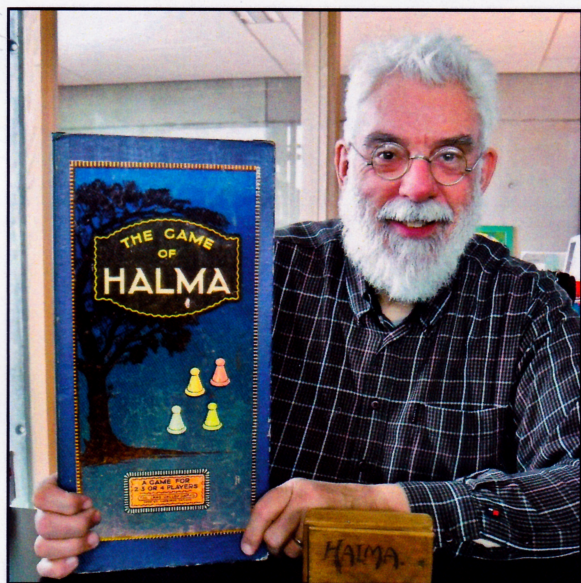


Who Are You **Fred Horn?**



Fred Horn with one of his favorites—THE GAME OF HALMA

Article by Bruce Whitehill

As part of our “Who Are You?” series, I’m happy to feature long-time AGPI member Fred Horn from the Netherlands, one of our first international members. [Full disclosure: We’ve been friends for more than 20 years.] You’ve read his stuff on these pages for a long time. Here is who Fred Horn is: game player, games collector, games historian, game inventor. And a lot more.

PLAYING

Bruce: One of three boys growing up in the Hague, Fred says he played a lot of games with friends and family during his youth.

Fred: *First I played simple dice-games like GANZENBORD; and dexterity games like KNIBBELEN, BIKKELEN, AND HOMAS KRUISVUUR-SPEL were nice features during a rainy day. STER-HALMA was much played besides my favorite HET LEIDSEPLEIN-SPEL a Dutch variant of MONOPOLY. And a deck of cards was always available for playing solitaire games or starting PESTEN, KLAVERJAS, or CANASTA.*

My father designed games for us, like HET HAZESPEL and Amsterdam-MONOPOLY that he manufactured himself. And for the children at the birthday parties, my father made a nice variant of PIN THE TAIL ON THE DONKEY, using a four-person bicycle!

Bruce: We all know PIN THE TAIL ON THE DONKEY, but what were Fred’s favorite games with names most of the readers would recognize?

Fred: *I love STRATEGO—playing it, collecting versions and variations of it, researching it, and writing about it. The game QUINTO, from the 3M Bookcase series, is so simple and so entertaining! I wish I invented it. I don’t have a real favorite. It depends on the situation and the people you want to play with. And new games are always hitting the market that are sometimes a real asset to me, such as AZUL not so long ago.*

Bruce: I asked Fred, as a player, who would he most like to play a game with, alive or dead.

Fred: *I would have liked to play with Sid Sackson (1920-2002) and Alex Randolph (1922-2004), two great men in the games world I knew only later in life. And if I could get around more easily, I’d love to play again with my good friend Niek Neuwahl, a fellow Dutchman who has been living in Italy for decades; he too is an inventor who has made dozens of game premiums for companies, as well as numerous games that have been produced commercially.*

[NB: some of Niek’s mini-“matchbook” games are included in the goodie bags that will be distributed at the AGPI 2025 Convention in Italy in October.]

COLLECTING

Bruce: After playing more and more games over the years, Fred soon became a collector.

Fred: *I started collecting games in high school, mostly focusing on abstract strategic games at first. Later my interest widened into games manufactured, invented, or sold in Holland. Over time I built up a large collection, reaching around 10,000 items, which, in 2009, I donated to the “Vlaams Spellenarchief” in Brugges, Belgium.*

RESEARCH AND WRITING

My interest goes further than only collecting games. For the last forty years, I have been researching the history of Dutch games, with a focus on the authors.

Bruce: As Geert Bekkering pointed out in his article about Fred and the DAU Barcelona award (AGPI Quarterly, Winter 2023), Fred is a member of two game inventor groups, the SAZ (Spiele Autoren Zunft) and its Dutch equivalent SAN (Spel Auteurs Nederland), and former chairman of the yearly Dutch Game Award (Nederlandse Spellen Prijs) jury. He has been a regular participant and speaker at the Board Game Studies colloquia. He received the 2021 Oeuvre Prize from Ducosim for his achievements, and the 2023 DAU Barcelona Award for a lifetime achievement in games. He continues doing research on games and inventors of the Netherlands and publishing articles on the subject in journals like SPEL! (the magazine of the Ducosim organization) and the AGPI Quarterly.

Fred is generous with all the information he collects, finding ways to make it available to the public. He doesn’t get paid for his research or his articles. And he gives games away.



Fred Horn, born in Amsterdam in 1945, moved to the Hague when he was four. He "changed places between these two cities" a few times and has been residing in the Hague with his wife Saskia for the last 30 years. They have been married since 1969. At www.spellenlab.be, you can search for "Fred Horn" to see Fred's games; if you search just for "Horn," you will also find the games from his father Wim and grandfather Herman.

INVENTING

Fred: I invented my first game, called *CARDO*, at the age of eight, and it was really a "hit" in our family! Then in 1974, I developed a numbers card game for a school project, but that was a card game. That year, my day job was at the housing administration of the University of Amsterdam. My colleagues

were divided between chess lovers and those who preferred checkers, so I decided to invent a game that would be interesting to both these groups, who wanted to play something during lunch break. From that came my first real board game, *STRIKE*, which, I'm happy to say, was published as *FENIX* by Huch!. I've had many other games published, one of my favorites being *CITADELLA* (2004 Clemens Gerhards).



Fred Horn, David Parlett, Sybille and Bruce Whitehill—game time during their time at Essen.

I start with an idea about a certain game mechanism and try to invent a game that uses that mechanism. For me, the fun is in not using the same mechanism in another game. And the idea is not to imitate. Also, I follow the principle of "reduce, reduce, and once again reduce"—the simpler the better!

I am now retired, but I am not retiring from inventing games. Only death can bring that to a halt.

Bruce: Fred's game *CAN THE SARDINES* was invented (based on a challenge) in about 15 minutes; it was published in a Portuguese book on mathematical games. He also specializes in games made to order as promotional products. A number of his abstract games have been published by Clemens Gerhards, makers of special oil-treated all-wood products.

AND MORE . . .

Not only does Fred play games, he plays cornet, v-trombone, tuba, clarinet, all saxophones, drums, and even the washboard. In the Netherlands, he is better known as a jazz musician than as a game inventor. He was the leader of the famous Limehouse Jazzband for 25 years. A heart attack in 2023 affected his motor skills, which abruptly ended his musical career.

Fred: In the seventies I was a kind of semi-professional musician next to my daily job. Playing for more than 30 years, I made a lot of records, often playing all combinations of instruments. As a multi-instrumentalist, I still play in bands—it's the music I love: Jazz from the last century: the 1920s, '30s, and '40s.

A personal Bruce story: A car I had years ago had a six-disc CD-player in the trunk. I would load the discs and forget about them, turning it on when I was on a longer trip. At one point, the disc changed to the next one, and it was all jazz. Great jazz! "Fred would love this!" I thought. When I got home, I pulled the disc out to send to Fred—only to find that it *was* Fred, on a CD I had forgotten he gave me. AGPI

*What about **you**?*

What else is in your life besides games and /or puzzles?



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