Binary Diskworld

A small planet, rotating around the sun at the same speed as it revolves around itself. So, slowly, verrrry slowly! That is Solenia, as the game instructions tell the readers. The consequence of this peculiarity is that the sun never goes down at the places where it is shining. On the night side, however, people know nothing but darkness. This makes any discussion about abolishing or maintaining daylight saving time superfluous. The utterly unequal distribution of hours of sunshine, however, is problematic. The sunny side permanently lacks water, whereas the vegetation on the other side suffers from continual darkness. Each side is in need of what the other side has plenty of. This is where the game begins.

To achieve a good balance, players, once again, need to gather resources and transport them from A to B. But this time, they use an unusual mode of transport that meets the particular circumstances of the planet: an airship. So players don't actually move over the surface of the planet but on its periphery. That's because the sources of raw materials are situated on floating mountains that have a striking similarity to the Hallelujah Mountains from the Avatar movie. The same applies to the cities players have to deliver resources to: They float, too.

A giant yellow plastic blimp hovers above the center of the game board. It marks the position of the mother ship, from which players start their own freighters. Such a cargo airplane comes in the form of a personal board that is lying on the table in front of each player; by the look of the illustration, this airship originates in the steampunk era. Its stowage area provides a limited number of slots for the resources that a player has collected: wheat, wood, stone, and water.

To move, each player has an identical set of airship cards. At the beginning, you shuffle your cards and take three of them into your hand. On your turn, you play one card in order to head for a destination. The cards have a big hole in the middle, which stands for a porthole in the airship. When the pilot places the card on the main board, it can be seen what resource is provided there. The card stays in place, thus blocking the resource for the time being. You can freely choose the destination. However, it should not be too far away from one of the previously visited locations or from the mother ship; otherwise, you would have to pay a premium in the form of resources. The card indicates how many pieces can be loaded: one, two, or zero. The zero-cards make sure that the mother ship continues moving across the planet. With this, the day gradually turns into night, and vice versa.

I Highly original implementation

In terms of the components, this game came to life in a highly original fashion. The game board consists of several flat staircase-shaped cardboard strips that interlock. When the blimp
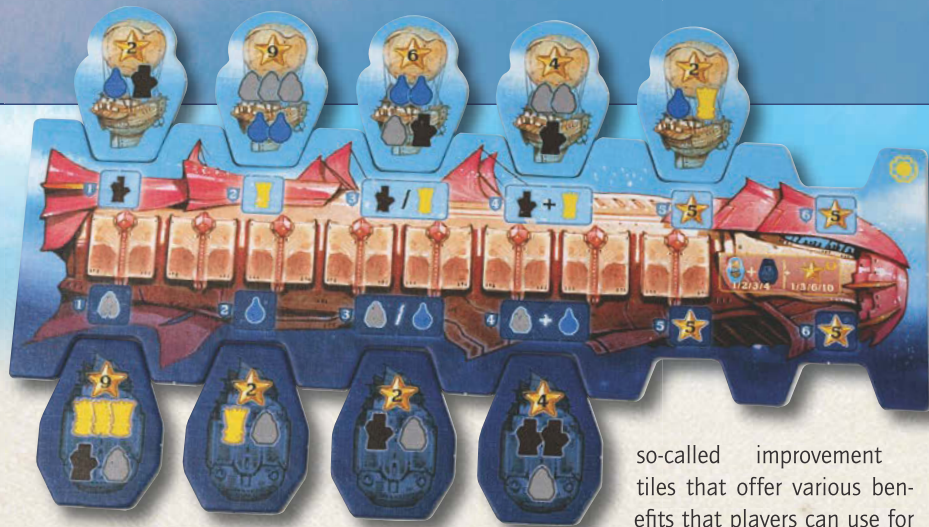
moves on, the last strip behind the airship is picked up and, with the other side facing up, reconnected at the front. Since the giant airship has meanwhile been moved ahead one space, it will be floating again exactly above the middle of the game board. The cards that were laying on the disconnected strip score bonus points and then fall off the world – obviously, at least this planet is a disk.

The recipients are the floating cities; they are accessed in the same manner as the resources. What they require is shown on a number of delivery tiles that are displayed face up, separately for day and night. It takes two to five resources to fulfill such an order. At the end, you can get a reward of two to nine gold stars. You put a completed delivery tile in an empty slot of your freighter where you get an additional little bonus.

Once all players have used all their airship cards (that is, after 16 rounds), the game ends. In order to determine the winner, all players total the values of the gold stars they have collected over the course of the game.

For getting into the game, the described version is sufficient. For those who want more, the components provide some variety. Each freighter, for example, has a B side that comes with rewards different from the A side, and with different storage rules. Plus, there is an assortment of so-called improvement tiles that offer various benefits that players can use for their flight across the planet.

SOLENIA owes a large part of its playing appeal to its appearance. The original movement of the mother ship and the constant change of the surface of the planet in front of all players add to the charm. Thanks to the resourceful shape of the game board elements, nothing comes apart. And if you take a closer look at the design of the airship cards, you might detect that the freighter is probably steered by an extraterrestrial (or somebody else with very untended fingernails).

I Limited long-term fun

The cards govern the course of the game and thus constitute a random element. But the influence of luck keeps within narrow limits, since there are only three different card values. However, you need to take the various bonuses into account that the cards provide when they fall off the world; some bonuses can be used only at specific locations. If you are not aware of that, you'll go away empty-handed.

A two-player game of SOLENIA is pretty sedate, since the participants will rarely get into each other's way when they collect resources. The game with four is considerably tighter and more suspenseful. The surface of the planet consists of no more than 5-by-5 spaces, and only just under two thirds of them provide the coveted resources. This often causes additional costs, that is, if you need to head for an island that is farther away.

The game instructions offer also a solitaire variant, where the player tries to achieve the best possible result against a die-driven dummy player.

The well-conceived box inlay that enables players to store the game components in an organized manner deserves a special mention. It is of the same solid quality as all the other materials.

SOLENIA is an entertaining family game that, due to its equipment and design, stimulates people to join in. However, the idea behind it – to collect resources in order to complete tasks – won't captivate a fastidious player's heart in the long run; and so, the long-term fun unfortunately has its limits.　　　　*KMW/sbw*