

New Arrivals, Fall 2020

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The avoidance of alienated labor and the pursuit of fulfilling leisure activities seem to be a pressing issue for Friedemann Friese. An indication of this is that **FEIERABEND** (aka finishing time) thematically builds upon **FUNNY FRIENDS** and **FUTUROPIA**. To begin with, each worker is groaning under the burden of a 70-hour workweek without any vacation entitlement – and for all this, he earns a meager salary. With your seven thick and thin meeples (which stand for male and female workers but have no function regarding content), you try to achieve better conditions through a strike so that you can enjoy your leisure time. To this end, you put your strike tokens on the applicable spaces. Therefore, workers like to visit the union office in order to get strike tokens.

Alternatively, they indulge in leisure activities – such as fishing or jogging (which gives you two or three relaxation points), visiting the amusement park (which gives you up to nine relaxation points, but you have to pay money), taking a vacation (provided they had already come out on a successful strike), or finding a (male or female) partner on a blind date, whose companionship will have a positive recreational effect from the next week on. Several workers at once are allowed to go to the pub. If they are short of money, they can wash the dishes there; otherwise, for giving up one little point, they can sprawl in front of the TV. As soon as you have placed all your workers on the board, your personal week ends. Now you take them back, receive income and strike tokens, but also a deduction for the lifetime you have lost at the factory. The next player might rejoice at the attractive spaces that have now become vacant again (e.g. on the union board or for a stay with the partner at a motel on the amusement board).

Once one of the leisure-seekers has accumulated 40 points in life quality, the meeples stay put on the board(s), and everybody places only his remaining workers. Last but not least, players tally for the recent work week one more time, and the player with the best-relaxed workers wins.

FEIERABEND stands out with its charming theme; it's a pity, though, that the gender differentiation (pay gap) is insignificant or almost trivial in terms of play. Figuring out which action spaces are the most lucrative ones doesn't help much, unfortunately, if they are occupied at the wrong moment; and the push for leisure quality (and for union support in particular) is dominated by relentless cut-throat competition. One can hardly catch up with anybody who has outpaced the others during the middle game. -cc

FAIYUM takes more than twice the time as **FEIERABEND**. In **FAIYUM**, set in Ancient Egypt, players have to cultivate the arable land in such a way that the region can become the granary of the country. In this game, Friedemann Friese combines deck-building elements with the market from **POWER GRID**. The more than 100 cards and 250 different wooden pieces signal that this game is something for connoisseurs. The basic principle is relatively simple: Play a hand card and carry out an action. By eliminating crocodiles that are lying around in many places, you gain a reputation (which is important for the final scoring) but also make space for all the others on the board.

Grapes, wheat or even roses can be harvested as resources that allow you to play cards. Buildings are also available to all players. Alternatively, you can buy a new, stronger card at the market, where the cheapest cards come at a discount price, whereas the most valuable ones are not accessible for the time being.

Option three is to gain income and take back the top three cards from your discard pile – or even more, if you want to and pay for them. In order to get this entire machinery going, you should work your weak cards into the bottom of your discard pile and rotate just the stronger ones. Once the fourth natural disaster has come up, the game ends – and by then, at least two hours will have passed by. -sd

Ankama

In each of the eight rounds of **DREAM RUNNERS**, players have to resolve one dream tile that shows on a grid of 3-by-3

spaces where to collect something useful or where there are nightmares lurking. Equipped with a very similar set of starting segment tiles consisting of one, two or three squares, everybody simultaneously creates a grid for himself, with the objective to virtually cover the nine spaces of the dream tile without any overlapping. In doing so, you try to banish nightmares by using the corresponding red print symbols; otherwise, the nightmares make you lose serenity points.

Appropriately laid-out green squares grant you star fragments, improve your night's rest, provide you with keys that you need for treasure chests, or give you coins that allow you to buy additional tiles, so that you can fulfill the requirements of the dream tiles better. Treasure chests give you more of these positive effects; and sets of star fragments can be converted into victory points. The advantage of the multitude of tiles is curtailed by the restrictive rule that squares exceeding the 3-by-3-square grid (as well as missing squares) disturb one's night's rest severely. So, as soon as you have enough money, you'll try to get hold of the (scarce) one-segment tiles, since they can be used most flexibly. Once the dreamers have resolved the eight dream tiles in play, each player's quality of sleep (i.e., number of dream points) is translated into victory points.

The dream optimization isn't quite stress-free, since the first player who is content with the grid he has created turns over the sand timer (enclosed in the game) and thus sets the time remaining for the others. The dream tiles are pre-sorted and show an increasing number of nightmares; ignoring these nightmares can have a steep cost. And you might easily overlook a particularly bad dream monster if you are too focused on the attractive items that you would like to rake in through the square that doubles the collecting effect. Whereas the aspects of collecting and converting are well known, the concept of this appealing puzzle task is novel: The template is not supposed to be recreated one to one but serves as a basis for attempts at optimiza-

tion. The sand timer governs the level of thinking that is adequate for the player group and limits the overall playing time; the suggested 30 minutes, however, might not be quite enough. Besides this, the game requires a certain level of quick thinking.

When Bruno Faidutti's name is written on the box, one could suppose that bluffing plays a role. This also applies to **Poisons**. Three to eight poisoners seek to kill each other, while each of them is hoping to take a plain drink. At the beginning of a round, you reveal one card from your personal deck, indicating in victory points how delicious your own drink is. Then you deal all the cards of your personal deck to your drinking buddies. One of the cards poisons the victim, whereas all the other participants remain unharmed – unless the version for advanced players is played. In this case, from round 2 on, a randomly drawn card determines an additional special effect, for instance, an antidote, a love potion that scores two extra points (provided the feeling is mutual), or a drink that awards two points to the coward who declines it. Everybody who chooses to take the drink reveals the cards allotted to him and scores for it, provided it is not poisonous; if somebody doesn't dare to drink, he gets at least one safe point.

Poisons is a brisk game that lives on malicious joy. The leading player can be sure to receive poison; therefore, he wouldn't drink anyway. But if his opponents anticipate this reaction and give the poison to somebody else, he could drink – could he not?

-cc

Board & Dice

The dice in **TEKHENU** are cleverly arranged around an obelisk that rotates by one sixth every second round. This rotation also changes the light conditions; they determine in a very original manner whether a certain die color is considered "pure" or "tainted" or is even totally forbidden for the time being. The active temple builder chooses one permissible die and places it on one side of his scales, depending on whether it is a pure or a tainted die. After every four rounds, everybody determines the balance of his scales by comparing the total number of pips of his pure dice and his tainted dice; any player with an overhang on the tainted side gets minus

points. Whoever is most successful in balancing becomes the new starting player.

You can produce resources that match the color of the die. The pips on the die indicate the maximum output, which is capped by your own production capacities; but during the course of the game, you try to improve these with the help of the God Osiris. Alternatively, you can use a die coming from the applicable segment to carry out one of six God actions, most of which require specific resources. In honor of Horus, you place statues; they generate not only victory points but also rewards, provided others carry out God actions at the location of the statue. For Ra, you build pillars in the temple complex; among other things, they score in connection with the buildings that you have erected around the complex with the help of Hathor. At the same time, you want to increase your population, i.e., advance your population marker on the populace track. Since this progress is coupled with the people's happiness, it makes sense to invest here; this is the only way to get access to cards (with the help of Bastet and Thoth) that provide one-time and permanent bonuses and present the prospect of a good number of victory points at the final scoring. After 16 dice actions per player and at least two and a half hours (with four players), the game ends – and with it, the stringent and highly interwoven converting of actions, resources, and cards into victory points.

The abstract euro-game mechanism does not lend itself to the thematic setting. Deciding on what to select from among the up to 15 cards displayed takes some time, even with experienced players. Unlike personal dice-rolling results, the dice on display affect everybody. The question of whether some (high-value) dice in certain segments are available might noticeably impair a player's personal (card-assisted) strategy, though. The concept is clear and plausible; but, as always, the devil lies in the details. For some players, **TEKHENU** is welcome brain food, whereas the game evolves into hard labor for those who are less ambitious.

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Board Game Circus

There is no doubt that lions are wild animals, but it remains to be seen whether meerkats or squirrels also belong to this

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category. Be that as it may, all players in **WILD CARDS** strive to attract as many animals of one kind as possible. This can be managed by offering them a new habitat. To this end, everybody lays out a Habitat card, face down. If the card matches the natural habitat of one or more animals in the face-up display, you can take at least one of them and add it to your own collection. Alternatively, you can play a Refill Hand card in order to replenish your own hand. If you have the most animals of one species lying in front of you, you are rewarded with a Leader card; these cards can serve as a tie-breaker, give you extra points or additional hand cards, or entitle you to exchange one animal from your collection with one animal from the open display. This bidding-and-collecting game takes about half an hour.

-sd

Catch Up Games

In the tactical game **WILD SPACE** animals are the protagonists: Bears, octopuses or geckos serve as pilots of the spaceships. Additionally, there are robots on board – provided you can play the applicable cards. You have no more than ten turns during the game. Each turn consists of either the flight to a planet or the exploration of a planet if you have already landed there. The Planet tiles allow you to take actions such as "Drawing cards" or "Putting cards into play." So it is worthwhile to lay out cards that provide the immediate effect of placing additional cards. The more animals of one species you collect, the more points you score. Over time, your troop develops special abilities that can trigger chain reactions. In the solo mode of **WILD SPACE**, you can fight a duel with an AI called the "Smuggler."

-sd

Cephalofair Games

At the butcher's shop, the kids get an extra slice of sausage; at the bakery, there are small pieces of bread out for tasting; and at the cheese department, you can try skewered cubes of a new cheese variety. Such little treats have always been an effective means of attracting new customers or maintaining a consumer base. If the purchased product is somewhat larger, the treat can even grow proportionally. For instance, the little ones might get a pedal car for free if mom buys a Porsche. That's similar with the new **GLOOMHAVEN** offshoot. Those who were toying with the idea of purchasing the number-one

game in the **BGG** ranking but shied away from the buying costs and the shelf space needed will find a suitable trial pack with **GLOOMHAVEN - THE JAWS OF THE LION**. Of course, this game is not for free, but it provides an unbiased, direct view of the very popular system at about one third the price of the original. Basically, everything remains pretty much the same but is not dealt with so extensively. It still is a cooperative fantasy game for one to four players and requires tactical decisions in the conflict between one's self-interest and the common good. But of course, it has less equipment. The box contains four new heroes with new miniatures, 16 new monsters, 25 scenarios, a city map, stickers, markers and all the other bits and pieces you need for such tabletop adventures. For an easier start, the scenarios are connected to one campaign with increasing difficulty levels.

