

Back at the NEC

Pevans reports from the 2014 UK Games Expo

Following last year's successful move, the Expo was back at the Hilton Metropole at the National Exhibition Centre this year. This is a large, comfortable hotel with a lot of different function rooms – all of which were used for the Expo this year, I'm told. In particular, the trade 'hall' was three rooms, rather than two, with a few traders in playing areas as well. As I'm aware from my own experience, one of the perennial complaints of a hotel-based convention is how much the hotel charges for everything. Being used to central London pubs, I didn't find the prices surprising. However, the Expo addressed the issue by having the hotel set up a 'food hall' that provided cheaper food (and drink). It was also the overflow breakfast room, which only a few of us found (thanks to Chris Dearlove for the tip).

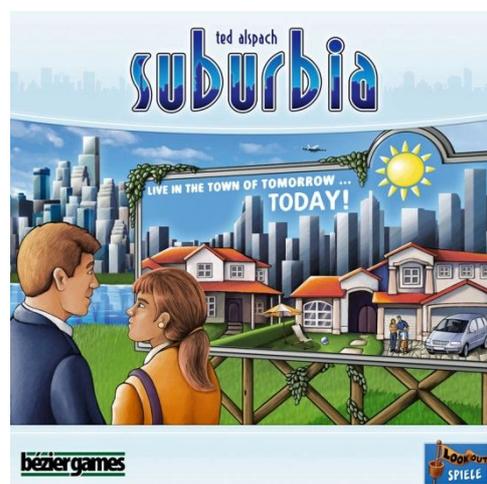
The UK Games Expo supports just about every form of game: board game, role-playing (table-top and live action), CCGs, wargames, computer games and all points between. As the Expo is consciously modelled on the Spiel games fair, the emphasis is on playing games and many of the publishers' trade stands had room to play their games. There are blocks of demo tables in the middle of the trade halls, too. On top of this, lots of tournaments take place in the dozen or so other function rooms around the hotel, with these areas used for open gaming in the evenings.

Playing the tournaments

The Expo kicks off on Friday with open gaming – the organisers provide a games library with an impressive selection of games for people to borrow and play. However, this year I had signed up for a tournament on the Friday evening. The only problem with a tournament is that it commits you to playing the same game several times in quick succession. If you're going to do this, it had better be a game you enjoy.

In this case, the game was *Suburbia*, Ted Alspach's clever city-building (well, suburb-building, to be accurate) game (see my review in *To Win Just Once* 139). I really enjoy this game and the mix of building tiles, only some of which are used in any game, means that it is quite different each time you play. There were just eight of us for the tournament, organised by Halesowen Boardgamers. So that was two games of four, swap around for two more games and then the top four play off, with the winner of the final game being the champion.

The first game went better than I expected and the final scoring left me as the clear winner. The second game was much tougher with some hard competition for the bonuses at the end of the game. It was won by Jennifer, who'd been in second place in my first game. I was only



four points behind. Unfortunately, between us was James, the winner of the other first-round game, so I was only third.

However, first and third in the opening rounds was just enough to put me on the top table for the final, along with James, Jennifer and Sue, winner of the other table's second round game. As you'd expect, after a couple of games' practice, everybody was pretty sharp, but the game went quite differently from the first two. I took an early lead (not the way I usually play *Suburbia*) and just pulled away from the other three for a resounding win!

My reward was a plaque (at this rate, I'll need a trophy cabinet in another... oh, twenty years) and a gift voucher for the traders at the show. It was an excellent end to an entertaining evening. And I'm still looking forward to playing *Suburbia* again.



Yours truly (left) receiving my trophy from Halesowen Boardgamers (thanks to James Graham for the photo)

Saturday and Sunday are the main days of the Expo with the trade halls open all day. As I've done the last few years, I played in the *Memoir '44* tournament on Saturday and hit the trade halls on Sunday. *Memoir '44* works as a tournament because you play several different scenarios of this simple WW2 wargame across the day, providing plenty of variety. The structure is that players are randomly assigned as Axis or Allies. They play three scenarios against different opponents, but are ranked according to how well they compare to the other people playing the same side. For the final round, we play off against the equally ranked



Forêt d'Ecouves scenario set-up

opponent in a final scenario, which is played from both sides. As I'm a fan of *Memoir '44*, it makes for an enjoyable day's gaming. And there's sufficient time between games to see the rest of the show.

Taking a quick look at the scenarios lined up for us to play, I was quite pleased to be drawn as an Allied player. Round one was "Forêt d'Ecouves," from mid-August 1944. It features a French Armoured Division attacking German forces in the eponymous forest. This gave my opponent a good

defensive position, but the French infantry all counts as special forces, which is an advantage. We both played cautiously, but I was able to move up my troops in groups of units, defeating the opposition in detail and demolishing his right flank. A 6:2 win was a good start.

