COBRAIN
RISE   DECLINE   DISSOLUTION

The Story of
TANG   RED LINE   DINO-DUELL
3 Games published in the 1980th by a small Dutch Manufacturer

as recorded by FRED HORN
INTRODUCTION

Everywhere in the World at any time Individuals or Groups invent Games and for the last 150 Years this goes on and on: year after year after year. Luckily for us most of these Games, ‘variants of well known existing Games’ or ‘things the inventor only keeps for him- or herself’, never reach a publisher or the market.

But sometimes the inventor(s) think different. Their Creation has to be published, because their Concoction is (in their minds) what ‘the World needs’ and ‘has been waiting for for decades’.

It will be no surprise that when nobody is willing to publish these fantasies the Inventor himself starts producing the Game, because you cannot withhold Society ‘THE BEST GAME IN THE WORLD’!

Although everything happens in Holland 50 years later as they say, also in Holland there are men with bright Ideas and the inner urge to show it off. This Story tells the adventure of 2 Dutch guys, interested in Games, who had these bright Ideas and who also did start a Firm to fulfil their Expectations.

For me the Story begins in the early 80th of the last Century when one of my colleagues – knowing my interest in the subject- drewed my attention to a small Exhibition of Games taking place in a Gallery located in one of these small Streets between the Canals in Amsterdam. Only 4 Games were exposed and especially 2 of these took my attention because of the abstract design.

The first one: “STRAAT” was made from plexiglass, and it turned out to be a 2-player game with a (for me) completely new playmechanism based on the transparancy of the perspex used for board and game-pieces. Two examples of this Game, part of my former Collection, are now in the Vlaams Spellenarchief.

This Game was manufactured by a small Studio in the “JORDAAN”, a well-known district in the Centre of Amsterdam.

Thirty years later, doing the Research for this Story, I could not find any trace of this Studio at all, it has disappeared completely. So we will never know who did invent that Game.

For the second Game: ”TANG” the people behind it could, after thirty years, be found and were willing to tell their Story.

In the 1980th I had my first contact with them, when I did locate them in the town of Leiden where they lived and in august 2011 they are still living in Leiden. Some visits to Jonathan Schouten and Paul Velleman, the partners in the former Firm COBRAIN, give the following Story about TANG and its successors and what happened with the Firm.
THE PARTNERS and THEIR FIRM

Jonathan Schouten born in Leiden and Paul Velleman from Utrecht are cousins (Paul's grandfather and Jonathan's grandmother were brother and sister).
From an early age on they both were interested in playing Games and at family-meetings they often played together.
When Paul came to Leiden to study Law the contact between the 2 nephews intensified.
Always busy with inventing games, according to Paul he does have notebooks laden with ideas about games, they had enough to play but one of these became their Favourite.
Without any idea about the games-world and not realizing what it means to produce a Game the nephews decided to publish this favourite Game.
Jonathan was then (and still is) working in his father’s Packing-Firm (Schouten Verpakking), which he now owns.
Having direct access to material for making games: cardboard, paper, etc. and knowing other firms that could produce pieces or could print things, they never thought of selling the Game but decided to produce it themselves.
On 25-06-1981 they did register the name of their game: TANG as trademark at the Dutch “Merkenbureau”.
Nearly a year later on 08-04-1982 they founded the “Vennootschap onder Firma” (Dutch for a 'Partnership Firm”) “COBRAIN Denkspellen”- Holland.
At the end of 1982 TANG was ready for selling, but it had been a busy time for both partners in the one-and-a-halve year before that moment.
They had to design Board and Playing-Pieces: they had to write Rules and fix the artwork for the accompanying Booklet; and they must find manufacturers who could produce what they wanted.

The Pieces were a problem because they are two-sided. As Paul told: “We at first had the idea to let them made of plastic, but we both judged that as too cheap looking, not that certain magic we had in mind. Then we turned to wood, but using that material was a costly affair, so we had to abandon that idea too. In some strange way that was also due to the fact that Jonathan did not know any woodwork-factory in the neighbourhood, Luckily for us he did business with a branch of the Metal-firm “METAVO-Leiden” located round the corner where “Schouten Verpakking” had its office and they were willing and capable of producing the Pieces. From flat aluminium-plate, printed two-sided with the silk-screen process and by punching the square pieces out, they could produce exactly what we wanted”. The Board and the Booklet with Rules were printed by ‘Drukkerij Jansen’ a short distance away at the ‘Aalmarkt’ and for the Box and other needed packing material they used of course what was “in-house” at “Schouten Verpakking”.