This is not a "best-of in miniature"; therefore, even players who have already spent a lot of time with **GLOOMHAVEN** need not steer clear of this reincarnation of the system. All elements have been newly conceived and the entity functions also as an expansion. This is the advantage that this treat has over many others: Who would actually mount a pedal car on top of his Porsche?

-ct

Corax Games

Last year, Rita Modl convinced players with her tactical dexterity game **MEN AT WORK**. Her new game, **KING OF 12**, also has a modest amount of rules; here, however, she resorts to gambling and bluffing elements. Each player starts with a random number value of a twelve-sided die and an identical set of seven character cards. Each round, players simultaneously select and play one card. After cards showing the same character have been eliminated as ineffective, players have to resolve the effects of the remaining cards. The alchemist, for example, doubles the player's own die value; the crook demands that all dodecahedrons are turned onto their opposite side; and the knight determines that the lowest values are scored. Otherwise, the player with the highest value earns two victory points, and the player with the second highest value gets one. The player who is leading at the end of a round (players with the same highest amount of points negate each other) has to remove one of his hand cards for all

future rounds. The first player to discard two cards this way wins. Follow-up games provide some variety if you change the composition of the cards; you can choose among twelve characters.

The individual player's influence is very limited, but this is intended in this fun game. Especially in the game with the maximum number of players, the characters often stalemate each other. Unexpected constellations make for surprised winners of some rounds – nobody should feel too safe. Even the course of a round might dupe the favorites. The constantly changing outcomes make for entertainment and laughter. Pure emotions! -cc

Czech Games Edition

Can deck-building, worker placement, and resource management coexist in one game? The Czech Games company takes this view and wants to prove it with **LOST RUINS OF ARNAK**. You are exploring an island together with your archeologists and have them dig. In terms of the game mechanisms, this is done by means of your personal deck and a very simple core turn: play a card, carry out an action or obtain resources. However, there are also additional free actions that can speed up the game. After all, you need to discover sites, pick up equipment, and collect artifacts. A round ends as soon as all players have passed since they are no longer able or willing use any of their five hand cards. Then you put everything underneath your own deck and draw new cards. Until then, there was a lot to be done: Guards were lounging around at some sites and needed to be convinced with forceful arguments that you were permitted to excavate there. Alternatively, those guys could have scared you; this is reflected in Fear cards that are added to your own deck. Initially, only five sites are accessible, but their number increases over the course of the game. Consequently, you should quickly send your scientists to the right sites via boat, jeep or plane, the reason being that all sites have only limited space.

UNDER FALLING SKIES has already been in existence since 2019 as a trial edition for download and print; this edition consisted of only nine cards. In the professional version now available, the game is still intended for one player. You need to prevent aliens from conquering the earth. While spaceships are filling

the skies, the humans are holding out in the bunker, and you have to develop an effective weapon for their survival. This is accomplished through multiple missions of a campaign in which you, as the solo player, try to ward off the invaders, each time with the help of a different city. The crucial element is the placement of the five dice on the cards that lie one above the other and serve as a variable playing area. By placing the dice, you trigger actions and develop your subterranean base. But the higher the dice-roll result, the faster do attackers approach the earth if they are in the same column as the placed die. If an alien ship reaches the base, you lose points and the ship returns to its mother ship in order to trouble you again later. In addition, the mothership comes closer every round. So it is high time for you to construct robots; robots enhance your actions or unlock stronger abilities as your base is being developed. If you manage to keep up the power flow and to develop the technologies up to the desired level, you win the battle – at least this one. There are still more than 20 left to fight.

-sd

Deep Print Games

When fauna and flora interact for the purpose of transforming a deteriorating spot of land back into the wonderful river flood plain it once used to be, this would be suited for a great educational game for a youth organization of nature conservation. But since **RENATURE** has been invented by Michael Kiesling and Wolfgang Kramer, it rather addresses an adult target group, more precisely, a group with playing experience. The fauna is represented by species such as the badger, salamander, eagle owl, and black woodpecker. The overall ten species are depicted on dominoes, and these dominoes are placed end to end, as usual. What's unusual is that they are only a means to an end. Actually, you have to place pairs of animals on brook spaces in such a way that parched areas will be completely enclosed at the right moment, which is scored in proportion to the size of the area.

Of course, you don't always have suitable animal pairs at hand in order to close an area; or you have the same number of points in an area as somebody

else, which eliminates you and the other player from the plants scoring. This brings us to the flora. Each player has his own set of wooden plant pieces. These pieces are nicely shaped and easy to differentiate by color – a blue oak tree is something that needs getting used to, though. Other than that, there is nothing wrong with the oak trees; they are the most valuable plants here, and when you plant one, you earn four points, plus one point for each other plant in that area of equal or lower value. Grass (called "turf") has the lowest value (1) and is scored only for already-present turf. When you plant – which is allowed only next to the just-placed animal domino – you naturally always like to use oak trees. But this isn't possible, since you have only two of these, but there are nine turfs plus several pine trees and bushes. During the set-up, you line up all your plants on your personal board, and by the end, when the dominoes have been used up, the plants should be gone from there. Otherwise, you get minus points according to the plants' value.

The authors' experience is reflected in the way they create something quite



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unconventional with a good matching of theme and game flow, by using predominantly conventional ingredients in combination with a few clever features – for instance, that each player has not only plants in his own color but also neutral ones on his board.

As **RENATURE**, the first game from the new company, Kyoto also is about something more relevant than the Middle Ages fuss that is so typical in our hobby. Might this be the common thread of this new publishing venture? Here, the Japanese city doesn't appear in its former function as an imperial residence but as the host of the first global climate conference. At that time, a first step in the right direction; with hindsight, one wonders why there haven't yet been enough further steps. The answer is almost automatically given by the game, which exposes the participants to the fundamental social conflict between the common good and individual interests. As in the real 1997 conference with its tough struggle in setting target values, negotiations are the most important thing in the game as well; players who don't like wheeling and dealing are in the wrong place here, even though a time limit of no more than 90 seconds per round has been set for consultations.

To accomplish something, instruments of power are required (and skipping school isn't one of them, Greta). You need to enforce a reduction of overindulgence and to contribute millions of dollars, here in the form of money cards and affluence cards. You can spend these cards after the current conference speaker has read the study card aloud. The study stipulates a reduction goal or funding goal and the cost range, and indicates the impending negative consequences – but just in part; only the speaker knows the full extent of the damage. In view of this partial infor-

mation, each country can now contribute money and up to two affluence cards, but it can also persuade or bribe other countries so that they make a contribution – or retract an already-promised contribution. Why the latter? Because everybody follows secret string-pullers; for instance, by being on the payroll of the oil lobby. This would give the country five victory points in the end, but also cause it to lose one point for every oil symbol that is showing on the affluence cards sacrificed by the community.

Once all 24 study cards have been resolved without any environmental sector exceeding the critical threshold, the conference is deemed successful. Otherwise, it has failed. Either way, each country may add all those affluence cards it has kept or gotten through a bribe to the points from its two secret agenda cards; and countries that have more money left than the others score for that, too. Too bad, though, that, in case the conference fails, the country with the most points loses and the second-best country wins instead. -mh

dip

According to **REMEMBER OUR TRIP** (first published 2019 by Saashi & Saashi), Kyoto and Singapore both consist of hotels, parks, restaurants, shops, and sights – just in different arrangements. But after a while, you'll have forgotten the exact composition anyway – and that's what the theme is all about. In terms of game play, everybody tries to create the above-mentioned structures on his personal city map, each of which consists of two to four image tokens. These tokens are drawn out of a bag and laid out in randomly composed groups of three, in order to be taken and placed on the different city maps later on.

Water areas obstruct the ideal placement, as does the current Memory card of

the round that determines where players have to place the tokens. For instance, you might have to arrange the tokens you have drawn in a straight vertical or horizontal line, diagonally or crossways. If an already-placed token is in the way, it can be removed – but at the risk of a points deduction.

Once you have completed a structure, you may score for this, but this fixes all its tokens in place. For reasons of flexibility, you would be inclined not to do this too soon, but the opposite is the case. Everybody wants to score at a time when the common board in the middle of the table still has the right gaps. If you are able to transfer your completed structure onto the corresponding spaces on the central board since these haven't yet been occupied, you place a location tile there, which gives you additional points. In keeping with the theme, this means that your own memory of the city has been correct in this case. Anybody who has something different on his board doesn't remember correctly. So players compete for the right definition of reality and strive to recreate it faster than the others. In addition, everybody tries to increase the number of points he has collected during the course of the game by fulfilling a displayed face-up Objective card. And it is important to cover four locations (which are in different places on each city map) with the printed structures.

Author Saashi (who also invented **COFFEE ROASTER**) has invented an almost strategic and highly remarkable tile-laying game and thus enriched a genre in which the actions are typically done from hand to mouth. It could have had a better visual appearance, though. -mh

Dragon Dawn Productions

A sealed resource bid – consisting of a mixture of power, influence, and money – determines the order in which you can choose your role for the upcoming round. Three roles are available. If you are the player "In the Public Eye," you have to reveal one of your objective cards, but in return, you get an additional support faction, are allowed to start, and might be able to decide ties in your favor. If you are the player "In the Shadows," you are the last in the order of play, but you may take a support faction or a few resources away from another player or gather information about an opponent's secret objec-



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DECKTECTIVE

In a **deck** of cards,
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tive, and you can also steal money from the common pool. The (up to four) other players are somewhere in the mid-field of the order of play; they impersonate "gray eminences" and may draw and play an additional action card.

In **GRAY EMINENCE**, you basically represent a person who pulls strings in global politics. Each of the ten characters available is a parody of well-known personalities, such as Jeff Bezos, Greta Thunberg or Jorge Mario Bergoglio, and they all have public objectives as well as secret objectives, one of which may be scored each round. Whether you achieve these goals depends on the supply of resources or cards of the different participants, but also on general parameters. Such parameters are, for instance, the state of relations between the USA and certain other states (this state, shown on a chart, can range over five levels, from "Conflict" to "Allied") or the handling of geopolitical problems. Players draw one event, i.e. a political problem for the current round; and, provided the resources required are in the common pool, they can solve this problem in one of three possible ways, each with different consequences. If there is more than one potential solution, players vote – of course, with their personal agendas in mind. If the resources don't suffice, the problem remains unsolved, but this which might actually be in many a player's interest. Everybody inevitably contributes to the constant refilling of the common pool, but has some say in what and how much to give.

What makes Timo Multamäki's game of scheming particularly up to date is that the U.S. president incessantly meddles via Twitter. This has an impact on the common pool and, of course, on international relations.