Round 2 was “Vaumicel Manor” from D-Day with a German counter-attack against US troops moving off Omaha beach. My plan was to do the same as in the first round, but my attack never got going and aggressive play by my opponent pushed me back. My tanks were ineffective, my infantry took heavy casualties and I went down 3:6. Ouch!

The final round took me to the Pacific and Guadalcanal in late October 1942. “Matanikau River” has Japanese forces attacking US Marines across the eponymous river in jungle. My plan was to defend robustly, hoping my artillery would do plenty of damage. However, my opponent punched through the centre and was able to get his tanks off the board, despite enfilading fire from my guns, and win 4:6.



Starting positions for Matanikau River

With two losses out of three, I was not surprised to learn I was only the fifth best Allied player, so my last round was the playoff for... ninth place! This scenario was “Counter-attack at Arras.” From May 1940, the scenario has British Expeditionary Force troops trying to force back the blitzkrieg – the German forces being led by none other than Erwin Rommel! This looks like a loss for the British as they are outnumbered – and their armour isn’t as good.

I played as the Allies first and quickly took up defensive positions. This allowed me to hold off piecemeal attacks from my opponent and I hung on for a 6:4 win. Switching sides, I then



The *Memor '44* final in progress: honours are pretty even so far

blitzed a 6:2 win as the Axis by quickly moving up my tanks and pinning the British against the edge of the board. 12:6 on aggregate is a resounding win – shame it was only for ninth!

Meanwhile Reg and Colin were fighting it out on the top board. This was much closer. First, Colin won 6:5 as the Axis. The tense reverse scenario went 6:5 to Reg, making the aggregate 11:11. Figures eliminated was the tie-breaker and Reg got the win. Congratulations to him and many thanks to Barry Ingram who organised the tournament. As a *Memoir '44* fan, I find playing several different scenarios over the day great fun.

My Saturday evening was spent playing *Terra Mystica* with a couple of the *Memoir '44* crowd, eating pizza with my roommate Pete Card and our old friend Hammy and being introduced to *Paperback* by David Brain. This is an excellent word game that uses *Dominion*-style mechanisms.



Paperback in play – I think the word is “vents”. The stock of cards is at the top.

Players have a hand of cards, each showing one or two letters. They use these – possibly including the generally available ‘common’ card – to make a word. Any special abilities on the cards used are triggered when they’re played. The total score of the word is then used to buy additional cards. Most of these cards will be additional letters, but players can also buy ‘Fame’ cards (nicely illustrated covers for amusing novel titles) and it’s fame that wins the game.

Paperback is self-published by designer Tim Fowers (using Kickstarter to fund this) and a second printing is on the way. This can be ordered from the game’s website:

www.paperbackgame.com. Word games are not everybody’s cup of tea, but I really enjoyed *Paperback* and will be ordering my own copy. I’ll give it 9/10 on my highly subjective scale on first acquaintance.

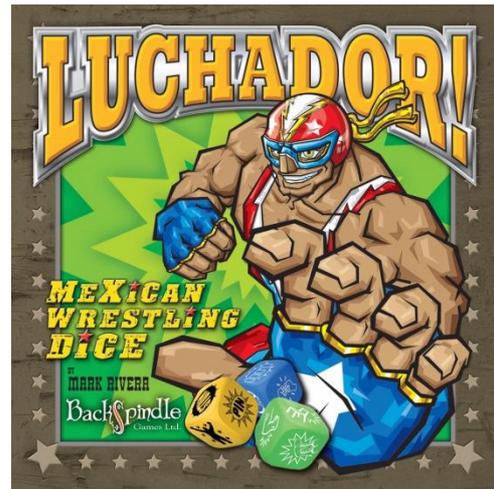
Exploring the new games

My exploration of new board games at the Expo takes place mainly on the Sunday – plus excursions between games on Saturday. Pete Card is my usual wingman on these occasions, though our interests do diverge at times. This report is organised in alphabetical order of exhibitor – not very exciting, but at least it lets me check that I’ve covered everything I looked at. Note that I’m only covering board games in this report, so there’s no mention of the many RPG publishers, retailers and others who didn’t have any board games. And I’m sure I missed a few, too.

