

FLAGSHIP

THE MAGAZINE FOR GAMERS

Phoenix

2003 Computer Game Awards
Age of Mythology
Introduction to Online Gaming
Battle of the Five Armies
Creating a PBM Website
Galaxy
Godfather
Keythedral
London Toy Fair
Meets & Conventions
Monsters
Total Conquest
Worlds Apart

plus ...

Board & Card Games,
Roleplaying,
Conventions and Zine Scene ...

... and all the gaming news, views & reviews!



1. The first step is to identify the problem.

2. The second step is to analyze the problem.

3. The third step is to develop a solution.



REPORT FROM THE BRIDGE

Fun For All

WELCOME to *Flagship* 102, another issue packed with news and articles about loads of different games. We hope you'll enjoy everything in it. Maybe when the real world hasn't much joy to write about, we should enjoy our games all the more.

There's plenty of fun stuff here, with personal reminiscences about the early days of PBM from key figure Chris Harvey, useful advice on designing your own website from Gordon McLennan, lively thoughts about creating monsters from Mark Pinder and suggestions about how to play comfortably in the same games group as your partner by Lisa Fordham. There's a first look at the early days of KJC's new release, Phoenix, and coverage of Total Conquest, Battle of the Five Armies, Godfather, Galaxy, Worlds Apart, Keythedral, Agora, Unexploded Cow and lots, lots more. Pevans looks at the new games he found at the London Toy Fair, we've comments on over thirty games from their players, your ratings for computer games and a big fat letters page. All, I hope, will be of interest to you.

We reckon to reflect what you think about the games you play. This approach has worked well over the years, so do keep in touch with us and send us your opinions.

Sometimes I feel that we gamers are much misunderstood, sigh. I was watching an archaeological programme on TV recently, where the team was digging up a Roman city that has now faded into pastureland. Computer-generated images of big buildings and busy market-places with extras wearing brown costumes, the usual stuff. But among the remains discovered were some boardgames and counters. Great! I sat up in eager expectation. But do we see the adult extras playing them, like real Romans must once have done? Oh no: cue well-behaved children shaking the dice. While I've nothing against children - especially well-behaved ones in practical brown costumes - I do think that it's a bit tough to see games-playing so carelessly represented as a youngsters' pursuit.

Ah well, maybe we've always been crafty enough keep quiet about playing games, in case the boss finds out...

I'll be away for a couple of weeks at Easter, to gloat over my new grand-daughter in Oakland CA, so contact Colin with any news then, at his address on the masthead.

Carol



FLAGSHIP

#102, APRIL / MAY 2003

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Contributions welcomed for Flagship 103. By May 9th, please.



WARGAMES



Agema Publications announce a new PBM wargame, **Ancient Battles**. This is a two player game developed from their successful Napoleonic Battles II system, but with new graphics and rules to reflect the period and its own stand-alone rulebook.

Agema's Richard Watts knows his stuff, and you can choose your army from a list of 39 historical armies, ranging from the Hittites to the Imperial Romans, Macedonians, Sassanid Persians and Crusaders. Unit types include chariots, elephants, pike phalanxes, skirmishers and so forth; a full range of weapons is also covered, including pila, slings and war machines. In fact, just about everything available in real history is included, although your choices are limited by the army lists in order to keep the force reasonably representative. With these forces, you fight a pitched battle over colour maps for between 5 to 15 turns, with each turn played every two weeks. Larger campaign games will become available at a later date using the same battle system.

The rules cost £5 post free in the UK, and turns are priced at £3.50 each. Contact: Agema@lineone.net

KJC Games are starting a new game of **It's A Crime**, the classic game of crime gangs battling it out in New York. This game (36) will have a bigger map of 99x99. Startups from:

www.kjcgames.com/crsetup.htm

Jorgen Kasperzak of the German firm Quirxel Games reminds us that the historical wargame **Austerlitz** was originally programmed by himself and that Quirxel Games have been running it in German since 1991. They offer a one-week turn game for experienced players, and a free sample position in an existing game for new players. The game can be played by post or email.

UK players will be familiar with the game as licensed by Supersonic Games here, while European players may be interested in the games run from Greece and Austria as well as from Quirxel themselves.

www.quirxel.de

Flagship Website ...
www.pbmgames.com

ADVENTURE GAMES



Congratulations to Entertainment Plus More, who celebrate thirteen years of fantasy fun with a Lucky 13 Reunion and Celebration. Moderator Hugh Bayer invites players who have been inactive for a year or more along with totally new players to enjoy two free turns of **Adventurers Guild**.

www.epmgames.com

There's plenty of good news about updates and improvements for KJC Games' long-running adventure game, **Quest**. A new moderation program has been written by KJC's Bat (Richard Brewster) that handles most of the moderation equations and information. This program is now improving the speed and thoroughness of moderation, even though implementing it did cause some delays initially. Links between the main Quest engine and the moderation program are being written at the moment.

Party and Alliance Renown have been introduced into Quest: GME (Game Master Edition). These new additions allow any party, and their Alliance, if they belong to one, to gain favour in different areas. Useful now, this will also provide a basis for future updates in most areas of the game.

The combat program has had several updates in the form of critical hits and a chance to avoid a critical hits. A statistical breakdown is given at the end of monster fights now, and soon will be for party vs party fights. The most important combat update, however, is a change to the way range works in combat, as previously this has caused problems. Bat reckons that 'with the dynamic blurbs and wealth of options the Quest combat system is at least one of the best around, if not the best.' Hey, how can we resist describing this statement as fighting talk?

Some Alliances have now reached Rank 3 and are receiving more moderated information. This includes information about the settlement that their HQ is located in, without needing to spend any Special Actions. Rank 3 means that an Alliance has a lot of influence, and gets involved in many important political decisions.

A new feature is the Party Plotline. This allows Alliances to have something to do that is not as world-shaping as the already existing Special Quests, but instead can develop roleplaying character quirks and interests. For example, an Alliance could

allot some moderation time for one of the parties to follow a character issue, like revenging a murder from years ago or retiring from adventuring. The idea is to allow character quirks and interests that previously had a low priority in the game system to be resolved: the sort of little things that can make all the difference.

Player-controlled shops have been added, giving a party something to brag about, minor influence in the settlement, somewhere to store a few pieces of equipment and a trading point where other parties can collect or purchase equipment. In time there will be shop services that will give ways to make gold.

The next elements to be overhauled will be Magic and Miracles. It's good to hear about so much new work going into a tried and trusty favourite.

www.kjcgames.com

Madhouse report that the *Kyr* area of **DungeonWorld** is running successfully, and serves as an ideal place for newcomers to the Dungeonworld system. Existing players can't transfer their characters across to Kyr, so all players will start on equal terms, while the Arabian setting offers something new.

<http://www.madcentral.com/kyr>

Madhouse are also expanding the standard game of **DungeonWorld** with a new range of character classes which will become available across the whole land of Bereny. We won't list all nine of these, but they include such interesting characters as Pixies, Dryads, Leprechauns, Gnome Fighters and Gnome Enchanters.

<http://www.madcentral.com>

PLAYTESTS

Planeshift α - Test

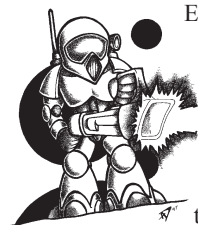
The designers of a new MMORPG, **Planeshift**, offer anyone who's interested the chance to examine their game, which is currently in alpha-test. The game will be a free one, taking place in a virtual fantasy world, where you start out as a mere peasant with the chance to grow into a hero.

They stress that they're working to create a convincing game world, with plenty of Non Player Characters to keep events moving, and 3D graphics and sound for an immersive experience:

www.planeshift.it



SCIENCE FICTION



Exciting news from KJC Games about their new s/f game **Phoenix**, which may well prove immensely popular. We publish some first impressions of playing the game this issue. KJC

are offering good deals for anyone who wants to start playing: startup is free and gains you a Courier Class Freighter, which is also free to play, as are the ground parties that can be set up from it, and you can choose to play for free for as long as you wish.

They expect you to move on to spending around £5 per week if you want to become a major player with a fleet of ships, a dozen outposts, a political and a starbase, but this sounds pretty reasonable, too. This £5 cost is made up from a political position costing £2 per week, as does a starbase; a special action costs £1.50 per action, a platform/outpost update costs 50p per update, while agents, operatives, ground parties, ships and debris all stay free.

The political position gives you two ships that are bigger than your starting freighter, increasing the number of things that you can do, and it allows you to create agents, operatives and officers. It also lists information about your discoveries, the members of your affiliation and the assets you control. You can only build outposts if you own a political position. However, KJC provide plenty of information about how to get into the game and it seems possible to progress comfortably as a new player before you need to send them money, with the aid of any affiliation that you join.

Phoenix is based on Beyond the Stellar Empire, which was praised as a game but criticised because the cost of play could mount up. It's interesting to see that Phoenix is addressing this old problem while keeping the affiliation-based play that was the great strength of BSE. The software is impressive, so processing speed will be greatly

improved. We're keen to hear what you think of the game. Has it kept BSE's pulling power?

www.kjcgames.com/phoenix

Harald Topf of CSPP is offering interested people the chance to log in to see the test games of his s/f PBeM, **Ashes of Empire**. It's a licence run by Henning Harperath: you may join the waiting list for free test games or to start the real game:

www.the.ashes.of.empire.de/gametest/login.php

The final game of Harlequin Games' **Star Quest** has ended now, with the winners congratulated in our *Hall of Fame* section. It's always a pity to bid farewell to a game, especially one with depth to it.

Madhouse are now working on opening up positions for planetary explorers in their popular 'pulp space opera', **Destiny**. Small 'away teams' will have the chance to explore an alien planet, to discover its secrets. Adventuring in a science fiction setting - sounds intriguing. www.madcentral.com

SPORTS GAMES



KJC Games' **Extra Time** now has a message board set up by one of the players. Players of Extra Time are invited to join to chat to their fellow players, but should note that the site is

monitored, so offensive messages won't be accepted:

<http://members5.boardhost.com/Extratime/>

We've been listing Dave Scriven's horse-racing game as Epsom. This was previously

run by Spellbinder Games, who called it Horses 4 Courses. We're now changing our listing to get the best of both names by showing it as **Horses 4 Courses: Epsom**. Epsom is the only course running at present, but the game can hold races on other courses e.g. Newmarket and Ascot and David's prepared to use these in time.

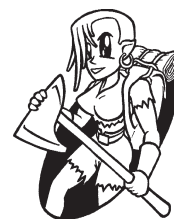
D.Scriven@btinternet.com

Another horse-racing game, Adrian Glover's **Winning Post PBM**, is set on a fantasy island, with its own horseracing and breeding industry. Ten players compete to win shields and game credits. Adrian reports that the game is still going strong, with a loyal band of players. *Adrian Glover, Winning Post PBM, 4 Stevanne Court, Lessness Park, Belvedere, Kent DA17 5BG.*

Early days yet, but hot news from Madhouse is the report that they're considering a revival of **Ultimate Football**, which they started to playtest some time ago before deciding to abandon it to prioritise their other games. If all goes well with engaging a new member of staff, they'll be resuming the playtest later in the year.

www.madcentral.com

ROLEPLAYING GAMES



Antony Dunks will be starting a new game of Xott Grande - **Xott Grande(r)** - soon. Most of the nine available places have already been taken, but there will be spaces for one or two new players, so if you're

interested contact Tony right away. The game runs to about 15 turns, but will end when its storyline finishes rather than on a fixed number of turns.

www.sark.net/~xott

Dark Wolf Games have closed **Bakufu**, with full refunds of player credit, and have absorbed **Saturnalia: the Viridian Isles** into **Saturnalia: NE**. www.darkwolf.ie

There's been a useful improvement in administration for Mark Pinder's **Lands of Elvaria**, reviewed last issue. Mark has set up a paypal account on the net to allow credit card payments. This means that players from all over the world can now join Elvaria. <http://communities.msn.co.uk/elvaria>

FLAGSHIP SUBSCRIPTIONS

www.pbmgames.com

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GBP (Europe)	18.00	26.00	48.00
GBP (Elsewhere)	21.00	30.00	55.00



FANTASY WARGAMES



The setup for Harlequin Games' **Legends** setup is £10 now, as they encourage players to download the module instead of receiving it by post.

www.harlequingames.com

Total Conquest now has a newsletter, and an interesting read this is. The GMs' internet servers were hit by the SQL Slammer worm in January, which delayed the processing of solo and mini games; ironically, some of the problems were 'caused by over reaching defensive measures on the providers' part'. Heavy, but the good news is that the situation has been resolved by dedicating a new server specifically for these games.

Custom games of **Total Conquest** are now available and proving popular. At present they allow you to adapt parts of the rules, races and cultures, and to run your own game with the people you want, but more options for custom games will appear in the future.

Appearing soon will be a 12 player scenario, set on the Battle Isle map, and available as both a standard and a custom game.

The next standard game of **Total Conquest** will be #10, a 22 player scenario that is filling up quickly. But if you'd prefer to start right away, or to get some practice, you can take over an inactive position in one of the existing games - mini or standard - immediately.

Finally, note that the special offer on **Total Conquest** charges has been extended for another six months. Not bad, eh?

www.totalconquest.com

David Callan has closed **Gorlos**, for technical reasons. He had a PC crash, but found that the old software won't run on the new machine 'despite many days of trying'.

Anyone who's looking for the fantasy wargame **Lizards** a great favourite in its time should contact Flying Buffalo pretty quickly. They're planning to run another game of this, but report that it's proving difficult to find enough players so they won't be reprinting the rulebook:

<http://www.flyingbuffalo.com/>

The Australian firm WoW Games are about to start their 250th game of the fantasy PBEM wargame **War of Wizards**. As its title suggests, you play a wizard who's able to

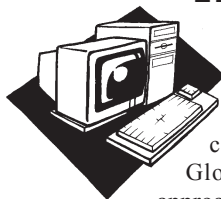
raise armies and manage resources as well as researching the powers of various types of magic. The game offers a lot of actions to choose from as well as the military and the magical. There are 16 different fantasy races to choose between, and you can send heroes out exploring, construct towns and different buildings, and treat your population as you wish. Of course, the drawback is that other wizards have the same options, so diplomacy is an essential part of the game.

We've had good reports of this game from experienced players. It's possible to take up a playtest position for free, but the usual charges are very reasonable, at \$A10 to start up (which gives you \$A10 worth of credit!), with subsequent turns at \$A2 for games which are run weekly or longer or \$A1 for games which are run more often than weekly.

<http://www.wow.pbemgame.com/>

ONLINE GAMES

The Sims



Writing about this spring's computer games in our last issue, our correspondent Globetrotter hailed the approaching release of **The Sims Online** (Electronic Arts) as

a game that would appeal to 'the affluent mainstreams who don't easily fit the hardcore gaming niche', and forecasting that 'this online version could yet become a phenomenon in its own right.' Yes, we're planning to have full coverage of the game in **Flagship**, but can meanwhile confirm that **The Sims Online** has come out in America. However, it won't be out until 31st October in the UK, so we'll rely on US players to give us their first impressions of the game.

The game has been created by Will Wright, who designed **SimCity** and **The Sims**, so hasn't changed the original concept. Most of the existing material has been included.

The characters exist in a virtual world which continues in real time, and they can build on the plot of land that each of them owns. The game is designed to contain a huge number of player-controlled Sims, with social interaction between them.

It'll be interesting to see what sort of activities the design offers, to keep everyone interested.

GAMING PEOPLE

Births

Congratulations to Michael and Louise on the birth of their daughter **Emily Rose Mulholland** in Oakland CA on February 13th. Emily was 3-4 weeks premature, weighed 5lbs 8oz and is making excellent progress. Ahem, we are a grandmother.

Deaths

John Harrington reports the sad news of the death of **Richard Sharp** in his article this issue. We send our commiserations to Richard's family and friends on this great loss.

Commiserations, too, to the family and friends of game designer **Sid Sackson** who died last November. Perhaps the most famous of Sid's designs, is the deservedly popular boardgame **Acquire**.

Misc

Madhouse's **Steve Tierney** has been starring in the lead role of **Oklahoma**: an amateur production, and a really challenging role. Wow, how talented some of us are! Break a leg, Steve!

Congratulations will be due to **Antony Dunks** on May 31st, when he'll have run his roleplaying game **Xott** for 18 years. And on July 29th his second game, **Xott Solo**, will have been running for ten years. Well done!

xott@sark.net

FLAGSHIP AWARDS 2003

In keeping with our expanded coverage of games, **Flagship** is proud to announce a series of awards throughout the year. You can vote for these all year round on our website (www.pbmgames.com) and we'll also be sending out voting forms the issue before the relevant award is announced.

Please take time to fill in the enclosed voting form or visit the website to vote there.



ROLEPLAYING

Harry Potter

Voldewarts is a fan based RPG Email Group based in the Harry Potter world created by J.K Rowling, but with some subtle - and some not so subtle - differences. For starters - you won't find Harry Potter, Ron or Hermione anywhere in the game, Most of their schoolfriends - and, of course, enemies - will not exist in this Universe, either. For a full detailed explanation of the history of this world, check out the History of Voldewarts. Hogwarts School for Witchcraft and Wizardry is there however, and many of the teachers and locations are the same. In short the students and events are entirely removed from the world of the books.

The website explains all you need to know to join in the game - or of course you're welcome to 'lurk' to see what is going on. Take a look at;

<http://house-of-cats.co.uk/NewWarts/>

Star Trek

Senior crew-members are being sought for all departments in the USS Independence NCC-91805, which is setting out to explore the Galaxy and protect the Federation.

Among the positions available are Chief Strategic Operations Officer, Chief Medical Officer, Chief Intelligence Officer and Chief Communications Officer, but there are plenty more. You can also play crew who aren't officers or take up civilian positions. Contact: grace@uss-independence.com

<http://www.uss-independence.com>

Warhammer

The GM is looking for four-six players for a game based on fantasy roleplaying, not battles. He's planning to start out with material from the *Death's Dark Shadow* adventure book and move into the *Doomstones* campaign, but you don't have to be familiar with these scenarios to play. Your character will begin in a village called Kreutzhofen, where great mountain passes lead to Bretonnia and the kingdoms of the Border Princes. Many travellers pass through what appears to be a peaceful settlement, but the locals may have dark secrets of their own.

When you apply to join, you need to provide a description and background for your character, together with a reason for him/her to be in the area. The game will be played on RPoL.net's message boards, where enrolling is free.

Contact: Michael G Jackson (eirais@optonline.net)

En Garde!

Four-five players are sought for a new game of En Garde!, where your character will have to climb the social ladder in pre-revolutionary France. Among many other activities, it's possible to duel, to keep a mistress or to go off to war.

Contact: lovandeath@hotmail.com

Futuristic

A new storyline is starting in this sci-fi Heavy Metal comics style of game. It's set on the planet Tarnow in a galaxy called Kaelyn, which is full of empires that are founded on slavery. Tarnow is a capital planet, which is now being attacked by the mad Overlord, Vundarr, who seems certain to conquer it. You can play a slave, a slave-owner, an emancipator, a slave tracker, a ruler or a merchant.

Note that players must be 18+, because of adult content and violence.

Contact: varicksgirl@aol.com

Horror

Player Characters are the children of monsters, sent to learn the scary skills they need at Creepy Academy, under Headmaster Crawly. The emphasis is on fun ('more campy than scary, but feel free to keep a bit of creepy...').

<http://www.storycrafter.com/story/index.php?storyid=182>

Contact: neobladerunner@yahoo.com

ONLINE GAMES

Traditional and Modern

Gamerz.net offers the chance to play a wide range of popular games online: ranging from chess (in many forms), to Backgammon, Connect 4, Draughts and various card games. Rules are provided on a simple but effective and fast website.

www.gamerz.net/pbmserv/

On the other hand **GameTable Online** is an online service offering more modern style strategy, board, card and dice games all playable against other people over the internet. The site has lined up more than twenty games so far, including four Cheapass Games (such as Kill Dr. Lucky) and even some German-style boardgames. We will bring you more news this in a future issue, but in the meantime you can check it out at;

www.gametableonline.com

EVENTS

Programmers' Day

KJC are holding a Programmers' Day at the British Legion (private function room), Cleveleys, Blackpool on Saturday 14th June 2003.

This is for designers who are serious about writing a PBeM Game and can code in Java, C, C++ or a similar language.

KJC, having developed Phoenix, the most sophisticated game engine for PBeM, want to go one step further. The Engine will allow programmers to write their own game interface without the worry of completing an entire game system - basically it's the d20 of PBeM.

Many of the techniques such as auto email decryption, formatting, automated reply and mapping procedures have already been developed over the previous three years. During the day they explain their methods of data storage with rapid access, GMing tools and methods of avoiding the pit-falls so many games have fallen into. As such, they expect any person attending to sign a Non-Disclosure Agreement. As a game designer/programmer all that you will have to do is write your own rulebook and game interface. KJC will market the game, pay for GMing and pay you your percent of the revenue. Contact kjc@kjcgames.com and request a programme which includes an agreement form to be returned.

Flagship at Conventions

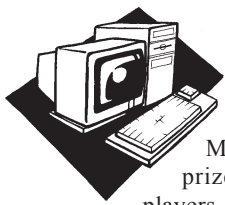
Your editorial staff attended **Towercon**, the independent games convention held in Blackpool over March 21st-23rd. A relaxed event with a vast number of RPGs, boardgames and cardgames to choose from, everything went swimmingly despite the personal appearance of Dr Evil. It's worth mentioning the convention's achievement in raising money for charity: this year, hundreds of pounds were collected for the charity that offers trips for dying children: the Make a Wish Foundation.

We're also planning to attend **Maycon**, from the 2nd-5th May in Birmingham. We've been invited to provide a team for the boardgaming tournament on Sunday 5th, and we're eagerly seeking volunteers for this: do come and play for us!

Finally, some of us will be at **BayCon** near Exeter at the end of April (24th -27th). If any readers are planning to attend any of these conventions, by all means take time to look us up - we'll be easy to find as we'll generally be wearing T-shirts bearing the Flagship logo.



WEB GAMES



Madhouse Offer Prizes

Madhouse are offering prizes for the top three players in the next game of their play-by-web **Catacombs**: they will each receive £10 worth of turn credit in any Madhouse game, which is a pretty good deal when Catacombs is free to play anyway.

In Catacombs, your single character Adventurer tries to gather the most treasure in the catacombs beneath a haunted house. There's no shortage of gold, but there are plenty of nasties that'll hinder your Adventurer's exploration. It's possible to co-operate with the other players' characters, or to fight them, and each game lasts for a set number of turns with the richest player winning. Turns are run every day. It's a simple idea, but fun:

www.madcentral.com/cgi-bin/catacombs/home.cgi

Net Congestion Causes Problems

We've some news about the online game **Merchant Empires**, which was reviewed last issue by Matt Mingus. Merchant Empires has been suffering from some speed problems. Advanced Powers, who run the game, have analysed the difficulty and found the specific problem: it's a net congestion in Amsterdam that is causing holdups for many users. They expect to resolve this soon, but in the meantime they suggest using a proxy server if possible.

<http://advancedpowers.com>

New Gladitorial Game

Battlefield Rome is a new gladiatorial web game. It's been developed under licence from **Roman Arena** so it resembles this, but as a new game it'll offer more scope for beginners than the older game. A ten-day trial is free, followed by a subscription of \$5 for 2 months, \$10 for 6 months, or just \$15 for a whole year:

www.battlefieldrome.com
www.romanarena.com

New Free Online RPG

New Age is a new, free online RPG. It has some unusual aspects, which could mean that it's attractively original, or not. For instance, your character starts off as a slave, but with the un-slavelike advantages of owning a few

gold coins and being able to go anywhere you wish. Small robotic balls can be obtained, which improve your status: an idea from computer gaming, possibly? Could work. There are races, classes and gods to choose from: indeed, it's possible for a character to become a god by reaching the appropriate status. Diplomacy is important, and you can join or create a clan for the purposes of development, trade and warfare. Details from:

www.wolfz.com

Free Fantasy Wargame

We've heard favourable reports from several readers who've been playing **Dominion**. It's a free online fantasy wargame, for twenty players. Your own plot of land is your dominion, and you use this and your allies' support to fight for good or for evil with military power, magic and espionage.

Dominion's setting is a world that is slowly recovering after being devastated by dragons. Since these dragons departed, however, various other races have grown up and gained strength, including the Sylvans, the Lizardfolk, the Icekin and the Firewalkers. This seems well worth trying and game 17 (incorporating several improvements) is about to start at the time we go to press:

www.kamikazegames.com/dominion/

Adopt an Alien!

The **Alien Adoption Agency** (AAA) is a MMORPG which has been running since 1997, with cute icons and lively support from its players. As its name suggests, the AAA is based on aliens - but while there is something of a sci fi feel to the game, these aren't conventional aliens at all! The game is free to play as long as you only adopt one alien. Take a look at it, at:

www.alienaa.com

New Games to try Online

In issue#100 we brought you news of Yahoo Games on Demand, a way to rent out computer games at a low cost and try playing them before you decide to buy (or otherwise). Although we hope to bring you a full update on this service in the near future, we can report that the site now has no less than 68 games, the latest additions being: **Trophy Hunter 2003**, **Daikatana**, **Soldier of Fortune**, **The Outforce** and **Praetorians**.

<http://gamesondemand.yahoo.com/play>

RPG NEWS



Wizards Upcoming Releases

Wizards of the Coast have some interesting new releases this month. We particularly like the sound of their new hardback D&D rulebook, **Fiend Folio**, although book 3 of the *Forgotten Realms: Starlight & Shadows* trilogy, **Windwalker** is also being issued as a hardback and there are a couple of **Dragonlance** paperbacks.

In May, Wizards will issue both book 3 of *Forgotten Realms: War of the Spider Queen*, **Condemnation**, and *Forgotten Realms Unapproachable East*. Both are hardbacks which sound like sound investments for brooding over.

Wizards of the Coast are also about to offer a D20 modern campaign setting, **Urban Arcana**, in hardback.

Red Dwarf RPG

Deep7 have just released **Red Dwarf: The Roleplaying Game**, which allows players to create their own characters in the vein of this much-loved comic TV series and to follow appropriate adventures in the Red Dwarf universe. It sounds as if there's plenty of authentic detail in the book, as well as the essential rules, stats and tips, along with a complete beginner's adventure.

Humour can be quite difficult to manage in RPGs, but as long as you're a Lister-type player rather than a Rimmer, this may be just the system for you.

www.reddwarf.com

D20 Modern Occult

New from RPG Objects is **Blood and Relics**, a D20 modern campaign model with an occult theme. Written by Charles Rice, the game has a European setting, where a long but covert war is raging between the good guys, the Sang Real, and the Caeder, who are the baddies. The two sides fight for the lost artifacts of power, arcane knowledge and the human soul itself with no holds barred, shudder...

Mongoose News

Mongoose Publishing are releasing **The Rookie's Guide to Atlantis**, which is written by Marc Farrimond for the **Judge Dredd** game, and which offers the chance to extend your scenarios beyond the walls of the city and out into the dark waters around it.

Another release from Mongoose is **The Quintessential Psion** (Sam Witt), which



BOARDGAMES

links with **Quintessential Psychic Warrior**, without being quite as horrific. There plenty of new ideas in this game, with new ways to use your psychic powers for information-gathering, combat and control

They've also compiled **Power Classes II**, as a continuation of their popular first series. This set includes such useful character-types as the Knight, the Mercenary, the Explorer and the Artificer.

Another interesting manual is **Encyclopaedia Arcane: Crossbreeding** (Jonathan Richards), which gives rules for creating not just familiar monsters but also embodying your own bizarre creations.

Looking for a detailed guide to a specific type of monster? **The Slayer's Guide to Harpies** (James Maliszewski) includes a description of their society as well as all sorts of detail about their abilities and ranks.

The hottest news from Mongoose, however, is the release of **Babylon 5** in May, with various supplementary material to follow during the rest of the year. This game is eagerly awaited, and looks like becoming a must-have for DMs - so many possibilities to work up ...

www.mongoosepublishing.com

Boardgame Players' Association

The BPA has been set up by American boardgamers as a non-profit corporation, established to support the shared interests of boardgame players world-wide.

If you enjoy any type of boardgames - wargames, social strategy games, racing games, train games, whatever - you can find people via their website who share your interests. The BPA sponsor annual tournaments, organize play-by-email games, and help to establish global player ratings. Among the events which they run is the annual World Boardgaming Championships® (WBC). At the WBC, about 1000 people from around the world compete to be named champion of their favourite games. The BPA's members vote to select the 100 or so games (the 'Century Group') in which competitions are scheduled:

www.boardgamers.org

Year round, the BPA also run PBeM tournaments for selected games, such as Breakout Normandy, The Russian Campaign, War at Sea, For the People, Victory in the Pacific and Gangsters. For more PBeM information, visit the BPA PBeM Tournament Page;

www.abovethefields.com/top/pbem/

Cheapass do Dice!



