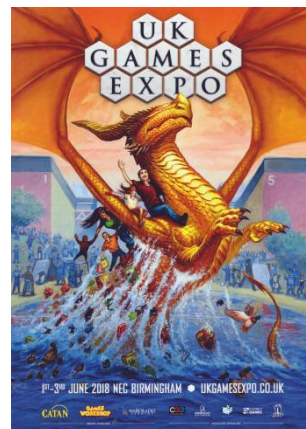


1, 2, Hilton Metropole...

Pevans reports from the 2018 UK Games Expo

This year's Expo again took over two Halls at the National Exhibition Centre (NEC). This time, however, the trade hall filled Hall 1 and took more space in Hall 2. The rest of Hall 2, along with rooms at the Hilton Metropole hotel, was used for tournaments and other organised events with open gaming in the evening – late into the evening in the case of the Metropole. It also ran for three days this year: Friday – Sunday. The show is rapidly fulfilling its aim of being a British equivalent of Spiel.



However, my show started on Thursday afternoon when I put on my Games from Pevans hat to attend the Retailer Summit hosted by asmodee UK (formerly Esdevium Games). This is an opportunity for publishers distributed in the UK by asmodee to show off their up and coming titles – particularly to retailers, many of whom will be busy at the show themselves for the next three days. It doesn't offer the chance to play any games, but here are my highlights of what I saw.

AEG (www.alderac.com) presented John Clair's *Space Base*, a neat dice and cards game with a science fiction theme. Each player starts with a set of spaceship cards. They roll dice to trigger their spaceships' actions and may then buy a new card. This replaces the existing card in that 'slot'. The really clever bit is that the replaced cards go to the bottom of the player's board where they will be triggered by other players' dice rolls. I like the look of this one and will definitely be keeping an eye open for it.



The Boufbowl display

The Boufbowl display

French publisher Ankama (www.ankama-games.com/en) has some wonderfully over-the-top designs. *Boufbowl* (designed by Yann and Clem) uses *Krosmaster*-style figurines for a two-player football (soccer) analogue. Players move their figures, passing the 'ball' or tackling opponents in an effort to score goals. A hand of cards gives each player further options. It's so not my thing, but it does look good.

Henhouse Havoc (designed by TOT) shows a similar graphic style for a game that is, in effect, a souped-up version of *Battleships*. Players use their weapons to bombard co-ordinates on opponents' boards, but lose weaponry as it's eliminated from their own board. Contributing to the destruction of a

weapon earns players 'sheaves' which can then be used to buy the eggs that are victory points. Secret Weapons cards add further mayhem. It's not a particularly deep game, but looks magnificent.



Stellium tucked between other games

Stellium (designed by Rémi Saunier) is a 2017 game from Ankama with a rather different graphic look to it. The key component is a bag of marbles in different colours. These are drawn at random, but each colour also has a different texture, so players can try to pull out just the marble they want. Marbles are placed on cardboard trays on the main board, scoring points when you match target configurations. It's an intriguing game, but too abstract for me.

Distributor Coiledspring (coiledspring.co.uk) showed off some new titles from Gamewright (www.gamewright.com). Most interesting of these for me was *Forbidden Sky*, the latest family-orientated co-operative game from Matt Leacock. Players are exploring a city floating in the sky in the middle of a thunderstorm. The objective is to find all the necessary pieces to power an escape rocket – completing a real electrical circuit – without being struck by lightning. I've enjoyed all the games in this series, and look forward to seeing the finished version of this one.

Okiya, published by Blue Orange, is also distributed by Coiledspring. Designed by Bruno Cathala, this is a simple little game, lifted out of the ordinary by the gorgeous Hanafuda-style illustrations on the square tiles. Each tile has several elements (bird, sun, banner, for example) on it and playing on a tile forces your opponent to play on a vacant tile with one of the same elements. Players win by completing a line of four or a



