

As we near the release of **Colosseum**, Days of Wonder's newest board game to be released this spring, we wanted to share this interview with the game's designers, Markus Lübke and Wolfgang Kramer. We think it will give you some unique insights into the two men and their collaboration in creating Colosseum.

Q1: - Please introduce yourself and tell us a bit more about your background?

Wolfgang Kramer:

I am 64 years old, married to Ursula Kramer, and reside in Korntal, near Stuttgart Germany.

I have been designing games for over 30 years, and what first started as a hobby became my full-time work in 1989.

My previous work was in business and operations management where in my last position I was responsible for a decentralized computer centre with 15 people.

Once my games started to be sold successfully, I needed to devote more and more time for them and it became impossible to combine profession and hobby any longer. Therefore I agreed with my wife, who has always supported me actively in the design of my games, to work full-time on game design.

In total I've published more than 150 game titles, with a total circulation of more than 10 millions copies so far. I have been fortunate that many of my games have won awards in several countries. In Germany alone I have received the prestigious "Spiel des Jahres" award five times.

Markus Lübke:

44 years old, 2 children Marius (4 years) and Eneas (1½ years), married to Karin (a photographer). We live in Bad Dürkheim, Germany.

- 1983-1985 Federal Navy - deployment in the Caribbean, Mediterranean Sea, Norway
- 1987: Studies in communications/information techniques, in Mannheim
- Since 1989 self-employed TV-cameraman, editor, TV-producer, author for newspapers, productions in over 30 countries worldwide
- 2002 TV-studio manager in Berlin, Studio 52 Unter den Linden
- Since 2003 studies in media management (business management, science of media, film, music)

Thanks to my TV editorial work I have been able to travel to many countries and get to know very different topics, themes, subjects and people. I'm glad to bring in this experience now when designing my games.

Music has always been an important part of my life. For 30 years I have been playing the drums in funk-soul groups.

What made me a newcomer to games some years ago, has made me an "oldcomer" interested in studying once again – curiosity. I learn new methods of working like how to structure and analyze how things are related to each other. These new experiences help me with the design of my games.

With the birth of my children, my perspective changed fundamentally. Seeing things with the eyes of children gives me a different approach to children's games. As a result of this I was able to publish my first game in Autumn 2006 with Wolfgang Kramer in Essen – a children's game.

Q2: - It seems that we have a collaboration of the extremes - one of the most recognized game designers working with a complete new comer. How did this

partnership on what was to become Colosseum come about?

In 2001 we got in contact through Ravensburger which recommended Wolfgang to Markus. Markus visited Wolfgang in his office and presented his game idea. It was summarized on a two-page work draft describing the theme "bread & games in Ancient Rome". Wolfgang liked the theme and worked out 5 versions of how the theme could be put into a game. We agreed on the one version we liked best and Markus did some deeper research on the theme.

Based on this Wolfgang developed a detailed game concept and both authors started working on the realization, which was followed by a two-year phase of game development. At this time Markus was responsible for the artwork, the making of prototypes and the theme, Wolfgang was in charge of the game mechanism. Both of us did the testing of the game. Wolfgang took also care of the rules and presented the game to an editor.

Q3: - Markus, what did you learn in the process of working with Wolfgang?

It is the mix of realistic judgment and enthusiasm for game designing which makes Wolfgang so professional. You put so much time and work into a game that it is of inestimable help to have someone like Wolfgang Kramer who is able to filter out the many possible "dead ends" of a development direction.

It is his modesty which makes him so kind - always precise and exact when it comes to work. Even little things, which do not match in a game, can slow down the game play and change the appeal to a game.

Wolfgang gives games the time to develop, a process that I am painfully missing in the TV business. The time you take just to decide on the one game idea out of many is only maybe 2% of the total work to be done. Then comes the time of testing and writing of rules, changing, refining, adding, taking out and retaking.

I was not used to this way of working. If you work on a TV production, the goal is fixed quickly and the content is worked out in a few days or weeks.

For Colosseum we needed several years with interruptions. What matters is the journey not the destination.

Q4: - Wolfgang, why did you decide to work with an unknown game designer and what does it change?

After having already worked with several co-authors I actually did not intend to design a game with another co-author. However the kind personality of Mr. Lübke's, his commitment and the very nice theme made me change my mind. Most probably due to his profession, Markus Lübke approaches a game with more theme and image orientation. Furthermore Markus has some very good handicraft and creative skills, which I do not have. It was very pleasant to work with him, and we established a friendly relationship.

