

Many Kramer Tracks Lead to Rome

The introduction perplexes me: "Two to four Romans leave their home with a clear destination in mind: Rome." What is a Roman's home then, if not Rome? But I learned something: In the times of the Roman Empire, Romans lived everywhere – except for one small Gaulish village, perhaps, but that's another story.



The subtitle of the latest work by Michael Rieneck and Stefan Stadler asserts: "Many roads lead to Rome." But in fact, there are not quite that many roads – to be precise, only four.

Each player has his own way on which he tries to reach Caesar's Palace in Rome as quickly as possible.

He takes from his province (his own repository board) whatever a Roman of that time had on hand: a handful of sesterces, water, wine and grain, one centurion, one vestal virgin (!), and – one die. That's what he starts with from his village at the edge of the gameboard. A whole fifteen steps are lying ahead of him. In order to master them, he needs to gain favor and privileges from Caesar. The means are manifold. And in this sense, there actually *are* many roads leading to Rome.

I Water into wine or what?

Action cards are laid out around the gameboard, face up. On your turn, you can choose from those lying at your side of the gameboard. On top of this, there are additional resources from the stock that you can turn into money or keep for better things. If you take wine, you can increase the quantity by giving up water. (Did the Romans possibly adulterate their alcohol?) A builder allows you to erect a house, which gives you individual advantages. You can hire additional centurions, but their price increases the more you own. This virtually applies to the vestal virgins as well – who

aren't bought, of course. Instead, for a contribution, they are at your service ... in religious terms.

On your turn, you select one of your cards, carry out the relevant action, and then exchange the card with a card lying in front of one of the other players. This player can use that card in his next turn, but you can't for the time being. In order not to have your new card stolen right away, you turn it over.

The centurion allows you another action, which is carried out without the card exchange, though. And he takes his leave as soon as you use him this way; therefore, this action is optional.

If you have improved your resources in one way or the other, you try to win the favor of the emperor. This brings Fortuna in person into play – in the

form of the die. Six consecutively numbered favor cards lie on the gameboard around Rome; the higher the number rolled the greater the favor. The die determines which of the favors (maximally) you may use, provided you make the sacrifice demanded. If you are not able or willing to do so, Caesar reacts with displeasure and demands one sesterce, declared a tax. But if you do, he waves his hand benevolently and you may get one or two steps closer to him; that means, advance toward the palace. For instance, if you send centurions back to the barracks or give up cubes of water or wine or grain.

I Vesta! Get me a beer another die!

The vestal virgins are faithful: They don't go back to their temple if you advance with their help. And they are useful: By using the clergy (an action), you can exchange one vestal virgin for an additional die – the advantage being that you can choose the better die roll result when you roll the dice for the next favor.

Unfortunately, each favor is only available once in each round of the game. If you go last, it might happen that a bad die roll keeps you from advancing. There are no possibilities for improving the result of the roll. Fortunately, the order of play is deter-



mined anew every round: first, by a special action card, second, by money. Since richer players are favored, this is an incentive to turn your resources into money. However, these resources are missing when you need to give them up for favors.

And then there are the privileges.

Every time a favor is not used, a token is put on the card. If Fortuna grants this favor later on, the beneficiary may take a privilege, and possibly even choose between two or three alternatives. These cards provide various advantages, too. Half of them give you additional victory points in the final scoring; others give you resources or a little push forward on your way to Rome.

As soon as a player enters Caesar's palace, the others don't have much time left – the current round is completed and this ends the game. If you are then still standing outside the gates of Rome, you can spare yourself the trouble of counting victory points, because you have lost in any case. The player with the most points wins.

I Original mechanism

The mechanism for the action cards that Rieneck and Stadler have come up with is original; we hadn't experienced something like this before. Each player can choose three out of 12 possible actions. For beginners, it makes sense to allot them; later, when players have become more familiar with the game, each of them chooses his starting contingent. This works only to a limited extent, of course, since others might have the same desires. You can always recognize what cards are at the other players' disposal, even if the cards are face down, since their function is also shown on the back. With a special action card, you can even use another player's card.

Thanks to the mandatory exchange after carrying out the action, you can take what you need on your next turn; however, you can't use this action again before the turn after next. And the player you have done the exchange with has to adapt himself to the new situation.

You can't put obstacles directly in the other players' way to Rome. At best, you can – at least in the three- and four-player game – snatch buildings from under their noses. The basilica, for instance, allows you to keep more than one privilege card

(that's why this card is the most expensive one). And the palace helps "married" players take a double step on their way to the destination. Ah, yes, "Starting a family" is also one of the possible actions.

From its visual appearance, FORTUNA is a pure 4-player game. Even if you play with fewer players, all four sides of

the gameboard are equipped with action cards, since all cards are needed to keep the balance. The number of buildings of each type is one less than the number of participants. The two-player game does without this scarcity – which means there is one element less of suspense.

As for competing for the favor of the emperor, the game lives up to its name. Which favors you are allowed to choose is pure luck. The fact that you can get yourself a second or third die doesn't change much. If you like to surrender to the luck of the die roll, you are in good hands with this game; otherwise, you'll miss the inclusion of a regulating element.

Don't expect any great leaps forward if you set out for Rome. The game makes headway somewhat slowly; with four players, it can actually take two hours until the first player has covered the (actually, not even so many) small steps. The version that we had at our disposal had a pre-release set of rules. We found some problematic points in the instructions, which were also unclearly structured. For this reason, we can't give a rating for FORTUNA here.

KMW/sbw



Title: **Fortuna**
Publisher: **The Game Master**
Designer: **M. Rieneck, St. Stadler**
Artist: **Franz Vohwinkel**
Players: **2-4**
Age: **about 10 and up**
Duration: **about 60 minutes**
Price: **about 35 €**