

The Puzzles from Sio

by Fred Horn

The sio brand was mainly known for their excellent wooden children toys, games and their “sio montage” construction sets [1].

History of sio

Just before WWII, the extraction and processing of peat ended in the area around the little village Vroomshoop in the province of Overijssel in the eastern part of the Netherlands. Hence, the local government started a search for new industries to provide alternative employment opportunities. In 1938, one idea was to set up a factory making toys, because one possible investor (family De Groot) in such an endeavour owned a company selling wood. A new company “Speelgoed Industrie Overijssel”, sio, (Toy Industry Overijssel) was incorporated and its factory was opened on June 12th, 1939. Out of the four initial investors: Mertens, Uilendreef, De Groot, and Van Riggelen, the first two started as directors.

Besides the investors, a key role was played by a Jew named Ernst Sigmund. He had a background in toys as a buyer for a large department store in Germany and, as such, had gained valuable knowledge of the manufacturing and colouring of toys. A few years earlier, in 1934, he had left Germany and started his own toy trading business in Amsterdam importing wooden toys from Germany and Czechoslovakia until that became too difficult in 1937. Hence, he asked the government whether it would be possible to establish a small factory somewhere in the Netherlands. Thus, the production of toys, designed by Sigmund and his wife, started in Vroomshoop. This continued until 1942 when he and his family were deported to Auschwitz and murdered [2].

After the war production was still based on their designs as the other people involved were not able to design toys. In 1950, the firm advertised for a designer, Rokus van Blokland responded and was subsequently hired. His later wife, Corry van Blokland-Mobach used sio for her final thesis project at the Royal Academy in The Hague and afterwards became a designer for sio as well. Besides designing the actual toys and games, they also did all the artwork for the boxes, game-materials, rules and publicity printings for around thirty-five years [3, 4]. A fire in 1982 burned down the factory in Vroomshoop and although production continued for a while at other places, the sio brand finally disappeared in 1990.

Sio's magnetic puzzlegames

Only a few board-, table-, and card-games were published by sio. In 1984 the firm released, at least, six puzzles made from plastic with magnetic pieces, which are presented here. From my own collection, now in Brugge at the Spellenlab [5], comes number 5. Four others, 1, 3, 4, and 6, come from Auke Reijenga, the owner of the puzzle museum in Joure [6]. Number 2 has not been identified yet.

Rules for sio 001 (Figure 1):

These puzzles involve hexagons on whose sides are printed 1 to 6. Three patterns are provided, and the problems consist of fitting the hexagons into the patterns so

that the numbers of all touching sides match. Two of the patterns need all of the seven pieces, but the third uses only six.

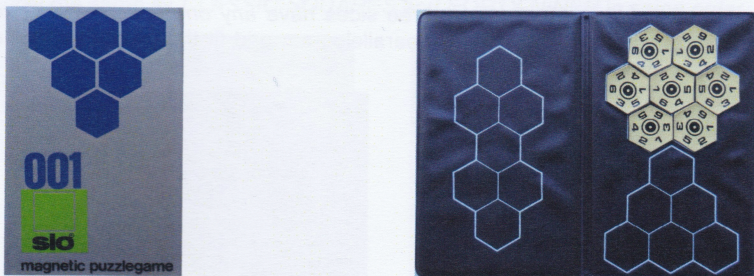


Figure 1. Front cover and the two inside pages and pieces of *sio 001*

Rules for *sio 003* (Figure 2):

Place all eighteen pieces with a rope such that a single loop is created. Next, the same objective, but now with two loops, and finally with three loops. This can be done in both outlines.

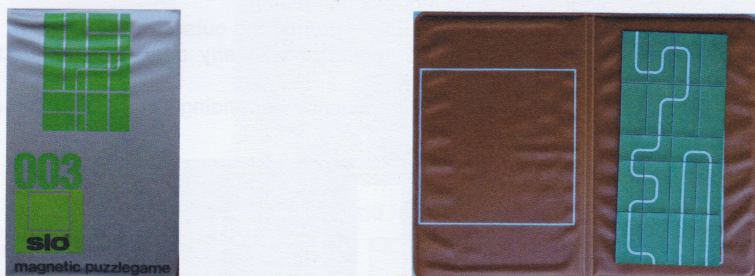


Figure 2. Front cover and the two inside pages and pieces of *sio 003*

Rules for *sio 004* (Figure 3):

First challenge: Place any piece somewhere on the squares within the outline. Subsequently place all other pieces, which always can be done. Second challenge: Leave out the not printed piece (no longer part of the puzzle as shown, as it was lost) and create a rectangle of either 6 by 8 or 4 by 12 with all the other pieces.

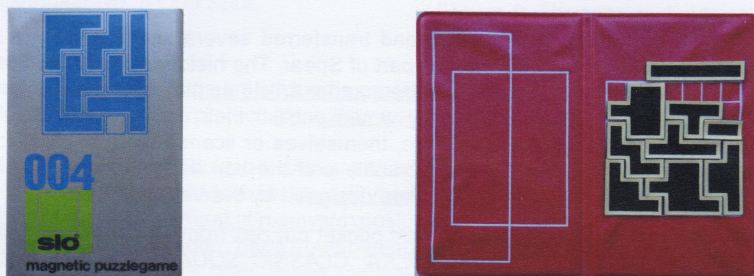


Figure 3. Front cover and the two inside pages and pieces of *sio 004*

Rules for *sio 005* (Figure 4):

In all solutions the colour of the touching dots must match. Using the triangular grid, fit the sixteen pieces so that (1) All three sides have *any one colour*, and (2) each side has a different colour. Using the parallelogram grid fit the pieces so that each side has a different colour.