Forbidden Sky on display

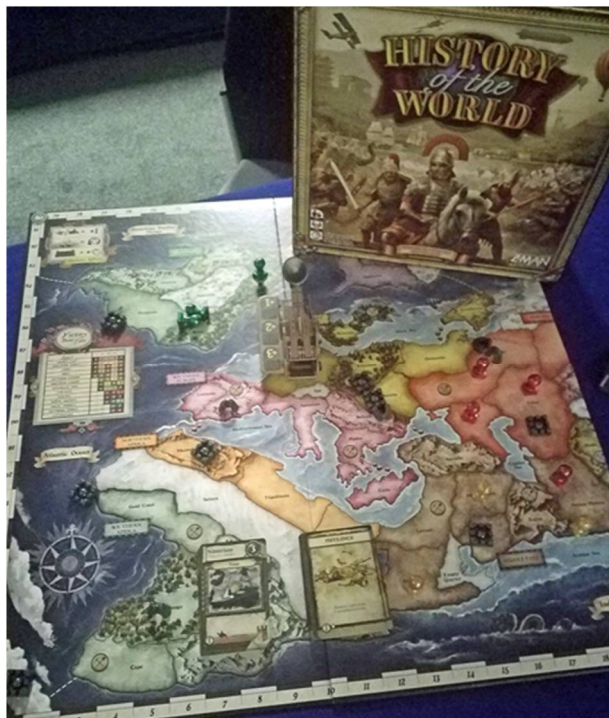
square or by preventing their opponent from playing – something that prevents the game becoming a stalemate. It's a delightful little game that I give a provisional 7/10 on my highly subjective scale.

Days of Wonder (www.daysof wonder.com) has an introductory *Ticket to Ride* game coming along. *Ticket to Ride New York* plays in just 15 minutes. The board shows Manhattan, players are running taxis rather than trains and gameplay is streamlined. However, it condenses the *Ticket to Ride* experience without over-simplifying. Full marks to designer Alan Moon.



Ticket to Ride: New York, but shouldn't ALL the taxis be yellow?

Wizkids (www.wizkidsgames.com) have lots of new games in the pipeline. Here's a little taster: *Fury of Dracula* is essentially a third edition of this clever hidden movement game; *Heroes of Dominaria* is explicitly a "Euro game" set in the *Magic: the Gathering* universe, though this is largely irrelevant to the game; *Maiden's Quest* is a little card game that is played "in hand" – no table required! And *Star Trek: Galactic Enterprises* is a business game with bluffing elements. There's more to come.



Here's the new *History of the World* with only two-thirds of the board visible

Z-Man Games (www.zmangames.com) is publishing a new edition of the Ragnars' *History of the World* – one of my Top Ten games. This has condensed the game into five Epochs (the original has seven and 2009's *A Brief History of the World* six), simplified the board and further streamlined the combat system (from *A Brief...*). Production is completely over the top: do we need a model catapult for tracking combat bonuses? It looks great, though, and hopefully has preserved the original game's appeal.

Switching hats

Thursday evening's press preview used the open gaming section in Hall 1 (supplied by the Thirsty Meeples' – www.thirstymeeples.co.uk – extensive games library during the show proper). After working my way along the first row of tables, I took stock and realised just how many publishers were involved. I reckon I'd spent a sixth of the time on a twelfth of the exhibitors. Time to move up a gear. Again, this was not an opportunity to play any of the games, so here are my highlights of what I saw.

Those of a certain age will recognise these words: "...in the dark winter ... the Men of the Northlands sit by their great log fires and tell the tale ... of Noggin the Nog." Yes, that's part of the introduction to the classic animated TV series, *Noggin the Nog*, featuring the voice of Oliver Postgate and the drawings of Peter Firmin.

And now we have the game. *Tales of the Northlands: The Sagas of Noggin the Nog* (www.sagasofnogginthenog.com) is a hefty production that includes everything from the TV series and books. It's designed by Nick Case and published by A-Muse-Ment with a Kickstarter campaign that finished on 6th June after raising just over £45,000 against its original goal of £10,000.

The game has the players as Lords of the Northlands, assisting Noggin in his quests and helping thwart his wicked uncle, Nogbad the Bad. They take actions with their Nog workers, producing and using resources. However, each action takes time, marked by moving the player's marker around a roundel which governs whose turn is next and how much they can do. It lasts a maximum of eight rounds and, assuming Noggin gains the crown rather than Nogbad, players score up to see who's won.

The game looks absolutely terrific, using Peter Firmin's original drawings, augmented by new artwork from the man himself. At this stage the game is expected in October,



"I say, Nogbad, I'd like a word with you." Need I say more?

though I wouldn't be surprised if that date slips, and I look forward to getting my copy. Yes, of course I backed it.

