The 5th Annual

# KYRA-CON

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Convention Guide

### Rationally Random: The Games of Leo Colovini

	AAA			
Region / Location		Rating	Players	
Gaming Station	G-4	Family Fun	4	Куга- Sta



#### Introduction:

For the past several years, Kyra-Con has selected a single game designer to highlight and honor. The exact selection process is a tightly guarded secret. All that is known for certain is that many game designers are considered but only one is ultimately bestowed with the honor of being the Designated Designer.

The Kyra-Con staff, having already made the selection for this year, approached the Royal Game Society and asked if the society could assist in honoring the winner. Of course, we were willing to offer what help we could. When we were informed of the winner, we were elated to assist.

It is with great pleasure that Kyra-Con and the Royal Game Society proclaim as the Kyra-Con V Designated Designer...



Mr. Leo Colovíní

Mr. Colovini is a native of Venice, Italy and a co-founder of Studiogiochi. With over 75 titles to his design credit – including several nominated for the prestigious Spiel des Jahres award – Mr. Colovini has earned a solid reputation as a world class designer.

By chance and good fortune, we were recently able to exchange several communications with Mr. Colovini. This provided us a wonderful opportunity to peek into his design process, to inquire about several of his published games, and to learn a bit of what the future holds for this talented designer. And now with Mr. Colovini's permission, we are pleased to share it with you.

#### An Interview with Leo Colovini

As previously mentioned, we recently had the opportunity to exchange several email communications with Mr. Colovini. He graciously agreed to answer several questions posed to him about gaming related topics. What follows are the questions we asked and Mr. Colovini's replies.

[Editor's Note: We have left Mr. Colovini's replies as unedited as possible. Only minor typographically errors and spelling have been corrected.]

#### Design Approach:

Designers have many approaches that they follow for developing a new game. Some start with a theme or subject while others start with a set of mechanics.

How would you describe your approach to designing?

I usually start a new idea under the shower, or walking in Venice, or before sleeping. Then I go to my studio and write down the ideas on the computer. Those ideas remain in the computer for months or years, and when I have time, I open the old files, and I choose an idea and I try to develop it.

Has your approach changed significantly since your earliest games?

Yes, a little bit. Now it's easier for me to imagine a working game before testing it.

What do you find to be the biggest road block you encounter when designing games?

I'm very lazy, and to start a game sometime is a big effort. To design the board especially.

How do you approach play testing? How well developed is a game before you first test play it?

Usually the games I design works since the first tests, obviously they are not perfect, but they work. But the fine tuning is a long work.

Of your games [in the Kyra-Con Library], which would you highlight at a convention for both new and experienced gamers? Why did you select this game?

I think Cartagena is the best choice. It's particularly simple so new people could learn it easily, and it is deep enough for geeks.

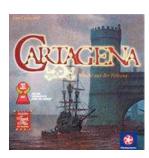
### Game Spotlight: Cartagena

Mr. Colovini's assessment of Cartagena as highly approachable and still deep is quite accurate.

#### Game Setup

#### Construct the Escape Tunnel:

Join the 6 boards such that a continuous tunnel is constructed. Place the boat at one end of the tunnel to mark the exit (finish). The other end of the tunnel marks the start.



#### 2. Prepare the Pirates:

Each player takes a set of 6 pirates in 1 color and places all of them at the start of the tunnel.

#### 3. Decide on the Pirate Rules:

The game can be played with 2 different sets of rules. If the game will be played with Jamaica Rules there will be more luck. If played with Tortuga Rules there will be more skill required.

#### 4. Prepare the Card Deck:

Remove the arrow card then shuffle all cards. Deal each player 6 cards.

Jamaica Rules: Cards are held secret in the players' hands. Acquired cards are drawn from the face down deck.

*Tortuga Rules:* Player cards are placed face up on the table. 12 cards from the draw deck are laid out. The arrow card marks the direction (order) the cards will be acquired in. During the game, replenish the row with 12 new cards only after all cards in the row are claimed.

#### Game Play

Each turn you are permitted to take up to 3 actions. You must take at least 1 action. Actions can be taken in any order desired. There are 2 possible actions:

#### Advance:

To advance a pirate, play a card. Advance your pirate to the next available (vacant) space that matches the symbol on the card played.

