

Just like in real life gambling till the bubble bursts

The following sentence can be found in Friedemann Friese's Friday diary: "It is bone-dry, but really good fun". The person quoted here is the writer of this review, and what he is referring to is the game **SCHWARZER FREITAG (BLACK FRIDAY)**. So, this is already the conclusion then? Not at all! But let's explain the game first.

We will be playing the stock market, until the bubble will explode and the shares crash. By then we will hopefully have channeled off enough profit and invested it in crisis-proof precious metals; because in the end silver bars will be decisive for victory.

In your turn, you have the choice between the following actions: Either

- you can buy shares or
- you can sell shares or
- you can buy silver or
- you are doing none of these.

The latter does not mean, however, that nothing is happening. Passing will also have an effect on events. At the beginning of the game very little is going on yet. The markets are quiet, the stock prices low and our scope of action very limited as we at this moment can only deal in one share at a time.

The shares are represented by small wooden briefcases in five different colors, with each color representing a company. There are equal numbers of all colors in the game and they all start with the same market value; but the contents of each player's

start package, the shares waiting for buyers on the market and those later drawn from a bag and entered into the game – all these components are determined by chance during the set-up.

! And all with taxpayers' money

We also need money, but do not have a single dime. This is not a problem, though, because the state will support needy business ventures, as Friedemann Friese so aptly observes. So we do not take out a loan; instead we receive subsidies. The advantage is that there is no need for repayment at the end of the game – we can just squander all of it.

If I use the money to buy a share, this will affect the market trend – but often not immediately. To grasp the subtle mechanism, we need to take a closer look at the board. Apart from the market price table, there are several bars for buying and selling. The latter are filled with colored briefcases at the beginning of the game, the buying bars are empty. If I buy a share, I take a briefcase out of the supply called market that is next to the board and put it in the depot behind my screen.

A further case of the same color is placed on the buying bar. Stock prices are not necessarily affected by this action. Only when three briefcases of one color are placed on the bar will this particular stock increase in price. When the bar is filled to the max, all prices will change.

A change of all stock prices means: A few briefcases are drawn out of the bag, which then increase the prices of the respective shares, the more briefcases the better it is. These briefcases will subsequently go into the market, in exchange for those from the filled sales bar that in turn wander into the bag. This implies that the prices of these shares will later increase more likely, as there are more briefcases in the bag to be drawn out at some time. A similar principle is used for the selling of shares, but here a briefcase is removed from the at-start filled sales bar. If it is half-empty, this will also trigger a change in the prices.

! Convert profits into cash

The market price table is subdivided into several levels. If a stock price climbs into a new value band, this will affect several factors simultaneously: The trading limit is relaxed; we are now allowed to buy more than one share; new subsidies become available and the number of briefcases to be drawn out of the bag in case of a price change will increase. The latter ensures that the jumps in prices on the higher levels are potentially greater in extent.



The Friday Project

On October 24, 2008 during the SPIEL in Essen, Friedemann Friese decided to work on a game every Friday for the next five years. At least for five minutes, or fifteen, twenty-five ... up to fifteen hours. The game was supposed to be published five years later on the SPIEL '13. And it was to be called "Friday".

After three Fridays he came up with precise ideas in his Friday diary for a game called "Black Friday". In April 2009 he stated: "Well, I've got myself in a fine mess. The game is all but ready." What was he to do? He decided to offer the game to several publishers and carry on instead with another Friday game, which can then be published in 2013.



Constantly advancing shares: oh heart, what more do you desire. It could all be so nice, if only for the black briefcases. With every new level an additional black briefcase is put into the bag, likewise half-empty sales bars provide for black briefcases, sometimes for two or three. And black cases are bad! They ruin the stock prices.

A single one drawn out of the bag during a price change is harmless. With several black briefcases, however, share prices will pummel. On the other hand, the black cases will drive the prices for silver up.

Oh yes, talking about the silver! It starts at a moderate price, but higher than the shares. Whenever their prices are reassessed, the silver price also increases, provided that at least three silver bars have been bought since the last price adjustment. Or black briefcases were drawn out of the bag. Silver is stable in value. At best, its exchange rate stagnates occasionally, but in general it tends to climb rigidly.

It has to be that way, as the exchange rate for silver determines the end of the game. As soon as it reaches the number 100, meaning the end of the scale, it is time for the reckoning. All players take whatever subsidies they are entitled to and buy silver for the resulting money. Whoever owns the most silver bars wins.

Many devils in the detail

It is obvious that you have to invest in silver on time, but to wait until the right moment is a delicate matter. The money invested in silver is no longer available for speculations and these promise more potential – at least for a while. The briefcase colors drawn out of the bag, the prices that go up: these



are – no matter what the chances – a question of luck, at least concerning the point in time when the price rise comes about. At the start there are 30 cases in the bag; the exact mixture remains unknown, as it is not obvious what colors the other players are hiding behind their screens. During the course of the game, the number of briefcases in the bag decreases, because more are being drawn than are thrown in. The probability of black cases popping up increases accordingly. These are, as mentioned before, at first not in the bag at all, later in increasing numbers. But for all that, Dame Fortune still decides when they appear and how much the stock prices climb respectively. In some games the prices never exceed the sixth level and in others they get to the end of the scale. Provided that the players make no mistakes, of course.

