



Go to the Ant

For seven years now the Scottish Lamont brothers have enriched the gaming scene every fall with a new animal-themed release. The sheep from *SHEAR PANIC* and even the rats from *HAMELN* were both examples of cute little critters running around the gaming world. The newest opus, however, is fairly low on the kawaii scale, because of ants as a species on the one hand, and with how they are used in the game on the other. It takes a great deal of imagination even to see that the small wooden playing pieces are actually ants. This changes though once they carry their prey tiles back to the anthill. More on that later.

In this game, the protagonists are the ant-agonists. They spend their days breeding, and dragging prey insects or leaves to their anthill. The scene of the action is a playing board which is ... hmm ... of unusual design, to say the least. It looks like a wild collage of flower beds, compost heaps and dubious slicks, all spreading across a green meadow. Anyone who gardens for a hobby will shudder to see it, as will the average boardgamer.

Take a closer look and you see numerous paths winding their way through the confusion, crossing and re-crossing. A tasty prey insect is placed at most crossroads at the beginning of the game; ladybugs, butterflies, dragonflies. Or perhaps leaves, some juicy with sap, some dried – everything that an ant could wish for.

The Nest defines the rest

In order to bring ants into the game, they first have to be hatched. This means that every player picks them up from his or her supply and puts them into nests.

Even before being hatched, the ant has to know where it is to work later, since there is a separate nest for each kind of terrain. Anyone born in the flower bed nest will then be sent

down the primrose path to the flower beds.

At the center of the playing board and slightly off to one side is a big anthill. This is where our ants all swarm out from, building some-

thing like a railroad network, representing a chain of ants which reach the prey and bring it back to the heap. Transport is one possible action in a round, hatching in a nest is another, leaving the hatching area for the paths is a third. These actions are all planned in your private anthill, which each player has in front of him and builds up during the game.

This private hill is built of hexagonal tiles, six of them to start with, each showing a different symbol and thus a different permitted action. To carry out any action, you put a standard playing pawn onto the corresponding field. Everyone has three pawns, meaning three actions which he can carry out during his turn.

Building your anthill is a fourth action which is absolutely essential to play. You build with tiles which are two hexagons wide, and can place them either alongside the rest, to extend the surface area of your hill, or on top to build it up. The first tactic lets you carry out an action more than once, while the second makes each action more effective.

Upping the ante

The system is as straightforward as it is brilliant. If I put my pawn onto a "hatch" hex on the lowest (first) level of my anthill then only one ant is hatched, but if the hex is on the third level, I can hatch three ants. The same

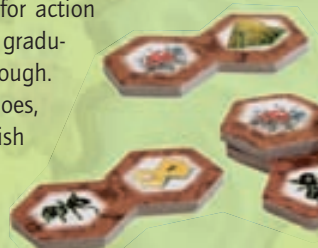
holds true for taking ants from the hatchery and putting them onto paths, for transporting prey, and for extending my anthill. The higher up the action hex, the more effective.

The hill can only be built up with tiles from your own personal supply. This can be replenished from the general supply, which is an action in itself. The general supply is drawn blind from a bag at the beginning of the game and constantly replenished from the bag, the only random element in the game and one which is limited in effect; the available pieces are laid face-up in three rows, so that everyone can see what's up for grabs and



usually has several alternatives to choose from.

So much for the parameters. Everyone is trying to deploy his ants in such a way that they can fetch home as many as possible of those tasty prey insects. The paths to the prey are places of peaceful commerce, where nobody can block anybody else's way. To start with it's not even particularly busy out there on the meadow, since everyone's anthill is still small and the options for action are limited. This gradually changes, though. And when it does, there's a skirmish for the prey,

