

FLAGSHIP

THE MAGAZINE FOR GAMERS

**Board & Card Games,
Computer Games, Play-by-Email,
Roleplaying , Conventions ...**

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

A Thousand Worlds
A Thousand Dreams
An Infinity of Possibilities

One is the result of

Legions

www.legions.com

REPORT FROM THE BRIDGE

Winter Cordials

WELCOME to Flagship 105! We hope this issue will prove a stay and satisfaction for you now that winter has at last arrived. Well, unless you're reading this in the antipodes, of course, where we hope you'll read it by your barbecue. We've lots of material here about all sorts of fascinating games, which we hope you'll find fun wherever you live.

As your editor I'm always amused by how different each issue is from the one before it. Game-playing is such a lively hobby that there's always something new coming along to write about.

Also, it's always inspiring for me to see how much of *Flagship* comes directly from you, our readers: you really care about the games you play and aren't afraid to say so. Oh, one policy which we maintain and which is worth mentioning here is that we do need your real name for anything which we publish. We're happy enough to print reviews and letters with pseudonyms as long as we know what your name is, but we'll always show this real name of yours in our *Rumours from the Front* section. While I'm on the subject, I'll add that in *Rumours* our policy is to offer moderators Right of Reply if a comment criticises them personally, but not if it criticises the game. We'd welcome more comments on a greater variety of games, too. Regular readers will know all this, but there's no harm in telling new readers how we handle stuff. We do try to be fair!

As always, we've plenty of lively discussion here as well as our news and reviews. By some strange chance there's an emphasis on reviews of s/f games, but this isn't altogether intentional, it's just the way the dice have rolled. Yes, I have a personal affection for s/f games, but I'm well aware that they're not to everyone's taste. These are all good games, however. And heck, there's plenty of other material as well.

I hope that the postal workers' unofficial strike action won't delay copies reaching you. The south-east seems to have been hit worst, as I write, with no end yet in sight ...

Christmas approaches. I was born on Christmas day - hence my personal name - so I have to struggle a bit not to be rather negative about the festival as a whole. However, I always remind myself that Christmas is the only feast which we Brits celebrate together, and of course it's good to have a chance to put our feet up and settle down to some uninterrupted games playing. I'm sure I'll be getting all soppy about my grand-daughter Emily's first Christmas, though maybe she'll still be a bit too young for playing more games than peep-boo at ten months.

Are you looking for a suitable Christmas present for your friends? Why not send them a Flagship subscription? We'll include a free Christmas card for them in your name, and add one issue to your subscription by way of thanks.

Our best wishes to you all for the festive season: have a splendid time!

Carol



FLAGSHIP

#105, Dec/Jan 2003/4

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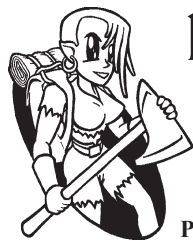
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Contributions welcomed for Flagship 106. By January 9th, please.

NEWSDESK PBM



ROLEPLAYING GAMES

Did you once play **Hunting II** and/or **Psyche** with **Dave Cooksey**? If so, you'll know

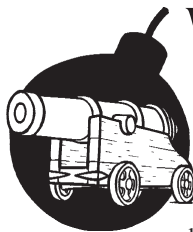
that Dave hasn't been running his games for several years, so it's good news that he's now ready to send updates and turns to all his former players. He asks you to contact him with your current address, either at his postal address or by email: Dave Cooksey, 2 Pemerton Road, Basingstoke, Hants RG21 5LW. dave.cooksey@btinternet.com

It's early days yet, but we hear that **Ulaidh Games** are working on a role-playing game set in and around the Roman Empire from 395AD onwards, to be called **Roma Capta**. It allows for its players to be commanders of military units, and to try to defend/break the frontiers or, indeed, to try to assemble factions to gain control of the Empire.

The key point which Ulaidh's Chris Morris emphasises is that micro-management won't be possible, because it couldn't be done then. 'A general in Dover couldn't expect to supervise the detailed activities of a cohort in Portsmouth (or Dover, for that matter!).' The personal side is finished, and so is the tactical. Ulaidh are now working on the strategic elements ('how is it that the Picts, Scots and Saxons all know to attack now?') and on the interfaces between the three. One interesting problem is scaling, to ensure that events move as fast at legionary level as at emperor level, 'so that a husband with a grudge doesn't spend the game equivalent of six months creeping into the palace with a sharp knife.' More news as the design progresses.

chrisjan.morris@virgin.net

Mark Pinder has been developing a web community for his long-running **Lands of Elvaria**, and has even started putting a listing on Ebay for email startups. He can accept payments by PayPal. His web site now has a *special offer* which he is also throwing open to Flagship readers who wish to play by email. With this, you can claim the start up and three turns for only £5.00, which is a pretty good offer. All game material is either emailed you as word documents and jpg pictures or it can be downloaded from the site. Though the game has been running for yonks, there are areas where you can start as a new player without running into experienced players.



WARGAMES

As well as collecting players for several games of their **World Wide Battle Plan**, **Flying Buffalo Inc** are also looking standby players to take up any positions that are vacated. This allows you to play at a reduced fee, so can be a cheaper way to learn to play the game.

Two variants which are just starting are a two-week Equal Forces game, and a nine-player game where you can play either China, Germany, Great Britain, Russia or the USA for \$5 a turn, or Australia, Brazil, Israel, or South Africa for \$3 per turn. A third, unusual variant, called the Alien Invasion WW game, will give each player 50 armies off the map. On the first turn you're given the email address of everyone who's in the game, and each turn you're given five more armies, also off the map. So you have to decide where to place them, and are allowed to put any number of your 'off the map' armies into any single sea space on the map. This means you can't ever be wiped out, as you always get five more armies next turn, and it's possible to build the armies up by not putting in orders (you won't be charged if you don't send orders, either). To win, only one player must occupy any spaces on the map.

flyingbuffalo.com

Historical wargamers will be interested to hear that Agema Publications' Napoleonic Battles has entered its third version, so is now **Napoleonic Battles III**, for fairly obvious reasons! The main difference is the new graphics, with full-colour units and map symbols in use on the card maps; also infantry units especially have more tactical orders that they can use. For example, they can break forward to run and then try to rally back into formation around the flag, or they can lie down to lessen the effectiveness of enemy artillery fire, or turn about their rear rank to face an attack from behind (and so on, you get the gist).

A campaign version of Napoleonic Battles is in the offing, this time being a clash between Napoleon and his opponents, in Germany. If you would like to take part, let Agema know. You will need the Napoleonic Battles rules (price £6 post free) and game turns will remain at the standard £3.50 tariff. Agema's Richard Watts advises interested players to try out a standard game of NB first to make sure you like it, as

dropping out during the campaign would let down your allies. However, they don't insist you try the purely tactical game first if you feel confident enough to dive into the campaign.

Agema's **PanzerGruppe II** and **WW1 Battles** are also now blessed with full-colour graphics, including icons for aircraft and a rather nifty shell explosion.

go.to/agema

KJC Games are expecting to start the bigger map game of **It's a Crime!** very soon, as there aren't many places left unfilled in it now. They were intending to start it as game 36, but as the larger number of players took a while to assemble, it's now going to be game 39.

So how does this variant differ from the standard game? The map is bigger, of course, at 99x99, and the gangs will be spread out more widely. For this game, too, all players will be placed in random starting positions.

kjcgames.com

Jason Oates is offering **Ancient Empires 10** on the generous terms of a free startup and two turns credit. He reports that the new design is acting very well, to produce a much more detailed and challenging game than previous versions. It's been playtested now for about six months, and running for five months, with a year to redesign and write. 'All this time and effort appears to have given me a game of much potential.'

Company Commander 11 has places available in it, and Jason has halved the start up to £6.00 till the end of the year. This is a pretty good offer, when the size of the rules and units is taken into account.

jason.oates@virgin.net

EMG have been running strategic play by mail wargames for some years now. Games are free and the website is maintained through donations. There are seven games that are currently running.

In **Global Diplomacy**, you play one of the Great Powers of the late nineteenth century: Austria, China, England, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Ottoman Empire, Portugal, Russia, Spain or the USA. You must use your diplomatic skills as well as your military might (armies, corps, fleets and squadrons) to become the dominant world power. This would be a good game to start with, as it's of low complexity while presenting a challenge to win it. **Global Diplomacy: Ancient Mediterranean** uses the Global Diplomacy rules, but is set in 305 BC around the Mediterranean basin.

Age of Discovery also uses the same

NEWSDESK PBM



basic rules, but there's a new map for each game which can only be discovered through exploration, and everyone starts the game at an equal size.

World at War is a modern wargame of moderate complexity, played to two-monthly turns. It has different types of resources; different land, air and naval units; technological improvements that can be made to each unit; a world market; supplies; limited intelligence; diplomacy with the neutral areas; an unlimited number of commands and an unlimited number of units in an area. There are also two variants, one for a head-to-head game and the second for team play.

With a totally different setting, **Sengoku, War of the Daimyos** is set in 16th century Japan, a period of constant war and turmoil. You're the head of your Clan, whose aim is to become Shogun of Japan by a combination of diplomacy and warfare. Your units are appropriate for the period and include Samurai, Ronin and Ashigari, while provinces can contain castles, palaces and ports. This is described as a medium complexity game and should appeal to you if you're keen on the Japanese setting.

<http://www.islandnet.com/~dgreenin/emg.htm>

POWER GAMES



Agema Publications' powergame **La Gloire du Roi V** is being given a makeover! Front pages of the game newspaper are now in glorious technicolour each turn, and a new and highly detailed colour map of Germany and a guide to explain who owns what has been produced. Other regions will be given

new maps at time goes on. Agema are also working on the Gazetteer for LGDR which gives details on literally hundreds of towns as they were in the 18th century.

Silver Dreamer have sent us an update of what's happening with them. They currently run three games, all by email, and they're all the sort of games that would have been run conventionally through the post. We've listed **Aspects of Might** under *Adventure Games* as it uses the popular Nexus system developed by Madhouse.

Absolute Terror uses a modified version of the Absolute game system that was

successful in **Absolute Power**, **Absolute Fantasy** and Jade's **Absolute Heroes**. It has been running about a year and, again, has plenty of opportunities for new players, though not many spaces. **Absolute Terror** is set in the year 2000, but in a world where magic, occultism and other weirdness lurks behind mundane society.

Absolute Terror's setup costs £20 and further turns are £5 each. You can get the rulebook free to peruse and see if it's your thing by sending a blank email to

absoluteterror-subscribe@yahoogroups.com

Absolute Power II is Silver Dreamer's prequel to their very successful game of the same name. Its setup is £20, which includes two free turns. This game runs to a slower deadline than the original game, with a two week turnaround. Alan Crump runs this game on behalf of Silver Dreamer and enquiries should be sent to AP2game@aol.com

You can reach Silver Dreamer at silverdrea@aol.com or on 01322 387195

Harlequin Games report a change of moderator for game 52 of **Serim Ral**, and we'll quote what Ed himself has to say about this game, as we reckon that it'll give you a pretty clear impression of his style:

'Deep in the mushroom forests of the Underdark the battle rages eternal, or at least for fortnights at a time. Many of those who began the epic struggle still remain though new powers have arisen to contest the caverns left empty by the passing of others. The inhabitants of the Underdark take no time to mourn their fallen comrades spending their time (when not actually engaged in mortal combat) instead racing worms around a silver stone. Battles indeed have begun, caused by the perceived iniquities done one worm by another. Fear not, those of you whose very breath awaits the reports of this weeks racing, falling as it does in the pages of the Light in the Darkness. They will not fail nor dare they falter despite the departure of the scribe (fare thee well, John Davis) whose very name has come to signify bad puns and a race of worms. The worms will continue, munching their way stolidly through the rock and fungus, though another (well, no, actually it'll be me) will report their progress.

John Davis has gone to Devon (I hope it's as pleasant as he imagines) so will, alas, not be writing the newsletter for **Serim Ral** henceforth. Otherwise the battle for **Serim Ral** moves on apace with the main contenders changing from time to time and alliances shifting but a little. A new series of special actions have hit the Underdark

module, both more deadly than a sharp pointy toothed rabbit and more generous than a man with no hands, we will see who avails themselves of their rewards and who falls foul of their dangers.'



FANTASY WARGAMES

Harlequin Games have now finished an exhaustive reworking of some of the basic pieces of **Legends**: the weapons, armour, ships, training types and spells. A group of about thirty players worked with Harlequin to design, playtest and release the new versions, which GM Sam Roads describes as 'about 15 pages of changes, all for the better!'

The plan was to open up new paths to victory by improving the weaker game pieces. Specifically targeted were the Illusionist and Sorcerer arcane classes, both of which were rarely picked as main characters. The Blur Rangers and Mage training types should now be much more popular choices, allowing for (respectively) hit and run guerilla forces and cheap blitzkrieg forces.

Improvements to armour and ships will make both more attractive options when looking to organise the logistics of raising an army, while the inclusion of ballistae as mainstream weapons is the first step towards making siege warfare play a larger part in **Legends**.

The 'fire' school of Wizardly magic has received a lot of work - giving the Hero positions a chance to take on small towns and villages early in the game with a few well-placed Fireballs. Also benefitting are the Warlock 'Battlecry' series, which are likely to be among the best spells in strategic conflict, since the Warlock is meant to be the best arcanist for battles.

Harlequin haven't made many reductions, but one of these is that the Seer's Crystal now only gives two free mana, which should reduce the number of cheap Seer characters who were able to outperform other arcanists in their own specialities just through use of the Crystals. Counterpointing this change is a balancing boost in the Enchanter's fetishes, which now all give a very decent mana recovery.

Twilight Crusade 2 is the new **Legends** module: it started on November 1st and can continue to take setups until Christmas. There will be no TechnoMages,

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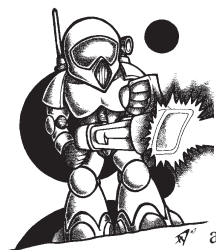
TechnoKnights or TechnoCrusaders in this game, but players will be allowed to run two positions at once. Harlequin say that this variant has worked well when run by the Dutch Legends provider and they think that 'this looks like being a more relaxed and fun game of Legends than the average.'

Immortals' Realm 2 will be released soon after TC2, and will contrast with it as 'a cutthroat, hardcore factional game'. *Immortals' Realm 1* was very popular, so this will be similar. The only significant difference is that the faction sizes drop to eight, in order to get all 13 factions filled out in a very bloody and crowded powergame. Indeed, it seems that the factions are already starting to get the wheels of diplomacy turning, as they seek to make short term alliances in an attempt to survive the turbulent first months...

harlequingames.com

Significant news from **Middle Earth PBM** is that Palantir, the mapping and information-gathering program which allows Middle Earth's players access to an interactive, editable colour map, has now been released. We've seen this tool in action and it certainly looks useful. GM Clint Oldridge reports that 'the response has been great. The aim was to provide a program that allowed players to focus on playing the game by removing as much drudgery from turn interpretation and creation as possible, and it has surpassed our expectations.'

middleearthgames.com



SCIFI GAMES

Flying Buffalo are collecting players for an extra long game of **Starweb**, which will end on 25,000 points instead of the usual 10,000. Note that they are still offering free trial games of **Starweb** to newcomers.

Flying Buffalo are also planning to start a new two-week game of **Mobius I**, and invite further applications to make up the necessary number of players.

flyingbuffalo.com

Among the free play by mail wargames which **EMG** offer are two with science fiction settings.

In **Imperium** you rule one of the Major Houses in a Galactic Empire, and when the Emperor dies you seek to increase your

House's standing to become the next Emperor. You have starships, armies, leaders and undercover agents to deploy in order to gain power and must be prepared to use diplomacy, treachery and guile to succeed in what GM Doug Greenin describes as a moderately complex game.

Imperial Expansion is described as suitable for novices as well as experienced players. You represent an alien civilisation which has just discovered space travel, but such are the whims of fortune that other rival civilisations in the galaxy have made the same discovery, so the race is on to claim uninhabited solar systems and achieve leadership of the galaxy before they do. Exploration, colonisation, ship-building, technological research and good ol' warfare are all part of the game, and you may choose to form alliances or do battle with the other players.

Both games are free and the website is maintained through donations:

<http://www.islandnet.com/~dgreenin/emg.htm>

ADVENTURE GAMES



Players in **KJC Games'**

Monster Island have been able to submit their orders by email for some time. Now they'll be able to receive their turns electronically, as pdf files, which should increase the popularity of this long-running game. It's a game that's suitable for newcomers, so this is good news for us all.

They have a new editor for *Message in a Bottle*, the **Monster Island** newsletter. He's Tony Austin and the first newsletter from his editorial desk, issue 67, can be downloaded from KJC's website. Take a look at it to gather the flavour of the game:

kjcgames.com

The Austrian firm **SSV Klapp-Bachler OEG** run the open-ended game **Heldenwelt**, which we reviewed in issue 103. There's an English version as well as a German one, so everyone should be able to have a go at it.

The basic story-line is that adventurers must help a city which has been captured by golems. To do this, you go to explore an island nearby, which is full of mysterious artifacts, strange creatures and possible adventures.

Hannes, the game's designer,

programmer and moderator, is keen to assure readers that **Heldenwelt** is beginner-friendly: there's a training programme for beginners, with advice given throughout, and beginners play for free. Indeed, you don't need to pay until you decide to take up a larger position. When you do start to pay, the monthly fee is 6.90 Euro, £4.40, \$6.90 per party and this covers 20 or so turns. This means that it's possible to enter orders daily from Monday to Friday, and to keep things fair there's a target turn, to make sure that every party has a fair number of turns in the game each month: if you miss a deadline you're allotted more turn slots.

This issue, **SSV Klapp-Bachler OEG** are making a *Special Offer* for **Flagship** readers: each new setup of a **Flagship** reader will get a one-time access to a special, well hidden **Flagship** shrine on the Training island. Let us know how you get on!

www.heldenwelt.com

Aspects of Might uses the Madhouse **Nexus** system to create a fantasy world that has its magical and religious system based on the Tarot deck. It has now been running for over two years and developing all the time, so there's plenty to do to discover in it. There is a system in place to let players design new things for the game, be it spells (called suits in the game), buildings or special enchantments. There's plenty of space for newcomers too, as the starting area caters for them.

It's possible to play a single character position to try the game out for free and to play it for free for as long as you like. Rules and setup information can be obtained automatically by sending a blank email to

astralweb-subscribe@yahoogroups.com



SPORTS GAMES

KJC Games have announced the arrival of their new football game: **The Premier Edition**.

This is based on the rules of their existing footie game **Extra Time**, and will run alongside it for the same charges. It's a more intensive game than **Extra Time**, and will suit players who enjoy a really competitive atmosphere.

In **Premier Edition** it's a premier division club that you control, with millions rather than thousands of pounds to spend in

NEWSDESK BOARDGAMES



acquiring the top players or maybe poaching them from rival clubs. Each game lasts for just the football season and if you play until the end you have the first choice of the same team in the following game.

kjcgames.com

Jason Oates reports that his long-running **Soccer Stats** continues to prosper, and announces that he's making a *special offer* until the end of this year: the startup and five turns is now a mere £5.00.

jason.oates@virgin.net

Trevor Dexter of *Olympia Games* announces that he's now set up a small website for his players in **Pro-Soccer PBM**, and plans to develop a much larger site next year. We look forward to covering this in the course of time:

pbm.dexter@talk21.com

CARD GAMES

From *Steve Jackson Games* comes **Spooks**. At \$9.95, Spooks is an excellent, if simple, shedding game similar to **Uno** or **Qwitch**, but it has a great twist. The suit showing on the discard determines what the current rules are. Add to this a trick-taking element, and Spooks allows for much more choice-making than you'd initially think. The cards themselves are absolutely gorgeous to look at, and the basic nature of the deck makes it possible to play other games with it. It's highly recommended by a member of the editorial team!

Z-Man Games offer a second game in the series that started with **Grave Robbers From Outer Space**, which they're calling **Grave Robbers 2: Skippy's Revenge**. At \$14.99, the games are based on creating your own B-movies, with all the necessary 'Bad acting, poor special effects, and a plot with a thousand holes.'

Dungeoneer: Tomb of the Lich Lord costs \$13.99 from *Atlas Games* and is suitable for younger players. As a valiant Hero, you must explore the danger-laden corridors of the Lich Lord's Tomb, with the gods throwing in a few more problems for you as you proceed.

Cheapass Games' **Timeline**, mentioned by Pevans last issue, is now out, at the budget price of \$3.95. In it, Cheapass take up the theme of time travel, cheerily announcing 'Congratulations! You've invented a time machine. You will use it one day to learn

about the rich history of the planet and perhaps even contribute to the betterment of Mankind. But first, you're gonna play the stock market and get really, stupidly rich.' Yes, the theme is trading, and you must try to make a serious profit on the commodities you buy while travelling through time. This won't be easy, because the values change as you travel, in a way likely to appeal to those of you who enjoy strategy gaming.

BOARD GAMES

Winner of the Game of the Year award from *Games* magazine in the USA, **New England 1621** is selling like hot cakes and tops the best seller lists of many games shops. It costs \$44.95 from *Uberplay Entertainment / Goldsieber*. You play the head of a family which has just stepped off the Mayflower, and you need to ensure that your family survives and prospers in this unfamiliar land.

Days of Wonder offer **Pirate's Cove** for \$49.95, which has the buccaneering theme that its title suggests. You start off with a secret map and a basic sloop, ready to seek out sea combat, plunder and treasure. The most famous pirate at the end of a year wins the game!

Mayfair's **King Me!** at \$25.00 deals with the manoeuvres of high and low, seeking to succeed to the kingdom's crown as their old king retires. The idea sounds fun: we'll be interested to hear how it plays.

Yinsh is the fifth game in the **Project GIPF** series of six games, each for two players. Yinsh costs \$29.95 from *Rio Grande*. You start with five rings on the board, and the rings each leave a marker as they're moved: the marker switches colour if it's jumped over. The aim is to be the first to form three rows of five markers in the same colour. Of course, this isn't an easy task...

In search of a game for playing with the kids or young-hearted adults over the holidays? *Rio Grande's* **Chicken Cha Cha Cha** costs \$29.95 and is a memory game set in a chicken yard, where you chase wooden chickens around the egg board. Once you catch a chicken, you take its tail feather and put it in your own tail. The first player to collect all four tail feathers wins!

Deadwood: On Location is an expansion set for *Cheapass Games'* game of bad movie-making, **Deadwood Studios**. The new

boards represent six different sets for working away from the studios, on location. It's a very reasonable \$2.95, though of course you'll need the *Deadwood* rules set to use the expansion.

Fresh copies of *Hasbro's* **Lord of the Rings Monopoly** are arriving at *Leisure Games* on 12th November. Supplies are limited, so if you want a copy, order it soon! It'll cost you £39.99 in the UK. Other games shops will of course be stocking this game, but again the game looks set to sell out fast. We at *Flagship* will be fascinated to see this new twist on an old game.

Just before we go to press, we've some news from **Mark Stretch**: 'The British games company *JKLM Games* launched two games at the Essen games fair.

Kogge, designed by Andreas Stedding, is set in the old days - not as good as usually reported - when many dangers awaited a merchant. In addition to thieves, malcontented customers and too high tolls, trade routes weren't as secure as they are today. Storms, pirates, war, malevolent officials, silted-up harbours and other disasters afflicted the trade routes. And so it could happen that cities which yesterday were only a few days away now lay at opposite corners of the known world. Precisely these problems are depicted in the game of *Kogge*.

Kogge is a game for two to four players. Across the web of trade routes, the players try to trade goods as profitably as possible and to build trading offices, known as Kontore (sing. Kontor). The ever-changing routes between the cities don't make life easier for the players vying for victory as best merchant on the Baltic Sea.

Constellation is designed by Hans van Halteren and it is a game in which you try to form patterns on a 7x7 layout of Stellar Tiles. If you are the first player to create the pattern on one of the three visible Constellation Cards, you get the card and the points. The other players will just have to aim for another pattern. The only problem is that each player can only create patterns using a specific tile attribute, eg for you, all the tiles in the pattern have to have the same foreground colour. In order to create the pattern you are aiming for, you are allowed to swap any two tiles in the layout, as long as these two have an attribute in common, eg they both have the same background colour.

Further details are available from
[www.jklmgames.co.uk/
welcome_to_jklm_games.htm](http://www.jklmgames.co.uk/welcome_to_jklm_games.htm)

NEWSDESK ROLEPLAYING



Flying Buffalo Inc report that they are now licensed to reprint all the **Lost Worlds** books that are currently out of print. From November 15th they're starting with *Wraith* (#1009 \$7.50), which they'll also make available in a scenario set: *Curse of the Tarbella* (#8801 \$15.00). The Curse of the Tarbella is a free scenario which you can download from their webpage at:

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

but note that to play it you need the *Skeleton* and the *Wraith*. These two books are included in their scenario set, along with the complete printed scenario.

FBI ask interested gamers to write and send them a scenario for any *Lost Worlds* book that's out of print, as they expect to sell the books in sets of two books and a scenario for \$15. If you just want an out of print book from the series, they'll reprint this once they get ten or more advance orders for it, at \$7.50 each.

They're planning to issue the *Lost Worlds* books with photographs rather than artwork: Calye Calhoun will pose for the 30 photos in the first of these as *Amara Wintersword*, the female barbarian with battle axe (#8609 \$8.95).

(UK and European readers should expect to pay more on these prices for postage, of course.)

www.flyingbuffalo.com

Atlas Games have issued a hardcover sourcebook for players interested in discovering all the various aspects of crime and the law that can appear in fantasy adventure games. **Crime & Punishment** is suitable for all of the d20 systems and contains new core classes, new prestige classes, new equipment, new spells, new magic items, new feats and suggestions about how crime and the law can play an exciting part in a campaign. This sounds a useful reference book for most adventures.

Atlas also announce that the latest *Ars Magica* title, **Sanctuary of Ice**, is out now. This is the Greater Alps Tribunal sourcebook, which'll be useful if you're interested in medieval fantasy or the myths and pseudo-history of Mythic Europe. You can learn more about it by following:

www.atlas-games.com/product_tables/AG0267.html

They're also offering **Ancestral Vault**, a collection of magical information from the

African fantasy land of Nyambe that featured in **Nyambe: African Adventures**. Opening *Ancestral Vault*, you'll find details of artifacts, plants, feats, equipment and games from exotic Nyambe, along with information on the African-style ships that can carry this cargo into a traditional fantasy campaign.

atlas-games.com

Mongoose Publishing have issued some D20 sourcebooks that seem to be well worth checking for information and for scenario ideas. There's **Ancients***(OGL), a hardcover at \$39.95, which covers the early days of the Egyptian and Greek empires and which can be used both as reasonably accurate history or to include mythological and magic elements. Also in hardcover is **The Book of the Sea** at \$34.95, which includes sea domains, naval warfare, ports and trading rules with all you need to know about adventuring both above and, ulp, below the sea.

The **Slayer's Guide To Ogres** at \$9.95 provides plenty of material about these dangerous monsters, with ideas for scenarios using them. **Encyclopedia Psionica: Worldshapers**, at \$14.95, concentrates on psionicists and psychic warriors, who can use their minds to affect the world around them, while **Quintessential Rogue** at \$21.95 has vital information for anyone playing a rogue character.

A more specific sourcebook, which will be welcomed by fans of *Babylon 5*, is **The Narn Regime Fact Book** at \$34.95. This includes all you need to know about this species, from their history to their starships.

Crimson Empire is a new roleplaying game set in the broken world of Thargos. It has been some years in development, and its designer Chris Loizou stresses that *Crimson Empire's* emphasis is on atmosphere rather than its rules.

Thargos was once united as a mighty empire, but a series of natural disasters have ruined the world and its cities, fragmenting the old empire. It's a world that's full of many types of danger, including conflict between two opposing forces: the knights who once imposed law and order for the empire and the darkun zealots who use magic and poison to further their own ends. There are the familiar character classes of humans, elves and dwarfs in the game, but also some creatures that are unique to *Crimson Empires*: most of these are deadly. Thargos will be a dark world to venture into.

The rulebook is an attractively presented A4 volume of over 300 pages, with plenty of examples and numerous illustrations. Find

out more from:

www.crimsonempire.co.uk

We've news of several new and mostly shuddersome sourcebooks from *White Wolf*.

Demon: Houses of the Fallen is a hardcover sourcebook costing \$17.99, which looks at the each of the seven Houses of the diabolic host. It's designed to serve as parallel with the celestial Houses of the angels covered in **Angels of Wrath**.

The **Ravenloft Players Handbook** is a hardcover core rulebook for the *Ravenloft* Campaign Setting and costs \$20.99. It updates the setting, to make it compatible with the revised third edition rules, and describes the nightmarish Lands beyond the Mists, where monsters like vampires, shapeshifters and the walking dead prey at will upon the terrified people. As well as covering the lands, people and monsters, this sourcebook also covers the basic character classes, skills, feats and spells.

White Wolf's **Shades of Gray** is an *Orpheus* sourcebook for \$12.99, in which the *Afterlife* has become suddenly crowded with lost souls after poisoned drugs hit the streets. Who or what is responsible? - it's up to the *Shades* to find out. *White Wolf* warns that the sourcebook is suitable for mature readers.

Also from from *White Wolf*, **Tribebook: Stargazers** is a revised sourcebook for **Werewolf: The Apocalypse**. Costing \$10.99, the *Stargazers* it deals with are the wisest of the Garou tribes. In journeying westwards, however, they discover that they've lost their homeland, and now have to call on all their tribal lore to reclaim their heritage.

Tradition Book: Verbena is also a revised edition of a sourcebook for **Mage: The Ascension** at \$11.99. It deals with the *Verbena* witches, who celebrate the Great Goddess and the Horned God, and seek the return of the old ways.

Their **Vampire By Gaslight** is a sourcebook for **Mind's Eye Theatre**, and costs \$11.99. As the title suggests, it's based on **Victorian Age: Vampire**, provides a new historical setting where the Kindred may seize their chance to survive and prosper.

Kenzer offer a new adventure in the **Hackmaster** series: **Crypt of the Lizard King**. The Count of Beorn has sought adventurers to discover the truth behind a series of raids on his lands: is it true that an old and evil power is responsible? Suitable for character levels 5-7, the scenario costs £7.99.

NEWSDESK MISC



At £26.99, *Wizards of the Coast* announce the imminent arrival of a fascinating D&D sourcebook, **Draconomicon**. Yes, it's everything you need to know about the D&D world's dragons, in lavish detail! There's information on how to play a dragon, how it's likely to fight, how to oppose it or ally with it and statistics about all the different types of dragons and their interests. Essential reading for gamers.

ONLINE GAMES

Dark Age of Camelot: Trials of Atlantis is the new expansion pack for this award-winning MMORPG. Trial of Atlantis has just been released in the USA (though the European release date hasn't yet been announced), and offers an underwater setting for the players.

