

FLASH

THE MAGAZINE FOR GAMERS

Supernova III

Austerlitz

Boardgames for Fun

Clix Miniatures

Horizons

Imperial Expansion

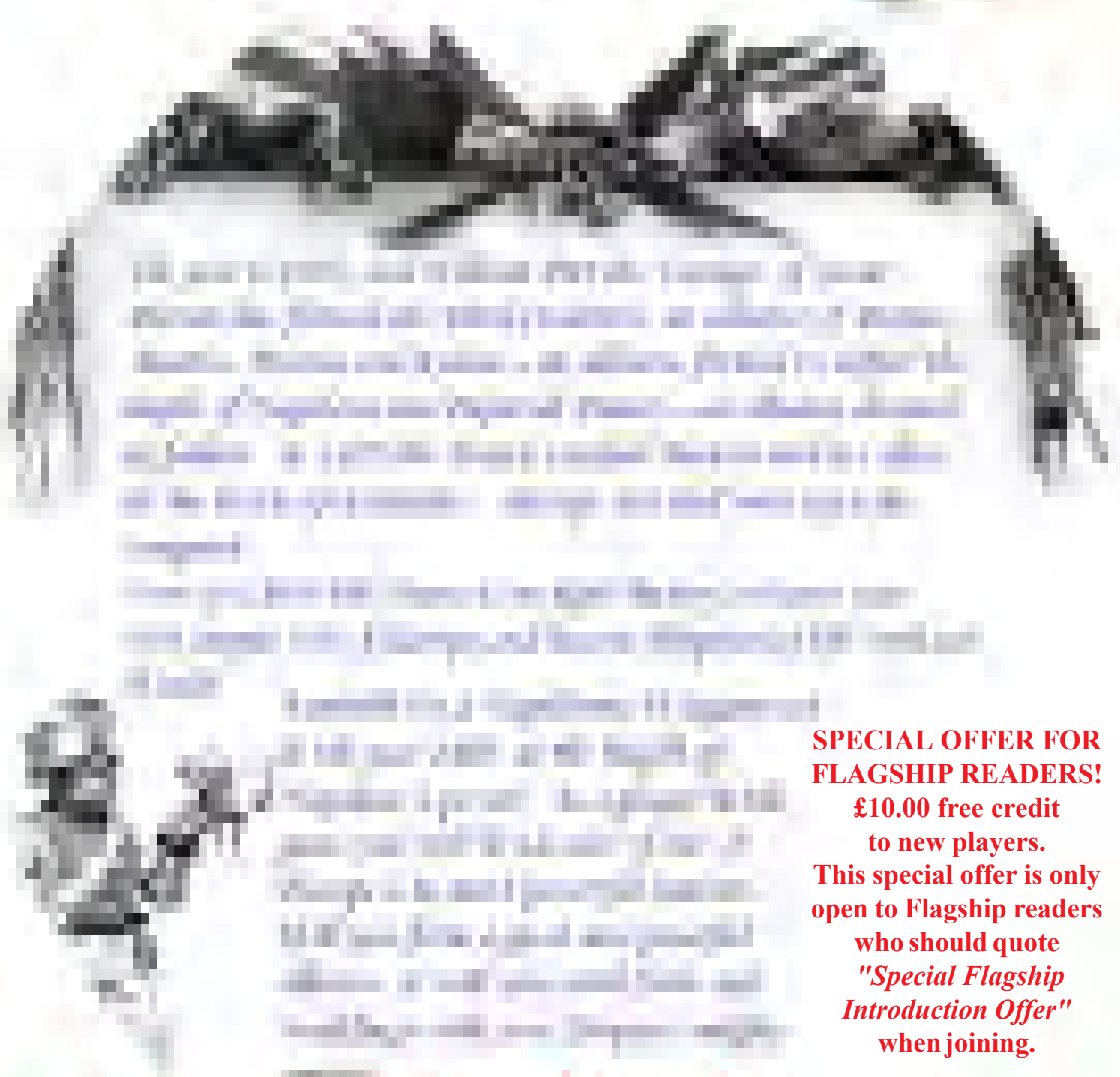
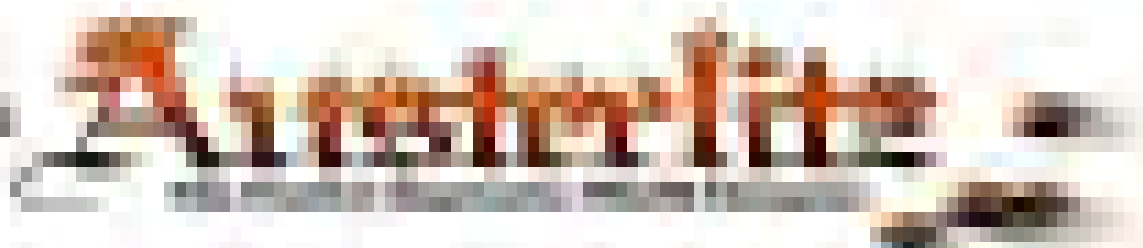
Princes of the Renaissance

Superstition in Roleplaying

A Tale in the Desert

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

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www.austerlitzben.com

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REPORT FROM THE BRIDGE

Into 2004 ...

WE HOPE THAT you had a fun time over the recent festive season, and found time to play a few games. We did: can you imagine your editor trying to convey the acronym 'DNA' in crumbly blue plasticine? This task formed part of the family quiz game **Cranium**, ulp, and yes, it was too difficult for editorial success, but otherwise the game was easy enough to keep a dozen family members happily entertained for hours.

We should all play more games, because they give us a chance to fail harmlessly or, better still, to shine. Real life needs improving, after all: it's a little too unforgiving.

2003 was a busy year for *Flagship*. We continued to cover lots of different games, new and old, and we're glad to have featured some vivid guest columnists. Because we're an independent magazine, we can reflect the views of our readers: your views. Not that we expect you to agree with each other, oh no...

Here's another game-packed issue as your first *Flagship* of 2004. We've a varied range of material here, with many different types of game and lots of different game settings. Our contributors describe turnbased games, boardgames, roleplaying and web games, which between them offer you experiences springing from fantasy, science fiction and near-history. You can consider roleplaying or strategy. There's a range of playing styles on display, too, from the tentative to the provocative.

We've also new stuff here, and not just in our news columns. One of its beta-testers describes the MMORPG **Horizons**; we've a review of the miniatures system **Clix**, which is the first time we've reviewed miniatures, even though plenty of you use them; we've an interview about setting up **Red Emperor**, the new internet game site; we've new boardgames being discussed.

We don't neglect established favourites, of course. As ever, too, we've plenty of description, discussion and controversy. There's plenty to think about here in these pages. If there's anything about games which you think we leave out, do let us know. We think that above all, the total impression which *Flagship* conveys - with the help of all our contributors - is one of enjoyment. We are proud about this. It's a shame that there isn't as much evidence of sheer enjoyment in other forms of entertainment as there is here in *Flagship*.

Have a good 2004. Do we have any sage predictions to make about the Future of Gaming? - nah, just let's make sure that it has a Future. Oh, and remember to watch out for the crumbly blue plasticine!

Carol



FLAGSHIP

#106, Feb/Mar '04

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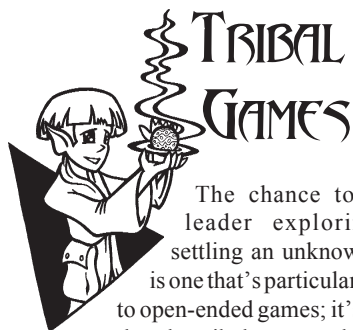
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Contributions welcomed for *Flagship* 107. By March 9th, please.

NEWSDESK PBM



The chance to play a leader exploring and settling an unknown world is one that's particularly suited to open-ended games; it's good to see that the tribal games which were one of the earliest kind of PBM games are still flourishing, by email now as well as by post.