Q5: - Markus, where does the Colosseum game idea come from?

In autumn 2000 my wife and I with some friends, visited a performance show for horse breeders, called "FriesenKörung". There were about 5000 visitors in the hall.

The atmosphere was indescribable. There was the crowd yelling from their places in the seats and these impressive black horses, led by squires dressed in white, running down in the stadium.

I asked myself - how much work must it take to realize such a spectacular show in a stadium? I had already filmed horse and motor sports racing, soccer and athletics competitions, Thai boxing and other sports events but here, people were completely crazy.

That was when I got the idea to make the planning and organization of events as a theme of a game. I wrote the concept for a game and called Ravensburger. They recommended I contact Wolfgang Kramer who I did not know - as I had no idea at this time how a game came into being. However, the first conversation with Wolfgang brought me back to reality. "That hardly makes a game..." is how he summarized our first long conversation. Many weeks and emails later we found an entry into the game. And from that time we progressed step by step...

Q6: - Now tell us a bit more about the game.

In Colosseum the players take the role of Roman spectacle organizers. Each player gets his arena in which he performs his spectacles. For that he has, for example: gladiators, artists, lions, chariots, priests or torches at his disposal. He has to buy them or gets them by negotiation. With those persons, animals and props he equips his spectacles. The bigger the spectacle is, the more efforts are done for the preparations. There are more persons, more animals, more props, but also more spectators are coming. So revenues increase correspondingly, with which the player can finance further, even bigger spectacles and get the rights for their performances. And if the emperor or other members of the nobility show up, the number of spectators increases again.

The goal is to organize the biggest of all spectacles and to attract many thousands spectators in the arena. Easier said than done as competition is large, and of course there are other fantastic spectacles in other arenas as well...

Q7: - How would you position the game? What kinds of players do you think will enjoy it?

Colosseum is a game where luck, tactics, strategy and negotiation skills are well balanced. It is a sophisticated game in rules and material but easy to play and the player has a lot of possibilities to influence the game play. It is perfect for players who like to immerse themselves in a fantastic world full of adventures where they can prove themselves. It is above all a game for players who like demanding family games but who are not so fond of complex strategic games.

Q8: - Wolfgang, to which of your published games do you find Colosseum similar to?

Although being simpler with more elements of luck and an additional element of negotiation, Colosseum is somehow similar to the 'Princes of Florence'.

Q9: - The game industry is quite active with many titles and it has become more and more difficult to select a game. What makes Colosseum unique, why should I play it?

Wolfgang Kramer: Colosseum has attractive material with a wonderful theme where you can immerse yourself for one or two hours. The game offers different strategies, and challenges the player with each game to break the previous record of spectators.

Markus Lübke: In Colosseum the player feels the tension of an organizer who performs a spectacle. The atmosphere of the Ancient Rome - the arenas, the emperor, etc... all makes you feel a part of a world which only exists in your imagination.

Q10: - Once the game was invented how long did it take to find a publisher? Give us a feel for the process you have been through?

As Ravensburger initiated our cooperation, we presented them the game first. They liked it and tested it in-house for half a year. Because of what they felt would be high production costs, however, they finally did not take it. For similar reasons, another publisher declined. When Mr. Pierre Gaubil from Days of Wonder came to visit Wolfgang Kramer at his home in the summer of 2005, Wolfgang did not really think of showing the game to Pierre, supposing that it would be far too complex for Days of Wonder. At this time he did not know their games "Shadows of Camelot", "Cleopatra" or "BattleLore". But Pierre immediately liked the theme and the prototype. As the authors still wanted to improve some details, they agreed that Wolfgang Kramer would present and hand over the final prototype at the following show in Essen.

Q11: - For both of you, this is your first game title with Days of Wonder. What do you expect?

Wolfgang Kramer: I hope that Days of Wonder will succeed in a terrific realization of the game. For everything else I will wait and see!
I would be very happy if a lot of players have a lot of fun with Colosseum.

Markus Lübke: I think that Days of Wonder and Colosseum is a good match. The game fits in perfectly with their range of products. Theme and material have been developed with Days of Wonder in a way we had imagined it. I am confident that Days of Wonder will present the game to the market the way an emperor would have wished to see a spectacle in the Colosseum.