



English version of Helvetiq game launches this weekend

*By Jeremy Allen
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Helvetiq

An English version of Helvetiq, a board game reminiscent of Trivial Pursuit that incorporates a quiz on Switzerland and a competition that tests players' knowledge of the country's political system, is set to go on sale in shops and online on August 1. As well as serving as a fun diversion on rainy days, it provides a helpful exercise for those applying for Swiss citizenship, serving as an incentive to bone up on helpful facts and figures.

A new English-language version of the board game Helvetiq goes on sale in book and retail stores in Switzerland starting August 1 to coincide with the Swiss national holiday.

This follows the launch of the game in French by Algerian expat Hadi Barkat at the end of 2008.

Since then it has gone on to become a hit. A venture capitalist by trade, Barkat came up with the idea for the board game while preparing to become a naturalized Swiss citizen - something he succeeded in doing in 2007.

During the application process he found that many of his Swiss friends did not know all of the answers to the quiz he had to take to gain citizenship. Barkat struck upon the idea of creating a game for both Swiss and expat wishing to learn more about the country.

"When we launched the game in French, we received many requests for an English translation from people living either in Switzerland or abroad," Hadi Barkat told Swisster. Given the large number of Anglophone expats in this country, it was a "no brainer," he said.

Currently expats who have lived in Switzerland for 12 years are entitled to apply for Swiss citizenship (or five years if you are married to a Swiss citizen). The application process includes an interview that tests the applicant's knowledge of Switzerland.

Helvetiq provides much of the background needed to successfully pass the interview phase. It consists of two games.

The first is a race to reach the top of the board, as players pick up quiz cards (there are 156 in total) and answer general knowledge questions on Switzerland. Each card has the same question on both sides but is phrased in a different way.

For instance, the question "What San Francisco building is designed by Swiss architect Mario Botta?" is reformulated on the other side as, "What Swiss architect designed the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art?"

"It's a memory game also and in that way it's a learning mechanism," Sarah Suter, head of marketing at RedCut, the board's designer, told Swisster. "Players go round the board and

come back and answer the questions twice."

Players who get the answers right, advance up the board, which offers a graphic representation of the annual summer ascent cows make to regain mountain pastures in summer.

A second game encourages players to learn about the Swiss political system. They can move up the political ladder using vote cards and can launch initiatives of the type to be submitted to a public vote. The goal of the game is make it into the federal cabinet within a specified time limit.

The initial 3,000 units of Helvetiq sold out in one month and to date the game has sold more than 8,000 copies. Barkat is planning to release versions in Switzerland's other official languages - German and Italian - on the same day as the English version.

He said some municipalities have shown interest in the game to use as a tool to help foreigners applying for citizenship to prepare for their interview. The authorities in Crans-près-Céligny in the canton of Vaud, for example, ordered between 60 and 80 of the French versions of the game, which were distributed to staff.

" We decided to order the games because the presentation is good and is a very fun way of presenting this country," Crans' mayor Gérald Bussy told Swisster. " We are also envisaging ordering more versions to distribute to those who are seeking Swiss nationality," he said. Initially, 2,000 units of Helvetiq in English are to go on sale at a price of 69.90 francs. In western Switzerland, the English version is available at Books Books Books in Lausanne, as well as OffTheShelf and Payot in Geneva.

The game can also be ordered directly from the Helvetiq website. Barkat plans to produce other games, based on the same model, but themed around other European countries.

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