As this game opens, a portal to Atlantis has been found in each of the three existing Realms. Through the portals, players must set out to discover what remains of Atlantis. It seems that the advanced people of Atlantis foresaw that they would perish, so they built a series of Trials into Atlantis, which must be overcome by those from the future who seek to explore their ruins.

Dark Age of Camelot looks splendid already, so the prospect of seeing what the designers have done to present these new underwater areas is an entrancing one.

We've news of an online game that will appeal to modern wargamers. To quote from *Playnet's* press release...

'**World War II Online** is a combined arms, online simulation set in a relentless, action-packed 3D environment where players can command and crew a variety of accurately modelled vehicles, naval vessels and aircraft and sling weapons to fight as foot soldiers with and against thousands of other gamers. World War II Online is the first and still the only massively multiplayer first-person virtual battlefield that covers a 1/2 scale map of Europe with accurate terrain modelling. It allows players to fight alongside British, French and German forces 24/7 in a persistent world in which character advancement and career paths provide a rich RPG layer and strategic systems are driven by player missions and command structures. World War II Online has received numerous industry press awards including *GameSpy's* 2001 Gamers' Choice Sim of the Year and *IGN's* 2001 Persistent World Game of the Year. Visit www.WWIIonline.com for details.'



PBeM FIRMS

Ah, the joys of the internet. Back in September, several PBM games firms discovered that players receiving PBeM turns via the service provider AOL were having their turns blocked. This was because AOL had decided to add some email addresses to their 'Not let through because we believe it is spam' filters.

Middle Earth Games had its me@middleearthgames.com address blacklisted in this way, and so did other PBM/PBeM companies who send lots of email turns out to people. This only affected people who use AOL to download their email, so if this happens to you it's not the firm's fault: be prepared to change your server provider.

Congratulations to *Madhouse* for holding a successful get-together (or Minicon, as they call it) for their players, which lasted over three days this summer. Life's busy for the Madhouse team because they've opened a new shop in Wisbech, which Steve Tierney describes as a 'cyber cafe, games shop, nerdy hangout joint <g>'.

Work has continued on their free games, **Haunted Manor** and **Catacombs**, which have both received new program updates, which include statistic adjustments for faster and more advanced play, along with other improvements. Progress is still being made with their eagerly awaited multi-user game, **Night of the Things** and their arcade-style game, **Zombie Holocaust** and their super-hero game, **Abnormals**.

Busy, busy. And we've heard on pretty good authority that there's a wedding planned in December... so it's all go!

Exciting news from *Flying Buffalo Inc.* They're beta testing some internet video conferencing software, and are looking for players to assist in this enterprise. An online game of **Tunnels & Trolls** will have started by the time this issue lands on your doormats, but if it's too late to join in with a character, up to 200 other people can watch the game as it is played, all for free. That's right: there's no need to supply your address or credit card information.

The software is called Viditel, from Santa Cruz Networks. You'll need a PC with an internet connection, with which you can download the software and participate. But if you have USB ports, Windows 98SE or

better and a USB camera and headset, the other players will actually be able to see your face. You can see up to eight people on the screen simultaneously, and switch between them as you wish or even set the program to show whoever is speaking at the moment.

<http://beta.viditel.com>

The next game Flying Buffalo try will probably be **Nuclear War**. More details from their website: flyingbuffalo.com



ZINES

There will be a stall of fanzines at the **Dragonmeet** convention in Kensington Town Hall on December 13th. We're planning a *Flagship* presence there, and also attending will be the editors of *The Black Seal*, *Carnel*, *Warstone* and *The Whisperer*. Drop by if you're free that day.

The Black Seal is a new fanzine that deals with modern horror gaming:

<http://www.theblackseal.org/>

Carnel is a roleplaying metazine:

<http://carnel.sdf-eu.org/carnel>

<http://carnel.sdf-eu.org/metazine>

The Whisperer deals with Lovecraftian horror gaming:

www.starrywisdom.co.uk/

Warstone is an impressively put-together WFRP magazine:

www.warstone.darcore.net

John Harrington asks those of you who follow amateur PBM games to support the 2003 Zine Poll and the Postal Gaming Website Poll. You can vote for up to ten amateur zines, which must be published by a Briton and have had at least four issues during 2003. Electronic zines count as zines rather than websites. Similarly, you can vote for up to ten websites run by people connected with then postal gaming hobby.

The closing date for votes is December 31st 2003, and you can submit them by post to John at 1 Churchbury Close, Enfield, Middlesex EN1 3UW or by email to:

zinepoll@fbgames.co.uk

There's more information at:

www.fbgames.co.uk/words/mfg/docs/zp03.pdf

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Phoenix

A Major Advance

ROB ALEXANDER describes the advantages of playing KJC's new game ...

SOME YEARS ago, I joined Beyond the Stellar Empire as run by KJC Games. Long-time Flagship readers may remember my Rumours comments - quite scathing of the game as it was run and played, but full of praise for its potential. I dropped out after about a year, thoroughly dissatisfied with the game and the way that it was run.

In summary, I thought that it was a potentially brilliant game, but one that was ruined by problems with the pricing system and some ill-thought-out rules. It didn't help that the ageing game program was difficult to modify. This isn't an uncommon opinion, I believe; the American version of the game topped polls for the best and the worst game of all time.

I was out of PBM for a couple of years, but last year I chanced on the KJC website and discovered they were working on **Phoenix**, a completely revamped version of BSE. This obviously piqued my interest, and I joined BSE again in October 2002, ready for the conversion to Phoenix in mid-December. I've been playing for the ten months since then.

Kieron Redman reviewed Phoenix in Flagship 102, and if you've never heard of BSE before his article would be a good starting point. I'm going to talk mostly about the changes from BSE to Phoenix, so those who've prior experience of the game will get the most from this piece. If you're a former player who's thinking about returning, I'd encourage you to read on; the news is really rather good.

The game in brief

To summarise for those who never played BSE: Phoenix is a power, exploration and roleplaying game in a science-fiction setting. Game positions are on the scale of ships, starbases and armies, and an established player will run many positions. Everything in the game can be built by players, without GM intervention, giving the game an incredibly 'solid' and realistic feel. Special actions provide a hand-moderated element, but this doesn't dominate the gameplay.

The UK version of BSE has been run continuously since 1992, and the game as it stands is based on the actions of thousands of players. This weight of history contributes to the game's tremendous depth.

Turns and orders

A major change in Phoenix is the new turn and orders system. As in BSE, each position you control accepts its own orders and generates its own email turnsheets. However, rather than running one turn a week, starship positions can run every working day if so desired. If you don't want that level of micromanagement, they can 'store up time' for a maximum of five days, and maintain a queue of pending orders. These queued orders will be executed once sufficient time is available.

Once you have a large number of positions, you'll be getting one or more turns every weekday. This obviously takes a fair amount of time to manage, but it's nowhere near that demanded by EverQuest or its ilk.

All orders are entered via the Order Entry Program, which needs a Windows PC. It is possible to write orders by hand, but this is not a

trivial exercise and I wouldn't recommend it. The program also tracks the basic details of your positions, your past order history, and the various items in the game. This reduces the amount to remember when writing your orders. The program can also draw star and planet maps in an attractive fashion.

Affiliations

BSE was totally dominated by player-run factions known as Affiliations ('Affs'). Although it was possible to remain independent, this wasn't advisable if you wanted to survive and prosper. The Affiliations were perhaps the best thing about BSE - upon joining one, you had immediate access to advice, camaraderie and material support. Not least, you had a measure of protection against pirates and other warlike Affiliations.

Phoenix is still oriented towards Affiliation play - new players start in a randomly-chosen Affiliation. You're not obliged to stay there, but your first action as a new player should be to contact your Aff leader. Most will be happy to help you out, even if that means finding a new Aff that suits you better.

Unlike BSE, though, Phoenix provides good opportunities for independent play. The game's advanced trading system (see later) provides a profitable niche for small-time trade captains. You can turn a fair profit just by shifting goods from place to place. Taking this further, KJC are actively encouraging small, trade-oriented Affiliations. If you become rich through trading, you can finance your own Affiliation. Alternatively, if you discover a new alien race, you may be able to become their leader.

One other change from BSE is that Affiliations no longer have 'special abilities' that are unique to them. All such abilities have been replaced with advanced technology, which any Affiliation can research. The distinction is that each Aff has a head start in certain areas; others can play catch-up, but by then the first Aff will have pulled further ahead.

Pricing

The single most common complaint about BSE was the pricing system. Each ship or ground party turn incurred a turn fee, usually £2.50. A typical turn didn't involve much excitement - it was possible to spend an entire turn just moving through a star system. Interesting encounters almost never happened by chance - short of a pirate attack (rare, and usually fatal) you knew exactly what your turn would look like before you even opened the envelope.

In the event of a war, this took a nasty turn. You might have a dozen warships on station, but moving them to the battlefield was going to cost you at least £30. You would then have to move them back, run turns while they repaired, and so on. Losing a battle was particularly annoying - it hurt you in and out of game. Allegations of 'war-by-wallet' were frequent.

Phoenix has replaced all this with an innovative pricing system. Ships, ground parties and secret agents are free to run, but they need to be paid wages in game money ('stellars'). The only positions that can actually generate stellars (ie bring them into the game) are starbases, and each one of these costs £2 a week to run.

Most serious players will want to run one or more starbases, and this makes it easy to pay the wages of your crews and employees. The decision to take on another starbase is a big one, and therein lies the magic of this approach - you can decide on a budget and stick to it. You don't need to worry about sudden jumps in wartime, and you can order

Phoenix at a glance

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

www.kjcgames.com/phoenix

all your ships around without worrying about turn fees. This change puts Phoenix light years ahead of BSE, totally transforming the way you play the game. Even if you don't run a starbase, it's still possible to play provided that you can get some stellars 'second-hand'. The main way to do this is by trade.

Trade

BSE never really encouraged trade. Certainly it was possible, but what was lacking was an actual motivation to trade - nobody could produce anything more cheaply than anyone else, and advanced technology was jealously guarded.

Phoenix has a simple but clever system to encourage trade. Every populated planet has market. Common trade goods have the same value everywhere, but each planet has a number of unique trade resources that can be found by exploration. These goods increase in value as you move away from their origin, ranging from twice their value on a neighbouring planet to sixteen times as much in a distant star cluster.

Many starbases run public markets that buy and sell these goods, allowing independent traders to get in on the act. KJC provide 'live' market reports on the Phoenix web site, and several enthusiastic players have created tools to manipulate this data in a variety of ways. One good example is the Trade Route Calculator at (<http://www.dewiek.net/public/trades.php>) - as the name suggests, this looks at the data and identifies profitable trade routes. I know several players who play the game primarily for trade. Turning a profit isn't always easy, but with a bit of planning it can be done.

Phoenix is also better as regards the trading of advanced items. Whereas in BSE advanced technology was relatively rare, and often restricted to a single Affiliation, all Affs now have a range of advanced items. Anything that exists can be researched, given time - there are no enforced differences between the Affs in this regard. The net result is a climate conducive to advanced item trade.

Other positions and charges

Another position type is the 'Political', a single character who commands your other positions. You need one of these in order to control starbases, and it costs you £2 a week. Your political provides you with a central stellar bank account, and generates a weekly summary of all your positions.

Once you've gained some seniority in your Aff, you can get a variety of affiliation reports appended to your political turn. If you want your Aff to take a major action (such as declaring an alliance with another Aff) then you can 'Raise an Issue' that your fellow members will vote on. When you create your political, you also get two free ships - a Caravel-class freighter and a Broadsword-class cruiser. This is a good starting point from which to build a massive fleet.

Special actions are still available, costing £1.50 each. Although you can attempt pretty much anything, they are mostly used for planetary exploration. Outposts and battle platforms behave similarly to starbases, but they don't produce a weekly update or incur a weekly charge. Instead, you pay 50p whenever you want an update. If you run many of these positions, you can pay £2 a week for unlimited updates. (You may notice that the fees described here differ from those given in Keiron's review - the fees were adjusted based on initial player feedback.)

War and Politics

The second biggest complaint about BSE was with the war and diplomacy rules. In an attempt to prevent outright war in the game, all combat had to be OKed by the GM. The rules for this were extremely nebulous, and the source of much frustration.

In Phoenix, all this is gone. Although individual players cannot wreak havoc on a whim, Affs now have total control over their military actions. If they want to start a war, they can. If they want to destroy a starbase, then ultimately they can, but there are likely to be repercussions from other Affs.

Those players who want to act outside the confines of Aff diplomacy can have their player-owned ships declare as pirates. This is a one-way trip, and can't be performed on Affiliation assets. Pirates can attack

anyone, without their Aff getting involved. The two central star systems (Yank and Skord) are owned by an alien race known as the Kastorians. Controlled by the GM, they have effectively made their two systems a safe zone for trading. In Solo (a neighbouring system), the player-run Association of Free Traders maintains a fragile peace. Beyond these three systems, however, it's a dangerous universe.

One might expect that this would lead to total anarchy, but nothing could be further from the truth. So far, the incidence of violent conflict has been much the same as in BSE, although the battles themselves have been considerably bigger. If anything, piracy is down - the official BSE pirates have 'gone legit' and the new-style pirates have not been much in evidence.

In part, this is because the new combat rules are much more robust, in that battles now last multiple days and starbases can now adequately defend themselves. Surprise attacks are no longer totally devastating, as reinforcements can arrive before the battle is over. Any attack is a risky proposition, and so far most people have been very cautious.

Combat can be demanding in terms of real time - the battle will run each day until it's resolved, so you'll want to check your turns daily and change your orders as necessary. On top of that, you'll be talking to your allies and perhaps your enemies as well. This is exciting and exhausting, in roughly equal measure, and quite unlike any game I've ever played. It's not the total overload of online games, and it's not the stop-motion of traditional PBM. It's very, very good.

Exploration

Planetary exploration is much the same as BSE, in that it starts with an 'explore the planet' special action and continues with special actions to investigate specific features. Under the new pricing scheme, this can be quite expensive, but unlike BSE the routine activities are free.

The new game engine is quite clever, in that it tracks what each player knows about the game universe. If you discover something interesting, such as a rogue asteroid, you gain knowledge of it. You can transfer this knowledge to other players, or keep it to yourself. Even if another player knows what you've discovered and where you've discovered it, they'll still have to do some work to discover it themselves.

This special knowledge includes jump routes into new star systems. Starbases can do research to look for these. There are new star systems being added all the time, but until you've done the research you can't access them. This is an aspect that BSE never had, and it makes the universe a much more complex place.

All of this knowledge can be transferred to your Aff, so that all members can use it. The old established Affs have quite a body of such knowledge.

Getting started

Phoenix isn't a simple game, and the learning curve can be quite steep. That said, most established players have got the hang of the new system, so there are plenty of people to give you a helping hand. As I noted above, all new players are put straight into an Affiliation - you don't have to stay there, but your fellow members will help you get started. There are several player-run mailing lists, along with an official web forum for rules discussion.

If you do join the game, the best person to contact is the leader of your faction. If they don't respond, drop me a line (rob@truebeast.fsnet.co.uk) and I'll give you a hand.

Summary

I feel that Phoenix retains the best aspects of BSE while fixing its notorious flaws. It offers excellent value for money, an elegant order system, and interaction with large numbers of other players. It is truly player driven - the GM is there to provide flexibility through special actions, but he doesn't interfere wantonly with the game. Unlike traditional PBM, there is no lengthy wait between turns, but at the same time it doesn't take over your life.

Overall, I'd say that Phoenix is the best PBM game I've ever played, by a considerable margin. It represents a significant step forward in terms of playability, quality of simulation and scope.

Wildlife

All creatures great and small

PEVANS takes a look at this new boardgame ...

IT'S GOOD to see a new game from Wolfgang Kramer on his own (he's designed quite a few games in collaboration with others over the last few years). **Wildlife** is published by *Clementoni* and was one of my surprise finds at last year's Spiel fair (it was a surprise because I didn't expect to find a heavyweight strategy game from this company). While the *Clementoni* edition is in German, US publisher *Überplay* is now producing an English language edition, making it more accessible to UK gamers. So I thought the time was right to review it.

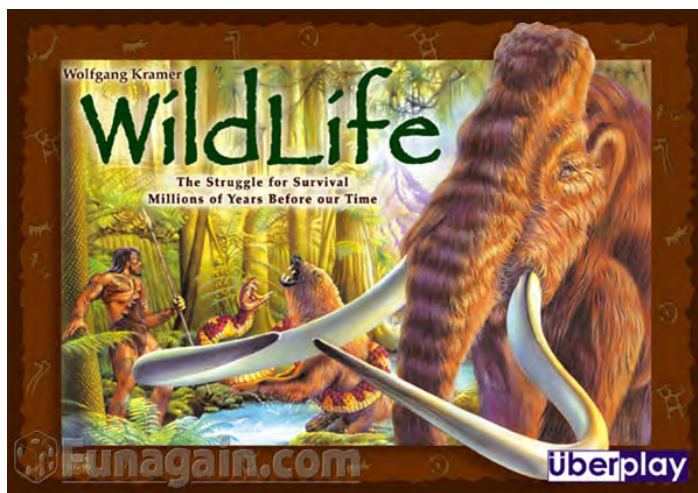
Essentially the game is about scoring points by expanding the territory you hold by playing your cards. However, there are several ways in which points can be scored (though dominating areas on the board will probably get the most points), so it's not that simple. And players are able to expand the possible actions open to them through the game - cleverly, doing this scores points as well. The intricate scoring system gives plenty of scope for tactical ploys, but the basic idea is that the player with the most points at the end of the game wins.

Let's start at the beginning. Inside the box is a mounted board, which shows an island divided into twelve areas - two each of the six different terrain types (water, desert, mountains and so on). Each area is made up of a number of spaces and the board also has the scoring tracks. There are solid cardboard playing pieces for each player, together with markers, wooden pawns and cards. Each player is a particular animal (Bear, Eagle et al) and gets the appropriate play aid and pieces for that animal. Each animal has different adaptations to the six types of terrain. Two types will be inhospitable and you can do nothing there. Two types you can move into (Migrate), one you can Expand in (or Migrate) and one you can Attack in (or Expand or Migrate). Players also get a number of Food tokens, which are the game's currency, and a hand of ten cards.

To start the game, players put some of their pieces on the board (according to the number of players and within certain limitations). The basics of the game are that players take it in turns to play cards, adding and moving their pieces on the board. They score points when an area is fully occupied and every so often trigger a major scoring round, when players get points for having the most in various aspects of the game.

A player's turn is pretty simple: the player carries out the actions they wish in whatever order they wish. They may play up to three cards from their hand. They may move (Migrate) one of their pieces and they may convert food tokens to Victory Points (a way of scoring points, but most of the time you need food more). Then they make their hand back up to ten cards.

The first wrinkle in the game is that one of the cards you play must



be auctioned to the other players for food tokens. Whoever wins the auction gets the benefit of the card. This is a clever mechanism that maintains involvement during other players' turns. It also lets players get round the limitation of the cards in their hand (by buying a card they don't have) and play out of turn.

As you can see, the cards are the heart of the game. There are five types of card. Terrain cards show a particular type of terrain. Playing one lets you do whatever you are adapted to do in that terrain. So, if you can Expand in it, you can add a piece to one of those areas on the board or move a piece into one of them (since Expand includes Migrate). The Attack adaptation can only be used if the area is full and allows you to replace someone else's piece. The removed piece is out of the game, making Attack quite powerful. Adaptation cards allow you to improve your adaptation in one type of terrain by one stage. From No Action to Migrate, or from Expand to Attack, for example. Markers are provided to indicate your new adaptation and these stack up through the game. Ability cards allow you to take one of the Special Abilities, which give you additional things to do. The numbers of these are limited and, if the one you want isn't available, you take it from the player who's got the most points at the time. (A blatant bit of handicapping, but very satisfying all the same!) Joker cards can be used as a Terrain, Adaptation or Ability card. Again, this offers a way of getting round the limitations of your hand. Finally, there are Event cards for three different events. Plague forces each opponent to lose a piece (which is out of the game). Famine means they lose food. And Food Source brings extra food tokens into the game. Another ingenious twist is that the player in last place gets some food as well as the player who played the card.

Players continue taking their turns until an area is filled. The player who placed or moved the last piece into it scores some points. S/he moves an area marker off the scoring track onto the area. This shows that the area has been scored (and can't be scored again). It also shows the number of points (3-5) scored for completing the area, which goes up during the game. If it is the fourth, eighth or eleventh marker, it also triggers a full round of scoring (at the end of the player's turn).

This is where the big points are scored. First, each area is scored, points going to the player with pieces in it - or to the players with the most pieces. Having an area that's full of your pieces is best (five points). Failing that, you want to be the only person with pieces in it (four points). Or at least the biggest (three points)... Players then score for the largest

Wildlife at a glance

A board game designed by Wolfgang Kramer and published by Clementoni (in German) and Überplay (in English). It is a strategy game for 2-6 players (there are special rules for a two-player game) aged 10+ and takes about 90 minutes to play.

Manufacturer: Rio Grande / Amigo

Designer: Wolfgang Kramer

Number of Players: 2 - 6 Time to Play: 1 - 1½ hours

Buy from your local game store or

www.leisuregames.com: £24.99

www.funagain.com: \$29.95

herds on the board. That is, the largest groups of animals all connected together. With ten points for the very largest herd, there are some big points available here, too. There are also points for the players with most Adaptations (count those markers on your play aid board), most Abilities and most food tokens. As you can see, there are lots of ways of scoring points. Most points will come from pieces on the board (areas and herds), but the other aspects of the game will also boost your score.

The game ends when that final, eleventh scoring marker is placed or when one player plays their last piece on the board. In either case there is a final scoring round and the player with the most points wins.

Simple, eh? Well, in any turn your options are limited by the cards in your hand. But you can only play a number of them, so you have some decisions to make. This gives a strong tactical element to the game: where can I make best use of which cards this turn? However you also need to keep track of the different scoring opportunities and work your way towards them. So you may have a strategic goal of maintaining a big herd while getting the most pieces in a number of areas. And I haven't mentioned those Special Abilities yet. There are five of them. The most obvious is Intelligence, which allows you to play an extra card in your turn. There are four Intelligence cards and getting one is undoubtedly a good move. There are five Food cards and one of these will give you two extra Victory Points every turn. Get these early on so that you can get the extra points for as many turns as possible. The three Mobility cards allow you to switch a piece for any other piece on the board - a lot faster than Migrating. There are two Defence cards, which are used to block an Attack or a Mobility move. And the sole Aggression card allows you to Attack in an area that isn't full (you still need to have the Attack adaptation in that terrain).

All of which gives players still more tactical options. However, there is an opportunity cost to everything you do. Because you can only play a limited number of cards in your turn, choosing one card to play means leaving several cards unplayed. To make sense of this you need to have some strategy - though there's nothing to say that your strategy won't change during the game.

All in all, this is an excellent game that demands lots of decision making and some planning. Apart from the strategic element, it is full of tactical options and requires your attention throughout. I recommend it highly - particularly now an English language edition is available - and the game gets 10/10 on my highly subjective ratings scale.



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Austerlitz: France

MIKE WATKINS, on achieving la gloire ...

SO, YOU have chosen to play France. A nation with an amazing army, the second best naval morale, a great strategic position, colonial holdings and with plenty of space but which only infrequently (in my experience) makes it into the end game. Hopefully these notes will help you get *la patrie* off to a good start. Anything after that is in your hands.

Economy

France has everything it needs to run a competent economy. There are several bonus production areas, including for wool, food and horses. There are a few areas of arable land below the y 35 line which are also useful.

The only drawbacks are the mines. There is no gold mine and there is only one ore mine. Not only do you only have just the one mine, but it is within reach of a sudden attack by Italy, the Rhine and Holland. An alternative source of ore, be it the ore mine by the Red Sea or one of the ore mines near France's start up positions in the colonies, is therefore vital.

Until France can rely upon a second source of ore it can only really support two factories. A sensible first build is therefore an ore mine, two factories, two weaving mills and five sheep farms. Next turn seven more sheep farms, any mines you have managed to acquire in the colonies, maybe a horse farm or two and the balance make up of estates. Third turn, ten estates. Starvation must be avoided at all costs and you should look to have at least ten estates for every million of population, and keep an eye on the level of your food.

The last point on the economy is that you will need money and yet more money to support your armies and fleets. Any spare population not used in building production sites or military units should be used to increase your population (so a couple of quarries are useful).

Brigades

As France you have access to one of the finest armies in the game. Your infantry are as cheap as anyone else's and they are as good or better than their opponents in combat. They are also the fastest in the game. The same is true of the cavalry and you have the cheapest artillery in the game. The Mounted Artillery in particular are about 25% better than the average (and cheaper than average as well).

Not only are the standard units very good, but you also have access to Guard units. Only the Russian Grenadier Guards and the Prussian Avante Garde compare to the Old Guard, but the French are faster. There is no unit as strong as fully trained Garde du Corps in melee, and they can also trade shots with most infantry and win.

Having said all that, the core of your army should be made up of Grenadiers, supported by Tirailleur, Cuirassier, Dragoons and Mounted Artillery. The Guard units are nice luxuries, but you will need the bulk provided by other units to protect them until the time is right for them to be unleashed.

Navy

As historically, your navy will probably have to grow on whatever is left over after the demands of the army. Mastery of the seas is of little benefit

if the enemy is in Paris. And the wealth available in the colonies can be matched and beaten by that on offer nearby in Western Europe.

When you can build ships I recommend building a healthy mix of large merchantmen and type 19s. They move at the same speed and should give you the greatest bang for your buck. The larger warships are a little slow and building smaller ships can be a large drain on resources. A few size class 1 and 2 ships are useful though, just to chase down enemy merchants.

Colonies

France starts with some small holdings in the Colonies. The position in the West Indies is slightly stronger than in India. In the Indies, France should initially look to secure Haiti and as much of America as the Spanish and Brits will let them. French Guyana has to be viewed as indefensible and it may be worth trading it to Portugal or Holland for land elsewhere or ships.

In India you have a strong squadron capable of sweeping many of the smaller colonial powers from the sea. However, the French possessions are not best placed for rapid expansion and France is unlikely to be able to spare the troops, ships and commanders from Europe to really dominate. A realistic objective is simply to retain the trade cities (so that there is a market for others to trade in) and try to secure at least one of the ore mines in SE Asia.

Strategy and Diplomacy

Although France has many strengths, it also has weaknesses. One is that it cannot develop its strategy as the game progresses. France has four nations on her borders, another two who can descend upon her shores and three more who can easily reach French territory.

From the start you need to have decided upon your plan, and then pursue it. Before the first turn is in you should have some idea about who will be your first victim. Ideally by the time you strike you should have stripped him of his allies, been assured peace on your other fronts and have a willing ally or two to help with the attack. And then strike hard and fast so that your main field army is available to meet any who would seek to take advantage of your distraction.

Of your immediate neighbours Spain has the weakest army. However, it is a large nation and could tie you down for months while others prepare to invade from the East. Holland, the Rhine and Italy have better armies but are more vulnerable to quick strikes and losing even small tracts of land. They also tend to have more neighbours willing to join you in your attack.

You will need to start talking to almost everyone from the start of the game and then keep on talking. The powers further away can be used to either help dismember those closer or as useful threats to keep your neighbours quiet. Also remember that you can offer things to sweeten the deal. The Dutch are short of woodland. The offer of lumber in return for the money to build the camps and other costs helps your economy while making the Dutch reliant upon you and friendly. French Guyana, plus a little whispering, may be enough to persuade Portugal to attack Spain, allowing you in the back door.

In short, France is not for the passive. Russia, Turkey, Morocco or Britain can all sit back and watch in isolation. France does not have this luxury. You have a fine army, a competent navy, a large population and a starting position that will allow you bestride Europe, and maybe the world, or result in your early departure from the game, attacked on all sides.

[In future issues we will be running strategy articles for the other nations in Austerlitz. By all means send comments on the game.]

Austerlitz at a glance

Detailed PBM Napoleonic wargame from Supersonic Games Ltd in the UK, Quirxel Games (the designers) in Germany and SSV in Austria. UK charges are £10 for startup, £3.75 per turn.

www.austerlitzpbem.com

The Sims Online

The Beta Program

JIM GOULD got in at an early stage ...



LET ME SET the stage by saying that I am a Sims fan, I own all the expansions and I'm in the process of purchasing the PS2 version. I'm also a MMORPG addict, having played most for several months at one point or another. **The Sims**

Online seemed a natural for me, and I was ecstatic to get into the beta program. Another thing you should know is that in MMORPGs I spend 75% of my time solo, so interacting with other players is enjoyable, but not necessarily high on my list of priorities.

Millions of The Sims fans should be able to instantly recognize The Sims Online, by a familiar interface and in-game menus. The head and body types provided in the creation of your Sim are extensive. With the many configurations for male and female characters, chances are your Sim will not be just one of the masses. While entering profile information, you have to consciously decide whether or not this will be an online representation of yourself or a character. A server check verifies that your avatar name is unique. Finally, The Sims Online asks you to select a city for your Sim to reside in: this can prove important if you are hoping to interact with friends already in the game.

The 'needs' framework of The Sims is shared by The Sims Online, although keeping your Sim well-fed and clean are less of a worry, and new goals are less directed and left more to the player. Those players who enjoyed the building aspect of The Sims will likely want to earn money, buy objects and build larger houses. For these players, success lies in providing food and moneymaking objects to other online Sims. The most common road will be to purchase a lot, build a home, place skill-enhancing or moneymaking objects, and then welcome other Sims inside to use the equipment.

More chat-driven players will be content to move from house to house, dancing, chatting with friends and playing games. All Sims start with ample money to live on and you are never required to add to your skills or earn money. These free-spirited Sims can find many houses that offer free services such as food, showers and entertainment. The owners will have tip jars about in the hope that guests will give a little something back, or at least clean up after themselves.

Your Sims gain skill points in familiar

categories (logic, mechanical, cooking, charisma and body), in the same way as you do in The Sims. The twist is that the more Sims are in a location studying a skill, such as cooking, the faster they will all learn. In addition to gaining skill points studying, you can also gain skill points, such as logic, by solving problems on a chalkboard for which you will also earn some money. The amount of money earned is based on two things: your current level in the skill used, and the number of Sims doing the same task. This encourages like-minded Sims to come together in a house to perform the same tasks. There are other money-making objects that require more than one Sim to operate, such as the Pizza Maker (4), the Code Breaker (3), and Maze (2). These require interaction by the Sims (mainly through chat), to solve a puzzle and earn money. Again, this is based on the skill level of an attribute, depending on what position the Sims is at. For example the Code Breaker has three positions: Logic, Mechanical and Body.

