

MADE IN BRITAIN

by Mike B

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RECENTLY, WHILE RECLINING ON MY EXTRAVAGANT SOFA SIPPING ON A DRY MARTINI, SUCH BEING THE LIFE OF A BOARD GAME REVIEWER, I HAPPENED TO BE PERUSING A DOCUMENTARY 'FROM BEDROOMS TO BILLIONS'. IT CHARTED THE RISE OF THE UK VIDEO GAMES INDUSTRY, SPECIFICALLY THE EARLY 80S, WHICH SAW US BECOME THE SOGGY DIGESTIVE DUNKING EQUIVALENT OF SILICON VALLEY FOR A FEW GLORIOUS YEARS. THIS STORM IN A TEACUP WAS BROUGHT ABOUT LARGELY THANKS TO SIR CLIVE AND HIS RUBBER KEYBOARDED DOORSTEP, THE SINCLAIR SPECTRUM, AND THE SUBSEQUENT RISE OF THE BEDROOM CODER.

For those ignorant of any of this, well the bedroom coders were a uber-talented group of teenagers, a sort of hive mind wunderkind who went on to revolutionise the video games industry, all from the safety of

(this is going to be so sweet kiddies). The Expo's very own daddy Richard Denning, designer of 'The Great Fire of London' and 'Nine Worlds'. Martin Wallace, Andy Hopwood, the Tinkerbot Games crew with their recent hit 'Ghostel' and

even Greg Carslaw.... Far more eloquent types have joined the dots between video games and tabletop many times on many different blogs, articles and napkins.

But what I'm alluding to is a reimagining, if you will, of those early faltering steps of the software industry, albeit with

a lot more cardboard. Not so much drugs and alcohol as Gaviscon and a good strong cup of tea.

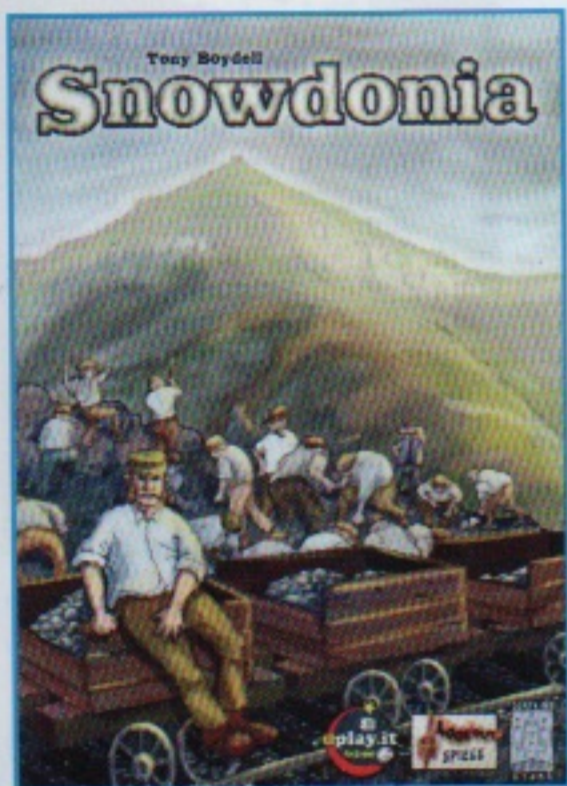
Much as the multitude Muggles didn't "get" video games during its birth pangs, writing all that joystick waggling off as a stage we were going through, our beloved tabletop is meandering about those same confused corridors. The fact we're celebrating the tenth anniversary of the Expo is proof that we're wearing them down, and you need only look up from this article, go on I'll let you. Look around that hall, gloriously busy ain't it? Aside from the Fantasy Flights and Asmodees there is a satisfying amount of good old British talent to be found out there. Feel free to take a moment and go indulge yourself.

You back? Great! Each of us has a secret mission, a sworn oath we've taken without knowing it. Board gamers, by their choice of obsession,

inherit as part of their DNA that evangelical need to spread the love of our hobby like Chickenpox at a kids' birthday party. Collecting is fine and something that many of us do to excess, but if you're not sharing your toys then you're really missing the point of what we do. Now for the science. We as a species need 'Play'. Just take a look at the work of Dr Stuart Brown or Scott Nicholson. Playing makes us better people, sociable, intelligent, creative.

Back to the analogy, you remember the whole video games thing we were doing. In the 80s we had Llamasoft with the eternally cool Jeff Minter coding his homespun innovative psychedelic delights. Well now we have Andy Hopwood, Greg and John-Paul, who beaver away to put out clever little gems like '6', and Greg's 'Escape the Nightmare'. Maybe they're not always as chrome as their American cousins but, more importantly, they have lots of interesting moving parts, and they approach our hobby in fresh and ingenious ways. I think that's what the English invasion has always brought to our side of the table, an abundance of enthusiasm, a newfangled way of looking at things and a dash of cool Britannia.

And do you know what the coolest thing about all of this is? We are all capable of becoming shed-based tinkerers. The tabletop design space is far more accessible than that of the video games sector. All we need is a musty work area or dining table, a fistful of felt tips, cardboard, dice, sticky back plastic and some passion for creating. The world is your oyster, you just need to channel your inner Blue Peter presenter. We all have



their Super Ted pyjamas. I heartily recommend giving it a watch, especially if you grew up during this period and savoured some of these 8-bit delights. It's a classic rags to riches tale, brimming with Hollywood clichés. Imagine Wall Street if directed by Mike Leigh and consisting primarily of the cast of Grange Hill; not so much Gordon Gekko more Sonic the Hedgehog.

Now, you may well ask, what has any of this got to do with board games? Why is this buffoon wasting our time with this nonsense? Well allow me to elaborate. It's my belief that we have started to see some of that good old British ingenuity frothing to the top of the board games cappuccino.

We have many excellent English designers who've switched the bedroom for a shed: the industrious Tony Boydell, designer of 'Snowdonia' and this year's 'Guilds of London'. Mark Chaplin and his nerve-jangling 'The Thing' and long-gestating 'Lifeform'



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