Hub Games (www.wearehubgames.com) is the new name for The Creativity Hub, originators of *Rory's Story Cubes*. The man himself, Rory O'Connor, was on hand to show off their new games. These included the finished version of *Untold: Adventures Await*, which I first saw at last year's Expo and was launched at last year's Spiel. *Untold* provides a structured way of using the story cubes to generate a story in five scenes, building up to a climax.

Hub's latest is *Holding On: The Troubled Life of Billy Kerr*. This is another co-operative game, with the players as a medical team trying to deal with an awkward, amnesiac (or is he?) patient. While caring for the patient and dealing with other day-to-day tasks, the players must try to work out who Billy Kerr actually is. I was warned that playing the game is genuinely stressful and players will, at some point, lose their tempers with Billy. This makes it sound perhaps too realistic.



Holding On displayed – note the blurry pictures (with the odd sharper image) on the tiles

There are ten different scenarios in the box, each starting from much the same point. However, I'd expect each scenario to support several plays as players get further into Billy's psyche. I was particularly taken with the sets of picture cards that illustrate Billy's memories. They start blurry, but aspects of each picture come into focus as the team delves further into Billy's memories. Cleverly, the blurry bits can turn out to be rather different from what you initially think they are.

From what I've seen, the finished *Holding On* will be a terrific experience to play. I'm not sure how much of a game it will be. However, I very much look forward to seeing the final product.



Nanty Narking – now, where's the dragon?

Polish publisher Phalanx (phalanxgames.co.uk) had *Nanty Narking*, Martin Wallace's re-working of his *Discworld*-themed *Ankh-Morpork* to Dickensian London – hence the Victorian slang title. *Ankh-Morpork* is a fun game of utter chaos that often involves the destruction of swathes of the city, so I'm not sure how it will work in its new guise.



U-BOOT on display – that's the model sub just above the schematic

The most striking thing on Phalanx's table was the open-sided cardboard U-boat model that was part of the display for *U-BOOT: The Board Game*. I do hope it's part of the published game, which was very successfully backed on Kickstarter in February. It's a co-operative game for a team of four players, each taking a different role in the U-boat's crew. Models are used to show the positions of crew and equipment, which must be used to the right places to carry out actions.

Players choose a scenario from the supporting app, whose software then provides the enemy players are working against. I suspect players will need to practise before playing the game, as they're expected to know their role and how to carry out the actions available to them. To help them, they have reproductions of genuine U-boat equipment – such as the ingenious cardboard dials used to determine the direction to fire torpedoes in given your target's heading and distance. *U-BOOT* has clearly been a labour of love for the Phalanx team and is as much a simulation as a game.

Hitting the show proper

On Friday I had the company of my roommate, Pete Card, and we did the rounds, finding things that interested us. Finding Gale Force Nine (www.gf9.com), I took the opportunity to have a look at their *Doctor Who* game – given the good job they've done with their board game adaptations of *Firefly* and *Star Trek*. *Doctor Who: Time of the Daleks* was designed by Andrew Haught and gives all the players the chance to be the Doctor. Though each is a different incarnation of the Time Lord (Patrick Troughton for me, please – though the model for the second Doctor is an expansion pack).

The game is mostly co-operative as the Doctors must work together to stop the Daleks reaching Gallifrey and wiping out the Time Lords at the start of time. However, the way to do this is for one of the Doctors to get to Gallifrey first, saving the Universe and winning the game. The game is powered by dice of various colours, each colour having a different set of symbols. To win an adventure, the Doctor needs to roll the right set of symbols, so the more dice he has, the better. Extra dice come from companions, and playing "Timey-Wimey" cards (which are acquired using "Sonic" points).



River Song with the fourth Doctor? At least Leela is there to keep her in line...

The game's mechanisms are clever and there's clearly real pressure on the players as the Dalek ship moves ever closer to Gallifrey and Daleks (neat models) keep popping up and getting in the way (if Davros appears, you're about to lose!). Yes, what appeals to me about the game is the atmosphere. Though heavily weighted towards recent incarnations of the Doctor, the adventures and Companions are drawn from right the way through the TV series. This is definitely on my list to try.

Both Pete and I were keen to see what PSC Games (www.pscgames.co.uk) had for us. The answer was black jump-suits with rows of red LEDs down the sides. Very, umm... fetching. However, the game is *Red Alert**: Richard Borg moving his simple wargame system (aka *Commands & Colors*) into space. Seeing the huge playing mat and chunky models on display, my first question for main man Will Townshend was "how big will the production game be?" "The same as this," was his response. Wow! This game is going to be in a seriously large box – I just hope the cost of posting it isn't prohibitive.

