

UK Games Expo 2010

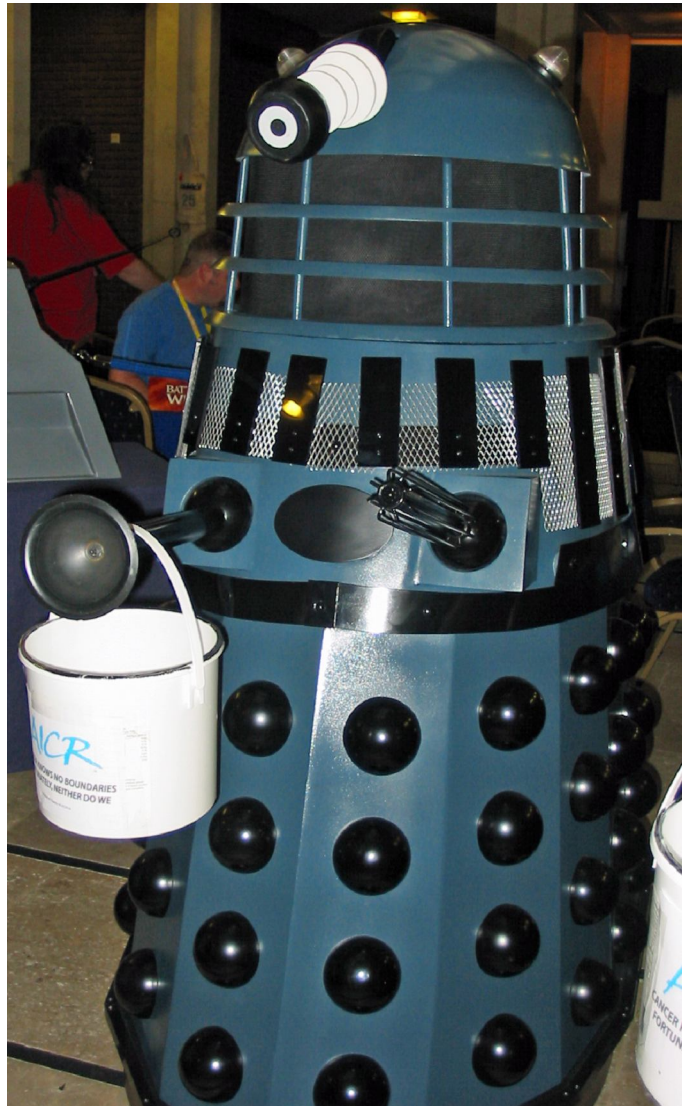
Pevans went to Birmingham

My journey to Birmingham for the UK Games Expo is usually very relaxed. I pop round the corner to the station and sit on a train until it gets to Snow Hill. This year, though, Chiltern Railways were not their usual reliable selves. The train I intended to catch was cancelled and the one I did get broke down at Banbury! In contrast, engineering works on the way back meant a section of the trip was by coach, but Chiltern Railways handled this very slickly.

Despite the transport issues, I arrived at the Clarendon Suites on Birmingham's Hagley Road—the Expo's usual venue—on Friday afternoon. At this stage things were still being set up. After a quick look round, I repaired to the Strathallan Hotel next door to find the games playing already in progress. The Strathallan is the 'after hours' venue for the Expo and also where lots of the visitors stay—though there are plenty of hotels nearby.

The UK Games Expo is a terrific mixture of traders, demonstrations, displays and tournaments and covers every sort of game. The organisers' explicit aim is to emulate the accessibility and appeal of Essen's Spiel and they do a good job. The 2010 event was, as usual, great fun.

Saturday morning saw a long queue outside, comprised of both people with tickets and those who wanted one. This is where it's really useful to have a trade pass, allowing you to bypass the crush at the main door and sneak in at the back. On the other hand, having a trade pass means you're there to work. Ah well, you can't have everything. And I was able to take enough time to have a look round, though I didn't



They're much less intimidating
when their cry is "Donate!"

A stack of *Tacticos*

get to play too many of the games. As always, I concentrated on the board games, but there was a lot of other stuff going on.

The labyrinth of the Clarendon Suites has rooms all over the place. The tournaments are mainly tucked out of the way in the many meeting rooms with the main halls used for the traders and demonstration/participation tables. The two big rooms on the ground floor are exactly this mixture. In the first of these, Shaun Derrick (Games for the World) was showing off his *World Cup Card Game 2010*. This is an adaptation of Shaun's board game, *The World Cup Game*, using the same basic mechanics to let players fight out this year's World Cup. The players each have a selection of teams and try to get one of theirs to the final—and to the cup, of course. Players use the cards they draw to win matches as they progress through the stages of the World Cup finals. *The World Cup Card Game 2010* was voted Best Card Game of 2010 at the Expo—see more about the games at www.gamesfortheworld.co.uk

Alongside this was the Mynd Games team and their 2008 card game of battling wizards, *Solairis*.