#### 2. Retreat:

Move a Pirate backwards along the tunnel to the first spot occupied by 1 or 2 pirates (skipping empty spaces and those with 3 pirates). If the pirate lands with 1 other pirate, collect 1 card. If 2 pirates, collect 2 cards.

#### Game End

The first player to land all 6 pirates on the boat wins the game.

#### **Design Approach: (Continued)**

Of all of your game designs, which is your favorite? Which are you most proud of?

It's very difficult to choose. On one side I'm proud of the most successful games, as Cartagena and Inkognito, on the other side I have a special relation with the games who were accepted less than they would deserve, as Alexandros, or Submarine or Dschingis Khan.

What was the inspiration for [Carolus Magnus]'s mechanics? Specifically the separate land areas combining over the course of the game.

This is a nice story. I think it was the 2009, when I developed a first idea: to make a game with two levels. The main level on the board and the secondary level outside the level in which you fight for the control of the pieces inside.

I made a board and I tried a first version of the game. But I wasn't satisfied. Then we (Dario De Toffoli and me) left Venice to Nurnberg. We were at dinner in a typical brewery and we started discussing the game idea but we hadn't the prototype, but just some wooden pieces. Therefore we used the cardboard discs that are used under the bier glasses and we displayed them in a circle. After a while we started to play and in that very moment we developed the idea to merge territories!

Were there any special challenges that you faced with [Carolus Magnus]'s design? If so, what were they?

It wasn't particularly difficult to develop this game, after the brewery evening the game raised up easily.

### What is your favorite aspect of this design?

I like the main idea of the 2 levels. There are pieces on the board that you can add if you like but that are not your pieces as it is normal in other games. You must fight outside the board for getting their control.

Then I like the merging, because it introduces an irreversible direction to the game.

### Game Spotlight: Carolus Magnus

Even though the design of Carolus Magnus is over 10 years old, the game remains a Kyra-Con staff favorite and is proudly highlighted here for you.

### Game Setup (for 3 players)

The following setup is for a 3 player game.

#### 1. Prepare the Board:

Place the 15 territories in a rough circle in the middle of the table, leaving a small space between each. Place the emperor on one territory at random. Place all cubes in the middle of the circle. Take three cubes of each color and place 1 cube randomly on each territory. 4 dice will be required.

#### 2. Prepare the Players

Each player takes 1 court board, 8 castles, 1 set of numbered discs.

Each player also receives 9 starting cubes determined at random using the dice. If a crown is rolled, cube color is player's choice. These cubes are placed near the court board (not in the court!) Select a player to be the initial starting player for the game randomly.

#### Game Play

Each round of play has 2 phases: An Opening and Action Phase.

#### 1. Opening Phase:

In turn order, each player selects a numbered disc from their set that has not yet been played (initially all are available). Players may not select a number selected by another player in the same round (if there is option, then the first to pick the number is considered the lower value). After every 5<sup>th</sup> round, players regain all discs for use.

The number indicates how far the emperor moves and in which order the players will play the action phase. Lower number played goes first.

#### 2. Action Phase:

Each player performs three actions, in this order, as follows:

- *Play 3 Cubes:* Place 4 cubes in territories and/or the player's court. Check paladin control and adjust if a player has court majority.
- Move Emperor: Move emperor clockwise 1 to # played regions.
   Check Castle building and merging.
- Replenish Cubes: Roll 4 dice and claim cubes as indicated.

#### Courts, Castles & Territories

A player controls the paladins (cubes) of a color when the player has a majority of that color in his court. Majorities are relative (not absolute). If a player ties another player, control remains with the current owner. Mark control with the appropriate color disk on the player's court board.

When the emperor lands in a territory without a castle, the player who controls the most cubes there builds a new castle. Control of the cubes is determined by summing the cubes present in the territory under control of a player (i.e. based on court control). If there is a tie, or no one controls the territory then no castle is built.

When the emperor lands in a territory with a castle, control of the territory is checked. Control of the territory is determined by summing the cubes present under the control of the player and adding castles present. If control remains with the castle owner, no new castle is built. If control of the territory changes, then all castles in the region are removed and replaced by castles of the controlling player.

When a castle is built, adjacent territories (on both sides) with castles owned by the same player are merged. Place the territories together and combine all castles and cubes together. Newly merged territories are not checked for changes in majority control (i.e. check on future turns only).