Given the numerous options you have in this game, the instructions on eight DIN-A5 pages (half of them filled with set-up details and glossary) are short. Too short. Nevertheless, I find it worthwhile to work my way through the game. -mh

Drei Hasen in der Abendsonne

While the players scene is still discussing whether Hilo is a plagiarism of Skylo (a debate that shows complete disregard for the game CABO), the North Bavarian company Drei Hasen in der Abendsonne has spoken out: To the best of their knowledge, all these games belong to the family

of "Golf" card games that has been in existence in the Anglo-Saxon area for a long time. And since the company didn't want to be inactive, it has now contributed the next variation, **ALLEGRA**, where players also reveal their own cards and try to have the fewest points showing in the end.

Again, you can discard three identical cards from one row or column. What's new is that somebody may knock on the table when you are revealing a card – maybe it would suit him... It might make sense to leave the card to a player who is interested in it, since you are then allowed to take a card from that player's display in return. But the crucial change is that the right column of your left neighbor also belongs to your own display and is therefore considered for your own score. Now you can reveal or discard cards there – and selflessly furnish your neighbor with fit occasions. The look to the right and to the left adds considerably more depth to the game and turns the session-closer for occasional players into a brain teaser for graduates of a gamblers' academy. -sd

Edition Spielwiese

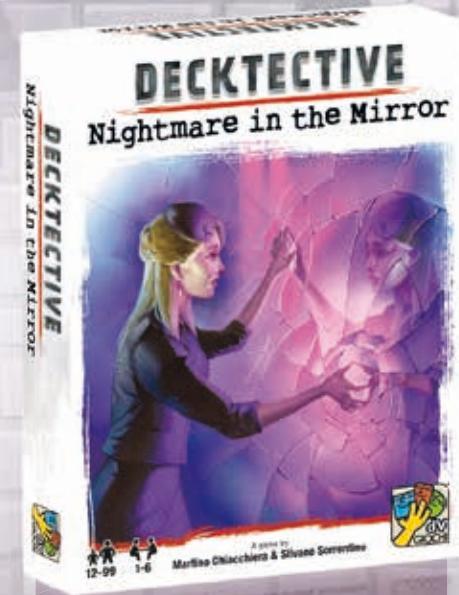
Quite a few years ago, Wolfgang Riedesser had the idea of using a so-called "Wimmelbild" (teeming picture) as the basis of a board game. His **UNGEHEUER INDISKRET**, published by Heyne in 1992, came with a large picture, created by graphic designer Marino Degano, that was filled with frivolous and sometimes pretty morbid scenes. One player, first blindfolded and then unblindfolded, tries to guess which scenes the active player has marked with his frame to fulfill a common task.

This is completely different in **MICRO-MACRO**, by Johannes Sich, where a team of investigators sets out on a joint search for evidence in order to solve 16 crimes. Each case consists of a deck of cards with tasks, clues, and images that the lead investigator communicates to the other members of the team bit by bit. The lead investigator may participate in the investigation, as long as the team doesn't make mistakes and needs to investigate further. An introductory case helps players become familiar with the requirements and procedures. Later on, players may switch to the advanced mode and restrict themselves to the starting card of the new case.

The investigations examine details such as the murder weapon, the motive,



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the getaway vehicle, and the victim's place of residence. Answers are provided by a 75-by-110-centimeter city map of an accordingly sturdy paper quality. This map is covered with an overwhelming abundance of detailed line drawings, some of which show such minor differences or subtle details that the enclosed magnifying glass renders as valuable help. Good lighting is definitely of the essence. Up to four investigators can lean over the map in order to pursue their pleasurable job with full concentration and great meticulousness.

The 85-year old Ali Mitgutsch, author of children's books and the intellectual father of the "Wimmelbilder" filled with plenty of little mishaps and dramas, will probably regard this appealing adaptation of his concept with delight. -lud

Feuerland

A warning notice like "This game may contain traces of the mechanisms of other games" would be quite an understatement in the case of **NEW YORK ZOO**. There is practically nothing that fans of Uwe Rosenberg's games haven't already come across in other games by the same author. But as a DJ of his own oeuvre, the industrious author from the German region of East Frisia knows how to adeptly mix his melodies and rhythms into a hit track.

Each player has his personal board and tries to be the first to fill its spaces with animal enclosures and other attractions. In turn, players move an elephant along an elongated board any number of spaces within the permissible moving range – **PATCHWORK** and **Nova LUNA** send regards. Depending on the space where the elephant ends up, you get either an enclosure or animals. The enclosures are sorted by size (first, small; later on, large) and differ by various shades of green. Enclosures are immediately built and serve as an interim goal. If you manage to fill one of them completely with animals of one of the five species, you obtain an attraction; this helps you to fill your board more quickly or allows you to fill gaps that you couldn't close otherwise. Every few spaces, the elephant triggers the breeding of a species (the instructions don't tell how the elephant does this, though). Therefore, you always try to have at least one pair of the species that is about to reproduce. When one player has filled his zoo after a family-friendly

playing time, the others often still need one or two tiles.

Compared to earlier Rosenberg games with down-to-earth themes (medieval farm, peat cutting in East Frisia, seaming patches together), here it gets more fashionable. The animals (penguins, flamingos, meerkats, kangaroos, and arctic foxes are made of wood, are colorful and fancy, and they don't inhabit a petting zoo in the village of Arle but the zoo of the city that never sleeps. -ct

Game Brewer

Do you also sometimes feel old? Careful: Board games can reinforce this impression, and this doesn't even require knights or Greeks from ancient times. In the board game **PARIS**, you impersonate a real estate investor from the long-gone (early) 20th century and look back at that era with a gentle smile. Players strive to acquire magnificent buildings and invest profits in the preservation of landmarks – no sign of hedge funds and other leeches. Technically, the authors' duo Kramer and Kiesling demand two things here: First, you need to draw a building tile and place it in one of the six districts on the cartwheel-sized circular game board. Second, you use – quite old-fashioned – a house key; "Smart Home" came later. Initially, you place the key on a bank, which gives you money. Later on, you can move it to an unoccupied building, which activates bonuses, or directly to a landmark, e.g., the Arc de Triomphe that is sitting in the center as a three-dimensional item (if it obstructs your view: On the back of the board, this building is shown only as a picture). **PARIS** takes a good 90 minutes, provided the players use their actions to provide themselves with suitable resources and place their keys on buildings to indicate: "Sorry, sold!" -sd

Garphill Games

VISCOUNTS is the third stand-alone game of the **WEST KINGDOM** series. This time, a three-dimensional cardboard castle rises high in the middle of the main board, and the players' viscounts move around it. Depending on whether you take the inside path or the outside path, there are different actions available to you. You can hire townsfolk or construct a building. Trading posts, guildhalls, and workshops are taken from your player board; if you do so, you activate abilities.

Alternatively, the viscount can also focus on the work inside the castle. If there are three workers in one segment, at least one of them works his way into the interior area of the castle. The first player to have a construction crew in the center of the castle has them probably work on the countess' chamber and can therefore enjoy a nice points payout from the principal. Besides this, clerics can transcribe manuscripts in order to collect points. Not everything is always completely legit: As in the two predecessor games, there is an area on your player board where you record corruption and virtue. Depending on your action, the two corresponding markers move towards each other until they finally collide and thus determine your level of virtue.

And there is even more new stuff for fans: **THE WEST KINGDOM TOMESAGA** provides two options. First, those who own the three **WEST KINGDOM** games can additionally gain tomes, according to their position in the end. Plus, a player who completes a particular task gets an additional privilege. If all three games are played in a row, an overall scoring takes place. Alternatively, the box also contains components that allow players to play each part of the series cooperatively. The **ARCHITECTS** game, for example, now comes with an overlord who has his own worker figures for placement; these figures can also be thrown into jail. At the same time, players need to cooperatively fulfill the overlord's demands – without too much dawdling: If an event card has to be drawn and there is none left, all players get lots of minus points. And it is doubtful whether the overall total of points will be sufficient for the win. In the **PALADINS** game, you can now – among other things – use two-part placement spaces together with another player. Here also, there is an overlord who makes life hard for everybody.

In **RAIDERS OF SCYTHIA**, wild horsemen and horsewomen invade Persia, Greece, and Syria, raiding settlements, completing quests, and capturing a lot of booty. All this helps to achieve the goal of being the most effective horde of raiders by the end. You place your one worker on one of the locations; to begin with, this will be in the village. This is where you have him work, procure materials, or hire somebody for your own crew. When you think your crew has grown strong enough, you go

raiding. The strength of your crew and a dice roll determine your success – and not everybody will remain alive. Each raider has a special ability and can be made more efficient through horses or eagles. The special elements are: After placing your worker, you take a different worker from his current location; the workers come in three different colors and can become active only at certain locations. Sounds familiar? Right: This is a reimplementation of *RAIDERS OF THE NORTH SEA* (sb 2/2017) in a substantially revised version, according to information from the publisher. On top of that, all three expansions have been incorporated in the new game.

-sd

GDM Games

In *INSTACRIME*, two to six investigators cooperatively try to solve a mystery – only with the aid of 12 photos. During the annual reunion of the Munford family at a hotel, there is unfortunately an incident that James Teller, the new boyfriend of Dorothy, the owner of a publishing company, doesn't survive. Might that have something to do with the projected change of the family head's last will? Each detective gets one photo; he doesn't show it to anybody else, but he has to describe it in as much detail as possible in order to enable the others to "see" what the picture shows. After that, new photos are handed out; the remaining ones are put face up on the table. Provided the descriptions have been precise enough, the players are now able to bring the pic-

tures into a chronological sequence, trace the steps of the suspects and determine the murder weapon. This is a communicative task that requires players to mainly rely on the other detectives' observations and descriptions for about an hour – besides a few more clues, such as bills or short written notes.

-sd

Haba

THE KEY, an innovative series of deduction games, has already been acknowledged by the review of *MORD IM OAKDALE CLUB* (sb 4/2020). Now Haba takes the next step, and this time, destroyers are on the move. In *SABOTAGE IM LUCKY LAMA LAND*, things in an amusement park don't run as smoothly as they should. Again, there are three suspects: Gonzo Musone, operator of a neighboring ramshackle indoor playground; mayor Olivia Goodwill, who would have preferred to have a shopping mall built on that site; and, finally, Jennifer Dillington, who wasn't offered a job at the park after her internship as an acrobat and rope dancer. The investigators' task is to find the perpetrator. Who has used what tool to put a fairground ride out of operation? And again, all players simultaneously rummage through the cards on the table: 140 clue cards with witness statements, shoe prints, and snapshots in order to substantiate the correct charge. Time is of the essence; but if you are too fast, you might make mistakes. And therefore, again, the winners might be the players who are more diligent and need fewer clues than the others. The difficulty

level of this game is "easy," since players have to match no more than three statements per case.

