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ARTICLES

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF HARE & TORTOISE

David Parlett

Independent games inventor and researcher

As Hare & Tortoise continues to flourish after more than 40 years on the market perhaps it would now be acceptable for its author to indulge in some introspective retrospection. It can claim to occupy a significant position in modern boardgame history, partly as one of the earliest no-dice race games, and partly as the first ever recipient of the German Games Critics' *Spiel des Jahres* award. Readers may remember Tom Werneck at a previous Colloquium (Paris, 2010) outlining the history of this award and the effect it had on expanding the German games industry.

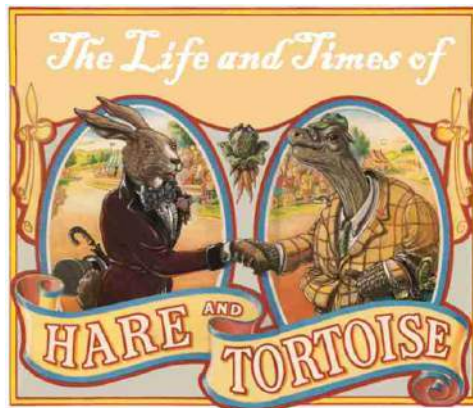


Figure 1: Title based on Gibsons 1987 box design

Forty years ago, said Werneck, German players regarded Britain as the gamers' paradise, and in some respects the initiator, or at least the forerunner, of the German industry which began to eclipse it in the 1980s. One outcome of this expansion has been the tendency of British and American games commentators to designate a whole class of games as "German-style" or "Euro"-games, of which Hare & Tortoise is now widely considered one of the earliest¹.

¹See Woods, Stewart: Eurogames: the Design, Culture and Play of Modern European Boardgames (McFarland 2012).

I have been invited to explain how the game arose, why it has appeared in so many guises, how I nearly lost the rights to it, and why it was nearly withdrawn from the German market as soon as it appeared.

Everyone knows that race games are as old as the hills. Until the 20th century movement was always governed by dice or other randomisers and were therefore essentially games either wholly or largely of chance. But in Hare & Tortoise the key to success lies in the skilful use of resources — specifically, in carrot economics. At start of play each player receives cards representing 65 carrots and places a runner at the start of a track counting 65 spaces to home. At each turn you can move as far as you like, provided you can pay for it. The cost of moving increases in triangular proportion, so you can either hare forwards at great speed and run out of carrots early, or plod slowly spending one at a time but then risk losing position perhaps irretrievably. How you get carrots back in order to continue the race depends on which square you choose to move to. In addition, the further forward you are in the race, the fewer you get back.



Figure 2: Race games are as old as the hills

Non-dice race games first appeared (as far as I know) with *Bantu* (1955) followed in 1962 by *Formula One*. I was unaware of these and had no conscious intention of inventing a diceless race game when in 1969, inspired partly by the first moon landing and partly by the acquisition of some sheets of attractive dark-blue stout card, I developed a game called *Space Race*. Earth was at the bottom of the board, moon at the top, and the object was to get your spacecraft from Earth to Moon and back. You started with 60 units of fuel and, as this wasn't enough to do the trip, you placed three re-fuelling stations anywhere on the board.



Figure 3: Movement is governed by carrot economics, player interaction is based on changing relative positions in the race

The cost of moving was triangular, and changing your orientation by 60 degrees also counted as a move, so it cost six just to turn round completely. This still seems like a good storyline to me and I can't remember why I abandoned the game, though it's a well-known fact that once the moon was landed on people lost all interest in the real space race.



Figure 4: Non-dice race games: Bantu, Formula 1

In 1972 I joined the games-testing panel of the newly-founded Games & Puzzles magazine, and soon felt moved to produce something novel to throw to the lions. I remembered liking the mechanism of Space Race, but thought that using a two-dimensional grid made for difficulties. So I decided to junk the theme and try the mechanics out on a linear track.