Anyway, the game takes the standard core of *Commands & Colors*-style games: play cards to move your units, roll dice to blast away at your opponent. These have, of course, been tweaked to reflect the different setting of the game. Specific changes include task forces so that your opponent isn't quite sure what they're facing and debris fields so that flying through destroyed ships can be hazardous. The particular change I like is that, instead of simply counting how many units they've destroyed, players score points according to the value or significance of each. This should make for a more subtle game.



A whole heap of spaceships: *Red Alert!*

The other change is that, not being a historical setting, there can't be any real-life battles – though I'm sure there will be some scenarios to give players standard set-ups and a way of learning the game. Instead, *Red Alert* uses a points system, like miniatures wargamers do. At the start each player has the same number of points and 'buys' the units they want with these. Thus one player could have a couple of battleships and a fleet of fighters while their opponent might have a squadron of cruisers.

There is, of course, plenty of scope for expanding this: different ships, alien races with their own types of ship and abilities and so on. However, just the base game looks

terrific and I look forward to finding out how the system works in this different setting. The Kickstarter project runs to 26th June and has already raised double the amount required and thus unlocked all sorts of 'Stretch Goals'. Yes, of course I've backed it.

(* "Sir, are you absolutely sure? It does mean changing the bulb.")

Ian Brody of Griggling (www.grigglinggames.com) was not with the PSC team this year. However, there was a preview copy of the next game in Ian's *Quartermaster General* series on display. This is *The Cold War* which involves three factions: NATO, Warsaw Pact and non-aligned countries. The game has less emphasis on the military and more on espionage and diplomacy – as you'd expect in a **cold** war. I look forward to giving it a go.



Quartermaster General: The Cold War preview

The result of the Ragnar Brothers' (ragnarbrothers.com) latest Kickstarter was available for all to see on their stand. *Darien Apocalypse* is their latest big-box game and the second in their "Quantum" series. As with the first, *Nina & Pinta*, the game is about colonising the New World, but with several parallel versions of America to confuse



The demo game of *Darien Apocalypse* in progress

things. In this game, the specific topic is the disastrous Scottish colony of Darien (the effect of its failure on the economy of Scotland was a factor in the Scots agreeing to the Act of Union). This time there are four parallel worlds to play on and the four Horsemen of the Apocalypse to worry about.

Pete and I sat down with Phil "Ragnar" Kendall and played through a couple of rounds to get a taste for the game. There's a definite flow to the actions available to players. You embark your wee Scottish colonists onto your ship in one version of Scotland, sail them to Darien, explore the land to discover resources, construct buildings using those resources, trade to generate goods, ship the goods back to Scotland and turn them into cash, victory points and/or more recruits.

The major twist to this is that when a player takes an action, the other players may copy them, taking the same action for their own rewards. However, the first player will have more actions available to them. Thus the other players must weigh up what other actions they think the first player will take and decide whether or not to use one of their limited actions to copy them. It's a clever mechanism that means players are involved in the game all the time.

The second twist is, of course, those four horsemen. At the start of each turn, one or more of the parallel worlds will be visited by a horseman. This stops all actions in that world for that turn. What's more, they leave a 'shadow' behind (a smaller horseman piece), which stops a specific action being used in that world from now on – until a player uses the Pray action to remove it. The game can be played competitively, players scoring up after 12 turns, or co-operatively, where all the players have to beat the horsemen's score. Having whetted my appetite, I look forward to playing my copy of the game.



North American Railways ready to play

At the Surprised Stare (www.surprisedstaregames.co.uk) stand Pete and I met an old gaming buddy from the Warfrog crew, Martin Hair. He joined us, plus a passing gamer called Tim, to try *North American Railways* (designed by Peer Sylvester). This is a card game of share buying and railway building. However, it's far from being '18xx: the card game'.

There are two sets of cards in the box: share cards, in five colours, and city cards. There are also locomotive markers for each colour (company) and some paper money (I like games with paper money). Both sets of cards are laid out in grids and the important point to note is that players can only take a card from the bottom of any column. Aha: it's not just about which card to take, but about what card that releases for the next player.

In each round players first get to buy a share. Half the money paid for this goes to the company treasury. The player with the most shares is director of the company and gets to spend the company's money buying a city card for the company. (As there's no geography in the game, a company could happily go from New York to New Jersey via San Francisco.) Then the company pays dividends: the total of the amounts on its city cards split between the shareholders.