-sd

Heidelbär

The namesake of the game **ANANSI**, who you might picture as a preacher, has set himself the objective of gathering stories, and that is, tricks. However, they count only if they have been passed on, which requires followers. This represents the prediction for a trick. The unusual aspect is that the announcement doesn't have to be made at the beginning of the round. When it's your turn to add a card to the trick, you don't need to abide by the genre-typical options, namely: follow suit, change the trump or discard. Alternatively, you may place a card in front of you and take none or up to two follower cards, according to the printed symbol number. You can inspire these followers anytime, i.e., add them to a trick you've won.

If you are able to show as many inspired followers as the number of taken tricks at the end of the round, you rake in two, four or seven points, plus one for each of your tricks; otherwise you go away empty-handed. Unquestionably, a clever trick prediction system. Another aspect is the cards you have used to get followers; this changes the trump suit time and again, according to a majority principle – which makes the right timing all the more important.

A thematically stringent terminology is not always the ideal solution, especially not if the game has a pretty quirky theme.

FIND

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If you don't know that this is a trick-prediction game, you won't necessarily realize this after reading the instructions. The little-known original, **ETERNITY**, was better in this respect; that game was about the promise of planting trees and then actually doing so. But if you are not willing to pay an exorbitant price for it, you have no chance to still get the Blackrock edition from 2016. Therefore, it is highly welcome that Cyril Blondel's and Jim Dratwa's game gem has now been made available with a new theme.

-mh

Hobby World

The establishment and development of civilizational achievements during the Bronze Age is the theme of **BRONZE**, which turns out to be a collecting, majority and race game. The active leader of a settling civilization chooses one of four face-up Technology cards; each of these cards determines in which of the seven types of terrain and which of the three types of settlements he may invest a cube in his color. Then he integrates the chosen card into his personal array of cards, with the effect that identical types in the same column as well as the two cards to the left and the right are activated.

Terrains are settled from east to west. In the end, a player who has created a chain of his own settlements within the same type of terrain – without any opposing settlements in it – will score a number of victory points according to its length; also, somebody profits from gaining the majority in a province (i.e., land tile) where the settlement has been completed. For every new land tile that a settler is entering, he may select one card from several ancient sites that provides additional rewards for certain constellations on the board or in his own array. As soon as one leader has placed all his settlements markers or the province furthest in the west is fully occupied, all players add up their victory points.

BRONZE basically is an abstract game that lives on the classic struggle for majorities; therefore, playing with at least three participants is recommended. You will prevail in this demanding family game if you make use of the synergy effects of City cards and Technology cards and manage to gain majorities, even if they are slim.

In **BREAKING BEARS**, players experiment with bees in order to produce the best honey. Each bear scientist gets one

swarm card that indicates the number of additional cards and honey tokens he starts with. The backs of all cards look the same. The cards are separated into research cards and honey cards, shuffled and laid out in two draw piles. Players simultaneously place one hand card in front of them; their effects are linked to the decisions of the neighboring players. To begin with, each honey card produces one to three honeycombs (i.e., honey tokens). If your left or right neighbor or you yourself have chosen a certain card type on the previous turn, up to six honey tokens can be added according to the instruction on the card. Too many are not healthy, though. If you have eight or more honeycombs, the bear eats them all; but as compensation, you receive an experience token. If you have played a research card, you draw the indicated number of new cards from a pile of your choice, plus additional cards for each condition met (the same applies to the honey cards). A swarm card triggers a scoring. The card owners with the most honey (including experience tokens, each of them counting as "1") earn a swarm token. As soon as one bear has accumulated five swarm tokens or one of the card piles is depleted, the player with the most swarm tokens is declared the winner.

As is always the case when players need to make decisions simultaneously regarding cards, it is important to correctly assess the other players' upcoming actions. A proper amount of indications for this defines the quality, and this is the case in this game. The precondition is (also as always) that all participants know what they are doing. Ten percent of the cards instruct you to give your neighbor a honey token, which lets you gloat with malicious joy if your action causes the bear to eat your neighbor's entire supply of honey so that he won't get the swarm token he was hoping for. On the other hand, the experience token he gets this way is a valuable consolation prize, since it increases his chances in general. Original and smart.

-cc

Huch

Generally speaking, it doesn't make sense to release a dice game that is based on such a successful dice-driven board game as **RAJAS OF THE GANGES** (sb 7/2017); but of course, the big board game can be turned into a roll-&-write version – which gets us

to **THE DICE CHARMERS**. The large playing pad contains the known locations of the original game: river, province, market, and palace. **RAJAS** experts will easily be able to orient themselves. The new game comes with symbol dice (no number dice!) in four colors. The starting player takes and rolls all eight dice and picks one of them, at the same time blocking the second die of the same color from subsequent players. Each of these players also chooses one of the remaining dice and enters the effect on their sheet from the playing pad, drawing roads through the provinces or crossing out spaces on the river. You can get bonuses everywhere and immediately use them. Of course, the money track and the fame track are still crucial; this time, their starting spaces are on the left and the right corner of your sheet. And again, the game takes exactly as long as at least one player needs until his entries on the two tracks intersect. This can be expected to happen after about 30 to 45 minutes, that means considerably sooner than with the big brother.

-sd

Jumbo

The Dutch company has secured the rights to the Netflix production *Money Heist* (original title: *La Casa de Papel*). At the time of writing these lines, the Spanish streaming series is now in its fourth season. The subject is the infiltration of a banknote printing plant by criminals who are hoping for a billion-euro coup by/through getting access to the printing machines. The plot mainly focuses on the relationship between the gangsters and the hostages, which is themed in two games at the same time. In **HAUS DES GELDES - DAS SPIEL**, four to eight players act in two teams, but nobody knows who belongs to which team. The thieves want to print a certain amount of money within five rounds, whereas the hostages try to secretly sabotage the criminal undertaking. This is done by way of a bluffing game: All players offer a face-down card to the current game master, and these cards can either start the printing press or sabotage it. Players tell the master whether he should – or rather shouldn't – choose their card. The game master selects a few of the cards, and these cards are shuffled and then revealed. This might result in a booty, but in any case, it causes players to discuss who should become the next master. After five rounds, the gangsters

need to have accumulated the amount required; otherwise, the hostages win.

In **HAUS DES GELDES - ESCAPE GAME**, all players take on the role of gangsters and cooperatively try to implement the plan of the mastermind, called "Professor." The plan consists of 15 steps, each of them being a riddle that they need to solve in order to get a four-digit number. The solutions can be looked up in the manual, but players can also use an app. The app measures the elapsed time as well. Depending on the chosen difficulty level, the gang has to finish the job within 60, 90 or 120 minutes; after that, the police will storm the building.

-sd

Korea Board Games

Alex Randolph was probably the first who adopted the traditional KALAHÀ, the African bean game, as an author's game, with his OH-WAH-REE, released by 3M. Besides numerous other adaptations, there is now a brand-new one out, **FRUIT PICKING**. Each of the up to four players has his own board with hollows. As in the original, the board has six starting places (here, "farms"). You take all beans (called

"seeds") out of one of these hollows and seed them, one at a time, into the next hollows in a clockwise direction, trying to get one seed into the seventh hollow, where you can harvest, as in the original. For more variability, the five fruits that need to be grown are initially allotted to different hollows in every game. The pieces of fruit are depicted on the tiles as singles, pairs or sets of three (the latter applies only to strawberries); this equals the seeds yield you add after landing there. As in the classic game, you try to fill the harvest space, since this is what you use for paying for one of the cards laid out in the middle of the table. As in SHOWMANAGER, these cards also come at variable price premiums. Only if you don't plant seeds during your turn may you buy a card of the same fruit variety that is sitting in the hollow you have landed in. The first player to accumulate four to six cards in certain combinations (e.g., three pairs or one "full house") wins.

In general, everybody optimizes his own empire of hollows; however, players compete for the common display on the table. It can be easily observed how close

the individual players are to their goal, so that somebody might snatch away a pineapple, for example, from under the nose of a player who would urgently need it for the win. Nevertheless, **FRUIT PICKING** proceeds quickly and smoothly; the playing time is no more than half an hour tops. While you are waiting for your next turn, you can already plan your move, i.e., choose one of the up to six options. It is almost always worthwhile to bring the last seed to plant into the barn, since this allows you to take another turn, as in the original game.

An over-dimensioned pagoda not only serves as an eye-catcher in **FOUR GARDENS** but actually has an essential function in terms of play. The objective of each of the two to four players is to create a garden landscape that is appropriate to this showpiece. To this end, you lay out cards. Whereas the back of each card shows a picture section that belongs to one of the four landscape panoramas, the front specifies three options. On your turn, you play exactly three hand cards and carry out one of the given actions from each of these cards.

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To begin with, you plan at least one garden section by laying out a card that indicates the resources you need. You can either choose one resource and put the corresponding token immediately on the garden card, or you acquire several resources and add them to your storage. In addition, the card determines which floors of the pagoda are rotated 90 degrees. After a rotation, the pagoda side that is now facing you shows you the kind and number of the resources that you can then collect from the pagoda floors from top to bottom or bottom to top (according to the instruction on the card) and add to your storage until it is full. With another action, you clear your storage by putting the resource tokens on the corresponding places on your cards. As soon as a garden has been provided with all resources required, you turn the card over and advance one step on the track of the God whose color is marked on the card. Beyond this, the Gods reward you for each additional completed garden of the same panorama. Once you have completed a panorama, you get a bonus in the form of a storage extension, victory points or resources. In the end, everybody adds his advancement on the Gods' tracks to his score.

FOUR GARDENS challenges the players' intellect in several respects. You need to optimize your purchases by manipulating the pagoda in your favor, to score in the panorama competition and benefit from already-established gardens, and to outpace your opponents on the Gods' tracks. The multitude of the ramifications of the associated decision tree can't be fully comprehended at first go. But from the second game on, you will realize what's important – preferably by playing with less than the maximum number of players. A sophisticated collecting and optimization game for connoisseurs. -cc

Kosmos

With **ANNO 1800**, Kosmos continues the series of PC adaptations. The publisher was able to win Martin Wallace as the creator of this game. To augment the recognition value, the board game uses graphics from the original computer game. And yes, the whole thing is now anything but virtual; actually, it is a two-kilo box with plenty of material. The construction game is about the industrialization on your own island. And you explore new islands

as well, since your population not only needs to have their basic needs covered but soon also asks for special goods.

If you focus on being in control of the duration of the game, you'll try to be the first to play your seven population cards. To this end, you'll often need more inhabitants, but you can also score for good-functioning small towns. Pioneers in key industries can also earn good money. If you need material that you can no longer produce because you don't have enough workers, you can get it from the competition in exchange for gold. And gold is good for reactivating inhabitants that you have already used. An alternative is the town festival that gets everybody back on his feet – but when people celebrate, they don't work. Wasting time is generally not advisable. It's not without reason that the instructions warn players of the presumption that the end would still be very far away. The game might be over very quickly – which means, after about two hours.

