

Aperitif for The Legends of Andor



A Leitmotif From a Parallel World

On the 11th of August, a small parcel arrives in the mail. No sender, no cover letter. Contents? The photocopy of a newspaper article about a missing female archeologist, two broken twigs and a piece of fur, serving as an envelope for a small wooden tablet. The latter shows one midline and several cross lines, randomly grouped together. Is this some form of game? Is it a promotion? If so, what does it advertise?

Posting in the [spielbox.de](#) forum reveals: Others have also received said parcel. A Facebook group is created on the fly, under the name of "Suchaktion Potsdamer Forst" (search operation Potsdam Forest), because that is where the archeologist has supposedly disappeared, and any new discoveries are exchanged between members. A Google search for Josephine Martenstein, the archeologist's name, reveals that she has left certain records on the Internet. Her employer, the "Archäologische Institut Brandenburg" (Archeological Institute of Brandenburg) also owns a website. According to DENIC, the managing institution of the .de-domains, it has already been running for a couple of years. So, is it not a game after all?

I Fiction or reality?

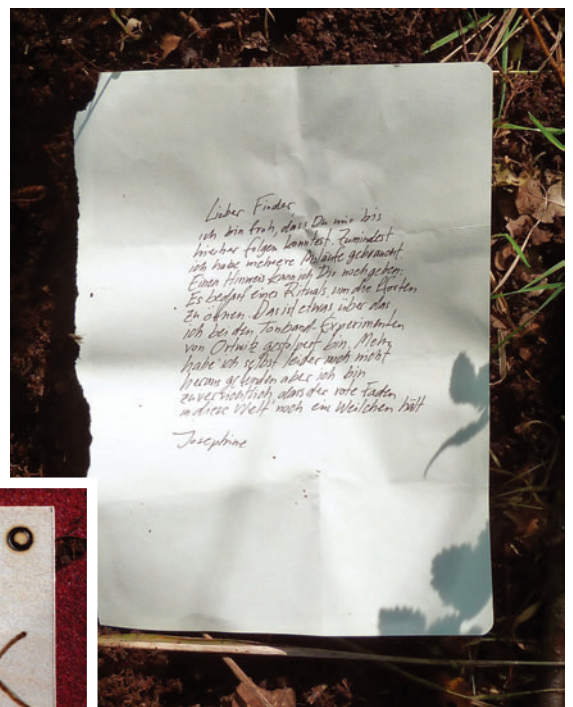
The institute website mentions Josephine's mail address. A mail sent there receives an out of office message: She is currently busy at a dig. In her diary she mentions the geo-coordinates of a site where she has dug out a metal piece

with similar line markings as our wooden tablet. And she is expecting to find even more there. The site, however, is not located in the Potsdam Forest, but at the other end of Berlin, at a distance of only one kilometer, as the crow flies, from the abode of the [spielbox](#) chief editor. Unfortunately, he is on holiday at the moment. Bad timing!

Instead, Kai Blitz (which literally translates into Kai Lightning, his real name, who is the proprietor of an esoteric forum) digs up a small casket engraved with Celtic ornaments. It contains a letter by the arche-

ologist and yet another tablet. Meanwhile – it is still the 11th of August – the community in the Facebook group has found out that the signs on the tablets are taken from the Irish Ogham alphabet. When put together, two of the already discovered seven different tablets result in the word Andor. When entered into the input screen of a certain website, the first portal to Andor is opened up.

By now it should be obvious what we are dealing with here: A board game,





namely *DIE LEGENDEN VON ANDOR* (The Legends of Andor), which is meanwhile available in English, French, Spanish, Italian, Hungarian, Russian and Czech. In the run-up to its publication, the Kosmos publishing house launched an alternate reality game, in short ARG, a novelty in the games sector. About 70 parcels had been sent out, not only to journalists and bloggers from the game scene. Happily, most of them got involved in the adventure.

A man with the illustrious name of Alexander Maximilian Otto Serrano, or Amos for short (see picture below), came up with the game. With his company, soma-labs, he has created the "Erzählkosmos" (narrative cosmos), a venture that is planning to organize a vast amount of adventures. The Kosmos publishing house was their first client and therefore lent its name to the game. Amos has, however, in the past been responsible for numerous ARGs, created for Microsoft and book publishers like PONS, the Aufbau Verlag and Rowohlt, amongst others.

The Andor ARG has been designed in close cooperation with Kosmos and the game's designer

(sic!), Michael Menzel. There were no literary sources for Andor. The preparations took three months. And, as usual, not everything went according to plan. However, that is the nice thing about the job: "Thank goodness unexpected things keep happening," says Amos. The adventure has deliberately been created to respond actively to the players' behavior.

| Prelude to the game

In the developmental stage, Amos made it a matter of special emphasis to include, aside from the board game world, several intermediary historical levels, which needed to be accessible through investigation in the real world.



This way the institute, the workplace of the missing archeologist, has in fact its own homepage, but is nevertheless pure fiction. So is the prelude to the game, of course. Josephine Martenstein had supposedly found out that her great-grandfather Cornelius during his last years took part in strange séances and Celtic rituals, which even he himself may not have entirely understood. His notes, only fragments of which survive, make reference to Andor and the six portals. Also mentioned are radio waves and Reka, a powerful white witch (Reka also appears in the board game). Unfortunately, the man then dies in a fire at his villa during the Walpurgis Night of 1912. His great-granddaughter, who considers her job to be her vocation, starts to investigate into the past. In doing so she obviously enters a parallel world. In her notes, which can be found in the treasure caskets, she talks about a leitmotif, connecting her with this other world.

| Open end?

But let us return to current events: It takes a couple of days for the first portal to Andor on the website to be finally opened. It then reveals new geo-coordinates, this time five kilometers from the abode of the spielbox online editor, as the crow flies. He starts his search the next day and also digs up a casket, its lid embellished with Celtic ornaments. This one contains another tablet and a note by Josephine Martenstein, in which she talks about the audiotape experiments of a certain Mr. Ortwitz. Only a couple of days later a medical file of the Nuremberg hospital arrives in the mailbox. It contains the record of an interview between doctor and patient. His name: Johannes Ortwitz. He has admitted himself to the psychiatric ward because he was hearing voices.



The letter comes with a USB stick, containing part of a zip-file.

Within the Facebook group it quickly becomes clear that the various pieces

have to be united. The problem is, the zip-file is password secured. After some attempts this can be retrieved from the medical file. Finally, the file turns out to

be a sound document, but it only plays back white noise. Andreas Buhlmann of Cliquenabend.de, another player, is finally able, after a lot of fiddling, to coax a clear voice from the sound file: Reka, a character we have already met in the documents, has a message for the players. Among other things she points out that the twigs in the parcels may still be needed. One player on Facebook, meanwhile, has consulted a tree expert to find out their origin. This however comes to nothing, as the photos are simply not good enough.

By now the second portal has opened up and revealed that the next site is in the national park of the Sächsische Schweiz (Saxon Switzerland, near Dresden). Our [spielbox](http://spielbox.de) colleague Udo Bartsch had just spent his holiday there, and left only shortly before the revelation. If only he had stayed one day longer ...

At this point the editorial deadline interrupts our latest coverage. We will keep you updated about further events on the website www.spiel-box.de/sb125e.php. *KMW/cs*