With all the components available the Partners only had to fill up the boxes. Because of the flat Pieces there was no need for a large box so they used a small plastic transparent box which allowed them to place the Pieces on the bottom of the box in such a configuration that the image of 2 sword-fighting Warriors is recognizable (see the image on the front page). They did separate the 3 layers of aluminium tiles with small ridged greaseproof paper, normally used in Holland by butchers when stacking sliced cold meat, put in the folded board and on top the small booklet with the Rules.

Now they were ready for selling the game. For fl. 15,= (fifteen Dutch Guilders) you could get one and I myself bought the game (the first edition 1982) at the Gallery and afterwards another one (the second edition 1983) in “Magazijn de Bijenkorf”, a large department-store in Amsterdam.

A lot of publicity was generated by both partners and their presence at 2 large game-gatherings in the RAI in Amsterdam (‘SPEELGOED 83’ and ‘SPEELGOED 84’) was a great success and even got them more publicity.

The game sold well, but there was a problem with the folded board. Some buyers found play difficult. They could not get the board flattened in such a way that the leight-weighted aluminium-tiles stay on the board. Jonathan told me that when customers complained he shipped a non-folded board in a cardboard cylinder by post, which of course was expensive.

But in the end they sold nearly 2000 games, only a few still remain in stock. That was for a large part due to the fact that the partners traveled to all kind of places in Holland to demonstrate their game. Going to schools and game-clubs while they also did
attend markets: they grabbed every opportunity to present the game to a more or less interested public.

Jonathan at the instruction-board 1983

Schools and Game-clubs: they have gone everywhere

When little children were also playing Jonathan and Paul noticed that they were more interested in the tiles than in the game. These children got into their own game using the tiles in a kind of ‘domino-way’ of playing.

In the meantime TANG was selling very well, so the 2 partners decided to bring out a next game, based on the idea that players have to connect tiles (like in Domino).
Paul worked out a concept with only one-sided tiles. The name for the game: RED LINE was an easy choice because of the game’s goal: “make a continuing Red Line!” On 06-05-1986 the name was registered at the “Merkenbureau” and the game entered the market in Juni 1988 with a selling-price of fl. 12,= (twelve Dutch Guilders). This time the partners (Paul made the lid-cover-design himself) had only to deal with the Printing-firm Jansen.

The game was completely made of printed cardboard with the Tiles pressed out. As it turned out the game was not really successful, although Jonathan and Paul again traveled the country to demonstrate their new game. Presenting themselves and their game(s) at the “Spellenspektakel Eindhoven” and the “Ducosim-beurzen” ; again going to schools and clubs did not give it the boost they had expected. Also the retail-shops had nearly no interest to purchase the game with the result that it was nowhere on sale. Paul blamed himself for that because then ( and that did not change over the years ) he thought the game was “too fabricated” and not really tested to the limit.

But all that was no option to stop thinking about a next game. Paul had developed an abstract game which he gave the ‘working-title’: “FOUTJE BEDANKT!”, which refers to the fact that one ‘miss’ normally led to loosing the game. = FOUTJE BEDANKT! may be translated as ‘small mistake, thank you!’=

In fact making a mistake was nearly fatal and Paul told: “Jonathan was always making a simular error in his opening, so loss was quick and easy! I named this loosing the game within 3 moves the ”Jonathan-Foutje“ = ‘Jonathan’s-Miss’ !".
The game was played on a board with pieces in the shape of a square; a circle; a triangle. In its original form it was intended to serve as part of a promotional campaign meant for the firm REAAL. When this failed to materialize at the end of the 80th Paul and Jonathan decided to publish it under their own name COBRAIN.
But for abstract games there was no market anymore so the decision was made to give the game a ‘Theme’. In the late 80th Dinosaurs were ‘Hot’, so why not change the squares; the triangles; and the circles into Dinosaurs who are going to take a bath in a river? And it was a game of challenge which caused the name for the game: DINO-DUELL as an easy choice.

We are now in the early 90th of the last century when Jonathan and Paul made this fatal(when looking back) decision to produce and market the game themselves. The production of the game was not an easy one and a race against the clock was going on. At the last moment Jonathan provided the photo for the cover of the box, using a scene out of Africa (when you take a good look you can see people walking in the bush!) with drawn in Dinosaurs.
The game was intended to be introduced in a big presentation at “SPIEL 93” in Essen. Everything was going wrong there. Their stand was located way back from the important spots in the halls; nobody showed any interest in their new game; the price was too high, so there were no customers at all to come by and buy a game.