There are no NPCs in this game: it's a city full of players with different personalities and motivations. To chat with somebody, all you have to do is walk up to that person, type and hit enter (all text appears in a comic book chat bubble). You can engage any willing person in various activities such as a hug or passionate kiss. I have yet to steal someone's Sim girl or get into a fight, although these actions are possible.

Dancing is the most common interaction, although there are plenty of solo dancers out there also. I found the number of additional option during dancing (move options not found in The Sims) very entertaining, and when you string several moves together it can be quite amusing.

Unfortunately for me, unlike The Sims, The Sims Online lacks the challenge and frustration of managing a complex system of 'needs' (happiness, goals and limited time). Where other online games provide 'quests' or tasks, The Sims Online has no real plot and there is certainly no main objective, leaving it up to the player to invent his or her own situations. Worse, most activities are passive in nature, which means the player commands the Sim to begin a task, then sits back and watches for five minutes while the Sim labors away.

If you enjoy avatar chat or chat in general, it may appeal to you.



Star Fleet Warlord

Part one of ROBIN ORMAN's diary of a US v UK game (game EH7) ...

THIS ARTICLE is the first part of my diary of game EH7 of **Star Fleet Warlord** (SFW), run by Pagoda Games. The game is still ongoing as I write, but these diary entries have been written largely in the present tense, based on my notes made at the time.

EH7 stands for European Historical (game) 7, and presents a different scenario to the standard SFW one. In particular, the Historical scenario is a team game, and this makes it ideal for trans-Atlantic matches: there have been four such matches so far, with the UK currently leading 3-1. Both teams involved in EH7 played in the preceding game (EH6, would you believe) where the UK won a resoundingly solid victory as the Alliance. To give the Americans a chance to save face, we agreed to a rematch and thus EH7 was born.

A note on terminology: throughout the diary I'll be making mention of Y123 and similar dates. These are the turn numbers (eg Year 123) with Y168 being the start-up turn, Y169 being the first turn, etc. I'll also be referring to sector numbers, which are shown in the map illustration opposite.

The scenario

The Historical variant of SFW is a team game which pits the Alliance (the Federation, Gorn, Kzinti and Hydrans) against the Coalition (the Klingons, Romulans and Lyrans). After turn 5 (Y172), the first team to possess twice as many major sites as their opponents (major sites are planets, gas giants and the like), wins the game - unless one team surrenders beforehand.

Each team comprises six corporations - with each of the races (except the Kzinti and Hydrans) split across two positions. The initial map layout is shown in the illustration, with the capital letters and numbers denoting each position's Home Sector ('Z' is for the Kzinti). The lowercase letters represent the Home Sectors of minor races (the LDR, WYN, Tholians and ISC) who don't take an active part in the war, other than to viciously defend their territory. The remaining sectors are 'wild' - generally possessing more resources than Home Sectors, but also infested with pirates and monsters.

Taking sides

In EH6 it was the US team's turn to have choice of sides and they opted for the Coalition, leaving the Alliance in the hands of the UK players. Now it was our turn and we decided to switch sides - both to experience the other aspect of the game, and to give the Yanks a chance with the 'winning' side.

Plus I wanted to get my hands on the Romulans, and their lovely, sneaky cloaking devices.

Both teams fielded roughly the same players as the last match: we had lost one and were reduced to four, so Mike Lay (our team captain) and I offered to take two positions each. After some discussion, Steve Howick took the Eastern Klingon corporation, with Mike Lay commanding the other half of the Klingon empire as well as the Eastern Lyrans. David Alsford opted to lead the Western Lyrans, whilst I took the reins of both Romulan positions.

The Coalition begins with a stronger economy and moves first, and is thus suited to take the initiative for an aggressive, early strike. The Alliance has the greater potential for growth however, and the longer the game lasts, the more things are likely to go in their favour, all else being equal. With that in mind, we prepared our plan of action. The Western halves of the Lyran and Klingon empires would proceed to hammer the isolated Hydran position, removing them from play as quickly as possible and securing our western flank. The remaining Lyran corporation would expand east and southeast, rapidly taking out the neutral WYN before they became too entrenched (a tactic I perfected as the Kzinti in EH6) and slamming into the Kzinti for a real cat-fight - meanwhile the Eastern Klingons would attempt to keep the Federation penned up and scrabbling for income in the bordering 'neutral zone'. Finally, on the eastern side of the map, the Romulans would use their unique cloaking technology to catch the two Gorn players off-balance.

At least, that was the plan.

First moves - Y168-Y170

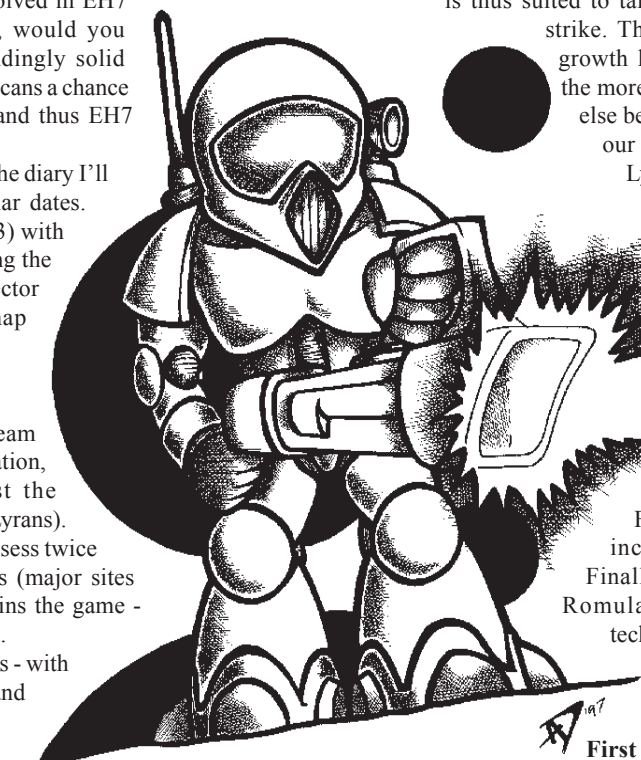
Early turns went more or less smoothly for the Coalition. Sector bonuses - which are economic boosts for holding every major site in a sector at the start of a turn - were acquired in good order for all positions, and scouts were deployed to neighbouring sectors. Unlike a standard SFW game, our Home Sectors were completely devoid of the Nasty Space Monsters - saving us the bother of having to hunt them down before they chewed up our valuable ships - although we were promised especially nasty ones in the Wild sectors.

The Klingons and Lyrans efficiently dealt with their own sectors and started to expand outwards with ruthless efficiency... A slight change was also made to The Plan to give the Western Klingons the responsibility for the subjugation of the WYN sector (#21). It was deemed they would have more forces to spare with only the Hydrans to deal with (and that with the aid of the W. Lyrans), allowing the Eastern Lyrans to concentrate on the Kzinti threat.

My Romulans also made an early mistake by forgetting to issue Counter-Espionage orders - the intelligence officers responsible for this oversight were quickly executed and more conscientious (and highly motivated) ones took their place. Fortunately the opposition didn't send their spies in, which could have resulted in the early identification of my Homeworld locations - the loss of which eliminates a position.

Scouts and decisions - Y171

This turn the scouts' terrain scans started flowing in. Or at least, some did: the scout I'd sent into sector 81 got clobbered by a marauding pirate



StarFleet Warlord at a glance

Run by Pagoda Games, this s/f wargame with an authorised *Star Trek* theme has several variants:

www.pagodagames.co.uk

00 L1	10 L2	20	30 Z	40	50 F1	60	70 G1	80 G2	90 i
01	11 d	21 w	31	41	51 F2	61	71	81	91 i
02 H	12	22 K1	32 K2	42	52 t	62	72 R1	82 R2	92

Map showing the sector numbers

cruiser between turns. This is something of a setback, since I'm going to be competing with the Eastern Gorn player for control of that sector, and I don't dare to send ships into unexplored territory (they're too likely to be destroyed or disabled by nasty terrain). Fortunately, I've got some backup scouts ready to take their late comrade's place - but it will still cause me a delay of two turns before I can enter the sector.

My other Romulan position to the west managed to get their critical scan - sector 71 - but discovered to their dismay that the majority of terrain suitable for prospecting was in the north and central regions - closer to the Western Gorn player.

In order to ensure that I'd secure some decent prospecting terrain, I decided to adjust my strategy to take an even more aggressive approach. With this in mind I carefully examined the Romulan ship lists to pick out a small, cheap fleet, but with sufficient firepower to eliminate most opponents. I settled on a large carrier, which boasts high Attack and Defence Factors (AF and DF) due to its fighter complement, supported by three 'shield-ships' - tough vessels that would withstand a maximum of damage for a minimum of cost. These latter ships are important: because of the way the combat system works in SFW, damage dealt by an enemy fleet is distributed more or less evenly across all of the ships in the opposing fleet. Damage also initially goes to a ship's shields (which doesn't affect its combat ability) before affecting the hull (which does). So having a numerical advantage means that the ships in your fleet will tend to last longer and fight more efficiently than your opponents'. To protect my carrier and its vulnerable fighter-craft, I wanted to keep this damage-division effect going for as long as possible.

Each of my positions will prepare one of these mini-fleets for deployment into the contested sectors of 71 and 81, where they will be used for hunting down monsters, NPCs, and Gorn ships that come too close.

Good news and bad news - Y172

Y172 saw the remainder of the scout reports come in (except for 81, of course). My Western Romulans have pulled some rather appealing territory in sector 62, which promises a decent prospecting income. The Eastern Romulans also received their scan of sector 92, which they should be able to secure and exploit relatively free from enemy interference.

To ensure I got my scan of sector 81 next turn, I had sent no fewer than three scouts across the border. One of these had the misfortune to fly too close to a Neutron Star, and so had its engines drained to the point where the ship is practically useless (and can't scan). This one will now prospect a nearby asteroid field before limping back for repairs. The other two encountered no such obstacle, and hopefully at least one will survive the pirates long enough to get me the information I need.

Space monsters and pirates - Y173

The turn got off to a good start with a report from subspace (battle reports intermittently received from nearby sectors) of a small tussle between the Western Gorn and the resident Space Monster in sector 71: a Giant Space Brain. Despite throwing three small frigates and a fast-attack cruiser at the beast, the Gorn failed to do more than give the Brain a headache, and were mercilessly crushed. This means that the

Western Gorn will be operating at around a 300 Economic Point (EPs - the currency of SFW) disadvantage to my own economy for a while, assuming all other factors to be equal. Only a small lead for me perhaps... but a few more such mistakes could give me a decisive advantage.

For the Eastern Romulans, the scan of sector 81 finally arrived. Fortunately, my side of the sector has been blessed with a surfeit of asteroid fields and nebulae - all good prospecting terrain - and a lack of the same for my opponent. With the bevy of prospectors I've assembled on the border, I'm confident of a large cash boost in a few turns time, which I can use to fuel my war machine.

Meanwhile, a brave little freighter in sector 71 has 'bounced off' of (encountered and retreated from) the Orion Pirate battle station in the region - the freighter had been on the way to claim and prospect the gas giant there. Eliminating this NPC installation will prevent the Pirates from building any more ships - and my mini-fleet is close by. The Admiral in charge is given his orders and the ships' weapon banks are primed for an imminent engagement...

Covert planning - Y174

Battle-scarred debris is all that remains of the Pirate base in sector 71, which was crushed with ease by my fleet - as was another such base in sector 81, which my fleet there ran into unexpectedly! These two conquests will reduce the remaining pirates to the status of pests, since their ships will slowly be destroyed by chance encounters with Gorn or Romulan vessels, and no new ones will be built.

At another planet in sector 71, my engineers had spent the turn constructing my own battle station. This brings the benefit of an improved scan each turn, pinpointing the exact numbers of ships in each hex. This has yielded a nasty surprise however: a five-ship fleet has been spotted a mere two turns from my border. Since NPCs do not tend to bunch together in such large numbers, this can only be a Gorn fleet sent down to either disrupt my prospectors or attempt a scan of my Home Sector. To counter, I will divert the remainder of my available resources for the Western Romulans into the construction of a fast-moving fleet of destroyers and fast cruisers - these will patrol the northern edge of my Home Sector, in the hope of catching the enemy fleet if and when it attempts to enter for a scan.

Of course, my own scouts are busy trying a similar trick against the Gorn. One that had obtained a scan of sector 61 is busy making its way up the eastern edge of that sector, ready to slip across into the corner of sector 70, whilst my sector 71 scout (rendered obsolete by the new battle station) will refit itself before sneaking northwards on a similar mission. Here the cloaking device should give me a definitive advantage: cloaked ships can only be detected by a special scan issued by a well-trained ship or powerful base, making them the very devil for my opponent to track and intercept.

Orders are given and the Romulan Supreme Commander waits anxiously for his next turn. The enemy are mere hexes away from his forces - the war for supremacy between the Gorn and the Romulans is about to begin...

To be continued...

Confessions of an MEPBM Newcomer

BRIAN HANCOCK reports his first experiences of Middle Earth PBM ...

WHILE AN experienced PBM gamer, I recently completed my very first game of **Middle Earth 1650** moderated by Harlequin Games. I had the good fortune of finishing in the top three on the winning team, and would like to share some of the things I learned to help aspiring new players compete with the veterans. For the veteran readers, I hope you find this entertaining!

Picking a position

The first, and arguably the most important, decision you must make when playing ME 1650 is the choice of which nation to run. In ME 1650 this is especially important, as the capabilities of the various nations vary widely, and they are not balanced versus each other. Some nations like Northern Gondor are extremely powerful, and can do almost anything with a modicum of success, while others like Cardolan have many weaknesses and no real strengths, significantly limiting the range of possible actions. If you are an individually competitive player do not chose one of the weaker positions - you will constantly be behind the power curve of the other nations and will become frustrated.

Winning the game

The rules provide two basic ways to win the game:

- 1) Find and bring the One Ring to Mount Doom
- 2) Eliminate your opponents by killing all of their commanders, taking their only possible capital, or bankrupting them.

In actual application however, only the second option is truly viable to achieve victory. Even a successful casting of *Locate Artifact True*, will yield no information on the One Ring before about turn 15. Further, even if you locate the One Ring, the logistics involved in finding, reliably transporting and keeping the One Ring are virtually insurmountable. The inclusion of Victory Conditions in the game gives the impression that competition in ME 1650 is individual as well as group. In Gunboat style games this is likely true, but in the traditional team based game, Victory Conditions are largely ignored. Victory Conditions (VCs) are generated randomly, and are not necessarily achievable. A VC to collect ten additional artifacts is a cake walk for the Noldo position, but Cardolan is just as likely to have such a VC, and for them it is virtually impossible to complete.

Meta-strategy

Strategic actions in ME 1650 can be largely grouped into one of two categories:

- 1) Character-based actions
- 2) Army-based actions.

It is through these character or army actions that the success or failure of your nation will be determined. Optimum performance involves

attempting to achieve as many effective character and army actions as quickly as possible, while countering those of your opponents.

Character-based actions

The most effective character-based actions are those which aim to reduce your opponents' ability to wage war: personal challenge, assassinate, steal, curse (a spell which kills enemy characters), influence their population centres away; or those which enhance your own ability to wage war: train, hire army, locate artifacts. As characters are able to ignore terrain penalties for movement, they can often move very quickly, and quite stealthily to complete their missions. In ME1650 the Dark Servant (DS) team is character advantaged.

Army-based actions

Army-based actions are traditional 4X game (explore, expand, exploit, exterminate) moves geared towards capturing/destroying enemy population centres while protecting your own. The actions involve a host of logistics ranging from recruiting, to feeding, to moving successfully to a viable target. Armies, while quite useful, are very expensive to maintain, move slowly and predictably, and require large amounts of ongoing resources (food) to stay effective. Troops tend to die very quickly. In ME 1650 the Free People (FP) team is army advantaged. A natural question you may ask is which is better, armies or characters? While to some extent this depends on your individual circumstances, and all positions will want to field some degree of both, the generalized answer is characters. Characters cost less to maintain, have greater mobility, are less vulnerable, and more flexible in application than armies.

Economics

Economics in ME1650, while critical, are relegated to a support role. A team cannot win the game through wealth alone, but they can surely lose it via the lack thereof. Gold is used to create armies and characters, as well as to maintain all of a player's existing assets. At first glance the commodity market looks intriguing, but unfortunately the market model is not particularly robust. As goods in ME 1650 have very little intrinsic value, the primary purpose of the world market is to dump as many goods as quickly as possible in order to generate gold for maintenance, etc. With a few notable exceptions (eg purchasing timber to replace a sabotaged bridge) commodities are rarely purchased.

Diplomacy

One of the great pleasures of the team version of ME 1650 is the strong aspect diplomacy plays in the game. In most games diplomacy consists of persuading your neighbours to attack you last, or sending them various taunts. In ME 1650 fully 20% of the positions in the game do not belong to either of the major factions, and must join one or the other before the game ends. This provides enormous incentive to converse, persuade, cajole these third parties into your faction. Diplomacy is absolutely vital, and it is possible to win the game solely on the basis of superior diplomatic effort. Despite this, it is remarkable how few players engage in diplomatic activity. Contact your neutral neighbours early and often. Remember that ME 1650 is an entertainment product, and a neutral will likely join the team that can give them the most entertainment value for their currency.

Middle Earth PBM at a glance

Team-based fantasy wargame from Harlequin Games, with a 'Lord of the Rings' setting. £10 for startup & 2 turns (existing players £5 with no free turns), further turns are £4.50.

www.middleearthgames.com

Communication and teamwork

In most faction-based PBM games, a small fraction of the players can form a team, usually in order to win the game. In ME1650 there are two mega factions each possessing 40% of the players of the game! Large teams promote meeting more players, and require a much greater degree of organization, leadership and social acumen to succeed. Due to the complexity of ME 1650 there is a great deal of ever-changing information that must be gathered and distributed. Sharing information among team mates is absolutely vital, and it is common practice to share entire turn files with one another. Even if you are a new player to ME 1650, the very first thing you should do is flip to the last page of your setup turn and compose an email to all of your team mates to get the ball rolling. The second thing you should do is setup a user group at Yahoogroups.com, inform your team mates of the address, and upload your turn. In ME 1650 the faction that communicates early, often and completely - and thinks of its team mates interests at all times - tends to win, even against much more experienced opposition.

Order issues

Some of the orders available in 1650 have very subtle effects, or in some cases the rules text is misleading. Below are some of the orders which I found particularly problematic:

850: Note ME has no initiative system. A smaller, more mobile unit, with better command will not necessarily move first. Such issues are resolved with a coin toss. Also be aware that is very easy to miscalculate army movement due to the presence of small fords etc. Always have your team mates double check any critical move orders.

860: Force March is guaranteed to lower your morale, but it is not guaranteed to move you any further than a normal army move. An army must have the exact number of movement points to enter a hex, and Force March only provides two more.

830: Naval movement requires a long chain of destination variables. It is very easy to enter a single incorrect hex direction and throw your entire course off. Also, storms seem to plague the seas and often wreak havoc with water-based movement. It is also important to know that there are few, if any, useful orders a character can execute while at sea. 665: A bridge can be sabotaged from either of the hex sides it joins. This means that to guard against such sabotage one must write 605 orders for both hexes.

725: The rulebook states that single class characters cost 5,000 gold, and that multi-class characters cost 10,000 gold. This is not in fact true: if you use the 725 order to create a single class character it will still cost 10,000 gold.

728-731-734-737: These orders enable a character of a particular class to create a new character of the same class for the reduced cost of 5,000 gold. Study the schedule for when character slots become available on page 18 of the rulebook, and plan which characters you will name ahead of time. Arrange to have a character of the appropriate class at your capital the turn a new slot opens to take advantage of these orders.

180-185: The rules text states that an aligned nation can only have a disliked, neutral or tolerated state with other neutral nations. Keep in mind that as soon as the neutral declares for one faction or another, he is no longer considered neutral, and relations can be lowered to hated, or raised to friendly.

260: It is harder to execute this order than it is to threaten a pop centre away in its entirety. Do not use.

300: The most efficient tax rate in the game is 60%. The longer you wait to raise it to this level the greater your opportunity costs (in terms of lost revenue and lost camp loyalty) you incur. Try to issue this order by turn 2.

400-420: The only troops that have real value in ME 1650 are heavy infantry, and heavy cavalry, avoid recruiting the rest. Men-at-arms are only valuable for creating low cost seed armies.

780: Use in lieu of 765 only if you have baggage train items (eg war machines) to transfer other than food.

770: Hiring an army costs 5k to create the container. By clever planning you should be able to avoid this order after the initial couple of turns by creating seed armies.

340-357: In order for these transfers to work the nation giving the items must have friendly relations with the target nation. It does not matter what relation the target nation has with the giving nation.

500: Be sure to have the emissaries in your faction issue this order versus one another so your opposing faction cannot.

949: The new loyalty rating of a transferred pop centre is equal to half the emissary rank of the emissary who received ownership. Do not use weak emissaries to receive critical population centres!

710: This order will fail if you issue it at an allied pop centre. It must be issued at one of your own pop centres.

285-290: Encounters can be useful to certain nations with powerful characters, all other nations should strive to avoid them whenever possible, as they will more than likely have harmful results.

740: If you have a character you wish to be rid of, sacrifice him to a faction mate in a challenge instead. Do not use this order.

948: While many of the critical transfer orders (325, 947) express quantity as a percentage, note that this essential order expresses quantity in units. Be sure to double check this or your ally may be very disappointed when 90 units of food arrive instead of 15243!

Completing your turn

After discussing with your team mates what role you are to play in the upcoming turn, find a pencil and use the order sheet provided with your turn as scratch paper to draft your orders. Be sure to look up in the rule book each and every order as you write it to get the required information correct. Once you have done this go to the official Middle Earth web page at:

<http://dialspace.dial.pipex.com/town/way/gs21/megfiles/lib.htm>

Click on 'AutoMagic' on the lefthand side to begin downloading a wonderful order input utility that will catch many of your mistakes. AutoMagic is by and large cross platform compliant, and fairly easy to use. Type in (or import the XML file provided with your turn PDF) your character info. Next input the draft orders you prepared in pencil, and correct any errors. Then go to the 'send' section of the utility and copy the text of your orders on the right and post it to your allies on your yahoo user group. This should be done several days in advance of the deadline so that your faction mates can catch any errors, and provide you with critique. After making any necessary changes send Harlequin Games the AutoMagic file to submit your turn. By following this procedure each and every time you submit a turn, you will make few if any errors, and your allies will also know what you are up to. Veteran players often get lazy in order writing, and follow a much more abbreviated procedure which has a much higher incidence of error. One way a new player can effectively compete with a veteran is through superior effort and organization.

Getting information

In the real world information is power, and it is no different in ME 1650. Poor decisions are more often the result of inaccurate/ incomplete information than poor strategy. A new player can level the experience gap between himself and the veterans very quickly by doing a little research. The previously mentioned official ME web page has a plethora of useful information, but the Bible of ME 1650 is maintained by Kevin "Bobbins" O'Keefe, and can be found at:

www.middleearthpbm.co.uk

This site contains detailed instructions on how to get the most out of every encounter, a complete list of all characters and artifacts in the game, sample turns for every position, and much more. When in doubt, don't take a chance, look it up!

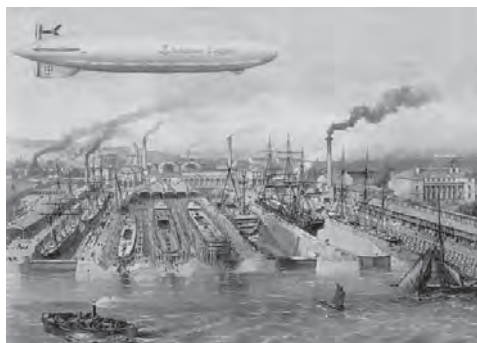
Finally, the customer service staff at Harlequin is among the best I have ever encountered in the PBM world. They are an excellent source of information and will happily respond to any query promptly.

[We've heard that Kevin O'Keefe is no longer maintaining the website mentioned above, though the site is still active until the end of the year. Middle Earth Games may well incorporate this site into their own in the future.]

Lords of the Earth

Campaign 1: An Age of Air and Steam

MARTIN HELSDON returns, to continue his saga ...



WE LAST LEFT the Norskrad, the Merchant House I play in game 1 of **Lords of the Earth**, settling into its new home in the city of St Georges in Morocco. Since then, the world has kept turning: a new religion has swept out of north west Afrika and into

the Middle East, and invaders from Mars have landed in South Amerika, Australia and north Afrika. As if this were not enough, the Company has been embroiled in a battle to prevent another asteroid impact...

One thing that can never be said about Lords is that things are quiet. Friction arises from ancient enmities (some of the players have been in the game since it began - that's two hundred and eighteen turns), the struggle of nation against nation, the insidious spread of the cults of the Secret Empires, natural and unnatural disasters, and the gradual improvement of technology. This campaign has reached the year 1766; for the industrial nations of the world the available technologies roughly correspond to the late Nineteenth Century. Some nations are still mired in the Renaissance and can but stare jealously at the wonders of steam power. And now we have invaders from Mars with Heat Rays, Black Smoke and other horrors.

Not all LotE games aspire to the same epic qualities of this, the first campaign. It has been running for so long there are numerous plot strands and arcs. The newsfax, the means by which turn results are published, needs a careful study, to discern the threads reading between the misinformation and dis-information introduced by players.

As LotE01 is the testbed campaign (though not the most advanced technologically, there is one game set in the Twentieth Century but with wildly divergent back history) rules changes usually impact it first. The old Renaissance Supplement and the Industrial Rules have been amalgamated into the Modern Age rulebook. Whenever the rules get updated, in addition to new technologies, things change...

Being the testbed, the campaign is subject to changes to fix the basic game mechanics. Recently a proposal to cap trade earnings threatened to wreck Merchant House positions (a Merchant House gains its revenues primarily through trade - 'it's about money really' as the Modern Age rules say) causing a great deal of angst. Another Merchant House player posted his declaration to drop to the Yahoo e-group. It would have been disheartening to see ten turns effort removed by a 'fix'. The MAXTRADE bodge to the game mechanics has not been

applied, but we do not yet know what might be put in place instead.

To the game, then...

Norskrad had settled into the Swedish-Russian city of St Georges following the Great Lisbon Earthquake. Most of my yards (the means by which hi-tech units such as steamships and airships are built) had been destroyed, so the next few turns concentrated on rebuilding the Company. Many of my engineers had died, and the loss of 'homeland' damaged the Bureaucracy and Infra levels, as well as the University. There is still discussion amongst the players about the cause of the earthquake: was it a natural event, or caused by the hideous Elder Race the Cthonians in the unfortunately not lost city of G'harne, down in west Afrika?

In the wider world, a Company mercenary was kidnapped by a previously unknown secret society, and a hideous fungal plague was unleashed in the capital of the Swedish-Russian Empire, Rome and at a site in central Asia. The Stronghold of a powerful Secret Empire, worshippers of the elder god Hastur, had been destroyed and now the cult unleashed its revenge - a plague known as the Contagion.

With the government decimated, the Swedish-Russian Empire fragmented into the militants supporting the heir to the Tsar and the Parliamentarians. Agreeing to the demands of his senior officers the young Tsar launched an attack into Hussite Poland, whilst the capital of the old Tsar was hit by another outbreak of the Contagion. Amidst all this a mysterious crate arrived at my Home Office, from the fallen Stronghold where Swedish scientists and others had been studying the mysteries of the Hastur worshippers.

Given that plague attacks were wiping out cities - the Pope died when the Contagion roared through Rome - any present from the Stronghold of the enemy was a very clear danger. I toyed with casting it into the ocean, but decided to open it at sea to prevent any outbreak. Just as it was opened, a tattered Swedish-Russian officer arrived at St. Georges, desperate to regain his notes from the crate.

The information inside was horrifying. The Hastur worshippers had been in contact with the Mi-Go, extraterrestrial servants of Nyarlathotep, who had previously bombarded us with asteroids at the behest of the Daemon Sultan prior to his defeat. The Mi-Go had agreed to bring another asteroid to Earth to devastate their enemies as well as supplying them with a number of plague canisters to aid in the pacification of the 'native tribes'. The Mi-Go had abandoned the asteroid and fled into deep space, and it was now on an uncontrolled trajectory for Earth, with impact in two or three years. Given that the agricultural production is already reduced by the impacts on the Danish Empire's capital of Venice, the South China Sea (the Mi-Go were aiming for Japan) and northern Canada (to settle an inter-cultic dispute with the Ice Lords), one more and we might well be reduced to cannibalism...

The officer wanted transport to the New World, to seek out the owners of the flying ship Uraeus. An urgent rendezvous was arranged, and in league with Swedish-Russia and others a desperate plan was hatched. Past newsfaxes were read again to gain clues - from the description of the impact on Venice and a strange epilogue in one newsfax when something hit a Mi-Go asteroid it was likely that the rock would be tunnelled, possibly with an interior command system. If we could reach that... From the after-effects of the other impacts - strange unearthly monsters littering the devastation - it was likely the asteroid would still have inhabitants. If we could get there, we would have to fight our way in. But how to control the alien devices that might exist? When the

Lords of the Earth at a glance

Lords of the Earth at a glance

A commercial PbeM powergame that exists in several separate games covering different historical periods. Game 1 is run by LotE's designer, Thomas Harlan. For available places in all LotE games check:

www.throneworld.com/lords

Hasturite stronghold had been taken, the living brain of a captured Danish officer had been found in a Mi-Go brain canister. Perhaps he could interface with any alien controls...

The Uraeus was readied for space flight. The Swedish-Russian officer had brought a few vials of space-mead with him - enough to get to the asteroid we were now calling Nemesis. By this time about five players were involved, and complete secrecy was required to prevent news of our endeavour reaching any hostile. As the junior partner in this gathering of players, most of whom had been in the game for hundreds of turns, I decided to obey the restrictions. It was left in my hands, however, to finalise the details of the mission.

As Nemesis began to glow red in the outer atmosphere the Uraeus was launched. As the ship climbed into orbit dozens of strange objects were seen - Martian landing cylinders. War had already begun in South Amerika.

The ship reached Nemesis, discovering that it had massive solar sails. We fought our way in, and a control centre was found. The brain canister was engaged - we had control of Nemesis! But the Danish officer, more than a little mad from his confinement, declared he would finish the mission his dead Empress had set him to: the destruction of the Hasturites. He knew where their new Stronghold was. Killing my character who was trying to deactivate him, he sent Nemesis towards Earth, only then noticing the small santo my character had dropped in the final struggle, a picture of his Empress, now revered as a Saint...

So ended the newsfax. From information therein, if left alone Nemesis would have hit before the end of the turn. Despite the intent to bring it down on Earth, no impact had occurred.