#### Game End

When a player achieves 8 castles in play on territories, the player wins. Alternatively, the game ends if there are less than 4 territories in play. The player with the most castles in play is crowned the winner.



#### **Game Themes:**

Euro-game designs are frequently noted as lacking theme (or that theme is merely 'pasted on'). Our experience with Italian designers is that this trend does not hold true.

Do you see an Italian school of game design as distinctly different from German, French, English, or American? If so, to what do you attribute this?

Italy is a strange world where we have more designers than players. In Italy there is not a market for games, therefore the few people who love games are geeks.

Role playing games, or geek games are much more appreciated than family German games. My games, for example, are considered too easy. This is the reason Italian games are closer to the Anglo-Saxon style, than to the German one.

How important is theme in your games and design process?

Sometime I start from the mechanism and then I paste on a theme, but more often I started from the theme thinking to a mechanism who could represent it. In any case, as Alex teached me, I never add a rule, just because I want to simulate something, I always try find the core of the mechanism.

Did you select the theme of Atlantis or was that made by the publisher? If you, why did you select Atlantis? If not, what was the original 'theme'?

It was the original theme. Since the beginning I removed the tiles from the path, and this immediately remind me the sinking.

Is Atlantis a re-imagining of Cartagena? Are the games related in your mind?

Actually not. I just introduced a movement system similar to the Cartagena one, because I wasn't satisfied by the previous system.

### **Game Spotlight: Atlantis**

Many gamers consider Atlantis to be very similar to Cartagena. Are the gamers right or is the designer? Why not play a game and decide for yourself.

#### Game Setup

Separate the tiles by letter (A or B) and shuffle each group. Build a path from Atlantis to the Mainland as follows:

- 'A' Tiles: 10 x 2, 10 x 1, 6 x 2
- 1 Water Tile
- 'B' Tiles: 6 x 2, 10 x 1, 10 x 2

The path can be any shape the players agree on. Place the remaining water tiles in a pile. Shuffle the movement cards and form a draw deck. Each player palces 3 figures of a color in Atlantis and takes 1 bridge. Youngest starts.



#### Game Play

Prior to your turn, you may purchase cards by discarded a collected tile and receiving ½ the tile's value in cards. Players must then take 3 actions, in order:

### 1. Play Card and Advance Figure:

Move the figure to the next tile with the card's symbol. If unoccupied, stop. If occupied, play another card and advance. You must end your movement on a tile or the mainland. To cross a gap (water) without a bridge, pay the lower value of the 2 tiles on either side of the gap. You may place your bridge for free. All players may now cross the gap for free. If you are unable to move to an unoccupied space, show your cards to the players and draw 2 new cards.

### 2. Pick up Path Tile:

Take the first unoccupied tile directly behind the figure moved. Take only the top tile. If a gap is created, place a water tile there.

#### 3. Draw a New Card:

Draw 1 new card (regardless of number played)

#### Game End

The game ends when a player completes the turn that moved the player's 3<sup>rd</sup> figure to the mainland. All other figures on the path must now be moved to the mainland, paying the costs for crossing gaps but not collecting tiles or cards or placing a bridge. Keep track of negative points if unable to pay.

Each player scores points equal to the sum of the tile values plus 1 point for each card in hand. The player with the most points wins. Ties share the victory.

#### **Other Design Work:**

We suspect that most gamers who are familiar with your games are unaware that you have designed a Role-Playing Game – namely, Lex Arcana.

Yes, it could be surprising! I developed the game with Maggi & Nepitello, who are good friends of mine, and are the designers of the War of the Ring, and with de Toffoli. It was a nice collaboration. Marco and Francesco were the experts and they followed more the background, I designed the main mechanism, we called 'punto dado'. Characters, as usual in role playing games, had numeric [values]. In our game when you have to use a skill you have to roll a combo of dice at your choice whose maximum possible result was your value. For example if you have 12 in a skill, you may roll one d12, or two 6ds, or 3 d4s.

Do your interests in games extend beyond board games?

Yes, sure, I love games of any kind

Which style of gaming do you participate in?

Board games, card games, children games, games for museums, electronic games (I designed the AI Of Cartagena.app who is going to be released in the apple store).

[Editor's note: Cartagena 1 is officially released and the Al is quite good!]