What did young people do in the late 1980s, completely without smart phones, without the Internet? Play role-playing games, watch movies on VHS, go bowling. This is also what the characters in **GREENVILLE 1989** do, a town in the USA where suddenly everything is different. The town seems gloomy and deserted, and those who are present are no longer able to see one another, but instead they can hear the thoughts of the others – this might be kind of nice for a change, but the inhabitants, impersonated by the players, want to end this misery. For this purpose, they say where they currently are and what they are going to do next, based on the displayed image cards. The current game master, here called the "Guide," draws more of these cards, lays them out face up, and then secretly determines which of the new cards, in his opinion, would be best suited to continue the just-commenced stories.

Then the other players guess jointly what follow-up the Guide might have planned for which player. If the choice has been correct, the card is placed in front of the respective player. And if, at some point, all players have gained four cards, they win this cooperative mystery game. For every mistake, however, a player who has not been provided with a new card has to advance on one of the "Passages

to the Other World." If he takes his fourth step there, all players together lose.

PARIS - LA CITÉ DE LA LUMIÈRE (so the title of the English language edition) is not situated on the Seine but inside the box. In phase 1, both players alternate placing their eight cobblestone tiles in the bottom of the box, thus creating a kind of city map. Alternatively, you may take a multiple-space building. In phase 2, you have to place the building on top of your own or neutral color spaces. If the buildings are illuminated by street lights, you score points in the end. Alternatively, you can activate laid-out post cards in phase 2; this allows you to additionally take a one-time action that enables you to put special buildings on the map or to rearrange tiles, for example. The largest connected built-up area scores additional points, even if it is not completely lit up by street lights. Unbuilt buildings cost you points, though. Therefore, you should have an idea as early as in phase 1 as to what you will actually be able to accommodate later on in this nicely illustrated map of Paris.

-sd

Lifestyle

Even three decades after the downfall of the Soviet Union, there still are hardline comrades who haven't heard anything about perestroika – for instance, the crew of the spaceship Krasnaya Zarya that was sent on a secret mission to build a new world. The fact that this operation fell into oblivion might be because the gorgeous ship crash-landed. As known from some PC games, the crew in **RED OUTPOST** gradually clears out the flying object in order to keep a communist settlement going almost without any private property. With sardonic texts, the Russian publisher caricatures supply mishaps from former times that dominate life during the exactly two days that players spend on the distant planet.

Depending on the time of day, shepherds, miners, farmers or bureaucrats are moved from the barracks to their workplaces; everybody has access to all settlers. After carrying out an action, the settler is exhausted and needs to lie down and rest. Before that, he produces something at the location he was moved to; and depending on the pleasure he has with that activity, his mood changes. The player who had the most control of the worker can get victory points. But

this might backfire if a worker is in an extremely bad mood.

-sd

Lookout

Didn't Uwe Rosenberg say he would – given his duties as a father – mainly develop games with a shorter playing time for the time being? **HALLERTAU**, however, is a battleship of the AGRICOLA class that had probably been in the pipeline for quite a while. And of course, the new game also is about agriculture; in this case, about hop production in one of the biggest hop-growing areas in Germany. However, it is not enough for Rosenberg to reduce the players' tasks to cultivation and harvesting. Each player represents a village chief around 1850 who wants to advance his settlement. Craft workshops are indispensable for this, and they need goods; so there is plenty to do. Each village chief operates on his own field board, stable board, and house board. The latter shows your own local community center; as if it were on wheels, it is moved one column to the right whenever one of the enterprises (to its right) has been advanced. This way, your village becomes more and more visible over time – a nice effect.

Sheep-breeding is of particular significance in **HALLERTAU**, as is the placement of your own workers on the action board; the costs for this also depend on the number of competitors in the same row. To begin with, you start with an easy-to-handle six workers; but towards the end, this number can double in a prospering village. And of course, you need to use your own field, which will soon be leached out, though, if you don't allow it to lie fallow from time to time. A game with the maximum number of players takes clearly over two hours. Almost half of the instructions consist of a glossary, which is not surprising, given the 336 cards alone.

-sd

Ludically

As beautiful as the results that Kickstarter sometimes yields are, as considerable are the delays in terms of the release dates other times. Both things apply to Chris Bøelingers **LIVING PLANET**: beautiful and late. And the game was not even slowed down for the last few meters because of Corona, but almost. Unlike its development process, the game itself follows a very rigid course:

It definitely ends after 12 rounds. And nobody would actually want to hold out any longer, since that is when the planet – after players have exploited it – will explode.

Four six-sided dice in player colors are at the center of what's going on – but they are never rolled. Instead, all players simultaneously choose their value for the upcoming round by means of cards. Normally, you have to use all six options before you can avail yourself of the complete set of cards again. Finding the right moment for the different numbers is difficult, also because they are effective in several places. Additionally, each card has an interesting special ability. This ability may be used only by the current starting player, whereas it is ineffective for any other player.

In the action phase, everybody has two turns. For instance, you can expand the already-explored surface of the planet, consisting of hexagonal landscape tiles, roam the area, or manipulate the price of the commodity market. In the first case, the chosen number determines the number of landscape tiles you can choose from when you expand the display. In the

Cube-tower meets worker-placement for 2-4 players, set in Zanziar, the same world as Perdition's Mouth, in a bureaucratic dwarven community.

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second case, the number stands for the movement potential; and in the third case, it indicates how many stock market cards you may draw before you change a price and trade commodities. Even though you can make good profits through purchases and sales alone – and this is what ultimately matters – you would nevertheless prefer to produce your commodities on your own.

The planet provides enough spaces for the construction of various production buildings, but only very few of them are suited for permanent use. This gets us to the catastrophes that threaten four times per round. Along with the type of resource that can be extracted, each building site indicates the color and number required for factories in order to produce there, and also shows which buildings and people might be affected and by what kind of disaster. The latter is relevant for the construction of suitable protective buildings. So, in order not to shoot yourself in the foot after the production phase, you need to choose the sites carefully. And you should also keep an eye on your opponents' particularly profitable or critical numbers.

For those who are not yet familiar with the game, **LIVING PLANET** can be quite frustrating. You cannot figure out at the first go how you can develop without your assets being destroyed by the inevitable catastrophes. As usual for this author, the unusual mixture of exploration game and economy game focuses on the planning. If you have had fun with the basic version, the three expansions that are already available give you plenty of possibilities to test your skills by using additional landscape tiles, new types of buildings, and more types of resources. Elaborate solitaire and campaign versions are already included anyway. -mh

Ludonaute

Does it also bring tears to your eyes when you take **COLT EXPRESS** from the shelf – not because of nice memories but because the train cars had been put together without any talent and therefore look so crooked and awry? Help is near in the form of **COLT SUPER EXPRESS**, the card game based on the German Game of the Year 2014. No more constructing; the train is now assembled of cards, and your outlaws move back and forth on them. The bandits are controlled by your deck,

which consists of only four to six cards, depending on the variant. Each round, you may use three of them in an order that has been determined beforehand.

As usual, players, in turn, reveal a card, and the running, climbing, and shooting begins. If an outlaw has been hit and falls off the train, he is out, just as somebody who is standing in the last car at the end of a round, since this car is decoupled: Goodbye! The player whose meeple is the only one left on the train (which happens after about 15 minutes) wins. If several bandits survive right in the front, on the locomotive, the player with more car cards wins, since he has taken the higher risk. And there is even gender equality in the Wild West: Now you may also shoot at the gals anytime. Take that, Belle! -sd

Mandoo Games

Leo Colovini's enterprising Studio Giochi has managed again to place a title with this Korean company. Obviously, the air for Euro-style games with a modest amount of rules – even if they have a certain pizzazz – has become thin on the continent of origin. Are European players (or the European market) oversaturated? Maybe. But this is exactly what might make it worthwhile to have more than just a glimpse at **MERCHANTS OF DUNHUANG**.

Eight cards are laid out in a circle on the table next to one character tile each. On your turn, you move the camel (which serves as a means of transportation to all players) clockwise to the next character tile – unless you pay one or more coins in order to reach a tile that is further away. Then you either take the goods card lying next to this tile in your hand or put it in your display. The value of these cards (from 1 to 10) depends on their frequency, as in **DALMUTI**. Besides an immediate goal that is practically unachievable, the main objective is to gain majorities in your hand and in your display. In case of a tie in the displays, the player who was last to play prevails; as for the hand cards, everybody earns as many points for every card type as the face values of the cards show – provided he (also) has the most cards of one type. Display majorities score only two meager points, but the number of display majorities limits the hand card scores. This is pretty tricky, since you may not simply take a card into your hand once it has been displayed, or discard a hand card. Only if you have placed the

camel on certain character tiles may you carry out a helpful action; depending on the character, this action might not just refer to cards from your own hand but even allow you to steal a card from another player.

Making decisions is pretty difficult; the end comes sooner than you would like. If you memorize what cards are picked by the other players, you'll certainly have a slight advantage. Crucial are the victories in the fights for the individual majorities. The winner will be determined after about half an hour. And it is very likely that the defeated players demand an immediate return game.

-cc

Mattel

The sensational success of **THE WEREWOLVES OF MILLER'S HOLLOW** doesn't leave even a market-listed mega-corporation untouched. In **JEWEL HEIST**, five to eight players act either as robbers or as detectives. Analogously to the paragon, the thieves are aware of each other, but the detectives aren't. The vault (a plastic base with a transparent cover put over it) is standing in the middle of the table. The jewels are put on the vault base, and two glass marbles are placed in the grooves of the vault cover as a symbol for alarm, since they can easily roll off. During the night phase, the representatives of the law keep their eyes closed while the robbers cautiously take the cover off, steal one jewel each and hide it somewhere (for instance, on their body). Only if a marble rolls off may it be touched in order to put it back; in case the lawbreakers fail to do so, one jewel is given to the detectives, as a commission fee. If the robbers don't manage to steal at least one jewel within two nights, they lose immediately. During the day phase, players discuss the situation and decide who should get an arrest warrant. As soon as one player has gotten two warrants, the game ends and the opposing group rakes in all remaining jewels. The group with the most jewels wins.

The incentives have been set just right, and the feel of play is on par with that of the original. Often, players had asked for a version for a lower number of participants, as derivatives such as **ONE NIGHT ULTIMATE WEREWOLF** have proven. But the new game reflects the fascinating dynamics better, so that **JEWEL HEIST** can rightly be called the little brother.

