (A 'Generous Tip' is much better played on yourself, for example!). The atmosphere of the game is helped by the cheerful and entertaining illustrations on the cards. It's great fun and a game I look forward to playing a lot more. I'll give it an initial 8/10 on my highly subjective scale.



The other side of the partition at the back of the stand was another publisher from Greece, a newcomer in this case. Artipia Games was showing *Drum Roll*, a board game of 1900s circuses, designed by Konstantinos Kokkinis and Dimitris Drakopoulos. It's a resource management game where players have to hire personnel and performers, sell tickets and put on a show. While preparation takes several turns, there is a clever mechanism that allows players to try to stretch this out or to put on their show as soon as they're ready.

Depending on how good their show is, players get various benefits, but must also pay salaries to their performers and other staff. The game goes through three shows in different regions of Europe, each of which provides different bonuses. At the end of the game there are some additional bonuses and the player who's done best overall wins the game. The game is more demanding than its light-hearted theme and artwork would suggest and requires a good bit of planning. It's excellent stuff on first acquaintance and another 8/10.



Swedish publisher Gigantoskop, at the end of the hall, caught my attention last year with their game of creation, *Genesis*. This year they had a new edition of *Forceball*, a card game of a futuristic game that seems to have some similarities to (ice) hockey (and thus provokes comparisons to the venerable *Slapshot*). Players' cards show attacking moves—pass, dribble, shoot—or defensive actions—block, tackle, intercept. The attacking player tries to score a goal, while the defender tries to take the ball for themselves. Either way, the roles swap sides and it's the other player's turn to try to score. (*Slapshot*, of course, was a multi-player game with a rather different emphasis as players tried to out-guess each other as they pitted their selected team against their opponents' teams.)

The game plays at a furious pace once players know what they're doing (which doesn't take long). Additional cards provide other options, including fouls, for which players will be penalised if the referee spots them. After three periods, the higher score wins. The game was originally produced in a limited edition for a sports company and is now more widely available through this version. Impact! Miniatures produce this edition in the USA and have raised capital (on Kickstarter) for a bigger production run aimed at getting the game wider distribution.

I found *Forceball* entertaining enough, but very dependent on luck. As a two-player game, it's not my cup of tea and not something I'd be likely to play very much. It gets 5/10 on my highly subjective scale.

### Hall 5—smaller publishers (part 3)

Through a foyer-type area (useful for a cup of coffee or sandwich) at the end of hall 4 is hall 5, which will loop my tour back to the top of hall 10. However, the first thing I saw coming into hall 5 from this end was the busy stand shared by several French publishers. These include Le Joueur, whose excellent card game, *Sandwich* (ah: a good French word that!), I commented on in issue 118 of *To Win Just Once* (and gave it a definite 8/10).

At the end of the stand was another new publisher with the wonderful name of Sit Down! that hails from Belgium. Their game was the unpronounceable *Wiraqocha*, a game of exploring and mining across the brightly coloured jungle tiles that make up the playing area. Players mine 'Somnium' (which is one way to win the game), conquer tiles, fight their opponents, develop technologies and hunt for the pieces of a specific artefacts (a second way). They deploy Explorers, Zeppelins and Drilling machines, all illustrated with a definite steampunk atmosphere.



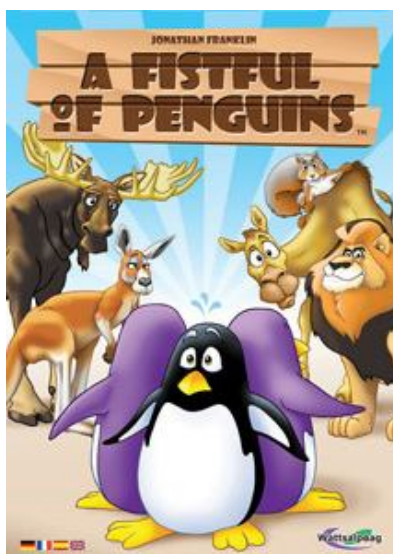
It was clear from the brief explanation that there's a lot going on in the game. Not least making best use of the dice you roll at the start of your turn. Players have to decide how best to pursue one of the game-winning goals and use the tactical options provided by the game and the other players to follow their strategy. It sounds interesting and I hope to give it a go soon.