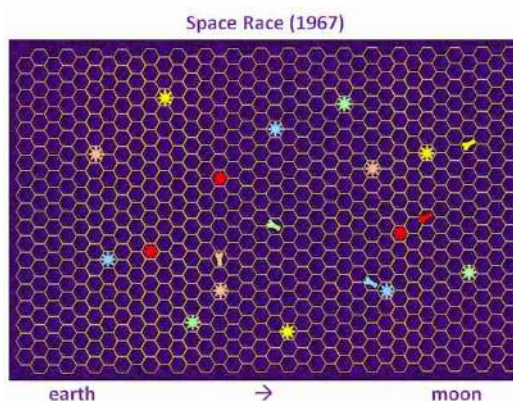


Figure 5: Space Race (unpublished, 1967)

I drew an 8x8 grid of 64 squares in a boustrophedon (zigzag) layout, with Start at one end and Home at the other, and then wondered what to put on the squares. Obviously they had to be different ways of getting fuel back when you ran out. The first would be equivalent to the fuel dumps that already existed in *Space Race*. I marked these in with a random symbol. Then it seemed a nice idea to vary the amount of fuel you could acquire in inverse proportion to your position in the race, so the further ahead you were, the less you received. Accordingly, I next randomly marked some squares with numerals 1, 2, 3, 4 on which fuel could be gained in appropriate amounts. Then I thought of other ways, such as gaining fuel by missing a turn, or by travelling backwards, or even by some random event like rolling a die. Three more symbols were needed for these, and I duly marked them in to produce a board that looked like Figure 6.

Having drafted my board, I tried a test run by playing the part of four players with different characters. The first would spend fuel profligately, racing ahead fast but running out of fuel soonest. The second would spend it sparingly, conserving energy but initially lagging behind. The third would play strategically, considering each position on its merits, and the fourth would play completely at random, or at least follow a mix of behaviours. Two or three run-throughs were enough to suggest, to my delight, that the analytical player tended to win, and there suddenly came to mind the thought “This is rather like Aesop’s fable of the hare and the tortoise”.

From there on the game virtually invented itself. Your fuel would be carrots, and the non-numerical squares would naturally be carrots, lettuces, hares, and tortoises. You would gain carrots by pausing on a carrot square,

S→	!	4	2	3	X	?	1
3	?	1	⊙	4	!	3	2
!	2	4	1	3	X	!	?
⊙	X	1	⊙	?	⊙	2	4
4	3	!	2	X	1	4	?
1	?	4	3	?	2	⊙	!
2	!	3	4	1	?	2	3
H←	X	⊙	!	X	1	⊙	X

Figure 6: Testing the basic pre-thematic idea

or by travelling backwards to a tortoise square, or by landing on a lettuce and converting it into carrots. And the hazard squares would of course be hares, which are traditionally mad, or at least unpredictable. It was the ideal example of the mechanics of a game inspiring the theme or storyline rather than vice-versa.

Everything from here to publication happened with leporine rapidity (hare-like speed). I tested and modified the game with real players in autumn 1973, then took it to the *Games & Puzzles* test panel, who sent me out of the room and rated it 6/6. Graeme Levin, the magazine's founder and publisher, undertook to act as my agent (for 50% of the proceeds) and offered it to Philmar Games. When they turned it down he next went to a new company called Intellect Games, all of whose products we had admired, and they accepted it. We signed the contract just before Christmas 1973, and by next June it was on the market in this original design by Shirtsleeve Studios (Figure 7), which in some ways still remains my favourite.

For the next few years it came high on the list of most popular boardgames as voted on by *Games & Puzzles* readers. The Intellect Games people went to all the Toy Fairs then current and signed a sub-licensing agreement with Otto Maier Verlag (Ravensburger Games). So far so good, but now the rot very nearly set in. Intellect Games went into receivership and in 1978 sold out to an industrial materials company called Turner Research Ltd. Unlike Intellect, Turner had no experience of games but probably just wanted to get on the bandwagon, perhaps inspired by the success enjoyed by Invicta



Figure 7: From abstract to thematic prototype



Figure 8: Intellect Games (1972-1977)

Plastics with *Mastermind*. Graeme and I promptly went into litigation to try to retrieve our rights to the game, especially as it was now wanted by Waddingtons House of Games, in those days the leading British games publisher.

Meanwhile, in 1979 Ravensburger published their first edition under the title *Hase und Igel*, or *Hare & Hedgehog*. Hedgehogs replaced tortoises because the equivalent German fable, collected by the brothers Grimm, has a different storyline.



