

Pevans looks at the new games

London Toy Fair 2010

This year's London Toy Fair returned to its former home at Olympia. This felt more comfortable than the echoing caverns of ExCeL. It's certainly more convenient for me than trekking across London to the eastern end of Docklands—though I do like the odd journey on the Docklands Light Railway. There's something slightly exotic about their trains, they just don't feel like real trains—more like continental trams. Anyway, none of that at Olympia.

For anybody more used to consumer shows, a trade fair like the Toy Fair is an odd beast. Ostensibly, the aim is the same—to show off your products, current and future, with a view to persuading people to buy them. However, it doesn't always feel like this. Many stands are closed—often literally, as they are surrounded by blank walls—with admission controlled by receptionists and even security guards.



Reception and security at the Hasbro stand

Nor is there any money changing hands. Things aren't available for sale, it's all about orders for later in the year. In some cases, things may not actually appear if there isn't enough demand. The atmosphere is thus very different from a consumer show. It's much quieter, for a start, and the visitors are mostly dressed for business. It always amuses me that Toy Fair is a place where middle-aged men in suits discuss what Barbie will be wearing this year!

There's a lot of interesting stuff to see at the Toy Fair. Games are only a small part of what's covered, though, so there aren't many new games to see—and few that are of interest to hobby gamers. I do make a point of covering the whole show, but usually the most interesting things are in the 'greenhouse' section. This is an area of smaller stands "for the small, innovative companies", particularly new businesses, and this where to find games inventors.

I was pleased to see Lynne Cadenhead and the 1745 Trading Company back again. They publish the *Quests of the World* games: currently *Scottish*, *Irish*, *English* and *Welsh Quest*. These are a series of trivia games with a geographical slant and a race mechanic. They are particularly well-produced games that look very good on the

shelf and on the table. They play well, though there's nothing too special in them as games—*Irish Quest*, in particular, has gone down well with my Irish relatives.

New for this year is what I think of Corrie Quest, which is based around the *Coronation Street* soap opera. The questions have been set by the TV series' production team, so they are absolutely canonical and cover the show's fifty-year history. The game will be available later this year as part of the fiftieth anniversary celebrations. For more see www.questsoftheworld.com



Kibodo

Also returning was the Art Meets Matter team, who published *Bookchase* two years ago. Their latest is *Kibodo*, a word game where the letter tiles are keys from a keyboard. Continuing the computer theme, the game's subtitle is "control, shift, delete." The idea is that players can shift and delete letters around the grid of words formed from earlier plays. Players can earn bonuses by connecting to the number keys placed around the board. It's a neat twist on traditional word games and looks good as well. See kibodo.info, but watch out for the soundtrack!

Circa Circa are the publishers of *About Time*, the trivia game about historical dates. Having expanded with a German version of the game, this year sees the launch of a travel edition of the game. There's more at timegame.co.uk

My favourites of the Toy Fair were the two games from Dice Maestro. Both of these are dice and card games in chunky mid-size boxes and the brainchild of Antony Brown. The first game is *Jurassic Wars*, which is bound to be popular just because it has a T Rex on the cover! It's a combat game with players pitting the dinosaurs from

their hand of cards against other players' critters. Both players also play combat cards and then use dice to resolve the fight. Generally, the predators have the upper hand, but a determined herbivore can still see off its attacker. The first expansion set for the game will be available soon. This is *Raptor Attack*, an additional set of cards that introduces the option of a pack attacking together.

The second game is *Wildlife Rescue*. Here the aim is to save endangered species, the winner being whoever has the highest valued set at the end. Players can gain bonuses by getting particular animals in their collection—according to a card they got at the start of the game. Players gain cards by rolling and re-rolling dice to make sets, *Yahtzee*-style. They can also use action cards to 'transfer' animals from other players' collections. The more valuable cards are harder to get as they match fewer symbols on the dice, so there are some subtleties to the game. Both of these are attractive and appealing games, so I expect to see a lot more of them. You can find out more at www.dicemaestro.com

Edugames is a New Zealand company who were at the Toy Fair with *Brit Quiz*, a general knowledge quiz about Britain—following on from their first game, *Kiwi Quiz*, about New Zealand. The game is simply a box of cards, each with four questions about Britain. Designer David Allis characterised these as being "stuff you should know!" The aim is to provide an entertaining way of learning about the country—educational rather than trivial. There's nothing special here, but it's a

decent package at a good retail price. See www.edugames.co.nz



Starplayer

Inspired Games launched the first of their *Starplayer* games at the Toy Fair. Subtitled "The Football Board Game", this is a board game about running a football club. Players roll the dice and move their pawn along the track round the outside of the board. The space they land on may allow them to buy a player (cards) for their team or draw a special card. No doubt they roll again if they roll a double... Once you have your team, you roll the special dice until you have won enough 'cup matches' to make it to the Cup Final. The winner of the game is decided by the penalty shoot-out at the Cup Final. Sadly, I can't see much of a game in this. The second product will be the *Starplayer Football*

Card Game, presumably using the cards from the board game in a different format. See more at www.inspiredgames.co.uk

Kamtronic were another publisher to return to the Toy Fair, showing their football trivia game, *Football Legend*. The questions and other cards allow the player to progress along the pitch and shoot—scoring a goal if they beat the keeper. Get a question wrong or lose a challenge and the other player gets the ball and has the initiative. You'll find more at www.football-legend.co.uk