Estonian publisher 2d6 was back for a second year. They didn't have any new games to show us, but there is now an online version of their business game, *Making Profit*, which can be found from their website www.2d6.ee

As it's a World Cup year, I was expecting some football games and ATB (Across The Board) Games didn't disappoint as they had their game, *Socceristic*, on display. I first saw this at the 2012 Expo and didn't feel the need to renew my acquaintance. You can find out more at the company's website: atbgames.co.uk

Backspindle Games is a Northern Irish publisher, probably best known for Discworld game *Guards! Guards!*. Their latest is *Luchador! Mexican Wrestling Dice*. No, this is not some strange variation on jumping beans, the dice don't wrestle! It's a dice game of Mexican wrestling (known as "lucha libre" or free fighting, which is where the name comes from). The two players roll their dice onto the wrestling ring board (the demo version had a nice model ring), looking to score hits on their opponent while blocking their attack.



The game looks quite fun, but the theme does nothing for me (and it's a only two-player game – though four can play as two tag-teams). If Mexican wrestling or dice games are your thing, take a look at backspindlegames.com to find out more.

Battlefront Miniatures were on hand with a range of *Flames of War* products (backing up the tournaments going on elsewhere) and, of course, *Firefly: the board game*. See *Flames of War* at www.flamesofwar.com and *Firefly* at the Gale Force Nine website at www.gf9.com

Black Box Games is the publisher of fantasy battle card game *Lords of War*. They had new expansions for the game, which you can find at lords-of-war.com

BoardGameStarter is the new venture by Michael Roberts and veteran gamer Darren White. As well as providing a boardgame-specific crowdfunding platform (not unlike Spieleschmiede in Germany, if I understand this correctly), BGS aims to assist games designers in developing, testing, designing, manufacturing and marketing their game. The business also provides warehousing, distribution and fulfilment services for new and existing publishers and retailers. This is a very new venture, but at least has some track record in producing Mike Hutton's *1862* last year. To find out more, take a look at www.boardgamestarter.co.uk

Pete Burley was busy demoing Burley Games' *Kamisado* and *Take it Easy!*, both of which have been around for a while now.

The first game Pete and I tried when we rocked up on Sunday morning was *Brave the Elements*. This is a new game from Miles Ratcliffe and Chaos Publishing, whose *Mediaeval Mastery* I saw at the 2012 Expo (see *TWJO* 126). We joined Martin Abrahams and another Pete (Dennis?) for a four-player game of trashing each other's buildings. As players draw new



Some of the final artwork for *Brave the Elements*

cards to make a full set of buildings at the beginning of each round, this is not too much of a handicap – though you do score a point or two if you have enough buildings left at the end of a round.

Each round players get several chances to use the cards in their hand – disasters – and attack, in effect, their opponents' buildings. Buildings destroyed or captured are kept as victory points. The cards, both buildings and disasters, are all tied in to the four classical elements (earth, air, fire, water) and there are bonuses and penalties according to which elements players use.

Brave the Elements is an interesting game that kept the four of us entertained for the best part of an hour. Because of the luck of the cards, there is a noticeable random element – if you get the right cards you can string together several actions in a row. The game was pre-production, so we were playing without the final artwork. This was on display, though, and looks really good. The game didn't meet its target on Kickstarter, but it will be re-launched "in a few months" – keep an eye open for it. I give *Brave the Elements* a provisional 8/10 on my highly subjective scale. See the Chaos Publishing website for more information: www.chaospublishing.com



Round 2 of *Brave the Elements* – red is infiltrating my position



Playing games on the Coiled Spring stand

Extra points to distributor and now publisher, Coiled Spring Games, for using most of their space for tables and chairs so that people could play their games. One of the new items on show at the Expo was card game *Anomia*, which was voted Best Party Game in the Expo Awards. I must admit that I completely missed this one, so I suggest you take a look at the description on Coiled Spring's website: www.coiledspring.co.uk. Also being published by Coiled Spring is Andy Hopwood's latest, *Dodekka* (see below).

Cubiko Games is Gavin Birnbaum's publisher for his fine wooden games (which started with *Cubiko* itself). Gavin was busy demonstrating his recent games, including cycling game *Yellow Jersey* and horse racing game *Steeplechase*. He also had a prototype of his next games *Sumo* and *Jam*. These are both played on the same raised board with a central hole by flicking dice around. I look forward to seeing the finished article next year. For more about Gavin's games, see www.cubiko.webs.com or catch up with him at Spiel in October.



The hand of Gavin demonstrates his latest

As befits the UK's largest distributor, Esdevium Games had a large space with a substantial team of demonstrators introducing visitors to some of the games they distribute. In particular, this area was also listed in the programme as AEG (*Love Letter*, *Thunderstone*), Asmodee (*Nations*), Days of Wonder (*Ticket to Ride*) and Fantasy Flight Games (*Android: Netrunner*, *Star Wars*).