Nic Haynes is returning as a GM with his **Moonbiter**, which he says took two years to write, and has been play-tested with friends for a year. You start off with your own clan or mercenary group, but once you've gained enough experience you can run any of the positions, from an army general to the lord of a city, or even a titular head of one of the factions. It's possible for your tribe to become rebels, loyalists, bounty-hunters, savages or peaceful settlers.

A map of the game world is supplied as an Acrobat file, and this world is a large one, with elements of myth and fantasy and scope for plenty of factions. Nic wants the game to be player driven, and emphasises that turns are open, so you can attempt anything you like with your actions having some impact on the game: 'It's basically like being part of a book, and my plan is to write one based on what happens in the game.' He also promises detailed battle reports and a descriptive sheet for every city.

The £10 startup includes two turns, with subsequent turns charged at the rather unusual system of £3 for every hour spent moderating. This £3 does sound reasonable for a basic turn, and turns can be run by email as often as two per week, though a postal option is also available. Nic writes well, and has plenty of ideas:

oinkyfattypig@hotmail.com

Some sad news from *Harlequin Games*. Their popular **Crack of Doom III** has now been closed. It's always difficult running a game with licensed software because problems are hard to fix, while extending or adding to the game may be impossible.

GM, John Davis, has been spending a lot of time writing a big history of Lorasias, 'to give the players some comfort and help them deal with the death of the game.' It's always sad to see a game close, but we're sure that after a suitable period of mourning, Crack of Doom players will find another game that suits them.

Australian GM Peter Rzechorzek is starting a third continent in his popular **Tribe Net** game. This open-ended game with an Iron Age setting has been running since 1997 and now has ninety five players. Details in *Galactic View* or contact Peter at:

tribenet@netspace.net.au

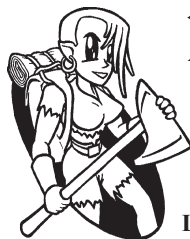
We reviewed Mark Palin's tribal game **Clansmen** in issue 103, but anyone who's tried to join the game may have been frustrated by Mark's change of address. He assures readers that he is still running Clansmen, and if you sent correspondence to the previous address - he hasn't received anything - please contact him at the new postal or email address in *Galactic View*, or phone 01952 595110 (1800-2000 hours).

Mark adds that there's a minor error in the review: players receive 1000 points at start-up, not 100.

mp004f8903@blueyonder.co.uk

Earliest of all the PBM tribal games was **Tribes Of Crane**. In recent years this has been run by Melvyn Huntley of *Zen Games*, but Melvyn has been unable to process turns for much of 2003 because of serious health and family problems. In December, Melvyn told his players that he is optimistic of resuming the game this year. We send him our very best wishes for a less troubled time in 2004.

zengames@quista.net



ROLEPLAYING GAMES

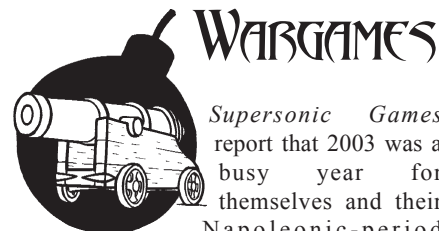
Mark Pinder reports that **Lands of Elvaria** is running smoothly, with new players attracted by his email special startup offer, which he promoted via the web and *Flagship*. In the new year the Elvaria turn fee rose to £4.25. All other costs remain the same.

<http://groups.msn.com/elvaria>

Simon Williams now has a new website for **Chaos Trail**, with particular emphasis on his new area (though everything will be covered). The website is still under construction, but already there are plenty of pages about the land and its people. Note that we have a general article this issue from Simon, about constructing a game world.

www.chaostail.com

Turns and all other correspondence should be sent to ct@chaostail.com



Supersonic Games report that 2003 was a busy year for themselves and their Napoleonic-period wargame, **Austerlitz**. Following the launch of their website last August, they're planning further software development and updates into 2004. Features so far include sample game turns, downloadable rulebooks and help files such as tactical journals, FAQs and game strategies from experienced Austerlitz campaigners. Oh, and you can also download some fun wallpaper to brighten up your PC. There's a link to show which empires are still available in new and existing games, and lists to show every game winner to have taken part in Austerlitz. 'Winning players are given a rank depending on how many games they have won, ranging from colonels to Major Generals.'

Supersonic's GM Sam McMillan reckons that 'the most successful part of the website so far has to be the forums where players chat about their games, rules discussions and new ideas for Austerlitz. At the time of writing the forums have over 1750 posted messages dedicated to 131 different topics. These messages have come from over 130 registered members.'

Supersonic also took up a player's suggestion to launch Austerlitz Champions' games, in which previous game winners play against each other to see who should be crowned Champion of Champions. Champions' games 1 and 2 have proved to be a major success and game 3 is filling up quickly.

The postal version of Austerlitz games reached a new milestone, with game number 200 starting in December, while Austerlitz by email has become very popular among their new and existing players. Email players may now receive turns in Adobe pdf format, which is already installed in most modern computers and is also obtainable free from the Adobe website www.adobe.com. This format prints in exactly the same style as the postal turns. Email turns have been reduced to £3.00 per turn and have generated great interest from players abroad.

In 2004 Supersonic Games hope to complete development on the software for Austerlitz to give their email version better graphics, playability, depth and value for money. The plans are already in place and updates are hoped to be introduced soon. However, they're keen to assure players who prefer the paper and pen version, that they

NEWSDESK PBM



have lots of new ideas to enhance your enjoyment, and that items to be introduced are just around the corner.

See *Galactic View* for Supersonic's postal address, or check the new website at:

www.austerlitzpbem.com



FANTASY WARGAMES

Three versions of the complex **Serim Ral** are run by three separate firms, *Incubus Designs*, *Mindless Games* and *Harlequin Games*. Of course, the style of each game depends on its moderator as well as its players. We've had an update about Harlequin's version from their moderator, Ed Lane, and think it's interesting enough to reproduce to give you some idea of what Ed brings to the game:

'What news in the realms of the Underdark? Well Katie the Vampire bat, our resident flying news reporter, continues in good form despite recent scares concerning her health. Light in the Darkness continues its worm on worm competitions, and with the races finishing in an untidy brawl, the worms have been moved (as if by magic) into a gladiatorial arena to do battle. Several have fallen already to the cruel blows of their opponents - only the last worm standing will claim the prize.

The game itself continues apace with a small swing toward the more evil religions recently as a result of special actions but still with plenty of potential for it swinging back the other way.'

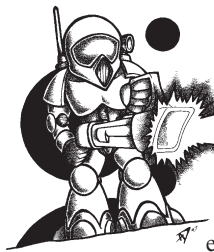
www.harlequingames.com

As we went to press, we heard news that Rob, the Serim Ral inputter had just porcessed following order: *Terminator Slaughter 160 Wombles*. He is now considering suing for mental cruelty in the workplace!



SPORTS GAMES

Adrian Glover, who runs the horseracing game **Winning Post**, has increased the charge for a season's play from £25 to £30, but please note that the season now runs for twelve turns rather than ten, so it's still a pretty good deal for players.



SCIFI GAMES

KJC Games have good reason to celebrate. One of the editors of the US online magazine *BYTE.com* has been playing in the Felini faction in their open-ended science fiction game **Phoenix**, and has now published an enthusiastic review of it. This sort of publicity is good news for everyone who's keen on turn-based play, and is likely to attract new players globe-wide to KJC's games. The magazine can be found at: www.byte.com and KJC themselves at www.kjcgames.com

Rolling Thunder Games suggest that a good way for players interested in **Supernova III** to find out more about the game would be to download the rules for free from their website at www.rollingthunder.com/supernova/SNFTP.htm

It's also worth asking current players any questions about the game on Rolling Thunder's message boards, because they are 'a very helpful lot, full of all sorts of advice to new potential targets...er...allies. Especially early on, there are so many economic decisions to be made that new players can use all the help they can get from their fellow would-be galactic rulers':

www.rollingthunderforums.com/

Rolling Thunder's Pete Dorman adds that 'a recent post at ...