Have you brought design elements from different game styles into your board game designs? If so, which?

I don't think to have introduced voluntarily element os a different style. But sometime I started a game from a classic one, for example Corsari is a gin Rummy variation.

Lex Arcana was designed several years ago. Have you considered revisiting RPG game design?

As I told you I'm very lazy, an rpg means too much work, and there is the problem of the language. Such a big work just for Italy is antieconomic. And I cannot write in English as Nepitello is doing for example with his new Lord of the Ring rpg.

#### **Collaborations:**

Of the more than 75 games you have designed, over half are collaborations with other designers. The designers you have worked with are quite varied and many are accomplished designers in their own right. Your collaboration with other designers appears to be a trait unique to you.

How have your collaborators influenced your designs?

It depends on the kind of collaboration. My first games was developed with Alex Randolph who was my master, my teacher, my guru. This period of my professional life was obviously the most influencing.

Then there are the collaborations with de Toffoli who is still my partner in Studiogiochi. We always collaborate in developing the games we release. He is a kind of annoying voice in my mind who says: don't be satisfied, the game is nice, but it could be improved. The prototype could be improved (he ALWAYS don't distinguish well the colors of the symbols, etc..!), rules are not clear enough, etc..

Then I collaborate with unknown designers. Studiogiochi is an agent and we organize every two years the Premio Archimede for unpublished games. It happens very often that a non professional author has a great idea, but that the game doesn't work. I love to work in this cases on those games, and very often I find the way to improve them and to publish. In the cases in which I really add something of creative I usually add my name to the ones of the original authors, obviously if they agree. But I worked also on a lot of Studiogiochi games in which there is not my name, because my ideas could be considered in the range of redactional work, that is they were just a setup of the rules and the mechanisms.

Then I collaborate with well known authors, as Michael Schacht or Bruno Faidutti. They were nice experiences that happens underr certain strange circumstances. I liked them a lot and I'm always ready to repeat them.

I believe that Alex Randolph was a personal friend and mentor to you and your earliest games were collaborations with Alex. Of all the advice on games that Alex may have shared with you, what are you most thankful he provided?

Alex was a friend, a mentor, a father, a grandfather. I met him when I really was a child, if I remember well I was 11 or 12 years old, in a chess club. Since I was a child I loved to design the games I played, so when I met him and I heard that he was a game author... The most important advice of Alex was probably the following: don't design a game because you want to publish it, design a game because it is what you like to do. The second most important is an advice who strongly affected my style: don't add any rule if it is not strictly necessary. Find the core of the mechanism and forget all the rest.

What designer would you most like to work with that you have not previously had the opportunity to do so?

Wolfgang Kramer, I love his games and his style. And I like him a lot, as a person.

How did the development of [The Dutch Golden Age] come to be? Did you or Giuseppe originate the game idea or was it mutual?

I was at dinner in Amsterdam with Michael Bruinsma (999 games) and he asked me to develop a Catan game with the Dutch golden age background. I asked to Giuseppe to hel me because he is really a big fun of Catan and he knew all the existing expansions. We made the game, but then Teuber didn't give to Michael the permission to publish a Catan game by another author. So I worked for removing from the game all the Catan aspects and I developed an alternative system. I mean in the original Catan game when a territory was activated by the king it gave resources (as it gives now money). Resources, as in all Catan games, were different depending on the kind of region, and with the different resources you can build things. I inverted this system. Resources are now all identical, no matter the kind of territory. But you can build specific things only if you are in the right place.

How did you work on the game balance with different numbers of players (2, 3, 4). Did you do something special to get each to work well?

It wasn't necessary. The game works well with all the number of players.

Do you find it easier or more productive to work with others when creating a game?

Yes, I think that collaborations are always a nice way to work.

What is the best benefit of collaborative designing? What is the biggest challenge to collaborative designs?

The best benefit is that you have two different styles in the same game, this make the games more various and interesting. The challenge consists in finding the way to merge the two styles and the different ideas.

### Game Spotlight: The Dutch Golden Age

A well regarded game in its own right, The Dutch Golden Age highlights influences on Mr. Colovini's designs (i.e. Settlers of Catan) and how he succeeds in his collaborations (e.g. with Giuseppe Baù).