Cheapass Games don't only design

cardgames. They've just released **Diceland: Infinite Space**, an expansion for their **Diceland: Deep White Sea**, which features spaceships from their own computer game **Strange Adventures in Infinite Space**.

www.cheapass.com

Games Stable Increases

Rio Grande's **Puerto Rico** won last issue's Awards for Board Games as well as our columnist Pevans' own personal endorsement, so it's good news to hear that Rio Grande have been reprinting the game, which should reach shops around now. They've put a free expansion set for it on their website, to acknowledge the support that the game has received. Rio Grande have also been reprinting **Mamma Mia!** and **Cartegna**.

New is **Carcassonne: Traders & Builders**, the second expansion for Carcassonne. This deals, as you'd expect, with traders and builders: the former earn points who complete cities extra points, the latter allow you to place extra tiles to allow the cities and roads to grow faster. A cute touch is that a pig, properly placed (ahh...), can enrich the value of a farm.

In **Bean Trader**, you play a member of the union of northern European cities and merchants who ran the bean trade in the middle ages. Players travel from Hanse city to Hanse city in wagons full of beans, and if you've earned the most money from this trade you win the game. Hmm, this one probably depends on who you play it with.

Amun Re is a design by the esteemed Reiner Knizia which is set in Ancient Egypt. You're a pharaoh, and must aim to develop your own area profitably enough to be able to build your own pyramids. Building the most pyramids wins the game. Power cards will help or hinder you design, and you also need to make sacrifices to the god **Amun Re** if you're to prosper.

Paris, Paris is based on the idea of running a business that caters for tourists. Your cafe, bistro or souvenir shop makes a profit whenever a tour bus stops beside it, and naturellement the player who makes the most euros wins the game.

www.riograndegames.com

CARD GAMES

Cheapass in your Pocket

We've a review describing three fun card games from Cheapass Games in this issue, and Cheapass have announced a further range of new releases.

Starting their new releases for 2003 were two games in their Hip Pocket series, **Light Speed** and **Steam Tunnel**. Light Speed is a space combat game for two four players, while Steam Tunnel is an abstract cardgame which, they say, is also set in space. **Give Me The Brain**, which won an Origins Award in 1997, has been updated by doubling the number of cards and adding new artwork. Also getting revamped is their strategy card game **Starbase Jeff**, which'll appear in the Hip Pocket format. Do we detect an s/f theme this year?

Even if you're not interested in their games, take a look at Cheapass's hilarious newsletter, which is worth reading for its own sake.

www.cheapass.com

New Froop!

Savant Garde Entertainment have released **Froop!**, an abstract strategy game. They compare this to dominoes, because you must try to add your cards to the edges of a chaotic shape on the table, called the Froop, while simultaneously cutting off your opponents' opportunities. The principle is simple enough while sounding fun to play, and there are variants to make the game more challenging. Savant Garde have included rules in 15 different languages because they believe that this game will have a world-wide appeal.

www.savantgarde.com

WARGAMES

New Sci-Fi Wargame

Agema Publications have now released the rules for **Strikeforce 70,000**, a science fiction tabletop wargame. They describe it as having 'groundbreaking rules; discussion on how to create your own unique army; weapons explanation and analysis'. It's fully illustrated, with a colour cover, and quick reference cards are included. The charge is 6.50 in the UK, with an extra 3.00 for overseas.

go.to/agema

Phoenix

First Impressions

KIERON REDMAN describes gaining power and influence in space ...

Phoenix, formerly known as Beyond the Stellar Empire, has truly risen from the flames of BSE. Taking on board suggestions from players, indeed, shaping the game on player suggestions, has given this new version a 'made to measure' feel. Improvements are numerous, but the game's ten-year history is still alive. Old players and new players, listen up: the Phoenix has risen ...

A living background

Phoenix continues from BSE and, in terms of time in game, is a seamless transition. The history, which has been evolving since the British launch of the originally American space opera game in 1992, is rich and deep.

Phoenix is made up of factions of players, known as Affiliations, which, like political parties, have their own agendas, aims, ambitions, strong points, weak points, etc. These Affiliations and their actions have been shaping the Phoenix universe. Indeed, player actions are the most important factor in the development of the game, with GM-controlled Affiliations included to protect neutral space and help new players. The Affiliations themselves have been evolving, with some dying, some emerging, and some of the original ones still around. Each Affiliation has its own history, with most being directly linked to player characters' events, but some created by founding players to make sure every Affiliation has a real sense of history, meaning that each has a real sense of the future.

This whole feeling of depth hits home as soon as you begin to research the game (everyone does that before they join, don't they?) and look at the Affiliation websites, which all of them have. Each has its own version of the same history, which may sound bad but to me is extremely life-like, and as a history student it's something I can really relate to (just as Iraq sees this war affair as an attack on liberty, America as a defence of liberty). Most Affiliations have vastly different aims: the Imperials want to protect their power, whereas the Affiliation for Free Trade just wants to trade with anyone with stellars (Phoenix's currency). This ties in with their differing styles - some business-like humans, some warrior felines, some alien slug creature's dependent on war.

There is definitely a sense of richness, variety and a niche for everyone.

How to start?

When players sign up, they have two different options: they can be randomly assigned to an Affiliation or they can choose an Affiliation to join. It is possible to go it alone in Phoenix, but this is not a starting option: the help and support of a tight-knit group of players is extremely important to help newbies get out into the cold universe and fend for themselves.

The first option, being randomly assigned, does seem to have a lot of attraction. There is no need to read through lots of differing propaganda

and pleas for your membership: instead you click a button and wait to see which Affiliation you get put with, then do the reading. If you're extremely lucky you will be put with the Affiliation you joined with, if you're not then you move to the one you like. If you don't ever do the reading and don't like the Affiliation you joined, you miss out on a brilliant game. Although the first option ensures no player is out of his or her depth straight away, it can be quite annoying for Affiliation leaders, if players join, decide they don't like the Affiliation and do a runner to another. However, it is better than having no recruits at all, so no one's complaining that much.

Then there is the second option, which I prefer. Look through Affiliation websites, write some emails, do a bit of homework, and you can join a group of players who will be approaching the game in a very similar style to yourself, without having to move around too much to find them when you are in character.

All new players start off with a small ship, and must report to the leader of the Affiliation they join or are randomly placed in. Ships travel around space, needing crew to run them and stellars to pay the crew. For ships the week is split into 300 Time Units, or TUs. Every action that you perform costs Time Units, meaning you have to prioritize what you do in any given week. It is also possible to set up standing orders, so that if you perform the same trade run with the same ship every week, you can send in an order filling up 900 Time Units: if nothing goes wrong, your ship will be happily performing the trade run for three weeks hassle-free.

Ships are free to run, to encourage new players to try the game for free. Some Affiliation leaders will try to get you to perform a couple of missions (usually trading or supplying runs) to help you to have a feel for the game without any real-life costs, and then leave you to your own devices, with you deciding when you upgrade to having a Starbase and incurring real-life charges. Some leaders may not have these types of 'training' missions, some may just leave you alone to perform any operation that you would like, others may encourage you to invest in a Starbase as soon as possible, as ships do cost in-game resources.

Whatever happens, you will be able to get a feel for the game for absolutely nothing. When you're hooked (that's a deliberate *when*, not an *if*) you will want to operate Starbases, Outposts, Agents and Operatives.

Expansion? How?

The next step from the training missions with a ship is to become a governor of a Starbase. Once you do this you will have the power to create enough wealth to support some more ships, which means being able to expand what you do, ie one ship to trade, two to explore, or it means you can concentrate on your chosen niche within the game. A Starbase is no harder to run than a ship, due to the innovative gaming system (discussed later) and is only £2 a turn, which is once a week, to run.

Starbases have factories, which manufacture goods: these can be anything from equipment for ships (including bridges, shields) to structural units and other trade goods. Starbases can also trade with the local population and the worldwide population on the planet they inhabit; they can buy and sell trade goods, pets and luxury foods to name but a few items. Starbases can also have mines, which exploit minerals, which are needed for the construction of other items. Some items are needed for the construction of other items and so forth. High tech items also

Phoenix at a glance

Developed from Beyond the Stellar Empire, Phoenix is free to start and can be played for free until players wish to develop an advanced position at a cost of around £5 weekly.

www.kjcgames.com/phoenix/htm

need blueprints before they can be put into production, and these have to be researched at special complexes, which are also present on Starbases.

Other positions connected with Starbases include Outposts, which are basically Starbases without factories, which just mine resources. These incur a real-life cost of £1.50 an update, which can be requested as frequently as required. There are also Platforms, which are in orbit of space stations and act as an extra defence barrier, and pick-up point. Platforms can be packed full of space weaponry to defend Starbases, and incur a real-life cost of £1.50 an update. All of these, like ships, need work hours from employees to run, and employees need paying stellars to work.

Once a Starbase is set up, you need to also have a political position. Think of a political position as a type of central bank account for all your positions. All your income and expenditure comes through this, and you receive a weekly report giving financial, geographical and labour information on all of your positions. This is £1 a week and so to get involved on a higher level, steps you up to a £3 real-life cost a week. This a bargain compared with the amount of entertainment gained from one Starbase and a few ships.

There are also opportunities to delve deeper into the game. Agents and Operatives add an element of espionage to the game. They can perform simple missions like starting a rumour within a starbase, while highly trained Operatives can be charged with high-danger missions to assassinate important figures of enemy Affiliations. Charges for these positions are relatively low real-life, but extremely high in game.

Last but not least, there is a Special Action order, which can be issued by the position it is relevant to. A Special Action can be used when there is no rule showing what to do, and you want to do something unique or off the beaten track. An example may be the investigation of an ancient ruin, or the study of a new breed of wildlife. The GM reads these carefully, checking against the history of the situation (has this animal been studied before? etc) and writes a specialized response. This can go on until a final conclusion is reached. Due to the time-consuming nature of SAs they are slightly more expensive than a normal turn.

So how do I win?

Phoenix is not a game that can be won. It is open-ended, and if the future brings the same kind of excellent development and evolution the last ten have brought, this game can easily continue for many, many years.

So, if you can't win, what can you do? That question could be answered over many pages, but here is a phrase that sums it up: anything that is logically viable.

Now, I know what you're thinking: that is never true, no matter how much games promise no boundaries, there is always a wall, painted cleverly to conceal itself. I have already indicated this boundary, however, and that is logic. If you want to investigate a ruin found on a remote moon, you can, in depth, performing whatever searches, scans and analysis that you wish. If you want to trade special goods from one planet to another, fine; want to invest in shipyards and try and build a war fleet, trade fleet, exploration fleet, fine, and so on and so forth. The only way to win is to set aims and targets, to improve personal wealth or knowledge or be a hard-line member of your Affiliation and work night and day for the prosperity of their (and your) cause.

I can give you an example of what I am doing at the moment, and this is routine stuff: you can be much more imaginative than this. In Phoenix, when you have items specific to the world they were found on, which can't be found anywhere else, the value you can sell them for increases with distance from the source. At one of my Starbases I have investigated the possibility of a specific luxury food type, which was found by a previous player in a routine exploration search. They were ant eggs. After a couple of special actions I found I could exploit them at a certain rate. So, I sent a small ship with some ISR drives (the things that make ships fly) and a spare jump drive (the things that allow ships to jump systems: systems are small areas of space owned by different Affiliations; they are travelled between using jump engines) to a starbase



with one of my bigger ships on. I set my bigger ship up and sent it to start trading the ants eggs. My aim was to start making profit, and I won.

Looking at the game system

The rules for this game are pretty long. If that's a bad thing, then so be it, but the rules need to be long to cover all the possibilities of such a versatile game. The first thing to do is to read the introductory manual, the basic ship manual, the affiliation manual and, if you are interested in trade, the basic starbase manual. Read these once. There is no need to remember any complex coding system to administer orders, KJC have come up with an easy-to-use piece of software sent in the start up pack. Simply install the program and you are ready to go.

The program has a database of positions and items, which will expand as you get deeper into the game. This enables you to select a position, select an order and then fill in a series of drop down menus and labelled boxes with the relevant information to complete the order. This is the same for every type of position. You save the data, with your one position or your seven positions, and send it to KJC for processing. You then eagerly await the results.

The Phoenix soars

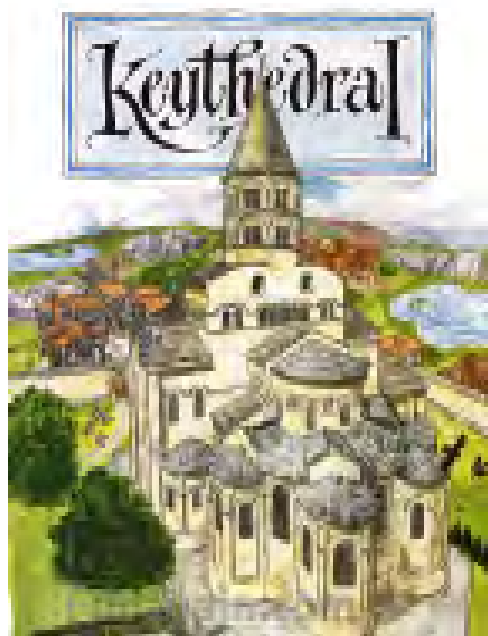
I have tried my hardest to include as much information as possible here, while concentrating on the new elements of Phoenix. There are things such as merchandising, research and the structure of the universe that I have omitted, indeed there's probably more that I cannot recall at this time. I have deemed this not to be relevant for a review that assumes little or no knowledge. The difficulty in selecting relevant information is a testament to the depth of a superbly diverse game.

There is only one bad thing I can really say about Phoenix, and that is its massiveness, its unlimited options, its need for commitment from the player and the way in which it gets in the way of everything else, consuming every spare second, and sometimes consuming seconds reserved for other thoughts. This game is truly unique, and truly brilliant.

Keythedral

PEVANS builds for victory in this tile-laying boardgame ...

I'VE BEEN going on about **Keythedral** for a while now, so it's about time I gave you a proper review of it. To start with, there is an impressive amount of stuff inside the box. What is truly remarkable is the variety of the illustrations: each tile of a specific type - the seven Quarries, for



example - is a different picture. The production quality is terrific - with the single exception of the flimsy box. Even here, there is text on the inside of the box, including some very useful hints on playing the game. You cannot fault the attention to detail.

The game is about building a cathedral (the 'Keythedral'). This is shown on one of the boards, which has spaces for the five levels of building tiles. On

one side of each tile is the purchase cost in terms of resource cubes, the value (1-5, according to level) is on the other. The cost of a tile on level one is two of the common resources. By level five, the cost will include (at least) one of the expensive resources that can only be gained by trading. The number of tiles available on each level decreases. The game ends when the last building tile is bought. The player with the highest total value of building tiles is the winner (highest total value of remaining resources breaks any tie).

It's that simple. Except that getting there is rather more complicated. The playing area is made up of the octagonal fields, interspersed with the players' diamond-shaped buildings. Each player has five buildings, numbered one to five. In turn, everybody gets to place workers in the unoccupied fields adjacent to their buildings, one number at a time. The type of field then gives the resource that each worker will produce. So players have to think ahead: what resources do I need? Therefore which fields do I want to get my workers into? Thus which number building do I want next? And what do the others want?

The way it works, you see, is that each player, in turn, chooses a building number. Starting with that player, everybody in turn places a worker adjacent to their building of that number. Providing there's an

unoccupied field. Then the next player chooses one of the other numbers. What you get is a sequence of intricately interlocking tactical options. The resources you end up with will depend on what order the buildings are actioned and which fields the other players choose. All sorts of tactical nuances fall out of this. If all the fields around a building have been taken, no worker is placed, so players can be squeezed in this way. Conversely, a field with only one building adjacent to it guarantees a resource cube for the player whose building it is. Having more than one building adjacent to the same field is counter-productive as you are then competing with yourself. And having a building across a field from an opponent's building of the same number can be bad news - especially if it's the player on your right.

All of which means that the layout of the playing area is important. Setting this up is the first thing that happens in the game. It starts with two quarries and two woods. Players then take it in turns to place a field (taken at random), followed by one of their buildings. The number of field tiles in play depends on the number of players. All of this means that there's a lot of decision-making going on: first in the set-up and then each turn in play. The danger is that the game bogs down in analysis paralysis: players taking forever to weigh up all the options and consequences of each decision. However, having played the game several times, I've come to the conclusion that each individual decision is not that important. Hence it's not worth taking too long agonising over it. For example, choosing the order of the buildings may seem vital, but all the resources are useful (the need to trade things ensures this) and you will usually get a reasonable number of them.



Spending resources

Okay, we've got as far as gaining resources each turn, but what do you do with them? Spend them, of course! Each player in turn gets to buy something and this goes round until everybody's had enough - or run out of resources. A minor point is that players can pass on one round and then come back in (unless everybody else has passed), which can be a useful tactic.

I've already mentioned that building tiles are bought with resources, so this is one of the things you can do. The next thing you can do is trade resources. The trading options are shown on the second display board. The Trader will exchange any two resource cubes for one of any of the five basic resources. The Blacksmith sells one ironwork for any two

Keythedral at a glance

Boardgame involving tile placement for 2 to 5 players aged 8 and over. Play-time averages 1 to 1½ hours. Manufactured by R&D Games and designed by Richard Breese Price varies, though due to demand is currently rather high (up to £60)!

resource cubes. The Glass Maker sells one stained glass for any three resources. And the Goldsmith sells one gold cube for any four resources.

Players can also upgrade their buildings. These start as cottages. Pay one wood and one stone and you convert one to a house. You get to place workers in two unoccupied fields adjacent to a house. As the hints in the game note, houses are more valuable the earlier they are played, so that they take effect in as many turns as possible. Hence the early turns usually see a frenzy of house-building. Having said that, the last game I played was won by the player who didn't build a single house. He concentrated on buying building tiles with the 4-5 resource cubes he gained each turn.

For one wood you can build a fence. This blocks a building from a specific field. This is useful for reducing competition for a particular field or hampering a specific player. You only have three fences and you don't get them back, so use them carefully. One little tactic: a building that's entirely cut off by fences can be re-located! You can remove a fence, but it costs you two wine cubes. The hints suggest it's more cost effective to fight back with a fence of your own than to remove fences. Finally, players can spend one cube of any kind and buy a Law card. These are face down, so you don't know what you're getting, and buying a Law card ends your turn. You have to weigh up whether it's worth losing the rest of the turn to make sure you get one (which is more difficult the more players there are in the game). The Law cards allow you to do something special: a free cottage to house conversion, for example. Or trading one resource for any two.

Once everybody's done all the actions they want to (or are allowed to), the turn ends. The first player marker moves to the left and a little auction takes place. The player to the left of the marker decides whether to bid a number of resource cubes or pass. The next player has to raise the bid or pass. This goes round the table to the player with the marker. S/he just has to match the last bid. The highest bid pays the player who would otherwise have the marker and then chooses who is first player!

Being first player is an advantage, but it's not a huge one. Hence, I have seen players win the bid and give the marker to the player on their right. This way they start with the marker for next turn! And that's the game. People generally find the game shorter than they expect the first time they play. The second time they anticipate this, understand that they've got a lot of decisions to make and take a bit more time over the game. The result is that the game takes a bit longer than the advertised 1-1 1/2 hours to play (though this also depends on the number of players).

There are clearly multiple strategies for the game, but the best seems to be aiming to buy building tiles regularly - I aim to get one of each value. I have not yet tried hoarding resource cubes in the first turns and only buying higher value building tiles. Logic suggests this could be a viable strategy, but it does depend on somebody buying the cheaper tiles.

All in all, this is a tremendous game. It requires some thought, but not too much; moves briskly; provides lots of tactical opportunities; and the best man wins.



SpielChamps 2003

Sunday May 4th
MayCon, Birmingham



SpielChamps is a card and boardgames tournament to find the finest gamers in the land. Teams of four players will compete over four selected games (*Aquire, Settlers, Carcassonne & Puerto Rico*) to amass the highest team score.

SpielChamps 2003 will be part of **MayCon** (www.maycon.org) which runs from Friday 2nd through to Monday 5th at the City Inn, Birmingham. MayCon provides a full holiday weekend of gaming from 6pm on the Friday to 2pm on Monday.

Come one, come all for some friendly competition amidst a weekend of convivial gaming to suit all tastes.

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Total Conquest

A Newbie's Report

PHILLIP GEER is spell-bound by his discovery...

Total Conquest is the wind beneath my wings. It has quickly replaced the newspaper as my morning fixation. Not since *Fantasy General* have wargame, epic and email blended so seamlessly. And *Fantasy General* ran from DOS, so I am as pleased as Punch to have found a replacement for it. I can finally move my 33 mHz dust factory to the garage, where it will begin its new life as a combination space heater and hotplate.

Total Conquest appeared to me during a random Internet search. As I read the help files (it was the first thing I did!- really!) I thought to myself, 'Can it be? An Internet game I can really play at my own pace?' The client installed on the first try and I quickly immersed myself in the tutorial, a solo adventure.

First steps - the solo game

I chose to play my first solo adventure as a race of Civilized Humans, since traditionally humans have been the baseline race by which all others are rated in fantasy roleplaying games: this race was chosen not for its benefits, but because I was betting that the strictures on it would carry the least teeth. I'd seen a lot of games, and I couldn't help being somewhat skeptical that Total Conquest would live up to the hype.

I did have some problems submitting an approved staff of heroes, but I got around them. Clicking first the Autofill button followed by the browser Back button yielded a list of approved hero ability scores. I tailored them until they fitted both my tastes and the game requirements. The sheer breadth of choice really got me enthused. Countless times I checked my Hotmail account, scanning in vain for the message from 'TC Engine' that would eventually arrive to tell me that the game could begin.

The client interface was surprisingly polished for a game just shy of beta. It only took me a few moments to get the hang of using the pop-up tabs. For my first turn I ended up doing and undoing my orders several times, because I wanted to try out every feature and test every constraint. I was hoping this would help me avoid any nasty surprises further down the road.

On my top of the line workstation the game worked flawlessly. However, my neolithic home computer has problems running at anything larger than 800 by 600 resolution. I couldn't deliver orders to some troops because some popup buttons would emerge off screen where they couldn't be pressed. I eventually found that if I renamed troops with long names (such as 'Heavy Crossbowmen') to a single character, the problem would go away. When it comes to my home computer, I'm used to these kinds of workarounds.

It seems that the solo adventure flows at the pace you set for it. Since my Elven, Dwarven, and Orcish opponents seemed willing to wait things out, I quickly decided to go on the offensive. After beefing up my armies with the Train and Increase Size commands, I marched them straight into the grey unknown toward the Dwarven capital.

When the next turn's report arrived in my email inbox, I was a little miffed. The armies had marched into no-man's land without using the

Conquer command, and so had cut their own supply lines. I lost several troops to starvation and had to turn back and establish control in order to survive. More tutorial highjinks ensued when my forces discovered an impassable river and decided to squander most of the turn's movement arguing about which soldier would attempt to cross it first.

There were many notable blunders during that first game: my inept selection of a tactic that had my best troops sitting around scratching themselves during battle; the turn I sent all my troop leaders on a quest and then wondered why my armies failed to move; when I accidentally tried to conquer a village of giants thousands strong using 500 scouts. The sudden appearance of a powerful tribe of trolls brought the campaign to a merciful end, but I felt I had learned everything I needed to succeed against human opponents.

To my dismay, I found out during my first week of minigaming that I still had a lot to learn.

Next steps - the minigame

The asynchronous nature of Total Conquest can be confusing to new players. Most of them come to the game never having played games over email, let alone anything as intensive as a wargame. The solo game gets them in the mood for turns on demand, a mood that can turn to consternation in the minigame, which runs at the speed of one turn every two days.

Not everyone realizes immediately that this time is necessary in order to have decent human opposition. Some abandon their games on their way to something running at a faster pace, allowing the other players to abuse their kingdoms' provinces as they see fit. Others are so quickly driven out of contention by the superior statecraft of their enemies that they retreat to the solo game to hone their skill. The authors of Total Conquest foresaw this, and wrote into the game the ability for anyone to take over an abandoned kingdom.

Veterans hooked on Total Conquest add themselves to as many games as possible so they will always have something going on. They'll abandon hopeless games in favor of new ones to preserve their spot in the Hall of Fame rankings according to Victory Points. As for myself, I had everything under control until the weekend, when everything went nuts.

During the workweek I had gotten into a rhythm. Long before I submitted my first Civil War minigame orders, I had cased my solitary opponent. On the TC website I watched his games unfold. Now I didn't have much to go on, only his fluctuating victory points and the time-elapsed ebb and flow of his kingdom's borders. But based on those two things I figured that he would pose a challenge, but that a victory wouldn't be out of the question. As it turns out, there is always plenty to do on your first turn, but some of your moves are sort of predictable, in a manner similar toward opening moves in chess. I spent less than five minutes on my first turn and went on with my Monday, the orders being due at midnight.

Coping with bereavement

That night I learned of my grandmother's death.

One of the ways I took my mind off of it came in studying other games on the TC website. One game in progress strongly piqued my curiosity. Of the six original players, the one in second place had abandoned the game with nearly 800 victory points and half the board in his control. It was an opportunity to try all sorts of options that had not yet made themselves available to me, and I just couldn't pass up. I also came across a Civil War game that had been opened a week before

Total Conquest at a glance

Low-cost fantasy PBEM wargame, with trial solo and two-player games:

<http://www.total-conquest.com/>

with no takers. And when a player with nearly 30 games under his belt accepted my challenge to a duel, it brought my total number of concurrent games to four.

So when it came time to fly to the other side of the United States to console my family and pay my last respects, I had become firmly entrenched in the Total Conquest scene.

Playing under pressure

The chaotic exuberance that surrounds my typical break from the rat race would have been more than enough to disrupt four concurrent PBEM wargames. But here I was thousands of miles from home, stuck in a hotel with an itinerary that would have made the Defense Secretary break out in a cold sweat, surrounded by people who swore an oath not to give me a moment's peace. The hotel where I stayed had an Internet-capable computer for patron use, a computer which I planned to use to send my orders, if I could ever find a free moment to do so. So it was with great delight that I snuck down to the computer when everyone else was asleep and attempted to play Total Conquest.

Unfortunately, this computer was in sad shape. Long obsolete and straining under the load of an unpatched copy of Windows 98, it had so many garbage programs running in the system tray that there wasn't room for the Start button on its 640 x 480 screen. Yet on its 28.8 modem I tested the limits of Total Conquest.

TC has a feature that lets you enter orders without client or applet. You can't really see what you're doing, but if you've printed out your reports like I had, you can put in a turn's orders by entering data into text boxes. Online help is available right beside each box. Still, there are an awful lot of boxes to enter. When you click the submit button, it checks your entries against the server at once and lets you know if any of them are out of the question. It took me several tries, but I didn't miss a single turn.

All in all, I was very impressed and pleased. I plan to use this on certain turns to check critical moves against the server before I commit to them within the client.

Meeting the others

During my first week I chatted with some of the veteran players and administrators. They were all quite friendly and extremely helpful. I was particularly interested in the 20-30 player standard games which carry a small fee per turn played, as well as the Brotherhoods, clans of players who swear fealty to one another and help each other in games. One player expressed his opinion this way. He said 'You need to join a brotherhood to have a chance in the standard games, because they'll gang up on you if you aren't in a brotherhood.' The comparison made me think of prison movies, so I didn't care to dwell on it. There is also a fee to join a brotherhood, but the fees are so small (.5 Euros as of this writing) that apparently it's well worth it, unless everyone playing is a member of the same brotherhood. One brotherhood currently has 17 players, so this is not impossible to contemplate.

Although hundreds of names are listed in the Hall of Fame, I have seen barely 20 active players logging onto the TC site. There is nothing preventing a person from creating several game identities and playing multiple kingdoms per game but his conscience, yet so far this hasn't been a problem. The ability to abandon a kingdom is protection against cheating in minigames, and a player would have to spend extra money to cheat in standard games. In my opinion this feature is highly underrated.

Failure or success?

Did you want to know how my games turned out? Did my late night exercise in pain pay off with glorious victories, or was it all in vain? Well, my first game, the one for which I practically stalked this poor guy, was a huge success. One by one his isolated expanding armies fell to mine as I hunted them down. I'd like to say it was because of my brilliant statecraft and daring military maneuvers, but we both knew it was dumb luck. I stuck all my armies together and marched toward his border to draw a line in the sand, as it were, and one of his armies accidentally bumped into mine. Next turn, another one fell under similar

circumstances, so I besieged the capital of his lone province and finally took it. No great skill, no real finesse was required, just the ability to get every turn in on time with decent commands. According to one veteran player, this is key

to winning at TC.