<http://rollingthundergames.ipbhost.com/index.php?showtopic> has generated 46 responses and counting - great advice abounds there for any new player.'

supernova@rollingthunder.com

Flagship needs YOU!

Sports Gamers



Do you play Sports Games? Flagship is looking for a regular Sports columnist.

Interested? Write to carol@pbmgames.com

PBEM FIRMS



Congratulations to Mo Holkar for his marriage last

autumn. Mo's RPG PBM firm *Undying King Games* is on a back burner at present, because he's concentrating his efforts on a new company, *Red Emperor*, which is involved in web-based strategy games. Red Emperor will soon be launching their first game, which they're planning to launch to the PBM community first before scaling up to a more general market. You can learn more about this from the interview which we're running with Mo's colleague, Chris, in this issue: we thought that you'd find this an interesting subject and look forward to telling you more about the games in future issues: www.redemperor.com

Mo's other non-PBM firm is *Freeform Games*, which publishes murder mystery games. Freeform recently sold their 1000th game, so business is going well.

www.freeformgames.com

Mindless Games, who run one of the versions of **Serim Ral**, report that they are now seriously interested in obtaining another game, and are 'open to all offers of any genre, as long as it's computer-moderated, but preferably with e-mail capabilities.'

Because both of their children are now out at nursery/school, the Mindless GMs Andy and Cara are starting to have a bit more time and energy to think about getting hold of and/or writing new games. They're also planning to get some investment into the business over the next few months, which will help things run more smoothly.

www.mindlessworld.net

We're sorry to report that the US firm *Adventures By Mail* closed on Friday 29th January. The US versions of **It's A Crime** and **Monster Island** have ended, therefore, but this in no way affects *KJC Games*, and their licence to continue running these two games. KJC's Mica Goldstone regrets the news that 'Keith LaBlanc has been given his notice... We at KJC all liked Keith and will be sad to see him go. He is one of the veterans of the industry.' Hear, hear.

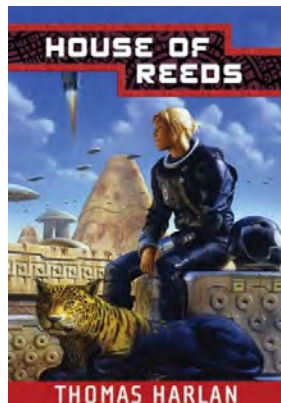
ABM contributed greatly to the growth of PBM by designing **It's A Crime** as a game to attract new players. It's good to know that both this and **Monster Island** are still available from KJC.

www.kjcgames.com

NEWSDESK BOARDGAMES



BOOKS



Thomas Harlan, who moderates **Lords of the Earth** as well as being a well-known fantasy novelist, announces that the new hardcover Sixth Sun book, *House of Reeds*, will be

in stores in mid-February. The paperback version of *Wasteland of Flint*, which was reviewed in *Flagship 104*, will be out at roughly the same time.

www.throneworld.com

BOARDGAMES

Our regular boardgames columnist, Pevans, writes ...

The various games fairs around the world take place at the end of January and beginning of February - after this issue of *Flagship* goes to print. This usually means lots of new releases in the following months as production gets under way. Expect a lot more news in next issue, but here are some announcements to be going on with.

Fans of railway games and designer Alan Moon's games will be pleased to know about **Ticket to Ride**. Also available in German (as **Zug um Zug**) and French, this new game designed by Moon is published by *Days of Wonder* and should be available by the Spring. According to the company's press release, 'Players collect cards of various types of train cars that are then used to claim railway routes connecting various cities across a map of North America. The longer the routes, the more points they earn. Additional points come to those who can fulfil Destination Tickets - goal cards that connect two distant cities - and also to the player who builds the longest continuous route.' The game has already had a rave review from Mik Svellø on his website (www.brettboard.dk), so this is definitely one worth looking out for. US retail price is expected to be \$39.95 - I expect it to be getting on for £30 in the UK.

Veteran designer Wolfgang Kramer will have several new games in print this year as he celebrates the thirtieth anniversary of his first published game. At first glance, the one

of most interest is another of his collaborations with Michael Kiesling, **Raja**. Described by Kramer as being a strategy game in the same vein as *Tikal* and *Mexica*, this is being published by *Phalanx Games* and is due out in April. Unlike the South American setting of the earlier games, this one is Indian - Rajasthan, to be precise. Another Kramer game that should be available shortly is **Sunken City**, published by *Uberplay* (and in German as **Versunkene Stadt** by *Clementoni*). The theme of the game is that the players are raising portions of a city that sank beneath a lake centuries ago to search for treasure. They have to evade Neptune, who is busy sinking the city again (presumably some game mechanic that allows player to interfere with each other's progress). Most treasure at the end wins. It doesn't sound too challenging, but it's certainly worth a look.

For a new publisher, *Uberplay* are pretty busy this Spring, with a dozen releases. Another one of these is an English language edition of **Alhambra**. Also coming up is **Hoity Toity**, which appears to be a re-working of Klaus Teuber's **Adel Verpflichtet**. Recently re-released in Germany by *alea*, the game has been published before in English as **Fair Means or Foul** (by *Gibsons* in the UK) and **By Hook or by Crook** (by *Avalon Hill* in the US). The game uses a bluffing mechanism in which players have to outguess each other to collect cards and out-score each other. The theme remains that of English gentlemen collecting (and stealing) antiques. However the new edition allows up to six players - previous versions have been limited to five.

Phalanx Games now plan to release the long-awaited, Francis Tresham-designed **Revolution** this Spring. This is a strategy game set in the long wars between Catholic Spain and the Protestant Netherlands. The idea is not to simulate the wars, but to capture the flavour of the many factions and changing nature of the conflict. The game has been in gestation for about twenty years, so its final appearance is a big moment - especially to fans of **Civilization** like me!

News of the following releases has also reached the *Flagship* office ...

Rio Grande Games have regretfully announced that they need to raise their prices, because their board and card games are manufactured in Germany and the value of the dollar has fallen against that of the euro, so their manufacturing costs have risen. They assure customers that they'll reduce their prices again once the dollar recovers.

2003 has, however, been a successful

year for them. Indeed, it was their 'most successful year ever'. Games that they've recently released are **Attika** and **Samurai**, with **Alexandros**, **Corsari** and *Phalanx's* **Hector and Achilles** coming out this month.

Samurai is a design from Reiner Knizia based on gaining control of the important power figures of Old Japan. You need to deploy your forces around these figures, but also to gain the support of the other powers in your efforts: no easy task. In **Corsari**, you play a pirate captain who has to recruit an 11-man crew of suitably blood-thirsty sailors, who will nevertheless get on well with each other. **Hector and Achilles** is a two-player cardgame in which one player leads the Trojans and the other the besieging Achaeans; you fight a series of battles, while other cards other heroes from the Trojan War.

Following on from these later this year will be **Torres**, **Tikal**, **The Bohnanza Expansion** and **Circus Flohcati**. Meanwhile, they plan to release four new games in March and April: **Goa**, **St Petersburg**, **Marco Polo** and **Power Grid**. **Goa** is a game with an historical setting, where your business competes to trade spices and colonise more successfully than your opponents. **St Petersburg** is a cardgame which concentrates on the creation of this city, where you must erect the splendid palaces and bridges, while ensuring that you've enough traders to pay for the work.

www.riogrande.com

It's good to report the arrival of **Pitchcar**, a game based on an old tabletop favourite called **Carabande**. Players build a circuit



from sixteen curved and straight wooden pieces of track, and then

take turns to flick their racecar discs around this circuit. There can be up to ten different circuits, over twelve feet long. Success requires dexterity, of course, but you've the choice between careful, steady progress to block your opponents or wilder movement to overtake them.

The track and racecar discs are made in Italy and of good quality, but the manufacturers warn that if you already own *Carabande*, note that the new *Pitchcar* track won't fit with the old *Carabande* track.

\$69.95 from www.funagain.com and in due course, from retailers in the UK and elsewhere.