Naturally, as my characters had been aboard the Uraeus, an awful lot of players blamed me for the dramatic (and inconclusive) ending and for keeping the threat secret. My mailbox was fairly lively. My associates kept a low profile. The owners of the Uraeus informed me that despite our security precautions there had been attempts to stop us. If the information had been more widely disseminated, then potentially all the Secret Empire cults who would like a dark freezing world (and there are quite a few, remnants of the war with the Ice Lords and others) would have tried to hinder the mission. It was a no-win situation.

On top of this, certain parties had already been circulating a fake e-mail purportedly between the Martian players and myself. Apparently I had agreed to help the invaders.

In the next turn, Nemesis did not fall. The asteroid had vanished into the outer darkness.

The fake e-mail caused me more difficulty than the mission.

Sadly, there is a very small minority of players who take things too far. Some try to play multiple positions in the same game to give themselves an edge. Probably as a symptom of e-mail, there have been occasional spats on the e-groups where personalities collide, and outbreaks of people hiding behind pseudonyms and in one bizarre instance, a false gender.

In this case, although the majority of LotE players are American, the perpetrators of what, in my view is poor game play, were not American. One is actually a GM of another LotE campaign, although their game has been stalled for a year. (LotE operates on a franchise system - you can buy the right to run a campaign; this leads to a significant number of players having access to the GM rules and the GM discussion e-group, thus having a better view of the game mechanics than the other players.) In-game shenanigans are one thing, but when it leads to the attempted character assassination of the player, a line has been crossed.

Most LotE players do not encounter this sort of behaviour. Indeed, of the two or three meltdowns on the LotE01 e-group I am aware of, the same small minority is usually involved. It is an unfortunate dimension to online gaming.

Elsewhere in the game, the kidnappers of my mercenary captain were found to be an organisation naming themselves the Black Watch, apparently part of a new Merchant House, the Polytechnic League, that had abruptly appeared in Athens. This Merchant House was selling very fast airships, and others discovered its true origin: the Assassins, the servants of the Daemon Sultan who had reinvented themselves after the fall of their dark master. Someone purchased and then took one of these

advanced airships apart - it was powered not by technology but by the magics of the worshippers of Ithaqua! Even as a Jesuit priest exorcised the airship, the Danish Empire closed down the Polytechnic League, and the Stronghold of the Assassins in Egypt was located and destroyed.

And Spain had collapsed again. The battle between the Spanish and the Secret Empire named the Golden Dawn had gone disastrously wrong. The Shawnee had sent an army to help the Spanish clean their house. Someone caused the Shawnee leaders to rebel, and they initiated their own crusade against the Spanish as they were now convinced that the Spanish government was in league with the Golden Dawn. Mayhem resulted. The powerful North Amerikan army wiped the floor with the Spanish. In the next turn the Shawnee rebels became a player position and continued to throw the wrong-footed Spanish about, taking their new capital and reducing them to fewer regions and cities than you can count on one hand. And a volcano erupted just to the north.

The battles between Great France and the Martians in South Amerika resulted in the humans being pushed back. Against the onslaught of Tripods, Heat Rays, Black Smoke and other unearthly weaponry, cannon, cavalry and muskets could not hold. Gradually a widespread effort began to aid the beleaguered humans with armies arriving from south Afrika and elsewhere. And still the invaders came on...

Elsewhere a nomad army fled a portion of the Sahara in fear of 'that which walks the sand'. Strange disappearances occurred in Australia, scouting units vanished. Then a combined Swedish-Russian Carthaginian force encountered the invaders on the Upper Nile and was destroyed.

It has become a War of the Worlds in the closing years of the Eighteenth Century...

The earlier Ice Wars derived in part from the Cthulhu Mythos, with the worshippers of Ithaqua destroying the religious Anchors that preserve Earth from the return of the Great Old Ones. This new War has numerous sources. So far the classic by H G Wells, the 1953 film version by George Pal, the Barsoom of Edgar Rice Burroughs, and the Tripods by John Christopher seem to feed into this new threat. It remains to be seen if human armies, armed with relatively low tech can successfully hold off, let alone defeat the Martians.

Playing the game

All of the above gives some indication of the flavour of the LotE01 campaign. The game is played on a number of different levels.

Players communicate with each other by telephone or e-mail, or by being members of Yahoo e-groups, in addition to the primary e-group. I belong to five e-groups, based on in-game religion, geographical location, position type and other interests. Much of the time expended in playing LotE01 is in exchanging messages with other players, be they diplomacy, ideas, strategies and general chat.

Players communicate with the GM, mainly by turnsheets. The turnsheet includes all the information about unit and Project builds and costs, as well as espionage and religious actions, and Leader actions. The Bureaucracy Level determines the number of Leaders and Princes a player has at their disposal and these are the prime way players have their plans and actions carried out. A Leader has a set number of Action Points according to the Leader's abilities and the types of units they are commanding, to spend during the course of a turn (in LotE01 turns presently cover two years) and the player has to allocate these points to actions. The most simple action is movement, but there are dozens of others, some specific to the position type, be it Open Nation, Religious Primacy, Religious Order, Merchant House or Secret Empire. Leaders can command armies, invade enemies, lay siege to cities, support or indulge in espionage, investigate locations looking for evil cultists and so on.

Despite the size of the two rulebooks, amounting to some 160 pages, plus the campaign specific note and clarifications it does not take too long to understand the basics. After fourteen turns, I believe I understand most of the rules, and had a reasonable grasp after two or three. LotE is time consuming to play, very engrossing and usually a rewarding gaming experience.

[Martin's diary of Game 1 ran in issues 97-100.]

MagBlast: Second Edition

BEN WILLIAMS plays a cardgame set in space ...

GLITTERING pinholes in the cosmic curtain of space serve as the backdrop for Fantasy Flight Games' **MagBlast: Second Edition**, a card game of fast-paced, interstellar conflict. As many as eight players square off to spryly construct fleets of starships, intent on annihilating their enemies' flagships. With any amount of skill and luck, a brazen fleet commander might walk away victorious, even unscathed, to cavort triumphantly through the inhospitable plenum of nothingness.

www.fantasyflightgames.com/magblast2.html

Streamlined schematics

Designers of MagBlast show an obvious appreciation for the classic television space dramas of the previous three decades. They are indebted to nostalgic shows such as *Buck Rogers*, *Babylon 5*, *Battlestar Galactica* and *Farscape*, which featured tactical ship battles as a staple of interstellar storytelling. On the front of the box, a bewildered star-fighter encased in his metal sarcophagus is frozen in terror, his scream silenced both by the confines of his vessel and the vacuum of space. For all we know from the smoke arcing behind his ship, the pilot is just as likely spiralling uncontrollably to his doom as he is narrowly escaping the blasts in the background. Clearly, MagBlast espouses television assumptions that laser blasts do more to settle stellar disputes than the words of slick-talking diplomats. Besides, blasting enemies is much more fun.

Simple rules explained simply

Players soon begin eradicating any one of MagBlast's eight meddling species utilizing three types of cards and the rules pamphlet, which consists of three half-pages of black and white rules. The documentation benefits from simple rules explained simply, providing pictures of example cards and the layout of the playing area when needed. One of the more interesting, and admittedly peculiar, rules of the game is the requirement that players provide sound effects when playing a laser blast card against an opponent. Players can, of course, adhere strictly to this rule or not, but playing with the rule does add some youthful foolishness that enhances the game's enjoyment.

The only time the rules might be confusing is when it comes to simultaneous play of action cards; for instance, when a defender immediately counters a Squadron action card with a Time Distortion card. Nevertheless, the rules are conceptually ambiguous but mechanically clear, and they in no way hinder play. In fact, the minuscule amount of rules helps, not hinders, the game. Even where there is only a sense of possible confusion, the game designers provide italicized examples of game play to make sure there's clarity. My only complaint about the documentation is that there's no listing of the game's contents; the initial number of cards that are suppose to come with the game is unknown. For a .PDF copy of the MagBlast rules, visit Fantasy Flight Games' website at

www.fantasyflightgames.com/magblast2.html

Pop iconography extends beyond the game's cover to grace the front and back of each card. The face of each card is rendered nicely in colour. On the flip side, three different soft-gray collages denote the card's

particular type: flagship, ship or action card. Generic, sci-fi inspired names for starships enrich the stellar back-story and aid players in envisioning a plausible background for their cosmological demolition. With help from the amusing, true-to-genre weapons and accessories, the game does a fair job developing its quirky space milieu.

Engaging the enemy

The aim of MagBlast is to build a fleet that not only withstands the punishment of opponents but also brings any hostile throng of fortified ships to its knees. By discarding and drawing cards on each turn, players hunt for the necessary action cards usable with their starships, which are laid out in four, colour-coded sectors surrounding their flagship.

Players start by randomly drawing a single flagship and placing it in front of them. Each flagship represents a particular culture with a unique game advantage and has four colour-coded sectors corresponding to the card's top edge, two sides, and bottom edge. Within these sectors go the fleet's various other ships, drawn from a deck of ship cards. Four such cards are drawn initially, and each player studies the cards before placing them face down around the flagship, one ship card to a sector. When each player is done placing the ship cards, the cards are turned over and play begins with the player whose total ship hull value is the lowest.

Now might be a good time to explain hull values and other fun MagBlast mechanics. Each ship card comes with a picture of the ship, its given name, its particular ship type, a hull value, a designation of its capabilities, and its movement rate. Not including a ship's picture and name, all the information on a ship card has an importance in gameplay. A ship's type either gives a general idea of the ship's offensive powers (in the case of scouts, gunships, and dreadnoughts) or strictly delineates its capabilities (in the case of minesweepers and carriers); hull values represent the amount of damage a ship can suffer before being destroyed; text or symbols account for a ship's special ability, whether it involves firing a laser or clearing away the mines; and finally, if a ship can move from one sector to another, a movement rating is given in the upper right-hand corner.

Play proceeds clockwise, with players drawing up to five action cards by which they obliterate their opponents or acquire additional ships. To visit doom on their enemies, players unleash vicious attacks either against starships sitting in sectors around an enemy flagship or, if an enemy flagship's sector is devoid of a starship, against the flagship itself. But before they do, players have an option to move their ships, at least the ones that can move, from one sector to another. Astute players use this chance to coordinate attacks on particular sectors or redistribute the location of ships to cover vulnerable, or dare we say defenceless, sectors.

Blasters away!

Once an attack begins, it's rather straightforward. Only ships in corresponding, coloured sectors are capable of attacking each other, and in most cases, the attacks often succeed unless the defending player has a special action card to guard against the attack. Such defenses are not rare, but they are uncommon. It usually takes a few laser blasts from a scout ship (whose lowly blasts normally do 1 point of hull damage) to destroy any other type of ship except for another scout, which has 1 or 2 hull points of protection. Players that have dreadnoughts and gunships capable of magblasts can easily take out a sizable enemy ship - such as another gunship - with one or two shots.

Whether because an enemy boarding party commandeered a ship, or a hostile vessel simply blew a ship to smithereens, players can acquire more ships for their fleet by redeeming action cards that display resource symbols. The abstract resource symbols crudely represent the player's accumulation of wealth, granting the game a simple economic aspect.

MagBlast at a glance

Published by Fantasy Flight Games, the game costs \$19.95 from Fantasy Flight's web page.

www.fantasyflightgames.com

Most cards display one such resource symbol, but some cards have two. For each redeemed set that contains three identical resource symbols or three different resource symbols, players may draw a ship card to place in one of their flagship's four sectors. This is an uncomplicated but effective method for simulating investiture of assets into recruitment and construction.

Over the course of the game, players struggle to balance the use of action cards for blasting foes or building ships. Of course, having enough ship cards to occupy each sector is not only desirable, it's necessary for survival; however, playing it safe by building a sizable fleet might not protect against a ravaging host of particle beams and boarding parties.

Pleasant discoveries

MagBlast is a fun game. Surprisingly, my initial thoughts were not enthusiastic. Looking at the box for the first time did nothing to heighten my expectations, and honestly, I thought playing the game might be work. Even the first readings of the rules didn't do much to create excitement. Only in the middle of the fray, when I noticed that the game asked a little more of me than I expected it to, did I actually find myself looking forward to proceeding turns.

After many hours, and several hands of MagBlast, I put the game away and felt confident that any card game enthusiast would at least appreciate the game even if the game's design didn't challenge or redefine the genre. MagBlast doesn't offer anything overly original in terms of rules, mechanics, or art. Its form and function are reminiscent of other great card games past and present that did shake up the card industry during their time. However, just because MagBlast isn't on the cutting edge of the industry doesn't mean it isn't worth a try. In terms of its ability to engage, encourage and enrapture players during an afternoon or evening together, the game receives high marks.



PRINTERS AD

Neutral Zone

American Football League

COREY SAPP describes this lively sports game ...

Neutral Zone American Football League is a highly involved PBEM that allows the player to become coach, general manager, and owner of a 'professional' American fantasy football team. Nothing is left out. You manage your team through trades, draft, training camp, pre-season games, regular season, post-season, and if you are lucky, the championship. There is even a pro-bowl, which the moderators Andi Thornton and Chris Sadler take care of with your players. The only thing missing are recognizable names from the NFL. For the most part, all management of your teams takes place on a program created by Andi and Chris. When all available actions have been taken, you email or upload your turn. The program itself has no bugs that I am aware of, and if there are problems Chris and Andi are prompt in taking care of them.

When you begin, you are given a team with a full roster of players unless it is a new league, and then you draft your team. Each player has an overall rating (which is taken as some sort of average based on the personal attributes) from the low 40s to the low 80s. Generally, the higher the number, the better the player. In addition to the overall rating, each player has five personal attributes: Skill, Speed, Strength, Stamina and Morale. Also, there are a number of hidden attributes, such as leadership, selfishness, illegalities, etc.

It is in these personal ability lines that the first area of depth reveals itself. Andi and Chris like a little mystery, and would rather have people experimenting than simply crunching the numbers to find out what the perfect combination of abilities is for any given position. They give very little away, so it is up to you and other players to make sense of these issues. For example, is it better to have a Tackle that is very skilled but not terribly strong or fast, or would you rather have one that is very strong and fast but unskilled? Morale is an attribute that can have a profound effect on the team as whole, or simply player X. Lose, and morale drops team wide. If your first string Tight End is making less money than the backup, he may not be happy about that and will play accordingly. Hidden attributes play an important role as well. This could perhaps be debated, and much is, but I have had players that seemed to play far above what their rating might have indicated.

Each team also has a scout who assists in scouting other teams, players in upcoming drafts, free agents, as well as how much players are likely to improve during training camp. Scouts can be hired and fired, allowing a team to upgrade.

Before each game, you put together a depth chart for your offence, defence, and special teams rosters. You can use the program to do this for you, or you can do it yourself. The computer method is to simply place the highest rated player in the starting position. It has been my experience that this is not always the best method. The computer does not look at the attributes, and you may not get the best guy in there for the position.

Once the depth chart is put together, you put together your game plan. This can be a daunting task, because there is a lot to it. First you must take a look at the kind of defence your opponent is likely to use.

Then you have to figure out what can work through that defence. There are a large number of pass and rushing plays available, and you have to be careful to choose those plays that suit your team. For example, the first team I played in League 3 could not throw the long pass. I have my theories as to why, but it just did not work. However, I made it to the play-offs two years in a row throwing short passes. The preseason games allow you the room to figure out what your team is good at, both on the offensive and defensive side of the ball.

There are a great many things that you can do to help your team. If you run across a team that passes almost 80% of the time, perhaps you want to try a couple of blitz plays, or run man-to-man. It all really depends on your players.

Now with the game being managed, you have to manage your roster. Do you have the best possible players in every position? Do you have salary cap room (and yes, there is a salary cap), to pay for that star player? Do you have players or draft picks that you would rather trade, to get another player?

A game of depth

There is a lot to this game, far more than is possible to explain in this short review, but I will say that there is enough depth to it to keep anyone interested for a very long time. Many of the people that are playing in the different leagues have been there for some time. They are often willing to help the 'newbie', though I advise checking every trade you make for the first couple of weeks very carefully. There are a few in the various leagues who might like to take advantage by sneaking in a bad trade or two.

The thing that I enjoy the most about the game is watching your players develop into stars. You grow to like them in the same way as you enjoy the real stars. I switched leagues recently so that I could try my hand at drafting a team from scratch, and I could still tell you the names of my old Tight End, and my first round draft pick, rookie of the year, all-pro, top-five Quarterback. By the same token, you also feel the heartbreak of watching them get old, injured, and unable to play, like my own 30 year old Cornerback who slowly but surely got left in the dust by younger, faster players.

The other aspect of the game that is great are Andi and Chris. I needed some help early on, and they were very fast in their responses. They also keep their minds open to changes that can help the game as a whole. For example, on one of the discussion forums, a number of players were trying to help those teams that had become perennial losers. They waded through the host of changes that were proposed and implemented the best of them, to allow those losing teams a chance to improve.

The game allows for as much interaction with the other coaches as you want. If you simply want to sit back and play the game without getting overly involved with it you can. You can also be a mover and a shaker, making trades, sending out 'press releases' to increase team morale or develop a rivalry with another team. Some of the leagues even have weekly newsletters.

Neutral Zone has enough depth to keep you interested for some time. While the game is complex, it is also not hard to learn the basics, and even a rookie has a chance to make a competitive team. If sports PBEMs are your thing, this one is a must. I would happily suggest it, and have, to anyone I know.

[Do you play a sports game? If so, we'd welcome an article from you! We're also looking for a regular sports correspondent - contact us if you think you could take this on.]

Neutral Zone at a glance

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New Computer Games

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Star Wars Jedi Knight: Jedi Academy

Publisher: Lucas Arts

Platform: PC

For those of you who played Jedi Outcast, Jedi Academy is going to seem instantly more than a little familiar. With similar sound effects and only slightly modified graphics engine, JA certainly feels the same as the predecessor. There have been some small improvements, and some small detractors, and the result is a game more or less as good as the first one. I think that's better than 90% of the games out there, but if you were looking for something

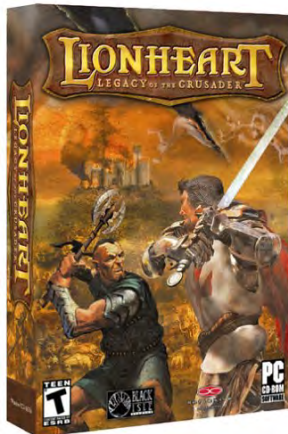
dramatically different, you're not going to find it in JA.

Port Royale

Publisher: Tri Synergy

Platform: PC

Port Royale, developed by Ascaron Entertainment, is a game that allows you to sail the Caribbean during the 16th and 17th centuries - that is, in the place most famous for pirates and during the time period when pirates were the strongest. However, you don't play a pirate in the game. You don't even play a basic sea captain. Instead, Port Royale takes a higher level approach to the pirate game genre, and it allows you to hire pirates and merchants to work for you. Does this approach work? Erm ... no. I wouldn't recommend Port Royale unless you're looking for a slow-paced game that challenges your brain more than your reflexes, and unless you're only planning to play an hour or two each night.



Lionheart: Legacy of the Crusader

Publisher: Interplay

Platform: PC

Wow. Yeah, that's my summary for this role-playing game. But it's not 'Wow, that was good' or 'Wow, that was bad.' It's more 'Wow, I wonder what the hell happened there?' You see, Lionheart is an excellent game for about 20 hours, with open-ended gameplay, a good balance between combat and quests, and an opportunity for real role-playing. But then the next 20 hours feature a long linear march of boring, repetitive and slow combat, culminating in one of the

worst endings I've ever seen. To say Lionheart goes astray is to put it mildly. On balance avoid it until the price comes down

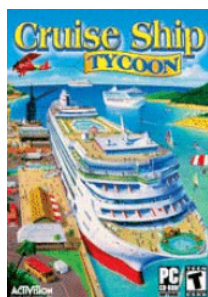
The Hulk

Publisher: Vivendi Universal Games

Platform: PC

If you've ever been a comic book fan, you've got to be somewhat happy and alarmed at the recent explosion of interest and development of the entertainment industry into your pastime. With many ideas in these companies going stale, they seem to turn an eager eye to proven plotlines and characters that've stood the test of time. Besides, most of the ideas in comics are more original than a lot of the movies or games around. In short, if you consider yourself a Hulk fan or a Marvel fanatic, you probably already own this game. If so, I hope you're enjoying tearing through towns and places laying waste to your enemies. However, if

not, numerous limited game features, shortened play and poorly implemented secondary characters reduce this game to the 'try before you buy' category.



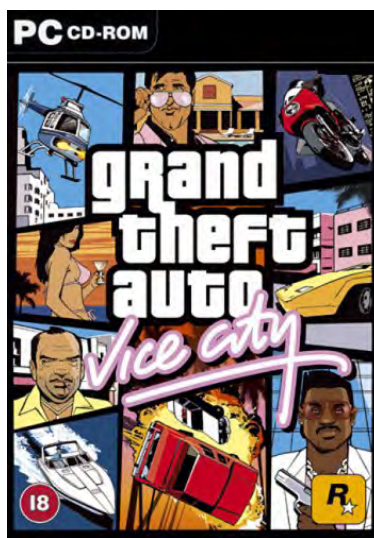
Cruise Ship Tycoon

Publisher: Activision

Platform: PC

The first time I played Cruise Ship Tycoon, my ship hit some rocks and sank. The second time, a big squid-like creature (called 'our primordial friend' by the game) grabbed my ship and dragged it to a watery grave. About this time I realized that not only did I need to do the typical tycoon things in the game, I also had to steer the ship.

You might wonder how I didn't realize this before, but let's just say that Cruise Ship Tycoon doesn't come with a plethora of documentation. The four page 'manual' only describes how to use the opening menu system, probably the one part of every game people already know how to use. So, anyway, on to my third attempt. This time I actually had some success. Starting with a small ship (that's 'small' relative to cruise ships), I littered the interior with sleeping quarters of different sizes, added in places for my guests to eat and drink and have fun, hired some staff and then set sail. I started making money and was able to upgrade to a bigger ship, and then... you guessed it. I made another appearance on 'When Squid-like Creatures Attack' (look for it on the Discovery channel). At that point whatever little enthusiasm I had for the game began to wane, and, worse, I was pretty sure that the three aborted cruises had already shown me everything Cruise Ship Tycoon had to offer.



Grand Theft Auto: Vice City

Publisher: Rockstar Games

Platform: PC

Aaaah, the 80s. It's a pity that many of you are too young to have lived in the 80s, because it was quite a time. Pastels, stonewashed designer jeans, neon, flashy cars, big hair - the 80s had it all. Embarrassing? Oh sure, in the extreme. And yet it had a flavour, a sound, a style that was instantly identifiable as belonging to no other era. Now, you might play Vice City and ask yourself, 'It's a parody, right?' You'd be wrong. It's the 80s that were the parody, and Vice City got it just right. The

gameplay in Vice City remains, essentially, unchanged from Grand Theft Auto III - steal cars, drive, shoot people, get paid. Enough creativity has gone into the missions, almost too many to count, that Vice City with no other changes could almost stand alone as a game, or at least a heck of an expansion pack. I personally see Vice City as very near the perfect game. It's engrossing, has a speedy learning curve, and is packed with action. You can play for just an hour, or be sucked in for hours on end. Though I have to warn you that several times I intended to play for just an hour, only to find myself several hours past with no idea where the time had gone. I suppose with a great game, that's always a risk.

Conferences, Crime and Kids

CAROL MULHOLLAND on this and that ...

OF THE VARIOUS trips that I've been on in a busy year, there was one that was actually relevant to *Flagship*: a visit to Manchester University in September for a conference on 'Digital Games Industries: Developments, Impact and Direction'. I often grumble about people not taking games seriously enough, so I was interested to see what sort of people would turn up to confer about digital gaming. My first glance round surprised me: no ponytails and a fairly high proportion of women. While I don't object to ponytails, I was so glad not to be the only female present.

It was mostly video games that were discussed: their history, their profitability, their hardware and their players. Well, this emphasis is understandable because the video games are worth big money: the sales of games software in 2001 were estimated at \$11 billion world-wide and growing. It's always good to hear of a prospering games industry! Indeed, a couple of the people who attended the conference were bureaucrats researching the possibility of establishing video game companies in their own countries, while here in Britain Sheffield University is setting up a course on designing and programming video games. I was surprised that only one speaker talked about online gaming, and tickled that the video game reps reckoned that online gaming is but a passing fancy which won't affect their own industry. (Ha, whisper this not in the realms of **Everquest**, **Asheron** or **Camelot**...) So are they correct? If this is true now, will it still hold true when broadband becomes common?

Apparently more than 90% of digital games are now bought by over 18-year olds, though I suspect that a fair proportion of these over 18-year olds are actually parents buying for their children.

And the future? Well, there's a move by the advertising industry in the States to produce computer games as part of their sales campaigns, which seems harmless enough. Has **The Sims** succeeded in the worthy objective of increasing the number of female games players? And what about the Playstation's dance mat? - is this a game at all?

I was a little suspicious of some of the figures that were given: but then, I'm always amused by the faith that economists profess in numbers in public, while in private all those that I know personally avow that theirs is an inexact science. Indeed, at least one of the speakers quoted the sales figures produced by firms as if these were completely trustworthy.

Some of the talks were interesting, some not. Treating a type of game seriously because it's making loadsa money isn't especially inspiring. I must confess that I've blanked out quite a lot of what I heard because it didn't seem much fun, but if you'd like to skim through the material it's up on a website. You'll soon spot the paper that I helped with myself:

www.cric.ac.uk/cric/workshops/dgi

Oh, and the sandwiches were lovely! One of the talks that interested me at the conference was about online gaming. After establishing how this differs hugely from computer gaming, the question arose of who actually owns the characters created by game players. They're intellectual property, but do they belong to the game software company, or their player?

I remember this question being hotly debated in roleplaying circles many years ago, when a moderator started to write a novel about the campaign that he was running: some of his players objected that he was

using material that they'd created and therefore felt that they owned. I can't remember how this particular controversy was resolved - peaceably? acrimoniously? - or even whether it was resolved at all. It's the sort of discussion that has probably arisen more than once! But I can sympathise with any player's belief that his game character belongs to him: it's a belief that the game designer is anxious to foster, after all. On the other hand, the game as the whole is the designer's responsibility.

In many games, a moderator will be glad to have a substitute player take over the character of someone who wants to leave his game. But online games have made the matter particularly relevant, because it's now possible to sell a character and/or his possessions via EBay - for real money. Is this a moral thing to do? Is it right to buy a powerful game character you've not created yourself? Does this infringe the game designer's copyright? Indeed, is it even legal? And does the fact that in-game possessions can now be sold for real money encourage other players to wade in and steal them for re-sale? Probably!

This particular element has been discussed by Mark Ward, the BBC News Online technology correspondent in an interesting essay called 'Does Virtual Crime Need Real Justice?' (<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/technology/3138456.stm>) Virtual crimes are new ones! While Mark Ward agrees that intellectual property is a valid category, the experts he quotes agree that this sort of crime isn't one that the police could easily deal with: the worth of a magic cloak within the game doesn't really correspond to anything in our much more boring real world.

So it looks as if some sort of in-game protection is the only reasonable course to follow. It's always good gaming advice to make friends and allies! Ah, the days of my youth! I'm old enough to remember when the Much Older Generation would disapprove of seeing me 'wasting time' by reading a book when I should be sewing, knitting or peeling spuds. No, I didn't take much notice! Then came the time when it was Television was the great danger and it was books that were the Good Thing. Indeed, you could be turned into a self-aware and moral person by wide reading. And there's just enough truth in this to make it plausible, eh?

Now, there's a school in the USA which is putting tremendous emphasis on playing games. The project is described by Vicky Hallett in a Special to *The Washington Post* (Thursday, October 16, 2003; Page VA03) called 'The Game's Afoot at Henry'. Fourth- and fifth-grade classes were given a bingo-like game called **Take It Easy**, which greatly improved their progress with maths. This isn't a new idea in education, but game-playing has become a cool activity in the school. There's an after-school games club, Wanna Play a Game, and an annual family game night. Around 75 games can be borrowed for a night or two from the school library.

The games that work best are those designed to amuse rather than simply to educate. Popular games are the German **Take It Easy**, which was nominated for the German game of the year award in 1994, **Carcassonne**, **Zicke Zacke Huhnerkacke** and the card game **Apples to Apples**.

Much as I love living in Devon, I don't get to many game meetings nowadays. It was fun to attend *Towercon* last March, and I'm planning a trip up to *Dragonmeet* on December 13th, where I look forward to handing out copies of *Flagship* to potential readers. If you're planning to attend, look out for me: I'll be the friendly old bat by the fanzine stall.

Monsters

Enough is Enough!

JASON BROWN swivels a satirical eye ...

SINCE THE dawn of roleplaying time (some time in the style-challenged 1970s), monsters have been crawling out of the collective imaginations of roleplaying companies such as TSR and Wizards of the Coast, but perhaps more importantly, from common or garden roleplayers like you and me. There have been countless roleplaying supplements for an astonishingly wide range of games, from **Bunnies and Burrows** to the big daddy of them all, **Dungeons and Dragons**. This latter system alone has spawned *Monster Manuals*, *Fiend Folios* and *Monstrous Compendiums* (or even *Compendia* for the pedantically minded). The problem is that there are only so many monsters possible before the designers find themselves really scraping the bottom of the barrel.

TSR was one of the first to hit bottom with the decidedly Flumph, and I'm certain that the Beholder was designed when Gary Gygax had a serious case of writer's block and came up with the utterly pathetic idea of 'a big eye with lots of little eyes that eats characters for breakfast'. Actually this latter example shows that a lame idea can actually turn out to be quite good in practice. But now I say, enough! There are no more monsters possible! Monsters are becoming increasingly pathetic, not to mention recycled. Just because the *Monstrous Folio* volume 24 comes replete with a well known logo on the cover does not mean it will actually be any good. In fact, the creatures in the next monstrous compendium appendix might just end up like the ones here.

But enough with the rambling! Here, for the whole world to see, are the creatures of my own design which are, in my opinion, the most pathetic creatures ever found populating a roleplaying world. If you actually use any of the creatures contained here, please email me and tell me what your players thought and how many of their characters decided that suicide was a preferable option to actually fighting these things.

Baby Balrog

The breeding habits of balrogs are still a source of debate amongst scholars. Some believe that balrogs, owing to their extremely magical nature, don't actually 'do the deed' as we would understand it and that balrogs are, by nature, asexual. Others believe (although it is scary to think about how they came across this information) that balrogs are quite active sexually and that the reason they are so rare is that they are all off in the secret balrog mating grounds, having a lot more fun than most of us. While the methods of balrog breeding remain unknown, the results are not. Baby Balrogs look exactly like balrogs in miniature, standing about as tall as your average halfling. Like regular balrogs,

they carry a flaming whip and are hostile to just about everything and anything. They just run away with their tails (cough) between their legs at the slightest sign of danger. **Combat:** In combat, Baby Balrogs attack with their itty bitty claws and their tiny little flaming whip. When they attack, they let out tiny, high pitched imitations of a fully-grown mother balrog. They fight rather well, the only problem being that while they begin combat with a confident, swaggering attitude they get very disappointed when they're not as powerful as daddy and run away crying.