As well as having a large retail stand, Games Lore were demonstrating recent games from Czech Games Edition (notably *Tash-Kalar* and *Tzolk'in*).

Gen 42 had the full array of expansions for *Hive* on show and were busy demonstrating the game.



Waggle Dance in play on the Grublin stand

After the success of last year's *Cornish Smuggler*, Grublin Games was back this year with a new prototype, *Waggle Dance* – along with production copies of *Cornish Smuggler*. As the name suggests, the game is about bees, collecting pollen and making honey. It features lots of dice, with each player having a set – their worker bees. Players use their dice to collect pollen from the flower cards, move it back to their hive and turn it into honey. And make more bees, build honeycomb and so on. The winner is the first to get enough

full honeycomb tiles. It is brightly-coloured fun and I look forward to trying it.

Waggle Dance's Kickstarter campaign raised £20k of the £15k needed, so we should be seeing the game before Christmas. To find out more, see www.grublin.com

Andy Hopwood has come up with some neat little games (as Hopwood Games) and his latest is *Dodekka*, which is being published by Coiled Spring. This is a typically smart, quick card game. Players collect cards in five suits (colours), with the aim of having the highest value in the suits they collect – otherwise the points will count against them. Their options each turn are to take the card closest to the deck or draw another card and add it to the end of the row. The catch is that if the total value of the cards is more than 12, they get all the cards.



Dodekka on display

Dodekka is entertaining, plays quickly and gives players some decisions to weigh up. Great for family play (and there's a bit of arithmetic involved, too) and a decent filler for gamers. Hopwood Games is at www.hopwoodgames.co.uk, but there's more about *Dodekka* on the Coiled Spring website: www.coiledspring.co.uk/product/dodekka

Pete spotted another card game, *oddball Aeronauts* – “a game of duelling airships” – from Maverick: Muse. The initial attraction was the stunning artwork which portrays this strange world of piratical cartoon creatures – the oddball Realms. The game is designed to be played



The *oddball Aeronauts* stand

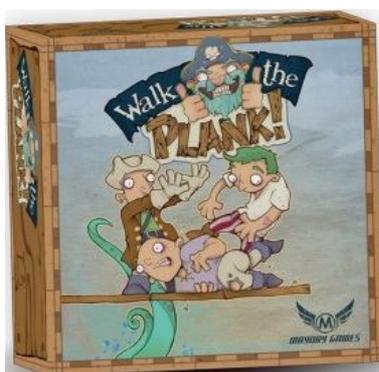
from hand so that “no surface [is] required” and is a two-player duel where the objective is to force your opponent to discard all their cards.

There is a deck of cards for each player, from which they draw their initial hand. Cards in hand are kept strictly in order as it's only the top few cards that can be used each turn. A turn is a challenge between the players, comparing the level of their chosen skills. The loser discards cards, the winner gains cards. To this can be added the effects of events and ‘tricks’. While it sounds straightforward, out-guessing your opponent becomes an important part of the game as it progresses.

When one player runs out of cards, they lose – a process that should take 15-20 minutes. And then they want revenge, of course! *Oddball Aeronauts* has been funded through Kickstarter (naturally) and should be

available early this Autumn. For more, see themaverickmuse.com

One of the silliest games I've enjoyed in recent years has been Mayday's *Get Bit!*. Players are a line of swimmers (robots in the original version, more recently re-themed as pirates) being chased by a shark. When the player at the back is caught, they lose a limb and last robot/pirate standing wins the game. It's great fun and now has a prequel: *Walk the Plank!*. Here we find out how the pirates end up in the water.



Walk the Plank! looks just as silly as *Get Bit!*. The idea is that the players are the stupidest pirates and are being disposed of by the rest of the crew. They play cards to jostle and shove other players further along the plank towards Davy Jones's locker. However, everybody has to play a sequence of cards before anyone finds out what the first cards do. There's plenty of scope for getting it horribly wrong and leaping to your doom “because you are, well, stupid.”