NEWSDESK ROLEPLAYING



We've some news of recent releases ...

Dark Ages: British Isles, from *White Wolf* at \$21.95, is the first regional sourcebook for the *Dark Ages*(tm) line. It contains a history of the land and descriptions of the major cities, but mainly deals with the ancient powers that still lurk in the realm which Mithras of London thinks he rules: vampires, wolf-men, the fae and the still-powerful pagan gods.

Monsters, Minions & Marauders is a sourcebook for the *Fantasy Hero* series and is published by *Hero Games* at \$26.99. As its title indicates, there are monsters aplenty, from the scary but familiar orcs and ogres to strange new menaces like the sharthak and dreamstalker...

Ultimate Monsters, from *Mongoose Publishing* at \$34.95, covers the creatures that can be classed as monsters which have appeared in the d20 system. At 256 pages, there are magical beasts, giants, undead, dragons, elementals and plenty of others, all updated to be fully compatible with the new 3.5 revision of d20.

Mongoose Publishing have also issued the **Mongoose Player's Pocket Handbook** at \$19.95, which contains the revised d20 rules and material, all pared down for portability and easy reference.

Back to the theme of monsters, but with the Munchkin touch, there's the **Munchkin Monster Manual 2.5** from *Steve Jackson Games* at \$14.95. This 'contains 3,905 monsters--of which only 3,872 are orcs--including such fell nasties as Auntie Paladin, the Misplacer Beast, and the dreaded Monster With a Name So Long There's No Room for a Picture in the Book.' It's updated for the 2.5 rules, and includes new monster templates. Laugh while you tremble!



rules for mass sacrifices, sample plots, a complete Bloodspeaker history, and details of both the four Bloodswords of Yajinden and the four Masks of Iuchiban.

Paradigm Concepts now offer **Bloodspeakers** at \$19.99. This is a d20 *Legends of the Five Rings* sourcebook, dealing with the blood magic of the Bloodspeakers. It includes new prestige classes, rules for mass sacrifices, sample plots, a complete Bloodspeaker history, and details of both the four Bloodswords of Yajinden and the four Masks of Iuchiban.

Wizards of the Coast have published **Unearthed Arcana** at \$34.95, as a new guide to variant rules for *Dungeons & Dragons* (tm). It's aimed at offering a wide choice of variant rules for roleplaying in any D&D campaign, expanding the options available to both players and DMs. Modular, the rules can be used for any D&D campaign to any extent required.

Also from *Wizards of the Coast*, **Player's Guide to Faerun** at \$32.95 is a sourcebook for *Forgotten Realms*. Previously scattered material has been compiled and expanded, to cover race and regional information plus new magic items, spells, epic-level play and the use of psionics. *Forgotten Realms* gameplay is here updated to the D&D version 3.5 rules.



Angel RPG, from *Eden Studios, Inc.*, costs \$40.00 and offers all you need to know about running and playing a game set in what the blurb neatly terms the 'Angelverse'. It's based on the TV series, of course, and this sourcebook contains all you need to know about character creation in addition to the characters known from TV. You also have information about magic, psychic art, the supernatural and suitable people and places. There are even instructions for creating Angel episodes, seasons and series.

Continuing the theme of vampires, **Lords of the Night: Liches** is a d20 System from *Bottled Imp Games* which costs \$21.99. This is a continuation of the *Darkness Rising* series, and deals with the Arcane Lich, who are the most ancient, powerful and terrifying of all vampires.

D&D Map Folio I is a loose-leaf folio of maps suitable for any *Dungeons & Dragons* campaign. Published by *Wizards of the Coast* it costs \$9.95 and is drawn from maps that have appeared over the years on the D&D website, which are now gathered into one volume. More collections like this will follow.

The **Expanded Psionics Handbook** from *Wizards of the Coast* at \$34.95, overhauls the whole psionics system of *Dungeons & Dragons* after two or more years of player feedback, to give a more balanced power structure.

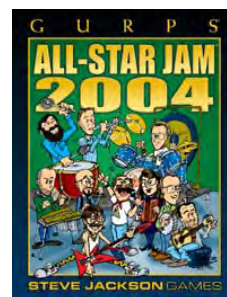
Mongoose Publishing offer 256-page **The Book of Adventuring** at \$34.95 for use in d20 system campaigns. There's advice here on the proper use of equipment and intelligent spell casting, along with options and ideas for every realm of adventuring.

In contrast to adventuring, **GURPS WWII: All the King's Men** from *Steve Jackson Games* at \$24.95 covers British forces at the outbreak of war. 'It describes soldiers from all around the British Empire, the way they were recruited, trained, and sent to war, the men who led them, and the battles they won and lost. Also included are a cross-section of British weapons and equipment -- from the very good to the very bad, from sidearms to the battleship King George V -- and a host of campaign and adventure ideas for GMs. So, keep your chin up and get your lads in the thick of it -- sharpish!' Stirring stuff!

Moving on from sourcebooks to campaigns, **The Dragon in the Smoke** in the *Victoriana* series from *Heresy Gaming* at \$12.99 is an RPG set in Victorian London. The characters have to hunt for two missing children, when the only clues they have are baffling references to a dragon. This campaign is suitable for beginners to the *Victoriana* system, and includes rules for oriental martial arts experts as well as plenty of other useful information.

White Wolf's **The Ascension (Mage: The Ascension)**, \$29.99, involves mages struggling against each other to tip the scales of Karma in their favour. Why? Because the Day of Judgment is at hand, and the gods are counting how many souls they now own...

Speaking of gods, *Alderac Entertainment Group* have produced **False Gods: Stargate System Lords** at \$26.95. It's been discovered that the frightening gods of ancient history like Anubis and Cronus are really members of the Goa'uld, a parasitic alien race which seeks galactic domination. Send your characters into their forbidden empire, to take the fight back to them...



Finally, *Steve Jackson Games* offer the **GURPS All-Star Jam 2004** at \$24.95, in which ten of their most popular GURPS authors were allotted 10,000 words each, to write about whatever they wanted. The book therefore includes a very varied range of topics, among which are Kenneth Hite, writing about ghost hunters; David Pulver's far-future space-opera campaign setting; Gene Seabolt with the travails of the last band of Spartan mercenaries, trapped in a decaying Europe. There's plenty more here - something of interest for every RPG player.

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NEWSDESK MISC



CONVENTIONS

We've just heard that the American company which was intending to run a European GenCon in Amsterdam at the end of 2003, but in fact didn't, has now sold the rights to **GenCon Europe** to a new company, *Horseman Events*. While the GenCon held at London Olympia was a success for those who attended, the costs involved in using such a prestigious venue proved too high, leading to the commercial decision to pull out by the US company that ran the event.

Horseman Events was formed in the autumn of 2001, by a group of friends who have helped to run the successful Excalibur games conventions and who together have considerable experience of running conventions in the UK. Horsemen have decided to return GenCon to its roots and the popular format of on-site accommodation and the family atmosphere that was enjoyed for so many years at Camber Sands and Loughborough. To achieve this, GenCon UK 2004 will be held at the **Butlin's Holiday Centre in Minehead, Somerset**.

www.butlins.com

'The majority of gamers wanted a return to the halcyon years of gaming events - outside London and based in a popular holiday resort. With the Butlin's resort near Bristol, we can have a bigger and better GenCon UK, with the potential for growth in the future' says Mark Smith, Horsemen Events' front man.

Running from **Thursday October 14th to Sunday October 17th**, GenCon UK will have an extensive programme, including industry guests, role-play games, card game tournaments, board games, computer games, an art show and a huge trade hall. Celebrations will be held to the 30th Anniversary of Dungeons and Dragons. With the majority of Butlin's Holiday Centre's facilities being available for use this seems an ideal games convention for families. Attendees will have a range of accommodation options (including self-catering and half board) and free car parking. In addition other on-site leisure facilities will be available, including the giant sub-tropical Waterworld (with water rides and wave machines), cinema, sports courts, Go-carts and the Megazone. The site also has a wide range of food and drink outlets, ranging from fast-food (such as Burger King and Harry Ramsden's) to restaurants and pubs. There is also a range of other facilities, including a laundrette, cash-points, a nursery service, and an on-site supermarket.

