

London Toy Fair 2011

Pevans reports on the new games

After last year's peace and quiet, the bustle of the 2011 London Toy Fair was something of a relief. The whole place seemed busier and livelier and the organisers were certainly boasting that there were more exhibitors. Some of these were up on the balcony around the main hall at Olympia, giving an interesting vantage point over the rest of the show.

As a trade show, the Toy Fair is rather different from the games events I am used to. In particular, some exhibitors have 'closed stands'. Access is often by appointment only and the hoi polloi (that's me) have to make do with rubbernecking through any windows there are. Chief of these is Hasbro—I've even known them have uniformed commissionaires guarding the entrance. Luckily, most companies are more interested in showing off what they have.

The other thing about the Toy Fair is that it covers the whole of the toy industry and games publishing is only a small part of this. As it's the only part that interests me, it doesn't take me long to do the rounds. However, it's a point of honour for me to walk every aisle and make sure there isn't a small stand hidden away between the blank walls of the closed stands. The most interesting section, though, is the Greenhouse. This is made up of small stands—a cost effective showcase for new companies. This is where to find the games inventors.

In the Greenhouse

Let me start with the Greenhouse then. First up is Annets Entertainment. They were showing off their game, *Whirred Play*. As the title suggests, this is about



The board for *Whirred Play*

homonyms, words that sound the same, but are different: flee/flea, rein/rain and so on. Each player chooses one of the words on the card and scores according to how many people choose something different. As they move along the scoring track that is the board, different options are available to players. In particular, they can challenge the leader to a duel to try to bring them back into the pack. First to fifty points wins.

As a game, there's not a lot to this. I can see it being quite fun in a family environment, trying to out-guess and bluff the other players. There is also an educational aspect to the game as players learn new words. Annets Entertainment reports that *Whirred Play* went down well in local retailers last Christmas and is available from their website, where there's also more information about the game: www.whirredplay.co.uk.



The *Chice* app on a smartphone

Chice was an interesting departure from what I expected to see. It is described as an app that replaces dice for any dice-based game. Players choose hexagons from an odd-looking grid of 18. Each is valued at 0, 1 or 2, giving them a score. Picking more hexagons gives a greater range to the possible scores. It was only when I looked at the website later

that I realised that the value of each hexagon stays the same. Hence, it is quite easy to identify what these are and, in effect, choose the result you want. Judging by what's on the website, this is how the app is supposed to be used. I don't get this. It would be simpler just to let players choose the number they want. Am I missing something? Take a look for yourself at www.chicegames.co.uk.

The stereotype of games inventors is that, lacking any other models, they re-invent either *Monopoly* or *Trivial Pursuit*. *Flaggo* breaks the mould. It combines both games. Players roll two dice to move their neat aeroplane pawns along the track round the outside of the square board. The spaces are marked with national flags to identify the type of trivia question they have to answer. Correct answers mean points; enough points buy a letter and first to six letters (F-L-A-G-G-O) wins. Oh dear. The production is decent and the game has plenty of questions, but the 'flag' theme doesn't make this anything out of the ordinary. The game's website is www.flaggo.com.

Liquid Graphics is a graphic design agency which has worked on several games. One of those on display was *Shhh ... or Tell It*. This is designed to help people understand when they should keep quiet about something and when they need to speak out. Players are given a scenario and have fifteen seconds to make their



The spinner from *Spinawina*

decision. Correct answers garner black tokens; wrong ones get red. The aim of the game is to have the most black tokens when you reach the finish on the board. I can see that this is a useful training/learning tool, but I don't know how it stands up as a game. To find out more, see www.shhh-or-tellit.org.

Spinawina is a trivia game with something of a travel theme and a novel way of selecting the category of question (from the 14 categories available). The circular playing area on the board is divided into rings and segments. A clear plastic 'spinner' serves a double purpose. Players rotate it to find the type of question they have to answer: according to the section where the spinner stops and the segment where their peg is. The spinner is also a peg-board: players move their peg towards the centre as they answer questions correctly. First to the middle wins. Again, this is a fairly standard trivia game—apart from the spinner. There is plenty about the game on the website: www.spinawina.com.