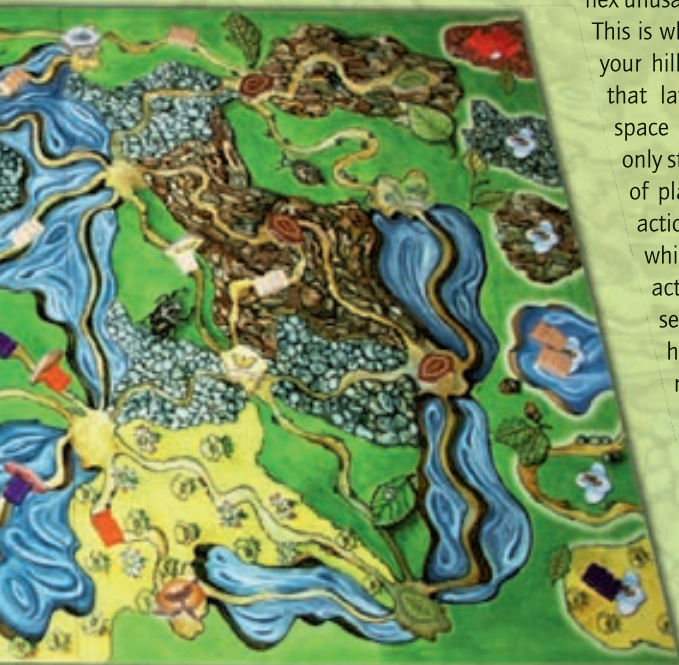




since sadly, there's not enough for every-one. There is one insect too few of each sort in play. And this means: It's time to play rough.

I Pincer movements

In one of the nests, we can hatch soldier ants, thereby putting an end to the peaceful commerce on the paths. Specifically, an ant which was previously crawling harmlessly along on a path suddenly becomes a thief, and steals its neighbor's prey, if the player in question has a soldier in the nest. This doesn't even cost a regular action, but it does cost the soldier its life. We can hatch more though. A player



building material for the anthills. "Lurking" isn't quite the word here, though; you can see the ant-eaters coming, you can roughly anticipate when they will arrive and what havoc they will wreak. It's irksome when they gobble up prey insects, and downright irritating when they raid a nest and you don't have time to get your newly hatched ants to safety.

Time to look now at what happens to the food we transport to the big anthill in the middle of the playing board. Leaves are set to one side for the moment. The insects however - of which you can only bring home one of each kind - are placed onto your own heap, where they are simply in the way. They make one action hex unusable and can't be built over.

This is why it's important to spread your hill out sideways as well, so that later on you have storage space for your prey. Leaves are only stored (or scored) at the end of play. There's a sixth kind of action hex especially for them, which doesn't perform an action as such but simply serves as storage space. The higher up in your hill, the more points the leaf you place there will be worth.

Prey insects on the other hand are multiplied together. Both together decide who wins.

ANTICS is another of those wonderful games where you are faced with the

wanting to use his soldiers in a less aggressive manner has the option of deploying them as guards for his own transport ants. These are then immune from robbery on the paths. For the sake of completeness we should mention that soldiers can also build bridges across the chasm.

The ant's natural enemy also has a part to play in this game; the ant-eater. Several examples of this species are lurking amongst the



dilemma of wanting to do more than you actually can during your turn. Granted, even from the beginning of the game my anthill allows me all the possible actions, but only at the lowest level. Thus the first thing to do is spread out and build up, so as to be able to hatch more than one ant in a round, place more than one ant or transport more than one prey. It takes several rounds to create a flexible working base, and during this time your opponents will have built up their network in the paths. The way that ant trails are built out from the hill to the prey is reminiscent of a railway game, where we build lines out from a common home station to depots to fetch raw material and resources back home. You never need more than four steps to bring the prey

back to the hill. In the last third of the game, at the latest, the ants get antsy, so to speak, and start racing about. A player who realizes that the last ladybug is just about to be snatched away from under his nose has no choice but to deploy his soldiers to grab this prey from his enemy in turn.

Although it might not be immediately evident from the playing board, the game material has been designed with loving care.

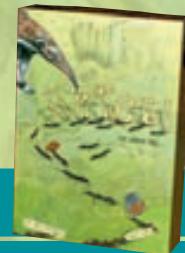
At the very latest, you'll recognize the cute factor by the time you put a prey insect or a leaf onto your ant's back for transport.

The instructions are - as we have come to expect from Frigor Games - written with wit and verve, and have a number of entertaining details.

Of the seven games which the Lamont brothers have put onto the market so far, I find that ANTICS is the best. So it's a shame that it's sold out for now, even from the retailers mentioned on the Frigor homepage. Regrettable also that, so far, no publishers have shown interest in putting out a new edition, which would be desirable.



KMW/sw



Title: **Antics!**
 Publisher: **Frigor Games**
 Designer: **The Lamont Brothers**
 Artist: **Judith Lamont**
 Players: **3-4**
 Age: **about 10 and up**
 Duration: **about 60 minutes**
 Price: **about 40 €**

Reviewer **Playing appeal**
KMW **9**

Christwart Conrad* **7**
Stuart W. Dagger **8**
Stefan Ducksch** **6**

**An original logistics game
 ** The anthill's design and function are a real hit. However, especially with four players there are too few options to be able to do all you need on the busy, crowded board.*