



Expat designs new board game on Switzerland

By Jeremy Allen

Lausanne - 12 November 2008 | 16:35

Helvetiq/Redcut

A new board game aimed at teaching people general knowledge about Switzerland went on sale this week in French, with a version in English planned for the first half of 2009. Helvetiq, which was dreamt up by a non-Swiss businessman, contains in its box two games, one on general Swiss trivia and another about this country's political system. It might even help you through the citizenship test.

The first of the two games in the box, which is emblazoned with the Swiss flag, is a Trivial Pursuit-type board game. The questions include classics, like 'who wanted to imprison William Tell', more modern ones like 'how did the Swiss inventor of Velcro come by chance across his invention', and the downright contemporary 'who are the Freitag brothers?' (Editor's note: answers below.)

Two to four players must work their way along a line of cows at the top of the board and reach a chalet to claim victory.

The second game allows players to play the role of politicians and climb the Swiss political ladder from commune or municipal level to a place in the federal cabinet. They must create laws at appropriate times.

The games were first dreamt up by Hadi Barkat a few years ago when he applied for Swiss citizenship in Lausanne. Barkat, originally from Algeria, had to meet the mayor and answer some general knowledge questions about Switzerland as part of the procedure to obtain a passport. "I asked some of my Swiss friends some of the questions and they found they didn't always know the answers," he told Swisster.

Barkat, who is a venture capitalist by trade, decided with some friends from his student days at the EPFL science university in Lausanne to design a board game that would "make sure people learned". The box set became their hobby. Along with a design team, the game in

French took them 20 months to produce.

" For now we only have a French version due to limited funds, but we're keen to make a version in English, which we aim to produce in the first half of 2009," said Barkat. Some communes in western Switzerland have also shown interest in the game, which could be useful for foreigners applying for citizenship or Swiss youngsters turning eighteen, according to the game's designer. Currently, Vevey is interested in buying the game, Barkat said.

The answer to the general knowledge questions are:

Hermann Gessler wanted to imprison William Tell, as he refused to bow before a pole on which was perched the protector's hat.

The Freitag brothers are the Swiss designers of the famous bags made from recycled materials such as truck tarpaulins, seat belts and bicycle inner tubes.

The Swiss inventor Georges de Mestral thought up his method of fastening clothes 100 years ago, after returning from a walk and discovering burrs stuck to his clothes. The seeds inspired him to develop Velcro. The name was derived from 'velour' and 'crochet'.