Figure 9: First edition (Intellect Games, 1974)

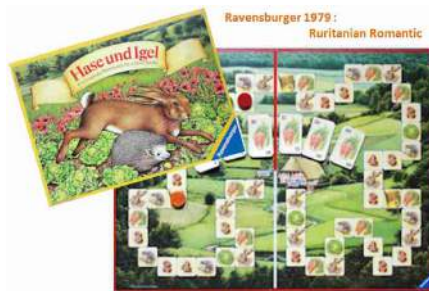


Figure 10: Ravensburger's Game of the Year (1979)

Whereas Aesop's motto is "Slow but steady wins the race", the Grimm version is "*Schlau und langsam gewinnt*" — "Slowly but slyly wins the race" — since the hedgehog wins by cheating. But even the Ravensburger edition was jinxed, being very nearly withdrawn before publication. It transpired that the company reps had difficulty in understanding the game sufficiently well to promote it to retailers, perhaps partly because it looks so much like a children's game but actually is too sophisticated for most children under ten. According to Werneck, the message went out "This game is poison — forget about selling it and push our other games instead".

Had nobody thought to question this command, *Hase und Igel* might have died stillborn. What saved it was the establishment in 1979 of the *Spiel des Jahres* — the Game of the Year Award. This award, the first and still the most prestigious of its kind, is made annually by a jury of games critics who test, review and critique newly-published games. Founded by a group of journalists led by Tom Werneck and Bernward Thole, their aim was to provoke the games industry into competing with one another to produce the best games possible. Also, of course, their perceptive and analytical reviews encouraged potential purchasers themselves to become more critically demanding, thus establishing a *perpetuum mobile* of sophisticated supply and demand.

Amongst the 20 or more games they considered were also *Twixt* (Alex Randolph), *Acquire* (Sid Sackson), *Alaska* (Eric Solomon), and *Shogun* (Teruo Matsumoto). Although *Hase und Igel* eventually prevailed, it was by no means a foregone conclusion. Possibly it succeeded because it came near the top of everybody's list while its rivals ranked highest with some critics and lowest with others. Whatever the intricacies, they declared *Hase und Igel* Game of the Year 1979. For maximum prestige and publicity they wanted the ceremony to take place in a major city and the award to be presented by a member of parliament. For this they secured Antje Huber, then Minister for Family Affairs, who agreed to make the presentation provided it was held in her constituency. Her constituency happened to be Essen — and that's why the exhibition centre at Essen remains to this day the venue for the biggest annual toy fair in the world.

Needless to say, the management at Ravensburger were taken aback by the critics' acclaim for the game they had thought was poison and should be hidden away somewhere like some lunatic old relative. Fortunately, one of their reps read Werneck's review of it in Germany's most prestigious newspaper, in which he also announced the probable establishment of an award. Surprised to find the game so highly rated, he decided to test it more thoroughly with his family, which in those days was not something reps would normally do as a matter of course. To his surprise, they enjoyed it, and he encouraged his colleagues to give it a similar run with their own families and friends. Now Ravensburger were in a bind. They had decided to remove H&T from their product range because the representatives' inactivity was producing poor orders, and yet here their reps were, now busily selling the game. After much dithering Ravensburger decided to accept the award, despite its novelty and uncertainty as to whether it would impact on sales or reputation.

Meanwhile, back home, Graeme and I were still engaged in a legal tussle with Turner Research to retrieve the licensing rights. This was now becoming urgent, as Ravensburger were paying royalties into a holding account until they knew whom to send them to. Eventually, in 1980, we reached an agreement by which Turner released their claim in return for a payment of 500. This enabled us to go ahead with licensing the British edition to Waddingtons, who, to my chagrin, produced a rather disappointing version. Presumably the sub-Disney artwork was supposed to look more child-friendly, but its overall cheapness was emphasised by the use of a floppy cardboard box and a component reduction that reduced the maximum number of players from six to four.

For the next few years my half of the royalties for all editions was more



Figure 11: Bundesfamilienministerin Antje Huber, Erwin Glonnegger (Ravensburger), and author. [So here's Antje Huber presenting the award to Erwin Glonnegger, then responsible for Ravensburger's entire range of games, with me standing around in the role of innocent bystander.]



