

Azahar from Colombia

Market saturation with just twenty copies

The year 2016 will go down in Colombian history, with Azahar becoming the first board game publisher to represent the country at SPIEL. Javier Velásquez, author and driving force behind the publisher, is sure he is the first as there are no other companies publishing designer board games in the Latin American country of 50 million people.

With his small team and five different games in his luggage, Javier Velásquez travelled more than 10,000 kilometers from Bogotá to Essen. 'In his luggage' is somewhat inaccurate though, as the shipping of the games had been "quite a challenge". It is no mean feat to fulfill the German authorities' requirements when you live in Bogota and do not speak a word of the language, which is why he and his team only brought 90 copies, among them the recently completed cooperative game AYE. Dutch publisher Quined Games contributed 60 copies of Velásquez's first game, XANADU, for which it is the European distributor.

In 2012 Javier Velásquez celebrated a small international success with XANADU. "We had sold maybe 20 copies in Colombia, which meant the market was saturated" Javier says, grinning. Then they sent it off to the Usa where someone podcasted a very favorable video "and suddenly I had to figure out how games could be sent from Colombia all over the world; a tough job".

Javier Velásquez first encountered "European games" eight years ago. At the time, one Colombian company (no longer in business) imported board and card games from the USA, Rio Grande Games for example. Until then he had only known

CHES and other classics, and games like MONOPOLY, RAGE, and TRIVIAL PURSUIT. In 2008 he came across SANKT PETERSBURG and was thrilled. He started to think more about games, read books about them and

in the interior of the country and truck transport costs from the coast to the capital would have been prohibitive. Instead, he tried banner and business card manufacturers, but most were unable to print tiles with matching fronts and backs. Azahar has since found one supplier in the country willing to go along with their requests and able to deliver sound quality – "maybe not quite to European standards, but close enough."

Javier Velásquez earns his money as a university lecturer in literature. The publishing house is his second mainstay, but it is about gamification rather than board and card games. Javier develops educational games in the widest sense for companies but his true passion lies with board and card games. "I am working hard to make a living from it, one day." It does not seem entirely impossible. Azahar claims to be an international publisher and with many good ideas and decent quality they have targeted an audience beyond Colombia. That is why Javier Velásquez went to Essen; to make contacts and gain experience. Visitors showed a real interest in the five games presented at the booth. While

the company has certainly profited from being exotic, it also has a standard for making "European games" with a certain local Colombian color. So, despite the expense of the journey, Javier hopes to be back next year. "It slightly depends on the success of my new game 'Takyon', which I am planning to offer on Kickstarter."

The Colombian designer and publisher Javier Velásquez certainly has a knack for salesmanship. *Nicola Balkenhol/cs*



Javier Velásquez presenting AYE

developed prototypes. In 2012 he finally attended the large Comic Convention in San Diego, California, and felt inspired by all the options. "I thought it should be possible to establish a community for good games in Colombia, and I wanted to initiate it" says Javier. He had to found his own publishing company for XANADU because none existed in Colombia.

But how to manufacture the game? China was not an option, as Bogotá lies