

Call me Rupert

Review of *Media Mogul*

Media Mogul has had some bad press since it first appeared, so let me start by saying that it's not a bad game. And I've had some experience, playing the game in both the UK's SpielChamps tournament and the European Boardgames Championship, EuropeMasters. At first glance, **Media Mogul** is not particularly prepossessing – particularly for someone who's had fifteen years exposure to the high quality production of German games – but it's perfectly serviceable. The game is played out over a map of the world, divided into continents, using good quality cards, wooden pawns and cardboard pieces.

As the name suggests, the players are moguls, aiming to generate cash by selling advertising through their newspapers and radio and TV stations. **Media Mogul** ends when the deck of cards runs out. Players add up the value of their media and their cash and the highest value wins. It sounds simple, but getting there is rather more complicated.

Media Mogul starts easily enough. Everybody has some cash, with which they buy their first media outlets and place each on a continent. At this stage, competing directly (radio versus radio, for example) with other players doesn't make sense as there's plenty to go round. Plenty of audience, that is. Each turn, players gain pawns from the continents they have media on, representing their readers, listeners or viewers.

Once a media mogul has an audience, what does he do? Bombard them with advertising of course! Playing cards as advertising generates income for the



player, according to how many audience pawns they have for that medium and the effectiveness of the advertising. One (billion dollars) for every two pawns is the best rate available, so these are good cards to get hold of.

There's an unfortunate side effect of advertising: it bores people. So each advertising card has a cost in terms of the audience pawns lost. Clearly, advertising that bores fewer people is more valuable. So there is a luck element in the game in getting hold of the right cards. But the 'best' cards are only available to the 'worst' media, which helps balance things out: a player can only have two newspapers, but, with the right cards, they can generate good income.

The immediate impulse when playing the game is to put some media on the board, grab an audience, play advertising and count the cash. The problem with this is the boredom that takes pawns away again. A player who does this each turn for the first three turns will probably get 2 cash per turn and have a couple of pawns left on that medium. By building up the audience and only advertising in the third turn, another player can generate the same amount of cash. However, they've played just one card and have a large audience (up to 8 pawns) to exploit next turn as well. A large stock of pawns gives a player a cash cow – providing they have the advertising to cash in on this.

As the game goes on, players begin to compete. First, if players are retaining pawns between turns, there are fewer on the board. So picking up extra pawns becomes more difficult as the game goes on. Second, as players generate income they invest in new media outlets. Once players are competing for the same audience, only the best will get the pawns. This also makes it harder to pick up more pawns. The answer is in the second use of the cards: players use cards to bid against each other for the audience in each continent. Which means players have to decide how they want to use the cards in their hand.

On top of this, the rules impose various limitations that force players to make decisions and limit what they can achieve. The result is a game that starts quietly, but gets pretty cut-throat at the end. And whoever makes the best use of their opportunities will win. Having said that, I do have one issue with the game: there really is only one strategy. Okay, it might differ in detail (newspapers versus radios, say) depending on the circumstances each time you play, but it is essentially the same. Overall, then, a decent game, not a great one.

***Media Mogul** was designed by Richard Huzzey and is published by JKLM Games. It is a strategy board game for 3-5 players aged 8+ and takes about 90 minutes to play. It is available from specialist shops in the UK at around £20 or direct from www.jklmgames.co.uk at £20 plus postage and packing.*

Pevans rates this game 6/10 on his highly subjective scale.

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