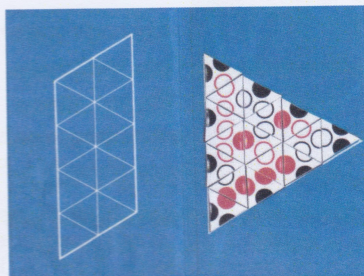


Figure 4. Front cover and the two inside pages and pieces of *sio 005*

Rules for *sio 006* (Figure 5):

In all solutions the colour of touching stones must match.

1. Make a 4×4 square with *any one colour* around the outside edge.
2. Omitting one piece, make a 5×3 rectangle with *any one colour* around the outside edge.

These puzzles have solutions that vary in difficulty depending on the colour chosen for the outside edge.

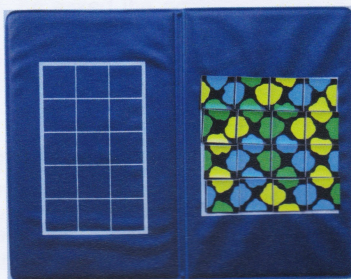


Figure 5. Front and back cover, inside pages and pieces of *sio 006*

Additional information (by the editor)

Ownership of the company and sio brand transferred several times and for a brief period, between 1980 and 1982, it was part of Spear. The history of Spear or Spear's Games is interesting in itself and could be another article as they sold quite a number of puzzles besides games. Often, they would publish their games under localized brand names, such as Juego Spear etc, themselves or licence them to local toy or game companies. They also owned Scrabble and the box and marketing materials related to the Dutch language version were designed by the Van Bloklands.

Spear started selling a series of magnetic pocket puzzles from 1982 onward. Initially, eight titles were available, namely *POLKA*, *CLASSIC SQUARES*, *FORTY-NINER*, *PEBBLES*, *HEXAMATCH*, *SET-A-SQUARE*, *LOOP* and *NUTS* (see Figure 6).

Given their appearances and instructions, *sio 001* is identical to Spear's magnetic pocket puzzle called *NUTS*, *sio 003* is likely *LOOP*, *sio 004* might be *SET-A-SQUARE*, *sio 005* appears to be *POLKA* and *006* appears to be *PEBBLES*. Recently,

a copy of *sio 008* was found by Joop van der Vaart (Figure 7, left), which is the same as *HEXAMATCH* (Figure 7, right). Hence, the still unknown, *sio 002* and *sio 007* are probably the same as *CLASSIC-SQUARES* and *FORTY-NINER* in some order.

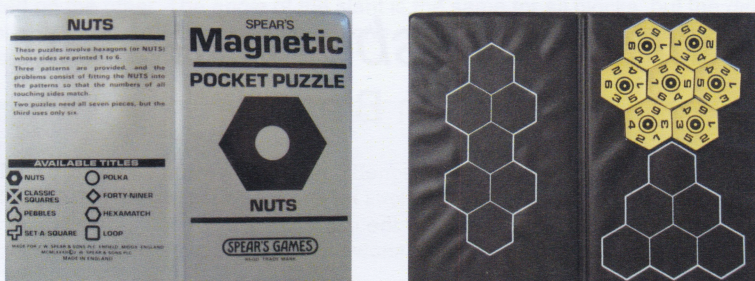


Figure 6. Back and front cover, inside pages and pieces of *NUTS*



Figure 7. Front of *sio 008*, front and insides of *HEXAMATCH* by Spear's

An image, see Figure 8, of Magnetic Travel Games by Spear's on sale in 1985 shows even twelve titles [7]. They were marketed as Timeshrinkers, although that name was not present on the actual cover at that time. This was done later as, for instance, the fourth game from the left, called *ODD SPOT* was rebranded as *Timeshrinker No. 5 Odd Spot*.



Figure 8. Timeshrinker series

References

- [1] *sio* (speelgoed), [https://nl.wikipedia.org/wiki/sio_\(speelgoed\)](https://nl.wikipedia.org/wiki/sio_(speelgoed)).
- [2] Local stolpersteine project, <https://www.struikelstenengooisemeren.nl/hooftlaan-13-bussum>.
- [3] Ron and Bart van Blokland, *Digital exhibit of the work of Rokus van Blokland and Corry van Blokland-Mobach*, <https://rvbcvbm.com/en/rvbcvbm>.
- [4] <https://deventerverhaal.nl/nieuws/expositie-over-het-overijsselse-sio-speelgoed>.
- [5] Toy Museum Deventer, <https://hetspeelgoedmuseum.nl>.
- [6] Spellenlab, Belgium, <https://www.spellenlab.be>.
- [7] Puzzelmuseum Joure, <https://www.puzzelmuseum.nl/Home.html>.
- [7] Image 52 of 53 uploaded by Eàmon Bloomfield, Germany on March 12th, 2023, <https://boardgamegeek.com/image/7396941/spears-games>.