More newcomers

That was it for the Greenhouse, but it was not the only place to see new games from new companies. I'm a fan of motor racing games, so I was quite taken with Desktop Grand Prix from Fifth Wing Games. Although only in prototype form, the game has a retro feel that harks back to Waddington's *Formula 1*—all it needs are the dashboards. Having established a starting grid, players roll dice to move their car around the track. More important, though, is making best use of the hand of manoeuvre cards that each player starts with. What's different about the game is the racing line shown prominently on the track. This is the first game I've come across that simulates this important feature of an F1 race: the optimum route around the circuit. I look forward to trying this game.

Giggly Games is the label for two actors and their brainchild, *Game for Fame*. Players race around the appropriately star-shaped track to achieve megastardom—and gain the most money. They



earn cash through little performances, either solo or with co-stars, with other players acting as judges. Players can add an entourage and gain or lose from the attention of the paparazzi on the way. The game looks like a lot of fun when you're in the right frame of mind and it certainly seems to have gone down well with those who've played it so far. See the videos (and other stuff) on the website: www.gameforfame.co.uk.

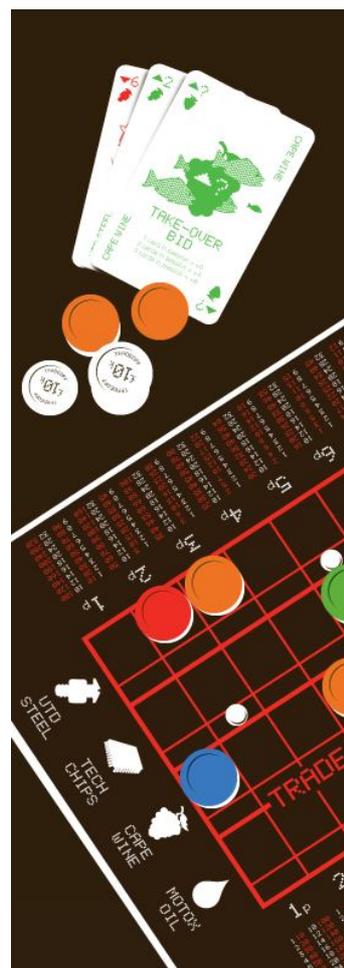
Tradeoff is a complete contrast: a stock market game that explicitly links playing the market with gambling. Players have chips for money and the playing cards at the heart of the game also affect the prices of the four companies that players trade in. As you'd expect, players buy and sell to make money, riding the ups and downs of the market. However, the winner is the one with the most 'toys' (yachts, aeroplanes etc), bought with the money they've made. Players thus have to balance retaining money to speculate with and spending it on what they need to win. Another one I look forward to trying—and the publishers promise advanced rules for those who have "mastered" the standard game. For more see the website: www.tradeoffgame.com

Rest of the main floor

That's the new guys out of the way. Then there are plenty of established companies exhibiting their new games. Cheatwell Games has been around for a while and has a huge range of entertaining games. I took a look round their stand, but didn't spot anything new and they were too busy for me to get a word—which sounds like good news.

Drumond Park has been around for a while, too. In recent years they have produced a number of board game versions of TV quiz shows (it looks like they picked up some licences from the now defunct Britannia Games) to add to their range of original games. Releases for this year are *The Million Pound Drop Game* and *Eggheads*. Alongside these are a sister game for their classic, *Articulate!*, where players have to get their partner to say as many words as possible in a random category. *Articulate! (Your Life)* has "six new lifestyle categories", but appears to be essentially the same game. Finally, *His and Hers* is the latest in "the Logo Family" of games where players have to identify "everyday lifestyle icons". In this case, the questions are about how the opposite sex ticks. As Drumond Park had a closed stand, I wasn't able to look at these more closely. There's more on their website: www.drumondpark.com.