The final element is that each city also has bonus symbols and these are worth a large chunk of cash to shareholders at the end of the game. Most money wins, of course. There is an elegant simplicity to the game which belies all the thinking that goes into playing it. It still flows quickly – there aren't that many cards – and four novices didn't take much longer than the 45 minutes on the box. *North American Railways* gets a provisional 8/10 on my highly subjective scale – and you don't even need to sign up to Kickstarter to get a copy.



Warm Acre (warmacre.com), however, is kickstarting its latest card game: *Blame Space* (blamespace.com), designed by Richard Wolfrik Galland. At its heart, this is *Game of Blame* in space. Players dump colour-coded cards and switch roles to avoid the blame (i.e. taking the most cards from the pile that match the colour of their role). It's neat, fast-playing fun.

Apart from the different costumes depicted on the cards, *Blame Space* adds some wrinkles to its predecessor. In particular, one player may have betrayed the others and, instead of taking any blame that's going around, scores for the number of damaged life pods (and there weren't enough on the ship for everybody to start with!). Players may be thrown into the Brig – an obvious alibi if you're blamed – or Quarantined because they've picked up an infection. I look forward to seeing the finished article (it was successfully funded in mid-June).

Warm Acre were also showing their 2017 game, *Jane Austen's Matchmaker: Chapter Two*. This takes the original game of matching male and female characters from Jane Austen's novels and adds in properties and patrons – providing extra actions and scoring opportunities – plus a more subtle scoring system.

Tucked away on the very last row of stands, Pete and I found Jamie Frew and friends surrounded by an esoteric collection of Victorian *objets* and demonstrating *The Old Hellfire Club*. This is a story-telling card game in the vein of *Once Upon a Time* and *The Extraordinary Adventures of Baron Munchhausen*. The idea is that players are what's left of the original Hellfire Club in Victorian England.



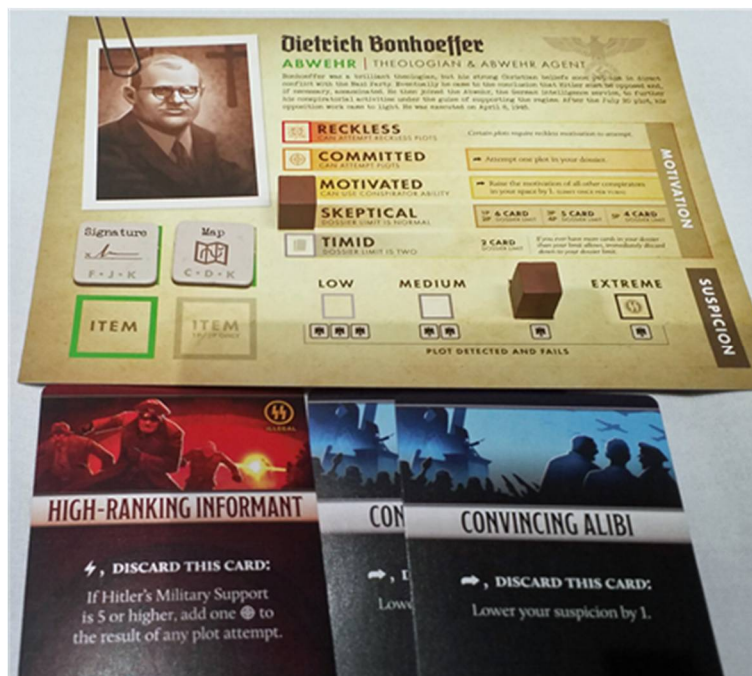
Playing *The Old Hellfire Club* – Yes, I was Boney's gaoler, don'cha know...

Players tell tall tales of their over-the-top lives, using their hand of cards for inspiration (potted crab, dynamite and a portrait of Queen Victoria!) and picking up the plot from where the previous player left off. The aim is to earn pennies by playing the most outrageous boasts. However, any story can be wrecked by clever card play from the other players and the current story-teller loses the pennies they'd gained. The longer you go on, the more pennies you win, but the more likely someone else will interrupt. Hence the option to pass on the story-telling baton and keep the pennies you've earned.

