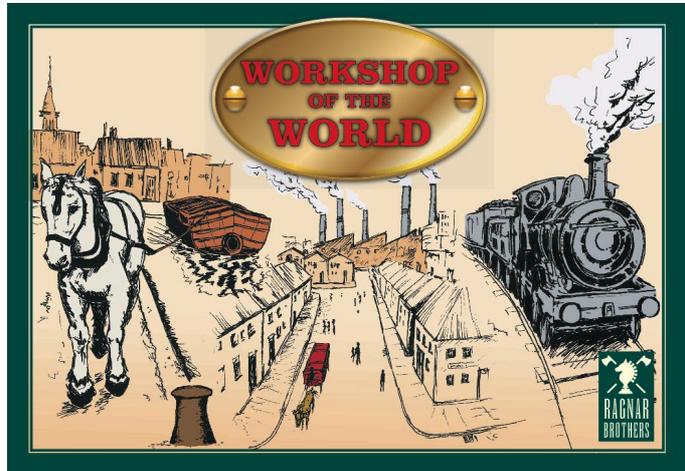


The Industrial Revolution *Workshop of the World* reviewed by Pevans

Workshop of the World got my immediate attention since it's the latest game from the Ragnar Brothers. Then I discovered that it was inspired by their earlier game, *Canal Mania*, and by Martin Wallace's *Brass*. This definitely sounds like my kind of game. Like both its inspirations, this game is set in England during the Industrial Revolution. Players place industries in the towns around the board, connecting them with canals and, later, railways. These generate revenue: money for players to spend, but also what wins the game at the end.



The game comes in a shallow box, but it's big enough to hold all the game's components. First of these is the board. This shows most of England and southern Scotland in a rather garish green. Towns and cities are shown by circles in different colours, each denoting a type of industry and numbered with a value, 2-4. A network of lines between the towns shows where players can build canals and railways. There's a revenue/scoring track round the edge of the board, spaces for cards and tracks that show the values of each type of industry.

Other components are sets of wooden cylinders in different colours for the players. They also have rectangular cardboard counters in their colour. These show a horse-drawn canal barge on one side and an early railway locomotive on the other. There's a deck of cards, one for each town together with some wild cards, and plastic coins for money. There are also 'demand' tokens (cardboard discs) that are used to set the value of each type of industry. All of decent quality.

Moving on to game play, *Workshop of the World* is a game of two halves—the canal era and the railway era. The two work in the same way except that players build canals in one era and railways in the other. Each starts with players drawing two demand tokens and playing one. This increases the value of a specific type of industry (they all start at zero). The cards are shuffled and some set aside to give an even number of rounds for the number of players.

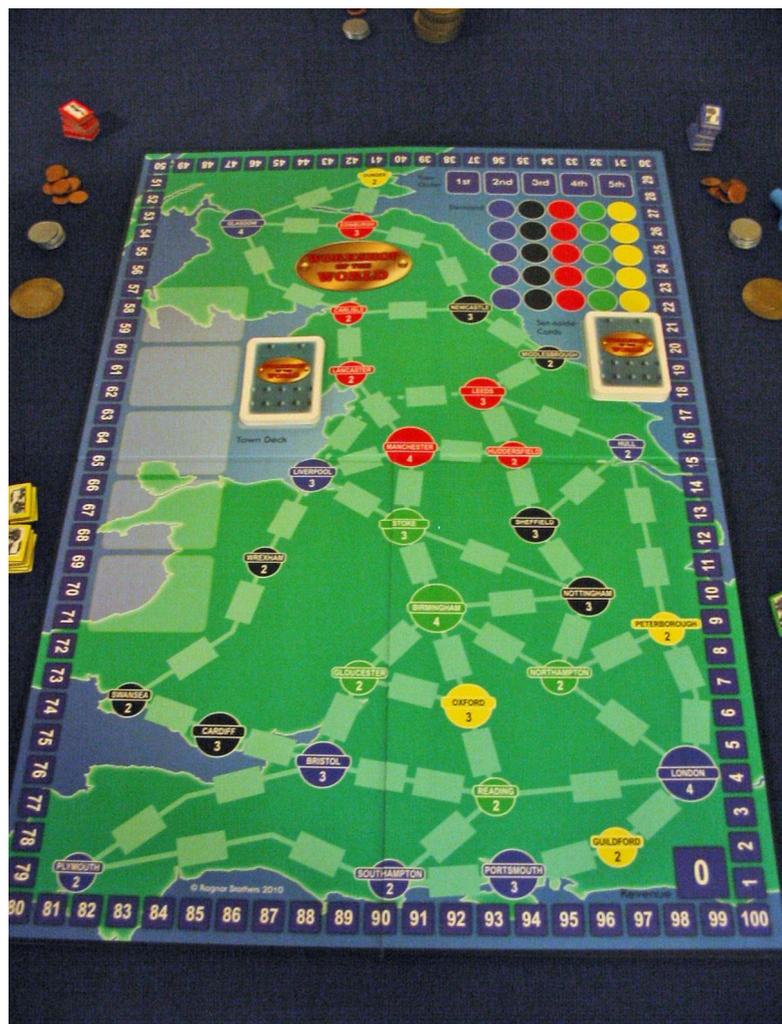
At the start of each round, as many cards as players are dealt out. Players now bid for the order of play. This is a sealed bid auction: players put coins in their hand and hold out their closed fists. When revealed, the bids set the order for the turn and players choose cards in this order. Players who bid the same stay in the same order as before. A tactical point here is that the person in first place only needs to