In the world of toys, anything that's aimed at girls rather than boys will be coloured pink and probably covered in hearts. Marriage Games's *Complimental* isn't particularly pink, but does use a lot of hearts in its graphics. I suspect it is aimed more at women than men. The idea of the game is that players collect compliment cards in various categories and assign these—secretly—to the other players. Once they have the full set, they have to justify their choices to the group. It's a clever idea, competing through being nice to the other players! I can see it being huge fun in the right circumstances, but I can equally see it being excruciatingly embarrassing. Full marks for trying something different, though. Details at www.complimental.co.uk



Fiendish Numbers

Some years ago Seager Games gave us *Where is Moldova?*. This year they were back at the Toy Fair with two new games: *Fiendish Numbers* and *Fiendish Letters*. Both of them feature a board for each player with a grid of numbers or letters. Players make stacks of number or letter tiles on these to create sums or words. Play is simultaneous with players trying to use up their tiles before anyone else. The games strike me as designed to appeal to people who like the puzzles in *Countdown*.

Also on show with Seager was *The Amazing Mammoth Hunt*, from a company in New Zealand. This is a nicely-illustrated board game in which players travel the world tracking down mammoths through their footprints. Players have to guess where the square they land on is on the map of the world, adding to their knowledge. This looks like a fun family game.

Bananagrams was apparently launched at the Toy Fair in 2006, though I didn't notice it then. It was back this year on the Winning Moves UK stand, where it made a pleasant change from the *Top Trumps* decks and local *Monopoly* games that are their stock in trade. The publisher, a family business based in both the UK and the US, had its own stand at the Spring Fair. *Bananagrams* consists of a set of letter tiles in a banana-shaped (and coloured) bag. Players each take a bunch of tiles and build their own grid of words, taking or swapping tiles as they go. First to get rid of all their tiles when the stock is exhausted wins "the anagram game that will drive you bananas."

This year sees two new games from the same team: *Appletters* and *PairsinPears*. The former, in a red, apple-shaped pouch, is a Domino-like game using letter tiles. The latter, in a green, pear-shaped pocket, has players racing to make pairs of words in matching patterns. Both are billed as educational games for children and families, but also have rules for adults to play. I'm always wary of "educational" games—often there's no game, just instruction. In this case, though, both look like real games. See www.bananagrams-intl.com for more.

Next year's Toy Fair will be at Olympia again on 25th-27th January 2011. For more information see the Fair's website: www.toyfair.co.uk

Spring Fair 2010

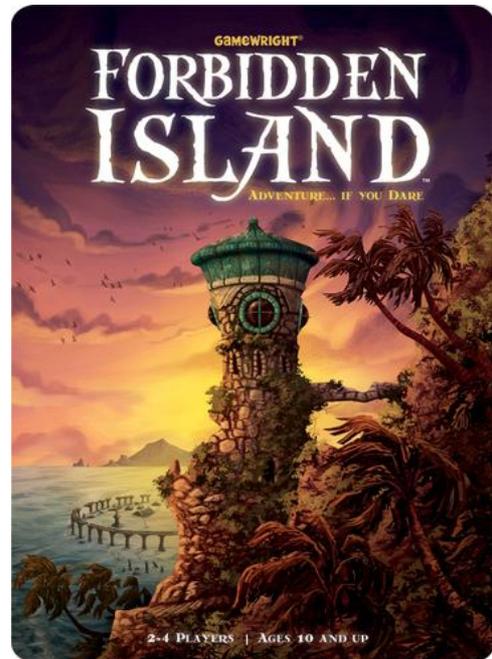
This year I made the trip to the National Exhibition Centre (NEC) for the Spring Fair as well. I remember this event taking place in the Spring, but it's now held in February—a couple of weeks after Toy Fair this year. It is a much bigger show than Toy Fair, since its remit is much wider. However, it has a Toy section (just part of one hall) and thus includes games in its coverage. A quick check of the exhibitors showed pretty much the same suspects as the Toy Fair. It was noticeable, though, that several had more space at the NEC than they did at Olympia. There is no equivalent of Toy Fair's greenhouse and so no small, start-up companies.

Distributor Coiled Spring Games was at the Spring Fair with the latest games from French publisher Gigamic and Gamewright in the USA, amongst others. Gigamic's *Kakuzu* is a multi-player Sudoku variant. It uses a 9 x 9 grid of numbers, concealed by stones. Players identify the hidden numbers and gain stones when correct—most stones wins the game when the board is clear. It is expected to be available this April. Also from Gigamic is *RÖK*, a game of pattern matching using 'stones' in several colours engraved with runes. Players take a handful each from the bag and

throw them on the table. Then they grab matching pairs. It's fast and frantic and wonderfully tactile.

Gigamic is also producing a new range of games in cube-shaped boxes. The first of these is *Regatta*—no relation to any of the previous games of that name except that, like them, it's about yacht racing. Inside the cube are some great model boats, a couple of model buoys and a deck of cards. Players use the movement cards from their hand to move their boat, following the rules of yacht racing. The idea is, of course, to be first to complete the course around the buoys back to the start. Good fun and with variations for family or adult play.

Gamewright produce some great children's games. This year they are publishing *Forbidden Island*, designed by Matt Leacock, it's a cooperative game in the style of his *Pandemic*. The players are a team of adventurers racing to rescue treasures from the eponymous island before it sinks beneath the waves. It's clearly a more family friendly theme and should do well if it's half as much fun as *Pandemic*. You'll find more at coiledspring.co.uk



For more on the Spring Fair see www.springfair.com

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