

The Gathering of Friends 2003 – Columbus, Ohio

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The Gathering of Friends is a nine-day gaming event thrown by Alan Moon, designer of countless award-winning German games. I was invited through the kindness of Holger Herrmann, owner of the game store Spielbar in Germany and a retailer of Eight Foot Llama games. This was my first Gathering, and for diehard fans of Euro-gaming, it is about the most fun you can have.

Some 237 people came this year, playing in and out of a hotel ballroom that was literally packed with games. You would be very hard-pressed to name a game that was not in Columbus that week. And on dozens of tables, round the clock, these games were played almost without pause. Getting into a game could not be easier; lingering by a stack usually resulted in an invitation to play within moments. And that's obviously the real fun of the Gathering – meeting lots of gamers, and just spending time with hordes of kind and terrific people.

Besides the endless pickup games, there are also scheduled tournaments, and a few special events as well. I was only at the Gathering for 4 days, but I was lucky enough to catch the Treasure Hunt, which this year was a series of challenging puzzles based on the game Clue. There was also a highly entertaining Family Feud game which about 70 people played at once, loaded with game-themed questions.

And that's another thing about the Gathering crowd: they can be playing heavy-thought games like Die Macher and Amun-Re one minute, and then have a blast playing Loopin' Louie and Family Feud the next. Good times.

Everyone brings a game to the Gathering as a doorprize, and on the last night, Alan hosts a ceremony to give them all away. This is yet-another highlight of the event, as the prize table is piled high with great games, some of which are very hard to find.

For the record, this year I played: Edel, Stein + Reich, Mare Nostrum, Amun-Re, Europa Tour, New England, Compatibility, Goldland, Eiszeit, TransAmerica, Hick Hack in Gackelwack, Traumfabrik (my new favorite game), Crokinole, Loopin' Louie, Captain Clever, Mystery in the Abbey, and Phoenix. I also learned to play Clans, Battle Line, and Dschunke. Of all of these, Crokinole was the only one I'd played before, so I'm greatly indebted to everyone who took time to teach rules to me!

I won't try to mention everyone I met, but I will thank Holger Herrmann for the invitation, Walter Hunt for his assistance at the prize ceremony, and of course Alan Moon for running the whole thing. I'll also mention that despite the stresses that come with throwing such a large event, every time I saw Alan, he was clearly enjoying himself immensely – while successfully ensuring all of his guests were doing the same.