Habitat/Society: Baby balrogs are solitary creatures, having been dumped in a dungeon by their parents in order to teach them something about life as a big balrog. Their parents usually leave them there to fend for themselves for a few hundred years before they come and collect. And mummy always seems to choose to pick up junior just as her little darling encounters some cruel, nasty adventurers.

Ecology: Baby Balrogs fend for themselves in a dungeon quite well, usually living off rats and snakes, although they like kobold when they can get it. Very few creatures prey on Baby Balrogs, just in case mummy turns up just before they start their meal...

Cookie Golem

The Cookie Golem was created by a baker/wizard who was, to be perfectly honest, stark raving bonkers. It seemed that he had some mad delusions of grandeur involving him as ruler of the world inhabited entirely by sentient cookies. Luckily for the world, his plans fell through. However, before he died, the baker left in his notes the plans for creating the not really dreaded at all Cookie Golem. A Cookie Golem takes one week to make by a wizard of at least level 3. The wizard makes the dough at a cost of 5 gold pieces, uses cookie

cutters to cut out the shape of a man and while the cookie is baking, casts *Jump*, *Mending* and *Magic Mouth*. The result is the utterly useless Cookie Golem. Cookie Golems don't give two figs about their master's orders. They simply run around all the time yelling 'Run run as fast as you can, you can't catch me I'm the Gingerbread/Chocolate Chip/etc man!' Because of their utter uselessness, very few wizards can actually be bothered creating the stupid little things.

Combat: Cookie Golems don't seem to do a lot of fighting. They're too busy trying to evade their masters. However, when they are forced to fight, the average kobold would find them a complete pushover, if they can catch one that is. When defeated, Cookie Golems usually make pretty good eating.

Habitat/Society: Cookie golems, if they can escape from their master, seem to develop some form of intelligence over time. In game terms, this can be measured as 1 point per month for six months, after which



they stay as they as, as thick as two house bricks. These 'free cookies' sometimes band together in groups which sit around at night and tell each other stories of the fury of the oven, of the dreaded Cookie Monster and of the awe inspiring King Cookie, who lives in a magical land where cookies are free from evil people who would eat them. Luckily for us, most Cookie Golems are eaten long before they can hear such tales.

Ecology: Yeah, right!

Fluff

The Fluff is the cutest creature that could ever exist. It is small and fluffy with big, dewy, 'Aww, who could hurt it' puppy-dog eyes. Actually, it is a fluffy ball with eyes, there's nothing else to it. No brains, no internal organs, nothing but fluff and eyeballs. Fluffs move through a kind of magical levitation similar to beholders. If you're having trouble imagining what they look like, think of a floating tribble with the biggest, cutest eyes you've ever seen. Although they look so cute, Fluffs are actually quite evil creatures. They attempt to use their unbelievable cuteness to rise in power in a nation. Although their inability to communicate effectively except through moving their eyes does pose obvious difficulties, some Fluffs have managed to become the pets of powerful kings (imagine it, 'Let's go to war with the neighbouring kingdoms, Fluffy goes all gooey eyed when I talk about it'). There are rumours of Fluffs actually becoming the head of state in democratic nations. Who could vote against such a cute thing?

Combat: In combat, Fluffs cannot attack. They have no arms, no legs, no magic, no psionics and no spells. They could conceivably attempt to ram someone, but it would inflict the same amount of damage as a teddy bear thrown by a weak kobold. However, Fluffs have a major defence. Their unbelievable cuteness means that no one, no matter what alignment, can bring themselves to harm a Fluff under any circumstances. Instead, would-be attackers simply melt into a ball of tears and insipid grins.

Habitat/Society: It is rumoured that somewhere in the mass of planes, there is a fluff homeworld ruled by the Great High King Fluff. Nothing is known about the place because the few wizards who have chosen to research this obscure lore have gone insane, sitting around all day going 'Awww, how cute.'

Ecology: No one knows. Although if one thinks about how they would breed, they just don't seem quite so cute any more.

Transvestite Troll

Some trolls just don't feel at home in normal troll society. These trolls are more intelligent and sensitive than most trolls and feel that there must be more to life than waiting for adventurers to turn up loaded with greek fire, torches and Melfs Acid Arrows. These exceptional individuals leave their trollhole and go out into the world trying to find some meaning to life. As a way of marking themselves as different from regular trolls, Transvestite Trolls have taken to wearing floral frocks as designed by Lorna Ashtree. Note that a Transvestite Troll can be either male or female: it's the dress that matters, not the gender.

Combat: Transvestite Trolls are pacifists. Extreme, pointless violence is a notable feature of the traditional troll society which the Transvestite Trolls are rebelling against. However, hostile adventurers first encountering a Transvestite Troll will be subject to its shock attack. This attack is a result of seeing a troll wearing a bright yellow and orange floral dress. The Transvestite Troll gains automatic surprise and each character must make a save vs paralysis or be struck dumb and unable to move or speak for 1d4+4 rounds. The troll will try and use this time to escape. If forced into combat, the troll will fight like a regular troll, but will try to subdue the characters rather than kill them. Most Transvestite Trolls carry a broadsword which they prefer to use instead of their fists (bare handed attacks are far too troll-like).

Habitat/Society: Most Transvestite Trolls are solitary by necessity rather than nature. When they encounter others of their kind, they tend to band together and form 'troll-rights' groups. These groups never seem to achieve much, something about it being hard for people to listen to a troll wearing a dress. Still, it is rumoured that one such group of about 12 members is planning to hold a troll-rights march in Waterdeep. Should prove interesting.

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Boardgames for Fun

PEVANS suggests some that'd make good presents ...



BY THE TIME you read this Christmas will be nearly upon us, so I thought it was time I gave some suggestions on the games to get this year. Unfortunately, I'm writing this before this year's Spiel games fair, so I can't include the very latest games from Germany. So I'll include games from last year's Spiel to make up - these should still be in the shops.

First up is **Age of Steam**: see *Flagship 100* for details. Points to note here are that the game is a heavyweight: it has sophisticated mechanics, lots of scope for tactical play and a need for some strategic thinking. Despite the theme,

it's not just for railway gamers, but you have to be prepared for something that lasts two-three hours. It works well with four or five players, but I think the board gets a bit crowded with six. Designed by Martin Wallace and published by *Warfrog*, it's in the shops at around £30. And Warfrog is publishing an expansion set (an alternative board, showing England and Wales on one side and Ireland on the other) for the game.

Another strategic/tactical game, but more of a welterweight, is **Amun-Re** - reviewed in *Flagship 103*. This is one of Reiner Knizia's clever, intricate games. Again, it's more about tactical decisions, but within a strategic overview, and needs 60-90 minutes to play. The Ancient Egyptian theme is fairly thin, but does give a strong flavour to the game. Published in English by *Rio Grande* (the German edition is from *Hans im Glück*), it costs about £28 in the shops.

The Spiel des Jahres winner, **Alhambra** (now renamed **Der Palast von Alhambra**), is similarly in the welterweight class. The game centres on tiles representing different types of buildings, which you have to assemble into your own version of the Alhambra palace. You score points for having the most of a particular type, so you need to keep a careful eye on what other players are building into their own palaces. And decide whether and when it is worth competing. It pays to be aware of the numbers of each type available through the game. There is one other wrinkle to the buildings: the tiles have a number of walls round the edge. This limits how buildings can be placed, but you also score points for the longest continuous stretch of wall round your palace. These points are not insignificant and can be the deciding factor in the game. However, you are limited in what buildings you can play by which buildings you can buy. Only four are on offer at a time. These are drawn at random and each is placed against one of the four currencies in the game. The number on the building tells you how much of that currency you have to pay to get it, but has no other significance (another decision: is it worth paying a lot to get a building you want or do you wait for a cheaper one?). Once you've bought it, you can add the building to your palace immediately, or save it for later play (but you can only save a limited number of buildings). Money comes in the form of cards, each of a particular value in a specific currency. And you just pick them up: four are on display at any time and you take the one(s) you fancy (you can take more than one if their combined values doesn't exceed five). But you either take money or buy a building: you can't do both. This is the basic decision in the game - what to do on your turn. Do you build up

your stocks of cash or spend it on a building? Or use up your turn placing a building you saved earlier? I've only played the game a couple of times so far, but I've found myself doing one or the other several turns in a row. Either building up my cash reserve or splurging it on a sequence of buildings. There is one other neat little ploy in the game. If you pay the exact amount to buy a building, you get another go. So you can buy another building, or pick up some cash or play a building from reserve. Very useful, but is it worth passing over a building you want in the hope of being able to buy one for the exact amount and get the extra go? Decisions, decisions - and this is the core of the game: getting those choices right. It's an impressive game, though by no means a heavyweight. I think it benefits from being the third development of the same game system. Designed by Dirk Henn, it is published by *Queen Games* in Germany. Unfortunately there isn't an English language edition, but it is available from specialist shops with a set of rules in English (there is no text on the game components to cause linguistic problems) at around £20.

I'd also recommend **New England** (details in *Flagship 103*) in this category. Again, it's more tactical than strategic, has some clever mechanics and plays well in 60-90 minutes. It is only for three-four players, however. Designed by Alan R Moon and Aaron Weissblum, it is published (in German) by *Goldsieber* and is in the shops at around £25. An English language edition has just been published by US company *Uberplay* and should be in the shops - though the price is more like £35.

In the 'middleweight' class (I seem to be stuck with this metaphor), I'd recommend **Wildlife**, which I review in this issue. I put it in this category as I feel it's a deeper game with more strategy and it certainly needs a bit longer to play. The game is from acclaimed veteran designer Wolfgang Kramer and Italian multi-national publisher *Clementoni* and is published in German. This edition is in specialist shops with English rules at about £25 (there are some useful crib sheets in English available on the BoardGame Geek: www.boardgamegeek.com). However, an English language edition is on its way from *Uberplay* and should cost about £30.

If you like a bit of inter-player negotiation in your games, then it has to be **Bean Trader** (see last issue for the full review). This is more of a lightweight board game, but it's not without its challenges. Designed by Uwe Rosenberg and published by *Rio Grande* (*Amigo* in Germany), it retails at around £28.

For a two-player game, my recommendation would be **Balloon Cup**, which I covered in my column last time. It's a clever card game that I'd put in the welterweight category as it requires a bit of thought - but not too much. Designed by Stephen Glenn and published by *Rio Grande* (the German edition is by *Kosmos*), it retails at around £15.

For a bit of lightweight fun around the Christmas dining table, it's got to be **Bang!** (designed by Emiliano Sciarra and published by *DaVinci Editrice*), which I covered in *Flagship 100*. The second edition is in the shops now and costs about £12. Well worth it - especially as it can take that awkward number of players, seven. (In fact it needs at least five participants.)





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If I Have to Fight

MARC BANNERMAN loves to be a wargamer ...

WARGAMERS love to fight! That is what it's all about. Whether the game has evolved from the theme of ancient history or a first person shooter reflecting the men and equipment of our day, whether in the sky, on the sea, or trudging across a piece of ground soaked in the blood of grunts, we love the action!

The hobby has its own mystique. The attraction that many of us feel toward games of combat of any sort seems odd to the larger population. I've given up trying to explain it. I honestly do not know if I can. Some folks love postage stamps. Others are enthralled with collecting spoons (now that is something I don't understand!), or football. To each his own has always been my motto, so please give me that same latitude of understanding.

I'm a wargamer. I'm not ashamed of it. I enjoy the hobby immensely. It provides both a challenge and a release. There are occasions when it can be frustrating, like when you lose a fight. All in all, however, I find great satisfaction in getting myself so deeply involved in a wargame that those in the house can tell from the sounds from the computer and my mouth that I'm involved in a red-hot battle. I moan, curse, shout, stomp and do all the other things that aficionados do when they are into that delightful avocation that they enjoy so much. PBM Wargames are just the same: the opening of the anticipated envelope is very much like receiving dispatches from the front - how has the battle gone this day?

I even play musical tapes with movie themes from wargames to give me more of an atmosphere for the fight. Music from movies such as *Patton*, *Top Gun*, *Red Dawn*, *Victory at Sea* (one of my favorites), *Battle of Britain*, *We Were Soldiers*, and others certainly add audible reinforcements to my electronic battlefield. Once the music is playing, the screen is up and I am in charge, I become immersed into my surreal moment of taking out the bad guys. Now some critics call it a 'fantasy world'. Perhaps it is. Still, I have a great time with it and make no apologies to anyone.

Yet even with this almost inordinate love of wargaming, I find myself being rather particular. Not all wargames appeal to me with the same gusto. I therefore become selective, carefully picking and choosing the games that will give me what I am looking for. And what would that be?

Two areas in particular are vital for me to the full enjoyment of any wargame. The first quality in a wargame is that of a feeling of history. I'm not looking for a 'shooting gallery' type of game. Instead, I seek out and carefully open my tight-fisted hand to buy games that are historical in nature. Of course, it could be argued that all wargames are 'historical' in nature. I don't think so, at least not by my definition.

When I refer to the aspect of history, I'm seeking a touch of what really happened. Whether it is a feudalistic or more recent representation, I want something that makes me feel the moment. The battles should be built on historical events. That would include a good representation of the geographical area, a close approximation of the actual forces involved, and a hopeful outcome similar to what actually happened.

I guess you could say that I want to 'relive' a moment in history. When I begin to design a scenario, a nice text that not only explains what my mission or assignment is (very important!), but some historical background as to what really did take place. As I read this, I begin to get a feel for the context of the battle. I understand why it happened and what was the mission of both sides. Perhaps I am going to be Wittmann, prowling stealthily through the French countryside and surprising the British forces of the 7th Armored division laagered in and around Villers-Bocage. Then again, I might take the role of Manstein pounding away at the Russian southern defences with my Tigers, Panthers and grenadiers, seeking to break the enemy's defences.

This is a warning to scenario designers or those considering it. Make your text clear, succinct and easy to read. A poorly done introduction is a big red light to me that the scenario itself will be more of the same.

That first impression is vital! The battle could be any number of military situations on various levels of command where I am putting on the uniform of the commander of one of the opponents and seeking a victory. If I am to fight, let me have a moment in history to relive so I can walk in the boots of the man who was there and made those hard choices. Now I want to be that man. I want to feel at least some of the pressure he might have felt when faced with options of action, the fog of war, the plaguing problem of inadequate means of communication. If I can feel that in a wargame, then I feel I have to one degree or another relived a moment in time. It does not get much better than that.

I realise, of course, that it is impossible to create the perfect map, with every rock and tree as it was in times past. I understand that the exact size numerically of the units or the precise type of weapons they carried might not be available. That is not the point. What I want to feel is the tension, the stress, the responsibility of the moment. If the designer can do that for me, I assure you that he will have a loyal supporter in his efforts.

A historical flavour in a game makes it real to me. It is no longer just fantasy. A game should have the flavour of realism to me in order to be enjoyable. On one occasion, I was working with the beta team of a tactical level. I remember the heated discussion on whether it was a good idea to have a dead soldier on the battlefield. Some were horrified at the idea and argued vociferously against such a thing. I could not understand that point of view. After all, this is 'war' gaming and that means that men fight and die. Are we so antiseptic that we can't accept the thought of a body on the battlefield? I hope not. I'm not advocating blood and guts scattered over the screen, but I see no difference between the smoking hulk of a burned out tank and the dead body of a soldier where a battle has taken place. Both add an extra feel of reality to what we are attempting to relive.

The other quality that really cranks up my emotional engine is when a game is fun. Yes, I said fun. We do not have much opportunity for 'fun things' in life. I want, therefore, to enjoy my moments in wargaming. I want it to have the pleasurable quality. I play it and, win or lose, I have fun. A fun game for me is one that is challenging, yet not impossible. Nothing is more boring than a game with no 'bite' to it. It should be able to stir me up, make me think, make me feel something good.

To do that, I need that element of surprise. As I play, I always enjoy (well, almost always) the unexpected in the game. That is not an easy element to create and requires skill and thought on the part of the programmer and the designer. It seems to me that in every great battle there was always the unexpected, something that the commander, attacking or defending, did not anticipate. Naturally we have the benefit of hindsight, which allows us to foresee certain elements of the battle. How they are mixed into the conflict, however, is vital to the success of surprise. A good game will have that element included. I like that. It makes the game fun.

The last 'fun' element I need in my fight is a sense of reward or fulfillment. Once the smoke has lifted from the battlefield and I survey the aftermath, I want to feel a sense of satisfaction. Now that does not mean that I always win every fight. Even if I don't, I still have the feeling that I gave it my best. I've played some games where that has not been true. Needless to say I eventually put those on the shelf where the growing pile of discards sits, gather the proverbial closet dust.

So if I have to fight, and I do, let me have a fight that offers me a taste of history and a flood of fun. There are games out there that do just that. And when that is the case, they occupy a permanent niche on my hard drive. I have my favourite songs, my favourite movies, my favourite photos. These are things that I enjoy again and again. The same is true with a good historical fun to play wargame. I'll find myself going back to it again and again.

The Portrayal of RPGs

Has it Changed Over the Years?

LISA FORDHAM deals with negative stereotypes ...

IN 1982 TOM Hanks starred in the movie Rona Jaffe's *Mazes and Monsters*. He portrayed a college student who was addicted to the RPG *Mazes and Monsters*. After leaving one school when his addiction proved fatal to his grades he meets three friends to play this game. They all appear to be consumed by this passion and when they take it to the next step, actually investigating some ruins, Hanks' character believes it all to be real and goes crazy.

This movie was often quoted when attacking the D&D hobby. After all, it's all fantasy, takes you away from reality. Of course this movie coincided with two real-life examples where gaming was blamed for suicides. The first was a young man named James Dallas Egbert II. It turned out that he merely ran away from Michigan State University for several weeks in 1979, but his disappearance was a direct antecedent to the movie and ended up causing a media campaign claiming his absence was a **Dungeons & Dragons**-related suicide.

The second example involves Pat Pulling, a young mother who in 1983 founded Bothered About D & D and other harmful influences on children (B.A.D.D.) because her 16-year old son committed suicide and she blamed D&D directly. There were those that refuted her claims including Michael A Stackpole, writer and Game Designer, in *The Pulling Report*.

Well, it's been 21 years since that movie and things have changed in the depiction of RPGs - or have they?

On the October 14, 2003 episode of the new Series Navy NCIS titled *The Immortals*, the roleplaying of two sailors aboard a navy vessel leads to death. It is true that it was not face to face roleplaying as in the movie but rather a computer Massive Multiplayer Online Roleplaying Game (MMORPG). In the episode this MMORPG was apparently based on a *Highlander* theme and the message rang loud and clear: these games are violent and can cause violent and erratic behavior. Although they did not say that everyone playing would end up in dire straits, they didn't have to.

The basic synopsis is as follows. Both sailors were onboard a navy vessel and both were fans and long-time players of the MMORPG. They took their characters very seriously and fought online many times. One character seemed to always be victorious in their online encounters. The player who was often defeated suggested that they should take it to the next level, fight each other in actual combat. They both thought this was fun. The player who usually lost online, won the real-time fight. His opponent realized that his friend actually thought all this was real. And because he hated the fact that he lost decided to turn the tables. He challenged him to the following (paraphrased): 'If you are truly an immortal, then you should be able to walk back to land on the bottom of the ocean [with weapons and weights on his person of course]. When asked why he would allow his so-called friend to actually attempt such a thing his reply was said with fierce pride: 'To win the game'.

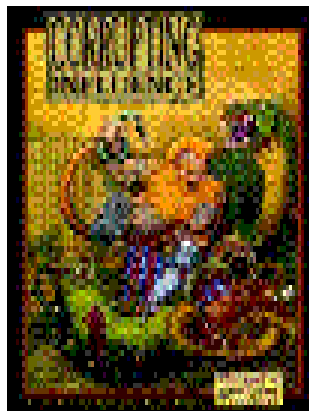
Besides the main craziness /attitudes of the two sailors, throughout the show there were little quips designed to treat this hobby with disdain. When finding out that the dead sailor liked MMORPGs, one of the team members was asked if such games are violent: 'Well, there's poisoning, thievery, stabbing, decapitation, and the occasional garrotte.' Again, based on an immortal theme the game could involve such things so what could be wrong with saying so? If this was the only negative stereotype shown there wouldn't be an issue. But it went further. Players of such games were described as computer geeks with no social life. For example when asking why the names were so unusual in the game the answer was 'When you're a computer geek invading dungeons and

fighting ogres, Jethro just doesn't cut it.' I am tired of the stereotypical association of roleplaying with nerds who have no social skills nor any social life to try out any such skills.

Near the end of the episode, after finding out how much the game meant to these two sailors and the length they went in believing it real (the dead soldier planted a bomb in the head honcho's cabin because he believed the crew was working with his enemy) one of the investigators quipped: 'I am so happy my parents pushed me into sports when I was little.' That line bothered me more than any other. There is a certain derision in the way they casually flung out such statements. Many people with diverse backgrounds enjoy this hobby and I thought we left those stereotypes behind.

What does this signify for the genre? With CRPGs and MMORPGs becoming more and more popular will there be a revival of the anti-RPG media? And is this warranted? I have not played many online computer games as I prefer the face to face or PBEMs. But, I suspect that like Rona Jaffe's slanted look at the game this too is an exaggeration that doesn't bode well for the industry.

So here is my request to all of you out there. Write to *Flagship* about how you dealt with these negative stereotypes, tell how you show the positive side of gaming. We want to hear from you!



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www.warstonedarcoweb.net

On Screen

Online Gaming

GLOBETROTTER, on Politics and Previews ...

YOU HEAR them every day in any sort of multi-player game: Clans, Alliances and Coalitions. Groups of players, banded together for a variety of reasons: to protect, to help each other, to help others, to attack a common enemy, to pool their power together as one. What many don't seem to realize, although they might compare one alliance to the United States, and another to Russia, they are stating more truth than it seems at skin deep. It is one of the base instincts of a human to find others, and stay near them. For that reason, early cave-dwellers banded together, and formed early tribes, then villages, then town, cities, countries, nations, and further on, to the United Nations.

The term I use for this banding together is 'Political Polarization'. Political, because if you look at it, it relates more to politics than anything else (or, at least, this aspect of a possible greater theory). Polarization, because of various expressions. Think of a magnet. Think of its two poles, north and south. Those are two sides of an argument, say, about Francis Ferdinand's assassination, the one that led to WWI. Put the magnet in a small area covered with iron filings. If the filings are countries, then you have the Allies and the Axis: Countries flock to one side or the other of the war, as the filings to each side of the magnet.

And such 'Polarization' occurs when you have any large group of people. Let me illustrate this by reference to three online games - though the same also applies to complex play-by-mail and email games.

Possibly one of the most perverted forms of the Political Polarization (For now on, referred to as PP), was in **Planetarion**

www.planetarion.com

Known as 'The Triad', it was a series of NAPs, MPAs, and ARPs between the three top alliances of the game at the time (as of my knowledge at this time of writing, one of the three had fallen): ReBorn (RB) VtS, AKA Legion and Fury. Whereas most applications of PP involve two or more sides, this aspect had three supposed rivals allying against everyone else, creating the next generation of ultra-powerful alliances (the first of which that I can recall had been the Concordium, the next one was the BlueTubas; I know there was one before the Concordium, and there was a lot of Chaos between BT and the Triad in which I can't tell who was the leader, but that's all that I know). In short, for all of the good reasons (except in the interests of a fair game), there was one mega-alliance that no-one could take down. For the moment, as previous 'Biggies' in Planetarion had fallen, some through internal disorder, some through players leaving, others just dis-banded, or were destroyed (Concordium, RIP.)

My second example of PP is in **EmpireQuest** (EQ):

www.empirequest.com

EQ is a semi-political extension of Planetarion. Many EQ players also play Planetarion. Most EQ players play PA. So you shouldn't be surprised when you see some of the same alliances in both PA and in EQ. But, surprisingly enough, the leader-board, and the entire balance of power, is totally different in the two games. In EQ, there is a semi-apparent right-left side of the political spectrum of those in power. The United Republic of Planets and Proteus X are on the left, and Some Alliance and Deadly Australian All Stars (DAAS) are on the right. Here, it's rather obvious about the good aspects of political polarization, because you have almost clear-cut sides. Smaller alliances tend to side with the URoP-PX or the SA-DAAS. But unlike the Triad, there is no chance of



them allying, mostly through the leaders of the URoP and SA making sure that a situation like PA's doesn't occur, by introducing artificial hostilities. There, PP is actively applied to avoid bad situations, and cause good situations. (Mainly because I am the second in command of the URoP, and a friend leads SA.)

My third and final example of PP in an online game is **Shattered Empires**

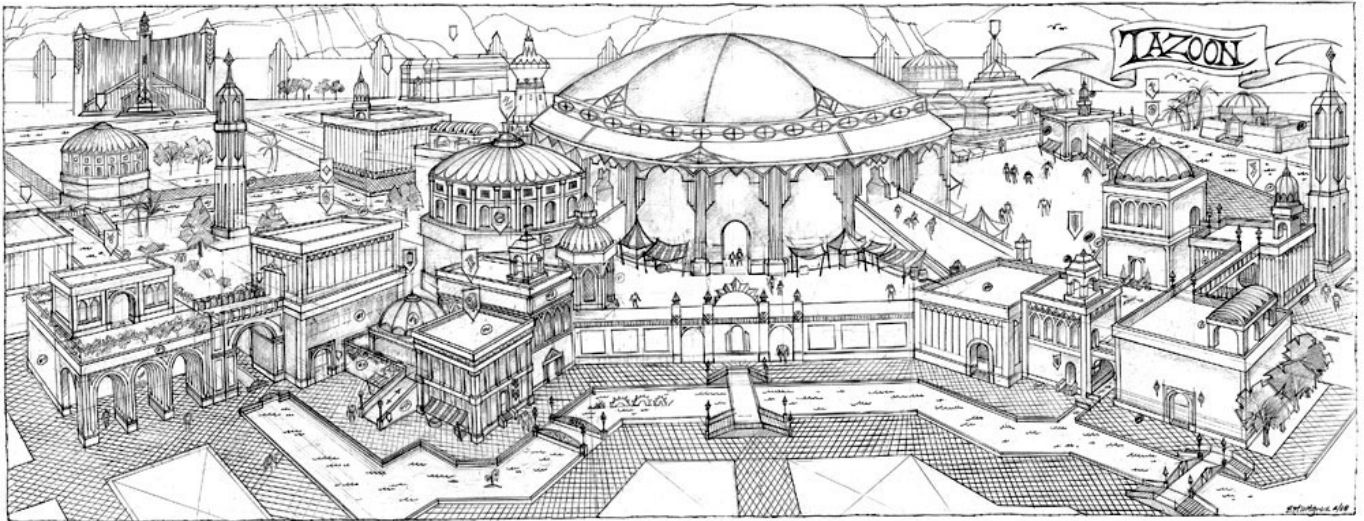
www.bluewand.com

In that game, there were two systems: Gaia and Pesic. Skipping Gaia, Pesic had a favourable (to game play) PP situation: the Continent 1 Treaty Organization (C1TO), and Matrix, was at constant war. While you didn't have to be involved, it was good for your side if you were. While this example wasn't as wide-spread throughout its system as the PA or EQ example, you must note that SE had about 100 players per system, most of them legally playing in both systems.

In short, Political Polarization can be both a good thing and a bad thing, depending on your point of view. There are those who believe that big alliances ruin a game, that you must either join the war or die. However, PP states that if human instincts are given control, big alliances will exist. Just by looking back in history, you can see this is true. But this article wasn't meant to dive into real life history, unless to use it as a comparison. This was meant to show the Theory of Political Polarization, and its Application to Gaming. Not its Application to Real Life Politics. Hmm, now there's an interesting article! But as to gaming, there is no escape: within every game there is another far more deadly game: Politics.

Horizons

After several years of development, Artifact Entertainment is very close to releasing their long awaited fantasy massively multiplayer RPG **Horizons**. If you believe the hype, this promises to have more playable races than any current RPG, and a larger world as well. While snooping around a computer games fair in America recently, I got a chance to check out a beta version of the game guided by Artifact's David Bowman,



Sample concept art from Horizons. For more details visit www.europe.istaria.com

and was able to see some of the game's features in action via a highly beefed up character created just for this beta session.

The first thing I did was to spend some time watching Bowman play as a dragon, one of the nine playable races you can use in Horizons. Bowman guided me through the game's user interface, which consists of a Windows-like interface that is very customizable - for instance I was able to start creating a sword via a short-cut formula already in the inventory. Sword ... OK, walk over to the village blacksmith, where alas I discovered I didn't have enough bronze to make the sword. Resources are a big point in Horizons and can be gathered and stored by characters for use in creating weapons, items and even houses in the game. Bowman gave me some bronze resources which I then used to make a sword with a click of the mouse. There is also an option to risk using less than the recommended amount of a resource to make your item, though this has a higher chance of failing to make your desired item.

Enough of crafting, I wanted a bit of action! So, off to take on some zombies and maggots. The game's combat not only allows you to do the typical MMORPG turn based feature but also allows you to use special abilities and put them in hot keys that can be used at any point in the battle. As the dragon, Bowman showed off a couple of the high level combat spells in the game, creating a banshee and even a devil spell that was quite impressive to watch.

Horizons' game world is 100x100 kilometers in size and 6 vertical kilometers in depth with no loading zones, so theoretically a player could traverse the entire world without seeing a load screen. In practice, however, most players will use transporters that look like TV's Stargate to speed up the process and that does take a little loading. One of the areas I moved to was an entrance to a subterranean land. I only had a brief look around as this area of the game is not yet finished. While Horizons is focusing on the surface world for the game's launch, there are going to be underground realms at a later date, presumably as an expansion.

Another part of the game is player housing, which will be put into Horizons from the start. Bowman showed me how to pay for a piece of property and then talked about how players can find resources to build their structures. Some of these structures will require groups of players to build, such as a bridge that will need to be created in order to access an island in the game.

Finally I took my character over to another area in the game which had become 'infected', for want of a better word, by a dark blight that had affected the surrounding area. The skies had turned darker and greener with lighting spikes - players will have to destroy the blight and their resulting creatures in order to return the land to normal.

Horizons is still in beta testing and while this brief tour of the game

world was very entertaining and informative, I hope that the final shipping version will be able to keep up to its promises. Game publisher Atari are planning to officially launch the US version of Horizons in November. Alas, as is often the case, I would imagine the European version may be launched several months later.

Dungeons & Dragons Online

Dungeons and Dragons Online. Yes, that's right - the big daddy of all roleplaying games is being developed by Atari and Turbine Entertainment (the latter being the creators of the critically acclaimed Asheron's Call and Asheron's Call 2).