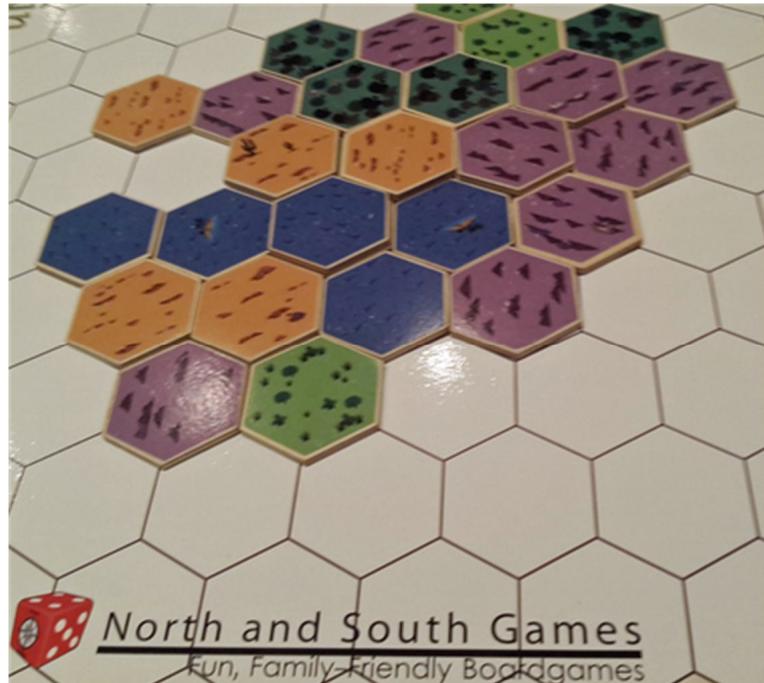
Apparently there's a third game in this thematic trilogy, *Hold Your Breath!* and I look forward to seeing this, too.

Mayday Games can be found at maydaygames.com

Meanwhile Mayfair Games had several demo tables with numerous games on the go, particularly *Mad City*. This is a quick-playing tile-laying game of city planning. That's as much as I know, though, so you'll have to follow up with Mayfair at mayfairgames.com

Medusa Games is the imprint of Expo main man Richard Denning and, along with *Great Fire of London 1666*, had a preview of Richard's latest work-in-progress. This has the working title of *Nine Worlds* and is based on Norse legend. The players represent different races and are competing to impress the Gods and take the place of the imprisoned Loki (sounds like a poisoned chalice to me!). To find out more, see the Medusa Games website at www.medusagames.co.uk

North and South Games made an impact last year with the first edition of their entertaining *Rock, Paper, Scissors, BANG!*. The second edition was launched at Spiel last October and was adorning their stand here, neatly packaged in linen bags. In front, though, was a large demo version of their new game, *Terrain*. It's very simple: players take turns placing hexagonal tiles onto a grid. Each tile shows a type of terrain (grassland, woods, mountains et al) and players score points for making groups of the same terrain.



The big demo version of *Terrain*

However, they don't know what tiles their opponents hold, let alone what anybody will have

next round, so making a nice group of three may just let the next player score a four... There's some scope to place tiles on top of others, which is an important tactical opportunity. Once all the tiles have been used up, the player with the most points wins. And then, as I remarked to designer Dave Cousins, you can play *Settlers* on the board you've just made. Or not. *Terrain* will come with rules for both a simple, family game and a more complex one for gamers. Dave expects it to be the basis for more games in the future. Catch up with North and South Games at www.northandsouthgames.co.uk

The affable Charlie Wilson was holding court as Northumbria Games, but sadly there was no sign of veteran games designer Francis Tresham, who should have been sharing with him.

Oakbound Games attracted my attention with their steampunk style and then I spotted they were promoting a board game called *Tripods!* The only question was: H G Wells or John Christopher? A quick look at the board showed places like Horsell Common and Richmond Hill and a late-Victorian style. Yep, it's *The War of the Worlds* board game – except that it isn't for copyright reasons.

Each player has a motley crew (the demo set had some wonderful individual playing pieces) trying to escape from London as the Martians invade. As the game goes on this gets more difficult as red weed grows across the pathways on the board. Plus there's plenty of scope for getting in the way of other players and the opportunity to bring down a tripod or two. The



game looks hugely atmospheric and I hope the gameplay lives up to this. It's certainly a game I'm looking forward to playing. There's more about *Tripods!* at the Oakbound website: www.oakbound.co.uk

Polish publisher Phalanx was appearing at the Expo for the first time (I think) with their new game, *1944: Race to the Rhine*. This approaches WW2 in western Europe in a novel way: as a race between competing Allied Generals. Players choose which way to go and must then organise the logistics of their advance to be the first to reach the river Rhine. Fighting battles with the enemy is just another annoying hold-up along the way!

It's a fascinating idea that brings to the forefront an aspect of war generally neglected in games. After all, an army marches on its stomach, as the man said, and that is the paramount concern in this game. Add in the use of wooden blocks for pieces and the period feel to the graphics and this game certainly looks the part. I just need to play it now to find out whether it delivers. You can find out more at the company's website: www.phalanxgames.pl/English (for the English language version).