In the corner of the hall was Mark O'Callaghan and his football game, *Tactico*. His stand was dominated by the mean and moody picture of a football manager from the game's box. Mark is quite clear that he wanted his game to embody the fun and excitement of football, rather than requiring players to know obscure trivia or detailed statistics. The result is a relatively simple, fun game of building a football team to beat your opponents' teams. It rather reminded me of Waddington's

Totopoly, one of my childhood favourites. *Tactico* will be the first in a sequence of games using the same system to replicate other high profile sports. To find out more, see www.tacticofootball.co.uk

Further back on the ground floor was a second room of traders and tables, where I spent most of my time. I was demonstrating the JKLM edition of Martin Wallace's *Tinners' Trail* and the almost-finished *Great Fire*. Designed by Richard Denning, one of the guys behind the Expo, *Great Fire* was shown at last year's show in prototype form and was well received. Four copies of the almost-complete game were on the tables this year and were in play most of the time. The game has changed since I played an early prototype, but the basic mechanics remain the same.

The board is a map of 1660s London with the fire already started in Pudding Lane. The players are landowners seeking to protect their own property from the fire—they're not so bothered about the other players' buildings! Each player also has three secret objectives that are worth points if still standing at the end of the game. And they can gain points by using the 'trained bands' to put out fires. Players act both to spread the fire and fight it in their turn, so the game offers many tactical opportunities. It's also great fun. Expect the game to be available later this summer.

JKLM's tables also included Prime Games's *Chelsea*—a simple-seeming game with some neat tactical twists—and the prototype of *Alien Ascendancy*. This is a complex game of developing your civilisation to dominate the galaxy, complete with space fleets, technological advances, interstellar exploration and warfare. The artwork looks terrific and the game is fascinating, but learning the rules will take a while.



The almost-finished *Great Fire*



The board and some cards from *Age of Industry*

Martin Wallace was on hand to show off his new game, *Age of Industry*. This is the first game from Treefrog Games, rather than the Treefrog line from Warfrog. This reflects two things: a change of name for the business and a change in philosophy, allowing the initial limited edition of the game to be reprinted. The first game under the new name is a development of Martin's excellent, but tricky *Brass*. Whereas *Brass* was specifically set in Lancashire in the Industrial Revolution, *Age of Industry* has two maps, one on each side of the board: Germany and New England. In both cases, players aim to construct industries, improve the technology in use and sell to the several markets about the board. Removing a lot of the dichotomies in *Brass* has produced a game that should prove easier to grasp, while remaining subtle and challenging. I look forward to giving it a go. There's more information at the new Treefrog website: www.treefroggames.com

Just across the way from Treefrog, the Ragnar Brothers were in 19th century dress to launch their new game. *Workshop of the World* is also set in the Industrial Revolution and is also inspired by *Brass*—and the Ragnars' earlier *Canal Mania*. This game applies the theme to Britain as a whole as players invest in the developing industries, building canals to transport goods to market. As technology develops, railways replace canals and players strengthen their industrial base, linking everything together. It's another game I'm looking forward to trying, especially given its pedigree. What's more, *Workshop of the World* was voted Best

New Board Game at the Expo. The game is available from the Ragnars' website (where you can also find their interesting Design Notes):

www.ragnarbrothers.co.uk

Next to the Ragnars was *Retsami*, the two-player abstract game that's been around for a few years now. It's played on a 9 x 9 grid with playing pieces spiralling towards the centre. However, this doesn't necessarily limit where they can move, giving players some interesting options.

Distributor Coiled Spring Games showed off a number of games from publishers such as Gigamic, in France, and Gamewright in the US. The big hit, though, was *Forbidden Island*. This is a card/tile game in an attractive tin with equally attractive artwork throughout.