Figure 12: Waddingtons Disneyesque design (1980)

than enough to live on. Both Ravensburger and Waddingtons extensively sublicensed their versions to other countries, producing a wide range of variations in a dozen or so languages. Variations included also promotional versions, such as Waddington's strategy game for Britvic, and an Austrian one, Voltinger und Wattinger, presumably produced by Ravensburger. More interestingly, a number of pirated editions appeared in other countries, mostly but not entirely behind the Iron Curtain. More touching were the home-made versions, mostly from the then GDR. The German Games Museum at Chemnitz recently mounted a special exhibition of home-made games, including several versions of *Hase und Igel*. My favourite is *Energie*, by Wolfgang Gropf. Ingeniously, he constructed the race track from playing-cards.

Waddingtons ceased production of *Hare & Tortoise* in the mid-eighties,



Figure 13: A variety of languages



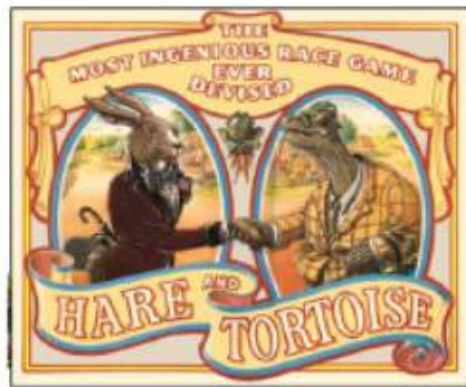
Figure 14: Promotional versions (Britvic; Voltinger und Waddinger)

and in 1987 Gibsons Games, a long-established British family firm, asked if they could license it. By this time I was no longer in touch with Graeme Levin, so I said “yes” independently and took the opportunity to ask them to junk the Waddington design and return to Shirtsleeve Studio for new artwork. For this edition I introduced a change to the sequence of some squares in the race-track, which has remained in all subsequent editions, and made substantial changes to both the method and the outcome of “juggling the hare” — that is, the randomly prescribed outcomes of landing on a hazardous hare square.

Gibsons ceased production in the 1990s, and in 1999, to my surprise and disappointment, so did Ravensburger after a solid run of 20 years. Thus for a brief period at the turn of the century no new copies were being printed. Fortunately, however, two or three other German companies expressed interest in taking it on, and I eventually licensed it to Abacus Spiele, chiefly because they were offering the largest advance on royalties, of which I was then in dire need.



Figure 15: Home-made in the GDR by Wolfgang Gropf (“Energie”)



Gibsons Games, 1987, with revisions

Figure 16

To avoid any dispute over artwork copyrights Abacus departed completely from Ruritanian romance and instead turned the two protagonists into very urban-looking racing car drivers. I wasn't happy with their design, mainly because of the hare on the box-lid, whose menacing grin looks less like that of a racing driver than of a used-car salesman. Abacus sublicensed to Rio Grande Games in America, so at least there was now an English-language edition to fill the Gibson gap.

But then in 2007, in a complete about-face, Ravensburger decided they would really like to have it back after all. After an arrangement with Abacus, Ravensburger re-entered the race with a design based on that of their 1979 original. More surprisingly, Gibsons also had a change of heart and asked again to publish a British version in 2010. As Shirtsleeve Studios no longer existed, I asked Gibsons to commission a design from Simon Chadwick, a Southampton-based cartoonist who had drawn some attractive hare and tortoise characters for my website. The result was so startlingly different from anything that had gone before that many players took against it. Perhaps the box is rather too stark, but the board looks beautiful as a piece



Figure 17: Abacus and Rio Grande edition (2000-2008)

of artwork to hang on the wall, if marginally less functional as a playing tool. Michael Gibson explained that he wanted to depart completely from the perception of *Hare & Tortoise* as a children's game and introduce a note of sobriety more in keeping with the strategic seriousness. He didn't even allow Chadwick to complete his intended colourful artwork of British landmarks decorating the periphery of the race-track — they remain the simple outline sketches that he made for his first rough draft.