Slated for release in 2005, Dungeons & Dragons Online looks likely to be centred around character advancement, dungeon combat, guild politics and territorial control over major portions of the game world. And yes, they will be using one or more of the existing game worlds familiar to players of the game over the years. Dungeons & Dragons is the ultimate fantasy role-playing game. It has introduced more people to game playing than any other game I can think of, and has spawned hosts of imitators and admirers. The social backbone of D&D gaming, groups of friends creating adventures and worlds to explore together, along with its copious (if poorly written) fiction, immense monster bestiary, and character development, in my opinion should make this a natural choice for the next generation of massively multiplayer game.

Should? Well yes, even the best of gift horses can turn out to be lame. Did anyone see the Dungeons and Dragons film? I rest my case.



Roleplaying Questions

Why, asks LISA FORDHAM, does the obvious never seem to happen?

I STARTED out trying to come up with some amusing questions that show tendencies in different roleplaying games and situations. What I think I ended up with is a list of stuff for a GM to look for as he starts up his/her games. So separated by type is my list of questions - please note I do not pretend to have any of the answers! These are questions that would defy the wisest of the wise ... unless you know better of course?

Fantasy Settings

Starting off, as you see by the subtitle, with a fantasy setting:

1 - Why do the hungry monsters never eat each other?

I mean if you live for years in these places and adventurers only come once in a while, wouldn't some of the non-intelligent monsters start looking elsewhere for food? Heck, wouldn't the smarter ones be picking off the less able to care for themselves?

2 - Why do the monsters always *stay* in those stupid rooms?

Think about it, no food other than the occasional adventurer (see question 1), no stimulation other than thumb-twirling and the occasional adventurer (see question 1), I would certainly head out on excursions.

3 - Why do people expect even the most evil clerics to have healing powers? This also applies to other than healing or warrior gods. I mean would a priest of Hephaestus really be able to fix you or would you bring your broken/older gear to him to get what his god is really known for?

4 - Why does the party always allow the thief to end up (appraising/carrying/skimming) the treasure?

'Oh, this is worth uh.. 5 gold. I'll just put it on my chain here.' I mean think about it, they are always the first ones to the treasure, they sift through it first and then you have them doing the appraisal. Thieves will not steal (usually) from their party members, but if it's not a part of the party yet....

5 - Why is a map made hundreds of years ago still accurate when there are intelligent evil creatures living in these dungeons? Especially if there are female creatures.. I mean - doesn't anyone ever remodel??

6 - How come you never see a good orc? Okay, never is too strong a word. I myself would sometimes add a good orc company or two. But is genetics all there is to life? What about nature vs nurture? I think it is pure speciesism (sp?) if you ask me.

7 - Why do barbarians always want to sound like Ahnold (or worse, Groo)?

8 - Why do people always play the extremes of alignments?

For example: lawful good means lawful stupid, or chaotic neutral means do whatever the heck you feel like, even if it doesn't make sense. People are a lot more complex than that. Roleplay the character, don't use the crutch of locking yourself into a two-word description of an alignment. And as GM, don't lock your players the same way. Personally I have long since abolished alignment in my campaigns.

9 - Why do people so rarely play fighters with social skills? When was the last time you ever invited Melthar the warrior to a high-society dance? I mean historically, knights of olde were required to have said skills. Albeit it was sometimes more honoured in the breach in the practice, but wouldn't some of that continued?

10 - Why do people with high IQs like to play characters without the brains God gave a turnip? (See Question 7.)

11 - Why don't GMs ever have appropriate rewards for the barbarianess heroine? Or conversely ...



11a. Why is it always the princess in trouble?

Let's save the damn prince for once... And we wonder why there aren't as many women in gaming...

12 - If dragons are so smart, why are there never any human traps? 'Hey Harry, What's this fu...CLACK...' 'Munch.'

And for extra credit:

Why didn't anyone come up with the rules for 'Payrolls and Paychecks'? If you got this reference, you've been playing for way too long.

Science Fiction Questions

Here are some questions for the Science Fiction Genre:

1 - When you crash and run out of food, why must you always eat live Fentari worms for dinner?

Oh and why can you always survive the experience? How would you like to eat GAKHH? Shouldn't some foods not mix well with your biology? Think about allergic reactions to foods common where you live (cow's milk, peanuts, etc.) - what would another planet's food do to you?? Hmm.. that could be fun.. Enquiring minds want to know....

2 - Why is it that diseases from another planet (race, etc.) affect you? Completely alien biology, evolved with a completely different set of proteins and signals, yet you manage to come down with denebrian fever.

3 - If the Force is so rare, then why does every roleplaying character have it?

Once again, an exaggeration. But it is enough to be a real annoyance.

4 - Why does the universal translator never work when you really need it?

Let's skip the obvious and say it's not run by Microsoft OS, but isn't it always the case that you are stuck resorting to sign language when you are meeting the bug monsters with six legs and mandibles to sign with.

5 - Why doesn't Customs stop you from leaving your ship with all of your weapons and armour?

I mean I can't tell you how often my mother-in-law was stopped for a pair of scissors. They were dull, mind you, and she didn't even remember

she had them. But if scissors don't get through how is a Mark III Phase cannon with a matching set of Atom-ite grenades?
6 - In Paranoia (tm), why does no one ever think to leave or blow up that Computer?

Mystery & Whodunnit Questions

Everybody loves a good mystery. But there are some definite tendencies that make no sense. For example:

1 - Why doesn't the butler ever do it?

I know it seems too obvious, doesn't that make it the perfect choice? And, why is there always a butler anyway? How many murdered rich people are there anyway?

Continuing along the same lines as Number 1:

2 - If these murders or gruesome acts keep happening in the same place because you have a group that runs regularly, why don't these people move?? I call this the Sunnydale(tm) Syndrome.

3 - How come no locals ever notice the dead bodies piling up? (See question #2.)

4 - Why is the local police force always composed of idiots?

Does it really seem logical for amateur sleuths to come up with every available clue whereas the trained professionals *always* manage to miss them. However, these same officers still manage to arrest our sleuths once in a while. Guess they have to fill their quota. Seriously though, it would be nice to see a smart police detective working with the group instead of against.

5 - Why are the evil ones always ugly and the good ones always pretty? Talk about judging books by their covers...

6 - How come only crosses affect vampires?

What if you have a Jewish vampire? I guess it's too hard to carry a lit Menorah on a chain around your neck.

7 - Why does someone always try to blackmail a murderer (and end up dead)? How stupid are these people??

8 - Why do the villains never kill those meddling kids?

Superhero Questions

There is no better feeling than to don your costume and save the world from dire peril. Here are some questions that always came to me during most superhero campaigns I have run in:

1 - Why do mentalists never have any mental defenses?

All too often true, especially in point-based systems, mentalists tend to be the most vulnerable to their own power.

2 - Why does every group always include at least one billionaire superhero? How many billionaire superheroes are there anyway?

3 - Why does one role player always want to play simultaneously the fastest, strongest, and most invulnerable character?

I suppose the rest of the group is supposed to play the cheering section? There seems to be at least one in every group. I don't understand it myself. Isn't battling the evildoer despite your weakness what makes you a hero? If nothing can touch or harm you, what's the challenge?

4 - Why would anyone ever want to be a villains' henchman?

The retirement plan really stinks.

5 - Why do people always pick the obvious weaknesses?

Fire creatures always complain about being hit with water.

6 - Why do superheroes never get bills for 'incidental damages', like the cars they throw at the villains?

7. Why do superhero villains always have escape tunnels, but never do in any other game?

8 - Why do superheroes always wear capes and tights, especially in those bright, primary colours (okay, occasionally all black)?

Politely trying to give a better target to the obviously weaker villain? Need to be fair and sporting after all.

So there you have it. I realize that there are plenty more questions where these came from. I would like to ask you to send me your best. Then there's the question of answers ... So, the person who sends me most amusing question or best answer to one of the questions above will get a prize from my extensive library of gaming books. *Bring it on!*

PBM Fiction

Following on from last issue's book review, SIMON WILLIAMS, GM of Chaos Trail, considers writing novels based on PBM Roleplaying games...

PERHAPS FOR the purist, and for the conventional writer, one of the worse (and more conceited) 'big ideas' that some of us who run roleplaying games toy with is the creation of a novel (or, gods forbid, a series of novels) based on various events, or indeed a whole epic saga, that as Gamesmasters we have brought into being. It's a tempting thought which all too often can lead to a truly awful result.

The concept, at first glance, has little to recommend it. Turns written in RPGs can be wonderfully atmospheric and great for keeping players hooked from one snippet to the next. Good chapters of a novel, however, they do not generally make. The language of a roleplaying turn is often quite different. It may be more to the point, although of course the scene still needs to be set. It is unlikely to take in the focus of anything more than the one character or group of characters that the player is controlling, whereas a good novel draws the reader into empathising with an array of different characters. It is also quite difficult sometimes, to think of a turn in terms of what it would be like as part of a novel. The second person, present tense, that players generally prefer but which can sometimes be more difficult for Gamesmasters to write, can make this even more difficult. Also, the dual inclusion of player's input and Gamesmaster's input can make for a clash of styles, which is barely noticeable in a turn (it can in fact be beneficial) but which can become glaring if used as a chapter or fragment in a novel.

Nevertheless, I write the above in good faith despite having written one long novel (of suspect quality) several years ago loosely based on **Chaos Trail** turns, and, not having learned my lesson, started another, far more ambitious series of novels (though not quite on a Robert Jordan scale, thankfully for me), also loosely based on such turns. But much more loosely - and the chapters written so far feel much more satisfying for it.

The key lies in throwing out pretty much the entire array of turns as they were originally written, excising less meaningful characters and adding new ones, and generally ripping up everything apart from the story itself. Because it should be the story, the underlying idea, which makes us wish to create something like this in the first place, and in the end the novel is nothing without the idea - yet the idea is still the seed that can form a novel, given sufficient skill and hard graft. The difficult work is in shaping the language, reworking as many times as required.

To cite my own example, I read through hundreds of old turns that I'd written, when I commenced work on this series of novels, and planned to use them, if only in a small way. In the end, the characters and the background story in which they were involved - which itself has changed and will continue to - were inspiration enough in themselves, and as yet I have still to use a single turn in anger.

In short, the whole idea of creating a novel from a script which has essentially already been written is to be prepared to throw out as much as possible, chop and change, and if necessary make such major changes that the end product bears almost no resemblance to what originally happened in the context of the game. So in essence, the original turns, the plots and sub-plots, have acted more as a catalyst than a constituent, playing little part in the creation of the product, but needing to be there to provide the original inspiration and the backdrop.

Is it worth doing? Only if writing is your lifeblood. It takes up endless hours; you end up going over and over the same things, reworking and reworking and sometimes even casting out something you have been working on for months. It is tiring, frustrating and there is little chance of it eventually being recognised and published. In short, you need to be addicted to writing fiction - and if you are, then you will plough on and do it, regardless of the above.

Grimm Scenario Ideas

COLIN FORBES and the Big Bad Wolf...



ONCE AGAIN, clouds scud across the moon, robins chirp from greetings cards, and miniature chocolate bars are on sale by the industrial-sized bag. Once again Yuletide is almost upon us! I must be honest, the idea for this article is far from original. Anyone who frequents the Lycos webpages may well be familiar with Aaron Schatz's daily column based around the top fifty topics searched each week on the Lycos search engine. In this article I've borrowed a page from Aaron's book, taking the top ten Lycos-searched fairy tales as revealed in the October 20 Lycos 50 Daily Report and used them as the basis for ten horror game concepts (OK, so this article was written at Halloween). How can fairy tales, of all things, get turned into horror RPGs? Glad you asked.

10. Goldilocks and the Three Bears

Well, to start with, you've got talking, porridge-eating bears who build houses, which strikes me as a pretty odd concept all by itself. This can be the centre of a recursive series of dream images - the continuous set of three choices, the snarl of the ursines outside their door - or as the kernel of a 'reverse dungeon' concept; when the party arrives at the Monstrous Keep, the monsters are out. What do they do? Make themselves at home? Eventually, the party will start eating the monsters' food, and sleeping in their beds - until a new party of adventurers shows up to kill them, horrific bearlike humanoids that they are.

9. The Three Little Pigs

The big bad wolf is even given NPC statistics in *GURPS Monsters*, so that's handy. He makes a great villain, and he shows up in a sequel, later on down the list. Or, of course, to continue with our 'reverse monster' theme, one could see this as a Werewolf adventure, destroying the homes of piglike capitalists (shades of Orwell), or of hideous pig-monsters from another dimension (shades of William Hope Hodgson).

8. Hansel and Gretel

Something about a house made of spun sugar makes me think of this as a nanotech future horror story. Take your favourite cyberpunk game (whether it be *Digital Burn*, *Transhuman Space*, or *Cyberpunk* itself) and recast the story. Homeless kids, lost in the urban jungle, find their way to a paradise house - where they may eat, or be eaten in true cyberpunk mode. Make the Gingerbread Tenement a maze, a magical chantry, or a child-eating monster - this story could work in *Unknown Armies* as well as *Shadowrun*.

7. Rapunzel

I have to say, this is a pretty weak story; it's all one gimmick. This is like some kind of *Grimtooth's* trap or puzzle-door from the old school. (*Necromancer Games* was supposed to release a Wurst of Grimtooth's Traps, but it's still TBA. Use *Fantasy Flight's* giddy *Traps & Treachery* until then.) Play the players' knowledge against them; make Rapunzel a gorgon, set an entire adventure in the climb up her hair (did the characters shrink, or is Rapunzel more than she seems?), get your horror out of the confounding of expectations.

6. Jack and the Beanstalk

Okay, this is more like it. Magical plant leads to invisible kingdom in the sky full of gigantic man-devouring, bone-grinding monsters. Yep, we're on the same page: this is one excellent *Call of Cthulhu* scenario. Are the 'magic beans' actually mushrooms? Is the 'stalk' a tentacle? Or a single strand of cilia? Mwahahahaha!

5. Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs

This is too easy. If you can't get an awesome *Ravenloft* adventure out of the Queen of Winter, her magical mirror, a hunted dwarven resistance in the forests and poisoned apples, you're not even trying. But when the players wake Snow White, on what do her blood-red lips need to feed?

4. Little Red Riding Hood

This can be the Big Bad Wolf's sequel adventure, or a great Werewolf-Hunter crossover. Ideally, you'd have two teams (maybe in a LARP), with Red herself as an NPC target for both sides; the Garou and the Hunters both want to draw Red over to their side, but the Garou want to see her dead if she won't snuggle up to Grandma . . .

3. Sleeping Beauty

Let's see what we've got here. Mysterious sleeping death, spread from a spinning wheel. Magical thorns and vines (and other things?) twist and writhe into the path of those who would investigate. The black curse of a forgotten being. Yep, you know it - this is another great *Call of Cthulhu* scenario.

2. Beauty and the Beast

This is such a *Vampire: the Masquerade* story that I don't really need to say anything else. You could probably run this one completely straight, but it will work best if neither the *Nosferatu* nor the *Toreador* PCs see it coming. Maybe mix it up with Romeo and Juliet, if you don't mind risking court cases brought by over serious Shakespeare literati.

1. Cinderella

Beautiful chick, bitchy rivals, big important dance, magical intervention. This is a *Buffy the Vampire Slayer RPG* scenario just waiting to happen. Is Prince Charming all he appears to be? Do the glass slippers suddenly become the far less pleasant 'red shoes' from other Grimm tales? Should the slayer just go stag and save the price of a limo? This could also work as a mystical kind of superhero adventure, since it's essentially a story about a secret identity. But Buffy's a mystical kind of superhero, anyhow.

You can't spell 'Grimm' without 'GM'

So much for using fairy tale flavour in roleplaying games. What about using roleplaying games for a fairy tale? There are a number of excellent sourcebooks for authentic faerie lore, from the out of print *Faeries* for *Ars Magica* to the brand-new *GURPS Faerie*. But they don't really capture the flavour of what English speakers call 'fairy tales' and the Brothers Grimm called 'maerchen'. For that, you need a combination of loose magic, world limits and a sense of the rules of drama that not many RPGs give you. *Universalis* is an interesting game from Ramshead Publishing (<http://universalis.actionroll.com/>) which will actually let you play a fairy tale, assuming all your players sign on, and the point is to tell the story rather than inhabit it as such. Which was, after all, the point of telling fairy tales, *Once Upon A Time* (my favourite card game ... www.atlas-games.com).

Gaming... With Children

NICK ROSEBY combines play and parenthood ...



I AM A GAMER, a computer geek, a husband, and a father. Juggling the three can be challenging at best. How do you host a game at your domicile with dice, paper, a DM screen, and all of the requisite RPG books all sitting in front of you while your one-year-old daughter continually climbs into your lap and your six-year-old son constantly bugs you for help with something or other?

Answer: You don't.

How do you avoid these annoyances, you ask? You need at least one or two things: a PC, a laptop computer, a Palm handheld, and/or a willingness to try new things.

That and an internet connection. I'm not going to send you a CD, you know.

It is not reasonable to expect to have a paperless and diceless gaming environment. You will need the books at least. You could scan them, but who is really going to go through that much trouble for a game? Believe me, I have tried it and it is a pain. The books are a given, unless you are using the D20 system (www.wizards.com/D20). Accept it; it will make you a much happier person.

What about characters?

Well, if you are using **Dungeons & Dragons 3rd Edition**, you could use E-Tools (www.fluidnet.com/site/DnDFrame.html), but I was underwhelmed with that particular tool when I tried out a friend's copy. If you are playing a very basic game of D&D, it might be useful. It just didn't float my boat.

My preferred method of character upkeep is PCGen (<http://pcgen.sourceforge.net/>).

I used to use it all the time when it was not D20 compliant since it had a ton of D20 stuff included. I made characters for **Star Wars**, **Forgotten Realms**, **Ravenloft**, and a host of others. They even kept up with every new product that WotC put out, including the latest goodies from *Dragon Magazine*. The OGL compliance issue forced them to pare down their offerings to the three core books and the *Psionics Handbook*, but they have reached agreements with several companies to use their products. They now include such entries as the **Kingdoms of Kalamar**, **Spycraft**, and the *Mongoose Games* accessory books.

Good stuff. Add to all of that the ability to add pictures to your character sheets, save them to HTML or PDF formats, and the ability to print out the basic stats of an entire group of PCs or NPCs, and you have the makings of a good program.

My daughter likes to eat dice. Granted, they look like candy, but I imagine that they would play havoc with the digestive tract of a one-year-old. I am not going to force my players to give up the feel of rolling a handful of damage yet, but I understand that I need to keep my area a little child-safe. Enter the computer and/or the Palm.

For your PC, I would recommend DiceRoller 0.1 Beta (www.rpgboard.com). It allows you to roll up to 1,000 dice at a time. It features the standard die standards, plus you can enter in any nonstandard amount of type with 2-999 sides. It also allows you to modify the results in a variety of ways. You want to drop the highest or lowest roll? No

problem. Are there +/- modifiers? No problem. The tool is a definite mainstay in my little e-toolbox.

Want to use a Palm-powered PDA? Try Gamer's Die Roller (<http://palm.dahm.com/roller/roller.html>). This nifty little tool allows you to roll up to twenty dice at a time and assign up to 24 custom die rolls. Does your elven ranger roll 2d6+3 all the time? Program it in as a quick roll and just tap to kill that minotaur. It also has a roll history that shows up to 20 previous rolls. That's very helpful for those **White Wolf** games where you need to roll 12d10 to hit, because you need to roll each die as a separate tap. That is actually one of the main downfalls of the program, but it is manageable. It also has a function that makes it usable with AD&D THAC0. It features large buttons for finger touch if you don't want to bother with the stylus.

Finally, I have the salvation of PBEM (Play By E-Mail) games everywhere: the Irony Games Dice Server (www.irony.com/webdice.html). This website has an On-web Dice Server, a Secure e-Mail Dice Server, iG's Electronic Dice Bag, a FUDGE Roller, and a Shadowrun Roller. With 2,147,341,840 dice served as of this writing, this is one of the most popular die rollers on the web. These programs are better experienced than described, but I will give you a basic rundown.

The On-web Dice Server is the basic application. You can roll up to 20 dice with varying sides, add/subtract modifiers, and drop the highest and lowest rolls. It also allows you to repeat the roll up to 20 times. White Wolf fans, rejoice!

The Secure e-Mail Dice Server is the same application, but with a twist. It e-mails the results to another party. Do you want to host an online RPG? Do you want to keep your players honest? Make them use this site to make their rolls.

iG's Electronic Dice Bag is a Java applet with quite a few features. In their own words:

- * Customizable dice bag - You pick the dice the program shows.
- * Attack die - Computes 'armor class' hit, defaults to twenty sided, customizable to other values.
- * Fudge dice - 'nough said!
- * Roll re-use - Compose dice combinations with mouse clicks and re-use at the push of a button.
- * Instant rolls - Just move the mouse pointer over a dice button and see a value. (Not available in some buggy versions of Internet Explorer.)
- * Blitz Dice TM Roller - Re-roll an entire encounter or a single die with one button push.
- * Roll sorter - Sorts a list of dice rolls ... shows who goes first.

Plus ...

- * It's scalable - resize it to fit your screen
- * Set your font size - bigger or smaller to suit your eyeballs
- * 'Robust' - we try to work around as many browser bugs as possible!
- * Fancy splash screen - well, we had to put our Copyright somewhere ...

The FUDGE & Shadowrun Rollers are applications designed specifically for those game systems.

So keep the faith, my stalwart companions. Gaming is still possible after children. All you need is a PC, a PDA, and/or an internet connection. I'm still not sending you a CD.

No sweetie. No-no. Put the sippy-cup down. Get away from there!

:: FZZZT ::

Remember what I was saying about expecting to have a paperless and diceless gaming environment? Don't expect it.

What are you laughing at little lady?

THE MIGHTY PEN



Increasing the Profile of PBM, 2

We've had a good response to our request for firms to get in touch so that we might work on ways of improving the profile of PBM. Notables such as SSV Graz, Harlequin Games, KJC are already putting names to paper, along with Flying Buffalo and other US based companies.

We're aiming to get a big presence in the global magazine market, and for a long period of time, but we need input from other companies for this to be as effective as possible. We feel that this will ultimately benefit all PBM companies, so the more people who help, the better. So if you wish to be involved, please get in touch with us at:

me@MiddleEarthGames.com

Clint Oldridge

[This seems an excellent idea, and we encourage everyone to get in touch with Clint.]

Kids in PBM and War in Gaming

Les Jones raises some interesting points in both his letters last issue, but I really must take issue with both.

Kids in PBM - Where's the harm? If a child has enough imagination and patience to sit down and put the effort in, why the hell shouldn't they be allowed to participate in the hobby? As a parent myself, I'd have absolutely no qualms about my daughter playing in any game at all, should she wish to do so. To countenance keeping children out of PBM or PBEM 'For

Their Own Protection' paints a very bleak view of your fellow players, does it not? And fair enough, a youngster might, in the course of his or her gaming, come into contact with a prisoner, but who's to say that contact won't actually enrich the lives of both parties? Every inmate is most definitely not a ravaging sociopath, my friend. And for what it's worth, I've played in a variety of games, over a long period of time, and never once have I bumped into anyone in a prison.

Besides, how, realistically, do you expect to keep a determined youngster out of PBM? In this day and age there's less chance that you'll ever be able to tell the age of your adversary/ally, and I think, personally, that this is one of the strengths of PBM - it doesn't matter who the hell you are, you've got a chance to make a difference.

War and Gaming - I can only say I admire your moral fortitude. Surely it doesn't, though, matter where, physically or temporally, a war is set, it's an awful thing to go through. I realise this, and yet I play games based around such conflicts. Why? Because I realise that what I'm doing is playing a game. It's an important distinction to make, no? For example, I do quite enjoy playing flight-simulation-type games on computers. I have, in the last decade or so, flown a great many aeroplanes into skyscrapers, in these simulations. Is it because I'm a sicko? Nope, it's because, just sometimes, it's a laugh to do it. As long as it's in a *game*. Where no-one can get hurt.

Larry Deyell

PS - Oh, and the Michael Ryan thing - If you truly think you could have done what he did, you really ought to seek some professional help.

Recommending Re-enactments

Designer's Angst (last issue) struck a chord with me due to certain activities over the summer holidays.

Have you witnessed the Sealed Knot re-enactment group in action? They cover the civil war period and are a sight to behold, well worth a visit - call it research if you will! If you get the chance, go to one of their bigger battles as it is quite a spectacle. They usually have a living history camp too, where you can chat to the SK members and they will quite happily answer any questions you may have.

Wayne Yeadon

[I usually go to a living history event that held as part of the Exeter Festival, and agree that there's nothing like seeing someone like an alchemist in action! The re-enactment folk are really dedicated. I'd love to see one of the Sealed Knot's battles...]

Are players so dumb?

Why is it that gaming is not considered a cerebral sport?

Think of it, chess is a huge sport with lots of acclaim; it even made it into the Olympics. Mensa is a giant organization dedicated to playing mind games. Mathematicians make the news if they try to challenge computers, or split atoms. Who are these people? Einstein, a man who didn't like to wear socks or comb his hair, is noted to be one of the most brilliant minds of the century. Bobby Fisher was a bright little boy. What's he doing now? Tesla liked to play with radios, and electricity, but was a known eccentric.

We hold people who like to play with their minds in high regard except gamers. Why is that? Tolkien is only now being recognized as a fictional genius because of a movie. Why isn't Gary Gygax a household name? Why must I continually defend my hobby from people who saw a bad Tom Hanks film, but mad scientists who mix spider genes with goats (see <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/sci/tech/889951.stm> for more), or pigs with tomatoes are 'OK'?

I wonder which are better, people who make monsters, or people who fight imaginary ones. Humm, I'll stick with the gamers.

Lisa Fordham

THE PBM AWARDS 2003

*It's time to look back over the last year
and tell us what have been your
favourite PBM and PBEM games.*

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Feedback on Issue 104

LAST ISSUE polled a respectable 8.17. **Wayne Yeadon** felt that 'it started off slowly and I thought I wasn't going to enjoy it, but it got better as it progressed' while **Larry Deyell** found 'heaps in there this time that I felt the need to read.'

Articles that you enjoyed included Rumours, Clansmen ('a fun read' - **Tom Haswell**), Supernova III, Lords of the Earth ('a period that interests me' - **Chris Morris**), Dave Panchyk's 'M memoir of a Cyborg' ('very entertaining and informative' - **Robin Orman**), while several of you agreed with **Paul Miles** that 'the general standard of articles was both high and varied.' Nothing was generally disliked, though **Chris Morris** thought that he's 'not too likely ever to play' Bean Trader, **Wayne Yeadon** thought that Supernova III was 'a bit too long' and that there were 'probably too many design type articles too, leaving the issue a bit unbalanced.' **Larry Deyell** growled that 'I don't want to know a monster's history, all I need to know is if it's flammable...'

Question 4 asked whether you're concerned that games tend to get bad publicity in the general press. 68.5% of you feel that tabloid journalists are just out for an easy story: 'Games are always represented as childish, while anything that shows grown-ups acting in a childish way makes good copy,' says **Paul Miles**. 31.7% find that relatives try to persuade you to do different things: 'They simply do not understand the pleasure of gaming and see it purely as something the kids do,' sighs **Wayne Yeadon**. Several of you objected to the idea of taking games seriously, however - 'I play for fun,' says **Mike Cornish**, 'not as a serious activity!'

Question 5 asks about publicity efforts. The possible methods that we suggested were: attending conventions, magazine advertising, online reviews and comments, designing games for newcomers and advertising free games for newcomers. 'All of the above?' asks **Larry Deyell**, 'Any good publicity can only be a good thing, no?' Magazine advertising was the method that 73% favoured: 'Seeing an advert from Madhouse in a non-PBM magazine is what drew me into PBM in the first place,' says **Robin Orman**, and **Wayne Yeadon** agrees that 'Advertising in magazines is probably the best way forward and offers of free games have to be a good thing.' 25.9% of you favour free games for newcomers, but no-one thought much of conventions or easy access online as ways to go.

Question 6 asked what sort of new game would appeal most to you: one that's easy to learn and doesn't take long to play, one that's likely to attract lots of other players, one that links with a favourite book or TV series or one that's got plenty of depth to it. Most of you voted for *all* the options, like **Robin Orman**, who picked 'A, with a bit of D, and some B for healthy player interaction. C probably wouldn't hurt either.' 'Depends what I'm looking for at the time,' explains **Tom Haswell**, 'maybe it's a game to make a second-string, maybe it's a game that'll take up lots of time and planning...' 'None of the above,' objects **Larry Deyell**, 'Interaction with real human players is where it's at for me - I'd like to see some more multi-player RPGs on the go, thank you. There's nothing like a little "co-operative" roleplay, I think.'

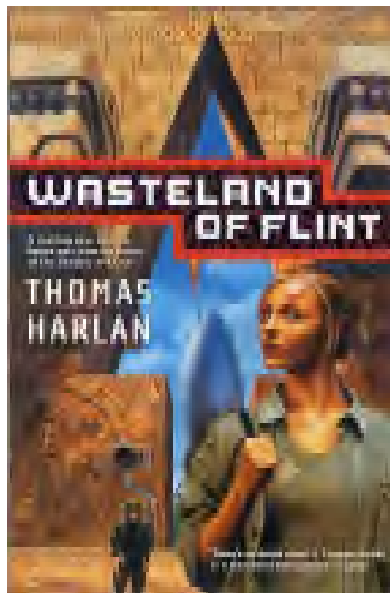
Many thanks to all who replied!

Feedback on Issue 105

- 1 - Please rate this issue from 1 (jaundiced) to 10 (jammy).
- 2 - Which articles/sections did you most enjoy, and why?
- 3 - Which bored you, and why?
- 4 - How highly do you value game materials? (a) I store everything away tidily when I finish playing, (b) I tend to lose stuff because I leave it around, (c) I junk anything I've finished playing, to make room for new games, (d) I've still got my games and game notes from way back.
- 5 - Would you consider buying or selling positions in an online game for real money? (a) Why waste time building a character when one's already available? (b) I'd rather start from scratch, (c) If I've put a lot of work into a character, I reckon I've the right to sell it, (d) It shouldn't be acceptable to buy a character.

- 6 - How much time do you spend in playing games? (a) 3-7 whole evenings per week, (b) 1-2 evenings per week, (c) most of the weekend, (d) a couple of hours every week.

[Replies welcomed by surface mail to the UK office, or by email to carol@pbmgames.com. By January 9th, please.]



Thomas Harlan competition

Last issue we offered you the chance to win signed copies of books by Thomas Harlan. The winners drawn from the hat were **Mike Jackson** and **Steve Savage** - the books are in the post!. Congratulations to both of them and bad luck to everyone who didn't win - better luck next time!

