

## London Toy Fair 2016

### Pevans visits Olympia

Toy Fair is very different from the other games events I attend. To start with, it's a trade show, so games are not being played, just business being done as publishers and distributors show off their wares. Secondly, games are only a small fraction of what's on show. Finally, it's about mass market products rather than the gamers' games I'm usually looking at. Hence, while Toy Fair takes over the Olympia exhibition halls for three days, a few hours is all I need to cover the relevant bits. I do enjoy this rather different view of the games industry, though – particularly as I missed last year.

Often the most interesting part of Toy Fair is the "Greenhouse" area: small stands intended for start-up businesses and newcomers to the show. It's often where you'll find games inventors and their creations. Let me start with the Greenhouse, then, and see what I can find.



A view over Olympia with the Greenhouse prominent

As I walked up, I immediately spotted Destination Board Games and their eponymous product, the *Destination...* games. They are far from being a newcomer, though, celebrating the tenth anniversary of their first game, *Destination Portsmouth*, with a new edition. The games are all about navigating your way around the places shown on the board, aiming to make the most money from picking up and delivering fares. (Very familiar to anyone who's played *The London Cabby Game* or the venerable *Taxi!*) Prominent on the stand was the (*Destination*) *Downton Abbey* game that they were launching last time I saw them. Find out more at [www.destinationboardgames.co.uk](http://www.destinationboardgames.co.uk)

Next door was French publisher and distributor Morning Family, making their first appearance at the London Toy Fair. They had some gamers' games on show, particularly the Stonemaier Games – *Euphoria*, *Viticulture* and the two launched at Spiel last year, *Between Two Cities* and *Scythe*. We can expect an expansion for *Euphoria* later this year. Also on show was speed game *Gobb'it*. This is a fast-paced card game of a bizarre food chain: chameleon eats mosquito, snake eats chameleon and, I assume, mosquito bites snake. And gorillas eat everything (really?). To complicate things further, cards in different colours and the colours must match. It's entertaining enough and aimed at family play.



The main attraction at Morning Family was *Exploding Kittens*. A game with kittens and explosions – what's not to like? At heart it's very simple: players take it in turns to draw a card and lose if their card is an exploding kitten (as is only right). However, other cards let players avoid this fate – or at least postpone it – in some way. They can look at the top cards on the deck, force other players to draw multiple cards or defuse the explosion. It is utterly bonkers and irresistible. I can't say I'm a fan of the artwork, though. Morning Family have an interesting and expanding range of games and can be found at [www.morning-family.com](http://www.morning-family.com)

At the end of this first row was Dicey Games with *Dicey*. This is a game of brightly coloured dice. Dice that are just a bit weighted. One side is slightly convex, making it harder to roll a 6 and easier to get a 1. The basic game is simply being the first to meet a specific challenge. Everybody plays at once and just re-rolls until they meet the challenge, so this is very much a speed game. The whole thing fits neatly into the drawstring bag, making it very portable and it's an entertaining bit of fun. It's for 1-6 players, aged 5+ and retails at £9.99. There's a website at [www.diceygames.co.uk](http://www.diceygames.co.uk)



Look: brightly-coloured dice!



You see: it's just brown!

Apart from these three, I only found two other games in the Greenhouse area. *Gimatricks*, from Israeli publisher Ashram, uses letter and number tiles in a game that combines word-making and numerology. I did not look any closer, nor can I find a website. Nor did I spend any time with Golingo Games ("We focus on educational games for children"), but they do have some information on Facebook: [www.facebook.com/goLingoGames](http://www.facebook.com/goLingoGames)

Rather than follow my wanderings around the floor – and gallery – at Olympia, I'll talk about the other businesses I saw in alphabetical order.

I made it clear to Dean Tempest at Big Potato that their new game was disappointing. *Obama Llama* comes in a brown box, a far cry from the brightly coloured packaging that makes their other games stand out. The game itself was inspired by the game played on air by radio DJ Matt Edmondson. The challenge is to get your teammates to work out a rhyme involving a celebrity's name (hence Obama + Llama). It's as bonkers as their other games and was launched online last year, appearing in John Lewis in the run up to Christmas.

Big Potato has two games in the pipeline for this year. *Scrawl* pairs doodling with Chinese whispers (start a doodle, pass it on, see what you end up with!), while *OK Play* is a simple tile-laying game for 2-4 players – all you need to do is get five tiles in a row... There'll be more from Big Potato at the UK Games Expo in June or you can visit their website at [bigpotato.co.uk](http://bigpotato.co.uk)

As I say every time, Cheatwell is a brilliant name for a games publisher. Cheatwell Games had the usual selection of terrific family and party games on display. However, I spotted a copy of *Mijnlieff* lurking on one counter. This is Andy Hopwood's neat two-player abstract from 2010 that comes as laser-cut wooden pieces. Apparently discussions are going on for Cheatwell to produce a new edition, which would be excellent. The full range of Cheatwell's games, puzzles and other things can be found at [www.cheatwell.com](http://www.cheatwell.com)

Distributors Coiled Spring had plenty to show off, not least Gamewright's range of terrific children's games and the huge variety of *Rory's Story Cubes*. However, I was very pleased to see games from Granna in Poland: the older *CV* and the new *CVIizations*. The latter – a civilisation-building card game – was great fun when I tried it at Spiel last year, so it's good to see that it's available in the UK. I expect to see more of these – and others – at the UK Games Expo and everything's on their website: [www.coiledspring.co.uk](http://www.coiledspring.co.uk)