Gen Con UK has been scheduled in the week prior to the Essen Spiel games fair, to help US and other non-UK manufacturers combine both events in a single trip. In late February 2004 information packs will be available for delegates and traders; to pre-register for an information pack, please contact Horsemen Events: contact@horsemenevents.com

We at Flagship are pleased to learn that there will be a GenCon this year, and expect to be attending (it is after all, virtually on our doorstep).

Game Stars Live the UK's largest consumer videogames show will this year feature the European Online Gaming Championship, which will run throughout the show's duration. Game Stars Live runs from **September 1st to 5th at the ExCeL exhibition facility in Docklands, London**. Aiming to attract around 100,000 gamers during its five-day celebration of games and gaming, the show will also host a number of official gaming challenges, aiming to crown the very best games players throughout the land.

www.gamestars.co.uk

The European Online Gaming Championships is a new initiative between London Event Co. and World Cyber Games organisers Sujoy Roy and Dominic Mulroy. The live finals will be the culmination of months of qualification in 100 iGames LAN gaming centres throughout the UK, and via dedicated online leagues. Each day of Game Stars Live will see a new European Online Gaming Championship challenge, with up to thousands of gamers taking part in live play-offs each day. Visitors to Game Stars Live will be able to turn up and enter on the day during special on-site qualification rounds. Entry to each Championship is included in the cost of admission to Game Stars Live – and there are some fantastic prizes on offer including cash, and 'money can't buy' packages. Various sponsorship opportunities exist for the Championships, which will be featured as part of Granada's Game Stars Live TV show, due to be broadcast on ITV after the event.

'The European Online Gaming Championships are all about bringing the top players from around Europe into one location for the greatest-ever PC play-offs,' says Kirsty Adams, event director, London EventCo. *'Sujoy and Dominic have shown previously how experienced they are in organising large-scale events such as these, and we look forward to working with them and our sponsors to establishing the European Online Gaming Championships as yet another must-attend component to*

Game Stars Live'

Carol Mulholland writes - 'I enjoyed the chance to get to **Dragonmeet** on December 13th 2003, in Kensington Town Hall. It's a convention for all types of game, and drew the usual crowd of cheerful enthusiasts. As an enthusiast myself, I brought along a pile of *Flagship 105* to sell, along with some back issues to give away as samples to any unfortunates who've not read our magazine before; all were carried away rapidly in a most satisfactory manner.

I was glad to be sharing a table with various zine editors which had been organised for us by John Foody, the editor of *Warpstone*, and it was a busy day for everyone. Well, it was busy for me as a keen gossipier rather than a player, with lots of interesting people to meet and far-fetched tales to hear from them, but nevertheless there were plenty of games available for those who wanted to take part in playing, and the hall's facilities are admirable.

Game conventions are always fun, and I'll certainly do my best to attend Dragonmeet 2004.'

www.dragonmeet.com



ZINES

Have you ever fancied running a low-cost hobby zine yourself, but been put off by not knowing quite what the task involves? Answers are now available! The editor of *Carnel* zine, Robert Rees, has generously compiled a friendly little booklet to tell you all you need to know and he'll send you a copy if you send him an SSAE. Check Robert's postal address in our *Zine Listings* or contact him at:

carnel@talk21.com

Cthulu fans will be glad to hear that a new issue of **The Whisperer** came out in time for Dragonmeet. Edited by Mike Mason, issue 5 looks grand with 64 A4 pages and a colour cover, and contains plenty of scenarios and reviews of all things Lovecraftian. It isn't cheap, at £12, but the price seems well worth it for those who love Cthulu themes.

www.yog-sothoth.com

Stephen Agar publishes **The League of the Last Days**, a general discussion zine with a heavy bias towards articles of interest to **Diplomacy** players. Issue 2 arrived shortly before we went to press.

www.leagueofthelastdays.com

SuperNova III

A Pirate's Viewpoint

MARTIN BURLINGAME plans galactic conquest ...

Star Date: 195427 (December 2003)

WING COMMANDER Jack Crow, Pirate Commander of the Buccaneer Fleet of Tortuga, folded his wings and nestled into his Imperial Throne. The throne room, freshly painted after a minor altercation with the supposed ambassador from The Galactic Star League (an alliance with a score of players), reflected the might and power of The Eyre. The Jolly Roger, the Imperial Flag, fluttered in the morning breeze. Crowds had gathered awaiting Imperial verdicts and proclamations but the Wing Commander ignored them.

Wing Commander Crow continued to read the latest in a series of dispatches from his 'Imperial Exploration Fleets'. Captain Blackbeard, commander of the 605th Star Fleet, continued to 'explore' the boundaries between The Eyre and a newly discovered hostile empire. Captain Blackbeard's report about brief sightings of enemy ships was startling, especially since this seemingly hostile empire, the Sh-Lakk Mindsphere, continued to refuse all diplomatic messages - possibly as a byproduct of the recent 'misunderstanding' between Blackbeard's Frigate and a Sh-Lakk cargo ship. Compounding this diplomatic nightmare was the report of the recent capture of a Sh-Lakk Mindsphere Gi-Las class destroyer in the Mecca system. Wing Commander Crow slammed his claw down on the throne. Confounded... how had the destroyer slipped past the pickets? Could the Sh-Lakk have actually developed cloaking devices as the Imperial spies had reported? Did they have some kind of mental powers that allowed them to slip past Eyre ships or had the antiquated sensors on the 54th Blockade Fleet failed to detect this high-speed blockade-runner? Only the brilliant maneuvers by the vastly outgunned Starwing Heavy Auxiliary crew had allowed Captain Red Sonja to capture this new threat. This was concerning and might require dispatching additional forces to cover the Warp points from Mecca into the heartland. Curses! Scientists would have to reallocate the Empire's research capabilities to the newly available Plasma Torpedoes. The Industrial might of the Empire would have to be retooled from 'peaceful' production to a war-like footing in preparation for the production of Nova Rail Guns and more advanced fighter craft. Shipyards would have to scrap passenger liners for new Warships. War was in the air. Commander Crow smiled and muttered 'finally'.

Star Date 195457 (January 2004)

Wing Commander Crow silently glided through the streets of Tortuga. They were packed with revelers, celebrating the recent victories of the Imperial Fleets. Anonymity was not a problem on this night. As he floated on the wind currents the Wing Commander was thinking about a few surprise visits to various imperial branches to make sure nothing was overlooked during this time of war. Dammed if he was going to let some other empire beat his.

Imperial Astronomical Observatory

The first stop was the Imperial Astronomical Observatory. Here cartographers chart the vast star map on a holographic board. As his fleet scouts continue to explore the complex warp points linking the Galaxy, the cartographers update the map with new systems, warp point information and eventually with the vital statistics of individual planets. With over 65 known systems plotted and 300 warp points connecting them mapped, Wing Commander Crow was still amazed at how little of the Galaxy was known. Rumors of over 500 empires, and that number seemed to grow almost daily, abounded. The Eyre had so far only discovered two in their section of the Galaxy.

The recent discovery by his scientists and subsequent production of the Nuclear Transwarp Drives had greatly enhanced the rapid expansion of The Eyre star map. This fabulous new technology stunned him in that it enabled fleet ships to bypass the required cooling period for the jump drives and thus enabled them to move rapidly between distant star systems. He remembered his youth spent aboard starships waiting for the drives to be cleaned out so the ship could move to the next warp point to jump once again. How nice it must be to not worry about that and just move and jump through the next warp point.

Jack Crow moved his claw across the holographic map. Green lines linked warp points between known systems. Icons reflected the location of all fleet vessels, fuel depots, colonies and recent battles. The recently discovered home world of the Sh-Lakk Mindsphere in the Chakkra system was flashed a dull red on the map. This new find would be addressed in the War College.