We hope to be bringing you more competitions for more free stuff in future issues of Flagship!

Neutral Zone

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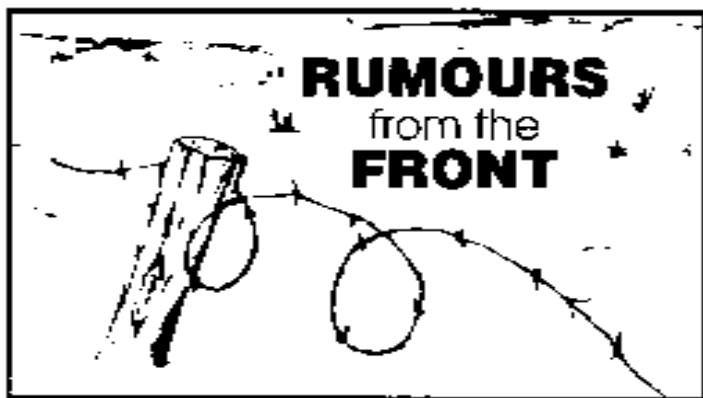
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[This column attempts to simulate a crowded bar full of players swapping experiences. It contains readers' uncensored comments, with no attempt to maintain fairness and balance; editing is only done for grammar, clarity, brevity and (occasionally) 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: Andrew Campbell, Chris Coxon, Larry Deyell, Colin Forbes, Michael Grant, Martin Helsdon, Chris Morris, Carol Mulholland, Robin Orman, Dave Panchyk, John Piller, Walter van Vliet, Jeremy Wasden

PLAY BY MAIL / PLAY BY EMAIL

Aspects of Might (Silver Dreamer)

Chris Coxon - 'I feel moved to write in support of the excellent online email game Aspects of Might run by Justin Parsler. Aside from using the versatile and flexible Nexus game engine developed by Steve Tierney of Madhouse Games it also boasts a large element of Gamesmaster hand moderation in the form of the Astral Web IC communication medium, the multiplicity of feasibility studies that one may undertake - indeed the only real limiting factor is your own imagination - Justin finds a way to weave almost everything thrown at him smoothly into the very fabric of the game itself. As such it is a constantly evolving game with many avenues available to be explored from alchemy through to windmills.

If you like a game where you very firmly hold the reins of your own destiny - I cannot recommend it high enough. Oh, and as a taster you can play one character free just to see if you like it!'

Barbarians at the Gate (Software Simulations)

Chris Morris - 'The Saxons have reached the borders of Egypt - OK, they've had help to get them there, but it's about as likely as flying pigs.'

Destiny: Star Marines (Madhouse)

Robin Orman - 'Another free single-character Madhouse game that I enjoy. "Mad" Max Stone has discovered a strange Alien Artifact (that looks suspiciously like the Stargate from the TV series) amidst a carnivorous jungle on the planet Tariah. If he sees anyone with a snake's head, he has orders to shoot on sight!'

DungeonWorld (Madhouse)

Michael Grant - 'Axehand continues his dungeon exploration. Plenty of loot left lying around by careless monsters. Trying to save enough for a magical battle-axe to replace the blunt normal one he currently uses. It's going to take ages to save enough gold unless he has another lucky find! Anyone know where the wealthy zombies dwell?'

DungeonWorld: Broken Lands (Madhouse)

Robin Orman - 'Freedom! A concerted effort has forced GateKeeper the dragon to retire, injured (permanently), and Gaelan has emerged from the depths of the earth to breath fresh air once again. Or what passes for it, in the barren, dusty wasteland that is the surface. Looks like a long trek over the surface of the Broken Lands lies ahead... and there are plenty of nasty dinosaurs to keep things interesting!

This is one of my favourite NeXus games, and I'd certainly recommend it. Especially since it's free!'

Michael Grant - 'Woe is me, for Landra Nightwarden was killed in battle. Chewed to pieces by a hungry school of Gnatti. Not a pretty sight I can tell ya'. Now I know how the hapless victims from various piranha movies feel!

Started a Monk after being recommended this class by a friend. It'll be nice to try a combative profession who does not rely upon weapons and armour. Prepared for combat from day 1. Jai of the Dragon's third turn just came back. A nearby Lizard Man provided some combat experience. Will see what goodies it left behind next turn.'

DungeonWorld: Frontier (Madhouse)

Michael Grant - 'The generosity shown by the wealthy in aiding us against whatever haunts the old imperial palace is an example to all. They have offered us weapons, armour, food, water and, most importantly of all, healing aids. Deep within this dungeon the number of skeletons seems to have been temporarily culled thanks to everyone's valiant efforts. Rumour has it that the more of us down here then the more undead will rise up against us. Not a pleasant thought at all! Anakine is injured as per usual but not too badly.'

DungeonWorld: Kyr (Madhouse)

Robin Orman - 'I've recently dropped this game (despite around 90 free turns remaining from Madhouse's offer). I found the inclusion of some of the less attractive elements of Destiny (e.g. food that only reduces the "Last Ate" stat by a certain amount, limited ammo for ranged weapons) unappealing - and rather odd, since the standard DungeonWorld rations (which completely reset "Last Ate") and bows (which don't need separate ammunition) were still available, to some degree. The Thirst statistic from Frontier also seemed out of place, and led me to spend longer worrying about "maintaining" my characters than enjoying the adventuring.'

Michael Grant - 'Still no monsters fought. Where are they all? Is someone or something racing ahead of me annihilating everything? Somehow protecting me from dangerous encounters?

Just found my first piece of loot. Some light armour to aid my Dervish in his travels.'

Einstein's Lot (Ulaidh Games)

Carol Mulholland - 'The game moves admirably, but I've been slow to send orders recently because of other commitments and - OK, I'll admit it - simply enjoying the summer weather. No deadlines, though, so I'm not handicapped. Well, not unless dark forces have been busily gobbling up all the other player areas and I've not heard about it yet!

Looks as if Alison will have to find a replacement for her mentor, but who to pick? Lecturer Gillian Newton seems to know more than she's letting on about vampires, so may be the prime candidate for this, but is she really as vague as she makes out? Alison rather hopes not...'

Horses for Courses (Dave Scriven)

Andrew Baker - 'I have only been playing HSC for three turns, but I find it very enjoyable. It's the best!'

S. Edge - 'Great horse-racing game with a GM that loves the game and is continually trying to improve it.'

Ian Baker - 'I am new to Horses for Courses, having played for ten turns. I have played numerous PBMs, some I have won, some lost. This game, so expertly operated by Dave Scriven, is the only game that has left me waiting my turn back the minute I have posted it.

This game is easy to play but I suspect complex to master. It's terrific value for money and any gamer who enjoys strategy games should gallop down the home straight to finish at Dave Scriven's door.'

Patrick Baker - 'Horses for Courses is really good fun and is a very good game. I really enjoy filling in my turn sheet, sending it off, and waiting for it to drop through my letterbox the following week. I consider it to be really good value for money and Dave Scriven, the GM, does an excellent job of running the game.'

La Gloire du Roi (Agesa Publications)

John Piller - 'I received a letter from the GM stating that game 4 has been closed down due to lack of support. This is a shame as I enjoyed this game a great deal.'

[Maybe you can move on to a later game, which is still running?]

Monster Island (KJC Games)

Michael Grant - 'There are a couple of excellent additions to the game. The *Message in a Bottle* newsletter now has a new editor. Just received his first edition. Very nice Tony Austin. Secondly you can now receive turns back via email. PDF format. I'll try this option maybe next turn to see how well it works and how it looks. On top of everything else there's news of new players trying the game.

Haliok is still having island fun. Battling lots of different creatures and making useful items with their body parts. Lousy buckler broke on me so had to backtrack to a local far post for more crab bits. Also just discovered how to make Barkbrute Body Armour but only have half the required monster bits to do it. Just typical! Time to go a huntin'!'

Mysticora (CJ Games) - Beta test

Dave Panchyk - 'Mysticora is a play-by-(e)mail game that incorporates RPG, economic, and strategic elements - and the mix is up to the player! I was invited to play in the beta test, and did so until recently. Gamemaster Channing Jones is conscientious, responsive, and fast to use his considerable programming skills to make changes as necessary - very useful, as I seem to be the idiot against which he needs to proof the game before final release.

One starts with a primary character, and as many secondary characters as the points allow, all of whom are created in RPG-character depth (adventuring party, anyone?). The player also has the option to also purchase military units, trade goods, and buildings. Various towns, estates, and dungeons dot the countryside, ripe for trade or plundering (the good at heart will know what to do with which). Check out market prices for prospective trade routes, visit taverns for local news, or set out to explore unseen lands.

The order system proved a little beyond me; you have commands such as *market_prices*, which then take various parameters. There is a graphical utility and web form for turns, which makes things easier; usability improves apace, and with plans to make Mysticora into Something Bigger, CJ Games is definitely producing something to watch.

www.mysticora.com

Postal American Football League (Cleopatra Games)

John Piller - 'I received my first PAFL turn for two years in mid-September, game 5. I hope this is the return of a great game.'

[This sounds hopeful! We look forward to hearing that the game has resumed a regular turnaround, so we can restore it to Galactic View.]

Quest GME (KJC Games)

Michael Grant - 'The five groups limit per player has now been removed from the game. Lots of players are planning to either start new parties or bring parties from other worlds into the GME games. Parties can now be transferred between the moderated worlds for free whereas it used to cost £5. This offer is only on for the next few months.'

Game 31 Naralia: The major arena tournament has come to an end.

1st: Stone Temple Slayers (1521) - Holy Ghosts - Won 150k gold plus a crown.

2nd: Storm Rangers (1824) - Apotheosis

3rd: Witchfynders (1150) - Holy Ghosts

4th: Ruin of Angels (1252) - Apotheosis

News just in that a new arena tournament is set to begin on November 8th and already has 63 groups taking part.

There are currently 13 official alliances within game 31 with several attaining rank 3 or getting very near to it. Only cities can house official alliances and with just 20 of these largest settlements available per game there are not many left spare. The alliances are presented in the order they appear in bought newspapers so there can be no talk of favouritism towards the alliance I'm in.

THE HOLY GHOSTS (123) stand against all evil lurking upon Naralia and are a Good/Garthrana (war Goddess of vengeance) worshipping alliance based in knightly city of Castle Deluthia. Renowned for being the first official alliance upon Naralia and for having some of the best fighting groups in Quest.

<http://perso.wanadoo.fr/holy-ghosts/>

CATACLYSM (149) are loyal to the Thieves Guild of Larochelle. Aiming to one day work for the assassins guild. First to achieve Rank 3 status and renowned for its gold... err... finding ability. :-)

<http://home.no.net/bienmor/cata10/index.htm>

ROYAL DRAGONS ALLIANCE (103) are dedicated against thieves and worship Dragons. Has been at war with Cataclysm for quite some time now.

<http://www.stevescutt.btinternet.co.uk/steve1.html>

APOTHEOSIS (122) is a non-religious varied alliance based in the city of Burnenville. Aiming to one day ascend beyond the gods! Famed for being the biggest alliance of them all.

<http://apotheosis.dfxwebs.com/index.html>

THE GRAND ILLUMINATED THUNDERBOLT SYNDICATE (GITS-107) is a neutral outfit of adventurers based in the warlike empiric city of Mortavlon.

<http://www.alun5.freemove.co.uk/Quest/GITS.html>

THE LIGHTBRINGERS (148) is a good/Garthrana worshipping alliance seeking to rid Naralia of evil and is based in the martial city of Derriden.

NEMESIS (112) believe in getting the job done and doing it right. Their motto is "our word is our bond". They are based in the solid city of Raviksholm.

<http://www.nemesis.me.uk/>

THE DARK ONES (120) work for the Magic Circle and the Merchants Guild in the exotic city of Amrakeesh. Seeking to gather artefacts of power, research long-forgotten rituals and investigate arcane sites.

<http://www.thedarkones.dk/Quest/TheDarkOnes.htm>

ANARCHY'S MANTLE (130) is the only evil/Fleyshur (god of devastation and violence) aligned alliance in Naralia and is based in the sinister city of Denvilera.

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

BLOODY HONOUR (115) fight to restore the balance between good and evil in Naralia and are based in the fortress city of Moonlight Bay (15).

<http://www.geocities.com/bhquestsite/>

RAINBOW PROPHETS (126) are currently contracted to the Bankers and Merchants guild and Novalan Temple in the trade city of Elkhart. Main focus in life - Gold.

<http://finalstryke.com/>

THE SCROLLS (111) is Naralia's only Molwanh (Nature Goddess) Alliance based in the prosperous city of Lavant.

MOR GWYLLT (145) work as the peacekeeper of the Free People's state of Mor Sallatane. Based in the Horselords' city of Mor Sallatane.

<http://www.alun5.freemove.co.uk/Quest/MorGwyllt.html>

Star Fleet Warlord (Pagoda Games)

Andrew Campbell - 'I have been playing Star Fleet Warlord for five years and loved every minute of it. Never won a game, but came second twice! Game E18 is about ten turns into it and I have started pretty well, but it is early days yet. Roll on turn 11.'

Supernova: Rise of the Empire (Rolling Thunder)

Jeremy Wasden - 'Being long in the tooth I can remember several years back hearing players' tales of woe about major bugs and the final collapse of SN II. Thus I was wary about starting up in the latest Supernova. Now having played for seven months I'm happy to report the game is stable and turnaround digital (rather than just clockwork). The Gms have frequently programmed upgrades to the game and are responsive to players' requests for changes. As a bonus, these improvements which have been carried out without interfering with the game's turnaround or causing bugs.

But nobody plays a game just because it works. This is large scale space opera with much emphasis in the first stages on exploration and a slow build of production and colonies. My race has not met any other races yet. As a power gamer I am looking forward to first contact and diplomacy kicking in. At this pace it looks like the life of the game is designed to be several years. This is re-emphasised when exploration returns information on distant and fantastic sounding goodies such as Mk III Matter Transporter, Mk III Universal Gate and Mk V Bombardment Missiles. We are currently researching only Mk II and Mk III generation basic missiles and space ships' nuclear engines.

Negatives? Initially I found the rulebooks hard to understand and the best explanations have come from players. I think that part of the idea behind the slow build up is because it takes a little while to learn how to create and then bandy those fleets around. With a high degree of complexity spreadsheet skills are very useful.'

Tough at the Top (Games by Mail)

Andrew Campbell - 'I have been playing Tough at the Top for three years and would recommend the game to any football buff. The game has individual stats for each player, but having a team of eleven players with good stats is not what it is all about, there is a lot more to it than that. Try it and see, you will not be let down.'

Walter van Vliet - 'Currently playing in game 200 as Colchester United. When I took over the team we were at the 23rd place; after 12 weeks of play we just made it out of the relegation zone.'

This game is fun and you really need to figure out how to use your team's strength at its best. Finding good players in England and at the foreign leagues is one thing, but they have to agree to sign a contract with your club also. So a good premier division player will not play second league. I set my own goals in this game: this year my own challenge is to stay in the 2nd division! If you like soccer, try this game!

Worlds Apart (Colin Andrews)

Martin Helsdon - 'Colin Andrews' Worlds Apart RPG campaign remains as intriguing and deadly as ever. At some point it's likely the campaign will revert to his old stomping grounds of North Eastern Saturnalia. As the Worlds Apart setting seems to induce greater player paranoia this may be a very good thing, though the North East had its own dangers. Still long, detailed and demanding turns, requiring quite a bit of thought.'

Xott Grander (Antony Dunks)

Larry Deyell - 'Mr Tony Dunks turning out the goods once more. A great mix of humour and action. I missed a couple of turns thanks to real life (but in a good way!), but it doesn't seem to have made much difference. My own character, a picture of sweet innocence, has been keeping himself busy, and the rest of the team have been faffing around helping one of our company get used to being a woman. Not that Prince Julien wasn't a big girl before his sex-change, you understand...'

Carol Mulholland - 'Gosh, what a tough land Xott is proving to be for my regrettably beardless female dwarf. Gloopy monsters tend to appear unexpectedly, and innocent bystanders get fatally glooped over by them. Will the resuscitation procedures work? And whatever transformed the Prince into a big-bosomed Princess to start with? Why isn't s/he grateful for this marked improvement?'

It looks as if this country doesn't regard its females as the superior sex like we dwarfs do, grrr...

Tony Dunks provides plenty of incidents, and isn't afraid to be funny.'

BOARDGAMES

Bean Trader (*Rio Grande*)

David Crane - 'Uwe Rosenberg's entertaining card game Bohnanza is now available as a board game. Each of the ten cities begins with two beans. Players start with one each of the eight kinds. Your initial hand consists of seven reusable Travel cards, and three random Order cards; one Order is discarded to determine your initial capital.

Each turn, use Travel cards (and, at times, Orders) to travel to another city, where you may purchase its beans at current prices, trade beans with opponents, and draw another Order. You may also earn money by filling an Order - that is, by discarding the specified beans at the indicated city.

When played, Travel cards are recycled, and Orders discarded. One Travel card requires the drawing of a Harvest card to add new beans to several cities and thus decrease prices. Play ends, and most money wins, after eight Harvests. Kudos to Rosenberg for using his bean!

[Reviewed by Pevans last issue.]

Clans (*Rio Grande*)

Bill Morris - 'Despite its theme of building villages, Clans is a fairly abstract game. It's easy to learn (there is only one type of movement allowed in the game), great production quality, and no luck involved. This game is pure strategy. It's a game that may take a few plays to really get into and learn the various strategies, but it's a very good game.'

John Roebuck - 'I played this game only once and it wasn't a lot of fun. I tend to enjoy themed games more than abstracts. This game is an abstract game masquerading as a themed game. There's not much to draw you in, even the overall game itself is rather shallow. If you like abstracts this may be a game you enjoy; however, if you're like me where you prefer theme, stay away.'

Pirate's Cove (*Days of Wonder*)

Bill Morris - 'Aarrg Maties!!! Piratenbuch (Pirates' Cove) is an interesting and very fun game of plundering islands to improve your ship, fighting fellow pirates, defending yourself against the royal navy, and attempting to defeat the very famous pirate, Blackbeard. All of this is done to become the most famous pirate at the end of the game.

We play games two times a week and end up playing Piratenbuch at least once each night. Although the game box states that play time is about one and a half hours, we generally finish games in about one hour. I have tried several different strategies and have not found any to be over (or under) powerful.

The game itself is very well made with a heavy duty folding board, wooden play pieces and quality cards. After 30+ playings there are virtually no worn or damaged parts.

All of this and getting to talk like pirates too (aarrrrg)!

David Crane - 'The game is a sort of amalgam of the German and American styles: simple and very playable, with beautiful components, but with a lot of dice-rolling. There isn't a lot of strategy involved, other than in deciding how much emphasis you want to put on firepower as opposed to a capacious hold and enough sail to escape unscathed from nasty situations. There are a few interesting tactical choices: for example, do you aim for your opponent's hull, hoping to force him to jettison treasure, or do you try to reduce his crew, knowing that Blackbeard will be blockading the recruiting port next turn?

All in all this is a very attractive game, and can be a lot of fun for a group of people who don't mind a little aggressive role-playing and who aren't put off by the considerable element of chance involved.'

Settlers of Catan (*Mayfair Games*)

David Crane - 'It's tough to find a game that everyone likes, but I've played this game with many people and everyone loves this game.

It's a bit long, but you get so into the game, it's easy to lose track of the time. Few new games are out there that can keep your focus for so long and result in fun by everyone. Buy it for a friend for Christmas!

J Farne - 'This may be my favourite game. I am so pleased to finally have a game that my whole family plays but that challenges a gamer's mind. Now for the pros and cons:

Pros:

- 1) It's different every time you play it. The random board possibilities add tremendously to the replay value.
- 2) Everybody seems to like the theme. Fun to play with everybody. Even more fun to play with gamers!
- 3) Good mix of luck and strategy.

Cons:

- 1) The biggest cons come from mixing good players with poor players. The problems with playing with poor players is that the game becomes about who can exploit them the most (same thing with Monopoly). And poor players making poor decisions can contribute greatly to another's benefit, which can make serious gamers roll their eyes while those benefitting from other's poor strategy shrug to each other saying 'I'm sorry.' Also, if someone doesn't want a particular person to win, it's too easy for

them just to give all their resources to an underdog that could put them over the edge.

- 2) My only other problem is the cost involved in purchasing all the expansions. The five-six player expansion is overpriced for what you get, but necessary for playing with five-six people.

All in all, this is a great game. It is still fun even if poor players make bad decisions if you just consider they're playing a part of the overall strategy.'

Wildlife (*Clementoni / Uberplay*)

David Crane - 'After two plays, I am enchanted by this game. You want options, you got them! A solid synthesis of tile placement, card management, and area control. This is no multi-player solitaire! As spaces fill up, the opportunity for conflict is high. The interesting thing is that despite this fact, it is not always best to get into conflict. You must choose your actions wisely. And with so many options, you really have to think. Some may find the downtime to be problematic but our three-player games always seem to move just fine. With so much to think about, you are always thinking about what to do next. In the games we have played, due to some online concerns about card distribution (terrain vs other cards), we decided to remove one of each terrain per player and just recycle the deck as needed. It has worked smashing! The only downside is that the tiles could have been better and the game length is a little long. Still, it is really a lot of fun for those who like to think about their games.'

Ryan Davis - 'I've played it at least twice now, and it's really good. It works best with three or four people; my first game had six and it went a little too long. But with four, your turn comes up quickly, and you can even be involved in other people's turn due to the auction mechanic.

The game rewards strategy but isn't overly complicated. Relatively easy to learn, but challenging. Great theme and board design. Don't let this one slip by.'

[The game is reviewed this issue!]

CARD GAMES

Bohnanza (*Rio Grande*)

Karl Richter - 'This great card game will be a hit at any game night. Players take turns planting beans in two bean fields. Like beans must be planted with like beans. If you can't plant then you need to harvest first to free up a field (or get that third bean field in play). Certain numbers of beans harvested at a time will earn you gold. Most gold wins! Oh, and did I mention the trading and donating that happens during each player's turn?

Fun and easy. Though it takes a round or two to get everyone comfortable with the play mechanics. Don't hesitate to buy this and enjoy a light yet socially enjoyable game!'

Once Upon a Time (*Atlas Games*)

Colin Forbes - 'Although I have enjoyed a wide range of card games over the years, my all time favourite has to be this storytelling game. The concept of telling a fairy tale while playing a card game is not one that might appeal to everyone - though I would still advise you to give it a try. The game has elements of the classic radio game 'Just a Minute' and is fiercely competitive - no, I mean really, really competitive! After all, the other players just ruined your lovely story'

[Comments welcomed by surface mail to the UK office or by email to carol@pbmgames.com. By January 9th, please.]

Hall of Fame

Legends (*Harlequin Games*)

Adventures in Avalon 22

Winner - Orcs R Us:

Goran the Red (**Michael Borgendahl**), Makula (**Anne Ingram**), August the Mad (**Anders Nilsson**), Sharn-Mes (**Pete Godfrey**), Snizort (**Paul Avent**) Dire Cromeck (**Wilson Whitelock**), Snarl (**Dean Johnson**)

Adventures in Avalon 5

Winner - Whitestorm Empire:

Leon Greymane (**Ed Kassens**), Valeron Whitestorm (**Andreas Bringedal**), Phlebas (**John Harllee**), Leogi Whitehand (**Jake Collins**), Gorian Hawkmoon (**Martin Collinson**), Washington (**Peter Dahlhausen**), Balthor the Red (**Mons Johnson**)

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www.gameskeeper.co.uk

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Lincoln, Lincolnshire, LN6 9DG

Gaming Crypt, 50 Castleton Road, Great
Barr, Birmingham, B42 2RR

The Hidden Fortress, 51 East Street,
Southampton, SO14 3HX
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enquiries@hidden-fortress.com
www.hidden-fortress.com

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Centre, Fore Street, Exeter, Devon

Krackers Games Shop, 5 Bath Place,
Taunton, Somerset, TA1 4ER

Not Just Stamps, 17 Crendon Street, High
Wycombe, Buckinghamshire, HP13 6LJ

Ottakar's, 102 Curzon Mall, Queensmere
Centre, Slough, Berkshire, SL1 1DQ

Playin' Games, 33 Museum Street, London,
WC1A 1LH

Roaring Ogre games, 53 Staple Hill Road,
Fishponds, Bristol, Avon, BS16 5AB

Wayland's Forge, 37 Auchinlek Square,
Fiveways Shopping Centre, Edgebaston, B15
1DV
0121-687-0105
games@waylandsforge.co.uk
www.waylandsforge.co.uk

Westgate Games, 20 The Borough,
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01227-457257
andrew@westgategames.fsnet.co.uk

*If there is a games shop local to you that we don't list - please write and tell us!
Better yet, take a copy of Flagsip in to them - we'll gladly send you a replacement!*

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VALKYRIE

Galactic View

WE'VE BEEN busy checking all the games and firms that we list in *Galactic View*, so we're fairly confident that all the firms listed were active at time of going to press. If we've dropped a firm or game that you know exists, ask the GM to get in touch with us.

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

UK, EUROPEAN & WEB-BASED GMs Ab Initio Games , PO Box 605, Bromley, Kent BR2 0YQ WEB: www.phnports.com EM: danny.jacconell@virgin.net TEL: 020 8325 2448	MC
Adams, David WEB: www.throneworld.com/lords/lored4/index.html WEB: www.throneworld.com/lords/lored10/index.html EM: davette@ae.net EM: davette@ae.net	ADA
Advanced Gaming Enterprises , POB 214949, Sacramento, CA 95821, USA WEB: www.agsystems.com	AGE
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Andrews, Colin , 20 Brown Edge Road, Holts, Oldham, OL4 5QG Arnott, Leven. WEB: www.jaysystem.co.uk/ EM: gs@jaysystem.co.uk/	AND ARN
Baird, Phil , 530 NE 63d Ave, Portland, OR 97213, USA WEB: www.throneworld.com/lords/lored1/index.html EM: philbaird@prattmail.com	BAI
Briny En Gardé (Terry Crook) , 11 Laurie Close, Burniston, Scarborough, N.Yorks, YO13 0JQ WEB: www.brinyengarde.co.uk EM: davette@ae.net	BRI
Martin Burroughs , 15 New Earth Street, Oldham, OL4 5ES WEB: http://myweb.tiscali.com/ae/tepepyd/index.htm EM: martinburroughs@tiscali.co.uk	BUR
Burrows, Pete. Burzwick PBM , 8 Magnolia Court, Beeston, Nottingham, NG9 3LG WEB: www.buzwackpbm/freeserve.co.uk EM: pate@buzwackpbm/freeserve.co.uk TEL/FAX: 0115 9224901 (pre 10pm)	BUR
Central de Jose SL , C/Numancia no. 112-116, 08029 - Barcebona, Spain WEB: www.centraldejos.com EM: torinimpc@meia.net	CEN
Crashworld , 4 Batefield, Clayton-le-Woods, Preston, Lancs., PR5 8UQ WEB: www.crashworld.com EM: andy@crashworld.com TEL: (Andy Smith) 01772 334878	CRA
CSPT , Alfred-Bucherstr. 63, 53115 Bonn, Germany WEB: www.the-ashes-of-empire.de EM: albert@bucherstr.63 WEB: http://home.i-online.de/home/ashes_of_empire/as/has2.htm (English)	CSP
Dark Wolf Games , BCM Darkwolf, London, WC1N 3XX WEB: www.darkwolf.ie EM: pbm@darkwolf.ie TEL: (Kain): 070 2069 WORG (0674), FAX: 0870 052 7521	DWG
Drac Games , 21 Chipperfield Drive, Kingswood, Bristol BS15 4DP WEB: www.dracgames.co.uk EM: derek@dracgames.co.uk TEL: (Derek Raneley): 0117 9607173 (9am-6pm Mon-Fri)	DRC
Dreamworld Games WEB: www.logicalsoccer.com/ / www.realitytracing.com TEL: 01380 811522	DRE
Dunks, Antony , Far Horizon, Sark, Guernsey, GY9 0SE WEB: ant@ark.net EM: www.sark.net/~sark	DUN
Entertainment Plus More Games , PO Box 2578, Appleton, W1 5412, USA WEB: www.epmgames.com EM: ag@epmgames.com	EPM
Evans, Paul , 180 Aylsham Drive, Uxbridge UB10 8UF EM: paul@pevans.co.uk EM: jgibbons@araway.co.uk WEB: http://www.jaraway.co.uk/	EVA
Faraway Games , 3 Maslem Rd, St Albans, Herts AL4 0GS EM: jgibbons@araway.co.uk WEB: http://www.jaraway.co.uk/	FAR
Flying Buffalo WEB: http://www.flyingbuffalo.com/ EM: rick@flyingbuffalo.com	FBI
Games by Mail , Bridge Street, Neston, S Wirral CH64 9JL WEB: GamesByMail.co.uk EM: colin@gamesbymail.co.uk TEL: (Colin, Yvonne, Trog): 0151 3361412 FAX: 0151 3361099	GBM