*Ephemaris* on display

Up on the gallery I found *Ephemaris*, an astronomy-based game of moving planets (okay, celestial bodies, since it includes the Sun and the Moon) in their orbits around the solar system. In fact, there are three games in the box. The first is a two-player abstract where each player tries to get the planets into the right positions against the ring of constellations in the background. The multi-player game uses coloured dice to move the planets, but

the goal is much the same. The third game is a quiz for up to seven players (or teams). Players must answer questions correctly to move their planet along its orbit. First to complete an orbit wins. The game sounds interesting and it certainly looks good. The biggest problem, as co-designer Freddie Holding confirmed, was being positioned next to a company selling karaoke machines! The game itself was in John Lewis for Christmas last year and will be more widely available this year: [www.ephemeris-game.uk](http://www.ephemeris-game.uk) is where to find out more.

Esdevium Games had their customary large stand close to Hasbro. The emphasis at Toy Fair is on the family-orientated items that Esdevium distributes, though a few gamer's games are hidden away on the stand.



Brainbox in the jungle

Gibsons is one of the venerable names in British games publishing, though their main focus has been jigsaw puzzles for many years. This year I was pleased to see new editions of *The Sherlock Holmes Card Game* and *221b Baker Street* – in snazzy square, black boxes – as well as classic party game *Pass the Bomb!*. The full Gibsons line-up is at [www.gibsonsgames.co.uk](http://www.gibsonsgames.co.uk)

Old-timers (in the nicest possible sense) The Green Board Game Company were celebrating their 25th anniversary with a stand decked out as jungle. The main feature here was *BrainBox* in all its incarnations, but there was still room for some of the company's classics (such as *Alpha Animals*). The latest arrivals seem to be *BrainBox* titles aimed at pre-school children. To find out more try: [www.brainbox.co.uk](http://www.brainbox.co.uk)

I almost missed Pants on Fire as they were in the corner of the gallery, set back from the main stands. However, Richard McLuckie grabbed me to take a look at the slew of new games they were showing (prototypes and working titles at the moment). *The Auction Game* uses real lots from Christie's with players estimating the value of the items – and getting a bonus if they can buy them cheap. *It Pays to be a Winner* was summed up as *Trivial Pursuit* meets roulette. Players answer questions to earn money, which they can then gamble to, hopefully, win more. *Whose Tagline is it Anyway?* has players trying to remember the film, product or TV show from its tagline. There are several levels of difficulty, giving players quite a challenge. *Wordoddy* is a word game where players use letter tiles to invent new words that they then define. In Fictionary Dictionary style, players then vote for the best definitions. Phew! That's a lot of new party games to add to the existing range. We should see more of them at the UK Games Expo in a few months. To catch up on the other games, see the website at [www.pantsonfiregames.co.uk](http://www.pantsonfiregames.co.uk)



The Pants are on Fire

Premium World was a new name to me and had a single game: *Super 11*. This was billed as "the ultimate football strategy game," which was enough to make me steer well clear (though I've a feeling I've seen that tagline before). The game features a pitch with these strange headless torsos as playing pieces that I just found creepy. Those made of sterner stuff can find out more at: [www.super11.co.uk](http://www.super11.co.uk)

Thames & Kosmos is the UK distributor for German publisher Kosmos and it's great to see more of their games (not to mention science, crafts and construction sets) becoming available in the UK. The current selection includes the *Legends of Andor* series, *Steam Time* and *Tumult Royale* (the two new games I saw at Spiel last year) and *Imhotep* from Phil Walker-Harding. This last is not so much about building the pyramids as transporting the huge blocks of stone used in their construction. Almost literally in this case, as the game has lots of chunky wooden cubes representing the building blocks. It looks like a lot of planning is involved as players need to excavate and load their blocks to be delivered in the right order. I look forward to trying it and may well get an opportunity to do so at the UK Games Expo. For more about Thames & Kosmos, see: [www.thamesandkosmos.co.uk](http://www.thamesandkosmos.co.uk)



*Ski Run* on display

Which brings me to the last in alphabetical order, which is Wild Card Games. Main man Sean Byrne introduced me to his latest: *Ski Run*. This is about the ups and downs of a skiing holiday: lifts and runs. The aim is to race across (well, up and down) the mountain and be first to get back to the bar (always my goal!). This is done through tactical card play with cards allowing players jump the queue, hire a skidoo or force

their opponents off piste. A clever touch is that the draw pile is face up, so players can see what's coming next. It looks a good, fun family game with some tactical decision-making. Wild Card have built up quite a range of interesting family games since they appeared back in 2004 with *Backpacker*. For the full low-down, see: [www.wildcardgames.com](http://www.wildcardgames.com)

That was it for another Toy Fair. It was good to see a few gamers' games getting an airing, amidst all the family and children's stuff (which, of course, is the show's focus). However, I was a bit disappointed that there were not more games inventors proudly showing off their baby. There have been plenty of these in the past – usually with a variant on *Monopoly* or *Trivial Pursuit*, but the occasional gem as well. Thanks to the British Toy and Hobby Association who organise the event – there's a lot more on their website: [www.btha.co.uk/toy-fair](http://www.btha.co.uk/toy-fair). Next year's Toy Fair is scheduled for 24th-26th January 2017 at Olympia.

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