The story ends when the deck runs out, hopefully with a suitable climax, and the player with the most pennies wins. We had good fun playing the demo game and I am looking forward to seeing the finished article. Expect a Kickstarter campaign next year, once game development is complete. For the time being, you can find out more on Facebook: www.facebook.com/TheOldHellfireClub.

After a bite to eat on Friday evening, Pete and I trotted into the open gaming area at the Metropole. Here we found a copy of *Black Orchestra* (designed by Philip duBarry and published by Game Salute – www.gamesalute.com – and now under the Starling Games brand) being set up by a convivial pair called Paul and Giorgio. They were looking for two more players and we jumped at the chance. This is a co-operative game that sets the players as some of the real-life figures involved in the various historical plots to assassinate Hitler. There's quite a bit involved in the game as the players have to build up their characters' motivation, putting together dossiers that will include historical assassination schemes. Then all they have to do is collect the right items, manoeuvre Hitler into the right location and successfully carry out the plan.

Just to make things more difficult, the more players investigate, the more suspicious the Gestapo gets. This can mean characters being imprisoned and interrogated, possibly incriminating others. If all the players are arrested, they lose – just one of the ways the players can lose the game. We were focused on a specific assassination plot (and trying to keep people out of gaol) when we suddenly realised we actually had everything to complete a different one. All we needed to do then was get Adolf to the right place and roll some dice... We had cards for re-rolls and the result was: boom!



I'm definitely suspected, but luckily I have a Convincing Alibi or two...

We were playing on the "standard" setting and won comfortably at stage 5 (out of 7). However, I found the game quite tense all the way through. Every move you make to advance the conspiracy also raises suspicion, so there's a fine line to walk. I thoroughly enjoyed *Black Orchestra* and it gets a provisional 8/10 on my highly subjective scale.

Paul and Giorgio moved on to other things, but Pete and I are made of sterner stuff. Pete picked a first edition copy of *Destination: Neptune* (designed by Ian Brody and published by his imprint, Griggling Games – www.grigglinggames.com) from the games library to try. We found a volunteer, Graham, to make a third player and set off to build commercial empires across the solar system. Two hours in to the 90-minute game we called a halt as we weren't yet halfway through.

The game is a nice idea, but extremely fiddly to play. Lots of things provoke stuff being moved and players have to keep track of VPs, money, fuel and fame: 2 tracks and two types of token. The main aim is to build factories and colonies at locations around the solar system. However, you must have a base first and can only get one by first establishing a research mission – though you can piggyback on other players' missions.

Many locations have a prerequisite technology, so you need to discover the appropriate technology first – or buy it from the player who has. All actions are triggered by playing the appropriate card, which gives fame as well and often allows other players to join in. Timing is important, too: play a research mission and you're potentially allowing the next player to build at that location.

Points are scored when triggered by someone playing a scoring card – timing is important again here – and at the end of each 'generation'. The game should continue through four generations, but we felt the need to get to bed for a few hours. *Destination:*



Destination Neptune: we may have reached Jupiter, but nobody's gone to Mercury

Neptune gets a provisional 4/10 on my highly subjective scale. I see there's a second edition, which apparently plays faster, so that would definitely be my choice should I ever play it again.

Saturday is *Agricola* time

Pete had a date to play miniatures wargames during the day on Saturday, so I made the rounds of the show on my own. Hidden away at the end of a row, I came across Korean publisher Baccum (www.baccum.com), where co-designer Minwoo Hyun was demonstrating the prototype of their new game, *Athens*. This obviously involves cards, as the colourful large format cards were laid out on the table, but the actual mechanics were a bit confusing.

Many of the cards on display showed actions which players could take by placing their worker. These actions generally involve generating or swapping the coloured cubes that represent goods. Goods can also be traded in for points, using the cards in the top row. When one of these has been used three times, it's flipped over and the game ends when all the cards have been flipped. Players can also spend cubes to add building cards in front of them, providing bonuses and special actions.



Cards, cubes, dice... it's all a bit confusing in *Athens*

Taking actions also needs people symbols, which are provided by the dice rolled at the start of the round. While the dice limit the actions available, everybody is working with the same limitations. To provide a bit of flexibility, players also have a few people tokens and can add these to take the action they want. On top of all this, players also take a production card each turn, potentially providing them with basic goods.

There is a lot going on in this game, which means there are umpteen ways to play, though the other players may get in the way. I thoroughly enjoyed my demo game and look forward to seeing the finished article. *Athens* gets a provisional 8/10 on my highly subjective scale.