Glover, Adrian , 4 Stevane Court, Lessness Park, Belvedere, Kent, DA17 5BG Hartlin, Thomas , 3210 East 23d Street, Tucson, AR 85713, USA WEB: www.throneworld.com EM: thomas@throneworld.com Hartlequin Games , 340 North Road, Cardiff CF1 4BP WEB: www.hartlequinames.com AND www.middleearthgames.com EM: pbm@hartlequinames.com TEL: 029 2091 3359 (04-30 weekdays) - Middle Earth only TEL: 029 2092 5665 (0-6-30 weekdays) FAX: 029 2092 5532 any time	GLO HAR HAQ
Hunky Monkey Games , 2A Guinea Street, Exeter, Devon, EX1 1BS EM: dpc@hunkymonkey.co.uk Incutus Designs , POB 263, Loughborough LE11 1ZG WEB: www.incutusdesigns.co.uk EM: ingbus@globalnet.co.uk TEL: 01509 217957 FAX: 01509 558788	HKM INC
Interesting Times , 10 Belmont Avenue, Barnet, London, EN4 9LJ WEB: www.interesting-times.co.uk EM: startup@interesting-times.co.uk TEL: 0750 658383 FAX: 0750 658384	INT
Jade Enterprises , 127 Queen Adelaide Court, Penge, London, SE20 7EB EM: jade.ent@ntlworld.com TEL: 020 83256307	JAD
Kamilkaze Games WEB: www.kamilkaze.com KJC Games , FREEPOST, Thornton-Cleveleys, Lancs FY5 3UL WEB: www.kjcgames.com EM: enquiry@kjcgames.com TEL: 01253 866345	KAM KJC
Lloyd, Rich , 79 Farmersville Road, Califon, NJ 07830, USA EM: lords4@throneworld.com TEL: (908) 832-5176	LLO
Madhouse , 6 Alexandra Road, Wisbech, PE13 1HQ WEB: www.madcentral.com EM: madcentral@aol.com TEL: 01945 583811	MAD
Mindless Games , 5 Basford Road, Nottingham, NG6 0JP WEB: www.mindless@virgin.net EM: andy.mindless@virgin.net TEL: (Andy Simmonds): 0115 979 0797 (9.30 - 6.30 weekdays only)	MIN
Neutral Zone , 33 Rockall Close, Havethill, Suffolk, CB9 0LU WEB: www.neutral-zone-football-phbm.co.uk EM: info@neutral-zone-football-phbm.co.uk TEL: 01440 713124 (7pm - 9pm)	NEU
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	OAT
Olympia Games , 6 Sandy Lane, Bamsote, Nottingham, NG9 3GS EM: pbm.dexter@talk21.com TEL/FAX: (Trevor Dexter) 0115 9436197	OLY
Pagoda Games , PO Box 5155, Tamworth, Staffs B77 4QQ WEB: www.pagodagames.co.uk EM: orders@pagodagames.co.uk TEL/FAX: (Keith Burnham): 01827 703251	PAG
Mark Palin , Clansmen, 6 Havenwood, Strethley, Telford, Shropshire, TF3 1FJ Pinder, Mark , 139 Nelson Way, Laceyby Acres, Grimsby, S Humberside DN34 3UJ WEB: http://groups.msn.com/elevaria EM: Markpinder@aol.com TEL: 01472 753430	PAL PIN
Quixel Games , Quixel Games Gbr, Am Panofen 7, 47608 Geldern, Germany EM: quixelgames@i-online.de Rebus Games , 70 Greenfield Crescent, Brighton, BN1 8HJ EM: domintem@zoom.co.uk	QIR REB
Received Wisdom , 9 Oundle Road, Alwalton, Peterborough PE7 3UP WEB: www.receivewisdom.org EM: stid@receivewisdom.org	RCW
Rolling Thunder Games Inc , PO Box 310, Eastlake, CO 80614-0310, USA EM: supernova@rollingthunder.com WEB: www.geocities.com/TimesSquare/Alley/2187/tribenet.htm EM: tribenet@netgpace.net.au	ROL RZE
Rzechorzak, Peter WEB: www.helderdwelt.com EM: svygrze@aon.at	RSV
Scriven, David , 15 Alandale Grove, Garforth, Leeds, LS25 1DJ Sevanstar Games , 27 Olympia Gardens, Morpeth, Northumberland NE61 1JQ WEB: www.sark.net/~svt/greentun.html EM: erevan@nickelglobalnet.co.uk	SCR SEV
Silver Dreamer , 174 Charles St, Greenhills, Dartford, Kent DA9 9AJ EM: silverdra@aol.com TEL: (Justin Parsler): 01322 38705 (Mon-Fri, 11-6)	SIL
Software Simulations , PO Box 2758, Yeovil, Somerset, BA20 2XH WEB: www.phnports.com EM: peter@phnports.com	SOF

Spencer, Jerry , 51 Elm Vale, Liverpool L6 8NY EM: jerry.spencer@liverpool.gov.uk Sporting Dreams , PO Box 5423, Derby, DE21 2ZB WEB: www.sportingdreams.com EM: info@sportingdreams.com and info@greyhoundrainer.com TEL: 01332 726376	SPN SPO HAQ
Supersonic Games , PO Box 1812, Galston, K4 8WA EM: sam@australitiz.co.uk TEL: (Scott, Sam, Chris): 01563 821022, fax 01563 821006 WEB: http://tempusfugitpbm.co.uk EM: enquiries@tempusfugitpbm.co.uk	SUP
Tempus Fugit PBM Productions , 96 Bishopwood Road, Tadley, Hants RG26 4HG EM: enquiries@tempusfugitpbm.co.uk	TFT
Terre de Jeux , 88 Avenue de Jussey, 91600 Savigny sur Orge, France EM: issasol@club-internet.fr	TDJ
Time Patterns , 14 The Hollows, Exmouth, Devon EX8 1QT WEB: www.timepatterns.co.uk EM: carol@timepatterns.co.uk TEL/FAX: 01395 276632	TIM
Timeyrm , 2A Guinea Street, Exeter, Devon, EX1 1BS WEB: www.timeyrm.co.uk EM: colin@timeyrm.co.uk TEL: (Colin Forbes): 01392 420582	TIW
Total Conquest WEB: www.total-conquest.com EM: support@total-conquest.com EM: christian.morris@virgin.net	TOT
Unidh Games , 62 Beechgrove Avenue, Belfast BT6 0NF EM: christian.morris@virgin.net	ULA
White, Stephen , 43 Sandway Drive, Briarcliffe, Burnley, Lancs., BB10 2IS WOW Games WEB: http://www.wow-phengame.com/	WHS WVG
Xanibis, Constantine , 7080 NW 75th Street, Pompano Beach, Florida 33067, USA EM: cvtan@jvcos.com	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)	ABY
Armistice Day , Stephen Agar, 47 Preston Drive, Brighton, BN1 6L A (Email: stephen@armisticeday.com)	QIR
Boris the Spider (Email: pbolduc@aol.com)	REB
Camel Robert Rees, Top Floor Flat, 22 Victoria Square, Clifton, Bristol BS8 4ES. EM: camel@talk21.com	RCW
Devolution , Tony Robbins, Lincoln House, Creaton Rd, Hollowell, Northants, NN6 8RP (Email: tony@hollowell.plus.com)	ROL
Diplomacy 2000 , www.lancelad.demon.co.uk/dip2000/	RZE
Flights of Fancy , Philip Honeybone, Email: phil@melly98.freeserve.co.uk	RSV
For Whom The Die Rolls , 14 Stepnells, Marsworth, Nr Tring, Herts., HP23 4NQ (Email: Keith@Thomasson.com)	SCR
Mission From God , John Harrington, 1 Churchbury Close, Enfield, Middlesex, EN1 3UW (www.fbgames.co.uk)	SEV
Off-the-shelf , Tom Howell, 365 Storm King Road, Port Angeles, WA 98363, USA (Email: off-the-shelf@lympus.net)	SIL
Psychopath , www.psychozine.co.uk (Web publication only)	SOF
Rhein-Neckar-Zine , (German language), Lukas Kautzsch, An der Rosswald 18a, 76229 Karlsruhe, Germany, (Email: lukas@oberfohl.de)	ABY
S.O.B. , Chris Hassler, 2000 S. Armour Ct., La Habra, CA 90631 USA (Email: chassler@adelphia.net)	ABY
Serendipity , John Wesley, Topferehe 4, 38259 Salzger, Germany (Email: jwwebley@aol.com)	ABY
Strangitude , Paul Sands, Flat 2, 432 Birmingham Rd, Wyle Green, Sutton Coldfield, B72 1YJ (Email: strangezine@btinternet.net)	ABY
To Win Just Once , Paul Evans, 180 Aylsham Drive, Uxbridge, UB10 8UF (Email: twjo@pevans.co.uk)	ABY
Variable Pig , Jim Reader, Vredelstraat 20, 3633 EC, Vreeland, NETHERLANDS (Email: cj_reader@wanadoo.nl)	ABY

HOW TO READ THE GALACTIC VIEW TABLES

Process shows if the game is run by computer (C), human (H) or mixed (M). The **Duration** of the game is shown by O (Open-ended) or F (Finite). GM is the GM's code shown in our listing of European & Web-based firms.

Medium shows whether a game is available via email (e), paper (p) or web-based play (w). Language is also indicated here where a game is offered other than in English. (G) German.

Start-up shows how much you will pay to begin playing the game. * indicates deposit returnable if you play to the end of the game, or prepayment discounts available (see moderator for details).

Free Turns - many GMs will give you a number of free turns at the GM each turn.

Turn Fee - how much each turn costs. * means that return postage is paid by the GM each turn. S means you need to send an SSAE or at least pay for the GM's postage.

Other Fees - the following footnotes apply: (a) more for larger positions or later turns in the game, (b) more for battle reports, (c) more for extended orders/longer reports, (d) more for several possible extras, (e) lower cost if you join the club. \$ indicates no credit refunds available. (f) higher start-up fee for paper rules

Flagship Ref shows the issue of Flagship where you can find the best description so far. a=article, s=Spokenmen Speak, d=diary. Thus, 4=meas Spokenmen Speak issue #4, * indicates a 'Euro-friendly' game: deadlines at least two weeks apart and prices for Continental players not more than 30% above those listed here.

Note - occasional optional extras like a newsletter are not included in the prices unless we judge that they are fairly frequent and essential for enjoyment of the game. Some GMs give discounts if you pay for a batch of turns in advance. Some offer reduced fees for email play.

All prices are generally for the UK and are given in £s except where noted. Non-UK European players should note that rates are usually about 25% higher than for UK players. If in doubt, contact the GMs.

Game	Process	Type	GM	Medium	Start-up	Free Turns	Turn Fee	Xtra £	Flagref.
Absolute Fantasy	M-O	Power: Fantasy	SIL	p	£15.00	2	£4.00	-	-
Absolute Heroes	M-O	RPG: Superhero	IAD	p	£15.00	2	£4.50	(b)	91a
Absolute Power 2	M-O	Power: Fantasy	SIL	p	£20.00	2	£5.00	-	-
Adventurer Kings	C-F	Wargame: Fantasy	PAG	p	£5.00	0	£2.50	-	35a, 72-74d, 88a
Adventurers Guild	C-F	Adventure	EPN	e	Free	1	\$ 1.0	-	-
Alamaze	C-F	Wargame: Fantasy	PAG	p	£15.00	1	£3.50	-	71a, 80a
Ancient Battles	M-F	Wargame: Historical	AGM	p	£6.00	0	£3.50	-	-
Ancient Empires	M-F	Power: Historical	OAT	e,p	£4.00	2	£3.25	£1 month	58a
Aspects of Empire	C-F	Sci-Fi	CSP	e,p	Free	*1, 53	-	-	-
Asyria's End II	M-O	Adventure	SIL	e	£2.50	0	£2.50	(c)	94s
Austerlitz	C-F	Power: Historical	AGM	p	£5.00	0	£6.00	(d)	90a
Austerlitz	C-F	Wargame: Historical	QIR	G only	?	?	?	(b)	34s, 96a
Austerlitz	C-F	Wargame: Historical	SUP	e,p	£10.00*	0	£3.75	(a)	34s, 96a
Austerlitz	C-F	Wargame: Historical	SSV	e,p,G	?	0	£6 Euro	(a)	34s, 96a
Australian Empires	C-F	Wargame: Futuristie	SOFF	e,p	£5.00	3	£2.00	-	101s
Barbarians at the Gate	C-F	Wargame: Historical	SOFF	e,p	£5.00	3	£2.50	101s	-
Battle Plan	C-O	Wargame	FBI	e	\$5	0	£3.50	(a)	19a
Beyond	M-O	Adventure	CRA	e,p	£25.00	5	£5.95	(a)	86a
Beyond the Stellar Empire	M-O	Sci Fi	KJC	p	Free	1	£2.50 - £6.00	-	22a, 83a
Championship League	C-O	Sport: Soccer	SUP	p	Free	0	£1.95	-	53s
Chicken Run	H-O	Sport: Motor Racing	RCW	e,p	£10.00	0	£0.50	-	-
Chusmen	M-O	Tribal	PAL	e	£10.00	2	£5.00	-	101s
Company Commander	M-F	Wargame	OAT	e,p	£12.00	2	£3.50 + £1.50/month	-	96a, 97a
Cover Operations	C-F	Economic	FBI	e	£25 per game	0	n/a	(d)	96a
Crack of Doom II	M-O	Tribal	HAQ	p	£10.00	1	£4.50	(d)	96a
Crack of Doom II	M-O	AGE	?	?	?	?	?	-	51a
Dark Age II	C-F	Power: Historical	SOFF	p	£5.00	3	£9.00 for 3	-	-
Dark Lands	M-O	Adventure	CRA	e,p	£25.00	5	£5.95	-	104s
Deathgate Arena	C-O	Adventure: Arena	EPN	e	Free	1	\$6.00	-	-
Destiny	C-O	Sci Fi	MAD	e,p	£10.00	4	£3.50	(a)	100a
Diplomacy	H-F	Wargame: Historical	TIW	p	Free	1	?	-	-
Dominion	C-F	Wargame: Fantasy	KAM	w	Free	-	Free	-	-
Dragonhelm	M-O	RPG: Fantasy	ULA	e,p	£4.50	1	£3.50	-	79a
Dragonstich	M-O	RPG: Sci-Fi	CRA	e,p	£25.00	5	£5.95	-	-
DragonWorld	C-O	Adventure	MAD	e,p	£5.00	2	£2.00	(d)	77-80a, 92-94d
Dunge: Briny	H-O	RPG: Historical (EGI)	BRI	e	Free	-	Free	-	-
EG1: Dangerous Liaisons	M-O	RPG: Historical (EGI)	SPN	p	£5.00	5	£0.80	-	84s, 93a
EG1: LPPS	M-O	RPG: Historical (EGI)	EPN	p	£10.00	4	£2.00	34a, 93a	-
Einstein's Lot	H-O	RPG: Modern	ULA	p	£4.50	1	£3.50	91a	-
Election Year	C-F	Misc: Political	FBI	p	£25 per game	0	-	-	-
Empires	C-O	Wargame: Historical	SOFF	e,p	£5.00	?	£2.00	-	63a
Epoch on Might	H-O	RPG: Fantasy	DWG	e,p	£10.00	2	£3.00	-	103s
European Empires	C-F	War: Historical	SOFF	e,p	£5.00	3	£2.00	-	53a
Extra Time-Charlman	C-O	Sport: Soccer	KJC/CRA	e,p	Free	1	£1.90	-	78s
Extra Time-original	M-F	Sport: Soccer	OAT	e,p	£3.00	0	£1.50 + 50p/month	(a)	53a
Fall of the Roman Empire	M-O	Wargame: Historical	DRC	e,p	Free	0	£2.00	-	78s
Fallen at the First	C-O	Sport: Horse Racing	KJC	p	Free	0	£1.50	-	-
Fantasy Soccer	M-O	Sport: Soccer	CRA	p	Free	5	£3.95	-	53a
Fellowship	C-O	RPG: Fantasy	FBI	e	\$5	0	\$1	-	-
Feudal Lords	C-F	Wargame: Historical	LWG	e	?	0	0.75 Euro	-	-
Feudal Lords: Right of Kings	C-F	Sport: Soccer	SSV	G only	?	?	£3.50 Euro	-	-
Galactic Conflict	C-F	Sci-Fi	FBI	e	Free	0	Free	-	-
Galactic Invasion 3	C-F	Sci-Fi	ARN	e	Free	0	Free	-	-
Galaxy	C-F	Sci-Fi	REB	e,p	Free	6	£1.50	-	94s
Gameplan	C-O	Sport: American Football	SOFF/McC	p	£5.00	0	£1.00 for 4	-	20a
Gameplan Baseball	C-O	Sport: Baseball	McC	p	£5.00	0	£3.00	-	-
Gameplan Boxing	C-O	Sport: Boxing	McC	p	£5.00	5	£9.00 for 4	-	-
Gameplan: Advanced	C-O	Sport: American Football	SOFF/McC	p	£5.00	0	£13.00 for 4	-	-
Godfather	C-F	Misc: Crime	PAG	p	£10.00	2	£2.50	(a)	73a, 83d
Great White Hunter	C-F	ARN	e	Free	?	?	Free	-	94s
Greyhound Trainer	C-O	Sport: American Football	SPO	w	£5.00	-	£1.00	-	-
Gridiron Stats	C-O	McC	p	£5.00	-	5	£8.00 for 4	-	-
Ground 8	M-O	War: Sci-Fi	AGM	e,p	£5.00	0	£6.00	(d)	-
Gunsboat Diplomacy	M-O	Power: Historical	AGM	e,p	£5.00	0	£6.00	(d)	-
Haunted Manor	C-F	Adventure	MAD	w	Free	0	Free	-	97a
Heldenwelt	C-F	Adventure	SSV	G only	?	?	6.9 Euro/month	-	-
Heroes of Olynthus	H-O	RPG: Fantasy	TIW	e,p	£10.00	0	£3.00	-	88s

Heroic Fantasy	C-O	Adventure	FBI	e	\$5	0	\$3	-	40a
High Seas	M-O	RPG: Pirate	CRA	e,p	£25.00	5	£5.95	-	-
Hooplaan	C-O	Sport:Basketball	McM	p	£5.00	2	£3.25	-	-
Horses/Courses: Epsom	M-O	Sport: Horse-Racing	SCR	p	£10.00	5	£2.40	-	98a
It's a Crime!	C-F	Misc: Crime	KJC	p	Free	-	£1.85	-	-
Kings of Steel	H-F	Wargame: Fantasy	WHS	p	£5.00	1	£2.50	-	13a, 77a
La Gloire du Roi	H-F	Power: Historical	AGM	e,p	£5.00	0	£6.00	(d)	76a, 86-89d
Lands of Elvira	C-F	RPG: Fantasy	PIN	e,p	£10.00	3	£4.00	(c)	59a, 93a
Legends	H-F	Wargame: Fantasy	HAQ	e	£20.00	1	£3.70	(c)	90a, 93a, 96a
Legends	C-F	Wargame: Fantasy	SSV	e,p,G	?	?	5 Euro+	(a)	90a, 93a, 96a
LoTe: 1	M-O	Power: Historical	HAR	e	?	?	?	?	(84a)
LoTe: 4	M-O	Power: Historical	LLO	e	?	?	?	?	(84a)
LoTe: 10	M-O	Power: Historical	ADA	e	?	?	?	?	(84a)
LoTe: 11	M-O	Power: Historical	BAI	e	?	?	?	?	(84a)
Mediaeval Empires	C-F	War: Historical	SOFF	e,p	£5	3	£2.00	-	-
Middle Earth PBM	C-F	Wargame: Fantasy	HAQ	e,p	£10.00	2	£4.50	-	-
Middle Earth PBM	C-F	Wargame: Fantasy	CEN	e,p	?	?	?	-	-
Mighty Heroes	H-O	RPG: Superhero	RCW	e,p	£9.90 a year	0	n/a	-	-
Mobius I	C-F	Sci-Fi	FBI	e	\$8	0	\$8	(a)	47a
Monster Island	C-O	Adventure	KJC	p	Free	0	£2.10	-	-
Morris Maximus	C-O	Sport: Fictional	MAD	p	£10.00	2	£2.50	-	81s
Napoleonic Battles	M-F	Power: Historical	AGM	p	£6.00	0	£3.00	-	71-73d
Necromancer	C-F	Wargame: Fantasy	MAD	p	Free	2	£2.50	-	63a, 70-71d
Nightfall	M-O	RPG: Horror	CRA	e,p	£25.00	5	£5.95	-	-
Neutral Zone	C-O	Sport: American Football	NEU	e,w	£3.50	0	£1.40	-	92a
Nuclear Destruction	C-F	Wargame	FBI	e	\$5	0	£3.50	-	-
Parzergruppe II	M-F	Wargame	AGM	p	£5.00	0	£2.50	-	82s
Peldere	M-O	RPG: Fantasy	CRA	e,p	£25.00	5	£5.95	-	-
Phanasmach	C-O	Adventure	CRA	e,p	£29.95	10	£2.95	-	30a
Play On	C-O	Sport: Aussie Rules	McG	e,p	AUS\$10	?	AUS\$5.50	-	-
Pop Tarts	H-F	Economic: Pop Music	RCW	e,p	Free	0	£9.99 per year	-	91a
Premier League	M-O	Sport: Soccer	BOU	p	£5.00 per season	-	£5.00 per season	-	63s
Primer Inter Pares	M-O	Power: Historical	INST	e,p	£10.00	1	£6.00/month	-	75d, 84a, 85a, 2a
Pro Soccer	C-F	Sport: Soccer	OLY	p	Free	1	£1.60	(c)	92s
Prometheus	C-F	Wargame	HKM	e,p	£4.00	0	£2.50	-	91s
Puna	C-O	Sport: Soccer	BLR	e,p	£4.00	5	£1.00	-	-
Quest	C-O	Adventure	KJC	e	Free	0	£2.10	-	36a, 47a, 94a
Quest Online	C-O	Adventure	KJC	w	Free	0	£2.10	-	-
Reception Grand Prix	C-O	Sport: Motor Racing	SPO	p	£5.00	0	£4.45	(c)	90s
Reality Racing	M-O	Sport: Horse Racing	McG	p	£5.00	1	£3.00	-	36a, 47a
Renaissance	M-O	Power: Historical	XAN	e	Free	0	£1.75	-	60s, 89s
Riddle of the Sands	M-O	Power: Fantasy	SIL	p	\$5	0	£2.90	(d)	-
Riflords	C-O	Sci-Fi	FBI	e	No	3	\$4	(a)	89a
Rugby League Breakout	C-O	Sport: Rugby	McG	e,p	£5.00	3	£5.00 for 4	-	96s
Rugby League Stats	C-O	Sport: Rugby	McG	e,p	£5.00	5	£8.00 for 4	-	51a, 85a, 96s
Rugby Union Stats	C-O	Sport: Rugby	McG	e,p	£5.00	5	£8.00 for 4	-	-
Run Chase	C-O	Sport: Cricket	RCW	p	£5.00	5	£1.00 for 4	-	-
SF	H-O	Sci Fi	RCW	e,p	Free	0	£9.99 per year	-	62s
S-LLeague: The	C-O	Sport: Motor Racing	SPO	p	£5.00	0	£4.45	(c)	90s
Saturnalia: Exile	H-O	RPG: Fantasy	HAQ	e,p	£10.00	2	£4.00	-	53a
Saturnalia: NE	H-O	RPG: Fantasy	DWG	e,p	£5.00	2	£4.00	-	-
Saturnalia: S	H-O	RPG: Fantasy	TFT	p	Free	0	Free	-	-
Serm Rai	C-F	Wargame: Fantasy	HAR	p	£10.00	1	£4.50	-	50a, 92a, 96a
Serm Rai	C-F	Wargame: Fantasy	INC	p	Free	0	£3.50	-	50a
Serm Rai	C-F	Wargame: Fantasy	MIN	p	£5.00	3	£2.00 for 4	(c)	50a, 78a
Slamdunk	C-O	Sport:Basketball	McC	p	£5.00	5	£8.00 for 4	-	-
Slapshot	C-O	Sport: Ice Hockey	McC	e	Free	0	\$0.50	-	53s
Smuggler's Run	C-F	Sci-Fi	ABM	p	Free	0	£8.00 for 4	-	-
Soccer Troopers	C-O	Sport: Soccer	OAT	e,p	£5.00	2	£2.00	-	51a, 85a
Soccer Strategy	C-O	Sport: Soccer	SOFF	p	£5.00	5	£8.00 for 4	-	40s
Space Troopers	C-F	Sci Fi	KJC	e	Free	-	Free	-	94s
Spaceplan II	C-F	Sci Fi	SOFF	p	£5.00	3	£9.00 for 4	-	57a
Speculate II	C-F	Economic	SOFF	p	£5.00	3	£2.00	-	103s
Star Chase	C-F	Sci-Fi	SOFF	e,p	£5.00	3	£2.50	-	101s
StarFleet Warlord	C-F	Sci Fi	PAG	p	£10.00	5	£3.00	-	72a, 78a, 91-93d
Starweb	C-F	Sci-Fi	FBI	e	\$7	0	£4.50	(a)	9a, 32-37d
Tanaka	C-O	Misc: Robots	FAR	e	Free	0	Free	(a)	75s
Tanka	C-O	TOT	TDI	only	?	?	?	?	-
Total Conquest	C-F	Wargame: Fantasy	TOT	e	1 Euro	-	1 Euro	-	98s
TOTL	C-O	Sport: Soccer	BLR	e,p	£4.00	5	£4.00	-	-
Tough At The Top	C-O	Sport: Soccer	GBM	e,p	Free	0	£2.50	-	96a
Tribe Net	H-O	Tribal	RZE	e,p	Free	6	£1.80	-	86a, 90a
Vitrol	H-O	RPG: Fantasy	RCW	e,p	Free	0	£0.70	-	-
War of Wizards	C-F	Wargame: Fantasy	WVG	e	Free	0	Free	-	-
War of Wizards	C-F	Wargame: Fantasy	WVG	e	\$5	3	\$5.40	-	-
Warlord	M-O	Wargame	CRA	p	£3.00	3	£2.20	-	61-62d
Peldere	H-O	RPG: Western	RCW	e,p	£25.00	5	£3.95	-	-
Wild World Web	M-O	Misc	RCW	e,p	n/a	0	£2.50	-	-
Winning Post	C-F	Sport: Horse Racing	SSV	p	?	?	?	-	58a
World Conquest	C-F	Wargame	GLO	e,p	£25.00	10	£2.50	-	-
World Empires	C-F	War: C20th	SOFF	e,p	£5.00	3	£2.00	-	-
World War I Battles	M-F	Power: Historical	AGM	p	£3.50	0	£3.50	-	78s
World War IV	C-F	Wargame	PAG	e,p	£10.00	3	£3.00	-	-
Worlds Apart	H-O	RPG: Fantasy	AND	p	£4.00	4	£4.00	-	92s
WW IV Blitz	C-F	Wargame	PAG	p	£10.00	5	£2.00	-	-
WW IV H2H	C-F	Wargame	PAG	p	£10.00	5	£2.00	-	-
Xott	C-O	Sport: Soccer	BLR	e,p	£4.00	5	£1.00	-	-
Xott Solo	C-O	Sport: Soccer	BLR	e,p	£4.00	5	£1.00	-	-



Meets and 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.

NOVEMBER

MIDCON: from 4pm Friday afternoon to Sunday evening, 14th-16th November 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 Jeremy Tullett, MidCon, 7 Midland Place, Derby, DE21 2RR

bookings@midcon.co.uk
www.midcon.org.uk

WARFARE 2003: 15th-16th November at the *Rivermead Leisure Complex, Richfield Avenue, Reading, Berkshire*. Traders, demonstration/participation games, competition games and a 'massive' bring & buy.

<http://dspace.dial.pipex.com/town/drive/gdo75/gdo75/>

FANTASYCON2003: 21st-23rd November.
www.britishfantasysociety.org.uk/info/fantasycon.htm
<http://www.britishfantasysociety.org.uk/downloads/Dealer.doc>

XVIIIth FRENCH NDC: 22nd and 23rd November in Paris. This is expected to be the largest Diplomacy convention in Europe this year. The organisers are offering special deals on accommodation. More details (location, tournament rule, precise schedule, details for accommodation, list of those who are pre-registered, Nathan De Troyes section on pronostics, etc) on the following link:

www.18centres.com/SPIP3/article.php3?id_article=yclouet@9online.fr

THE TORCH OF FREEDOM: 28th-30th November at the *West Retford Hotel, Retford*. A free-form roleplaying event running from 8pm on the Friday to lunchtime Sunday. Costs and accommodation details on the website:

www.flar.demon.co.uk/torchoffreedom/index.htm
steve@flar.demon.co.uk

DECEMBER

GENCON SoCaL: 11th-14th December at the Anaheim Convention Center, Anaheim, California USA.

www.gencon.com

DRAGONMEET: 13th December at *Kensington Town Hall*. This friendly London convention, is proud to announce that Anthony Daniels, Star Wars' C-3PO, will appear. Dragonmeet covers all aspects of hobby-gaming, from boardgames and collectible card-games to roleplaying, miniatures, play-by-mail games and live-action. There'll be hundreds of games to play, two trade-halls, guests, signings, seminars and special events all day.

Doors open at 10 a.m., and the convention will run until 11 p.m. There will be a *Flagship* presence here.

www.dragonmeet.com

JANUARY 2004

OXCON: 24th and 25th January 2004 at *The Mitre, High Street, Oxford, OX1 4AG*. Events include ..

* The 14th Annual Diplomacy Tournament on Saturday 24th.

* The 6th Annual Oxford The Settlers of Catan Tournament on Sunday 25th

* Lost Cities Tournament on Sunday 25th

* Fifteen-To-One on Saturday 24th.

Many, many other games played informally over the weekend! A well-stocked board games retailer will have a stall at the convention. There will also be a Saturday evening expedition to Oxford's finest curry-house. Food and drink served all day long. The Settlers tournament is the UK's second biggest and the well-established Diplomacy tournament features certificates for Best Nation.

Doors open 10:00am and the deadline for tournament registration is 10:50am on both days. Please e-mail us (before 22nd January, ideally) if you'd like to book a place at Friday's Laser Quest, Friday night curry or the Saturday curry. Advice regarding parking or accommodation in Oxford can be provided

Half-price entry for students Room booked for the whole day, allowing gaming until closing time

dipsoc@hotmail.com

richard.huzzey@st-annes.ox.ac.uk

MARCH

CONCEPTION 2004, 3 - 7th March 2004.

Naish Holiday Park, Christchurch, Dorset. Accommodation, which starts from £60, covers all five nights, and is in the form of centrally-heated holiday chalets with showers, microwaves, fridges etc. We will have a full range of both classic, living, LARP and war-gaming events, both scheduled and ad-hoc. Hot food and drink will be available on site (8am to 10pm), and the Site Swimming Pool will be open. There will be trade stands as well. Full details on the Conception 2004 website at

www.wessexgaming.org

APRIL

TOWERCON 2004: April 2nd-4th, *Norbreck Castle Hotel, Blackpool*.

An independent games convention with accommodation. TowerCon aims to provide a gaming environment that is relaxed and friendly and caters to a variety of gaming types. Board Games, Freeform, RPG's and war gaming are all supported. As usual there will be a *Flagship* presence here.

www.towercon.co.uk

BAYCON 2004 Held at the *Exeter Court Hotel, Kennford*, from 1.00pm Thursday 15th April to 3.00pm Sunday 18th April 2004 (the weekend after Easter). Kennford is situated approximately 5 miles south of Exeter on the main A38 (at the first junction following the end of the M5 motorway, and signposted Kennford Services). There is ample free parking in the hotel car park.

The main event of the weekend is the Victor Ludorum tournament to find the UK National Board Games Champion. The Roger Heyworth Spirit of the Game Trophy will be awarded to the person who has contributed most to other players' enjoyment (be that through camaraderie, good natured play, patient rules explanation etc.).


Bed & Breakfast accommodation will cost £26.50 per person per night in a shared room or £39.00 per night in a single room. All rooms have en suite bathroom and colour TV. There is a convention fee of £12.50 per person, which is payable in advance (£6 for children under 16; children under 5 free). Accommodation should be paid for at the hotel on departure.

www.robchapman.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk/baycon.html

Flagship welcomes news of any games-related conventions, pubmeets etc


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Lost, among bright stars on this most weary
unbright cinder, lost!

- Thomas Wolfe, "Look Homeward, Angel"

Flash, I Love You, but we only have 48 hours
to Save the Earth!

- Dale Arden, "Flash Gordon"