It is 1942, and World War II has been raging for more than 2 years, when Fred Schuh (7/2/1875 - 6/1/1966) is interviewed for an article in the DELFTSCHE COURANT about the release of his 40th Book on Mathematics: “Het derde deel over Differentiaal- en Integralkaeken” (The third volume on Differential and Integral Calculus). During the interview Schuh announces the writing, on demand of his publisher, of a more popular publication which he is now preparing as his 41th book: “Wondereijke Problemen; Leerzaam Tijdevrij door Puzzle en Spel.” He relayed, “Het wijkt af van alle vorige, omdat het populair gehouden is en geschikt voor lezen, die eenige herinnering hebben aan hun schoolwiskunde. Er komen nauwelijks formules in voor.”

(“It differs from all previous publications because it is kept popular and suitable for laymen who have minimal remembrance concerning their math in school. There are hardly any formulas.”)

This book, published in the Dutch language in 1943, is rare and hard to find. I spent years looking for a copy searching second hand bookshops. In the end, I found one in my father’s library (of all places). He had studied math during those years and was also interested in games!

The book was one of the first written on games with a solid theoretical basis for the described game principles. Later, at the end of the 1960s, Dover published the work in English and since then it has been recognized as a 'Standard Work.' It is regularly reprinted under the title: “The Master Book of Mathematical Recreations.”

In Chapter X of the book, subtitled “Enige Instuitspelen” (Some Games of Encirclement), Schuh describes in Part V—Het Soldatenspel (The Soldiers’ Game).

This game, originally published in a French magazine for soldiers in 1886, is, as Schuh states, substantially more difficult than the simplified so called ‘Games of Dwarfs’ already elaborated by him in Parts II, III, and IV of Chapter X under the names “Dwergenspel” or “Pak den Reus!” (“Game of Dwarfs” or “Catch the Giant!”).

Following the war and after being accorded emeritus status in 1945 Schuh continued writing mathematical textbooks. But he also wrote, based on his book published in 1949 “De macht van het getal” (The power of the number), another popular publication especially aimed for the youth: “Spelen met Getallen” (Playing with Numbers) in 1951. A photograph presented early in this book shows Schuh and former World Chess Champion Max Euwe playing the “Game of Dwarfs,” now called RATIO.
Schuh takes on all challengers, and wins!

The photograph above was taken during the introduction of the game “Het Schaakhuis” (The Chesshouse) in Amsterdam on March 29, 1950.

This ‘unveiling’ was highlighted with Schuh playing simultaneous games against some prominent Dutch Chess-, Dam-, and Bridge players. In the local paper reporting the event, Schuh was congratulated because he did not lose a single game; better that he did win all of them though!

The agreement between Schuh and the firm Haussmann & Hötte (Jumbo) to introduce RATIO to the game market was the reason behind organizing this event.

N.B. The game board that was used at this ‘simultaneous game’ event was never published by Jumbo. It is the board represented by Fig. 85 (pictured above)—the easiest version of “Catch the Giant”! It is clearly seen it is the ‘not punched out’ surface paper print pasted on cardboard.

The scheduled publish date of the game in 1951 never took place. A former member of the board, the late A. J. de Graaff, once told me about all the “issues” they had with the ‘Emeritus Professor’! Schuh was, in their opinion, incredibly strict concerning the set-up and the typing of the Rule book. Time after time he found incorrect pictures as well as errors in the text. This resulted in the delay of the game for more than two years, because, according to the agreement, Schuh had ‘the last word.’ The game was eventually published in 1953!

The real “gimmick” was in the use of an “unconventional cardboard disc” which, upon rotation, made it possible to display eight different board types, because of the four ‘holes’ in the board. That resulted in a total of 14 different variant boards for the “Catch the Giant!” game: 6 enclosure and 8 capture games.

Selling the game turned out to be a hard job for Haussmann & Hötte (Jumbo). Mr. de Graaff relayed, “In fact, the game proved to be too mathematical for our buyers. We had focused on the adult client rather than the ‘normal target market’ of a Jumbo game—children. Commercially it was a ‘flop’ and the firm never thought of continuing it after the first edition.”

N.B. At that time Jumbo was already negotiating with J. J. Mogendorf about licensing his game STRATEGO and they had more trust (as de Graaff told me in the 70s) in the selling possibilities of that game. This proved correct because STRATEGO is still one of Jumbo’s best-selling games.

Commerially (RATIO) was a “flop” and the firm never thought of continuing it after the first edition.

That is why the game RATIO is rare and hard to find.

Schuh had more success with the game ‘Spel van Delers,—a game he introduced in 1952 in the magazine “Nieuw tijdschrift voor Wiskunde” (New magazine on Math.) nr. 39, pages 299-304.

This game was later transformed in what is now known as “Chomp” or in Dutch; ‘Hap.’ This game is easy to play with pencil and paper. [Photo]

RATIO (Jumbo) 1953
Photo: Amsterdam Muis Historisch Museum

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