Just next door was another French publisher, Asyncron Games. Pride of place was given to their new revision of *Fief*. The game pits the players against each other as the lords of feudal manors, building up their fiefdom and competing with each other militarily, economically and politically. The new version looks splendid and was certainly providing good entertainment for those I saw playing it at Spiel. Asyncron has thoroughly overhauled the rules and provided scenarios for shorter games as well as the full-length campaign (which includes dynastic marriages, diplomacy between players and a lot more). *Fief* is definitely worth trying and I look forward to giving it a go.

Across the aisle were my old friends at Wattsalpoag, the US publisher that produces Kris Gould's games. I was particularly interested in the expansion set for my favourite of Kris's games, *Jet Set*. The first thing this does is add more cards to the game. These have two effects. First, they provide more variety to the game. Secondly, because there are more cards in the decks, the game will last longer. As one of the keys to the game is spotting when the end is likely to be triggered, this does make a change to the game.



On top of this, there are four different expansions in the box and you can add them to the base game on their own or in any combination. I immediately like the 'Distant Lands', which are long-haul flights, providing players with another option in their tactics. 'Hubs' provide bonuses for establishing a hub to your airline, depending on just how much it gets used. Again, this adds another twist that could change the balance of the game. 'Business' cards give players bonus actions that should make developing their airline easier. And 'Investment' cards provide some additional scoring during the game. Interesting stuff that I'll be trying out as soon as I get the chance.



Wattsalpoag had a new game as well: *Fistful of Penguins* is their first that's not designed by Kris, Jonathan Franklin is the man behind this one. It's a quick, simple, Yahtzee-like dice-rolling game. However, here the dice show animal symbols, not numbers. Each different animal scores in a different



way. Lions are worth lots of points, but you don't score any other animals—that's predators for you. Squirrels steal from other players, while Moose only score for those Moose that have a Squirrel with them! And the penguins give you tokens (good-looking translucent plastic pieces) that allow you to roll extra dice or re-roll.

The game is great fun, plays quickly and provides a real temptation to push your luck and roll the dice just one more time... I was not surprised that the game had sold out well before the end of Spiel. Luckily, Wattsalpoag have plenty more in their warehouse and it should be readily available. I give *Fistful of Penguins* 8/10 from my first meeting.

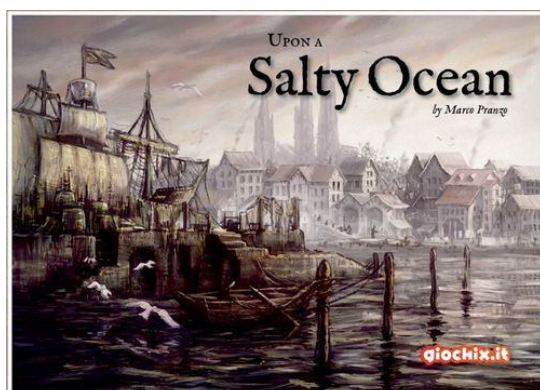
A little further along the hall was Italian publisher Giochix with two new games this year. *The Forgotten Planet*, designed by Giochix main man Michele Quondam, is about exploring the eponymous planet, laying tiles to show the terrain as the players travel round. Each player has a team of robots that it uses to prospect the planet, looking for valuable minerals. The robots must place metal paths as they go, providing both stable routes and energy supply.



*Forgotten Planet* bits – from the back of the box

As well as exploring, the robots build mines and can construct walls to keep other players away. Robots can move or destroy walls, too, potentially giving access to other players' resources. All of these activities cost energy, which is the way players' actions are limited. Robots on mines produce resources, which can be used in several ways, including turning them into victory points. At the end of the game, players get points for their holdings, which is the main way of winning.