I inherited all sorts of weird troop formations when I took up the leadership of the 800 VP behemoth. I thought I had a clever ruse in place with which to waylay my formidable and experienced opponent, but I made the same blunder I did in the solo game -- I tried to move my troops into enemy territory without a Conquer order. That's how it is with Total Conquest, as with any wargame there are a lot of things to remember, and forgetting any one of them can spell disaster. Now instead of being the bread in a sandwich of my own making, I'm soon to become the squishy filling.

The other two games haven't developed enough to say yet. In one I have a significant lead, as the player who created the game never played a turn. I suppose he was too impatient to wait around for an opponent and moved on without bothering to join the countless abandoned positions in other games. Frankly I don't blame him for turning down those positions, as even one missed turn can spell doom for a kingdom. A ranked player has taken over the game, but I think with my three-turn headstart I can still make a good showing. In the other game I'm pitted against the mastermind who's about to manhandle me in the high stakes game I just mentioned. Hopefully he'll pause in mid-spanking to teach me a few pointers. Everyone I've met has been polite, a far cry from most online worlds of today.

Behind the scenes

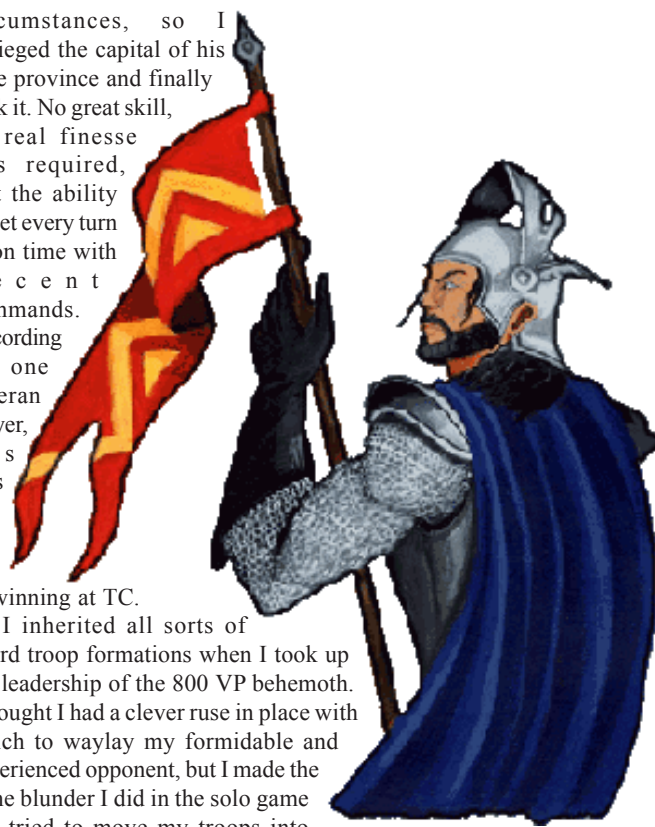
I guess the single thing about Total Conquest that impressed me the most was the dedication of the staff. Not only do they upgrade features and fix bugs, they balance the rules as well. At one point they told us no games could be processed for a week, but with hard work they reduced that delay to a single day. They were never too busy to answer my newbie questions that I was too lazy to find in the help files.

This stands in complete contrast to the way some other online roleplaying game admins behave. My secret fear is that a surge in the popularity of Total Conquest will tap them out, but I think the measured pace of the games gives them some room in which to work.

So much to find out

In the world of Total Conquest, there are so many things I haven't yet done. Some of the inner workings of the game are secret, and others are constantly in flux. So there's plenty of uncertainty in the spots where you look for it. That means the basic function of the game is stable and trustworthy, but there's always something new to look forward to.

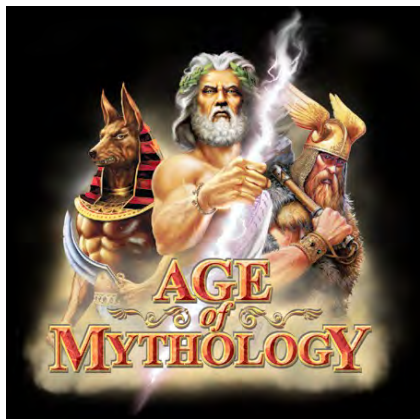
If you want to find out more about a game you can truly play at your own pace, check out Total Conquest. I speak from experience when I say that I'm sure you'll be welcome.



Age of Mythology

Packed with all manner of mythic beasts

GLOBETROTTER placates Poseidon in this RTS computer game ...



WITHOUT a doubt, Ensemble Studios is one of the premier developers of real-time strategy games. Its first two titles, **Age of Empires** and **Age of Empires II: Age of Kings**, received great critical acclaim and combined to sell approximately 9 xillion copies, thus adding substantial amounts to Mr Gates' already bulging coffers.

Of course, that kind of success brings with it gargantuan-sized expectations. The next offering, **Age of Mythology**, does an admirable job of living up to those expectations, even though it falls just a bit short in a couple of areas. In fact, were it not for these gripes, AoM would easily rival **Warcraft III** as the best RTS game of the year.

For its third title, Ensemble jettisoned the semi-historical settings that fuelled the first two Age games in favour of the classical mythology of heroes and monsters from the ancient Greek, Egyptian and Norse cultures. The primary hero of this saga is Arkantos, a young fella who hails from the magical isle of Atlantis.

A three-hour tour

The story, which is sort of parallel to Homer's *Odyssey* (in fact, Odysseus appears at various times throughout the tale), begins with Arkantos heading off to fight in the Trojan War. It seems that Poseidon is ticked off at the Atlanteans, and the only way to placate him is if the war in Troy is brought to an end.

After the battle of Troy, Arkantos wishes to head home, but circumstances dash his plans and he's forced to journey across most of the known (and unknown) world on mythology's most tortuous route back to his pad. Along the way he visits the Underworld, Egypt, Circe's Island and the Norse lands of Northern Europe before he finally manages to get back to Atlantis for the final throwdown.

As you'd expect, this kind of epic globe-trotting campaign makes for some imaginative settings and situations. The 32 single-player missions (not counting the three tutorial missions) are divided into three campaigns, Greek, Egyptian and Norse which also represent the three playable sides. And many of the missions are extremely well-crafted.

The early mission where you sneak out of the Trojan Horse under the cover of night and let in the rest of your troops, who quickly raze the city, is a great deal of fun. Circe's Island serves as the backdrop for another standout experience: As soon as you land on the island you're turned into a pig (!), so you must set out and free the other pigs (which are Odysseus and his men), all while fending off farmers and other would-be butchers.

Another highlight is a mission set in the Underworld, where you have to protect a group of dwarves who are desperately trying to build a new hammer for Thor. And the Welcoming Committee mission has you luring Norse clan leaders out of their bases so you can kill them.

Sprinkled throughout these encounters are moments of genuine comedy - a truly delightful surprise. During an early cut-scene, Arkantos and Odysseus share a disgruntled look after they learn that Agamemnon's plan is for them to do all the fighting; once the fighting is done, Agamemnon will rush in and rescue Helen. Another great moment is when the bad guy Skult tells Arkantos and Ajax to surrender. In response, Ajax fires a giant wooden bolt that kills one of Skult's men, and Ajax then says: 'We surrender ... move a little closer.' Great stuff.

Build me a settlement, dammit!

Regrettably, most of AoM's missions suffer from one recurring, frustrating problem: a severe case of build base-itis. No matter the situation, you're forced to form a settlement, build an economy, and raise a large armed force before heading out to take on the enemy. Even the mission set on Circe's Island sees you eventually building a settlement so you can destroy her. Why not just have your men, once they've been returned to human form, sneak across the island, find a boat, and escape?

I know base-building is inherent to the genre, but even the most ardent fan will be put off by just how much there is. What's most disappointing is that AoM's setting really lends itself to imaginative mission design and I don't think the designers took full advantage of the backdrop, which is a shame. It would've been cool, for instance, to have an entirely sea-based mission, wherein Poseidon threw sea monsters at you while you tried to steer a ship convoy to safety.

Fans of the earlier Ages will find managing these settlements extremely familiar. The resources to collect are your standard food, wood and gold, with a fourth resource called favour that each side has a unique way of collecting (see sidebar).

In addition, AoM follows the same age advancement from the Age games. Moving through the four ages requires you to collect a specific amount of gold, wood or food, and build a specific structure, such as a market or an armoury. The really cool thing about the age advancements is that each of them provides you with a unique opportunity to shape your strategy for the remainder of that mission, thanks to the gods above.

Because of AoM's setting, interaction with the gods is a regular occurrence and especially plays out during the age upgrades. Depending on the mission, you can choose to worship one of two minor gods, and your selection determines which special units, upgrades and god powers will be available, adding a wonderful bit of strategic depth. For example, if you're playing a mission wherein water is a factor, you'll want to pick a minor god that gives you a water-based myth creature, such as the Kraken, which you can then summon to obliterate an enemy fleet.

After each age upgrade you're given a god power, with a maximum of four per mission. Again, these powers - which range from swarms of locusts to massive asteroid attacks that flatten stretches of land - help

Age of Mythology at a glance

A computer game by Ensemble Studios (the creators of *Age of Empires* and *Age of Kings*), based on various ancient mythologies. Expect to pay around £30. Will run under Windows 98, Windows 2000, Windows Me & Windows XP. You may be able to pick up the game for about £20 if you're prepared to buy a used copy.

bolster a particular strategy. And if you pick your god powers carefully, you can use them one after another to decimate an enemy's forces.

Go forth and pillage

In terms of military units, the three playable sides provide a bevy of unique men, heroes and mythological units. Each side has its own standard military grunts, such as spearmen or the equivalent, but the real fun comes from using hero and myth units. These are the bona-fide ass-kickers, and they're an absolute joy to play around with (see sidebar). More importantly, they're also properly balanced.

And this balance is particularly noteworthy. A powerful myth creature will make short work of the game's standard grunts, but since heroes get an attack bonus when fighting myth creatures, it's extremely important to have a couple of heroes mixed in with your fighting force. And if you create a hero that also heals allied units, you'll have a powerful army at your behest.

Managing that army can be a bit annoying at times, though, because of AoM's errant pathfinding. On more than one occasion, I'd try to send my units to a specific spot on the map and they'd end up on a hill overlooking the spot where I wanted them to be. Other problems include units getting trapped between rows of bushes, units jerking this way and that as they move, and units hugging a cliff instead of simply walking down the road in front of them (which results in them moving much slower than they should).

It's also irritating that units won't move to let another unit pass by. During one mission, for example, I needed my hero to board a transport ship, but the shore was covered with my army. Instead of the army moving to let her through, she tried to walk around them, which got her nowhere. Only when I went in manually and created a path was I able to get her onto the ship. That level of micromanagement is a drag.

But when it comes time to fight, the units do an excellent job of butchering each other. The AI recognizes and confronts enemy units quickly and efficiently. The AI for your workers is a little more sketchy: sometimes, they'll automatically get to work when a resource is depleted, but other times they won't. Luckily, a handy interface tab tells you when a worker is slacking off.



the shore, seaweed sways with the tide, and ambient sea creatures such as sharks are visible swimming beneath the surface.

What really impressed me, though, were the game's animations. When a Minotaur smacks someone with his club, the poor victim goes flying, skids on the ground, and then bounces back into the air. Krakens will grab units off the shore, shake them, and then fling them away. And the special abilities of the myth units, such as Medusa turning a foe into stone or the Frost Giant freezing a hapless victim, really immerse you in the mythological world.

Those sweet graphics come at a price, however, especially if you want to crank up all the details. Even on my 2.2GHz with a GeForce3 card, there were noticeable slowdowns when I played at the maximum (1600x1200) resolution with everything cranked up. These slowdowns were especially noticeable when I had numerous units on the screen and I was using a god power. I tested the frame rates on a lower-end system - a 1.33GHz with a GeForce4 - and the game ran fine at lower resolutions.

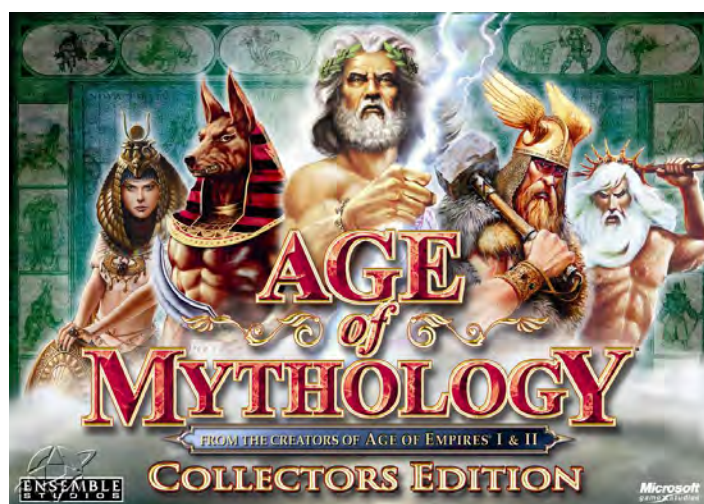
Slay Your friends

In addition to the single-player campaign, you get 21 random skirmish maps (each map has specific elements, such as a main river, but randomizes its location) that can also be used in multiplayer. AoM has four multiplayer modes - Supremacy, Conquest, Deathmatch and Lightning - and the game is playable over a LAN or via Direct IP, or through Ensembles in-game matchmaking service. Of the four multiplayer types, Deathmatch will be the most familiar to Age of Kings players, while Supremacy and Conquest are variations on the destroy-everything- in-sight theme.

Before starting a multiplayer game, you pick one of nine gods to determine which myth units, upgrades and god powers you'll get during the course of the game. A useful handicap feature also gives an advantage to a less skilled player by letting him collect resources at a faster rate, and by reducing build times.

Overall, the multiplayer segment is finely balanced. The games are a little slow to get started (the Egyptians, for example, can't build a barracks until they hit the second age, and the Greeks can't build farms right away), but once you're into the grind, the combat is fun. And because of the way the population cap is designed, you have to constantly expand by finding and building new settlements. Fail in this goal, and you don't stand a chance.

Age of Mythology isn't a straight-out classic, but I had a great time playing it. It's an easy recommendation for fans of Ensembles Age of Empires games, or for any RTS aficionado.



Animation brilliance

Instead of using the 2D graphics that powered the first two Age games, AoM enjoys a brand-new, fully 3D game engine. And boy, does it look sweet. The environments, units and buildings are packed with detail. I especially enjoyed the levels that featured water: waves wash against

Card Games

Trading, stringing pipes and driving cows

BEN WILLIAMS on three very different games ...

Agora



Ever wondered what it's like to compete as a merchant in an ancient Greek marketplace? Of course not. But trust me, **Agora** is exactly like this.

By Cheapass Games, **Agora** is a strategy card/tile game for two/four players. The game play is set in an ancient Greek marketplace. During a game turn you can collect income from your existing shops, build the market and buy more shops. The goal of the game is to be the first player to reach 50 coins to win the game.

In **Agora** the cards are played connecting to each other to form a huge market filled with many shops. These shops can be bought and your corresponding counter is placed on the shop so everyone can tell who owns which shop. You earn money from shops that are visited by customers. Customers can only visit your shop if it's located on the perimeter of the market. Shops earn money for each unbroken section they are located in. You can cut off your opponent's income if you play a card that touches a white part of his or her card. This cuts off the path so customers can no longer access the shops on the path 'card' you just blocked. The game mechanics allow you to play a card anywhere on the table and in any orientation. The resulting board is so organic you'd swear you were in ancient Greece.

Players take turns collecting income and constructing shops. You only make money if pedestrians can reach your shop, so if you wind up completely surrounded by new construction your income drops to zero. Watch out if you own the biggest store on the table: it's likely to burn down or be destroyed in a sudden, freakish and highly surgical flood. On the other hand, the biggest shop probably stands to make a bundle from the festivals that happen suddenly from time to time.

This game can take some getting used to but it's different enough to be worth the small time invested in learning it. You'll need 20 counters per person, consisting of a different colour. You can use more counters during game play but it's not a requirement. If you don't already own coloured counters, you can buy them from your local gaming shop or a variety of other shops (those little glass pebbles sold in candle shops and such places are ideal). I first played **Agora** on a hard wooden floor, which tended to provoke chaos if anyone sneezed and the cards went everywhere! I would thus recommend playing on a large cloth covered area so the cards don't slip during play.

The Very Clever Pipe Game



The Very Clever Pipe Game by Cheapass Games is a card game for two/four players. This game is an abstract strategy game and the creators promise that it plays like no other pipe-related card game. Games are usually short,

ranging from 20 to 30 minutes, so if you don't have lots of time to squeeze in a long game this could be just what you're looking for.

There are three kinds of games you can play with your card set. The first is Version One, Basic Pipes. Basic Pipes is for two players. The first player picks either the white or black pipe set and the remaining player takes the other.

The basic game play includes trying to close a set of pipes. A set is a string of pipes that ends in a cap or loops back into the set. Players pick up sets of their own colour when completed even if the opponent finished them. Whoever picks up the most cards is the winner.

Version Two, Basic Fields, is the second type of game you can play with your card set. The game play is similar to Version One except you want to surround fields of one pipe colour with the other instead of closing sets of pipes.

Version Three, Pipes and Fields, is the third game you can play with your card set. This game can be played by two to four players. Each player either chooses a colour, white or black, or a field, light or dark. This game uses the rules for both the first two games and can prove to be quite interesting.

For people who enjoy a challenge and a strategic twist, the third version of this game is a natural choice. You can also play this game in two teams, which can be a lot more fun for team-oriented players.

Unexploded Cow



Unexploded Cow by Cheapass Games is a very different sort of card game. The players in the game gather herds of cows and move them through bomb-filled farms. Players get money for blowing up the bombs and all the players try to gain more money than they started with to win the game.

This game is for three-six players.

Here's what the creators say about their game: 'Unexploded Cow is a money game in which the players are trying to collect enough points to win the Pot. On every turn you will buy Cows and pay for special effects by putting money into the Pot, then try to discover bombs with your own Cows in an effort to take money out of the Pot. All along, you will be earning points from the French as you liberate town after town from the terrors of unexploded bombs, and the player who scores the most points gets whatever's left in the Pot.'

Some of the cards have to be seen to be believed, like the cow cards. Some examples are the sloppy cow, the greedy cow, the ornery cow and the juggling cow. There are also career cows like the spy, general and mechanic cows. Totally wacky is the best word to describe these cows!

If you are looking for something weird, something humorous or just something new this card game has all of it, combined in an easy to understand game play format. Games can last as little as 20 to 30 minutes, so you could play a few games in one sitting.

Each **Unexploded Cow** game comes with 81 cards and rules. The game retails for £6.00 and you can order it online. You'll need one six-sided die and some play money for game play. You can also buy the die and game money online if you don't happen to have any from other games.

[Eek! A bit hard on cows, I reckon. What's wrong with using celebs, footie hoolies or politicians? - C]

Cheapass Games at a glance

This small, creative cardgames firm is based in Seattle WA:
www.cheapass.com

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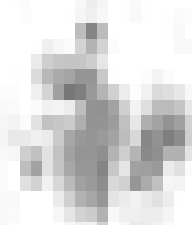
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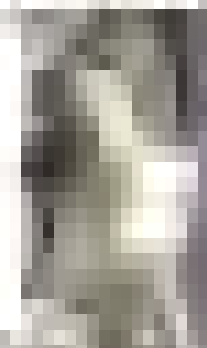


Napoleonic Battles II

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Worlds Apart

A Game with a Bite

PETER THORNHILL resumes and concludes his review ...

AS YOU MAY recall from the first part of this review, my character, Sara, is having none too easy a time of it as she explores the strange world in which she finds herself. After her family and, in fact, her entire village have been slaughtered in a seemingly random attack by bandits, she has made her way to the town of The Citadel. Here, although successful in finding refuge and work in one of the inns in preparation for her eventual revenge on the murderers of her husband and children, she has not only been highly implicated in the death of one of the inn's patrons, one Aghul the dwarf, but is also suffering nightmares about the death of her family. Not only that but the dead dwarf's companions seem none too happy about his demise either!

It is about this stage in the game that I took part in the highly enjoyable over-the-table game arranged by GM Colin Andrews at the house of a player in London, which was covered last issue. Suffice it to say, the strength of this kind of event, and in over-the-table role playing in general, lies in the refereeing. Colin proved himself particularly adept in this, especially as the assembled group seemed determined to ensure no-one took the session particularly seriously, and we also managed to get to the end of the scenario before we had tackled the middle! Colin may have acquired a few grey hairs but coped very well and a thoroughly enjoyable time was had by all.

Sara returned from her sojourn in the alternate world, wealthier, a little bit wiser and certainly more bemused, but still with many of her old problems to face. Before the Watch arrive to interview everyone about Aghul's death, she quickly arranges for all remaining scraps of the food he ate to be burnt and, in the process, came across another of Colin's neat tricks in the game. Burning the food scraps gave Sara a minus point of Reputation, as she had also tried desperately to cover her own tracks, or at least muddy the waters, by casting blame for the dwarf's death in various directions. Later actions gained her positive points of Reputation, but this did not lead her to zero and then on into positive Reputation. She now has both a positive and negative Reputation, reflecting the fact that different groups of people see her in different lights. She may kiss babies and help little old ladies over the street but, to some people, she still remains 'that bloody woman who murdered the dwarf'. A neat and effective way of simulating the varying views that people, even in a small community, can have of an individual.

So, having put the local 'rozzers' off the scent by burning most of the evidence, Sara's next 'challenge' (don't ya just love that ole management guru bullshit!) is to try to get rid of the somewhat irate companions of the dead dwarf, including their particularly unpleasant leader, one Red Jake. He is, to put it mildly, less than pleased with Sara, especially when he finds her rifling through Aghul's possessions for any clue as to why he might have been murdered. Luckily, the Watch have just turned up and Sara is able to deflect attention from her by blaming Aghul for a kidnapping that had taken place earlier in the game.

Clutching at straws she may have been, but the sudden arrival of large numbers of the local 'law' mean that Red Jake has to beat a hasty retreat, rather than face a barrage of questions. The look he gives Sara on his way out of the inn makes me think there is an outside chance she may run into him again!

All of this activity means Aetheldark, owner of the Weary Traveller Inn where much of the action so far has taken place, has got distinctly jittery and decides he is leaving town for a while, just to let things settle down a bit. He offers to take Sara with him and also just happens to mention he has 'lost' his belt knife and is there any chance Sara can lend him hers? Yes, it set the alarm bells ringing with me as well! Flee from town when she has just been implicated in a murder and lend her belt knife (presumably with a very distinctive design on it!) to Aetheldark so it can end up in either the back of someone else along the way or even hers?

Sara decides not to accompany Aetheldark and manages to persuade him that, if they both leave town at the same time, it will look even more suspicious. She offers to run the inn for him whilst he is away so he will have a business to come back to, whenever he eventually decides to return, and she can also spread the word that he has gone to visit a sick aunty or take his granny on holiday or whatever! Unlikely anyone will believe it but it may just help to muddy the waters still further.

Aetheldark slips out of town late one night and Sara, who has decided to follow him discreetly 'just to practise her tracking skills' discovers that he meets two companions on the edge of town. Aetheldark lends one of them a pair of his boots, so the stranger can lay a false trail, and the elven woman overhears part of a conversation which confirms her belief that to stay behind was a very good idea!

At least temporarily, all seems to calm down at the inn. The rest of the staff seem to settle to the new 'management' with a minimum of grumbling and Sara receives a boost when one of her companions from the over-the-table game, the faithful Derker, turns up at the inn one day. With nothing left for him in Wetherstadt, he has made his way to The Citadel to serve Sara as best he can and also to deliver a message. The sight of the large, broad-shouldered ex-guardsman draws the odd ribald comment from patrons at the inn, but Sara soon makes it clear that she has no amorous interest in the soldier; the same cannot be said for the barmaids, however! With the addition of the ex-soldier to the inn staff, Sara finally finds some time to deal with her own problems, namely the increasingly vivid and disturbing dreams that rob Sara of any kind of rest and lead to night after night of tossing and turning. She makes her way to the rather-aptly named House of Dreams to meet with a dream-interpreter known as Gell.

Blind though he is, Gell is soon, through subtle questioning, able to tell Sara that the creature that haunts her dreams is a night hag, almost certainly drawn into her mind by the trauma of the death of her family. As with all the best dilemmas, she has a number of choices now: she can 'feed' the night hag with increasingly dark and evil acts; she can try to bargain with it and pass it on to someone else, preferably an enemy (now that's what I call 'getting your own back'!) or she can fight it on another plane of existence - nothing too difficult about those choices then! Gell also reveals something else - Aetheldark, the inn keeper, was his main supplier of the narcotic drugs that the dream-interpreter needs to ply his trade. Now Sara has taken over the Weary Traveller, does she

Worlds Apart at a glance

Fantasy roleplaying PBM game from Colin Andrews, set across four different and dangerous worlds. Startup and the subsequent turns are all £4 each.

also want to take over supplying the drugs as well?

And so we come almost full circle. Sara returns right back almost to the beginning to visit the herbalist who first supplied her with the cooking herbs to see if she still needs someone to gather herbs. Sara figures that a couple of trips gathering the more 'normal' herbs will set her up nicely to start looking for something a little more 'exotic'. So, accompanied by the faithful Derker and a local guide, a young man named Kivan, Sara sets off on the first of her herb-gathering trips. Delighted to be back in the woods again, and much refreshed by a good night's sleep, helped by some herbs from the herbalist, Sara allows Kivan to lead the way into the woods which surround The Citadel and off into the countryside to find herbs.

The first night, however, her dreams return once again, almost with extra force as though the night hag is extracting her revenge for the previous night's rest and Sara jerks awake in the darkness, almost screaming from the nightmares that ruin her sleep. As she lies there, shaking fitfully and recovering her wits, she hears a -crack- in the woods as something or someone breaks a twig with a careless step. Rousing the others, they make their way through the woods, drawn by the light of a flaming torch and discover a small group of bandits, about to set off in a raid on the camp they have just left behind!

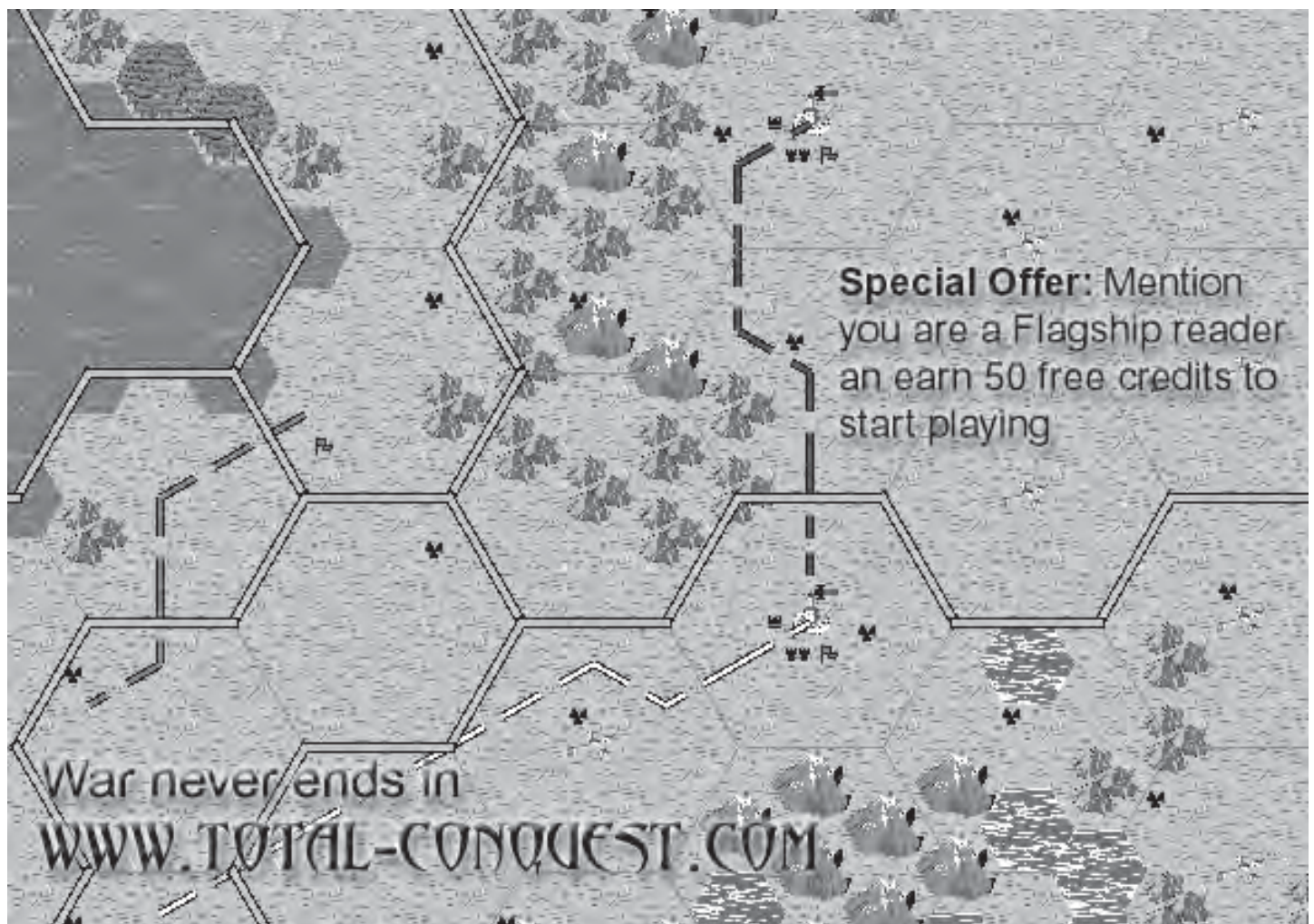
It is here that we leave Sara and her companions, crouching in the forest, preparing to ambush the ambushers, and turn to look at the game itself. It is always difficult in a short review to try to encompass the overall feel of a game and, in this case, it could be deemed even harder. The mechanics of the game are relatively simple and this can only be a good thing where a role playing game is concerned. Wargames, with mighty armies fighting huge battles, are the right place, in my opinion, for terrain charts, equipment tables, battle bonuses and the like. In a

roleplaying game, the mechanics should never interfere with the roleplaying and the game should be borne along by the story itself. Worlds Apart does this in a fine way, the story unfolding page after page (literally! The smallest turn I got from the GM during my review was just over four pages of A4 and my fellow gamers at the over-the-table confirmed that this was very much the norm), and the excitement and tension that Colin manages to weave into the plot as the story progresses keep you turning and turning.