bid as much as anyone else to retain their place. To take over first place, you need to be prepared to pay a bit more.

When a player takes a card, they place a cylinder in the appropriate town—this will be worth the value of that town's type of industry at the end of the era. They may then build one or two canal links, at a cost of 3 each. The first must be from the town they just played in, the second can extend the first or branch from the same town. The player scores (on the revenue track) the value of each town these links connect that has one of their cylinders in. Initially, of course, this will only be the cylinder they just placed. This gives players a big incentive to get the cards for towns next to each other so that they can link them up and, ideally, score each town several times over.

Once all the cards have been used, the era ends. Players may play a second demand token to increase the values of the towns and then score up. At the end of the canal era, players get their current revenue score in cash. They get cash for their canal pieces on the board and take these off. They also get cash for each of their cylinders on the board, according to the current value of the industry for the town they're in. These stay on the board, which encourages players to play into the same areas in the railway era and pick up the points for these again.

Players draw two more demand tokens and play one. All the cards are shuffled, the same number put aside and the railway era plays out—though, strangely, each railway link only costs 2 to build. The big difference is that players are starting with pieces already on the board. This means they get major points by building railway links to re-connect the towns they have cylinders in. A consequence of this is that players will often want different cards from each other, making the bidding less crucial. However, order of play is still significant, particularly where several players want a particular town and its connections.



When the cards run out for the second time, the railway era is over. Players have one last chance to play a demand token. Then they score up as before—using either the revenue track or the coins—and the player with the most money wins. From my experience, *Workshop of the World* is a close-fought tactical struggle that produces a close result. I have mostly played it with four players, but my one five-player game seemed to work well too.

There are an awful lot of things to think about when playing this game. Most of this you need to do when deciding what to bid and what you'll do with the card you want. You have to consider the value of a cylinder placed in this town, the value of the link(s) you can build out from it, how it connects into your network and thus how much it is worth bidding. To make things more complicated, though, you also need to take account of what the other players are likely to do. If other players want the same card as you, you'll need to bid a bit more to make sure you get it.

Then you can consider what you'd do with your second choice and third... Thus, once the bids are revealed and you know which card you're getting, you should already know just what you're going to do. The result is that *Workshop of the World* feels like an abstract, positional game. You do all this thinking about just where you want to play, given the options available. Making your play is then just following this through and feels rather mechanical.

When I'm playing *Workshop of the World*, I don't feel that I'm developing industries or building canals as I do when playing *Brass* or *Canal Mania*. This is much more an intellectual exercise. The lack of atmosphere puts me off, I'm afraid. It is a testing game that presents players with challenges and many decisions, but it's not one that I particularly enjoy playing. I suggest you try it for yourselves, though, and make up your own mind as it does have a lot going for it.

Workshop of the World is designed and published by the Ragnar Brothers. It is a strategy board game for 3-5 players, aged 14+, that takes about 90 minutes to play. It gets 6/10 on my highly subjective scale.

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This review was first published in *To Win Just Once* 110 (November 2010)