College of Sciences

Next stop for Crow was the Imperial College of Sciences. Here the imperial scientists controlled the 25 research centers (a fixed number for all players to keep an even balance) the empire used to research new technology, like the wonderful Nuclear Transwarp Drive. Currently scientists across the planet were focusing a majority of the Empire's assets on weapons for the war effort. Improved fusion engines to power the fleet; better armor, force shields and deflectors to counter the Sh-Lakk weaponry; faster and better space fighters for the carriers; and weapons of mass destruction for the coming ground war. As they rolled out, these new discoveries would be incorporated into the fleet, making the ships faster, better armed and more secure.

Plotting the path for technology always annoyed Commander Crow. So many different paths and so many different directions to chart: did one research better space science for survey sensors, better terra-forming to aid in colonizing, improved engines, better armor, more powerful weapons, ground technologies or horizon technologies such as Dyson spheres and Planetary Gates?

Imperial Administration

The Imperial Administrator's office was always chaotic. Here the production of all mines and industrial complexes was monitored and controlled. Limited by the constraints of population and the focus on war-like scientific discoveries instead of economic ones, the imperial administration juggled the complex requirements of maintaining growth while fighting a war. The requirements to produce the new Raptor attack carriers, the jewel of the Fleet, had forced the empire into near bankruptcy. Almost two months of production were used to produce one of these Attack Carriers, a true monster. Nearly two million tons of advanced weaponry loaded with the latest in fighter technology went into the

SuperNova at a glance

Complex science fiction PBEM from Rolling Thunder Games, Inc.
Charges are \$10 for startup and then \$6 per turn.

Contact: russ@rollingthunder.com

Website: www.rollingthunder.com

Web forum: www.rollingthunderforums.com

Reviewed in Flagship 104.

Raptor.

Imperial dreams could be made with these ships, but at what cost: almost twelve million crystals to power the advanced electronics of the fighter fleet, a staggering 20 million tons of iron converted from Raw Resources and turned into different forms of steel.

Damn the Sh-Lakk Mindsphere, if it was war they wanted it would be war they got.

Imperial Boot Camps

Located just outside of Tortuga stood the Imperial Boot Camps and training facilities of the Army, Marines and Imperial Guards. Here basic recruits were trained and molded into the ground forces of the empire. Rows of new equipment stood ready to replace the antiquated weapons of some divisions. New Ferret Excavator Tanks for the Armor units, Brumbar Assault Guns for the infantry units and Jet Fighters for the Air Force. All new equipment researched over the past few months as The Eyre began to focus its attention on conquest.

The might of an empire stood ready for the Wing Commander to launch.

Imperial Shipyards

The last stop of the imperial tour was the imperial shipyards. Here the shipyard hands worked to build the first two of many Raptor Attack Carriers. Two of the keels, consuming the efforts of 300 shipyard facilities, were already laid and almost three months of industrial production stood ready to build these ships. Rows of Bombers, the newest technology breakthrough - a fifth generation fighter, stood ready to be loaded aboard the carriers. These ships were the jewel of the empire and would lead the attack fleet about to be launched against the Sh-Lakk Mindsphere.

To be continued in the next issue...

The game itself

Supernova is an open-ended play-by-email game where a player designs a star-faring race from scratch and then vies for control of the space lanes. Players can be colonizers, warmongers, scientists or even pacifists; they can stay close to home and mine asteroids or expand into the distant reaches of space to find other players. Players can establish trade routes between empires or opt for war.

The game develops slowly with empires being about five star systems apart. It can take about six months to establish contact and another few to gear up for war. The game is turn based and turns run every two weeks.

I envisioned the Eyre as a pirate race focused on space combat and the acquisition of other players' resources. My birdlike race took almost every available space combat bonus (heightened senses, Intelligence) and offset this cost with some penalties towards colonization. One of the biggest challenges was handling the economics of the game. Many space games use simple economics to handle industrial output but Rolling Thunder envisioned a more complex system. Planets, asteroids and moons have a varying set of resources (there are over 20 base resources),

which can be mined. These resources can be converted to advanced components (synthetic materials, electronics) and these components assembled into the war machine any good space race desires.

An initial problem for all empires is the numerous different approaches an empire can take in this game. Increases in Jump Survey Sensor technology are mandatory to enable exploration. Beacons need to be built to colonize worlds. Iron needs to be mined to build Cargo Bays and Colonial Berthings. Crystals are needed for electronics. The research Centers need to be focused towards the correct technology. Fuel tankers need to be pushed out to refuel distant fleets. Ground units need to be built to guard the home system and to serve as a potential planetary assault force. Combat ships need to patrol the frontier. All in all it can be confusing and exhilarating. Nothing stimulates the blood better than an 80-page turn sheet where your exploration fleet encounters another player and there is a small battle on the frontier.

One thing I have noticed is that the game is very evenly balanced and controlled to prevent inconsistencies. While incredible advances in industrial output can be researched, it takes months and even years to convert the entire industrial output to this new and wonderful breakthrough. Weapons all inflict the same amount of damage based on classification (a 10cm autocannon (projectile strength:poor) weighing 100 tons inflicts the same proportional damage as a Light Thermal Lance (thermal beam strength:poor) weighing 1000 tons (the Thermal Lance does 10x the damage of the autocannon but also costs 10x as much to manufacture). This enables empires to customize the direction of the weaponry instead of being forced to take a mandatory path. All types of ground units play a factor - even the lowly Medical unit can make or break a battle.

The Eyre, as space pirates, focused on Grapples, Disruptor Beams and Fighters. After 30 turns our fighter complement features the 5th Generation Bomber with two engine upgrades. This weaponry focus greatly aids in space combat but has come at a high cost with ground combat upgrades, industrial output upgrades and horizon technologies all receiving lower priorities.

As one of the original players I have seen the game evolve as new ideas and concepts are developed. An active forum board allows empires to trade information or the occasional threat. After fourteen months of playing I am in position to try and conquer another player. Only time will tell as my Raptor Attack Carriers are deployed to the front. Hopefully my battle report will reflect the time and effort I have spent to win the war (of course there probably is another player out there who wishes a different ending).

Best wishes and may we cross paths in Supernova (especially if you are a cargo ship).

The game is a product of Rolling Thunder Games, Inc (Pete Dorman and Russ Norris) who've been in the PBM business since the early 1980s. Check out their website at www.rollingthunder.com and the company forums at www.rollingthunderforums.com to join in on the fun!

Wing Commander Crow will be waiting for you amongst the stars...



Horizons

Empire of Istaria

JOHN KEELER played the beta-test of this new online game ...



THIS NEW MMORPG, **Horizons**, takes place in a vast realm based in the traditions of high fantasy. As envisioned by the team at Arizona-based developer *Artifact Entertainment*, it stretches out to encompass assorted types of terrain that range from dense jungle to frozen tundra, grassy plains, towering mountains and more. Many of the individual locations within these environments are uncharted and untamed, which means they hold forth plenty of prospects for those brave and curious souls who seek the

kinds of danger, thrills and rewards associated with exploration and adventure. As well, cities, towns, villages, castles et al lie scattered about, providing suitable venues to practice more urbane pursuits such as crafting and trade. Those who wish to help bridge this divide by bringing civilization to the wilderness can build their own settlements and perhaps even their own empires.

Populating the land are familiar fantasy archetypes such as Humans, Dwarves, Elves, Gnomes, Fiends and Dragons along with the reptilian Sslik, the feline Saris and more - nine playable options at launch plus Subjugated Races that will be freed as the game unfolds. What we have seen and learned over the past months has certainly been impressive. In addition to the elements already noted, some of the project's other notable features are a character customization system with innumerable options, a school-based skill system that allows switching focus at any time, a dynamic world that will change as significant events take place, and next-generation graphics including some truly attention-grabbing spell effects. While *Horizons* reached the point of being launched in Europe and in North America, we've been exploring and adventuring extensively to provide as accurate a picture as possible of what to expect.