After this very disappointing event, and when both partners tried hard to sell the game in Holland during the next year with no results, they came to the conclusion that the game-market had no interest in the game.

In 1996 Jonathan and Paul decided to ‘throw in the sponge’ and call it a day. In 2000 they did liquidate the Firm due to a financial situation caused by the lack of any fluid assets.

Still in the storage depot of ‘Schouten Verpakking’ some pallets, laden with games, are gathering dust. In storage is nearly the complete production of DINO-DUELL – some 900 boxes- and a little less of RED LINE - some 800-.

A friend of Jonathan, having a stand on the ‘Bazaar’ (a weekly flee-market in Beverwijk), takes along some of these dusty games and manages to sell one of these sporadically. This brings a sad end to the Story of COBRAIN, but not to the story of Paul’s games!

Paul and Jonathan never stopped playing games and when Paul did come with a new invention he again wanted to “give it to the world”!

Jonathan gave up but Paul founded a new firm “YIRROUNT Games”, found a new businesspartner: Ankie Visser and “the game was on again”.

Their first product was presented in 2011: the game ARREZZO.
THE GAMES

1.

The name TANG originated from the Dutch word ‘tang’, which means “tongs” and, used in the Dutch expression “Iemand in de tang nemen”: ‘to have some one where you want him’ is exactly the goal of the game according to Paul.

The word TANG itself sounds very Chinese and the partners thought this word will give the public a suggestion of an old, original Chinese think-game.

When they found the Chinese character for TANG in the files of printing-firm BRILL, they also found out that TANG means “resist” in Chinese, appropriate enough to use the character as a logo for the game!

Playing the game has some resemblance to PLOY, but both games do have their own flavor.

STARTPOSITION:
Each game-piece has 1 or more hands: “Pointers” which indicates the number of squares that the piece can move over. Pieces can also rotate and in that respect a piece with 1 “Pointer” is turned over to make a 1/8-circle-rotation. 

The “Pointers” have also a function when pieces jump and when a player wants to immobilize a piece of the opponent by ‘blocking’ all the “Pointers” of a piece. Here is an example of a game with ‘play in progress’:

![Game Board](image)

GOAL of the Game is to capture all opponents pieces by taking or blocking.

2.

As said before this Game originated from “childrens play with the pieces of TANG”. Some new pieces with 2- and 3-Pointers were introduced bringing the total of pieces (Tiles) up to 48, 24 for each color –Blue and Yellow–.
The game is played as a table-not boardgame, but the Tiles are in fact layd down according to an imaginairy grid of squares.

GOAL of the Game is to be the last player who is able to lay down a Tile out of his hand.

3.
DINO-DUELL is a 2-player Game, played with 12 Dinosaurs for each player:

When publishing my Article on COBRAIN in the Dutch Magazine “SPEL!” both former partners gave permission to add, as an ‘inlay’, the game DINO-DUELL as “Spellenkaart #0007”:

On the Spellenkaart (Gamecard) you can see the initial position of the Dinosaurs at the beginning of the Game.
Dinos move 1 square in any direction. Capture is by moving a Dino in a straight line to a square occupied by an opponents Dino, but an own Dino has to be in between and all 3 involved Dinos must be of a different kind.

GOAL of the Game is to get 4 of your Dinos into the River.
ARREZZO is not a COBRAIN-game. Paul founded a new firm: “YIRROUNT Games” to produce it with a new partner. But of course it has to be mentioned here as a direct successor in the range of the preceding 3 Games which are all 3 his inventions. In these modern times information about the Game ARREZZO can easily be found at: www.arrezzo.nl or by surfing to “Yirrount Games”.

The Game itself is a 'Halma-derivate', but with enough new features to make it interesting.
GOAL of the Game is to get your pieces to the opposing side off the Board.
This is the starting position of the pieces:

which have 5 different forms

and also different ways of “moving and jumping”.

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END OF STORY

With this ‘Abstract’ the Story of COBRAIN has been recorded for our descendants. Of course I am very indebted to both former partners of COBRAIN, Jonathan Schouten and Paul Velleman, for making their time available and for sharing their recollections. Without them this Story would have never been told. To give a Lecture about the subject in München at “Board Game Studies 2012” is, with the Article in SPEL!, a way to widen the knowledge about unknown Games and the small Firms that produce them.

On the other hand there is still room for playing some of the Games yourself. ARREZZO can be easily purchased through Internet: www.arrezzo.nl Jonathan has still in stock RED LINE and DINO-DUELL. If you want to get one, contact him through: www.schoutenverpakking.nl

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