Figure 18: Gibsons' radical design departure (2010 – current)

In 2013 arrived a pleasing email from Devir Iberia, a relatively new Spanish games company who also publish such classics as *Carcassonne*, *Dominion* and *Settlers of Catan*, saying that they would like to produce an edition with rules in three languages — Spanish, Portuguese and Catalan — for sale in all the relevant-speaking regions including South America. This duly appeared in November 2014, using the motor-racing artwork originated by Abacus.

In 2015 yet another unexpected email appeared in my inbox. This was

from Benoît Forget, the CEO (or equivalent) of Purple Brain Creations (Paris), with a radical proposal for abstracting the mechanism of *Hare & Tortoise* and attaching it to an entirely different theme based on a classic novel. We are, at time of writing, revising a contract which, if implemented, should see the resultant new game appearing in September 2016.

So much for the cardboard game — now what about the keyboard? From the calculations required for successful play you might think *Hare & Tortoise* eminently suitable for translation into a computerised format. As early as 1980 it was enthusiastically reviewed in the British journal *Computer News*, and in 1984 Ravensburger started making moves in an electronic direction, but soon came to a halt. Perhaps surprisingly, only in France can you play it online against live opponents — for details, see Ludagora.net. A few years ago an American programmer did express interest in developing a *Hare & Tortoise* app for the iPhone, but by the time I had retrieved the electronic rights from Ravensburger he had lost interest. The possibility of a keyboard version has now become live again, but at the moment it's too early to make any announcement.

I find it fun to look back on the highly variegated story of my best-known game and the many different transformations it has been through. As it has now lasted more than 40 years, I can only hope that *Hare & Tortoise* will continue to run and run.

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Board Games Studies was first published in 1998, an initiative inspired by the colloquia on board games held at Leiden University, the Netherlands, in 1995 and 1997. Five institutions affiliated themselves with the journal: the Institut für Spielforschung und Spielpädagogik in Salzburg, the International Institute for Asian Studies in Leiden, the Russian Chess Museum in Moscow, the British Museum in London, and the Department of Computer Science at the University of Maastricht. The journal, which was published by CNWS Publications in Leiden on a yearly basis, was partially funded through the assistance of patrons and boasted a modern layout, trilingual summaries and color plates. The broad ambition of this journal required a continuous commitment from the editors, who reviewed contributions in German, French and English, provided translations of summaries for each article and, in several cases, collaborated extensively with authors to develop manuscripts that were to the academic standards of the publication. The journal had a trial run of three years, after which the format, content and review process was evaluated. The authors of the articles integrated wide-ranging literature necessary for a comprehensive understanding of particular games. Contributions from different disciplines — including psychology, computer science, philology, classical archaeology and history — allowed for a better historical and systematic understanding of board games to emerge. Starting in 2000, a section with a translation of primary sources was added. Book reviews and research notes further complemented the multi-faceted contents. Its first ambition, to serve as a platform for the publication of board games research, was met quickly, while gradually the journal gained prominence among researchers by publishing seminal historical overviews. The colloquia continued from 1995 onwards, moving from a biennial to a yearly schedule. The host institution was expanded beyond Leiden to universities and museums throughout Europe as well as Jerusalem, Philadelphia and, in 2013, the Azores. The colloquia continue to gather an enthusiastic group of scholars, players and collectors. Despite the institutional affiliations and a group of patrons, the production of the journal became financially and logistically problematic with CNWS no longer able to serve as a publisher. Reluctantly, the paper version of the journal was discontinued after volume 7 was published in 2004. The possibility of an online version of the journal had been explored with the online publication of the first issues, a decision that greatly assisted the dissemination of knowledge accumulated in those early volumes. The next step, an online journal that operates again as a platform for recent board games research, was not far away but required the skills and enthusiasm of previous and new editors to materialize. In these last fifteen years, the study of board games has gained momentum and this journal will not only showcase new results but, most of all, will encourage and publicize the work of the dedicated researchers in this field.

Alex de Voogt



To the authors

Board Game Studies is an academic journal for historical and systematic research on board games. Its object is to provide a forum for board games research from all academic disciplines in order to further our understanding of the development and distribution of board games within an interdisciplinary academic context. Articles are accepted in English, French, and German and will be refereed by at least two editors under the final responsibility of the Editorial Board. Please send your contributions in any editable format (Word, L^AT_EX, rtf, ...) with a matching PDF file. Please send all the illustrations in separate files.

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