Distributor Esdevium—though I should probably start calling them Asmodée—had their usual stand next to Hasbro (after all, they do handle Hasbro's hobby brands)



Tradeoff components



and their usual focus on CCGs: *Yu-Gi-Oh!*, *Pokémon* and, of course, *Magic: the Gathering*. They displayed a few hobby games on their stand, but nothing that stood out for me. For more about Esdevium Games, go to: www.esdeviumgames.com.

The Green Board Game Company is another games publisher that's been around for ages and has an impressive range of games. I didn't see any new games on their stand and the team was busy every time I went past, so I'm afraid I have no news from them. However, you can pick up on the latest—and the full range—at the website: www.greenboardgames.com.

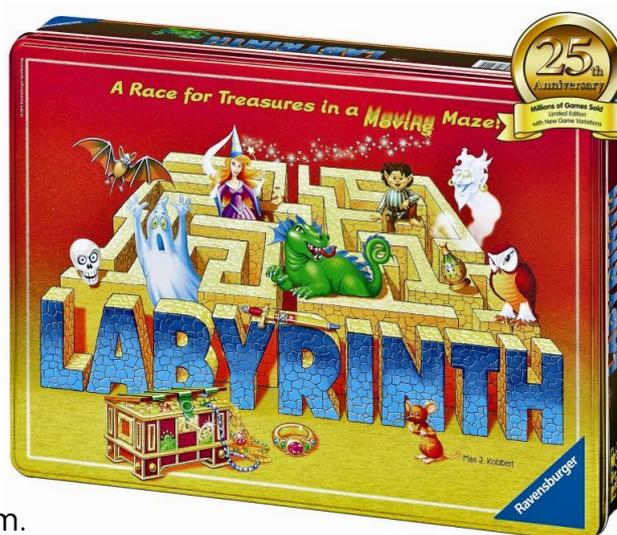
German company Haba publishes some wonderful children's games, all produced in good quality wood. The UK subsidiary was at the Toy Fair, as they have been for a few years now, but did not have any games on their stand. You can check out the selection on the website: www.haba.co.uk.

Hasbro are, of course, the big boys at the Toy Fair and have a large stand. As I've already mentioned, this is usually a closed stand and I didn't get in there this year. I have no doubt that Hasbro will have some new games this year. Experience suggests these will be new twists on *Monopoly* and *Trivial Pursuit* and something based on a license from Disney. Hasbro UK's games can be found online at www.hasbro.com/games/en_GB.

Paul Lamond Games is another long-running games company with a wide range. Their trademark black stand was at the Toy Fair as usual, but I couldn't find any

new games there. Checking the company's website I find the 'latest' news is from January 2009, marking their 25th anniversary. To take a look for yourself, visit: www.paul-lamond.com.

Ravensburger is a giant in Germany, but their UK subsidiary all but ignores the company's range of excellent games to concentrate on jigsaw puzzles. This year, however, they had a splash to promote the 25th anniversary edition of *Labyrinth*. What can I say? It's a classic! But it melts my brain. The only other game I could see on their stand was the latest edition of *Scotland Yard*—another classic. For more see the website: www.ravensburger.com/united_kingdom.