-cc

Mebo

Haven't we all wished for more unusual game themes every now and then? Well, here's what comes of it: The mountainous north of Portugal is roamed not only by very weird monsters but also by villagers possessed by demons – they gave Paulo Pereira's game the name **CARETOS**. It is astonishing that there are still normal people living there, but there will be fewer and fewer of them, since players have to capture these villagers. Each player has two monsters and controls them by means of so-called Night cards. The symbols printed on these cards are also shown on the Monster cards and stand for the movement and action possibilities of the monsters – that seem to have originated from *Alice in Wonderland* rather than *DUNGEONS & DRAGONS*. You always have three Night cards in your hand to choose from on your turn; these cards often also contain instructions for how to deal with neutral characters – for instance, to gather villagers into groups or disperse existing crowds. The latter is in the monsters' interest, since they can capture only single villagers. What is totally detrimental to a monsters' interest, though, is to bump into the Caretos that are moved by an envious opponent – in this case, the cauldron awaits the monster. If you are currently unable to get your monster out of there, you have to see to it that you throw an opposing monster into the boiling liquid with the help of the Caretos, since the cauldron has only enough room for one monster. The objec-

tive is to complete face-up public missions and face-down private ones. Whereas the former require scaring specific groups of villagers in specific constellations, the latter provide bonus points for certain combinations of prisoners each of which has a basic value of one point.

The terminology and the graphic design give **CARETOS** the look and feel of a children's game, but that is vastly misleading. Once players have become familiar with the symbols (that are depicted on the board with commendable clarity), the game develops into a very demanding struggle for positions, which won't overstrain your brain but has a remarkable level of variance thanks to the combination of Monster cards and Action cards. And after one game with all these creatures and possessed villagers, it is clear to you why this Portuguese region is not a touristic hotspot.

In terms of the graphic design and the theme, **2491 PLANETSHIP** is the exact opposite: a grown-up game. In that year, people are in a fix again. Their time on earth is almost forgotten; together with five other species, they live on world-sized so-called planetships, and the central Mothership Alpha is in distress. Everybody tries to rescue survivors from there – survivors as valuable as possible; similarities with today's political reality are probably purely coincidental, especially as here you are after the DNA of the rescued people. At the beginning of the game, the wreck of the Alpha is laid out, consisting of six to nine square sectors. One survivor each

(represented by a card) is waiting on most of the sectors – some, face up, others, face-down. In turn, the rescuers place one of their crew members on one of the (usually three) spaces available in a sector. The players whose rescuers have the highest total value after the placement snatch the survivor of that sector.

While positioning your rescuers, you need to consider the order in which the sectors and their spaces are evaluated. The spaces might have a special value in use, and the rescuers have special abilities and characteristics. Consequently, rescuers can increase in value, be relocated or even removed.

Although you would like to get hold of many survivors, you may keep only six of them in your hand for the next round; therefore, you try to optimize them bit by bit. This has to be done with regard to their use during the four rounds of the game, but also with the final scoring in mind. In the end, you score for the points value of your final hand cards and for majorities of certain characteristics that are specified by the four or five face-up missions.

If **2491 PLANETSHIP** seems somehow familiar to you, you are right: It is the true-to-the-original reimplementation of **ESTORIL 1942** (sb 4/2018). Whether the mechanisms – mainly consisting of assessing your opponents, bluffing, and optimizing your positions – are right for all those with an appetite for science-fiction themes, is undecided. But it is to be hoped for.

-mh

THE DICE CHARMERS

Use 8 symbol dice to expand your province, collect goods and sell them at the market! In the Roll & Write version you meet again the race for wealth and fame - will you win it?

HUCH!

Rajas of the Ganges

12 - 99
2 - 5
30 - 45 min

The Roll & Write verison of „Rajas of the Ganges“



Moses

Laying out number tiles in a long, continuous line, rolling the die and moving your pawn accordingly, and collecting a free tile – when you hear that Wolfgang Kramer is one of the authors of the new game **ALLE NEUNE**, you immediately think of **VERFLIXXT** (sb 5/2005); but in this case, you are wrong for several reasons: First, he has two co-authors (again), Bernhard Lach and Uwe Rapp; and second, the way of getting the number tiles is different. Here, cactus tiles divide the running track into segments. Only if you roll a number that lets you move your pawn into the next area can you take an empty tile from the sector you just left, provided there is an unoccupied tile there. So, as in the famous predecessor game, the path gets shorter over time. Later on, you can even collect several tiles at once, if you pass more than one cactus tile. However, you shouldn't forget the title-giving objective in this family game, meaning literally, "all nine(s)." You have to add up the numbers on two or three number tiles you have collected so that they amount to a total of 9. If you succeed, all tiles you have used are worth five points in the end. Otherwise, one tile is put aside and counts its value in the end – but as a negative number.

After the spectacular **SAFEHOUSE** (sb 2/2018), where a sinister guy was chasing the players over several book pages, the Moses company has cooperated again with bestselling thriller author Sebastian Fitzek. His book *Passenger 23* was set on a cruise ship, and it now serves as the narrative frame for **SEBASTIAN FITZEK KILLERCRUISE**. Again, Marco Teubner is responsible for the engine room; and again, the Moses company is at its best in terms of the materials. Before the first game, players put together a three-dimensional cruise ship with three decks inside the base of the box; this is where they will play this cooperative game. On each deck, they have to save the passengers from the killer, and at the same time find an entry to the middle deck; this is where the fourth character is waiting for taking supportive action. And finally, they need to track down the "unscrupulous psychopath" on the lower deck. But if the murderer kills five passengers before the players have fulfilled all their tasks, they lose the game. They also need to keep the characters alive, since they need them for completing their jobs. In a vari-

ant for advanced players, the group can additionally play under time pressure, as in **SAFEHOUSE**.

-sd

Next Move

In **BEEZ**, players collect nectar by having their little bee buzz across blossoms. Which flowers give you points is written on the face-up cards on display as well as on your own face-down task cards. The little flying animal on a hexagonal base is able to whizz around in five of the six directions – but strangely enough, it can't manage to go straight forward. Depending on the direction, you can choose among different moving ranges. Provided the destination space isn't yet occupied by another bee and provided there is nectar, this nectar is immediately stocked in your own honeycomb. If your bee lands accurately in the center of a blossom, you can even get two tokens at once. There are tokens in five colors, and you try to put them on your own comb board in keeping with your tasks. Once one player has accumulated ten tokens, the game is over. In light of the extensive additional information about the life of bees, it is surprising that the busy insects don't have to fly back to the hive in order to stock the nectar – but that would probably have been made the movement rule too complicated. The way it is, **BEEZ** acts as a family game in which the arrangement of the laid-out flowers can be changed from a compact area to more difficult formations. And in the expert mode, professional beekeepers can place the tokens in their comb only adjacent to others.

-sd

Paperplane Games

In **FAIRY TRAILS**, the two players – one representing the elves, the other, the gnomes – alternate in expanding the road network of Uwe Rosenberg's enchanted forest. To this end, on your turn you add a card from your hand to the network. The paths shown on the cards always extend connections of both players and occasionally lead to dead ends. So, contrary to what you might initially have expected, your interest in the expansion of your own network is ambivalent, since you'll soon be confronted with the problem of how to complete paths at all ends in time. Only when you have completed an individual road network of yours may you place one of your stones on each of

the houses connected to that path. The cards are designed in such a way that you can easily rain on your opponent's parade by providing him with so many branching roads that he will never ever be able to close all of them. The only thing that might help him in this situation is to score somewhere else, even if it's for a smaller road network. If neither of the players has been able to place all his 19 stones and thus win the game prematurely, the player with the most houses wins once all cards have been laid out.

The destructive aspect in **FAIRY TRAILS** prevails. However, you could sometimes get yourself out of it – if you only had the right card at the right time. With only two hand cards, players are pretty much at the mercy of Lady Luck. The impression that the losing player might have – that the cards are structured unjustly – is wrong, though. Their distribution is totally symmetric. Maybe the defeat was actually caused by a more inept course of action?

-cc

Pearl Games

This is another case of a dice game being based on a basic game that already focused on the use of dice. In contrast to its big predecessor **TROYES** (sb 1/2011), **TROYES DICE** is a roll & write version that takes only about half an hour. After nearly ten years, it is certainly acceptable to bring the original game back to mind. And when you open the game box, you see another good reason for this new game: The round game board with the rotatable wheel in the center looks great. The starting player rolls the four dice and places them on consecutive plazas in three colors. The black die temporarily blocks the plaza it has been put on, whereas the other three can be used by players, in turn. Since the dice lying on these plazas are transparent, they take on the color of the red, yellow or white plaza underneath. Now you can mark successes in the corresponding color segments on your scoresheet, provided you are able to pay the resources required for the die. This way, you can get citizens, for example, who give you points in the end. Or you erect buildings; and once you complete them, they trigger bonus effects. However, from the third round on, the black die additionally destroys entries on your scoresheet. Then you may no longer erect the respective buildings. The game

goes over eight "days" of two rounds each, and you can always see which plaza colors will be available in the next round. The previously blocked plaza tile is turned over and thus reactivated, now showing a new color. Then the wheel on the game board is rotated one notch clockwise and the dice are rolled and placed again so that a different plaza will be blocked for the next round. And if all this isn't enough for you, you can vary the game by also using eight additional tiles.

-sd

Pegasus

It is a charming idea to use the disparaging term point salad – something like a "jumble of points," referring to the excessive scoring of any achievements whatsoever in a complex game – for conceiving an easy and casual family game. **POINT SALAD** (originally published 2019 by AEG) consists of nothing but 108 double-sided cards that show one of six vegetable varieties on one side and indicate a point-scoring condition on the other. Each combination of bell pepper, carrots, and lettuce, for example, is worth eight points. Or you can get ten points if you have the most onions in the end. Some scoring rules are ambiguous – for instance, the awarding of three points for each carrot but two minus points for each onion. The game is played briskly and, quite rightly, even allows for the maximum number of six players. Its course is clear and simple: On your turn, you take either two vegetable cards or one point card from the common display and place it in front of you. Once during your turn, you may turn one of your point cards over to the vegetable side; this might make sense if, for instance, a once-promising scoring chance turns out to be not very lucrative or even counterproductive.

On the one hand, getting rid of an unnecessary burden of rules and focusing on the core idea instead makes the game accessible to occasional players who usually prefer games such as UNO or SKIP-BO; but on the other hand, **POINT SALAD** is equally suited for serious players who – weary after finishing a heavy brain twister – like to relax with such an evening-closer that is nevertheless far from banal.

-cc

Piatnik

In the gambling game **SPACE TAXI**, all players, in turn, roll the dice in order to shoot their own spaceship into space so

that they'll get as many points for it as possible. Six of the overall ten dice symbolize the crew of aliens, three dice provide fuel, and one gives you the chance to smuggle valuable crystals. On your turn, you roll the dice four or five times. Each time, you use exactly one, two, three or four dice, and you can choose the order in which you do this; once per turn, you may let the result go to waste. On the spaceship, you score all the more points the more representatives of the same type of aliens you have on board. Fuel guarantees for a successful start only if the tank contents achieves certain totals of fuel dice results. The crew results and the fuel results are multiplied by a certain factor. Then the smuggle yield is added, provided its dice value is not lower than any of your results of the current round. When the space taxi is fully occupied, you receive two coins. You need such coins to use joker dice, and they also give you two extra points at the end of that round. This can be immensely helpful, given the fact that the result of the weakest taxi operator is eliminated.

