Great Finds!

Das Diplomaten Spiel
(The Diplomats Game)

Back in June 2018 a man from Italy offered some old games for sale on a Dutch auction website. One that really caught my attention was an abstract strategy game from the end of the 19th Century: Das Diplomaten Spiel (The Diplomats Game). With its wonderful triangular box along with the fact of being an abstract strategy game for 2-6 players the decision was made to get it at any price.

Luckily only one other person was interested in the game and his final bid was a very acceptable price for me!

But what did I really buy? When the game arrived from Italy it turned out to be a small box measuring 21 cm x 21 cm x 21 cm (8.25" x 8.25" x 8.25"):

On the game box lid shown above two codes are imprinted:
1) Gebr. Must. Schutz. 8416 and 2) No 4282

There was also a ‘logo’ similar to that on the RULES sheet.

The game box contained the following:

A folded game board;
RULES sheet;
12 'leaves' with the starting positions of the games for 2 up to 6 players;
Game pieces (small metal 'cups' that nested into one another to build a 'tower' in 6 colors).
To get additional information about the game, I contacted Mr. Rudolf Rühle from the ESG.

(Europäische Spielesammler Gilde) has a similar game in its collection filed as:


Translated:

"Tactical game on a 3-sided Plan. Tower building. Capture and Freeing as per Tricolor. For setup prescribed alternative positioning. 14 Leaves. Completeness unclear, but for every number of players at hand. In 3-cornered (isosceles) box. Game principle like Laska as well as in some way Tricolor and Focus. Was offered by Wahnsehaffe in 1895. Thus I date it about ca. 1894. Publisher unknown."

After sending him the images of my "Great Find" he responded:


Translated:

"Dear Fred, this is a different issue than mine, but only in the color and with a logo and the right number. Otherwise identical. The logo is from Sala. I congratulate. Best regards, Rudolf"

Some remarks can be discerned, given the information provided by Rudolf Rühle:

1. The gameboard (Plan) is not triangular; it is a folded board with 6 triangular ‘parts,’ thus in fact a hexagonal board.
2. Rudolf mentions 14 leaves with a “starting position” for the pieces. In my sample, only 12 leaves are included: (3 for 2 players; 4 for 3 players; 2 for 4 players; 2 for 5 players and 1 for 6 players)
3. The publisher of my game is Sala, a firm that was located in Berlin, Germany. Is Rudolf’s sample from another firm?
4. Rudolf links the play mechanism (the building of towers/stacks) to that of some other games which all are from later dates (Laska 1911; Tricolor 1930; Focus 1963)
5. Rudolf dates Das Diplomaten Spiel circa 1894, which is in line with the used material of my game.

It is a pity, but at this moment no additional information can be obtained from Rudolf. He had donated his whole collection to the Games Museum in Chemnitz and the collection is in the process of being packed and transported. Also the museum is unable to produce any information on short notice because the building is in restoration and for some time the collections are stored and not available.

Game pieces (nesting metal cups) with “leaf” for a 6 player starting position

The Rules:

On a folded triangular leaflet (printed on both sides) the Rules for the game are presented.

It starts with a sentence of promoting the game:

"This new Game offers a great deal of plus-points, which will push the game at short rate to be a beloved one, and one making clear why this name is chosen for the game: Many times an “Alliance” with another player is helpful, but which association in a short time again must be broken down when own advantage takes over, which needs diplomacy.

The game can be played with 2 to 6 players. For each number of players there are “starting positions” added on separate leaflets:
The aim of the game is to immobilize all of your opponents by ending up being the only player able to direct ‘stacks of game pieces’ (i.e. your color on top) on the board.

In his turn a player...

1) moves one of his pieces to an adjacent free (empty) field along the line between these two fields. (N.B. no line, no move!)

or

2) jumps over an adjacent piece along a line to the free field directly behind in the same direction.

The ‘jumped over’ piece is captured and placed at the bottom of a (new formed) stack. (N.B. Jumps can be made by a single piece or by a ‘stack of pieces’ directed by the player on his turn. A single piece as well as a ‘stack’ can be jumped over.)

When a ‘stack’ is jumped over, only the piece on the top is captured. The rest of the pieces stay put and the new game piece on top now directs the ‘stack.’

This implicates that when a player cannot play (all his pieces are ‘trapped’) he has to wait till the moment that one of his pieces in a ‘stack’ is freed and he directs again a ‘stack.’

3) The game is won when there is only ONE player left directing ‘stacks.’

Be aware that there are NO lines between the fields on the edges of the board.

The (German) rules are not clear as to when a jump must be played when possible (forced move), and if a series of jumps can only be made in a straight line (no change of direction being allowed). Or if a change of direction is allowed, can a ‘stack’ be repeatedly jumped over and over again (more than once)?

Also, can a player capture (by jumping over) his own piece or ‘by his’ directed ‘stack’?

The rules leave a lot a guesswork, so in my opinion it is not too surprising that this has become a ‘very rare’ game. But also, a non-playable game can be a GREAT FIND!

In this respect I asked myself:

Was this game inspired by the Russian Draughts variant BASHNI. Or did Emanuel Lasker not only know BASHNI but also this variant when he ‘invented’ LASKA?

On the TV series, “Everwood,” the big city doctor (Andy Brown) who moves to a small town in Colorado finds it difficult to meet women, so he signs up for a dating service. With great hesitation, he arranges to meet someone he has exchanged a few emails with. Since he has not been completely upfront on his own profile, he questions the accuracy of his prospective date’s listing. He asks his computer savvy 20-something son, “What if she’s 93?” The son, Ephram, replies, “Then you’ll have a good mah jongg partner!” —submitted by Bruce Whitehill

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Answers to Bruce Quiz on page 33

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Total 100

Score 3 points each (maximum = 90)

ANSWERS—Page 31 from 3.03.01

The Name Game Puzzle...