

Toy Fair 2009

Pevans did the rounds of the London show

I used to reckon that I could just about get round the London Toy Fair and see all the new games in one day's visit. This year I was pushed to keep myself occupied for an afternoon! And this after getting a circular from the organisers boasting that the show was occupying even more of the South Hall of ExCeL than before. What it doesn't mention is that the show used to be in both halls (in recent years the London Motorcycle Show has been in the North Hall, which provides an interesting contrast in the people milling about between the halls – leather and heavy metal tee shirts tend to be bikers, suits are mainly toy people).

As always, games are only a small part of the show and I tend to spend most of my time in the 'greenhouse' area for new and small companies – this year split into two. This is where I'm more likely to find something that's of interest to gamers. The big companies tend to stick to anodyne children's games and variations on a theme (umpteenth versions of *Monopoly*, for example). Anyway, here are my notes on what I saw.

1745 Trading Company is the Scottish publisher of a series of trivia games – "Quests of the World" – each set in a different country. They started, naturally, with *Scottish Quest* and have expanded into *Irish Quest*, *English Quest* and *Welsh Quest* so far. The games come in plain boxes with the title in gold, looking like a set of hardback books. Each is played over a map of the country concerned. Players take a tour, answering questions at the locations they visit. They gain gold sovereigns, which they need to travel round, and the letters Q, U, E, S and T. First to get the full word and return to their starting point wins. The questions are in four categories, History, Nature, Culture and Modern, colour-coded to the points on the board. However, players get their choice of category when answering letter questions, allowing them to play to their strengths. There's nothing particularly innovative here, but the focus of the games sets them apart from run of the mill trivia games. They are well-produced and excellent examples of the genre. See www.questsoftheworld.com for more information.



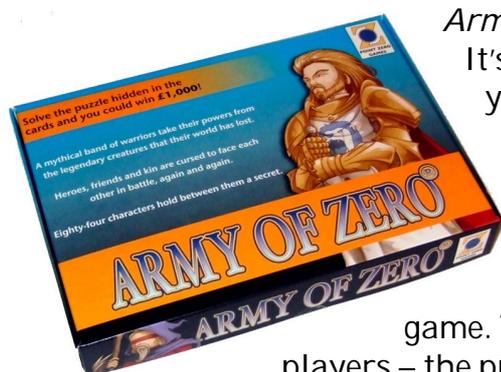
The name says it all: Ace Murder Mystery Games produces, as you'd expect, murder mystery games. The company has a set of five good-looking dinner party games, each with a different theme/period. They provide a set (8-10) of guests/suspects (with costume tips), a plot, with some scripting to aid players, and a narrative CD to

fill in the gaps. The writers stress that their emphasis is on the plot and the characters, providing role-playing opportunities as well as deduction. It's up to the players to work out whodunit, of course. Again, there's nothing very original in this, but each game is a good, well thought through package. You can find out more at www.acemurdermystery.com.

Eezee Cricket comes all the way from the Barbados and is a cricket trivia game. The batting player (or team) rolls a die six times (to simulate an over being bowled) and moves around the board. Depending on the square they land on, they will score runs or may lose their wicket. Landing on a square that involves losing a wicket brings the batsman a question and the wicket only falls if they answer it wrongly. The initial edition of the game is based on cricket in the West Indies, but an international edition is due out this spring. As you can see, the game is pretty basic, but it should have some appeal for cricket fans. See www.eezeekricket.com for more information.

JC Games was showing *Qb*, their dice-based word game that launched at the end of last year. While it only got into a limited range of retailers, it has been selling well in all of them. The game itself is straightforward: roll the lettered dice and make words from the letters available, adding them to the grid that the players build up on the table. The dice come in a drawstring bag, which makes the game readily playable while travelling. It's a neat variation on the word game and you can find more at www.qbgame.co.uk.

Kamtronic Games had *Football Legend*, a football (soccer) trivia game. Players answer questions and use cards for defence, attack and midfield, aiming to get into position for a shot on goal against their opponent's goalkeeper. There's a football game like this at the Toy Fair every couple of years and they all seem much the same. I can't see anything special about this one that will help it stand out. There's more information at www.football-legend.co.uk.



Army of Zero is the first game from Point Zero games.

It's a two-player fantasy combat game aimed at youngsters aged 7-12. Players use their hand (squad) of hero cards to attack or defend, aiming to beat their opponent's squad. As the age range suggests, this is a relatively simple game, but you do need to out-guess your opponent's moves to win the game. However, there is another dimension to the

game. The entire deck of characters forms a riddle for older players – the publisher is offering a cash prize for the best solution.

For more information see www.pointzerogames.com.

Tailten Games was at the Toy Fair showing *Pluck the Peacock*, which I saw at last year's Spiel games fair. Once I'd got over my amusement at the name, this is quite a neat set-collecting game. Central to it is a spinner and the fan of peacock's tail feathers. Players are trying to complete their own peacock tails using the cardboard



feathers and the actions that the spinner gives them. Okay, it's not the deepest game, but it does give players decisions to make and tactical options. It's an entertaining and highly colourful family game. The Tailten website is at www.tailtengames.com.

This was far from being a vintage year at the Toy Fair and there was really nothing there to interest the hobby games player. In fact there wasn't much to interest any sort of games player. It was also noticeable that a lot of names were missing. I suspect

many of the companies are concentrating their energies on the Spring Fair, which takes place at the National Exhibition Centre. I thought it was later in the year, but it was actually the week after the Toy Fair, which is one reason companies won't want to do both. Next year I shall have to remember to book in for it as well.

The London Toy Fair is run by the British Toy & Hobby Association (www.btha.co.uk). It is held at the end of January each year and is moving back to Olympia for 2010. For more information, see www.toyfair.co.uk.

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