As I walked the aisles of the trade halls (I try to make sure I peer into every corner), I came across Play with History and was impressed with the array of wooden games on display. It turns out that these fall into three distinct groups. Play with History itself publishes



A demo game of *Race for the Rhine*

modern, two-player, abstract strategy games made from wood and “inspired by history”. Thus we have *Romans vs Britons* (it’s a trap: there are two of them! Sorry, punchline to a very old joke there), *Royalists vs Roundheads* and *Tudor Galleons at War* to name but three. These are all nicely produced with dark and light wooden pieces and roll-up ‘boards’ packed in tubes. You can find these at www.playwithhistory.co.uk



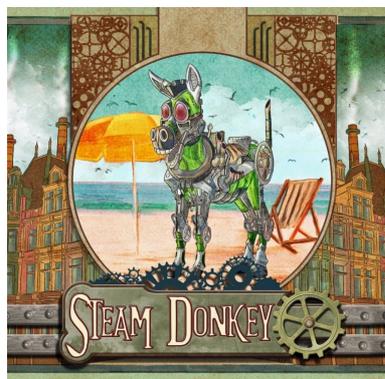
The second section is reproductions of games from across history, sold by The Historic Games Shop. The range of board games includes the Roman *Latrunculi*, Viking classic *Hnefatafl* and *Fox and Geese* from the Middle Ages plus a whole lot more. Then there are various sets of dice, playing cards from different centuries and rule books for historical games. It’s all terrific stuff and available from www.thehistoricgamesshop.co.uk

The final part of the triumvirate is Gothic Green Oak, which produces accurate replicas of historical games in natural materials for museums, re-enactment societies and film and television. The most popular of these are, of course, available in less authentic versions from The Historic Games Shop, but the place to go for the real deal is www.gothicgreenoak.co.uk

Playford Games had all (I think) of their “Moral Conflict” series of games on show. These are all about the conflict of World War Two and try to show the moral dimension of the war, not just the military/political/economic aspects. These are big games that need several players and plenty of time. I admire their ambition, but haven’t yet managed to play any of them. There’s information on all the games at playfordgames.com

I came across Porcupine Press for the first time at the London Toy Fair in January and here they are again. For my notes on their two latest games, *Telltale* and *Trix*, see my report from the Toy Fair in *TWJO* 142 or Porcupine Press’s website at www.porcupinepress.co.uk

Queen Games was another publisher demoing a selection of their recent games. In this case *Dark, Darker, Darkest* (see *TWJO* 144 for my thoughts on this), *Kingdom Builder*, *Escape* and others.



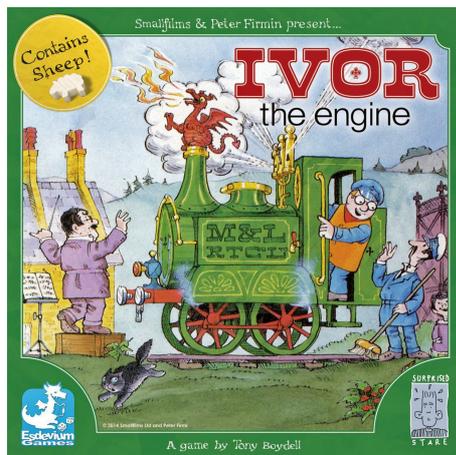
The Ragnar Brothers were showing off both a finished product, *The Promised Land*, and their latest prototype (and successful Kickstarter project), *Steam Donkey*. The former is a hefty boardgame pitting the ancient Israelites against the many hostile nations around them. I’ve played my copy a few times now and am still getting to grips with it – it does need a few hours to do it justice. The latter is a steampunk-themed card game of celebrating Queen Victoria’s Diamond Jubilee! For more information, see the Ragnar’s website at: ragnarbrothers.co.uk

Sopio was published a few years ago, but this was the first time I had encountered it. Designed by Alex Day and Danny Hooper, this “living card game” has been promoted on social media and there are now seven different decks, each with its own emphasis. However,

you only need one deck to play – and can easily add your own cards (the ‘living’ aspect) as the graphic style is very simple: stick figures with amusing captions.

Game play is simple: draw a card, play a card. Cards award players points or take points away from them or do something else. That covers plenty of options! You play through until the deck is empty and the player with the most points wins. It sounds like it should be fast, furious and good fun – enhanced by the entertaining illustrations. There’s much more on the website: sopiocards.com

Spirit Games was another retailer with a couple of demo tables which were busy every time I walked past.