Hope and fear and a bit of calculation dominate this dice-rolling fun. The minimum number of three players is recommended for maximum involvement.

Gambling plays a role in Reiner Knizia's **KAZOCK**, too, but on a considerably lower level. The "Ka" in the tile stands for "Karotten" (carrots), and you get these by rolling the dice with special dice faces. You may roll the three six-sided dice up to three times. The result determines how many carrots you gain or lose. The chances for gaining carrots are clearly better. In two cases per die, you may avail yourself from the carrot supply, whereas one of the other dice faces allows you to get carrots from all the other players. And then there are two sides that force the player to your right to

pay carrots to you – which lets the players who are not involved feel malicious joy, especially if he has been the one with the most carrots. Which is not even very unlikely. Once the carrot supply has been emptied, the player with the most carrots wins.

Although **KAZOCK** contains a mechanism that fleeces the other players, nobody can be harassed purposefully, since you may not choose your victim. This way, nobody feels disadvantaged and, all the way through the game, everybody has a real chance to win. The game quickly puts players in a great mood, especially with the maximum number of five participants who appreciate extremely brief and easy instructions. A game with the potential of becoming a long runner.

-cc

PSC

Since 1986, Lewis Pulsipher's **BRITANNIA** has been published by various companies, most recently, in 2008, by Fantasy Flight Games. Now, Plastic Soldier Company has taken up this game and – in keeping with its own corporate philosophy – has equipped it not only with miniatures, but also with a number of variants. As it is, the new name, **BRITANNIA - CLASSIC AND DUEL EDITION**, says it all: A two-player version is included. This is played on a separate game board, divided into fewer spaces, is set in the years from 350 to 1050. The new temporal focus and the omission of the Romans and of a few other invaders reduce the playing time considerably. The new setting has been accounted for through sundry, mostly minor rules changes, especially a modification of the population growth and, most importantly, the fact that now each tribe is scored at the end of a turn instead of the end of the round; this gives the entire game a significantly different feel from before.

-mh



Ravensburger

Compared to the Middle Ages or even Ancient Egypt, a 60-year-old story is downright fresh as the morning dew. That's how long the British sketch Dinner for One has been in existence on German TV. Almost unknown in the UK, its country of origin, this sketch, always broadcast on New Year's Eve in English, has become a German cultural asset for many people. Obviously, the Ravensburger company is of the same opinion, and therefore commissioned Inka and Markus Brand to invent a game version. Each round, one action card is used. First, the text with quotes ("You may now serve the soup") is read aloud and the card is then discarded face down. What follows is an action phase during which the butler figure moves along the discarded cards. In turn, the players have to remember the card texts and carry out the action correctly, such as serving food or proposing a toast ("Skal"). To simulate James' current alcohol level, you additionally have to stick little cardboard bottles between your head and shoulder or between your thighs. On top of that, players place a tiger head on the box and put both on the floor, because – during James' actions – they are supposed to run around the table (and stumble over the tiger head) that has been set with place mats, name cards, and plastic cups. For mistakes regarding the text or action, you get "tipsy chips"; but you receive these also if you wrongly accuse another player of having made a mistake. Well, I'll do my very best... -sd

Rio Grande Games

Considering that this game is about the world "beyond the sun," the universe is relatively small. There is just enough space for four planets in the form of cards. This makes clear that **Beyond the Sun** focuses on something else: the technological development. The Technology board, four times as large as the universe, shows a development tree. To rise on this tree, there are initially only four printed actions available to all players. Over the course of the game, the number of potential actions doubles, and there will be many more through Technology cards. However, you can act there only if you have already researched the respective technology; plus, you need space for your own action pawn, and in most cases, you even have to pay for admission.

There are basically two currencies: population and ore. Each round, you get more population or more ore. This increases when you clear the corresponding tracks on your player board by either moving the covering disks into the automation area or placing them on a planet.

Ore is practically indispensable for the more attractive actions, but the situation would look completely bleak without population. Population is required for manning spaceships – actually converted into such – and, especially, for advancing technologies. The latter has been designed in a very interesting manner: Development lines indicate which of the four types of technology the advancement can belong to. When you do research, you choose one of the possible types and keep revealing cards until two technologies of that type have come up. This might give you the agony of choice because some cards show enticing action spaces (which are accessible to your opponents only when they also have placed population there at some point) but other cards provide useful immediate bonuses. Both benefits together on a card are rare.

What's unusual is that each player has 20 special six-sided dice but never rolls them. Instead, they are used as cubes that combine three functions. Depending on the side that is facing up, they serve as food reserve, population or spaceship of levels 1 to 4. This has the indirect consequence that the growth of population diminishes as the food reserves decrease. At the same time, large space fleets, enabling you to control and colonize planets, entail that you have less population available for technological development. Dennis K. Chan has turned in a highly remarkable and variable first game, in which, after all, the universe isn't actually as small as it might appear at first sight. -mh

In **NEVADA CITY**, players take on the roles of the city's founding families. Within four to five years, they build a western city in the mid-1800s. Each family member does his part in this. This game adds another nuance to the known worker placement principle. Each character has a different working power and gets a corresponding number of action markers at the beginning of a year (i.e., of a round).

On your turn, you activate either a family member or a worker you have hired, and use all his action markers. This

way, you can cultivate your fields, breed cattle, produce silver in your mines, sell resources, acquire buildings and complete them, or take on one of the available contracts and try to fulfill it in order to get victory points. Each year, it is determined at random how profitable the production sites are and what the prices of their products will be. To this end, cubes are drawn blindly out of a bag and allotted to the two areas (production and market value); they are for the most part complementary to one another. A very sophisticated and elegant mechanism.

In **NEVADA CITY**, a cleverly interwoven Euro-style game has been masterfully embedded in a Western theme. Only the random events that can bother many a farmer or rancher at the beginning of (almost) every round do not entirely allow for the planning security that players of Euro games might want. At least, you can manipulate the occurrence of calamities, but this costs one precious action. Calling **NEVADA CITY** an "evening-length" game would be an understatement; it can take considerably more time, especially since the instructions contain mistakes and make it unnecessarily more difficult to get access to the game. But if players have clarified all the details and have become familiar with all the building options, there is some reason to hope that you can manage one game without a dinner break – at least with three players. Once players have become curious, they are dying for that.

Eight goods cubes are laid out on the 7-by-7-square board of **CARAVAN**. Their color indicates where to deliver them. Wooden camels serve as the means of transport. Each player has five camels – or six camels for a more casual game; this makes the course of the game even a bit smoother. On your turn, you use your four action points to place one of your camels on any unoccupied square or to relocate one, spend another point to use an already-occupied square, and load a good from that square onto an unladen camel or transport it by passing it on to another camel over any number of your own orthogonally adjacent animals. If one of these camels is standing on the destination square, the good will be delivered and – depending on the location – gives you three points (one square away from the center) or six points (at the edge of the playing area). If you own a theft marker,

you may steal a cube from the back of an opponent's camel, but you have to give the victim the marker in return. This is an exemplary compensation and elegantly prevents one player from falling victim to everybody else. Cubes that remain in place for a while (in most cases because the distances are too far) are upgraded by one or even more demand markers over the course of the game.

You should resist your first impulse to collect as many cubes as possible so that your opponents won't get them – the reason being that a camel carrying a good may not be moved and that it is forbidden to just throw the cube away. Instead, you need to keep the herd together and cleverly spread it in the right direction in order to convey the goods in as few turns as possible. This transport game captivates with its simple, clear, well-thought-out rules and an agreeable playing time; and the duration can even be influenced beforehand by the number of goods made available.

-cc

Schmidt Spiele

After his THAT'S PRETTY CLEVER, which set benchmarks for the genre of roll-&-write games, and the considerably trickier derivative TWICE AS CLEVER, Wolfgang Warsch has again come up with a plethora of interesting alterations in the application areas of the five color dice in his latest game CLEVER HOCH DREI. In formal terms alone, this is shown by the fact that the number of pages of the instructions has increased from eight to twelve and that the highest level in the solitaire variant now requires 450 points (instead of 280 or 320). But since the basic structure and the course of the game remain unchanged, experienced players of the

CLEVER games will quickly feel at home with CLEVER HOCH DREI.

A look at the blue sector of the board might give you a bit of a foretaste. Here, the entries recording the sums of the blue die and the white die have to be "7" in the middle, and need to ascend (right) or descend (left) by one number on the sides. If need be, you may set the row back to "7"; but this considerably reduces your chance of getting the points bonus for a result of "4" or "10" or even ruins it completely. The third action that can now be activated during the game is to avail yourself of an array of number jokers; once their spaces have been unlocked, you can use them not just from left to right but in any order.

-JUD

Space Cowboys

In 2005, William Attia's CAYLUS was the breakthrough for the genre of (now countless) worker-placement games. Now, CAYLUS 1303 has come out – a fundamentally revised version with a spiced-up graphic design. It has been slimmed down in some aspects (such as the coin currency), but it has also gotten some new elements, e.g., characters that are assigned to players at the beginning but move on later. Players still place their personnel on unoccupied action spaces that are strung together along a winding road. Only when everybody has passed are the actions carried out one after another. Whoever has planned poorly in the first phase and therefore doesn't yet have a resource required for a certain action (but gets it only later) goes away empty-handed. The buildings are activated only up to the current location of the provost (the provost can be moved at the end of this phase); actions regarding any

spaces after that go to waste. Regardless of the road, workers may be sent to the construction site (formerly, "building of the castle") in order to convert resources into victory points there. The most diligent supplier is additionally granted a favor – this can even be to take away a character from an opponent.

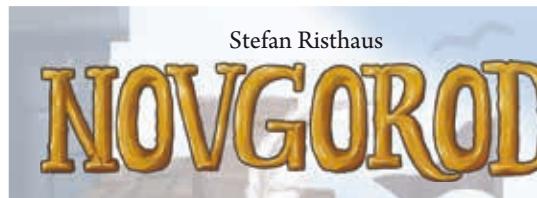
The character cards provide advantages that can be more or less strong (for instance, additional points when constructing a building). Some privileges (e.g. the right to enter an occupied space) are so popular that they normally don't stay with their new owner for an entire round. Players who are lagging behind and are short of resources should – in a spirit of anticipatory obedience – rather turn to weaker characters.

The characters have quite an invigorating effect, but their (frequent) switching can occasionally sow discontent. Some of the simplifications are more convincing than others. The time saving is less significant than advertised. Beginners should not play with the maximum number of participants, and there is even some doubt whether every experienced player will manage to keep up.