The thing that is not simple, however, is the story itself. Colin's worlds are full of a wide mix of characters: kind, evil, manipulative, helpful, selfish and, sometimes, just plain, downright awkward! Pretty much like the world we live in, then! Unlike other games of this type, the world does not revolve around your character; instead, your character occupies a (very) small part of the world and you must bend and sway with whatever goes on around you, slowly inching your way forward on whatever life quest you have decided is your character's story.

Colin's characters are full, rounded people with their own tale to tell, their own aims and goals and their own likes and dislikes: they won't jump to automatically do everything your character asks of them but will need persuading, cajoling, threatening or even bribing to help you. They're not being difficult, they just have their own agenda and you have to consider that, often as much as your own, if you want to survive.

If you want a game where everyone is keen and eager to help you with whatever quest you discover, look elsewhere. If you're after a game with some 'bite' to it, where you have to think hard about every turn you send in, where you really feel as though you are part of a tough, but fantasy, world and where you have to give serious thought as to how other characters in the game are going to react to what you have planned, then this is the game for you. Enjoy!



Godfather

The Head to Head diary concludes

NICK READ (Waxy Gordon) and GAVIN WYNFORD-JONES (Al Capone) play the rival gangsters ...

Turn 15 - Booze and drugs

Waxy Gordon - 'After the attacks of last turn things were a bit quieter this time around. The only conflict with Capone was my attack his warehouse, which went more or less to plan. I am slightly surprised to discover that the warehouse was fortified and had six well armed hoods guarding it. As a result, my enforcer took a few casualties while destroying it and he will sit out the next turn recovering from his wounds. I will need to buy some dynamite, which helps when attacking fortified premises.

Elsewhere, I am at last generating enough cash from the new rackets I have been establishing to build all the vats and stills I need to supply my booze selling rackets. With the increased capacity in place my income will increase a bit more. My lead over Capone in the economic rankings is now looking much healthier. Maybe it's time to do something about his lead in the military scores and spend some cash on weapons.

Now that my booze production is up to speed, my distributors are going to run out of capacity. I need to set up another distribution racket and buy some more trucks. I am also buying lots more equipment: choppers, dynamite, some more cars and some hoods to beef up my military ability.

That leaves me with four more enforcers. Three will set up nightclubs, since they are harder to attack than street based rackets and one will set up a controller racket. The controller is a new racket type designed to stop pilfering of cash from my own organisation. I am currently losing about \$6000 per week through theft and need to do something about it.

With all this trouble producing booze last turn I only sold about half the quantity of beer I could have. If I succeed in fixing it this time my income should take a big jump.'

Al Capone - 'The cruises turned up another nightclub belonging to Waxy: my suspicion that he's mainly in premise rackets seems to be right. Mind you, I'm doing the same, so I can't blame him. We destroyed China Joe's office which leaves the way open for me to set up in his place. Waxy attacked one of my large warehouses and the Feds closed down one of the few remaining Protection rackets. If it wasn't for the fact that they still generate income, I'd close them down myself at this point! I received the information sheets for the IRS and Legitimate Business. The former means that Capone could soon be having to explain his sources of income while the latter helps alleviate the same. Given the increasingly violent nature of this town, I'm going to invest as heavily as possible in legit operations: they are tough for another Boss to take over and provide a nice steady, legal, income. Having found nightclubs owned by Waxy over the past few turns, it seems a shame not to pay them a visit... He's also shot ahead on economics, territory and the winners score. This does not bode well.'

Turn 16 - Economics vs violence

Waxy Gordon - 'At last the cash tills in my boozers are ringing up the increased profits from a proper supply. My income from booze (which is nearly all my income) jumped from \$80,000 to over \$110,000. As a result I have now reached Godfather status.

Capone responded this turn by destroying two of my nightclubs, but I set up three new ones so the damage is limited. Hopefully this means he has not found any of my warehouses to attack. His income seems to have dropped again this turn - perhaps he is struggling to replace that warehouse. My economics rating is now nearly double his, suggesting that he is some way away from becoming a Godfather. His one advantage over me is a big lead in the military score, although we both spent large sums on weapons last time. If he is to catch me overall he has to start making better use of those weapons.

Unfortunately, Godfather status brings disadvantages as well as advantages. My higher profile means that I now have to expect more Police raids and quite soon a tax inspection from the dreaded IRS. I have to do a number of things to fend off an investigation. This turn I have to hire a banker and buy him an office. Then, I have to start diverting funds into legitimate business interests. That way, I will be able to launder illegal income when the investigation starts. If I start planning now I should be able to come up squeaky clean, otherwise the fines can be huge.

Far more fun is the fact that as a Godfather I can now operate in much larger areas. Two of my best men are going to attack near the corner of the city where I believe Capone has a door to door racket. Hopefully they will find other targets to attack too. For safety, because Capone rally ought to be expecting attacks this turn, they are going to work together attacking exactly the same area.

Meanwhile, I will recruit another enforcer, buy as many weapons as I can manage and also pay off my debt to Murder Inc which has been accumulating up to nearly \$10,000. Finally, one heavily armed enforcer is going to try cruising again. Cruising large areas can be dangerous because of the chances of getting caught in an attack, but hopefully he can find some good targets for next turn.'

Al Capone - 'First the good news: Waxy no longer owns two of his nightclubs owing to incidents involving dynamite and a lot of flying lead. And that's the only good news. My cash situation has become critical. My income and my expenses are now more or less equal and I have no way to increase income at the moment. As a result I couldn't restock on opium and there were no sales. The Murder Inc interest rate has moved up to 16% just as my ability to pay is going down. The really bad news is that Waxy was promoted to Godfather. He will now probably run away with the game as there is a real snowball effect: he gets another two enforcers and his area of operations increases significantly.'

Turn 17 - A turning tide?

Waxy Gordon - 'I am now absolutely trouncing Capone. I don't understand why, but his economics score fell again last turn while I am getting stronger still. My score is now more than double his, which is the first condition for victory. The other condition is that one of us reaches the rank of Capo. For this I have to increase my income by another \$75,000. This should take a few more turns. I am sure that Capone's only chance is to go on the attack: most of my income is from street

Godfather at a glance

A crime game set in 1920s Chicago. Available in this two-player version, but also in a multi-player version and there's also an introductory solo game for novices. From Pagoda Games at £10 + 2 turns for startup, then £2.50 per turn.

based booze selling rackets which are quite vulnerable to attack.

My attack last turn was straightforward: I destroyed a door to door racket and yet another protection racket but it was a little disappointing that I found no other targets. More interestingly my cruise found another of Capone's warehouses and two useful new rackets. The Gunrunner racket is quite profitable and has the major advantage that I can get access to larger quantities of weapons at discounted rates. My other find is the Loanshark. Provided you can invest spare cash, this generates a respectable return with little risk. Both of these rackets will help me diversify my income so I am not so reliant on selling booze and not at so much risk from an attack on my warehouses.

I am going to attack Capone's warehouse, but the rest of my enforcers can concentrate on generating more income for the victory. To reduce my reliance on booze I will set up a loanshark and start putting some money into legitimate businesses. I will also set up two more door to door rackets and hire another enforcer.

Although I am still behind Capone in the military rankings the gap has shrunk and I have a reasonable stock of weapons. Setting up a gunrunner will have to wait: with a bit of luck I could have this game won before I need one.'

Al Capone - 'A total disaster. Waxey destroyed two street rackets and Murder Inc repossessed a speakeasy to help me repay my debt. I still owe more than my total credit rating and things are looking dire. If I don't turn the situation around in the next two turns, I'm history. So, I'll bleed the population dry with the remaining Protection rackets in an effort to generate a modest surplus of cash and all the enforcers will cruise, looking for a way to slow Waxey down.'

Turns 18 - 20 - Victory and defeat

Waxey Gordon - 'The final few turns are not so remarkable, as I grind my way towards the victory conditions and my lead continues to grow.

To reduce the risk from Capone attacking my warehouse I diversified into some other rackets, loansharking and bookmaking, while continuing a few attacks on Capone.

I had one entertaining stroke of luck. When I set up my loanshark, I also built an office building for him to use. The following turn, I also moved my banker from his original office into the same one as the loanshark, guarding against the extremely small chance that Capone would have found his office in a cruise and launched an attack. So, when that small chance came about and he did attack all he found was an empty building. This good fortune makes a big difference, because an attack on a banker can yield cash or information from the attacked gang.

By turn 20, I reach the conditions required to be made boss of all bosses, Capo di tutti Capi, and the game is over.

Al Capone - 'One of the cruises turned up a Banker operation belonging to Waxey. I hoped to be able to recover some cash from the debris after a successful attack and rebuild at his expense but it was not to be. He obviously spotted me on the cruise and the Banker was nowhere to be found when I attacked. The cruises also turned up a nice collection of other NPC rackets: too bad I wasn't be able to benefit from them.

I am now on the slippery slope: my income is no longer sufficient to maintain my ranking and I was reduced to Mob Boss. Waxey is so far ahead on all fronts that I have no chance of stopping him. Worse, the interest I'm paying is now 33%, so it's only a matter of time before the sniper ends it all for me. To add insult to injury, the Feds raided the last of my Protection rackets ...'

On turn 20 I finally persuade Keith to let me be put out of my misery and Capone heads for the station, hoping to catch a train to New York before the Murder Inc goons find him ...'

Epilogue

Waxey Gordon - 'Since the end of the game, I have learned from Gavin that he had major problems with his debt to Murder Inc in the last few turns, which is why his income

fell away so badly. That explains why the margin of victory was so large, but I think that the win was set up in turns 5 and 6 by my early attacks.

In a multi-player game, my lead would probably have attracted an alliance of other players to peg me back. With only two of us playing, my lead in economic terms was always likely to grow as I reinvested the extra cash in more rackets. While he caught me in economic terms by turn 12, he did it by concentrating on protection rackets (which generate quick income but get closed down by the police) while I was building boozers (for a slower but more sustainable growth).

Capone's big mistake was not changing his behaviour from that of a regular game. Like most players, he set up his first few rackets near his initial base to avoid early confrontation. As a result, I destroyed five of his rackets with my first two attacks. When he retaliated my rackets were more spread out, so for every enforcer he used to destroy one of my rackets I was able to build a new one.

I had some luck with my attacks, but was maybe a bit unlucky when searching for new rackets. As a result, nearly all my income came from selling booze. However, with only two of us competing for space this did not limit my growth. In the full game a city of this size could be home for up to 18 players, so you are forced to diversify into many more types of racket.

All these factors make becoming Capo in a regular game much more difficult, which may explain why I have never managed it. Sound economic management is certainly a requirement for victory, but in my experience the winner is the player who also knows when to go on the offensive.'

Al Capone - 'I said at the beginning that all my mistakes would be out there for everyone to see. In fact, I felt I was doing all right until turn 15. Waxey's early attacks had had no longterm effect and we were keeping pace with each other. However, Waxey realised before I did that we needed to move into premise rackets in a big way. As a result, he got his promotions ahead of me and that gave him the edge.

My only real mistakes were that I didn't adjust my strategy quickly enough from a regular game to a one-on-one game, and I lost sight of the cash position on turn 15 which very quickly turned into an uncontrollable downward spiral: once the interest rate on my borrowing went above my ability to generate income, it was just a question of time. I also seemed to have a lot of difficulty in finding new rackets. I don't know how well Waxey was doing on that front, but his economics suggested 'better than me'! In a full game, the strategy of attacking early would have been a mistake and would have marked Waxey out as a loose cannon to be dealt with quickly. Also, I would probably have had an ally or two who could have helped me out of the hole on turn 16. I would then have acquired the China Joe racket and my syndicate would have benefitted enormously. However, that's Chicago for you.

I thoroughly enjoyed playing this game and writing the diary. Congratulations, Nick! (And if you were keeping count, the Feds closed down 14 of my Protection rackets and Waxey destroyed 7!)



Battle of the Five Armies

A new MEPBM scenario based on 'The Hobbit'

JEFFERY A DOBBERPUHL and SCOTT MOYES continue their head to head game ...

[Jeffery plays the Dark Servants, controlling the Necromancer, the Warg Riders, the Goblins and Gollum. Scott plays the Free Peoples, with Bilbo Baggins, the Elves, the Dwarves and the Northmen.]

Turn 4 - On the brink

Jeffery A Dobberpuhl: In some ways this game is a lot like bowling. Even though you are playing against an opponent, you also play against yourself. I will be suffering this turn because I was incautious with my movement orders two turns ago. As a result, the Necromancer (insert maniacal laugh) will be facing two elf armies with only the most modest of forces. It is amazing to me that the Elves are *still* staying in play! This, in my opinion, shows the play balance that must be inherent in this game. I mean, the Elves took *severe* beatings from my forces, but *still* are around to cause me grief!

In the north, the Dwarves must be nearing the end of their 3000 troop army. I have thrown everything but the kitchen sink at him and that army will just not collapse! Well, I've sent Gollum in to see if he can kill off Dain in his sleep. Nothing like having a sneaky 500-year old homicidal halfling with the ultimate ring of power on your side!

The Goblins: Well, this nation is hanging on by sheer willpower! My initial plan *still* seems good.

I'm bringing all spare army commanders back to the capital. I need to sell off a lot of product to keep the war going. Specifically, I'm trying to punch the dwarves as hard as I can this next couple of turns. I need to take the war *out* of my backyard and move it into the elves and northmen if I'm going to win.

The Warg Riders: I cannot believe the tenacity of my foe! He is a good player and has managed *somehow* to keep the elves in the game! How? I have no idea. In any event, he is now refortifying along the Old Forest Road. This means I need to vamp up my capital army as best as I can and hope for the best! In the meantime, I'm having Gollum do his best to reduce the number of dwarves in the world.

Scott Moyes: Free Peoples - "Lots of things happened this time," Thorin said. "I think the Evil Ones finally made their mistake, and now is the time to ram it home to them."

"What mistake is that Thorin?" the leader of the Northmen said. "There are thousands of Goblins and Warg Riders at both my Major Towns and I only have small armies to battle them. I swear, they are like



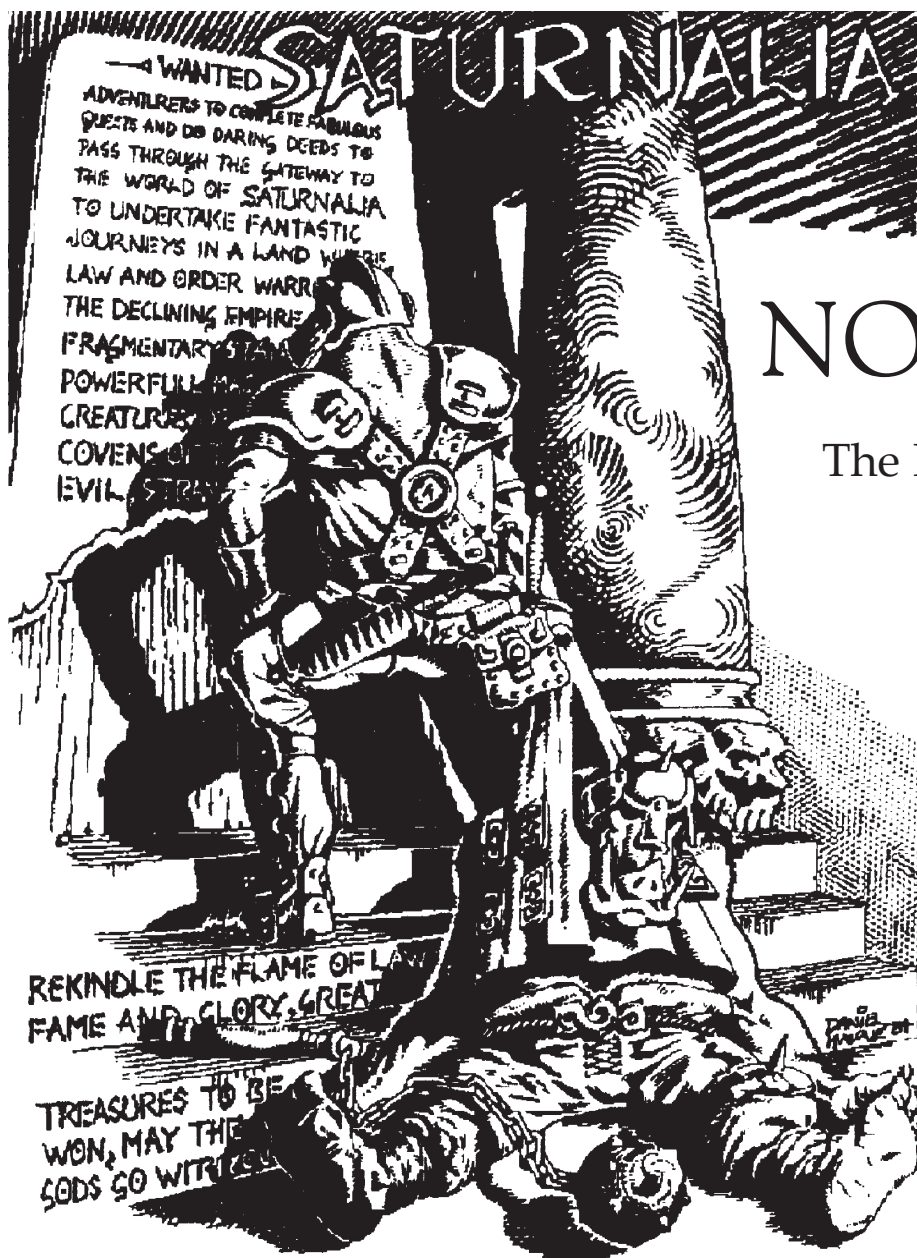
cockroaches, the more you stamp on them, the more of them come out of the woodwork."

"The mistake, my dear Northman, is that they don't have near enough to take your Major Towns. Not with both of them having forts. You have Beorn at your capital and a better fighter I've never seen. If he challenges the leader of the Warg Riders to ritual combat, he'll win easily if the Warg coward doesn't run. Thranduil of the Elves saw how easily they die. Even if the leaders refuse to fight Beorn, there's a 90% chance that they will just beat the Northmen army and die at the walls if they even attack. Same with your other Major Town. Our enemies have just been whittled down too much to take them. Bard and Koldana will move to Esgaroth to mop up. Chances are they'll just attack the armies and then lay siege to both of the Major Towns. If that is the case, Bard and Koldana will be there and can break the siege at Esgaroth. Swiftwulf will hire another army at Nuath and then Girion after that. I'm pretty sure that there's no way they can take them, it's a ploy to try to draw our forces from the north. They have already diverted a lot of their offensive forces to the north to try and stop Dain. Dain will take Valaina this time and with Lindal of the Elves sabotaging the fortifications at Yalumea, the Goblin nation's days are numbered. Lord Legolas, Lord Ohtar and Warlord Thranduil will march to just south of the northern road, combine and then attack Thlach. Montieff of the Northmen will move to Thlach and sabotage the Tower there. Gloin of the Dwarves is marching to Lag Agul to try to help Oin who is in a blocking mode. Really bad news now, Bilbo had the One Ring stolen. We will bend our efforts to retrieve it. This is the time, my friends, let's not waste it."

The mood in the chamber was somber, but none would disagree with the forceful Dwarf.

Middle Earth PBM at a glance

Team-based fantasy wargame from Harlequin Games, with 'Lord of the Rings' setting. £10 for startup + 2 turns, further turns £3.90. Turnaround depends on the game, ranging from 1 to 3 weeks. There's a variety of scenarios available, with Battle of the Five Armies - which is based on 'The Hobbit' and consists of just ten turns - especially recommended for beginners.



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My Life in Games

CHRIS HARVEY describes being in at the start of PBM and, oh yes, Flagship ...

CAROL ASKED me to write an article for the 100th issue of the magazine Nick Palmer and I originated so many years ago, (that's *Flagship*, but you know that, right?). I was too busy and so you got Nick's version. So then she asked me to write about what it was like to be the first person in the UK to run Play By Mail games commercially. I thought that might be fun. You can judge.

So right from the beginning, I want to get our terms straight. The hobby of playing games by post had long been in being before I discovered it. Back then it was mainly **Diplomacy** and I still claim to be the first or second person to buy that game in the UK and still be playing it with the original set. (A dark red box with 'white' Russians and 'yellow' Turks. But that's a bit off the point.) No, by commercially I mean 'to make a profit', and I make no apology for the fact that when I ran ICBM and when Nick and I started *Flagship* the sole purpose was to make money. (I have nothing against people who do it for fun, indeed I admire them, but it's only in rare cases that they last.)

So it was a dark and stormy Saturday afternoon when I read an advertisement in the Avalon Hill *General* for a 'Computer Moderated PBM Game'. What was the game? What was 'moderated'? For that matter - what was a computer? (Yes, we're talking a long time ago.) So I sent an airmail letter to Arizona and started to play **Nuclear Destruction** a simple but dastardly 'computer moderated game'. (It's still available from Flying Buffalo Inc in the USA, and it's still one of the best 'diplomatic games'. You can't win without allies, but you sure can die quickly without them.)

Anyways, Rick Loomis soon suggested that I run his games in the UK via his computer. I'd collect the players and the turns, post them to him and about three weeks (yes weeks!) later I'd post out the results. (At this point I wish to stake my claim for inventing the term 'postboxing'. I doubt it's still used, but if it is you owe me royalties.) After **Nuclear Destruction** (not to be confused with **Nuclear War**, a superbly funny card game also available from Flying Buffalo) came a variety of forgettable games (I've forgotten the titles) all of which I ran until **Starweb** came along.

Starweb was years ahead of itself. The computer that ran it had 16K of RAM and thus only 15 players could play it. The 'sixteenth' was used for un-owned planets. It is still my favourite game. It's superb on so many levels and I was quickly charging £1.50 and then £1.75 a turn for the ten or so games I had running at the same time. I must have postboxed (see, there's that word) dozens of games of SWeb and back in the 70s anyone who was anyone played in my games. One person played about eight at the same time.

A little about dates here. Rick started PBM in the USA in 1970. I think I began in 1971 and we first met in Los Angeles around then. On the 13 or so hour-long journey by car back to Arizona he and I became firm friends. A friendship I'm happy to say which was still going strong, by e-mail only this morning. (Although he's older now.) It didn't hurt that we were both politically right wing, had the same sense of humour, liked steaks and travelled to each other's countries almost every year. (We're also the same age bar a couple of months and both diabetics!)

The noise, the people

So, did I just make up the rules as I went along, as most people who start anything usually say? Nope. I didn't. I didn't think we needed rules. Boy was I wrong. Do you know how many people don't know what a 'deadline' is? Well, I know one. Hands up how many people don't know what a 'Stamped Self Addressed Envelope' is? One player even asked me for a map in **Nuclear Destruction**, a game that has no need of a map. Oh, and as for a 5 inch by 3 inch diplomatic message

card addressed on one side and written on, on the other - you're kidding, right. Sometimes these games took quite a while to get back from Arizona, especially when once (once in about five years) someone posted the envelope back by surface, a process that took ten weeks. (Yes, take it in, a ten week turnaround !) I well remember the phone call I had from some nitwit who asked me what I was going to do about it. Well, see sir (sir!), the envelope's in the post, whaddya want me to do?

I did however, and I would like this recorded, never send a reply to Nick that said 'Read the F*cking Rules'. That phrase originates from the Lower East side of New York City where Jim Dunnigan hung that slogan over the table on which he edited *Strategy and Tactics*. I was there the year he bought the magazine and I nearly ended up as his UK agent. (So, Nick - read your F*cking diary !)

In truth I had a lot of problems with my first customers (aka 'players') as when I said stuff like 'if you run out of credit you don't get your results sent to you' everyone thought I was talking about someone else and they were the exception. See, they'd all been brought up on **Diplomacy** which, whilst a fine game, was **Diplomacy** and it wasn't **Nuclear Destruction** and it sure as hell wasn't **Starweb**. So while the players were playing the game to the Dip. Ethos I was running it to mine. Now in ND you're not supposed to know the names of the other players in the game (well you weren't then) so my first act when the first batch of diplomatic messages (one of them was written in crayon on a bag) was exchanged, was to cut off the names and addresses.

There was uproar! It wasn't done in **Diplomacy**, so why was I doing it? Well, actually I was doing it 'cause Rick said that was how he ran it in the USA, but the idea didn't cross the pond and it wasn't long before I found some legitimate and sensible method of saving face and allowing direct communication. (I took the French opening and surrendered.) I was so short of players in those days that I took three friends from the same town, actually I think they lived in the same room, and put them in the same game. Funnily enough, they didn't win.

Branching outwards

Whilst this was going on I was holding down a 'normal' nine to five job in my family business and developing a side line. Rick had suggested that I run the games to pay for the games I was playing and so when he suggested I sell the games he sold it seemed and indeed was a natural extension. Pretty soon I had my own little zine *Overkill* and was selling little known games like **Helm's Deep** and other SF/F products. I started going to conventions which I loved (I met Nick in person in Birmingham for the first time, but you can't win them all), and opening up connections with the growing Fantasy hobby.

I had probably the second copy of a game called **Dungeons and Dragons** in the UK and quickly realising that this would go nowhere I left it to some people who started a magazine called the *Owl and the Weasel*. A much better name than the silly name of *Games Workshop* they then got stuck with. Instead I picked **Tunnels and Trolls**, which was a fun little game. I still treasure the letter from D&D's first UK agent pronouncing D&D too complicated and enclosing a postal order for a copy of T&T!

Lest I sound too critical of my customers (Moi?), I did make some really good friends in those days. I won't name any 'cause I'll be sure and miss some of them out, but when I bumped into David Wood on the steps of St.Martin's in the Fields on his lunch break and my family's day trip, we chatted and his parting words were 'you might as well sign me up for another game'. Also I ran several conventions of my own, the first in Loughborough with Gavin Wynford-Jones who relatively recently was still playing **Starweb**.

What is Play By Mail?

THE PROCESS is simple. Players send their orders for each turn in the game to a central moderator (or GM), who works out the results and sends them back. This simple process allows hundreds of players to enter game worlds of great depth, to contact each other between turns for discussion and negotiation and to play at a time that suits them.

In most games everybody's orders are processed together for each turn, simultaneously, but the results that are sent back are the individual ones for your own position. The other players won't know what you're planning unless you choose to tell them, which offers many possibilities for joint and covert action. There are all sorts of games, with all sorts of settings: roleplaying, wargaming, adventuring, empire-building, sports games and plenty more! Some are simple, some are complex, but they will all take skill and planning to play them well.

If you've never tried Play By Mail, give it a go. It will be unlike any other kind of gaming that you've played.

Competition, grrr

It was, however, at a convention that I was met with - The Enemy. A competitor. A competitor? What was this, some guy with a rip off of my game coming into my market and taking away my customers. It was horrible. I didn't sleep for weeks. Ye Gods, someone else was doing what I was doing and threatening the status quo (ie me). It wasn't on. He had to be stopped. I didn't stop him, I couldn't stop him and in fact he stopped himself when he discovered a more lucrative way of making money. I honestly can't remember the name of that second commercial CM game to be run in the UK, but one day he 'forgot' to take a backup, his game crashed and he closed it. He lived happily ever after doing something that paid. Ironically Flying Buffalo (Oh, FBInc. Or FBI, get it?) had picked up the same game as a franchise in the USA and thus began what we in the trade call the 'Great Growing'.