#### Game Setup

Place the game board on the table. Sort the cards by color and shuffle separately.

Form a bank with the guilders.

Each player selects a color and takes pieces of that color. The oldest player begins the game.



#### Game Play

Players take turns in clockwise order. On a turn, the following actions are completed.

1. Move the Steward

Roll both dice and move on the province track. Pay by space landed on:

2 Different Provinces A Merchant Steward Willem II 1 Guilder / Movement 1 Guilder each 3 Guilders each

2 Guilders / Influence

#### 2. Performs Actions

Perform actions in any order desired from the following:

- -- FREE ACTIONS --
- a. Move:

Move 1 movement token to an adjacent province for 0.5 guilders per province entered.

#### b. Guild Control:

Pay fee indicated o the guild chart column 1 space above the occupied level. Mark the control with a marker, returning lower marker to the owning player.

#### c. New Influence Marker:

Exchange 3 movement markers in the same province for 1 influence marker from the player's reserve. If none available, this action cannot be taken. NOTE: Only 1 influence marker is permitted in a province!

- -- SPECIAL ACTIONS --
- d. Population (Green):

Pay 5 Guilders to add a movement token to any province.

#### e. Investments (Yellow):

Pay 3 Guilders for top yellow card. Purchased Cards can be redeemed at any time: 1 Girl with tulips = 5 Guilders, 2 Girls with tulips = 12 Guilders, Set of 3 Shipping Company = 20 Guilders.

#### f. Arts (Brown):

Pay 3 Guilders for top brown card or pay 1 Guilder to an existing work in progress. Art work scores only if completed (full paid)

### g. Colonies (Blue)

Pay 3 Guilders for top blue card. For each set of 3 card types (Ship, Captain, Cannon) move 1 influence marker to one colonies box. The Dutch East Indies Company is a wild for any of the 3 required cards)

### h. Cultural Advancement (Grey)

Pay 3 Guilders for top Grey card. Windmills = 2VP, Governor = 1VP + 1 Guilder when steward stops there, Dice = Set the dice to a desired result (discard card when used). Cards may also match Investments (yellow), Arts (brown), Colony (blue), or Spice (Orange) and are used as such.

#### i. Spice (Orange)

Pay Guilders equal to the colony box to take top orange card. spices work as investments with much higher returns.

Note: Free actions can be taken as many times as the player wishes and can pay for. Each special action taken requires 1 influence marker in the appropriate color location (anywhere on the board). Flip the influence marker to indicate its use.

#### -- AUCTIONS -

If a player does not wish use an influence marker on a provinces (only!), that special action may be auctioned. Minimum bid is 0.5 Guilder as is the minimum raise. Payment is made to the owner of the influence marker. The purchaser does not need to make any additional payments.

### 3. Count Victory Points

Players receive victory points for:

Movement Tokens in Provinces 1 VP per token

4 VP (on board)

Influence Markers 5 VP (in East Indies)

6 VP (in West Indies)

Arts 3 to 8 VP (per card)

Windmill 2 VP

Governor 1 VP each

Money 1 VP per 10 Guilders

#### 4. Reset Influence Markers

At the end of a player's turn, all influence markers flipped are turned face up again.

#### Game End

First player to 33 Victory Points is the winner.

#### Criticisms:

A criticism by some commentators on Board Game Geek of your designs is that your games are too random. While your games frequently include a random element (cards, dice, etc) [the Kyra-Con Staff] do not find your games particularly random. Your games strike [us] as well balanced between luck and strategy.

Do you see your games as particularly more or less random than other games?

I think mosts of my games seem more random than they are. The first times you play, when you hadn't yet managed the strategy they could seem random, but then the best player usually wins, not the single game, but if you consider a range of 10 games, the best player usually wins at least the 60% of the games.

What is your approach to balancing random influences and player choice when crafting the play experience in your games?

Usually I introduce the luck factor for reducing the braining effect. I don't like games in which people could calculate everything in advance, slowing the game with long periods of thinking. I think luck is an element who could be managed by players as well as pure strategy. A good player is able to manage the luck, forecasting the good and the bad luck, while a bad player suffers the bad luck. Settlers of Catan is a great example of balancing, as well as poker.

