

Games We Have Played: Zorg and Paparazzi

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Lately we have been exploring the whole of our inner geekiness and we have played in a couple of Games. Bigger than BANGs: though we have hosted a BANG, the BANG is the junior version of The Game. One was called Zorg and was based on the film *The Fifth Element*. The other, which was only a week or so ago, was called Paparazzi, was created by XX-rated, and had an entertainment/Hollywood/paparazzi theme. This was somewhat daunting, since we know next to nothing about movies or any such thing.

A BANG goes for a few hours, maybe 4 hours or so, give or take a couple. Zorg went for an entire day — starting at 8am and finishing around midnight. Playing in the Paparazzi game was a whole new level for us — it went for *36 hours*. Yes, that's right, puzzles all day, puzzles all night, and puzzles all day again. So playing in such a game involves hiring a van, preferably involves access to a GPS, preferably involves access to wireless or mobile internet, involves serious stamina, involves knowledge of a standard canon of encodings and languages (semaphore, Braille, maritime signal flags, Unicode, ASCII, hexadecimal, the text of the declaration of independence, airport codes, Japanese incense notation, to mention just a few that are well-accepted among the community or have been used). So, we are hardcore — in a sort of futile and fantasy-guerrilla way which is a rather new flavour of geekiness for me. More Dungeons and Dragons type, less mathematical fanaticism. But let's not go too far!

The Zorg game traversed an area in the general region of the east and north-east bay, around Berkeley and Walnut Creek. Highlights of this game included dodecahedral minesweeper, decoding a message via fourier analysis of the music on a CD, puzzles involving the exhibits a science museum, a puzzle talking to a fake protester on the Berkeley campus, a physical challenge on monkey bars, a game of charades, and a game of Laser Tag (= Zone 3 or Dark Zone or whatever you want to call it). Most impressive.

The Paparazzi game, as you might expect, traversed a rather larger area. In fact it was enormous! We started just near the golden gate bridge and, on day one, found ourselves guided through the north bay, Sonoma County, Petaluma (becoming a regular gaming location!), the Napa Valley (yum.), the shipbuilding districts of the north east bay, down through Berkeley to San Francisco. Through the evening we spent much of our time in the city area, and then made

our way through the night down towards Stanford. In fact, on day two, there were a whole bunch of puzzles on the Stanford campus — not surprising, since XX-rated are Stanford students. We finished some miles south of Palo Alto. We were at a disadvantage due to our lack of experience in these overnight games, and also, as it turned out, through our lack of mobile internet access, which almost seemed required for some of the puzzles. Nonetheless we got by with some phone-a-friend strategies, some vicarious googling, some of our meagre general knowledge, and some extraordinary guessing by Rebecca. Not only did she guess several answers, saving us at least 10 minutes at a time, she *also* guessed several start codes for puzzles, thereby putting us ahead in the scheduling of hints. One time she guessed the wrong start code, however, which caused a programming headache for game control!

This game also had many high points. A puzzle at an airport. A video was made and edited *in the course of the game*, in which each team performed a few lines. We were given our lines and filmed as we arrived at the location on the first day, and on the second day were given a CD containing the video, which was now a puzzle. A physical challenge involving crushing “grapes” — water balloons — in the Napa valley. Several other wine-based puzzles in the Napa valley. A puzzle to which the answer was “poo”. A ride in a stretch limousine — in fact, one of the stretchiest stretch limousines I have ever seen. We were picked up by the limousine from a Safeway car park which is an infamous pick-up (in the other sense!) location. The locals must have found a little strange all these vans pulling up and people changing clothes in this Safeway car park. We were changing clothes because the limousine took us to a puzzle in a nightclub involving freak dancing — yeah, bump and grind, baby! A puzzle pick-up from a blackened van, in a pitch-black car park, from people wearing darkened sunglasses, at 2am — the puzzle actually consisted of a pornographic video! Well, sort of — it was animals mating, to the tune of the “Let’s do it like they do on the discovery channel” song. A late-night poker party, which lasted until morning. A donut-based puzzle. Several dance-pad based puzzles, you know, like the arcade game where you have to dance along to the music. I proved our team’s best dancer, more than once. That’s saying something.

A lot of fun. I think I am addicted.