A short distance away I found *Immortality*, designed and being Kickstarted by Nicki Lloyd. This is a competition through a maze for the immortality offered by Zeus. Player's options each turn are driven by the dice they've rolled. In particular, they will be picking up equipment to improve their chances in the encounters as they work through the maze. Getting through the maze is the key goal, though whoever manages this still has to face a final confrontation with Zeus himself. The game has stylised artwork with a very 'childish' feel and I don't think it's for me. To get a better idea, take a look at the Kickstarter project.

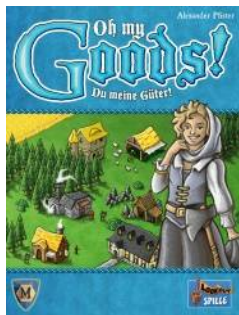
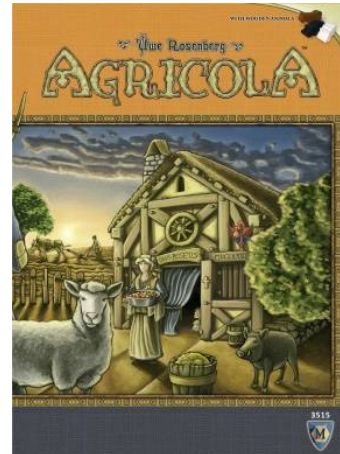
I rather liked the look of *Scrumpy* ([facebook.com/Scrumpygame](https://www.facebook.com/Scrumpygame)) and was disappointed that I didn't get a chance to try it. Designer Paul Frohnsdorff-Harris described it as a "deck manipulator" (rather than a deck-builder). Players use their cards to grow and harvest apples, press them into cider, make barrels to store it and, finally, sell it to gain prestige. Each card – apart from apples – can be used for one of several different actions. Players can also take standard actions, but these are less efficient. They can also hire extra workers, but only for one round. I'm hoping to get a chance to try it before it launches on Kickstarter at the beginning of September.



The *Scrumpy* prototype set out for play

As for the tournament: I was thoroughly outclassed, natch. The really annoying thing was the dithering player sitting to my right in my first game. "Shall I do this?" "Shall I do that?" "How about...?" He checked his cards, looked about to make a move and then sat back, checked his cards again and started perusing the board. The most annoying time was when he started "I'm definitely not doing that." Good, I thought, I can do it. Ten minutes later, that was exactly the action he took. By the end of the game – which took three hours, well over the time allotted – I was ready to thump him.

Of course it was the slowcoach who won the game with 53 points – the highest *Agricola* score I've seen (though I believe scores are slightly higher with the revised edition). I scored a respectable (by my standards) 31 ... and came last. The second game was over in less than two hours – still on the long side, I'd say, but it moved **so** much faster. This time I scored a personal best of 42 points! (I've since exceeded this in an online game.) As a result, I came ... last. It was a much closer game, though, with the winners tied on 47 each. As you can imagine, I was not on the top table fighting to win the tournament in the third round. Like several others, I dipped out, making my apologies to the organisers. Next time, I suggest chess clocks – or just enforcing the time limit.



Tournaments over for the day, I met up with Pete for a bite to eat. Then we went looking for games to play. I bumped into Adam, one of my adversaries in the *Agricola* tournament, who was also looking to play something and the three of us sat down to *Oh my Goods!*, which I thoroughly enjoy. Adam's friend Christian made it four for *Terraforming Mars*. We used Christian's set as he had some very nice pieces produced by his 3D-printer. I am enjoying this game now, but all three of the other players had more experience than me – and it showed.

They go up, tiddly-up, up...

I was on my own again on Sunday as Pete was into further rounds of his wargame tournament, so I strolled round to find people I hadn't managed to speak to yet. I hit the Medusa Games (www.medusagames.co.uk) stand and hung around until I got the chance to try the prototype of Richard Denning's latest, *Magnificent Flying Machines*. The inspiration is clearly a certain film, as players each have a specific 1910s aeroplane and are racing to be first from one end of the board to the other.



They buy games, they play games – the open gaming area



The *Magnificent Flying Machines* have almost reached their goal, but my seaplane is about to suffer a malevolent malfunction...