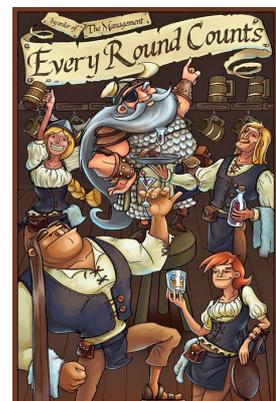
Surprised Stare Games surprised with their first licensed product: *Ivor the Engine*. I have to say that my knowledge of the TV show is nil, which the Surprised Stare team found odd, given that we’re much of an age. *Noggin the Nog* was my introduction to Oliver Postgate and Peter Firmin’s oeuvre and, Wikipedia tells me, *Ivor the Engine* pre-dates that (though it may be better known from the colour re-make in 1976-7).

Anyway, the game has the players helping Ivor round up lost sheep as they’re blocking the railway line! It contains a lot of sheep – nice white wooden pieces. Essentially, players are moving around the board to collect sheep and manoeuvring to where they can play

their cards to get extra sheep. The game ends when someone hits the target number of sheep, but final bonuses mean they may not be the winner.

Ivor the Engine is lightweight and entertaining with some tactical subtleties to keep gamers interested. And it’s what I bought with my gift token from winning the *Suburbia* tournament. Now all I need is more opportunity to play it! For more see Surprised Stare Games at www.surprisedstaregames.co.uk

Thirsty Knight Games were showing off the prototype of their first game, *Every Round Counts*. It’s a cards and dice game of competing bar people in a fantasy tavern. Essentially, players are gambling on how many beers they will roll on the dice, once they and all the other players have played cards to change the result. The game looks like fun and has some amusing artwork. However, a quick check on Kickstarter shows that it didn’t reach its target at the end of June. Still, at least I got a beermat out of it – probably the most useful freebie I’ve been given. Find out more at www.thirstyknightgames.co.uk



A short stroll later, Pete and I found another entertaining card game: *Next England Captain*. Now I have absolutely no interest in football, but this was billed as the antidote to the World Cup (and there were free brownies – never underestimate bribery when trying to attract people to your stand at a fair!). Publisher Too



My career isn't going too well and I'm definitely not *Next England Captain*

the right order. It provided quite a few laughs along the way, too, and played to a conclusion in about 20 minutes. It fits the bill as a neat, fun family game or filler and doesn't require any knowledge of football. I give it 8/10 on my highly subjective scale on first acquaintance. You can find more (including print 'n' play games) on the website at www.toomuchgames.co.uk and *Next England Captain* is being funded on Kickstarter.

Pete's and my attention was caught by another set of bold artwork. This time it was for *Rocket Race*, a steampunk-themed card game of rocket building from Triple Ace Games, better known for their series of role-playing games. In fact, *Rocket Race* is branded as part of their *Leagues of Adventure* Victorian Steampunk RPG.

The aim of the game is to be first to get to the moon in your rocketship. This is constructed from various components (cards) that players bid on, each with a reliability rating. Once you have a complete rocket, you roll the dice to see if you succeed. Then you buy some more reliable components or add-ons and try again... (Fail again. Fail better.)

A quick trial game proved good fun, though there is, of course, a big element of luck. I'll give it a provisional 7/10 on my highly subjective scale. The Triple Ace website is www.tripleacegames.com, but I didn't find anything about *Rocket Race* here.

SPY or Die Trying, published by Warm Acre, is like the climax to a Bond movie (or, indeed any other 'spy' film from the Sixties). A bunch of agents is inside the bad guy's lair trying to thwart his plans. Said baddie strokes his fluffy white cat and sends his minions to stop them.

Much Games claims that "we make tongue in cheek board games" and that's certainly true of *Next England Captain*.

Players use their hand of cards to tell the 'story' of a professional footballer. The different colours represent the different aspect of his life: the clubs he plays for, his personal life, his team members and so on. The aim is to build him up to the point where he can play for the national team and thus be eligible to be Captain. However, there may well be downs as well as ups along the way and this is part of the fun. (Though the game is family friendly and thus doesn't feature any lurid sex scandals!)

Next England Captain is surprisingly tricky: you have to get the right cards into your hand at the right time and play them in

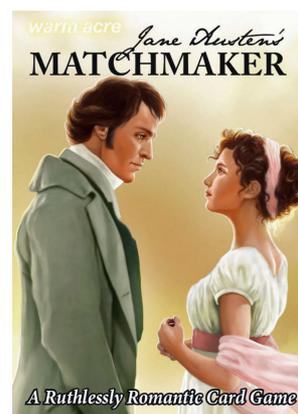


Demonstrating *SPY or Die Trying*

One player is the big bad, the others are the agents, who must co-operate if they are to succeed.