*The Forgotten Planet* sounds intriguing, but it is very abstract: square grey tiles played onto the table with wooden discs and cubes—and robots, of course. I shall definitely give it a try, but I would have liked something that looked a bit more like exploring a planet.



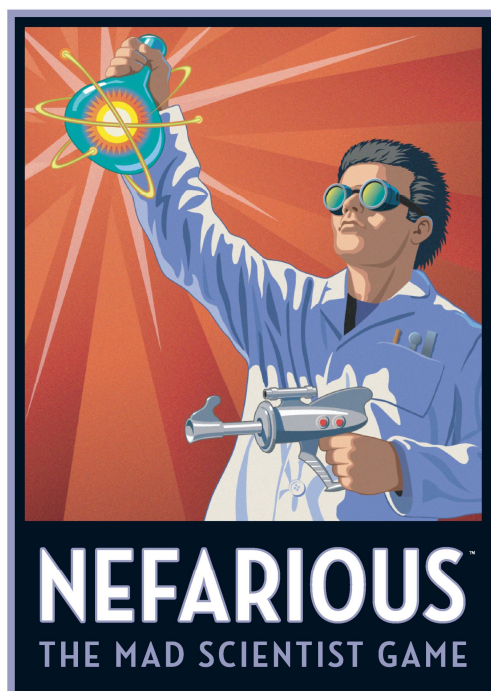
*Upon a Salty Ocean*, from designer Marco Pranza, looks altogether more atmospheric. The board shows the city of Rouen, France's main port at the beginning of the 16th century, laid out on the banks of an estuary. The city's wealth was based on fishing in the Atlantic, using local salt to preserve the catch. Players start with a ship, a salt mine and some cash and must build themselves a commercial empire.

This immediately sounds like my kind of game. While fishing is clearly where players start from, they can invest their income in the different buildings around the city. Initially, their investments will be to build up their trade: more ships, more salt mines and warehouses to store stock. Other buildings provide an income and then there are the grand, prestigious projects, such as the great cathedral and its stained glass windows and the Hôtel de Ville. The winner is the richest player at the end of the game—I was particularly taken with the rule that players are limited in the cash they can hold until they have a bank! Another intriguing game that I look forward to playing.

Along the back wall were a number of smaller stands. The first one I visited was Ascora Games, a US publisher whose first appearance at Spiel was with *Kaigan* last year. This time they had *Nefarious*, a new card game from Donald X Vaccarino (best-known as the man who gave us *Dominion*). I was intrigued by the odd-shaped meeples that come with the game. They look almost hump-backed I said, just as I spotted the sub-title on the posters: "The game of mad scientists". All fell into place—every mad scientist needs his Igor! Igor! and here they get a whole team of them.



Each player has a 'lair' card where they can assign their team of eager assistants to their jobs. They also have a set of four cards for the four actions available each turn. Players all choose their actions by selecting cards, revealing them simultaneously and implementing them in order. Essentially, the actions allow players to research new inventions (drawing from a deck of cards), play an invention (which costs money) or generate themselves some money—even mad scientists need to work!



Donald X. Vaccarino



The first player to reach a target value of inventions triggers the end of the game and the winner is the player with the highest value when they've all finished their turn. This is huge fun and plays simply and very quickly (more quickly than you might expect). To provide variety, a further deck of 'Twist' cards provides additional constraints to the game. Two are drawn at the start of the game and remain in place throughout. A simple, but very effective way of ensuring the game is different each time you play.

I had huge fun playing this at the show, added to by the atmospheric pulp fiction-style illustrations. The Twist cards give the game replay value (otherwise I can see it getting rather same-y after the fourth time) and I think Ascora have a hit. It gets 9/10 on my highly subjective scale.