Well actually we don't but we ought to have done, 'cause around about that time it seemed everyone and his dog was inventing PBM games. (Some I think we're invented by just the dog.) In the USA **Tribes Of Crane** became very popular and sold itself on the grounds that it was run by people (Actually a massive table full of old age pensioners working for pennies! True!) and not a horrible faceless computer. In the US it was run by, well, libel being libel shall we just say someone with a very singular position on advertising. He posted advertisements showing a Buffalo in the cross hairs of a gun sight. People were outraged! Demonstrations were held, police cars over turned and letters written to magazines. (Okay so the first two didn't really happen, but they shoulda.)

He also ran a hate letter, sorry I should say, a hate campaign of letters was also run, from the same address using the same stamps, to all the zines in the UK and USA (*Flagship* was born by then). When questioned about it a certain person not only admitted to doing it, but said he was doing nothing wrong. And, looking back, he wasn't.

But the PBM hobby was now on the scene, and growing. The Media became interested. I entertained two journalists in, of all places, the London Playboy Club, Bunnies an' all, for lunch and got through the entire meal without once mentioning that Tribes of Crane was available in the UK. I can't recollect what newspaper they were from and I don't think I ever read anything but I did enjoy the meal (hey, I was thirty!) and the company running TOC in the UK did spectacularly collapse for financial reasons shortly afterwards. (Sticking pins in that little effigy finally paid off.)

No regrets

See I don't know the scene now in 2003 but I never from day one thought that games run by people could ever continue. For love, yes. For profitability - no way. And if there wasn't financial growth there then, in my view there was never going to be a continuing game. Of course, there are the exceptions, and I take my hat off (or would if I wore one)

to people who for years have run games or zines for fun. Well done guys 'n gals. But don't tell me it puts food on the table, 'cause it don't. There's probably still a very big list of PBM games in the back of *Flagship* (when we started I think there were four!) and without looking I'll take a bet that the long running successful and popular ones are run by computer. Stands to reason. People have to eat. Humans get sick or go on holiday or (Strewth!) have exams.

A little digression here. Whenever I got a letter at *Flagship's* impressive offices, saying the GM was going to have to hold up a while whilst he took his Uni Exams even my little capitalist used to shout 'not fair, what about your public?'. Well, those people never had a public for long, it's just a pity that some players got taken for their money. Hands up anyone still waiting for their rules to Lords Of Valetia! Or anyone who played the D&D rip off run in Gibraltar that got a high rating in the charts because the only five votes it got came from Gibraltar. I may be a money-grubbing commercial capitalist swine, but I'm an honest one. (As Nick has said before me however, the aim with *Flagship* and my games was survival and stuff the rest. It's Hell out there, folks).

So was it better then than now? Nah, course it wasn't. Now you have many more games, better computers and by comparison an enormous market. Now you have PBEM. It was fun then, a lot of fun, but better? I think not. I haven't played a PBM game for about two years. The one I played I tired of and asked for my money back. The company concerned charged me all my remaining credit as an administrative fee for returning it. (Maybe some things were better then.) If I had to do it all over again, would I? You bet I would. PBM has given me some of the most fun times in my life. My games business took me to the USA almost every year from 1970 to 2000. I still have some great friends.

If I have to end this article on any note at all it's this: *Rot in Hell, Mr Foster.*

He was the bank manager who closed down my real life family business. I always promised myself I'd insult him in print one day.

See. It was too worth it ...

[Let's just add that Tribes of Crane still survives, but run now by a Really Nice Chap.]

RULE THE WORLD



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Created in 1981 by Thomas Hartley, author of the acclaimed
"Duke of Valetia" alternate history adventure series,
available in English, German and Italian.

Monsters

Welcome to a new Flagship series

MARK PINDER sets the ball rolling ...

The Lands of Elvaria is a contemporary fantasy roleplaying game which draws on many influences from popular fantasy films, novels, comic books and game systems. It is from this environment of over fifteen years of running Elvaria that the inspiration from this article comes from. When characters meet a monster in Elvaria it could well be the traditional dragon breathing fire, but more than likely it will be something that little bit different, requiring more than an ounce of cunning to beat.

Now many movies have their archetypal bad guy in his tower, planning his nefarious plot to rule the world.

Elvaria is pretty much no different from this except it can parody these concepts, evil villains owning pet cats, gloating and creating over-complicated and implausible methods of death had been around long before Dr Evil arrived on the scene. A recent example from Elvaria was a bad guy Necromancer who was breeding a colony of spider creatures that could be used to infest a local town and take it over so he would become its leader. The evil bad guy, though, was really clued up though on what was going on in the world and previous attempts to stop his evil plans had been foiled on every occasion. Only when he was finally defeated was it revealed that one of his keys to his survival had been his major magical item in his possession that dispensed knowledge, not your standard magical mirror but a magical knowledge-giving spiders web, known as The World Wide Spiders Web or basically the internet hits fantasy. Something the player can relate to can be advantageous.

The inspiration for many ideas is normally best left to the players themselves, and letting paranoia do its worst. No matter what hideous and fiendish plot as a GM you can envisage, it can usually be guaranteed that the players can think of something far worse, especially if they are on a group scenario and talking regularly. Feeding this paranoia can also be fun, especially if you have a good memory. There was once a player who was a major Doctor Who fan and knowing this proved to be invaluable: a few arrows with gold tips were found and for the rest of the scenario the player was convinced that cybermen were waiting around every corner, though his character could not possibly know this information.

The anagram is also a powerful tool in the armoury of any GM. Just make the name of a potential adversary an anagram of a past foe and the blue touch paper is lit: everyone knows that no matter how implausible it is, some people just cannot stay buried (or for a TV soap analogy, they just come back from Manchester).

Although everyone likes to be successful in a game, too much success breeds contempt and eventually boredom. If, however, there is a constant challenge and success has to be earned, then you are onto a winner. Everyone knows Vampires are destroyed by sunlight and have an aversion to daylight. Well, turn that theory on its head, give the vampires some form of immunity to sunlight and actually a taste for garlic in their food as they have been eating it for years building up a resistance to it: the

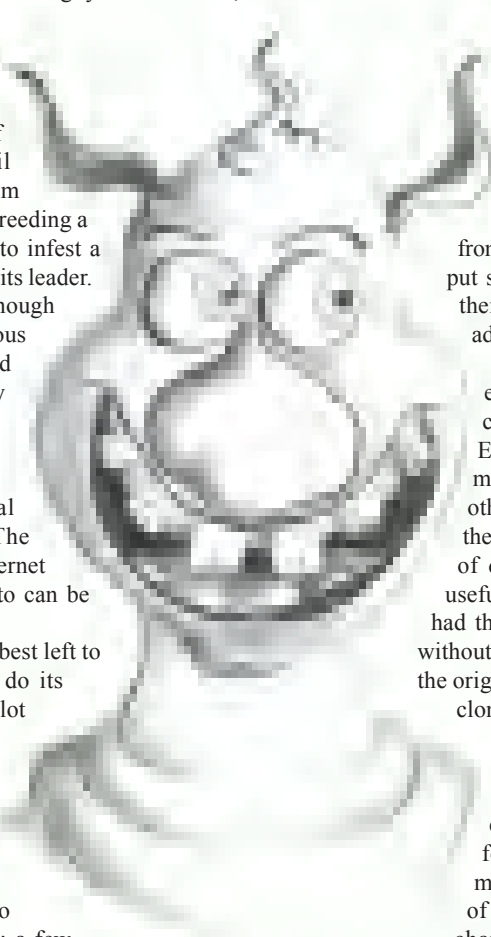
best laid plans can then be in tatters and suspicion then begins to set in - hang on, if they are immune to garlic what else can they be immune to, can they cross water, will they shy away from my holy symbol? Should the players finally be successful in their mission, they will be all the more satisfied at a job well done from the added twists and turns thrown at them.

Evolution is a powerful force in any environment and your game world should reflect this. Even Saruman in *Lord of the Rings* realised orcs alone were not the answer and created the Urak hai. Well if it was good enough for Saruman and Tolkien why not for you the GM? Beef up your monsters from the norm. Similarly, what a character took out in his early turns should no longer be considered a threat. However, revenge is a powerful force and if the orc nation had suffered from goody-two-shoes adventurers, they may well have put some of their clan into intensive training, honing their skills to be able to be a lethal opponent for the adventurers. Revenge is a dish best served cold.

Players can be a vital source of inspiration, especially once word gets out about what one character is up to. One major player character in Elvaria decided it was time his mage had a few more servants and created minions of himself, otherwise known as clones. Then, upon discovering they really were not up to the job, he started a program of developing them that bit further to make them useful servants. Well, from there a few other players had the theory that they could copy this work, though without the preparation and evolutionary steps taken by the original creator. Several months later there are several clones of many individuals and the gods decide to turn the world on its head, granting the clones their freedom from magical slavery. Suddenly, instead of the clones being their servants, they have a chance to become the masters and begin competing for the positions of political office etc that their masters were striving for. What was once a position of strength is turned into a tricky nightmare that the characters struggle to maintain, and indeed some clones actually supersede their creators in power and influence.

Another twist that can confuse and perplex is one that adapts currently-held beliefs, putting the characters into the situation where they are in a parallel universe: the Monsters around them are the same names but they are acting differently, following similar but not exact paths as before. With Elvaria being a game heavily influenced in game by the in-game religions, the Gods were slightly changed to have different attitudes: in the alternate universe they were the Law, feared far more than any Inquisition, as any breach of their law had just one punishment: Death. The change in pace and subtle changes to the environment that the characters find themselves in can be a significant challenge for any player to deal with.

Where possible I do not shy away from character interaction and the ability to take Monsters to the next level. I can start a plot line as a Monster begins to start making an impact on the world and its influence



begins to grow. Information on this Monster can then filter throughout the game to several players, who can then act on the information as they see fit. Indeed, having many pieces of a puzzle being held by many different owners can create a very credible threat as chinese whispers begin to evolve, with the Monster gaining a mystique all of its very own as tales and rumours are repeated. Eventually someone will begin to realise that if the Monster is not stopped then things could be very bad, then when the players collate the information, the realisation will probably dawn on them that they need help to defeat this monster. Now at this point they could try and recruit hirelings to aid them, but more than likely they will find a merry bunch of fellow adventurers up for a challenge. Thus the game is afoot and the players can really push their characters. It is now where the real fun begins, as the Monster and its entourage should be able to give the characters a real run for their money, and if this is not the case it can be beefed up or the scenario twisted so that things become a challenge. On a side issue, if characters are expecting a major reward or magical item from achieving their mission, do not lock it away in a chest as a prize, give it to one of the Monsters to use against the player characters: never shy away from giving your Monsters a potentially lethal loaded weapon.

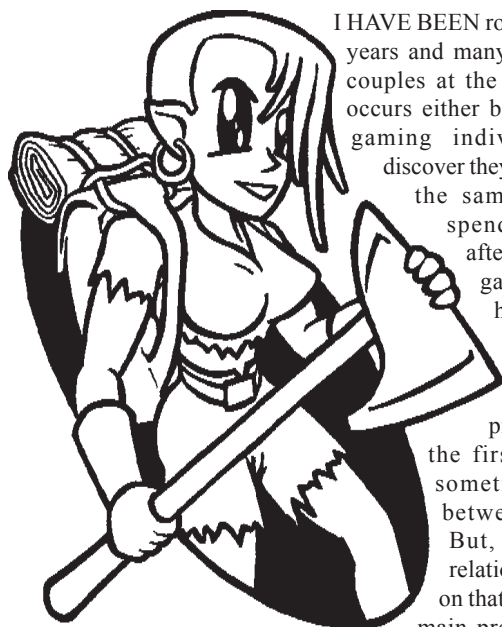
Designing Monsters for player characters to confront is far from being a simple case of grabbing a monster manual and throwing a handful of random Monsters at your players. To maintain a credible threat and anticipation level for your players, some degree of foresight is required, and in many cases a structure to the scenario.

[We welcome any further articles in this series about Monsters, both from game designers and from players.]

**INSERT
WESTPOINT AD
HERE**

Roleplaying with your Significant Other

LISA FORDHAM on the problems of playing together ...



I HAVE BEEN roleplaying for over 20 years and many a time have I seen couples at the same session. This occurs either because two already-gaming individuals meet and discover they both like fighting on the same side as well as spending time together afterwards or because a gaming fanatic forces his/her 'friend' to come to the gaming session.

The only problems inherent in the first selection is that sometimes competition between the two ensue. But, depending on the relationship, it may thrive on that competition. No, the main problems I am talking

about are when the second example occurs.

Until recently, when it's been through the second means, it has usually been a guy bringing a date, not the other way around. Many times she doesn't have any interest in or knowledge of gaming, but wants to share what he enjoys. Now, different things can happen if it's the 'friend' of the GM or the 'friend' of a player.

First let me state that many if not most of the GMs I have dealt with are wonderful. There is no playing favourites and their partners/friends are treated as anyone else in the group. But when that is not the case, things can get messy. 'How is this so?' I hear you asking. First of all, imagine your GM is incredibly protective of said person, that he makes sure that anything nasty happening only affects the others in the group. While not outwardly a terrible thing, this can breed some frustration, not just towards the GM but also to his companion. The atmosphere can get very 'unfriendly' during these times. Not something you really want to deal with.

Or, to avoid this, I have also seen the GM show that he is not prejudicial towards her by doing exactly the opposite: by making sure that she doesn't get any preferential treatment, by being harder on her and holding her to a higher standard than the rest of the team. The resentment you won't get from your players is, instead, garnered by your friend and that is just not worth thinking about. Believe me, she will know exactly what to say to cut deeply. I have seen it all happen before.

The same sort of thing happens when it's the player who brings a friend. If she is really not into playing, it's more or less the player having two characters and making sure it does things to his/her advantage. This is not too terrible as long as the GM keeps things in check. That way, the others in the group won't feel neglected.

What is worse than the former is when the player is very judgmental. This is his domain and she is not playing the 'right way' or in a 'smart way'. I have seen some reduced to tears by the harsh words. Again, it's

not worth fighting about, your relationship is much more important.

So what do we do about this? It's very tempting to just say 'don't do it!' but that is not very helpful. First, if she really knows nothing about gaming, tell her a little bit about what to expect. Make sure she realized that sometimes the humour in the room can get a bit 'crude' and that it is not personal. The idea is to have fun and she should get comfortable with the idea of 'playing a character'.

Make sure that she knows you are going to give her the same treatment you would anyone else and that it is not indicative of how you feel towards her. It is the way your character would act. Let her know this well ahead of time so she doesn't come into the situation blindly.

If you can, help her figure out what kind of character she would feel most comfortable playing. It will help her get 'into' the session sooner. And, the others in the party will also have more fun, if they don't feel they have to walk on glass because it's your girlfriend/boyfriend.

And, if all this fails, remember the most important thing. For those times when things just don't go right and she is unhappy with what is happening just make sure you have chocolate. The cure-all for all things bad.

Attention Space Cadets!

*Sign up for a free pbem
playtest of*

On Stellar Seas

Strategy - Diplomacy - Action
(lots of action)

Check out our rules at
www.offworldgames.com
(MS Windows or emulator required)

Computer Game Awards 2003

TOM FYFE collates the results of your votes for this year's best Computer games...

FLAGSHIP IS proud to present its first Annual Award for the best Board and Card Games, sponsored by **Leisure Games**. We were expecting a low vote since the poll was only announced in December, but in the end we had votes from 53 people - enough that we are satisfied these results are fairly representative. But on to the important stuff ...

The winner of the Best Board Game Award for 2003 is the bookies' favourite, **Puerto Rico** published by *Rio Grande Games*. Not only did this win on average Value, but it also gathered more votes than any other game (just, from Settlers of Catan). Puerto Rico was reviewed in

Game	Published by	Fun	Materials	Rules	Complex.	Value
Puerto Rico	Rio Grande	9.2	8.3	7.8	7.2	8.3
Pueblo	Rio Grande	8.9	7.5	7.5	6.5	8.5
Settlers of Catan	Mayfair	8.3	8.8	7.5	6.3	7.8
Age of Steam	Warfrog	8.2	8.3	7.0	7.3	8.7
Carcassonne	Rio Grande	8.1	8.5	8.9	7.9	8.5
El Grande	Rio Grande	8.0	8.5	6.5	7.5	8.6
Goldland	Goldsieber	7.8	6.5	7.8	7.7	8.5
Lord of the Rings	Hasbro	7.5	8.3	7.5	6.0	7.3
Nautilus	Mayfair	7.2	6.5	6.3	4.5	7.6
Diplomacy	Hasbro	6.5	7.2	8.5	8.2	8.8

(Game name, Publisher, Fun Value, Quality of Materials, Rules Comprehensibility, Complexity, Value for Money)
(Games which attracted only one vote have been excluded)

Top 10 Boardgames

Starting to run Galaxy

DOMINIC MILLER describes taking over the s/f wargame ...

How did you first start as a moderator?

MY FIRST TASTE of being a GM was when I was 15, in the late 80s. I had the idea for a football PBM and, with a friend, wrote a program on his BBC computer (cutting edge technology at the time!). I ran it for a season but because of exams and hardware problems (our printer gave up the ghost) it fizzled out and I returned to playing games instead of running them. But I retained an interest in developing and/or running games and when Spellbinder Games offered the space-based wargame **Galaxy** for sale, a game I'd played on and off for about five years, I thought I'd have a go at running it (alongside my full-time job). I had lots of ideas for improving the game, and I thought this would be a great opportunity to see how far I could take it.

So what did licensing involve?

As part of the deal I had the program source code, and a list of addresses of previous players. The program code was written in a language called 'C', about which I knew absolutely nothing! However, I wanted to make changes to the game, so I knew I'd have to either learn C or re-write the game in another language. I knew a little bit of Visual Basic (VB) and Microsoft Access, so I thought I'd use those to re-write the game. My plan was to start a new game as soon as possible with the old program (for which I would charge a fee per turn), and then export the data to the VB/Access version when it was ready, and then carry on with that.

My first task was to find a number of players for a new game: I wanted to have at least ten. I sent a letter to all of the previous players whose addresses I had, but only about three replied. I think many of the addresses may have been out of date. My next step was to advertise in *Flagship*. I put in a half-page advert and also managed to get Rebus Games and *Galaxy* mentioned in a couple of the news sections within the magazine. The response was again disappointing - I was still short of the ten I wanted. By this stage I was quite well advanced with the development of the VB/Access program, so I decided to use the VB/Access version from the start, and advertise the game as a playtest - with no fee. I sent another letter to the previous players, and got another mention in *Flagship*, and this time I got about six extra players. I started the game in January last year (2002). Unfortunately two players dropped out early in the game, but fortunately I managed to replace both of them - one of the new players happened to pick up a three-month old copy of *Flagship*, read about the game and got in contact just after one of the players had dropped out!

Were there any initial problems?

Galaxy is traditionally an open-ended game, with no limit on the number of turns. One of the games I had previously played in had run for three years. I didn't fancy running a play-test for that long (especially if I wasn't being paid for it!) and so I put a 30-turn limit on the game, which meant the game would take about a year (which it did, having finished in February 2003).



I expected there to be about five or six players still left in the game by that stage, so I needed some way of deciding who would win the game. I came up with a formula whereby players would score a certain number of Victory Points depending on how many planets they have colonised, how much they have built up their populations, industry & technologies, and how many rival planets they have bombed. The player with the most points would win. I was very conscious of awarding points for aggression: having played *Galaxy* for several years I knew that getting into scraps with other players makes the game much more interesting! I published a 'league table' every few turns (and towards the end, every turn) to show who was in the lead at the time. It was very close right up until the end, and the margin of victory was not much more than a single point. In the end The Ormers, run by Antony Dunks, held off a strong challenge by The Kaners, run by Simon Gibson-Poole. Whereas the Ormers built a very strong industrial base, and colonised many planets, the Kaners went on the rampage early on and picked up many bombing points. But they neglected to build a strong enough base and the Ormers, leaders from an early stage, held on to win. Though I made the game a turn-limited format for the purposes of having a finite length play-test I now also believe that it added a lot more excitement to the game. Following the conclusion of the play-test one of the players has suggested that I stick with the Victory Points idea for future games, but that the aim of the game is to reach a certain number of Victory Points, rather than see who has the most Victory Points after a certain number of turns. I think this is a great idea, and I'll be trying this for the next game.

Do you enjoy the task?

The playtest took up a couple of hours every other week. I thought I'd get a bit bored running the game - initially I was itching to play myself, though I knew I couldn't fairly take part. But as the game went on, it became fascinating watching the game unfold. Several of the players documented their thoughts, strategies and tactics each turn. Many times I read through people's comments thinking 'if only you knew...', having just read what their opponent was planning! There was also a lot of good-natured banter between the players, which I also enjoyed. The game has a messaging system built into it. Players can send messages to specific players, or to all players. The Kaners used this facility extensively to goad other players, spread rumours, and generally wind everyone else up! This proved to be very effective, and was a factor in the Kaners' strong performance.

Galaxy at a glance

A well-known s/f game that's also available in free versions on the internet. Dominic's version is more elaborate than these, and was run commercially for several years by Spellbinder Games. Rebus Games:

galaxy@rebusgames.com
07092 277 279

62 Beechgrove Avenue, BELFAST, BT6 0NF

Creating a Compulsive PBM Website

GORDON McLENNAN ...

DO YOU HAVE a website that is just 'there' on the internet, and doesn't generate business for you? Have you ever wanted to increase your profit by using the internet? Do you feel that other companies are pushing ahead while you are standing still?

Good design is the key to creating a compulsive website for your company and games - a website that brings customers to your site and then keeps them there! We have recently been commissioned by Supersonic Games for their websites. You can visit them at

<http://www.Austerlitz.co.uk>

Begin with the end in mind

So how do you begin to design your website?

A Chinese proverb reads, 'A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step', but in the words of Stephen Covey 'Begin with the End in Mind'.

So before setting off on that single step, it is wise to know where you are going.

So to begin, you need to: Ask Good Questions

The 'customer centred' website

So what should this first step be then, in this thousand mile journey? Should you start sketching websites - nav bars, menu bars, logos etc?

No : The first step should be to work out the answers to these questions:

Who is going to use it?

What will they want to do?

What do we expect from the site?

These are easy questions, and great websites are built around great answers to these questions.

Hidden wedges

Good design is using good methodology to avoid 'hidden wedges' - or problems that only appear big later on.

So how do you make a website customer centred? Here are the basic rules, then we will move onto the wonderful world of 'Use Cases' ...

Customer Centred Web Design must include the following : Ease of Use, Performance, Brand Value, Satisfaction, Good Content.

'Use Cases' or 'Who is going to use it?'

What makes things useful? Their fitness for the task intended.

Your website, must be appropriate for the purpose intended. Remember our first question? 'Who is going to use it?' Answer: your players, of course! Nope - potentially anyone on the internet.

Should the site be solely centred on your players? Should it be a site that allows players to enter orders, or communicate with each other? Should it be a site that actively invites the casual browser to join in the fun? Should it inform as well as entertain and provide a customer service?

Probably all of the above. But which do you want to focus on most? What will they want it to do? or 'What type of experiences do I want them to have?'

Why do people surf the net? To have fun!

If your players (and casual visitors) have fun in as many ways as possible whilst on your site, they will come back, and they will spend money. This self-evident fact eludes many designers.

So to answer the question, 'What will they want to do?', do the obvious thing - write to your players with a questionnaire and ask them: what would they like to see in a website?

Next, put your thinking cap on and anticipate the needs of 'casual browsers'. How can they have fun? How can they have it quickly and with the least possible effort? What service can you provide them with? What would make them come back? And what would make them become a paying customer?

What do I want from the site?

Answering this question will define your expectations of the website. With this goal in mind, your expectations are more likely to be met. If you are hiring a company to build your website, make sure that they understand your expectations, and can assure you that the site will meet them.

List the outcomes you want from your website. And then print them out and frame them. And put it on the wall for everyone to see. To remind you to stick to what you have decided...

The first three steps

So, as we said at the beginning, a journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step, and you have now made three. These three 'steps' or answers to questions will stand you in better stead than almost anything else you do. Your site could be a garish technicolour nightmare, badly laid out and horrid - but if it meets the customer's need, it will be more successful than a site that looks great, but does not do what the customer wishes.

Creating interest

Your site's homepage must engage interest by providing 'teasers' to the customer. These are items to excite and 'draw' the customer in.

Have a brainstorm session in your company, and include your customers in the brainstorming. Ask them what would most interest them on the homepage?

When you have these 'teasers' figured out, put them on your website.

Some commonly used 'Homepage teasers' are free offers, things to download, testimonials and reviews, etc.

Retaining interest

Most people try anything once. On your website, the trick is to keep them coming back.

The key to retaining interest is interactivity. What can the people 'do' on your site? It must take only one obvious click to get to the fun.

Here are a few time-tested ideas to keep people returning to your site.

Freebies: Offer Freebies to the customer. Special offers! Free play! Free downloadable literature! Freebies! I guarantee you that the more you give away, the more you will make.

Newsletter: Offer your visitors a newsletter, and make it a good newsletter. Offer them some example back issues to judge the quality. Send these out by email - at least once a month. In the newsletter, provide links back to your site.

Forum: Create a forum, or message board, for players to use. Even use a free service like Yahoo Groups. Create a community around your

website. This community will strengthen the people that play your game, and will hopefully make any newcomer feel more than welcome. A forum is also a living 'FAQ'. Make sure all your messages are archived for easy access by new players.

Useful online content: Offer the customer useful online content. Rulebooks, searchable databases, Frequently Asked Questions. This single item alone will bring players back to your site. PBM players are generally very competitive, and if a player knows that another player could gain an advantage through online material, then they will beat a path back to your site.

Classified: Offer free classified ads to your players. Again, this service is easy to add (no pun intended).

In all these items, seek to offer service to the customer. Make it easy for the customer to see benefit in visiting your site.

Prototyping your website

By this time, you have a good basic website design. However, before touching a computer, there are some steps to be taken to prototype the site.

Use post-it notes, or sketches, or a handy wall. Whatever you need to sketch out the site. Make sure it makes sense and is not too cluttered.

Choosing software

When your prototype is complete, you must then build the site.

If you are doing this on the cheap, there are plenty of free applications available for web design. Most computer (or web design) magazines have free software on cover CDs.

My personal freebie favourites are Xara Webstyle 2, and 1st Page 2000, both excellent packages for creating a simple site.

However, to produce a site with all the frills, you must really invest in the 'Big Iron' from Macromedia or Adobe. There are often free trials of these (admittedly expensive) applications on magazine cover discs. The professional quality applications offer so much more to make your life so much easier when building the site.

A quick tip : when building your site - simple is best. Different browsers display webpages in different ways. The simpler your website, the greater chance that it will look as intended on most browsers. You can design your site with only one browser in mind (Internet Explorer being the most popular), but this does limit your potential audience as it can scare users of another browser.

Marketing your website

Ok, your website is built. Now what? It's time to market it.

Here are a few brief ideas on marketing your site:

Existing Marketing Materials: "Every product we put out has our Web address on it. Every direct marketing piece sent out has the address, and it's also on our phone line. Whenever we promote anything, the Web address is there. The cost? Absolutely nothing. Just type." (Fai the Raphael, vice president of strategic marketing, Windham Hill Records)

Put your website address on everything you do - paper adverts, t-shirts, game turns, everything. Make sure your email 'signature' has the website address, and also make sure that any postings you make to newsgroups also have the signature.

Search Engine Placings: It's beyond the scope of this article to talk about the best way to get a good search engine placing. There are websites which offer a paid service where they submit your site to search engines (such as <http://www.registereverywhere.com>). There are also more limited submission services for free, or you can do it yourself. See <http://www.searchenginesbook.com/>.

Some search engines (notably <http://www.google.com>) also offer paid placings.

Webring: Join a webring! Visit <http://www.webring.com> for more details.

Banner Exchange: Join a banner exchange service with a community that suits your games.

Newsgroups: Be active in newsgroups. Help players and others, and remember to put your website on your message signature ...

Yahoo Groups: If you do not have a forum on your website, start one at Yahoo Groups.

SPAM: A final word on using SPAM, or unsolicited email to promote your games - don't!

Finale

And finally - a short summary:

Ask good questions to get a great site!

Ask your players what they want!

Create paper prototypes first!

Invest time in continually marketing your site!

And Revise your site at regular intervals!

And finally, remember to have fun as you produce your website.

When you have fun, this will come through to the players, and they will enjoy using the site!

I hope this article has encouraged you to use correct design methodologies when creating (or revising) your website. This has only scratched the surface however - if you would like more advice and assistance in building your site, then contact me at:

Gordon@TheMindSet.com

Note: Flagship have recently commissioned Gordon's company, www.TheMindSet.com to revise the Flagship website, <http://www.PBMGames.com>. To view a PBM game site in action, visit <http://www.Austerlitz.co.uk/>



The London Toy Fair 2003

PEVANS describes the new games he found there ...