The board reminded me of *Dark, Darker, Darkest* as both boards show a set of rooms and corridors. Here we have minions rather than zombies and the building isn't on fire – though there is time pressure on the agents (the countdown must have started!). The agents need to explore the board, collecting the items they need before confronting Blofeld the megalomaniac for one last showdown. Published in 2013, *SPY or Die Trying* can be found on the game's own website: www.spyordietrying.com

The latest game from Warm Acre is *Jane Austen's Matchmaker*. This looks like a set collecting card game. Or, as the website puts it, “a briskly-paced card game in which players try to make advantageous marriages” among characters from six of Miss Austen's novels. You can immediately see the possibilities, but also the restrictions – only the men can propose, for a start.



Matches are proposed between players, playing cards as necessary to make up any deficit or, indeed, to foil the proposal. And not all matches are advantageous as the winner, when the cards run out, is whoever's matches are the most virtuous. It's not a topic I would have thought about for a card game, but it sounds intriguing. I shall have to get hold of a copy and give it a try. There's more about *Jane Austen's Matchmaker* at www.janeaustensmatchmaker.co.uk and all of Warm Acre's games at www.warmacre.com



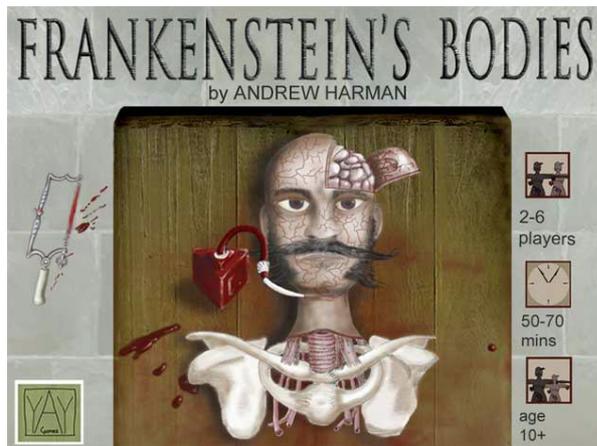
Bright patterned shirts can only mean one thing: Wattsalpoag is here! Main man Kris Gould was busy demonstrating their most recent game, *Buccaneer Bones* (which I covered in my report from Spiel '13 – see *TWJO* 140), along with other recent titles (*A Fistful of Penguins*, *Last Call...*).

Veteran publisher Wotan Games returned at the Expo last year and have now produced the game they showed in prototype last year, *Camelot – the Build*. The idea of the game is that the players are helping King Arthur complete the castle of Camelot. This they do by playing tiles onto the board (showing the castle layout). Tiles score points according to what they are and what they're next to. When the castle's complete, the player with the most points is the winner.

Camelot – the Build is touted as a game with only three rules that takes 30 minutes to play and is the first in a series of such games (*Camelot – the Court* was on show in prototype form and is expected in October with *Camelot – the Tourney* for 2015). I await the opportunity to give it a go. You can find out more from the Wotan Games website at www.wotangames.com



Building Camelot...



Frankenstein's Bodies is a gruesomely illustrated card game of reassembling cadavers, designed by Andrew Harman and self-published (as YAY Games) with funding raised on Kickstarter. I must be getting squeamish in my old age, but I did find the artwork off-putting. However, it was certainly popular at the Expo (and on Kickstarter). The aim is to assemble two bodies, taking parts from the draw deck or pinching them from other players, which gives players all sorts of options for messing up their opponents' plans. I can't find a website for the publisher

or the game, but there's plenty of information on the Kickstarter page.

At the end of this list is Z-Man Games – and the Z man himself, Zev Shlasinger, was in evidence at the show. They had a couple of demo tables where *Helios* was the most obvious game. I covered this in the first part of my report from the Gathering in *TWJO* 144. I expect we'll have a lot more games from Z-Man before the end of the year as they have an enviable track record of producing several good titles every year. Keep up to date at www.zmangames.com

Looking at the list of the exhibitors in the Expo programme suggests I've missed a few who had board games on show. Damn! I do try not overlook anyone. However, let me recommend the programme: quite apart from giving visitors the information they need (what's where and when), it contains some entertaining articles and is more like a magazine in its own right.

Let me also recommend the UK Games Expo itself. For gamers, it's 2-3 days of gaming (I recommend signing up for a tournament or two) with the opportunity to look at some new stuff and make the odd purchase. For non-gamers, there's a lot to see plus the entertainment of the various look-alikes (though in some cases it's more dress-alike than any sort of resemblance) and costume groups. I expect next year's event to be 29th-31st May 2015 (it's usually the weekend after the bank holiday), but keep an eye on the website to find out the dates and book your place: www.ukgamesexpo.co.uk

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Pevans took the photos (except where noted)
and played with Photoshop