The history

A decade has passed since the momentous battle in which the nine Living Races of Istaria successfully defended the great city of Tazoon against a massive attack from the undead armies of the Withered Aegis, a powerful sect of necromancer liches. Its leader, a mighty sorcerer named

Torrin Macalir, was destroyed, but that did not stop the nefarious cabal from continuing its efforts to conquer the world and enslave all its other inhabitants. Indeed, after over-running the principal Elven city of Feladan and its Gnomish counterpart, Rachival, the dark faction holds much of the frontier of Aradoth.

Within this setting, players will join the struggle to fend off and ultimately defeat the forces of corruption while enjoying features such as seamless travel, an open-ended character advancement system and a deep crafting system that even allows for the construction of player cities.

What's to be seen

During the just-concluded beta, *Artifact's* proprietary Evolution Engine had amply demonstrated its ability to generate a dynamic world and outstanding visuals. Diverse city architecture, landscapes and fauna are complemented by an impressive sky with a brilliant day and night cycle. Among the most remarkable locations are the Blight areas controlled by Undead. As a player enters any of them, the sky slowly changes into a dark, twisting maelstrom enhanced with highly realistic lightning. The spell visuals are also very striking, particularly some high-level ones that incorporate truly dazzling effects.



The video settings in *Horizons* offer a multitude of options that can be scaled individually to suit your system specs, so immense draw distances and highly detailed textures are possible if your computer is up to the task. You can traverse the entire world seamlessly without interruption; the only instances of loading times occur if you choose to teleport across the world. Interestingly, no dungeon areas are available as of yet. One possible reason for this may be collision detection. Creatures have sometimes been seen walking through objects like walls and trees, something that might be more prominent in enclosed locales. Nonetheless, the graphics are excellent overall, and are supported by a highly intuitive interface that can be customized in almost every aspect.

Horizons at a glance

A new fantasy MMORPG from *Artifact Entertainment* (www.istaria.com). Winner of several computer gaming awards in recent months. Screenshot shown above.

Software cost: \$44.99

Monthly Fee: \$12.95



What's to be done

Horizons currently has nine playable races. The more familiar selections consist of Humans, Half-Giants, Gnomes, Elves and Dwarves, while the more unusual offerings include the cat-like Saris, the reptilian Slik and the demonic Fiends, who resemble blue-skinned humanoids with horns and a tail. These eight are not restricted from joining any of the available professions, but since they differ in their physical statistics, some will perform certain skills more efficiently than others.

Basic combat in Horizons is relatively straightforward. Once a target is chosen and battle initiated, your character automatically continues attacking unless you stop. However, after you unlock specialized melee skills or spells, combat becomes more interactive. These can be fired off at any time during a fight, although many are timed so they cannot be used in quick repetition. There is no player versus player. However, Artifact has said it intends to release a separate game based on the Horizons universe and dedicated to inter-player competition.

When it comes to characters dying, the game seems quite forgiving. Players do not lose any experience or items. Instead, they are dealt temporary death points that negatively affect a percentage of all their abilities. One such point lasts for up to four hours and if your character repeatedly dies, they can accumulate, with even more severe effects. Thankfully, you can lessen the duration of the penalties by eating various foods that can be created by certain other characters.

Horizons boasts an extremely deep trade-skill system that allows crafters to gather and refine their own resources to create an almost extraordinary assortment of items. Almost any article in the game can be crafted, everything from a simple mining pickaxe to a huge player-owned castle. Trade skills are known as Trade Schools, and the available profession choices include Carpentry, Masonry, Alchemy, Spellcrafting and Blacksmithing just to name a few. In order to facilitate a greater degree of co-dependency between warriors and tradespeople, most if not all of the loot acquired from monsters comes in the form of raw materials, item recipes and broken armor and weapons in need of repair. Dedicated crafters will rely heavily on adventurers to obtain more advanced crafting recipes, just as adventurers will rely on crafters for items such as their armors, weapons and spells. Similar to Adventure Schools, characters may switch Trade Schools as they see fit, and again you can belong to only one at a time. Taking up a craft won't negate your combat abilities either, since your character can belong to one Trade and one Adventure School simultaneously.

The housing system in Horizons is another facet that seems exceptionally robust. Players can obtain various sized portions of land, and may erect one or multiple buildings on these plots, provided they

properly fit and adhere to local zoning laws. Structures range in size from small, personal dwellings to extremely large castles. It will also be possible for groups of players to construct their own cities by purchasing multiple plots in close proximity to one another. Since most construction requires an extensive amount of raw materials as well as the knowledge of multiple trade schools, the housing system incorporates a feature allowing landowners to reward other players for their help. Homeowners can leave money at their building sites and automatically compensate any player who contributes! This makes it possible for players to adventure or even be offline while their homes are under construction.

What's needed?

The minimum system requirement to run Horizons is fairly reasonable: an 850 MHz processor, GeForce 2-class video card or better, and 256MB of RAM. Playing on a 56k dial-up connection with a 2.4 GHz CPU, a gig of memory and a Radeon 9700 128MB graphics card produced good overall results even with all of the video options set to their maximums. Frame rates do tend to slow down

in larger cities and when many characters are in your immediate vicinity, which is not a surprise for any experienced online world gamer. Perhaps the most significant glitch afflicting the current beta build has to do with player character and NPC load times, since there is often a delay for models to appear when you enter a new area. In the final weeks of beta however, substantial improvements in frame rate and texture load times have been experienced.

Going retail

It will be interesting to see just how much new content surfaces in the retail version of Horizons, as the developers have repeatedly stated they would like to keep some material under wraps during the beta test.

One of its potentially most innovative aspects resides in the ability for the development staff to add or subtract content on the fly world. For example, this technology could allow Artifact to change the geography of the world without having to release a new patch or bring down the server for an update. These changes can take place even while thousands of players are logged on. The possibilities for events and quest scenarios utilizing this feature seem quite exciting and it will be of interest to see how frequently this capability is employed.

With the improvements in overall stability which led up to its North American release date of December 9th, Horizons seems well on track to offering players a graphically impressive online fantasy experience that includes an interesting variety of player races, highly customizable character professions and a crafting system with remarkable depth.



Austerlitz

Confederation of the Rhine

JOERG TITZ, with some ideas for a challenging position ...

AT FIRST VIEW the Rhine seems to be a strange country. It is not one of the bigger countries, it has six neighbours and it has only got one ore mine. But take it easy. The Rhine has one of the strongest armies and much more in the way of resources (money, ore, gold) in the starting turn than your neighbours. For a good starting position and a fun game, I want to offer you some ideas for the first turns.

Strategy

Don't be afraid about having so many neighbours. Because of its strong army it should be the Rhine that chooses which country to visit first with its troops. The Rhine needs to become bigger and stronger as soon as possible, so an early search for allies and enemies is important. It matters a lot for the Rhine to get more inhabitants and a second ore mine in Europe as soon as possible. To reach this goal early, France, Holland, Prussia or Italy are possible enemies.

Don't forget that war can already be declared in April 1808. An early war is the strategic advantage for the Rhine. In this case your strong position at the beginning of the game (with a stronger army and more resources than most of the other countries) can be used effectively.

Economy

I suggest building three factories, three mines (one ore and one gold mine in Europe and one gold mine in India), one mint, one weaving mill and two sheep farms in the first turn. In the next turns more sheep farms and mills should follow. About 12-15 farms and three mills together. Because of the wood in the warehouse, lumbercamps will be needed a bit later.

In my opinion it is very important to have a very strong economy as soon as possible to get a lot of EcPt in the first turns, so that a strong army can be built very soon and you will have advantages for the following turns.

Usually you need one mill, four-five sheep farms and one lumbercamp for full production in one factory. For one European ore mine two factories are OK. But because of the good resources in the warehouse you can build three factories in the starting turn, so you can produce more EcPt than with two factories and you can use that in the second turn to increase your army faster. For slightly better production, I suggest you buy wool and textiles from the Munich trading centre in the first turn.

