One More Amusement Park

The peninsula at Brooklyn's southern end looks back on an eventful history. In the 19th Century – when Coney Island was still an island – the masses discovered it as a beach resort. To provide diversions, race courses, carousels, and roller coasters were built. Establishments of various kinds provided more amusement. Until the Second World War, the area was considered the largest amusement park in the world. Then the glory faded.

Michael Schacht has taken up the theme of the early days of Coney Island, if only in name. His amusement park could really be anywhere. All you need is a gated green lawn that's divvied up and transferred onto the game board. Gradually, the parcels are developed and can then offer up to four attractions. Well, "attraction" is used lightly, because at first there can only be minor timewasters set up on the site. A weightlifter flexes his muscles, an ice cream vendor provides refreshment, and a fortune teller in her tent promises glimpses into the future. These characters are members of showbiz families and are represented by us, the players.

Each of us has been assigned our own board, made up of three old-fashioned train cars. These are home to nine representatives of the traveling people who want to set up booths in the amusement park. To construct the booths, we need different types and quantities of building materials. The more showmen we convince to set up in the park, the better our own revenues become.

As for how the game operates, everything is well thought out. Every player has his own board, on which the three train cars are shown. Each car has four compartments, but only three are occupied by performer tokens. If a showman leaves a car, vacating the space where the token was, you can see the type of income generated from then on. Depending on the car, this can either be attraction points – you could just as well call them victory points, since they decide the outcome of the game – or building materials or money. As there is always at least one open compartment in each car, a minimum income is guaranteed.

The train board also displays which and how many building materials we need for the construction of our fairground stalls. The materials are the red and white cubes that are drawn randomly from the bag or simply selected.

❚ Policemen for sale

To build a stall in the amusement park is one of three "major actions" that we can take when it is our turn. A second is developing new building lots in the park. This costs money, but also gives us, depending on the area, some sort of immediate income. The third possibility is to build major attractions, the kind that make an amusement park truly enjoyable: a roller coaster, bumper cars, a wild water ride, and the like. Again, for this we need building materials.

We don't have to pick just one of the three main actions, we could choose to do them all and in any order; in principle, we can only choose each option once a turn, but in certain conditions, we can carry them out multiple times. There's more: in the park, there are individuals who offer up their services for us to use as "secondary actions," mostly ways to barter. For example, we can buy a policeman and

with his help trade an attraction point for a building material – at any time, as long as the officer is with us. Unfortunately, he can be bought away from us by other players. But "buy" is the wrong word here, since the money spent doesn't go into our pockets, but to the bank.

We have to say a few words about the great attractions. They can only be built where there are already fairground stalls. That is, the big rides displace the small stalls. The small ones are dismantled, and the performers return to their homes – with the unpleasant consequence that they then reduce our recurring income. Still, dismantling them gets attention, and thus our points multiply. And the performers can also be returned to the park to start fresh somewhere else. Even other

player's booths can be built over – they must be, sometimes, since the big attractions indicate if the dismantled stalls have to belong to one or more players.

Another problem: A roller coaster, for example, extends over four building spaces, and can only be built once four performers have set up shop side by side. These four also have to belong to at least two different families. But when it is

finally finished, the coaster brings its builder at least half a dozen attraction points.

❙ No glory for Rome

Fine, I get it: The big attractions drive my little people out of the park and ruin my regular income. Well, then I'll just send them to the remote corners and leave them there to set up their stalls, where they will not as quickly – or maybe not at all – be built over. Nice idea, but the author of the game punishes players with this idea by subtracting points for each booth left in the park at the end of the game. To end the game, there are several potential conditions, only one of which is sufficient to finish things off.

Following ZOOLORETTO and AQUARETTO, Michael Schacht has once again turned a free time excursion into a game with CONEY ISLAND. Aside from the theme, though, the new game has nothing in common with its predecessors. In fact, it was not originally intended to be about a theme park at all, as Schacht revealed in an interview. Instead, he wanted to rebuild Rome after a fire. But Rome is already the subject of several games on the market, and the publisher was looking for a theme that would appeal to families.

The thematic makeover succeeded, and the game components have the high quality we by now expect from Argentum. As we build up our theme park, there are many loving details to discover – as long as you have good eyesight or a magnifying glass. And the author has balanced the numerous play details with each other. The more expensive it is to bring a showman into play, the more useful the income they will generate. The sooner a major attraction is built, the more attraction points it pulls in.

Still, the life of the traveling people in an amusement park is defined by hardship, with a lack of a little bit of this and a lot of that. Revenues are scarce – the author has seen to it that you can only put a little money aside for a rainy day. And luck can play nasty pranks. Namely, in the income phase, the building material cubes are drawn blindly from the bag. If it is the wrong color, the performers must remain in their trailers. It's a real hassle when this happens a number of rounds in a row. The fortune teller and two of her colleagues allow a player to choose building materials – but only after they have opened their businesses. And for that, of course, you need the right building materials. The only way out is to invest money in the patron, for with his help you can swap building materials. Accordingly, he is highly sought after. And if two players constantly draw the wrong color from the bag, it becomes a scramble for the patron and money.

The journalist is also desired. With his help we can buy a newspaper (which, amazingly, does not cost money, but a building material). Newspapers can either get us victory points at the end of the game, or we use them during play to repeat actions, a possibility that one learns to appreciate.

There are many opportunities to earn points, and it pays to follow the actions of other players. After all, we are building the amusement park together. To try out all the different strategies will take several games. However, each game takes a while, too. The box promises a playing time of 30 to 60 minutes. We're not the fastest thinkers, but also not brooders. In nine four-player games, we never succeeded to play in under 80 minutes, which is a bit too long for what is being offered here. Thus, our enthusiasm, unfortunately, remained restrained.

KMW/sb
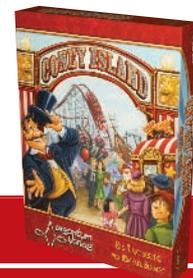
Title:	**Coney Island**
Publisher:	**Argentum**
Designer:	**Michael Schacht**
Artist:	**Dennis Lohausen**
Players:	**2–4 (for two: ↗)**
Age:	**about ca. 10 and up**
Duration:	**about 30–60 minutes**
Price:	**about 30 €**

Reviewer	Playing appeal
KMW	6
Nicola Balkenhol.	6
Udo Bartsch.	5
L. U. Dikus.	7
Stefan Ducksch*	6
Wieland Herold	6

* Smooth and round. So much so that the game doesn't spark.