-CC

SpieleMr

One could almost think that the small black cardboard box would contain a promo SKAT deck. PARTOUT actually is a trick-taking game in which you predict the number of tricks you expect to take and where you don't have to follow the leading suit. This unusual constellation alone makes it worthwhile to have a closer look at this first game of a new company founded by three students from Würzburg. In addition to four suits with cards of values from 1 to 9, there are six spe-



Stefan Risthaus
NOVGOROD

At the end of the 15th century, the economic might of the Hanseatic League reached from Novgorod in the east, to London in the west. Your job is to trade commodities and produce luxury goods to increase your wealth and reputation.

Find the right balance between investing into as many offices and fast ships on the one hand, and the effective capitalization of artisans and missions on the other hand. Whoever gains the most prestige, wins!

For 2-4 players aged 10+ years, 40 to 50 minutes.




Scalable according to your liking



cial cards that stand out from the normal equipment in this genre. The game is played with two or three teams, each team consisting of two players sitting opposite each other (in the three-player version, everybody plays alone against the others). One round consists of no more than seven tricks. In turn, all players announce how many tricks they think they'll get; the total number is relevant for the team. If the team reaches (or exceeds) this number of tricks, it receives a bonus; otherwise, every trick counts as one point. Soon it turns out that the player who leads the trick is just a passenger, since, without the obligation to follow suit, pretty much anything can happen. Even if somebody plays his card late, he can still change a lot, especially through special cards that eliminate others or that are the highest card in the trick. During a round, the trump suit and the number of trump cards can change multiple times, sometimes even within the same trick. Some players might consider this as too luck-dependent and somewhat chaotic, whereas others see it as a challenging mental exercise that can be solved with a bit of luck.

-sd

Spielworxx

Because of its ability to withstand heat, asbestos was considered a fascinating building material for decades. But meanwhile, it should be well known that it is infernal stuff in terms of health. All the more shocking is the information in the instructions of **THE COST** that, even nowadays, the use of asbestos is still allowed in many countries, e.g., in Brazil, China, India, Russia, and the USA. In that sense, **THE COST** is one of the so-called Serious Games that – beyond the purpose of entertainment – intend to make players think.

Players take on the role of entrepreneurs who mine asbestos and try to make as much money from that as possible. In doing so, they can proceed cautiously in order to protect the workers – or they can relentlessly force the exploitation. In the latter case, profits go up, but there will be worker deaths. Consequently, the player with the most money is not always a justifiable winner. Each round, you decide anew to mine asbestos in one of the (unspecified) countries. In addition, you can buy resources and invest in the country's infrastructure, since the extracted raw materials need to be transported

via rail or ship. All this contributes to the profit. If you neglect health protection, the result will be a dead worker and thus a burden for all. From now on, any casualty costs valuable resources for every player who wants to keep producing asbestos in that country. So how will the players deal with the human and material resources? The game ends after four rounds – or prematurely if all states ban the trading with asbestos due to high death tolls.

-sd

Stonemaier Games

In many games, the fact that time is money means that players advance their time marker along a track. This is quite different in **PENDULUM**. Here, the actions take actual time – different amounts of time. Although the title suggests a metronome, the game comes with three sand timers with different running times (from 45 seconds to three minutes) that set the beat. One set of actions is allotted to each timer, and the clock measures, so to speak, how much time a worker needs to fulfill a job. Each timer applies to two rows: one where it is standing, and another one where it is not. In an area where the timer is not currently present, you can move a worker to a different action space. However, he works only in an area with a currently present timer. Which means: You place a worker on an unoccupied action space, wait until the timer gets there, then carry out the action – and wait again until the timer has run out and has been moved somewhere else so that you can use that worker again.

Confused? This state might even increase, since each player controls more than just one worker. For some actions, you have to additionally pay gold. And of course, a space may not be occupied by several meeples, unless you place a so-called grande worker who can also be joining another worker (as in **VITICULTURE**). All your efforts are geared toward collecting resources and converting them into points, so that you can get your Vp token into the target area on four scoring tracks. To break up this entire time structure, you have a set of cards that enhance actions, release blocked workers or sometimes provide a few resources.

PENDULUM is characterized by the fluctuation between hectic activity and idle time. When all your workers are blocked for the moment, you have time that you should use to plan your actions for the

next hectic phase. The player who is best at making use of this rhythm has the key to success. A beginner's variant allows players to become familiar with the game procedures without any real-time stress. And as a multi-player solitaire pleasure with special timing requirements, **PENDULUM** is certainly extraordinary, but it is not a game for all those who want to relax when playing.

-ct

Super Meeple

In **GENESIA**, human history is retold in three ages that don't always proceed peacefully, as in real life. A modular playing area allows for a balanced starting set-up of the three to five civilizations involved. By way of drafting, each player puts together his card hand at the beginning of an age. During the heyday of the current age, you play all your cards in the phase indicated; the standard actions are complemented by special additional actions and benefits. Against some payment, you first place your clans in your home region or in already-founded cities; the cities are automatically established when there are at least two clans per space. After expanding – also for a price – across adjacent spaces onto unoccupied ones or even spaces controlled by others, players finally decide simultaneously whether to wage a war. If you choose to do so, you mark the space from where you intend to defeat an enemy clan with a superior number of your clans. The war phase doesn't end before all parties involved agree to peace. At the end of the final age, during which the costs for expanding are reduced, the control of each area is scored according to its printed number value; additionally, players get points for the effects of cards with secret objectives regarding certain areas or constellations.

Highly coveted and therefore fiercely embattled are the valuable provinces of the central region. Unlike in **RISK**, the attacks don't contain any luck factor. Compared to **RHEINGOLD**, where troops are also decimated par for par, the diverse cards bear much weight and constantly lead to surprises. There is one card that doubles a warrior's losses, for example, and another card allows a player to use drones to make a ranged attack. With just a few rules, **GENESIA** has been composed elegantly, and it quickly builds up an arc of suspense that culminates towards the



end. This is done in a very convincing manner at a reasonable playing time of about 20 minutes per warlord. -cc

The City of Games

As for the million-seller EXPLDING KITTENS, it is clear whether it addresses cat haters or cat lovers. But since there are definitely many cat lovers among game players, it might not be a bad idea to appeal to them with a game of that theme. In THE ISLE OF CATS, the animals are not depicted on cards but on TETRIS-style tiles. Each player is supposed to "rescue" cats by loading them onto his boat. Four tiles per captain are on display. In turn, each player takes one tile and places it on the floor of his boat. From the second tile on, you have to place the new tile orthogonally adjacent to an already-placed one. If you place a colored cat so that it covers the only space of the same color, you get a neutral extra tile that you may lay out immediately. In the end, you score for groupings of tiles of the same color and for any lesson cards you have obtained during the game. Rats that haven't been covered cause a deduction in points, as do rooms (printed on the boat) that have not completely been covered. Except for a few details, this describes the entire family version.

In the more complex standard version, players get fish – used as currency – at the beginning of each round. After that, cards are drafted that players can then either buy at the indicated price or discard. There are private lesson cards among these cards, as well as public ones that are laid out immediately but are scored for only in the end. Then the current order of play is determined; to this end, everybody plays the speed cards he has paid for. In order to pick a cat tile from the display, you not only have to pay for it (the price depends on the cat's place of origin) but also need a basket (contained on the cards, among other places). Oshax cats are placed for free, without a basket; they are jokers that can take on any color. If you get such a card, you want to keep it at all costs.

Although the individual elements are very common, the devil is in the detail – as is so often the case with a large number of cards – and some rules questions remain open. Detailed explanations can be found online. It is mainly the drafting that takes a lot of time, so that the stan-

dard version (which is at the lower level of a connoisseur game) turns out to be a full-evening game. By comparison, the family version comes off better, especially since its luck factor doesn't differ significantly. The individual turns are short, and the overall playing time is less than one hour; in this way, the handling of the cat tiles is real fun. -cc

WizKids

The original was released in 2017 and quickly sold out. Now, SIDEREAL CONFLUENCE is available in an impressive new graphic design and with minor content modifications. Within six rounds, players use technologies or converters to acquire goods or convert them into others, not just by playing applicable cards, but also through trading with each other, with only low regulations. Trading cannot be done in each of the three phases of a round, but – besides goods – it can also involve cards and even civilization features. Agreements in these matters are binding. Thanks to the nine included species with significantly differing strengths and weaknesses, up to nine players can participate; the minimum player count is four.

Since most actions take place simultaneously, it is indeed possible to play a game with the maximum number of participants. Only in the Confluence phase do players act in turn. Here, everybody has to share with the others the technologies he has just invented and has been able to use exclusively once. If you find this to be too much cooperation, you should play the Yengii civilization – they don't share. Finally, players bid goods in their closed hand for being the first to choose new research teams and colonies. The former can be turned into technologies, provided you can afford it. Your opponents will also profit from this sooner or later; however, you can't be sure that they would also develop something that would suit you. Colonies benefit your own civilization exclusively, but not every civilization has enough space for all six that you can maximally procure over the course of the game. And at some point, colonization is worthwhile only to a certain extent anyway.

Each player often plans and optimizes on his own, but there is also some interaction; therefore, you should definitely have a liking for bargaining when you play this CENTURY game on speed. -mh

Zoch

In CAN'T STOP and try-your-luck-games of the like, it usually lies in your own hands whether you roll the dice once too often and thus ruin everything you had so far achieved. DIE SEHER VON SANTIIBA assigns the spoilsport role to the others. One player rolls the dice. Then the other players secretly try to foresee the color of the die that the active player will choose. If not all of them have made the correct prediction, the active player takes the die or a card, depending on the face of the chosen die. The successful seers advance on a path in the direction of the Cloud-Castle of Wisdom or are also rewarded with a card. The question for the active player is now whether he should continue his turn and choose another color. If he does, the other seers might reveal their correctly predicted color and he might go away empty-handed, except for one "consolation" card. In the end, players evaluate the cards they have collected; after that process, the card values that are still visible determine how many additional steps each player can take on the path. The player who is eventually closest to the Cloud-Castle wins.

Normally, expansions follow pretty soon after the release of the basic game – after all, the company wants to fan the flames to keep the interest up so that it won't fall into oblivion. The eleven years it took for VOLCANO to now emerge from Bruce Allen's original TOBAGO definitely is the rare exception. The title-giving volcano rises in the center of the TOBAGO game board, covering seven spaces. Each player gets a new type of tile, a terrain triad, and connects it to the island in order to place his ATV there. Over time, lava is pouring over the island, which makes it much harder to collect the treasures. Even though the lava flow burns pretty much everything on the island, it is – strangely enough – possible to traverse lava terrain if the player gives up an amulet. Volcanologists and ATV producers worldwide might reach out to Zoch and ask how that works. -sd

... more in the current **spielbox 5/2020**

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