[Editor's Note: For excellent examples of what Mr. Colovini references here, we encourage you to check out games such as Masons and Dschingis Khan. Both can feel extremely random, but it is *Rationally Random*]

#### An Eve on the Future

Of the games that you have designed that [are not in the Kyra-Con library], which title would you recommend to add to the collection? Why did you select this game?

If you like Cartagena, you should like Draco, too. Then I suggest you to have a copy of dummy/yummy/ketchup, because it's the simplest game of the world and it could be particularly good with children or as filler. You have more or less all my classic games except Die Oster Insel.

Which of your game designs would you most like to revisit, expand and/or re-imagine?

I recently discussed with Michael Schacht about the opportunity to relaunch Magna Grecia

Dakota from Nexus Games [was recently added to the Kyra-Con Library]. In the box was a little catalog that listed a 'Coming Soon' section. It listed 'Leo Colovini's Aztlan' - a title we were not aware you had done. It sounds like a fantastic game and very intriguing by the mechanisms hinted at. It is a bit surprised it hasn't had much press information (yet). Can you share some information on this upcoming title?

NG international had some financial troubles in the last months. Now the company will close, but Roberto Di Meglio, the previous chief executive of NG, is going to open a new company and they will publish the game. The graphic is almost ready, so I expect to see the game published very soon. The name of the new company is Ares Games and you can find infos on info@aresgames.eu.

#### **Special Questions:**

We explained to [Kyra] that you are a game designer who lives in Italy. It was also explained that you had worked with your son on several game designs. This got her quite excited since she is also working together with her dada on several game designs. We asked her if she had any questions she might ask a world renowned game designer. After a brief pause, she asked the following: Can he make a game about dinosaurs?

Dinosaurs are simply great, so why don't make a game about?

### The Complete Ludography of Leo Colovini

Here is a complete list of all games designed by Mr. Colovini. All titles in bold are available in the Kyra-Con Library. We encourage you to play them as they are all excellent and unique games.

Game Title	Year Published
Aztlan	2011
Draco	2011
Geizen	2011
Elephant Memo	2011
Horseland	2010
Sherlock	2010
Atlantis	2009
Donna Leon: Gefährliches Spiel	2009
Islas Canarias	2008
Star Wars Clone Wars: Das Letzte Gefecht	2008
Star Wars: Galaktische Schlachten	2008
The Dutch Golden Age	2008
Wall-e - ein Geschenk für Eva	2008
Foot2Rue	2007
MinenRäumer	2007
Savana	2007
Sieben Auf Einen Striech	2007
Totally spies	2007
Trova le mine	2007
Wikinder	2007
Wikinger Bande	2007
Babar et le mistère des lettres perdues	2006
Cartagena II	2006
Dschingis Khan: Bewegung an der Großen Mauer	2006
Game Title	Year Published

Justinian	2006
Kakuro	2006
Kakuro Challenge	2006
Masons	2006
Nebraska	2006
Carcassonne: The Discovery	2005
Challenge Sudoku	2005
Go West	2005
Holidays	2005
Mango Tango	2005
Sudoku	2005
Druids	2004
Honesti-Disonesti	2004
Number One	2004
Submarine	2004
Tempo	2004
Alexandros	2003
Avalon	2003
Collection	2003
Corsari	2003
Da che pARTE stai?	2003
Familien Bande	2003
Hector and Achilles	2003
Inkognito: The Card Game	2003
Ketch Up	2003
Magna Grecia	2003
Minestrone	2003
The Bridges of Shangri-La	2003
Game Title	Year Published

Clans	2002
Meridian	2001
Vabanque	2001
Carolus Magnus	2000
Cartagena	2000
Doge	2000
Venezia 1848	2000
Yummy	2000
Il grande gioco del compleanno	1999
Dummy	1998
Europa 1945 – 2030	1998
Theseus	1998
Top Hats	1997
I giochi della frutta	1996
Lex Arcana - Carthago	1996
Die Osterinsel	1994
Lex Arcana	1993
Lex Arcana - Germania	1993
Lex Arcana - Schermo del demiurgo	1993
Die Magische 7	1990
Inkognito	1988
Drachenfels	1986

### A Heart-Felt Thank You

The staff of Kyra-Con and the members of the *Royal Game Society* would like to thank Mr. Colovini for his gracious gift of time and insight on games and designing. It is truly an honor for us to have honored you as the

Kyra-Con V Designated Designer