I had the pleasure of being introduced to SCHWARZER FREITAG on a Friday at a press launch by the Kosmos editor himself. Perfect. My next game took place two months later. This aging reviewer's brain had the rules no longer at the ready by then and therefore needed to rely on the rule-book. In the process some details were overlooked and accordingly the

game turned out badly. Not that





the rules were in any way incomplete or faulty. Everything is included – however not where needed and expected.¹ This becomes obvious in a particularly negative way when you are searching for details you are vaguely aware of having read somewhere. A compendium in table form for the stock price change modalities is available in our “Tweaks and Variations” department (page 60).

It is however really tricky: The game offers many small chances to tweak the mechanism that do not necessarily seem logical. When I sell a share, its price slides immediately one square to the left in the table. When I buy a share, the price does not change at all. When I buy the last share of one color at the market, its price immediately slides one square to the right. Should the color still be missing, even after the price has been changed, the price will wander



one square up. After it has moved left or down because of the price changes. And I then need to bear in mind that three briefcases in the same color will also induce a price change.

This will not, however, then lead to a change in levels, even when the price reaches a new level. That is exactly what makes the game seem so bone-dry. It is almost like sitting at an old-fashioned switchboard, sliding one switch to the right, another one up, plugging in a plug, pulling a lever somewhere else. Actually, quite ideal settings for a computer game.²

“It is bone-dry, but really good fun”, I quoted my first impression at the beginning of this article. In the meantime, I shall have to add: “if no mistakes are made in the game”. Admittedly, this is not quite meant as it was formulated three paragraphs above. What I am alluding to here is the proper way of playing. If you ruin yourself by speculation or sell your shares too early, you will starve prematurely and only be able to pass until the end of the game – unsatisfactory. I have also witnessed



games that stalled in the last third because the price for silver was momentarily stagnating – unsatisfactory. As the game is not able to prevent this, it merely scores a 7 in my verdict.

But maybe it is all the players' fault. They are simply too honest and lack the unscrupulousness of stockbrokers; they consider subsidies a burden and do not want to live off the state; they do not like to speculate on credit. All these people can learn a lot by playing SCHWARZER FREITAG. *KMW/cs*

1 Kosmos is now aware of the problem and the editorial staff are working out new rules.

2 As a matter of fact it is now possible to play SCHWARZER FREITAG online on www.yucata.de, but with slightly modified rules. There are no screens; everyone knows what shares the other players have. Sometimes Friedemann Friese joins in on the platform.



Title: **Schwarzer Freitag**
 Publisher: **Kosmos**
 Designer: **Friedemann Friese**
 Artist: **Christian Fiore**
 Players: **2–5**
 Age: **about 12 and up**
 Duration: **about 55 minutes**
 Price: **about 35 €**

Reviewer	Playing appeal
KMW	7
Nicola Balkenhol	7
Udo Bartsch	5
Christwart Conrad*	7
L. U. Dikus**	8
Matthias Hardel***	8
Wieland Herold	6
Edwin Ruschitzka****	5
Harald Schrapers*****	6

* *Fears and hopes of a shareholder can be re-lived wonderfully. Problematical rule hurdles. Sometimes a drop in excitement near the end.*
 ** *Thematically precise despite being prone to mistakes because of the rules.*
 *** *see box.*
 **** *Little charm in relation to outer and inner values.*
 ***** *The implementation through rules and subtle thematic ideas of this challenging gaming concept is not convincing.*

Only rarely have I seen such a bad rule that still contained everything. The relaxed rules concept, albeit well meant, would have had to be supplemented by gaming aids. It appeared to me as if the publisher had relied on the renowned author – and vice versa. Plus it seems doubtful that the rules have been blind-tested with inexperienced players. But it is more that experienced players – the target group of SCHWARZER FREITAG with its “gourmet” mechanisms – are in the gravest danger of making mistakes, as they may treat it like a supposedly conventional game, tend to skim-read the rules and proceed as usual. It is unusual how much the game takes badly to the tiniest mistakes. What a shame if the flow is then interrupted and the game put aside for this very reason. Because the way that Friedemann Friese loads the bag with potential for stock price increases and market breaking is actually quite awesome and as yet unheard of. Moreover, there has never before been a stock exchange game that presents in such an elegant way the price influences of two diverse groups. On one hand we players adjust the prices. This happens in a familiar and reasonable way. It allows reacting to the players' actions and calculating their will to seek profit. Often a true herd instinct can be observed, just like at the real stock exchange. On the other hand, we are dealing with the world beyond the game table, brilliantly represented by the bag. Its arbitrariness results in dramatic price explosions and sudden price crashes, which could never be induced by pure player action. Judged by its concept, SCHWARZER FREITAG is without a doubt a masterpiece, but you have to be willing to engage with it, even when all rule hurdles are cleared.