The long board is actually a series of cardboard strips, each a vertical section showing different terrain and difficulty levels (for take-off, flying and landing). This, of course, allows for lots of different 'courses' to fly along and makes for longer or shorter games, depending on how many sections you use. Additional card strips, placed horizontally, add weather conditions to each section – planes can avoid weather by flying high, but this takes longer (they have to gain altitude). Weather changes at end of the round according to the turn of a card.

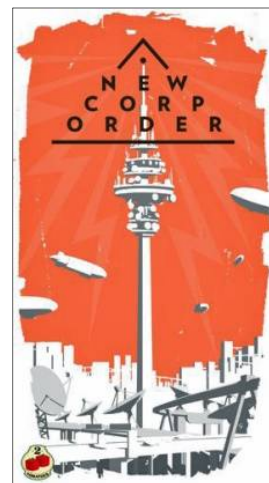
Players can take two actions in a turn, but use up their limited fuel by repeated flying. Whatever action is taken, players must roll the required symbols on dice to succeed. This is influenced by the pilot's skill and the plane's characteristics and players can then add spare parts or cards to succeed (while they have them). In the game I played, this meant that failures were very rare, but we were all stopping regularly to re-stock our planes. An alternative strategy would be to take risks and move fast.

However, players gain points by landing to deliver cargo and passengers and pick up more – there's also a bonus for being first to land in an area. Since you're doing this anyway, it makes sense to refuel and scavenge for spare parts. What really makes the game, though, is players' ability to sabotage, delay and otherwise interfere with their opponents. We were quite well-behaved, much to the disgust of the demonstrator – until we were close to the end, when the gloves came off!

I had great fun playing *Magnificent Flying Machines*. There are clearly some different strategies and plenty of opportunity for mayhem. We played over 11 board sections and I did feel the game went on a little too long. It looks like the game will be launched at

Spiel this October and I'm looking forward to it: it gets a provisional 8/10 on my highly subjective scale.

New Corp Order is the latest Kickstarter launch (successfully funded a couple of weeks after the Expo) from 2tomatoes (www.2tomatoesgames.com). A prototype was on display, but I didn't manage to play this one. Designed by Miguel Bruque, the game features four mega-corporations (primary colours) who control the media industry through subsidiary companies. Players draw share cards in the Corporations and play them to gain corporate agents (cubes) to place on companies. They can then use their cards to move cubes, not least to stage a takeover of a company owned by another Corp.



A successful takeover means the other Corp's agents are fired, one of them going to the player (it's worth points at the end of the game). The player also gets to use the company's ability, which will allow them to do things like refresh their cards – very useful for subsequent rounds. Players can also acquire "Consultants", which have a one-shot special ability. The rules look straightforward; the game's complexity is in the cards and players' machinations. It should play in 30-45 minutes, so it's a quick game, and one I'm looking forward to seeing in a finished state at Spiel.

It was good to see Moaideas Game Design (www.wix.moaideas.net) at the Expo (it's a long way from Taiwan). Several of their games were being demoed, but not the new one, *Mini Rails*, designed by Mark Gerrits. This is touted as a compact share-buying and track-laying railway game that plays in no more than an hour. It's played on a hexagonal board, made up of tiles that can be flipped over and positioned in any orientation. However, this doesn't represent any real-life geography.



Mini Rails on display (courtesy of Moaideas)

Each player has two pawns on the turn track and uses each to take a wooden disc in a company's colour (in *Kingdomino* style, this also sets turn order for the next round). One disc each round is a share, the other is placed on the board to extend the company's network – raising or lowering share value. There's an extra disc, so one is left at the end of the round. This company is taxed, which doesn't sound like good news. However, untaxed

companies are worth nothing at the end of the game. *Mini Rails* looks a clever little game with neatly interlocking mechanisms. I shall be looking to pick up a copy at Spiel in October.

And that, finally, brought my time at the UK Games Expo to an end for another year. The event gets bigger and better each year: the official figures show attendance of 39,000 people over the three days, 21,700 unique visitors. There were 375 exhibitors who, along with the events and outdoor spaces, occupied 30,000 m² – as much as the first 9 Expos put together.

Many congratulations – and thanks – to Richard Denning and the rest of the team (not to mention the myriad volunteers who are all over the place to lend visitors a hand). Next year's event is scheduled for 31st May – 2nd June 2019 and promises to be bigger yet. Keep up to date on the website: www.ukgamesexpo.co.uk

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I can't resist putting in a photo of *Maximilian*. I don't know what's going on (though Maximilian may well be Mad), but it looks wonderful