Next door was Bézier Games and supremo Ted Alspach. As well as his usual *Age of Steam* expansions, Ted was demonstrating the prototype of *Mutant Meeples*, which he described as *Ricochet Robots* with knobs on. As with the old game, the aim is to move one of the pawns to the target point by bouncing it off the walls and other pawns. Here, however, the pawns are mutant meeples and each has a super power!

Players not only have to work out the fastest path for getting to the target, they have to take into account each meeple's power. I found *Ricochet Robots* melted my brain, so this is one game that really doesn't appeal to me. Ted has launched this on Kickstarter to raise the funds for publication early in 2012 (and is halfway there at the end of October).

Ted had one game to show off in its finished form: *Tiebreaker*. This follows his ingenious *Start Player* in providing a simple way of dealing with a perennial problem when playing games. In this case, the problem is: how do you resolve a tie at the end of a game? Simple, draw a card from the *Tiebreaker* deck and the first to carry out the forfeit-style activity wins the tie. To get a better idea of what this is about, take a look at the wonderful video Ted has posted on BoardGameGeek: <http://boardgamegeek.com/video/10116>



*Tiebreaker* cards—with an intruding Bogeyman

Sharing the stand with Bézier was Omnigames from Denmark with their card game, *Rising Kings*. This is a relatively simple game: players draw a card and play cards. Each card has a special effect and builds up the players' own part of the kingdom in front of them. The game ends when the deck runs out and players may get some bonus points as well as the points for their buildings and characters. The player with the most points becomes King. Not a deep game, but one that is enhanced by the charming illustrations on the cards.

At the far end of the hall, just before heading back into hall 10, I finally found Treefrog Games, the new name for Martin Wallace's imprint. Their new position is excellent as they are the first thing people will see as they enter hall 5 from the main halls. Treefrog had made the most of it, too, using game artwork to great effect by merging elements from the various games on huge wall panels. It was arresting.

The games being played were, of course, *Ankh-Morpork* and *A Few Acres of Snow*. I covered both of these in *To Win Just Once* 116, so I won't go into detail here. *Ankh-Morpork* is great fun, but don't expect a deep strategy game: it's chaos all the way. (It was also to be seen in other languages on several other stands—Iello (French),



The Treefrog stand with its highly effective backdrop

Kosmos (German), Mayfair (American) and so on). *A Few Acres of Snow* is a terrific card-driven wargame on the French/British conflict over what is now Canada. I give 'em both 9/10 after playing each several times.

Martin had one new game on show. *Old Men of the Forest* is a relatively simple card game. Each participant plays a card, the two who played the highest cards each claim one card from those played. They use the right set of these to get an Orangutan card from the middle of the table, which will score them points at the end of the game. However, any surplus cards are tucked under the Orangutan and count as penalties at the end. It's neat, quick to play and all profits are going to the UK Orangutan Foundation. It gets 7/10 from me.

US publisher Stratamax Games was sharing with Treefrog again and they also had a card game to show off. *Let's Take a Hike* is designed by Stratamax regular Aaron Lauster and is all about a gentle stroll in the country. Or not. Players draw and play cards to fill their backpack and pockets. Sooner or later the group will go on a hike, turning over cards from the deck to encounter hazards—including the odd bear.



If a player has a matching card in their backpack, they keep going. Otherwise they must discard cards with the same number of bootprints on them. If they decide to drop out of the hike, they take a card which will provide some points at the end. So *Let's Take a Hike* is a push-your-luck game where players have to decide what risks to take and how long to keep going before scoring some points. It's good fun, but, for British hikers, is distressingly without any Kendal Mint Cake!



## The end

As always, Spiel was huge fun. I never fail to be energised by everybody's enthusiasm for games. And I've seen lots of new games that I look forward to playing. I'll be adding to this report as I play more of the games.

Spiel '12 will be 18th-21st October 2012 and I fully intend to be there. You can find more on the organiser's website: [www.merz-verlag.com/spiel](http://www.merz-verlag.com/spiel)

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Pevans took the photos and played with Photoshop.

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