THE FIFTIETH London Toy Fair was held at the end of January and I got along for a day to look at the new games. This is very much products aimed at the mass market, though a few 'hobby' companies are there as well. This report covers what the new companies had on show.



Quaffers comes from *ChonkyChonks* (I didn't like to ask) and is a game about wine. At heart we have a fairly conventional trivia game: roll the dice, move your plastic wine bottle round the circular and, depending on where you land, answer questions about

different aspects of wine and wine-making. Correct answers earn money and, with enough cash, you can buy your opponent's vineyards to win the game. The gimmick is that each player brings along a bottle of wine and these are concealed in the drawstring bags provided. The game allows you to taste other players' wines and guess what they are to earn more 'money'. There's a bit of knowledge, a bit of luck and a bit of tactics in this nicely-made board game. **Quaffers** made it into the shops for last Christmas and should be widely available this year - my wife certainly wants a copy!

Golden Goose Games had a prototype of their game, **Make a Million**. This is essentially a quiz game. Players start with a notional 100,000 cash and invest it in shares. Then they take in turns to roll the dice and move round the board. Depending on what they land on, they have to do an action or take a question card. Questions are about people, heads of government, capital cities, national flags, currencies and others. Get it right and your investment goes up, get it wrong and your shares go down. The first to raise the value of their investment to a million wins the game. What raises the game above the standard are the tactical options available. Players can auction a question card to the others (a maximum of three times in the game). Do you take the most money or sell it to someone you think won't be able to answer it? Players can also merge their holdings, subject to certain restrictions. This allows players who are clearly losing to take on the leader.

Biras is the game from *Okami* - though it's more of a game system. The board (the inside of the box) is a mosaic pattern of a five-pointed star and surrounding areas in lots of different colours. The other main component is a set of colour dice (i.e. cubes with different colours on the sides). In the basic game, you roll the dice on the board. You get points for sets of colours and for landing dice on the same colour as they rolled. There are lots of variations on this, giving several different ways of using the components. The rules are a bit opaque, but there seems to be an interesting game in here - albeit one that is heavily dependent on rolling dice.

Cirondo is a two or four-player abstract strategy game from *Cirondo Games Company* and is effectively a Chess variant (though it's some distance from the original). The playing surface is made up of concentric rings, divided into spaces in a checkerboard pattern (if you see what I mean), with an unused centre circle. The players each have a number of pieces, which come in three types. Moons (a crescent) move one space forward and take diagonally (as Chess pawns). Planets (a sphere) move and take 'diagonally' - in arcs - like Chess bishops. Solar Systems (a ringed sphere) move and take in any direction, like Chess queens. Moons that reach the centre of the board convert to Solar Systems. Moons and Planets start on the outside edge of the board, Solar Systems on the inside. Eliminate your

opponent(s) to win. Production is great, with a solid board and nice, hefty pieces with felt undersides - just like a high quality Chess set. There's also a computer version of the game and it can be played online at www.cirondo.com

Quadfootball is the company and **Quadfootball** is also the game. There's usually at least one football boardgame each year and this the one for 2003. The playing area on the board is made up of concentric rings divided into spaces. Each player has a quadrant, with a goal space on the outside. They also have two strikers and three defenders (it's a five-a-side game), which are moved around and pass the ball by dice roll and play of cards. The aim is to get your strikers in position to attack an opponent's goal, while defending your own. However, the turn moves unpredictably round the table, governed by rolling the dice. The first player to score against all the others wins the round. After as many rounds as the players feel like, the winner is the player who won the most rounds. Even to this non-football fan, this feels like the sort of family game that will go down well.



Contingences is a trivia game with a geographical twist from *Red Inc.* A track loops round the outside of the board with a map of the world in the middle. Both map and track are divided into six continents and players have to answer questions based on the continent they're in: geography, history, current affairs and so on. Each question answered correctly gains you a seat in the 'Senate' for that continent. The aim is to have a majority in the Senates. Get the question wrong and you lose 'credits' - lose them all and you're out! This seems like quite a tough game: you need to get a fair number of questions right to win and too many wrong answers will take you out.

Taso International has produced a game called **Tube Fun**. This has an interesting board showing stylised Underground lines. Each line is the same length, divided into stations, and they interlock/overlap in the middle. The aim is get from your starting point at the end of one line to your destination at the opposite end of another (for a longer game, you have to make it back again). Getting the interchange right can shorten your journey, but these stations also introduce hazards into the game. The game looks like good, family fun, isn't challenging and it has nice plastic engines as playing pieces.

Termination Incorporated has the theme of a shoot-out for hitmen - a tournament that provides an outlet for aggression in the otherwise peaceful world of the future (3001, to be exact). The board is a plain grid, broken by black lines that represent glass walls (the idea being that protagonists can see each other everywhere in the arena/board, but can't shoot through the walls). Players use cards to move, trying to get a clear line of sight in order to get a shot at someone else. A shot scores points according to distance (the nearer, the more points) and a die roll. It also allows the shooter to move through the a wall to make a getaway - a neat mechanic that makes sure players don't get into a loop of trading shots in turn and gives an incentive to get up close for maximum points. Once a player has got a certain number of points, he just needs to last a full round to win. As successful shots also remove (half) points from the player hit, this means everybody else will be after him/her. Players also have a limited amount of ammunition, but can re-load - the re-loading points are suitably exposed to other shots. I can see this being great fun with five or six players and a tense, cat-and-mouse contest for two. The game is being manufactured by *Carta Mundi*, so quality is high.

A longer version of this Toy Fair report is available on my website: <http://www.pevans.co.uk/Reviews> and follow the articles link.

Nice and E-Zine does it

JOHN HARRINGTON asks, is there a future for the paper-based zine?

A WEEK IS a long time in politics but it's a bleeding age when you are bursting for a pee. There are some things the Internet cannot supplant, and going to the toilet is one of them. On the other hand, playing games by post is one of the things that not only could be supplanted by the Internet, it is being supplanted. When I first started doing *Mission From God* in 1998, editors with e-mail addresses were a rarity; now almost every editor is online and I'd be prepared to wager that over 90% of each editor's players send their orders in by e-mail too.

So, is there any future in playing games by post in this e-mail age? At the risk of revealing a toilet fixation, I think the answer is 'Yes, until such time as someone can come up with a zine you can read whilst sitting on the loo'. Of course, with PalmPilots, Ipaqs, WAP technology, mobile phones that can bring you news before it happens and all that caper, the day when one can read an electronic zine whilst enjoying the sanctity of the smallest room may not be that far away. The first electronic zine you can read on the bog will, I predict, make a big splash, which will probably play hell with the batteries.

E-mail makes it easier for people to send in orders for games and as such should increase the numbers of people playing games in zines, not decrease it. This does not seem to be happening, however. Increasingly people are sending orders in by e-mail and getting the game report sent back via e-mail or viewing it on a web page. The old zine-based model of everybody getting the same information in their zine regardless of which games they are playing in is breaking down. If you are not playing in *Blinding Headache Diplomacy* why should you want to receive the report?

This is almost a throwback to the origins of the postal gaming hobby when zines were set up to report game adjudications and bog-all else was included in the way of content. Zines were thus published every two or three weeks or so. This may not be rapid by e-mail standards but is a darn sight faster than anything anyone is attempting in the postal gaming zine hobby now, with the possible exception of Jim Burgess (*The Abyssinian Prince* - that's the name of his zine, not his official title!)

The fact that postal gaming zines evolved from being 'game report only' publications to something a bit more like an open letter from the editor, crossed with the sort of bar-room banter you see on Usenet's bulletin boards, suggests there is a fundamental desire for like-minded people to subscribe to a regular publication devoted to their hobby. Thus there will always be a place for the games zine.

Sure, with the growing acceptance of Adobe Acrobat as an

industry standard document format I can see almost all zines switching over to electronic delivery within the next couple of years, with a few paper copies being delivered by your friendly local postman for those who have not yet succumbed to the digital dream. How bad would that be, eh? Editors no longer having to go through the tedious business of stuffing zines into envelopes, licking stamps and posting the zines. The thought of no longer having to pay a small fortune to get the zine printed is very appealing, because if it is not costing you anything to print and post the damn things why do you need to worry about subscriptions and the headache of trying to keep credit records up to date?

The trouble with producing a zine that is good to read as well as good to play in is that it takes a fair amount of time, and thus the 'one turn every week' model does not really work for zines. So, paper-based zines will concentrate on games where lightning turns are not a major factor in the enjoyment of the game, and/or they will sell to people who don't have time to play five games where each game requires you to put orders in once a week; once a month will do nicely, thank you, especially as I like to go on holiday for a couple of weeks each summer and I am not in the habit of taking my laptop PC away with me to log on and send in some orders.

Zines will survive because people like to communicate and they like to belong. As such I think it really does behove (great word - what does it mean?) zine editors to work a bit harder at maintaining the postal gaming community by reviewing other zines, publicising conventions and paying me an annual salary of £20,000 to tell them how to run their zines. They may not look quite the same as the postal gaming zines we have come to know and love, most of which are being edited by extremely dedicated people who have been publishing for ten years or more, but hopefully the new electronic medium will bring a fresh and exciting format.

The zine is dead, long live the zin-e.

In memory of Richard Sharp

In my article in the last *Flagship* I quoted strategy tips from Richard Sharp, doyen of the UK *Diplomacy* hobby. Sadly, Richard died in early March, finally losing the fight against cancer. Richard was one of the founding fathers of the PBM hobby. He ran the National Games Club for many years, had a book published on the game of *Diplomacy* and published well over 200 issues of his zine *Dolchstoss* but will, perhaps, be best remembered for winning the friendship and affection of a surprisingly large number of people whose political views were diametrically opposed to Richard's libertarian beliefs - a feat which takes some charm.

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An Introduction to Online Gaming

RUSSELL BEER describes what to do and how to do it ...

IF YOU ARE reading this article, then I don't have to tell you of the fun that can be had playing games of **Dungeons and Dragons** - my own particular preference - or any other roleplaying game. Suffice to say there are few hobbies that can stir the imagination and satisfy the creative process in the same way. The depth of the commitment is the only limit on the rewards that you can reap from your pursuit.

In my first five years (out of twenty) of learning the game I did little more than play. I later joined the ranks of the Dungeon Masters, though I never gave up the thrill of creating characters and playing in other worlds. I got my beginnings when I found and joined a club that had formed at our local park district. This organization was devoted to war-gaming, battle recreations and tabletop pallor games. There was a small group which occupied a table in the corner, away from the thundering guns, that drew my attention with their talk of swordplay and magic spells. My closest experience with this fantasy genre had been the books of Robert E Howard and J R R Tolkien and here they were, coming to life, and allowing people to participate and shape the world in their own way. There was no turning back.

Since that time I have played in countless worlds and tournaments, pick-up games and ongoing campaigns, and most recently games of the online variety. Internet gaming offers its own challenges and nuances. Hopefully we can explore them together and develop ways to integrate into these new worlds, ways that promote playability and the maximum amount of fun. After all, any hobby on which you spend your time should be as enjoyable as you can make it.

The first hurdle that presented itself was finding a game. There are many places to go where people are playing. A simple search will offer hundreds of suggestions and forums, but how do you join and how can you be sure the game you join is suitable to your own style of play? The answer is simple but the solution requires some work. You have to ask questions and be open, honest and forthcoming about your own experience and level of play. You will find few things more frustrating than joining a game where the players are new and you are not, except perhaps a game where the group has played together for years and you have recently cracked open the rules for the first time. The way to avoid these pitfalls is to ask those questions that glean the right answers. Don't be afraid to send e-mail, or instant messages if they are more convenient, to the person in charge. You will find the vast majority of Dungeon Masters to be highly receptive. They may be busy at the moment you contact them, but give them the chance to get back to you at their convenience and they may have something for you right around the corner. Be courteous; the same protocols that apply in everyday life also apply on the World Wide Web. Nobody wants to spend their time and energy on a pushy person when there are so many others who are willing to be

respectful and kind. All DMs have put a great deal of work into their projects with the express purpose of sharing the results with others. It only stands to reason they want as many inquiries as are out there. If their hands are full, they will let you know quickly and they might even have some ideas on where to go to find what you seek.

The next obstacle I encountered involved choosing the format in which I desired to play. There are two main styles online, each with their own advantages and disadvantages. One is the online 'posting board' - or play-by-post - variety. It requires a minimal time commitment and allows for greater occasion to craft your words and story. The DMs begin the tale and get their group together. With each new DM post, the players are notified as to the current situation and are invited to post their own responses and actions. While the descriptive aspects of this game are enjoyable, if you are looking for a style that speeds along like a face-to-face game, you could be disappointed.

Fortunately, there is an alternative. Another venue is the chat room game. There are a number of varieties, but most distinctly they come in two types: the open forum and the traditional refereed kind. Open forums are there to jump in at any time. Simply create your character, go into the chat room, and play. The only limitation here is the other players' acceptance of what you are doing. You have to acclimate to the environment,

get a feel for the others in the room, and make judicious decisions regarding your actions. Although they can be chaotic, they can also be a quick way to spend a little time and have some fun.

The other approach to chat room gaming is much more organized. It is structured like a face-to-face game including a location, a DM, and one or more players. It can include maps and dice rolling programs made available to players. Be sure to ask your DM what they are using and where you can get these supplements to play. Most are free and can be downloaded quickly and easily. If there is one major difference between online and face-to-face games it is the vocalization of those involved. You simply don't have the ability to hear the tone of someone's voice or see their face online in a chat room. The best solution to this problem is to be very specific with what you type. Do not assume that innuendo, sarcasm and irony will come across in the written word. So often a word or phrase is typed in haste and misinterpreted by the others in the room. Be patient, be specific and if something goes awry, learn from the mistake and move on. After all, it is only a game and not meant to be a life and death issue. Everyone is dealing with the same problems; you are not alone.

Above all, learn to enjoy yourself and the others who game with you. Make new friends all over the world and travel to mythical places in your mind with hundreds of people from thousands of miles away in reality.



GALAXY AD

THE MIGHTY PEN



Women in Roleplaying

The article in *Flagship 100* on women in roleplaying was interesting. I can't say that I've ever encountered the problem of stereotyping in the PBM roleplaying games I've been involved in. Perhaps the need to take time in writing a turn gives a chance for the GMs to think. I certainly hope my female characters don't fall into the stereotypes.

Chris Morris (Ulaidh Games)

Whilst I read and enjoyed Lisa Fordham's letter a couple of issues back, and can't fault most of the sentiments in Jim Kemeny's subsequent letter, I find it amusing that he points to, ahem, '...the juvenile fixation on half-naked females which is so prominent in PBM artwork...' as being part of the cause of the poor treatment of females within the PBM community.

Whilst it has to be said, when you see a 'Fantasy Female' she will, no doubt, have what can only be described as a 'Pneumatic' chest, an almost non-existent waist and loooooong, shapely legs, you must remember that there is, after all, an element of 'Fantasy' in everything to do with PBM. Of course, there's a fine line between 'Fantasy Art' and out-and-out 'Erotica'. As an illustrator I can safely say that sometimes it's all too easy to get carried away and not just step, but leap clean over that line. (Imagine, if you will, the impact that the Female Adventurer logo in this very magazine would have, had I gone with the previous draft, and left her in a bikini-style top, with her nipples standing proud?)

The semi-clad female has long been seen as a 'Convention' in the fantasy art genre, and will no doubt continue to be so until we all mutate into androgynous, self-replicating dullards. I would say that these conventions are part and parcel of the genre, and would hate to think that anyone, upon seeing such a picture in anything related to PBM, will think less of any female involved in the PBM hobby.

But the thing is, the point that I set out to make at the start of this letter, is that in all my years illustrating within the PBM community, 80% of the pictures I have ever drawn for anyone have been men, and of that a good 50% have been semi-clad at best, with rippling physiques and chiselled features. If anything, then, it would appear that the prevalent 'Juvenile Fixation' is not actually on semi-clad females, but semi-clad males. Food for thought, there, I think.

Anyway, I'll close by saying that whilst women are in the minority in PBM, they should be treasured whenever they're found. But then, I could just throw the cat among the pigeons here and say that I know of at least one female PBMer that positively revels in, and encourages, lewd advances. (She's in *Quest* game 31, gentlemen. And she will find you.)

Larry Deyell, Illustrator Extraordinaire

The Awards at Origins

I see that *Starweb* has been nominated for 'Best PBM Game' at the Origins Awards this year. Again. It has already won that award several times, and rarely does the year pass when it doesn't receive the nomination. *Starweb* deserved the first Origins award it won, but don't

you think it's hoggish to continue preening for more? A movie can win only one Oscar. A novel can win only one Pulitzer. And, presumably, I can win only one Nobel Prize. So why should games be eligible for more than one Origins award? I say limit each game to one award. *Starweb* has become the fat lady at the buffet who won't step aside from the garlic chicken.

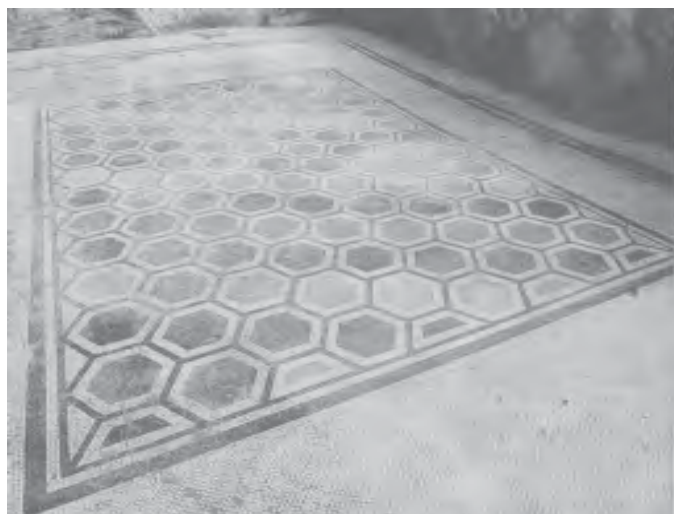
Bob McLain

*[Hmm, it's only fair to point out that the award has been won by *Dungeonworld* and *Middle-Earth PBM* as well as *Starweb*, and that *Starweb* is a game with excellencies that can quickly be appreciated. I think that it's important that a PBM game should feature every year. Other designers should make sure that their games are put forward.]*

Archaeology and gaming

Following on from Professor A Jold's interesting series of articles on the history of PBM (published in these pages some time ago), he may be interested that recent excavations at the Villa of the Papyri in Herculaneum have uncovered further proof of his theories. The villa in question was owned by Lucius Calpurnius Piso, none other than the father-in-law of Julius Caesar. As you can see, the enclosed picture shows that Piso was almost certainly a devotee of serious hex-based wargaming: perhaps he played out the battles of his son-in-law?

Colin Forbes



[The professor responds: 'Yes, indeed, thank you for drawing my intention to a most interesting discovery. This will be why Julius Caesar divided Gaul into three parts, of course. Perhaps back-stabbing Brutus was the third player?']

A protest

I was extremely disappointed by the review of *Harnmaster* you ran in *Issue 101* despite or perhaps through liking the game. I have drafted several attempts to explain what I did not like about it but after taking several reasoned and neutral approaches I think I will settle for just being rude and saying that it was awful and had no real place in an edited forum.

As a few salient points to illustrate my general argument, I would point out that allowing the author to parade his poorly informed and articulated complaints about D&D really did not help explain *Harn* to anyone. Would you have run a PBM review of *Dungeonworld* that started 'the thing I hate about KJC's *Quest* is...'? Making comparisons can be helpful if the comparison is in some way relevant to the subject being examined. If the reviewer had been talking about games such as *Runequest 3rd Edition* and *Chivalry and Sorcery* (which are more normally seen as a strongly simulationist peer group) I would not have minded but choosing D&D was utterly incongruous. After all you could write a review that pointed out the obvious failing of *Harn* to provide a suitable base for recreating the stories of King Arthur, Conan and Elric.

On this basis D&D is clearly superior to Harn. It is a stupid argument that ironically does not really deserve the attention I am spending here. Especially as the Harn writers seem to disagree with your reviewer as well. Two of the Harn products I own are dual statted for both D&D and Harnmaster. Keep the hobby horses for the letters page and out of the reviews.

Then there is the question of the material under review. I noticed from the illustration that the review was of the Third Edition which has only recently arrived in the UK. It would have been nice to have a few notes about the differences between the Third and Second editions. The mention of Magic and Religion was intriguing. Are we to take it that the two subjects are now incorporated in the main rulebook instead of being separate books as previously? The complaint about the lack of monsters also seems bizarre as apart from the orcs I have always understood that Harn is more about the conflicts between clans of humans than about inter-racial conflict. If the reviewer had not been drifting onto the subject of D&D again he might have shared why monsters are needed in Harn.

The reviewer also seems terminally confused between the terms naturalistic and realistic. Harn is not realistic and I am not sure it has really claimed to be. After all unless your reviewer has some special knowledge, magic, psionics and interventionist pantheonic religions are not actually real. To his credit he does seem to realise he is twisting himself into knots but doesn't seem to realise that that might be because he is barking up the wrong tree.

Harn has a particular vision, one that I appreciate a great deal, one that is rooted in the historical feudal world of our own past. Its vision is invigorating and unique and its writers are often imaginative and engaging. It combines a historical perspective and mindset with more traditional fantasy themes to produce a more downbeat and complex world.

One particular strength of Harn from my own point of view is the acute perception of human psychology that many of its characters and scenarios contain. Individuals are often motivated by very complex desires and character flaws. For me the richness of the setting is not in the rules (Runequest is better in my view) but in the depth of its fictional inhabitants.

Robert Rees

[It's good to see some strong feelings in our pages, though should say that I'd always encourage our reviewers to aim to interest readers without specialist knowledge.]

Browser-Based Strategy Games

What is it about them? Simply a set of number, words and pages stuck together in order to make a game. They've been around for years, starting way back in the 20th Century. The Century when Television was invented, man first walked on the moon, when computers were invented, and when Bill Clinton smoked his last cigar as president of the USA.

But one of the most important developments of that century? The Internet. A vast network of computers providing infinite information from all four corners of the globe. With that being the case, it would always be so that entertainment would be a major aspect of it. But why? Why are internet games so popular, and more to the point, why are browser-based internet games so popular?

Take, for example, **MechWars**. This game is very quickly turning into one of the leading browser-based games, and with **Planetarion** going 'Pay to Play', its growth can only be sure to continue. Started just one year ago, it has already had the chance to have a community of over 10,000 and then lose it again, and, again, see it grow back to around 8,000. Like **Empirequest** and **Dark Galaxy**, Mech Wars remains free, and for the immediate future that will remain to be the case.

Based on the idea of 'mech' warfare, you research technologies, build Constructions, construct Mechs, and attempt to kill those who oppose you. All this done while you sit at your screen and type in a load of numbers. Sounds... boring. Doesn't it?

But no, it isn't. This is actually addictive. This game actually lets your imagination run wild in a way that games such as *Half Life* and *Quake* rarely do. Text-based games allow you to be the one to add in

the graphics. In your own mind you are allowed to see how everything looks. No complaining of patchy graphics, no complaining of bad sound because it is *you* that makes all this.

Then, the community. Interacting with a sometimes hostile community makes it all worthwhile. You can infuriate someone by 'destroying' their army. You can make someone the happiest person in the world by protecting them against attackers. You can, in essence, do what Molyneux imagined in *Black and White*, what Meier imagined in *Civilization*. You can play God. Only this time, you're the 'creature', working for the higher powers. Whether these higher powers be your ethics, your goals, your dreams, or your clan leaders, you're still doing it.

You control the lives of hundreds, even thousands of people without ever seeing them anywhere except the mind's eye. And is this appealing? Yes. Extremely. So uninstall *Half Life*, delete *Sim City*, burn *Age of Empires*, because the next generation of full 3-D effects and Surround Sound is here. Browser-Based Text Strategy Games.

Russell Beer

Ethical query

If a long term alliance relies on all members to survive, but the game loses its appeal to the player, how do you leave the game without stuffing your allies?

Anon

[Suggestions, anyone? We've with-held the writer's name, in case that would damage any games he's in...]

Hall of Fame

Rise & Fall (Antony Dunks)

The four player playtest of Rise & Fall has concluded on turn #29, with an (in)decisive victory for the alliance between the Lerook BoozCruz and the Tormented. They were victorious after forcing the other empires out of the game. Finishing positions and percentage area controlled were as follows:

Lerook BoozCruz	40%
Tormented	32%
Kobolds	12%
Silver Empire	0%
unclaimed	16%

Congratulations to **Larry Deyell** and **Euan Robertson**.

Star Quest (Harlequin)

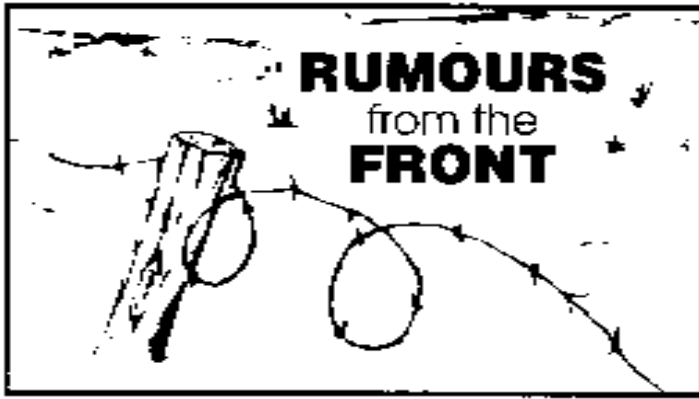
Final game of Star Quest finishes! After ten years of games and galactic warfare, the time has come to put Star Quest into retirement. So congratulations to winner **Dwayne Pribik**, and runner-up **David Callan**, for winning the last ever game of Star Quest.

Middle Earth (MEPBM Games)

Fourth Age game 142. This game started out as a major uphill battle for the FP as all five neutrals sided with the DS from the first turn. The game started to turn however when the North Kingdom dropped as the DS had been mistreating their possible ally, and the new player decided to join the FP. Finally, facing ever increasing military pressure from all sides, the DS surrendered on turn 28. The surrender showed a great deal of class on the part of the DS as they still had some very strong nations including the Inail, and Luiss, in the SW.

THE FREE PEOPLES of MIDDLE EARTH

Mageborne Traitor / Warrior Borne...**Clint Oldridge**
 Sigur / Sandovar.....**Dan Newman**
 Eldar Survivors / D'Hara.....**David Konieczny**
 Protectorate / Sons of Bombur.....**Brad Stephens**
 Northern Alliance / Sons of Finarfin...**Paul Scheel**



[This column attempts to simulate a crowded bar full of PBmers swapping experiences. It contains readers' uncensored comments, with no attempt to maintain fairness and balance; editing is only done for grammar, clarity, brevity and (occasionally) libel avoidance! In general, it's unwise to put too much weight on a single report, whether rave or curse. Readers are asked only to comment on games of which they have recent personal experience and to mention specifically if they are only giving a first impression. Unattributed comments, usually in [], are by the editor.]

Comments received from February 10th

Paul Appleby, Dan Buterbaugh, David Callan, Antony Dunks, Colin Forbes, Drew Gillmore, Matthew Gray, Michael Grant, Nick Hawcroft, Andy Kendall, Chris Morris, Carol Mulholland, Robin Orman, Robert Rees, David Saville, Wayne Yeadon

GAMES FEATURED THIS ISSUE

Middle Earth: Battle of the Five Armies (MEPBM Games)

Colin Forbes - 'An excellent introduction to the behemoth that is middle Earth PBM. The stripped down rules, lower number of players (only five) and limited number of turns (ten) mean that you can get taste for the game - a sort of entree to the main course. Sadly I find my appetite is unsatisfied by this scenario, but then I'm not even remotely a beginner!'

Phoenix (KJC Games)

David Callan - 'Recently started this. Initial thoughts: The turn editor is buggy. It's not cheap to play. The affiliation (DEN) that I joined has been very supportive, more than KJC whose player support is a bit hit-n-miss - it took three attempts to start-up and three attempts to get my first turn processed.'

Total Conquest (Total Conquest)

Matthew Gray - 'I joined Total Conquest recently after spotting their banner in a gaming site. The story line and rulebook was good, so I joined a solo game immediately to see what it is all about. There was a lot of Java stuff to download initially (about 10 MB big) which almost put me off because of my slow connection, but once I downloaded and installed it I realized it was worth it.'

Total Conquest gives you a taste of computer game in the way you submit your orders, but you still compete against other players, not a machine. Having only played six turns so far I am not really an expert, but I admit it gets more interesting every time I submit a turn!'