The game is a co-operative one, with the players a team of adventurers seeking the four treasures of the eponymous island before it sinks beneath the waves. The game is a development by Matt Leacock of his *Pandemic*, which was well received in gaming circles a couple of years ago. *Forbidden Island* does a good job of giving the players a tough challenge while making the game accessible to families. It was fittingly awarded Best General/Family Game at the Expo. You can find out more at Gamewright's website: www.gamewright.com



Workshop of the World

Next along was PaNic Games and *Tri 3D*, a simple, but clever abstract game. It's played on three triangular boards, one above another and players simply move their pieces to corral their opponents'. What makes the game is the 3D aspect, which allows players to jump levels as well as move around. It's a good-looking game, too. Find out more at www.tri3d.co.uk

Pete Burley was demonstrating Burley Games's excellent *Kamisado* and *Take it Higher!*, Pete's latest development—with Reiner Knizia—of *Take it Easy!*. This game uses octagonal tiles, but the basic idea—filling your board with tiles drawn at random to make complete lines of the same number—remains the same. *Take it Higher!* includes a number of additional elements that give players other ways of



The deceptively simple *Tri 3D*

scoring points. The game launched at last year's Spiel, but this was its first appearance at the Expo.

Surprised Stare had prototypes of their new game, *Totemo*, for people to try. This is a quick-playing, tactile and visual game of stacking brightly-coloured wooden cubes. It looked fascinating, but I didn't get the opportunity to try it out. There's more about the game on the Surprised Stare website: www.surprisedstaregames.co.uk

German publisher Eggertspiele was represented by Tobias Stapelfeldt, who was demonstrating their latest game, *Die Speicherstadt*, and their 2009 game of company politics, *Power Struggle*. I didn't get the chance to try either, but both games

went down well with gamers, judging by the reports I've had. *The Speicherstadt*, as the game is known in English, is set in the eponymous district of Hamburg. It is a network of canals and streets around warehouses storing goods from all round the world. Players get to bid for cards, allowing them to buy, sell and ship goods and, of course, score points. The game was designed by Stefan Feld, who's come up with some interesting games in recent years, and is another one I look forward to trying. For more on this and *Power Struggle*, see the Eggertspiele website: www.eggertspiele.de

Amongst those on the demo tables was Andy Hopwood, showing his set-making card game, *Niche*, and his latest, *Mijnlieff*. Played on a small 4 x 4 grid, the aim is to make the most lines of three: "what noughts and crosses should be" is one description of the game. As well as winning the Best Abstract Game Award at the Expo, *Mijnlieff* sold out of its first edition. You can't get a better recommendation than that! For more, see the Hopwood Games website: www.hopwoodgames.co.uk

The Clarendon Suites have a sort of atrium-like area on the ground floor, which gets some natural light from skylights. This is where various *Doctor Who* and *Star Wars* artefacts (Daleks, Tardis, droids) were on display—we had troupes of look-alikes gambolling round the show, too, including several incarnations of the Doctor. Which tied in nicely to Cubicle 7 and the *Doctor Who* role-playing game.

Up the stairs were lots of RPG publishers, a vast array of dice from Chessex, miniatures wargames and Carol Mulholland, editor of *Flagship* magazine. Leo Marshall was also to be found here, showing his entertaining word game, *LeCardo*,



The Dice Maestro stand

which I first came across at Spiel last year. Here, too, were the Dice Maestro boys with *Jurassic Wars* and *Wildlife Rescue*, the two dice games I saw at the Toy Fair.

And there was *Monkey Dash*, which I missed last year. Designed and demonstrated by Rob Fisher, the game involves some lovely wooden monkey pieces and chunky wooden cubes (representing banana crates!). The two players aim to manoeuvre the crates into a pathway across the board. It looks terrific, but Rob has about sold out of his handmade games. Check out monkeydash.co.uk to find out more.

Up on the first floor proper is an array of rooms which housed tournaments, lots of miniatures wargames—including some terrific scenery—and a whole array of computer games. Oh, and the café! Chris Baylis's Bring 'n' Buy was tucked away up here, too.

Amongst the guests at this year's Expo, I was pleased to see Ian Livingstone and Steve Jackson. They were visiting to promote the new edition of their *Fighting Fantasy* books, but also gave a well-received talk (I'm told—I couldn't get away) about founding Games Workshop and creating *Fighting Fantasy*. It was great to see they can get away from the computer games that keep them busy these days.

And that was the UK Games Expo 2010. While the formal event takes place during the day on Saturday and Sunday, there is plenty of gaming on Friday and Saturday evenings in the hotels around the area. The Expo organisers make a point of bringing a substantial games library with them, augmented by copies of the new games. This makes the evenings just as busy for us diehard gamers!



Monkey Dash

Next year's Expo is scheduled for 3rd-5th June 2011 at the Clarendon Suites again and I fully expect to be there. To keep an eye on the plans and schedules, watch the website: www.ukgamesexpo.co.uk

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