The UK division of University Games subsumed one of my favourite UK games publishers, Upstarts!, a while back. They have an impressive range of games, including favourites from Upstarts! as well as US games from the parent company. Their new game for 2011 is *5 Second Rule* (originally published by Patch Products in the US last year). The idea of this is putting people under pressure to answer a challenge (such as "name three breeds of dog") within five seconds. However, this was a closed stand so I didn't get a closer look at anything. You can find more at the website, though there doesn't seem to be anything there on

5 Second Rule: www.universitygames.co.uk.

Wild Card Games have been around for a few years since they launched their first game, *Backpacker*. Their latest is *Arithmanix*, a fast playing card game with an arithmetic theme. Play is simultaneous with players trying to make equations from the cards in their hand that equate to the target number on the table. Aimed at ages 8+, it clearly has a strong educational element, but it is also an entertaining challenge. The large format, brightly-coloured cards make the game attractive and easily playable. For more, see: www.arithmanix.com



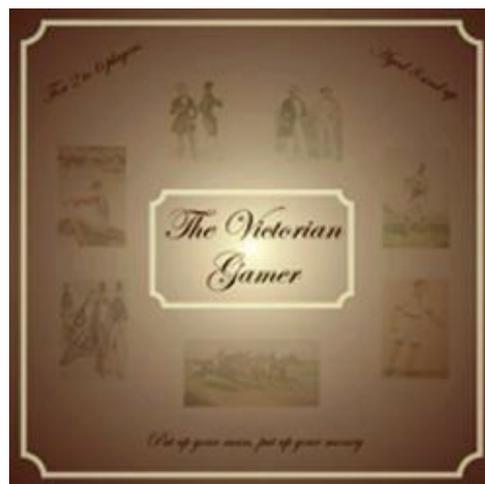
Arithmanix on display

Winning Moves UK has a long track record producing *Top Trumps* and local *Monopoly* games as well as a variety of other ex-Hasbro titles. They were showing the two games they launched for Christmas last year, both TV tie-ins: *Dragons' Den—the Board Game* and *Harry Hill's TV Burp Board Game*. In the first players are 'Dragons', deciding whether or not to invest in various business ventures. The game uses genuine inventions, so the outcome depends on how they did historically. The second game is a mixture of trivia and silly challenges "based around the wonderful and celebrity-filled world of television as we know it". Both sound like decent family fun and you can find out more at: www.winningmoves.co.uk

On the balcony

To complete my visit to the Toy Fair, I just needed to scoot round the balcony and see who was there. Circa Circa made their name with the *About Time* trivia game. For this year, they have a re-vamped edition of the basic game and a Travel edition. They are also moving into distribution, carrying titles from a number of small publishers. For more on *About Time* see the website: www.abouttimeboardgame.com.

A little further along were the Pants on Fire guys, best known for *Liar Liar*. They were showing this and their second game, *Eurobabble*, and also had a prototype of their next game, *The Victorian Gamer*. Perhaps Victorian Games would be a better name as the players put up their 'team' in a series of sporting events: relay race, boat race, horse race and prize-fighting match. Players bet on the outcomes, which are determined using dice, and the player with the most money wins. This looks rather interesting as the dice games have different odds and handicaps. Players will need good judgement and some luck to win the game. I look forward to seeing the finished article, but there is plenty of information on the website: www.pantsonfiregames.co.uk



I always remember Seager Games for the huge red box of their first game, *Where IS Moldova?*. Their latest project is called *Don't Get Mad* and mixes trivia, dice and gambling. Each turn, a roll of the dice gives the challenge and the odds. The lead player chooses the stakes—or passes the challenge—and other players can decide whether to take it up. Winning and losing moves players up and down a scoring track where they can have a positive or negative total. Highest total wins at the end, of course, but players are never out of the game as a challenge can take them from bottom to top. Or vice versa. Seager intends to produce the game in as eco-friendly manner as possible, using vegetable inks and biodegradable cardboard. We should see the finished result later in the year.

It was good to see the Toy Fair busy again, but there seemed to be fewer games than usual. There were a few that are of interest, though, in amongst all the trivia games. As always the Toy Fair was well organised by the British Toy and Hobby Association (www.btha.co.uk). Next year's event is scheduled for 24th-26th January 2012 at Olympia. There's plenty more information on the Toy Fair website: www.britishtoyfair.co.uk



This article was first published in *To Win Just Once* 113 (March 2011)
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