Drew Gillmore - 'The End Times are nigh. We have given over our cause to the Gods and Powers of the world, and it has been found worthy. We of the Dreadlords stand against nations that are twice our number, preparing for a last stand and rush to unite this land under one banner: Ours.'

Our single regret is that of the four nations that have worked together to achieve this, only three will have their names written in the history books of Antalia as victors. Four Kingdoms acting as one, single in thought and purpose, and working against those whose treachery drew the lines across the land. We stood on the side of Justice; Jy'Sestuai in the Sylvan tongue.

We of the Nykresi Conclave invested our time and energies into Magics and Powers, and focused the minds of our Heroes to one purpose: Thelien's Crown. The artifact was known to exist, and it was but a matter of time. We hoped to find it before the end, and our hope was not found wanting. Thelien's Crown is in the hands of its rightful heir, and the people flock to the Elven haven of the Nykresis Conclave for guidance and security.

Of our Allies, the humans of the Conclave of Houses have bled and died for this victory. Countless numbers holding at bay the hordes of orcs that threaten to overwhelm us all, paying for time with their lives. They accepted the Nykresi Elves as Allies and Brothers, advising us from the beginning of our fledgling

rebellion to reinstate the Order of Old among the elves. They have been a worthy ally, and contributed more to this victory than any of us.

The Kingdom of CorvusDei, also a human kingdom, has been like a rock to our north, stable and secure. Our first battles together against the Hordes of War to defend the heartlands of CorvusDei and to liberate the North bonded us with blood, and christened the Dreadlord Alliance with victories. A harbinger for the victories to come, when our two kingdoms joined together in battle against a common foe.

Then word came of treachery. One of the allies of the Dreadlords had joined with our sworn enemies in the South, five kingdoms styling themselves as "The Southern Coalition". Invasion of the sovereign Elven Union in the east was underway. We could not stand by. Unprepared for a confrontation in the South, fighting a war in the North, and unaware of the magnitude of events that were about to befall us, we heard their call for aid, and divided our forces. Our goal was achieved, the nations invading the Elven Union dividing, many pulling back to defend their lands, but not before the betrayers of Sacrumork had felt the bit of the sword. The Union, freed from an overwhelming invasion, turned back the forces of the Ale Quaffer Dwarves, and the Humans of Scara Bae. Their stores overflowed, and they sent resources by the thousands to support the Armies of the Dreadlords. Many of our people were freed from starvation due to their generosity, even while continuous armies of dwarves from the South invaded.

Yet in this time of agreement and support between we four kingdoms, many accusations flew. The Dreadlords were slandered and falsely accused of oppression. Even when facts that could not be contested were laid before all to behold, our friends and allies fell away, joining with the South in their jealousy of our Power. The three kingdoms of the Dreadlord Alliance and the Union of Pervert Elves were drawn into a Brotherhood of Nations, one crying out for true Judgment against the false accusations of the petty kings, and the treachery of the unworthy. At this time, the Northwest was all but ours, and the North east was willing to set aside animosities, though they consorted with our enemies. Three other kingdoms woke from their long complacency, at first claiming neutrality. Malthor, the Outlands, and the Far Pavilions were courted by ambassadors from both sides.

Only one stood with us, though the Elven Nation of Outlands had little choice but to look to us for the defense of their kingdom. A breath of fresh air, nonetheless. That just one Kingdom could see past the lies of our enemies gave us hope. Alas, our resources were too spread and thin, and we could do little but offer sanctuary to those who lived through the onslaught of orcs from the Horde of the Dungbeetle and the Human Cavalry of the Far Pavilions, who spoke honeyed words of friendship while they laid plans of betrayal and unspeakable acts of villainy against the people of the Nykresi Conclave. The Lady Eleanor of the ill-fated Outlands offered the Nykresi Conclave her support, and the support of her advisors and leaders, at the cost of revenge for her fallen kingdom. A price that we are willing to pay, or repay as the case may be.

At last the third neutral nation, the Kingdom of Malthor, became a puppet and mouthpiece of the South, calling for invasion of the Dreadlords with lies and empty accusations. With no one to support his wild ranting, his troops were thrown into an ineffectual and ill-advised course of invasion, to be slaughtered and outmaneuvered in the south of CorvusDei.

Now we stand on the precipice. The Outlands are gone, the Far Pavilions have been removed from their mad ruler, governed now by the wise and just human Warrick the Bold. Freed from the web of lies, the people flock to join the armies of CorvusDei, eager to make restitution for their gullibility. Malthor has felt the bite of treachery as the South has turned on him as an easy target, invading his lands while he bleeds for their cause in the North of his kingdom. Blackwill's Folly will long be told as an allegory detailing a lesson on whom to trust.

Our friends in Thuringen have been removed, taken over by Death Valley and the Gaul. We have long courted these two nations, hoping that they at least would see the truth. Of those that were part of the Hordes of War, they seemed to be unmoved by the false tales spread, and willing to listen. Yet even they have at last ended the peace, and set out to do something that no nation has accomplished: A successful invasion of CorvusDei, which boasts the largest army in the lands behind the Orcs of the Dungbeetle. They could not learn the lessons of Multiple Inheritance, or Malthor, so they must learn it for themselves. They could also not learn from their own experience, as Death Valley was once called Hidden Valley - but that is not my story to tell. Unfortunately, this tragedy is our own fault. Our own belief in Law and Justice led us to think that given the chance, these two nations would be our allies in the end. Alas, it is not to be. The promises of the South must be rich, indeed, for them to watch the South invade their Ally, Malthor, and to ignore it. The blade slips in easier, when you allow that who wields it close to your bosom.

At the end, two Brotherhoods of Kingdoms remain, twelve nations with divided loyalties; we four against eight.

The Nykresis Conclave is under attack. We postured defense in the South, while our armies were engaged against the treacherous Far Pavilions with

CorvusDei. Yet the armies of Sacrumork were content to wander around and enjoy the scenery, shaking at the thought of taking on alone our might, and our wrath, their soldiers turning tail and fleeing home at the slightest threat of counter invasion. Meanwhile, the Conclave of Houses engaged the forces of the Horde of the Dungbeetle, buying us time to secure the lands of the Far Pavilions.

And now, our full attention turns. The Human Kingdom of Nar joins with Sacrumork, giving them spine enough to approach our capital in the south, but where they once outnumbered five to one, they will find that their forces are now outnumbered and outmatched. The armies of The Conclave of Houses, CorvusDei, the Nykresi Conclave will join into battle together for the first time, to destroy the armies of Sacrumork and Nar and the other forces of the Hordes of War.

With the Beryl Hammer of the Gods in my hand, I stand as Thelien once stood, his crown on my head. I lead the vanguard, the Archers Guard, of the army named Nykresis Jy'Sestuai, which to those who do not speak the Sylvan tongue means "Justice of the Fates". Their ranks are impressive, numbering greater than fifty thousand strong, experienced and trained for warfare in environments. Our Balistae march with them, numbering greater than twenty-five thousand, with fifteen thousand light cavalry riding close, keeping an eye on our flanks. An army of veteran Elves numbering greater than one hundred thousand, with reinforcements on the way, regretting that they will arrive too late to do else but mop up the remaining forces.

Three other armies of the Nykresi Conclave will join into battle as well. Ten thousand Guardians of Power, the soldiers of the Mystic cause, along with twenty thousand Heavy Archers, bringing the human Cavalry recruited from the lands that used to belong to Far Pavilions. They form the army Nykresis Bhutan, or Strength of Law. Ogres, numbering greater than fifteen thousand, dwarves, in the tens of thousands, and other forces, both human and gnome, make up the armies Nykresis Orisis and Savrylle, Order's Oath and Silver Blade of Destiny. Another hundred thousand soldiers, battle hardened and ready for their true test.

Heroes that have overcome every obstacle they have faced lead these mighty forces into battle, ready to defend their homelands, and justice, and to duel with those of the enemy who are not too cowardly to face them. Heroes who have redeemed Thelien's Crown, even after they sorrowfully fought and defeated a group of adventurers from the Gaul, whom we had hoped to avoid confrontation with for the result could only end in sorrow and cause a rift between our kingdoms; quests of glory are often the grounds on which friendships bleed. Heroes who have used magics to change the course of history, and to forge a new future for our kingdom and all the people of Antalia. Heroes that have risked everything, and gained results beyond our greatest expectations.

Warrick the Bold brings his fourth Army to join us in removing the interlopers, forty thousand veterans strong. The Conclave of Houses brings support as well, dwarves and humans to join our ranks. Our resolve is firmed, our cause is just, and our armies are prepared.

The Last Battle for the control of Antalia shall be in Loth Savrylle, in the south of the Nykresi Conclave. When the dust settles, when the funeral rites have been said, when the loved ones that have been lost are mourned, and when the blood of the worthy and unworthy alike has been soaked into the land, regardless of the outcome of these battles, we will have accomplished that which we set out for over fifty seasons ago: Total Conquest.

The Judgment is at hand.'

PLAY BY MAIL / PLAY BY EMAIL

Adventurers Guild (Entertainment Plus More)

Dan Buterbaugh conducts - 'The Adventurers Guild Welcoming Ceremony:

The first seasoned member of the Adventurers Guild to welcome the new members is Cy Borg. He clears his throat, then begins.

"So, the simple pleasures of a full belly, a stout roof and cosy chair by a warm hearth do not suffice for you? You are stronger, smarter, more resourceful than your kindred? Your spirit burns hot for that beyond the mundane? Then welcome to the Adventurers Guild.

Here Human, Elf, Centaur, all races, any individual with sufficient desire and will are welcome. The best instructors of the Realm await your beck and call. Choose what abilities, equipment and strategy suit your pleasure, then you will be matched against your peers in personal combat. Use the experience and knowledge gained from these combats to increase your abilities.

Friends and comrades you'll gain as well, rivals and enemies there'll also be. For the later if you so choose, combat can be arranged up to and including a death match. However, as with any personal challenge, only by mutual consent can any contest occur. You need not fear at being dragged unready into mortal combat. And when you deem yourself ready there is a vast world to explore.

There are ancient temples rife with mystic powers to be mastered. Ruins of forgotten civilizations strewn with periapts of power to be searched. Perhaps lands teaming with Amazons, Demons and other peoples very much alive will be

to your tastes? Will you blaze a trail to places yet to be scored by the footprint of mortals? This is not a land where all that is to be discovered has been found. It is ever changing, ever growing, new places, new gods and most important new adventures.

My friends, the thirst for adventure is the call of Destiny. It speaks to the imagination and offers play to the confined powers of the spirit. Join us and set free the potential that lies within, the Adventures Guild awaits."

With the hint of a smile, Cy Borg looks over the new members one more time before walking back to his seat.

Next to address the new members is a wild-looking lizardman named Stonedog.

"No time for fancy speeches. There is much to do at the Asylum. My advice to you is this: visit <http://home.earthlink.net/~danbuter/AGPage.html> and much will be revealed."

Last up is a strangely-dressed human who seems very uncomfortable in front of this crowd that includes goblins, ogres, centaurs and even less recognizable beings. The Guild leader, Killian, introduces him as Dave, who is of the Player race, and from a distant land called Real Life. Dave glances around nervously, then begins.

David Saville - "Killian asked that I give you beginners some advice, so here goes. I am a player of extremes. My brutes are as big as they can be and my dodgers are small (i.e. Maug (96" human berserker) and Paz (36" goblin dodger)). I usually weight Strength and Dexterity heavily. In the short term, this will result in a great win/loss percentage. In the long term, Stamina and Cunning become more and more important and will eventually come back to haunt you. Some general guidelines: Develop a long term goal and stick to it. Do not expect to dodge with tall or heavy characters. Rather than balancing your stats, pick at least one area to excel in and choose a strategy to complement this.

High Strength: Think about heavy weapons or heavy armor to either give you a one punch ability or staying power.

High Dexterity: Think about dodging. Overwhelm your opponents with many attacks.

High Stamina: Staying power. Generally not a good idea to concentrate on stamina.

High Cunning: KP skills. Good for spell casters and well rounded

adventurers. Strive to fight at no encumbrance.

Get to your weapons' primary range and stay there. Attack as often as you can (5% or lower chance to hit). Never use anything at untrained. Do not waste much time or energy on spells that are only trained. For the non-human races, concentrate on what you are good at. Elves should depend on spells, ogres on berserk rage, etc. Use your secondary strategy to rest. Go all out in your primary strategy."

Dave slips his note cards into his pocket before saying "Good Luck" to the new members, and disappearing in a dazzling multi-color display.

"Before this Welcoming ceremony is declared over," says Killian, "I want to remind everyone that more information can be found at www.epmgames.com. Okay then, meeting is finished."

Ancient Empires (Jason Oates)

Andy Kendall - 'Game 10 - a new one for me, and I'm still muddling along trying to work out what to do. Hopefully I won't come into contact with anyone before I've worked it out. The great military offensive has begun, taking over a village with no resistance (hurrah!). First requirement is to find some metal to build with, and to feed the people properly.'

Aspects of Might (Silver Dreamer)

Robin Orman - 'I recently started in this game under a free character offer, similar to the one in Madhouse's Broken Lands. The game is interesting so far, based around the Tarot cards, and uses Madhouse's NeXus game engine. Players pay co-operatively, helping to rebuild a world shattered long ago by the departure of the Aspects (the manifestations of the Tarot arcana). Distinct from other NeXus games in the way that paying players have access to Feasibility Studies, which are hand-moderated orders that can affect the computer-moderated world, usually through the introduction of new technologies, more advanced techniques or the like.'

Assyria's End (Agema Publications)

Chris Morris - 'Continues to be gripping, with war, intrigue and manipulation bubbling away. The Assyrian Empire is on the verge of collapse.'

Destiny (Madhouse)

Robin Orman - 'The "Flying Dustbin", a ship flagged as a pirate by the authorities, has been attacked by a group of Stellar Patrol vessels, including one of my ships. The captain (who may or may not be the villainous Cut Throat Jake) has fled to the orbit of a nearby spacedock, leaving us with the dilemma of how to keep track of him. Land and search the station? Remain in orbit to keep them

pinned? Or keep following them in case they continue to flee? Law enforcement is no walk-in-the-park!"

Andy Kendall - 'I can now afford to repair the ship, and will then head off somewhere (probably going boldly) into space to find out if anything's happening out there. Just had a nasty rash of space dragons, space leviathans, space mantises, and just odd things which attacked passersby. I've only had one ship-to-ship fight, which took several turns as we were both armed with popguns (might as well have been for all the effect we had), and have only been hit by one comet. Not terribly complicated to play, but quite fun.'

Destiny - Star Marines (Madhouse)

Robin Orman - Just to show that military equipment doesn't change much, even in the far future, "Mad" Max Stone is beating a hasty retreat from the Kztich-infested tunnels beneath Tariah, after his experimental Etherwave Generator (a sort of mind-frying gun) unexpectedly broke down. Back at the landing pads, the civilian Max rescued earlier has narrowly escaped death at the hands of a rogue marine (who's since been neutralised), and is about to register for the first off-planet shuttle. Chalk one up for the good guys!

DungeonWorld (Madhouse)

Robin Orman - 'Rejuvenated and better-equipped from his time in the Black Tower, Alamar has now returned to the land of the living, and is back in the bowels of the Pits of Poldoon. Fortunately, no more deadly Mindreavers have been encountered, and the group has set off once more in search of fame and fortune... conspicuously avoiding the hall where the Mindreavers were last encountered...'

Michael Grant - 'How long have I wandered down here alone? Travelling further and further into this confounded maze. Lucky have I been in the abundance of booty left lying around by the nearby rabid zombies. They are a plague upon this place. Let them feel the bite of my trusty new battle axe and let the protection of my gleaming plate mail dull their claws. Beware foul beasts, for I am here to lay you all to a final rest. May my axe release you from your accursed unlfe - Grishok Axehand.'

DungeonWorld: Estates (Madhouse)

David Callan - 'This is fun! Got my crops planted and the estate looking good, when my Lord and Master gets a kicking from a couple of spirits and looks likely to die in the coming turn, which will render me out of the game! *Aagghh!*'

DungeonWorld - Broken Lands (Madhouse)

Robin Orman - 'Much to report from the continuing (mis)adventures of our hero, the ever lovable rogue, Gaelan. First comes the sad news of the passing of Adhira Cryztalgazer, enchantress and restaurant entrepreneur, who fell beneath the blades of several crazed Bufo Warriors (frog men). They probably thought she was going to put them in a soup. Ah well. Moving on, Gaelan and Confusicus the monk - after some shenanigans with magical boats on the lake - are nearing the stairs leading out of the Keldassi Flow. While some intrepid folks have already ventured down one stairwell to the next level (the fifth: Infernia), Gaelan has recently been approached by a brave dragon-slayer, who believes he has found the fabled "Stairwell to the Surface"... Behind a locked door. It appears Gaelan's special talents will be needed to escape this dreadful dungeon, but where there's a rogue, there's a way...'

Michael Grant - 'Once again the deadly Radiation sickness has me in its icy clutches. And another race to find and use a healing archway is on (just don't let me die within sight of one).

There used to be three of us, with an occasional summoned zombie or skeleton to keep us company. Nathaniel de Pewse has raced on down to the lower level. Brother Cadfael journeys about a day behind me, hastening to catch up. Soon our small company will regroup and prepare to conquer the dungeon below (Gulp!). At least I now carry enough spare equipment to consider seeking a trader. Just hope there's one nearby - Landra Nightwarden (Female Human Necromancer)'

DungeonWorld - Frontier (Madhouse)

Robin Orman - 'Chunthalaka has finally been cured of the poison that ailed him, courtesy of a friendly Witch Doctor, and is now ready to descend into the ruins of the Old Imperial Palace to help those exploring down there. Or rather, almost ready, since he's waiting for another native - the scout Chakram - to arrive. But maybe Chunthalaka will take shelter just inside for a bit, what with the big cats and hostile tribal warriors about... It's a real jungle out there...'

Michael Grant - 'I have joined forces with two others: a Midnight Elven warriorress called Kassie and a Tribal warrior named Chunthalaka. There is definitely strength in numbers here as this land is ferocious in nature. The sight of a stampeding elephant is enough to shake the most stalwart heart.

We have entered a dark haunted palace to the northeast side of Freedom

Rivers. Would that we were together down here but Chunthalaka awaits a witch doctor to cure his poison in the clearing above. Please be quick, old friend, for we need your bright spear by our side once more. We have already been attacked by vicious undead in the darkness. They strike hard and fast and give no quarter. Many down here are in a similar jeopardy: outnumbered and in desperate need of aid and supplies. A beautiful Centaur and a friendly priestess have been slain before my eyes this very day. Shere G'Ar and Henrietta you shall be avenged - Human Ranger Anakine Oakhart (Nature Girl to her friends)'

DungeonWorld - Kyr (Madhouse)

Robin Orman - 'Madhouse's (amazing) offer of a hundred free turns for two characters (if played by email) proved to be too good to resist (that's about four years free play!). So it is that Wahid bin Ithyr, a dervish (a kind of assassin/blade master character), and Talib al Haqq, a djan (a mystic who summons and controls djinni through the use of special gems), have appeared in the city of Rasiad, in the land of Kyr. In a flea market, no less. They're currently bartering for equipment, prior to heading out of the city to find a promising dungeon to plunder - preferably in the company of like-minded individuals, for safety...'

Einstein's Lot (Ulaidh Games)

Carol Mulholland - 'Yikes! We've narrowly escaped getting bitten by a vampire. So they weren't just a rumour after all. Not a sexy Christopher Lee-type vampire, though, but a bedraggled young woman lurking beside a cash machine. Clearly the forces of darkness aren't up to Sexy. Wonder where she stores her coffin? - in the bank vaults, maybe?'

En Garde! Dangerous Liaisons (Jerry Spencer)

Nick Hawcroft - '*Potted extracts from the diary of Didier Verouine, Paris fop: October 1565:* Arrived in paris with a purse full of crowns (daddy's a very wealthy knight, don'tcha know). Stress of journey relieved by visit to that infamous bordello, The Veils of Desdemona. Now I can focus my mind on climbing the social ladder.

December: By now, have ingratiated myself with the powerful Court faction by purchasing the rank of major in the Royal Marines. The uniform impressed the ladies - I have taken the beautiful yet ambitious Michelle Annier as mistress. No longer have the itch to go to the bawdy house. Joined the French Royal Society after submitting a dubious thesis. His Most Christian Majesty sometimes attends meetings - can't do my status any harm.

February 1566: Enjoyed some success at my club Blue Gables, winning thirty crowns on the gambling tables. My luck was soon wiped out at Longchamp - I bet on some old nag and lost a hundred.'

May: Dumped Michelle after she was tempted by a mystery admirer. If I ever find out who it was... Wooed Caroline du Suisse with exotic fruits and pastries and was soon invited to her boudoir. Must remember not to call out "Michelle". *Summer:* Led a battalion of marines on campaign against the Spanish. Managed to find time to engage in a little espionage in the Balearics which bolstered my reputation with the Court.

October: Attended a party at the mansion of Viscount Bezukhov, but the event was marred after someone hired three ruffians to ambush the host in his stables. It appears to have been a diversion as the Viscount's private rooms were later found to have been rifled.

November: My play at the Theatre Royal - "Eeh, Manuel! The bawdy yarn of a Yorkshire mill-owner's daughter and her slow-witted Spanish manservant" - was a great success, with a 40% return on investment. I'd consulted a seer beforehand, who suggested I arrange a brawl between rival factions The Companions of Mars and The Queen's Honour, to ensure notoriety - and it worked!

December: Braved the frost of the Champ du Mars to practise cutlass (my regimental weapon) on the straw dummies. Now to find Michelle's suitor. Comte Baldrick, while commanding a frontier regiment in Sapin, fell as he led an attack on a fortified village. Still, at least the Paulettes he was controlling are now up for grabs. I'll make a bid for the Ward of Lady Clarice de Starling, but I'll need to use my mistress's influence to stand half a chance. A bribe might help. I can marry the young girl off by December which should earn a pretty penny, as long as the King doesn't get involved.

So much to chronicle. Who would have thought the alluring Beau Ti'ful would turn out to be a spy for the Duke of Milan? Almost as scandalous as the way the Commissioner of Publick Safetie dropped the charges. Unseen hands at work, methinks. My trading company "The New World Tobacco Company" is still seeking investment. Have I sunk my capital into a turkey?

I was knighted after the Spanish campaign following my daring exploits boarding the enemy flagship and despatching two officers into the drink. Mother would have been so proud.

Thankfully I avoided the worst of the riots in Paris, sparked by the vote in favour of a Weapons Tax. Parlement was set ablaze and the Military Governor was forced to fire warning salvos at the mob to force it to disperse.

Life is never dull, although one wishes there were more characters with whom to share the adventure. Now, if I were to publish my diary...

Galaxy (Rebus Games)

Antony Dunks - 'Ha ha! Victory is mine! The Ormers have won. How this was achieved is still a mystery to me, though a great deal of credit has to go to my allies the Pioneers, who bore the brunt of the attacks which had they been directed against me, would have certainly cost me first place. In an outcome decided by Victory Points, the Ormers ended up with 44.64, just 1.55 ahead of the Kaners - an opponent that geography meant I never had a chance to meet (thankfully!).

With this the playtest over, attention now turns to the game proper (which should be advertised elsewhere in this issue), which I am looking forwards to with more than a little trepidation, there are some scores to settle, and no doubt a few people who would take a little perverse pleasure from bombing the Ormer Homeworld to dust.

PS - for those that do not know (and who would), an Ormer is a slow moving shellfish...

Gladius et Pilum (Quirxel Games)

David Callan - 'The best of wargames and the mother of Austerlitz! I have been playing a dropout position in this great game. Quirxel are looking for more international players to fill a new English Language Game. This game has a similar combat system as Austerlitz, but the economic side is a lot more complex and fun.'

La Gloire du Roi (Agema Publications)

Chris Morris - 'The flexibility of this game is astonishing. Richard is able to devise rules for anything, it seems. Industrial villages, joint stock companies, military regulations, agricultural colleges etc etc.'

LTWars (Mike Absolom)

Robin Orman - 'I'm on the waiting list for the second playtest, and am eagerly looking forward to game start. Come on people, a free playtest of a game of gang warfare in the London Underground - what are you waiting for?'

[This game has been running for years now, but it's in playtest because it's now in the hands of a new GM, who wants to be sure that he can handle it correctly.]

Middle Earth: Third Age 1650 (MEPBM Games)

Colin Forbes - 'I've been playing this game for twelve years! Whilst the first flush of enthusiasm has passed, two games still hold my full attention and I probably spend more time on them than I have ever done with a game. The first

is a game of the Gunboat variation - in this players are not permitted to communicate with each other. This leads to hours of speculation and map-making, though I should really only recommend this to experienced players. My other favourite game owes its success to the team I play with. Beginning with a bunch of newbies three games ago, we have built an international team (British, Greek and Australian) which is second to none I have ever played this game with. The team discusses tactics from every conceivable angle without the need for any formal team captain. As a result we have now won three games (out of three) and are doing rather well in our fourth. This is Middle Earth as it is meant to be played!'

Monster Island (KJC Games)

Michael Grant - 'Just started in Monster Island with a Norman called Haliok. The idea of working on a character's monsterliness stat should give you an idea of how serious a game this is. Thanks to my Quest friends for recommending this one. Sorry it took so long to get round to filling in the on line turncard. So far I have battled, created, quested, gathered, hunted and jazzersized my way through three turns. Give this one a try for a refreshing break from the intensity of most PBMs. Bags of fun to be had by all.'

Primvs inter Pares (Interesting Times)

Paul Appleby - 'A while ago I sacrificed my first human. When I was first in Carthage, sacrificing huge numbers of coins was the done thing, but human sacrifice is increasing (historically accurate). Sorry, but it's actually babies. However, from our point of view all our myths are about people committing suicide to save the city and that's what we believe these babies are doing. Personally I'm making a big mess of my political career but nothing irreparable, and planning to go on a business trip to Sicily.

Andy Kendall - 'Paul Appleby is dreaming! Much as I would like some new sane and morally upright families in Rome (and the gods know the game needs fresh blood), nothing has come of advocating this approach, and they'll have to be careful. Two "morally upright families" have taken to murder, theft, arson against their enemies, and happily support deliberately criminal actions. Recent actions involve a criminal pardoning other criminals, supported by the criminals being pardoned. Naturally they have lost no support over this, despite some superficial tutting. No new players have joined in about a year, although one or two returnees are now present. A big edit in January has altered the game balance, partially debasing the strategy used in the past, and eroding longterm support. The GMs could not provide an assessment of its effect (worrying), but claim it has no one-sided effect (practice suggests otherwise). Being promised the support of my current supporters should someone seek to abuse the edit's effect is not

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VALKYRIE

very comforting. Meanwhile numerous changes appear to happen unannounced - towns now rebel/surrender if a battle takes place within a hundred miles.

It might be accurate to history in some ways though - half of Rome are so busy feathering their own nests/murdering their enemies that the republic falls into disrepair held together by a very small number.'

[We offered Right of Reply to the GM...]

Darryl Ashing - 'New players are always welcome in Rome (and indeed other areas of the game) and we have had a few over the last year.

I shall say that in a game of politics set in the classical era of Rome then a certain amount of unpleasantness (in game!) is unavoidable. After all the brothers Gracchi both died horrible deaths as did one Julius Caesar (though he's a bit after our time) and many others suffered abuse etc.

Just because modern politics (in Britain at least) does not regard literal murder as a tool of governance does not mean that in other times and places this is not acceptable. A key feature of the game is that the players have to enforce the "rules", if they don't then they might as well not exist. In this case several magistrates had the opportunity to take action and for a variety of reasons (sympathy for criminal, unwillingness to spend orders etc) did not.

On the specific statements:

The big change: I would have to say this is your correspondent's opinion - many other long term players are happy. There's no current proof that it has this "one-sided effect". We did assess the changes but didn't want to reveal all "secrets". Certainly of no relevance to the lack of new players, where we understand difficulties of breaking in to a factional political game with long term factions.

The numerous unannounced changes are hard to think of. We have had a rule that all changes are announced one month before implementation, and sometimes delayed if there is sufficient feedback (the big change in January was in fact delayed several times until we felt we had got it "right"). I have consulted with the current referee and the moderator and neither of them can recall any unannounced changes, I am happy for your correspondent to cite examples and will own up if wrong.

I should point out that in the eighteen months I was moderator as many changes were rolled out as in the previous 7 years. All had to be passed through me and I was rigorous about the one month rule.

The towns rebelling etc has actually been a feature of the game since shortly after I joined (it was an on going discussion I was having with the referee at the time when I was a player). Thus it is at least eighteen months old Perhaps your correspondent has forgotten this as Rome has not been militarily active for some time. Also it is a "discretionary" action in that the moderator has to approve each change for reasonableness (one of the areas where I feel this game is superior to a purely mechanical game). It was also one of the first changes that was announced with a month's notice.

