

EuropeMasters 2008

Pevans was at the European Board Games Championship

Once again the "To Win Just Once" team qualified as one of the UK teams at this year's European Boardgames Championship. This took place on the Saturday of Spiel and is as good a way as I know of getting away from the overcrowded halls. Teams of four (drawn from a wide range of European countries) play a series of four games against members of other teams, scoring points for their finishing position in each game (5 for a win, 3 for 2nd, 2 for 3rd and 1 for last). Each player adds up their points and the team's score is the sum of its members'.

This year we had a selection of excellent, if demanding, games. First off the mark was *League of Six*. I like this game, which has a number of sub-games within it. There is a whole bidding game, for example, over who ends up at each town each turn (think *Amun-Reor Evo*). The currency for this ('guards') has no other function in the game. (Disclosure: JKLM has a badge on the box as we're handling the English language edition.) It's quite a subtle game with multiple paths to victory. My game (with a Belgian, a Dutchman and a German) was closely fought in each auction. I got a surprise bonus in the final scoring that left me a close, umm, third. Ah well. The rest of the team didn't do much better, so it was not a good start to the tournament.

The second game was *Amyitis*. This is a game I missed when it came out, but have been very pleased to be introduced to it. Essentially, it's a game system that gives



EuropeMasters 2008 in progress

players lots of opportunities to score points – rather like the same designer's *Yspahan*. Hence it makes sense to do something different from the other players. The theme is constructing the Hanging Gardens of Babylon: the players gain goods and trade these for plants and to improve their position. The EuropeMasters team do some analysis of the tournament game results and this suggests that being the last player in the turn order is good in this game. Guess who was fourth player in his game? I've only found one strategy I'm comfortable with and my opponents let me use it. It was enough to give me a narrow win. Marcus Pratt also won his game, which much improved the team's position.

Game number three was *In the Year of the Dragon*, the 2007 game from alea. This one I had played before, but hadn't thought much of it. Playing it again for the tournament made me realise that it is quite a subtle game within its regimented structure. It's played in 12 turns with an event at the end of each turn (you can see what these are, so you are able to plan for them). Players get 1 action each turn and add 1 person to their court. The people give various advantages, but you are limited in how many you can have by the number of buildings – one action is, of course, to add more buildings. I was so taken with it, I signed up for several online games (www.mabiweb.com, where I'm still playing this game and others) to try out some different strategies. None of the games finished before EuropeMasters, though! The practice seems to have helped, as I got another win. The team's score looked reasonable after this round.



Shark Bait with trophies and prizes

The final game was the terrific *Neuland* from Eggertspiele. This is the second edition of the game, which has a few tweaks from the original. It's an intricate game as players construct different buildings, each of which uses specific raw material(s) to produce other goods. For example, the farm produces food, which the mine uses to produce ore, which the smelter uses (along with coal) to produce metal, which the armourer can turn into weapons. At the end of the chain are buildings that are worth victory points. I like this game, but it is a real brain-burner (see my full review at www.pevans.co.uk/Reviews/Neuland.html). I got greedy, went for a high payoff strategy and was stuffed. That reduces my average quite a bit! And the rest of the team also suffered.

After a hard day's games-playing, we got the results. Top team this year was the top UK team, Shark Bait. Many congratulations to them for their second win (they also won EuropeMasters 2006). How about "To Win Just Once"? Well, we were the second placed British team. Ahem. We were 23rd, just half a point ahead of the third British team! I'm pleased to say that we did average one win each in the tournament – even if we didn't quite manage an average score.

EuropeMasters will be back next year for the tenth time (there were 11 earlier tournaments under the title of Intergame). The qualifying tournament for UK teams is SpielChamps UK, which is held as part of Manorcon each July. Keep an eye on the website for more information: www.manorcon.org.uk

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Pevans took the photos