As for Romans feathering their own nests, the real lot did so why not the game ones? Seriously, the game was designed for people to support Rome by the kudos that they gain by so doing not because it is the RIGHT thing to do. I fear if your correspondent does not like this aspect then he is probably playing the wrong game.

On a general note, this game is a simulation of politics. A brief review of even modern day politics will demonstrate that this is not a sport for people with very thin skins. We take every effort to be fair and even-handed (when we take abuse from all sides then we are probably about right). My personal feeling is that it is relatively easy to progress in Rome at present as a new player, as you will be courted by all sides.'

Prometheus (Hunky Monkey)

Andy Kendall - 'Suffered from long delays over Christmas, but now regular again. Not many players left in the game 1, and one of those is out of sight. I think terrain makes a huge impact - if you can't get oil/ore, you'll fall behind (in game 2 I have almost no ore, or places to look for it). Much like the boardgame Civilisation in play - learn technology advances, build things with them, shoot things, learn more technologies. Quite entertaining with some orders only showing their worth after much thought (or flash of understanding). Each turn has a nominal date range, but it's not really meaningful. Allegedly in 1985 currently, I can build biplanes. Mind you my phalanx is still going strong. The game has a maximum order limit which is harsh, but works well in practice - I always have to cross out about ten "wants" due to this.'

Quest GME (KJC Games)

Michael Grant - 'Welcome to the wonderful world of Quest. Many developments and changes are planned at the moment. To begin with you can now recruit subclasses from turn 5 onwards. A welcome amendment, as you used to have to wait until after turn 20. Other changes include modifications to certain character classes, weapons ranges, weapon speeds and armour encumbrance. I'm looking forward to seeing these alterations in action.

What's hot at the moment, I hear you ask? Halfblood berserkers, Elven archers, long bows, spears and flails. Armour configurations vary depending on whom you ask. Many are now travelling in cloth, leather or with no armour at all (if you can imagine such a thing!) and using small shields as these allow for greater combative speed. The bulkier plate mail and large shields tend to be more encumbering, so slow down combat attacks. Still it's a personal choice. Would your knight be seen dead in anything other than the finest suit of magical plate mail or your Dwarven footman without a large shield? Decisions, decisions.

Game 31 Naralia: What I can only describe as being a dark deed has been committed this day. Clotho Shardik, leader of The Dark Ones alliance, has been unjustly slain in battle by a Holy Ghosts party. Despite his misleadingly titled alliance he's proven himself to be a valiant friend to all. Simply because he works for the Magic Guild and shrouds himself in mystery does not give others the right to attack. What's more, an unknown artefact is now in the hands of the Holy Ghosts who simply refuse to return it to its rightful owner. We shall have to see if this trouble leads to all out war. All the alliances are now choosing sides and offering support. The fine print in ancient treaties is being closely examined for get-out clauses as I write. The time has come to prepare for War! Fetch my chain mail and war hammer.'

Wayne Yeadon - 'The Rank 3 initiation tasks for alliances still have to be completed in most cases, meaning that no alliance (AFAIK) has achieved such status yet. Some aspects of moderation have been delayed, mainly due to work being done on the combat routines and other tweaks to the programming. If everything works according to plan, the game is going to be much more interesting, with a fairer balance between different party setups. especially those making use of the subclass characters. I'm really looking forward to seeing how the game evolves over the coming months.'

Serim Ral (Harlequin)

Andy Kendall - 'Although two allies have dropped out, a few others have come forward. Despite not really having picked up the subtleties of the game, I have the largest empire currently, although it is under attack from two sides. I also have the most enemies against me, which makes for an interesting time. Orders do seem to occasionally not work for a reason I can't work out, but that is apparently common across the game. Equally, every now and then something beneficial occurs, though, so I think it evens itself out.'

Space Troopers (KJC Games)

Wayne Yeadon - 'Working with other squads and co-ordinating actions within a corp, proves to be an effective way of enjoying this game more. Some corp squads do not do this, seeming to prefer taking on missions, which is more of a solo pursuit. When you work with your fellow corp members, you can start to engage in Corps wars against other squads and attack their Dropzones and equipment. A field tech is a must-have in any squad if you want to travel any real distance, as you are restricted to your own dropzones for re-equipping and training without one. The squads I'm co-ordinating with, have achieved much more by use of the field techs' abilities and we continue to knock the stuffing out of the enemy! Great fun.'

Star Fleet Warlord (Pagoda Games)

Robin Orman - 'EH6 (the UK vs US historical team game) has recently drawn to a close, with the UK Alliance team (including yours truly) accepting the unconditional surrender of the US Coalition forces. The victorious Alliance scraped through without losing a single position (although it looked tight for my Kzinti at one point, with them only just managing to recapture their homeworld before being knocked out), whilst the Coalition lost both Klingon players to the might of the Southern Federation. The US team has since been in contact with us, and a re-match is being prepared. The UK will be playing the Coalition this time, and I shall be commanding the combined forces of the Imperial Romulans and the Romulan Republic. Engage the cloaking device!

E16 (standard rules) is teetering on the brink of closure, with the Tribble Trouble and Assimilators corporations vying to be first past the finishing line. There's always the possibility of a last-minute upset, but I think my chances are fairly slim. Still, I've avoided being knocked out (touch wood!), and am fairly high on the scoreboard - not bad for my first standard game.'

Starquest (Harlequin Games)

David Callan - 'Just heard that game 6 is stopping - only two players left - and that there will be no more games. Not happy, but if Harlequin cannot get players... Game 6 was a slow game, never met another player, though communicated with a couple. Shame. I always enjoyed it.'

SuperNova II ()

David Callan - 'Well it has returned and appears to have collected a lot of players despite the extremely high turn fees. \$6.00/30 orders for a computer-

moderated PBM. I do not believe you can play the game successfully without playing a min of 60 orders per turn. At the moment the game is little more than an expensive playtest as the code is being developed as players play. There are advantages and disadvantages to this method of running a game. The disadvantage is that as the rules change players can suffer, a good example was the rules/code surrounding the surveying of Warp Points. A recent change left many players with ships stranded in systems with no way out! Of course the advantage is that the GMs have the opportunity of listening to players and making enhancements. All in all it is expensive and at the moment not good value for money.'

The Thumping of Ground 8 (Agema Publications)

Paul Appleby - 'Agema managed to send me a flyer for my birthday, so how could I resist? I decided to join (The Thumping of) Ground 8 despite never having played an s/f game before. It's expanding - just like the universe! - with 18 players (it looks like - you can't tell who are NPCs with Agema) on turn 1, 24 by turn 3. I have to admit I'm impressed with the company admin - they picked up on £3.60 credit that I had remaining from a previous game, which must have been well over two years ago.

In the game, well, it's an extremely hostile environment and I had a pretty rotten turn 2, losing one ship to an amoebic spatial anomaly - the GM! - and then a second to apparently incompetence by another (presumed) player's gunnery officer, I think the idea of piracy is probably capturing stuff to sell or ransom, not reducing unarmed ships to their component atoms, chaps. It really wound me up for most of the day, which is probably a tribute the in-game atmosphere - the brutal and amoral one of *Alien* and *Outland*. Preserving this is why all diplomacy has to be in character and no silly names for characters or units are allowed. Disgraceful - my friend Biggus Diccus shall hear of this!'

Tribenet (Peter Rzechorzek)

David Callan - 'Excellent game, regular turnaround, great player interaction. The Macedon have just survived their third winter and have found iron, coal and tin. It's now time to end the nomadic existence and try their hand at City building.'

ONLINE GAMING

Dark Age of Camelot

Colin Forbes - 'A Rumours comment will not suffice to describe this game. It threatens to devour what remains of my life. Review to follow ...'

BOARDGAMES

Lord of the Rings (Hasbro)

Robert Rees - 'I take the claims of those who have "cracked" this game and find it "too easy" with a pinch of salt. Having owned it for a few years now I have never seen all the hobbits get to Mount Doom (although three players does sometimes seem a bit easier than four).

What makes this game truly fantastic for me is the co-operative element of play. "Taking one for team" as someone else put it is far different from being knocked out of a conventional confrontation boardgame. The fact that despite lacking the inter-player rivalry it remains devilishly engaging as Sauron marches across Middle Earth is testament to a really innovative design. It also has the distinction I think of being about the only family game that cannot lead to arguments on Christmas Day.

Another impressive thing is that here is a game that despite being sold in outlets as wide as WH Smiths and various department stores is not "dumbed down" and refuses to insult the intelligence of its players.'

PBM FIRMS

Madhouse

Andy Kendall - 'The service is its usual - very good. A notable point for me as a postal player was, when a turn was delayed for a few days, it had a note with it advising of an extended deadline. I greatly appreciate being informed of such things in such ways.'

Harlequin Games

Andy Kendall - 'Had a nasty shock. While a turn said orders "no later than Weds", a turn sent in the afternoon missed the running time. I was pretty irritated by that (a delay in answering a query made that worse, although repetition of the delay has now been prevented). I still object to a deadline being misrepresented (as it seems to me), but some editing of time-critical game issues was done to prevent serious damage.'

Feedback on Issue 101

ISSUE 101 scored a feisty 8.7. So far, everyone seems to agree with **Wayne Yeadon** that 'the new style, covering all types of gaming, is better for the longevity of the magazine as a whole and I enjoy it too'. Favourite articles included Rumours, Harnmaster, Godfather, Battle Of The Five Armies, Diplomacy ('I read through imagining the chaos that would evolve should beer be introduced to the equation' - **Larry Deyell**) and Worlds Apart. On Screen was both praised and disliked (by different readers, of course!), while Merchant Empires, Destiny and sports articles were named by people who avoid games with s/f and sports themes rather than because the articles were badly written. 'Not enough chat!' grumbles **Jack Turner**, who should be happy with issue 102.

Question 4 asked about possible ways to improve Newsdesk. The idea of a regular competition was your favourite of the possible ways ('could be fun' - **Paul Appleby**; 'Free turns, RPGs, Boardgames, all expenses paid trip to conventions, chance to meet the game designers/GMs and vouchers for Leisure Games or other gaming shops? As you can see, I reaaaaally like this idea a lot' - **Michael Grant**, eek!), though more artwork was also approved. Several of you thought things are fine as they are, but we'll see what we can do, honest: no promises, though ...

Question 5 asked about dirty folds. No-one who replied has been the victim of a major dirty fold, indicating, I hope, that these are not common nowadays ('I've never been seriously stung, though I've had a few games go down on me with small amounts owing' - **Paul Appleby**). Indeed, we've now heard (at second hand, but from a player) that the firm which prompted this question is promising to resume their game: let's hope that this happens before much longer. Oh, and no-one who replied would pay a lot of money up front.

Question 6 asked the biggie: how we can get more people to play games? Well, sounds like there's some work to be done by us all. 'Half the population aren't interested - and could be,' says **Chris Morris**. 'No matter how hard I try, I can't get people I know to play games,' sighs **Wayne Yeadon**, 'They don't understand it in the first place and are just not interested basically. Usually seen as a waste of time, like couldn't you find something better to occupy your time with?' 'Don't be embarrassed about playing games is a good start. But don't over-explain if they aren't really interested. And write your turns on the bus,' suggests **Paul Appleby**. 'Everyone should be told about games,' argues **Michael Grant**, 'I think your brave step forward in digressing from just PBM to PBEM, RPG, boardgames, wargames and computer games is an excellent way forward. It should allow gamers who usually focus on just one type to experiment and enjoy a wider variety of fun just as long as they get to see and hear about Flagship.' 'Someone, somewhere, must need a void filled in their life,' reckons **Larry Deyell**, 'If we all recruited just one person to the cause, that'd be, um, at least 20 people!' 'Maybe if we buy our families boardgames next Christmas and encourage them to play, they'll be hooked on playing games?' suggests **Mark Avery**. Hmm, now that could be an achievable goal, if you appoint yourselves to read and explain the rules: *Lord of the Rings* works pretty well with a family group ...

Thanks to all who replied, with votes and with quotable comments.

[Choose more than one answer if you wish, and feel free to comment.]

- 1 - Please rate this issue from 1 (grungy) to 10 (glorious)
- 2 - Which articles/sections did you most enjoy, and why?
- 3 - Which bored you, and why?
- 4 - Should you delay leaving a game because (a) you've made a commitment to your fellow players, (b) the point in the game's action would make your departure bad news, (c) you feel a loyalty to the moderator?
- 5 -
- 6 -

[Replies welcomed by surface mail to the UK office, or by email to carol@pbmgames.com. By May 4th, please.]

Galactic View

WE'VE BEEN busy checking all the games and firms that we list in *Galactic View*, so you'll see a considerable reduction of those shown as active in our listings this issue. Don't be alarmed by this. We know that moderators are busy people who don't always reply to a query: more names will no doubt trickle back in time! If we've dropped a firm or game that you know exists, get in touch with us. We're cautious of listing moderators without their express permission, but will follow up any corrections.

GV is a list of (mostly) European PBM/PBM firms known by FLAGSHIP to be operating at the time this issue was published. There is no cost to GVs for this listing, which we publish as a service to our readers. GVs listed below are cross-indexed by a code to the game register on the following pages. GVs to whom payment should be made by name are listed by name rather than firm.

UK, EUROPEAN & WEB-BASED GMS	
Ad Infinito Games , PO Box 605, Bromley, Kent BR2 0YQ WEB: www.pbmsports.com EM: danny.mcconnell@virgin.net TEL: 020 8325 2448	McC
Adams, David WEB: www.throneworld.com/lords/lotel04/index.html WEB: www.throneworld.com/lords/lotel01/index.html EM: daveste@oz.net	ADA
Agema Publications , 3 Workop Rd, Off Carlton Rd, Sneyton, Nottingham NG3 2BA WEB: go.to/agema	AGM
Andrews, Colin , 26 Brown Edge Road, Holts, Oldham, OL14 5OG WEB: www.vjastystems.co.uk/ EM: gl3@natrally.co.uk	AND
Baird, Phil , 930 NE 63d Ave, Portland, OR 97213, USA WEB: www.throneworld.com/lords/lotel1/index.html EM: philipbaird@primalnet.com	BAI
Briny En Garder (Terry Crook) , 11 Laurie close, Burniston, Scarborough, N.Yorks, YO13 0JQ WEB: www.brinyengarde.co.uk	BRI
Burrows, Pete, Buzznack PBM , 8 Magnolia Court, Beeston, Nottingham, NG9 3LG WEB: www.buzznackpbfm/freeserve.co.uk EM: pete@buzznackpbfm/freeserve.co.uk TEL/FAX: 0115 9224901 (pre 10pm)	BUR
Central de Joes SL , C/Numancia no. 112-116, 08029 - Barcebona, Spain WEB: www.centraldejoes.net EM: torisnimp@metia.net	CEN
CSPT , Alfred-Bucherstr. 63, 53115 Bonn, Germany WEB: www.the-ashes-of-empire.de/German WEB: home-1online.de/home/ashes_of_empire/ashes2.htm (English) EM: h.tapi@cspp.com	CSP
Dark Wolf Games , BCM Darkwolf, London, WC1N 3XX WEB: www.darkwolf.ie EM: pbm@darkwolf.ie	DWG
Dracs Games , 21 Chippertfield Drive, Kingswood, Bristol BS15 4DP WEB: www.dracsgames.co.uk EM: derak@dracsgames.co.uk TEL: (Derak Rainey): 0117 960173 (9am-6pm Mon-Fri)	DRC
Dreamworld Games WEB: www.logicalsoccer.com/ / www.realtracing.com TEL: 01380 811522	DRE
Entertainment Plus More Games , PO Box 2578, Appleton, WI 54912, USA WEB: www.epmgames.com EM: ag@epmgames.com	EPM
Evans, Paul , 180 Aylsham Drive, Uxbridge UB10 8UF EM: paul@pevans.co.uk	EVA
Faraway Games , 3 Maslem Rd, St Albans, Herts AL4 0GS EM: jgbhons@faraway.co.uk WEB: http://www.faraway.co.uk/	FAR
Flying Buffalo WEB: http://www.flyingbuffalo.com/ EM: rick@flyingbuffalo.com	FBI
Glover, Adrian , 4 Sevanne Court, Lessness Park, Belvedere, Kent, DA17 5BG	GLO
Harlan, Thomas , 3210 East 23rd Street, Tucson, AR 85713, USA WEB: www.throneworld.com/lords EM: thomash@throneworld.com	HAR
Harlequin Games , 340 North Road, Cardiff CF14 3BP WEB: www.harlequingames.com AND www.middleearthgames.com EM: pbm@harlequingames.com TEL: 029 2091 3359 (9-6.30 weekdays) - Middle Earth only TEL: (Ssm Roads): 029 2062 5665 (9-6.30 weekdays) FAX: 029 2062 5532 any time	HAQ

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WEB: www.hunkymonkey.co.uk
EM: ape@hunkymonkey.co.uk
TEL / FAX (Tom Fyfe): 01392 420582 (4 - 8pm & weekends)
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WEB: www.interesting-times.co.uk
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TEL: 07050 658383
FAX: 07050 658384

Kamikaze Games
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KJC Games, FREEPOST, Thornton-Cleveleys, Lancs FY5 3UL
WEB: www.kjcgames.com
EM: enquiry@kjcgames.com
TEL: 01253 866345
Lloyd, Rich, 79 Farmersville Road, Califon, NJ 07830, USA
EM: lord4@throneworld.com
TEL: (908) 832-3176
Madhouse, 6 Alexandra Road, Wisbech, PE13 1HQ
WEB: www.madcentral.com
EM: madcentral@aol.com
TEL: 01945 583811

Oates, Jason, 6 St Georges Rd, Dorchester, Dorset DT1 1PA
WEB: <http://freespace.virgin.net/jason.oates>
EM: jason.oates@virgin.net
TEL/FAX: 01305 251451

Pagoda Games, PO Box 5155, Tamworth, Staffs B77 4QQ
WEB: www.pagodagames.co.uk
EM: orders@pagodagames.co.uk
TEL/FAX: (Keith Buriham): 01827 703251
Mark Palin, Clansmen, 6 Havenwood, Sirelley, Telford, Shropshire, TF3 1FJ
Pinder, Mark, 139 Nelson Way, Lacey Acres, Grimsby, S Humberside DN34 5UJ
WEB: <http://communities.msn.co.uk/ace/horia>
EM: Markpinder@aol.com
TEL: 01472 733430

Quirrel Games, Quirrel Games Gbr, Am Panmolen 7, 47608 Geldern, Germany
EM: quirrelgames@i-online.de
Rebus Games, 70 Greenfield Crescent, Brighton, BN1 8HJ
EM: dominicm@zoom.co.uk
Received Wisdom, 9 Oundle Road, Alwalton, Peterborough PE7 3UP
WEB: www.receivedwisdom.org
EM: std@receivedwisdom.org
Rolling Thunder Games Inc, PO Box 310, Eastlake, CO 80614-0310, USA
EM: supernova@rollingthunder.com

Rzechorzek, Peter
WEB: www.geocities.com/TimeSquare/Alley/2187/tribenet.htm
EM: tribenet@netspace.net.au
SSV Klapp-Bachler OEG Postfach 1205, A-8021, Graz, Austria
WEB: www.heldenwelt.com
EM: ssv-graz@aon.at

Scriven, David, 15 Alandale Grove, Garforth, Leeds, LS25, 1DJ
Sevens Games, 57 Olympia Gardens, Morpeth, Northumberland NE61 1HQ
WEB: www.sark.net/~sark/sevens.htm
EM: arid@nidnet.globalnet.co.uk

Silver Dreamer, 174 Charles St, Greenhalme, Dartford, Kent DA9 9AJ
WEB: www.silverdreamer.com
EM: silverdrea@aol.com
TEL: (Gavin Parker): 01322 387195 (Mon-Fri, 11-6)
Software Simulations, PO Box 2758, Yeovil, Somerset, BA20 2XH
WEB: www.pbmsports.com
EM: peter@pbmsports.com

Spencer, Jerry, 51 Elm Vale, Liverpool L6 8NY
EM: jerry.spencer@liverpool.gov.uk
Supersonic Games, PO Box 1812, Galston, KA4 8WA
EM: sam@asteritz.co.uk
TEL: (Scott, Sam, Chris): 01563 821022; fax 01563 821006
WEB: <http://tempusfugitpbm.co.uk>

Tempus Fugit PBM Productions, 96 Bishopswood Road, Tadley, Hants RG26 4HG
WEB: <http://tempusfugitpbm.co.uk>
EM: enquiries@tempusfugitpbm.co.uk
Terre de Jeux, 88 Avenue de Jussey, 91600 Savigny sur Orge, France
EM: basol@club-internet.fr

Time Patterns, 14 The Hollows, Exmouth, Devon EX8 1QT
WEB: <http://timepatterns.co.uk>
EM: carol@timepatterns.co.uk
TEL/FAX: 01395 276632
Timewyrm, 2A Guinea Street, Exeter, Devon, EX1 1BS
WEB: www.timewyrm.co.uk
EM: collid@timewyrm.co.uk
TEL: (Colin Forbes): 01392 420582

Total Conquest
WEB: www.tout-conquest.com
EM: support@total-conquest.com
Ulaidh Games, 62 Beechgrove Avenue, Belfast BT6 0NF
EM: chrisjan.morris@virgin.net

WOW Games
WEB: <http://www.wow.pbemgame.com/>
Xanthus, Constantine, 7080 NW 75th Street, Pompano Beach, Florida 33067, USA
EM: caren@lycos.com

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SPN

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WWG

XAN



Zine Listings

This list only contains details of Zines and Zine Editors who have been in contact with Flagship.

Abyssinian Prince, Jim Burgess, 664 Smith Street, Providence, RI 02908-4327, USA
(Email: burgess@world.std.com)
Armistice Day, Stephen Agar, 47 Preston Drive, Brighton, BN1 6LA (Email: stephen@armisticeday.com)
Boris the Spider (Email: prhoduc@aol.com)
Carnel Robert Rees, Top Floor Flat, 22 Victoria Square, Clifton, Bristol BS8 4ES. EM: carne1@ialk21.com (www.geocities.com/shudderfix/carnel)
Devolution, Tony Robbins, Lincoln House, Creaton Rd, Hollowell, Northants, NN6 8RP (Email: tony@hollowell.plus.com)
Diplomacy 2000, www.lancedal.demon.co.uk/dip2000/
Flights of Fancy, Philip Honeybone, Email: phil@melly98.freeserve.co.uk
For Whom The Die Rolls, 14 Stepnells, Marsworth, Nr Tring, Herts., HP23 4NQ (Email: Keith@Thomasson.com)
Mission From God, John Harrington, 1 Churchbury Close, Enfield, Middlesex, EN1 3UW (www.fbgames.co.uk mfg@fbgames.co.uk)
Odde, John Marsden, 91 Westwood Avenue, Lowestoft, Suffolk, NR33 9RS (Email: John@odde.online.net)
off-the-shelf, Tom Howell, 365 StormKing Road, Port Angeles, WA 98363, USA (Email: off-the-shelf@olympus.net)
Psychopath, www.psychozine.co.uk (Web publication only.)
Rhein-Neckar-Zine, (German language), Lukas Kautzsch, An der Rosswald 18a, 76229 Karlsruhe, Germany, (Email: lukas@oberfoul.de)
S.O.B., Chris Hassler, 2000 S. Armour Ct., La Habra, CA 90631 USA (Email: chassler@adelphia.net)
Serendipity, John Webley, Töpferreihe 4, 38259 Salzgitter, Germany (Email: jwebley@aol.com)
Strangitude, Paul Sands, Flat 2, 432 Birmingham Rd, Wyde Green, Sutton Coldfield, B72 1Y1 (Email: strangezme@linccone.net)
To Win Just Once, Paul Evans, 180 Aylsham Drive, Uxbridge, UB10 8UF (Email: twjo@pevans.co.uk)
Variable Pig, Jim Reader, Vredelanstraat 20, 3633 EC, Vreeland, NETHERLANDS (Email: cj.reader@wanadoo.nl)

Meets & Conventions

GAMES GAMES GAMES DAYS: Monthly games days hosted by SFC Press at *The Duke of York, 35 New Cavendish St, London W1* from 12.30 onwards. Admission is free. Contact SFC Press, Old Dover Road, London SE3 8SJ; email events@sfcpress.co.uk.

APRIL

GENCON EUROPE: 18th-21st April at *London Olympia*. This may be the last GenCon in Britain: there are plans to combine with the Dutch games festival *Spellen Spektakel*, which takes place every November in Eindhoven. While changing to November seems sensible to catch the Christmas market, we hope that this London GenCon in April will be a success and boost gaming in Britain. There will be an art programme, an auction, a bring and buy, seminars and plenty more, including guests of honour Todd Lockwood and Jonathan Tweet.

www.genconuk.com
www.genconeurope.com

BAYCON 2003: 24th-27th April (the weekend after Easter) at the *Exeter Court Hotel, Kennford, Devon*, running from 1pm on the Thursday to 3pm on Sunday. The main event will be the Victor Ludorum tournament to find the UK National Boardgames Champion. An account is kept of all games played throughout the convention and the player with the best overall score receives the Victor Ludorum Trophy. In addition, there are prizes for the top ten players.

www.downbeat.demon.co.uk/baycon.html

GODSTONE: 26th-27th April, a small gaming convention in *Godstone, Surrey*, will be organised by Guy Arnold if enough interest is shown. Contact:

gnj15a@netscape.net

MAY

MAYCON: 2nd-5th May at the *City Inn, Brindley Place, Birmingham B1 2HW*. Boardgames, Silly drive, Freeforms, Music Quiz, RPG and whatever other games you ask for. Accommodation available in the hotel.

julia_and_chris@computability.demon.co.uk

THE CAMBRIDGE MIND SPORTS OLYMPIAD 2003: 3rd-5th May 2003 at the *Parkside Community College, Cambridge*. The event will feature tournaments for Settlers, Acquire, Puerto Rico, Dwarves, Reiner Rama, plus lots of classic games, like Chess, Go & Othello. The Settlers tournament will be the English heat of the World Championships. All are welcome to attend. Details from:

<http://www.msocambridge.org.uk/>

Macmillan Nurses. Details from:
<http://www.nidome.co.uk/2003bc>
2003bc@nidome.co.uk

GENCON INDY: 24th-27th July in *Indianapolis, USA*

AUGUST

CONJURATION: 1st-3rd August at *New Hall, Cambridge*. British Roleplaying Society convention, with RPG author Ken Hite as Guest of Honour. Accommodation available at £33 per night including breakfast. Membership currently costs £25.

www.conjuration.info

BATLEMASTERS: 29th-31st August at *Leicester University*. The show has been moved from its usual April slot so as not to clash

with GenCon UK 2003. More details to follow, from:

chris@eurolog.org

JUNE

FIASCO: 21st June at *Armley Sports Centre, Carr Crofts, three miles from Leeds city centre*. First run by Leeds Wargames Society as a venue for one of the National wargames competition rounds, it has since grown into a bi-annual event. The winners of the FIASCO awards will be decided at the summer convention. Details from:

fiasco@leedswargamesclub.fsnet.co.uk
www.leedswargamesclub.fsnet.co.uk

JULY

MANORCON: 18th-21st July in *Birmingham*. A large boardgame convention that has been running since 1983. The 200-250 attendees stay and play in a large, modern Hall of Residence with bar and canteen facilities and ample room for both tournament and open gaming. Free car parking is available and the site is also within easy reach of public transport to the city centre with its pubs, restaurants and nightlife. Details: Neil Duncan, MANORCON, 25 Sarum Hill, Basingstoke, Hants RG21 8SS, UK.

<http://devel.diplom.org/manorcon/>

2003BC: Saturday 19th July 2003 in *Bishop's Stortford*. Free onsite parking. 'Living Greyhawk' will be run from 10am-2pm and 'Living Sarbreenar' from 3pm-9pm. Each game costs £5 with all 'profits' going to the

OCTOBER

SPIEL '03: 23rd-26th October, *Essen, Germany*. The biggest games fair in Europe, presenting games of all kinds and toys from around the world. This one's the biggie! Last year there were 148,000 visitors and 573 exhibitors from 21 nations, with plenty of media coverage for the event. Details from:

info@merz-verlag.com

NOVEMBER

GENCON EUROPE SPELLEN SPEKTAKEL: exact date TBA, in *Amsterdam*.

MIDCON: mid-November (exact date TBA) at *Birmingham City Thistle Hotel*. A general boardgames convention held annually since 1980. Attendance around 120-160 people, mostly boardgamers. The convention hosts the National Diplomacy Championships. Details from Midcon, Not Just Stamps, 17 Crendon Street, High Wycombe HP13 6LJ.

midcon@sfcpress.co.uk

www.sfcpress.co.uk/Events/Midcon/index.htm

Flagship welcomes news of any games related convention, pubmeet etc



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