The Rhine has four areas with a population density of 4 or more, except for Munich. These areas should be used for the factories and the mint. There would be the possibility to increase one area from 3 to 4, but it's better to use the citizens there for building troops and economy.

The inhabitants have to pay taxes and the mint changes gold into Louisdore. So the Rhine has a regular income. To earn more money there are some possibilities: in the starting turn the Rhine has a lot of gold in Europe and India. This could be taken on a trading ship or baggage trains and be sold in other trading centres when the rate is high (6 or 5). The ships can even move to the Caribbean. Or the gold could be sold in Munich. You could sell other goods too, but it could be better to use

them for the production of the EcPt. It is better to sell the goods in little steps. You can earn more money if you sell 100 EcPt ten times than 1000 EcPt once. The money from the colonies can be transferred to Europe, but you need to take care to keep enough money in the Indian warehouse, if you want to build any production site there.

Brigades

It is important to build as many strong troops as possible in the first turns. Never forget to train them. It is much better to have 170 battalions with an experience level of 8 and 7 than 340 with a level of 3.

I would prefer the Grenadiers for the Rhine. They only cost 140 Louisdore per man and are the strongest infantry troops. In addition, I'd choose some Riflemen. Later, when the number of citizens is low, Pioneers and Light Artillery should be built. After building horse farms, Cavalry could follow. The Musketeers are great, to build extra federations. They can be sent into the hostile country to conquer it.

In the starting turn there is one brigade of 7 Colonial Troops (Kt). I would suggest demolishing these brigades in the first turn: they cost nearly 200000 Louisdore per month, and before they can do anything in the colonies they've cost about one million Louisdore for nothing. If you don't like to demolish it, transport this brigade to the colonies.

Ships

Unfortunately, the war fleet of the Rhine is small and weak. It could be used for transporting troops to India, or from Europe to India. Or it can escort the trading ships that are bringing goods from India to Europe.

One alternative use for the war ships would be to sell them: maybe England, Holland, France or Denmark (or others) have an use for these ships. As a price, I suggest charging half of the money and the EcPts that are necessary to build them. This makes the risk for your trading ships a bit higher, but the fleet is weak so you won't miss it. You just make money and EcPt by selling it, and save the monthly cost.

The trading ships are good enough for transporting goods or brigades, and for trading goods in other trading centres.

Colonies

It is important to transport ore, zinc and wool from India to Europe in the first turns for the EcPt production there.

There are some possibilities for the colonies. One course is to conquer Haiphong, but usually this will be a race between the Rhine and Spain. Or Thailand/Malaysia and their mines can be interesting to conquer too. The same applies to the lonely zinc mine island on 82/99.

The colonies are not necessary for surviving in Europe, but India can deliver some interesting goods like ore, gold or zinc.

After conquering the first areas, estates and lumbercamps (for increasing population or building fortresses if necessary) should be built.

Diplomacy

Because of your six neighbours, good diplomacy is important. Try to make alliances or at least friendships with some of them. If this isn't possible with their other neighbours, they could help you in the case of a war. That means that Naples could help in a war with Italy, Warsaw in a war with Austria or Prussia and so on.

Selling your war ships could be a part of your diplomacy and a good start for making an alliance.

Your spies should be used to get information about your neighbours (how many troops they have, or which relationship they have to the others). Avoid nasty surprises: spy on your neighbours!

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

Lord of the Rings Trivial Pursuit

ERIC RIDLEY tries this topical variant ...

THIS ISSUE I have decided to turn my eye on some of the more mass-market games that have been released of late, starting with a new variation on a classic game. **Lord of the Rings Trivial Pursuit** has been brought out in time to cash in on the fervour that surrounds the *Return of the King* film, which is currently laying waste to all in its path at the box office. *Hasbro* have previously been responsible for *Star Wars Trivial Pursuit* and its expansion based on *Episode One*. Both of these games were solid, and enjoyed by me very much, so a slightly sweaty panic came over me when I realised that LotR triv (as those in the know call it) was soon to be upon us.

I ran to my local toyshop (well, drove actually) and gasped at the huge display for the game, then I gasped a second time as I looked at the price tag. I had forgotten how much Triv always costs. The original version was not cheap, the *Star Wars* edition came in at £50 and now the LotR version looked set to sting me for a forty spot. It is ten pounds cheaper than the *Star Wars* version but I still consider this quite perturbing. None-the-less, I forked over the money I had stolen from my Nana and jogged (drove) home.

Upon opening the box I noticed that there were new rules included to add extra flavour to the game. You could still play Triv the way everyone knows how, but this allowed you to have a Ringwraith chasing you and gave you an excuse to wear the one ring (provided in the box) without looking weird(er). The new rules are not long, or complex, so one trip to the kazi later and I was familiar with them.

They are as follows. A Ringwraith starts in the centre section and as soon as a player gains a wedge of any colour he is given the One Ring: at this point the Ringwraith starts out from the centre and heads for the Ring Bearer at a rate of one die roll per turn. Every time any player gains a wedge the One Ring changes hands and the Wraith will chase them

instead. If the Black Rider should land on any space occupied by a player with a wedge it is taken from them, the same happens if it gets to the Ring Bearer, the difference being an exact roll is not required to land on his space. So what is the bonus for carrying such a heavy burden? Well, once per turn if the Ring Bearer gets a question he doesn't like, he can skip it and be asked another. If he gets that wrong though, he loses a wedge. Exciting stuff.

New rules are great, but an entire game they make not. The quality of the questions is all-important in this situation. The game is based on

the entire movie trilogy, not the books. That's great if you ask me: thousands of people have seen the movie, but not all have read the books. The aspect that is slightly annoying is that for Hasbro to release this game in time for the third film to come out they had to start producing it only knowing fully about the first two films. If you are aware of this it makes some of the questions a little easier, especially the 'Making Movies' questions because you know the answer has to lie in the first two films, not the last one. Anyhow, without wanting to infringe on any copyright, here are a few sample questions from the game. Who wears the ring of power called *Nenya*? What's the name of the creature that guards the pass of *Cirith Ungol*? What's the name of the actor who plays *King Theoden*? In my mind the game is set at the mid level of difficulty.

I find a lot of the questions easy, some very hard. It will boost your ego a bit knowing that you can get about six or seven questions in a row that you know the answer to. Then there will be an absolute stinker that you have no chance of getting (usually when a wedge is at stake).

The board is of fantastic quality and the pewter pieces (*Gandalf*, *Aragorn*, *Frodo* and *Galadriel*) are pretty too. The whole thing is very nicely put together and presented, as it should be for the price. The cost of the game as opposed to the number of times you will play it is my main concern with this game. If you think you are going to get the use out of it then it is a good choice; if it is a once every few months at a party type of affair then maybe think twice. The new rules add a little spice to the game but with a lot of people playing it can really slow it down with players losing wedges all the time. You have to be pretty hot at the questions to get it finished in a reasonable length of time. I like the game and my girlfriend is good enough to play me regularly at it. I think the questions are about right for you to be able to play it with casual fans and lunatics (sorry, enthusiasts) alike. Watch out for the sharp price tag though, ouch.



LotR: Trivial Pursuit at a glance

Trivial Pursuit variant with some additional rules.

Price: £39.95

Publisher: Hasbro (www.hasbro.com)

Players: 1 - 4

Playing time: 1hr +

Imperial Expansion

A Beginner's Guide

FRANK BAKKER's tips for success in this s/f wargame ...

IT'S ALL about colonists! Why? The goal of the game is to get as many victory points as possible!

That's right, and victory points are granted for planets and for lots of IP income. If you want to own a lot of planets, you will need the ships and/or technologies to do so. To achieve this, you will need lots of income, which comes in handy anyway, since you directly get points for your high income. (NB: An additional 4 VPs are awarded if you control the homeworld of an enemy player.) Therefore, a high income builds the basis for success in **Imperial Expansion**. How do you achieve a high income? Well, let's see what gives us income:

Each colonist (on a planet) generates 1 Income Production (IP). Each factory (robotic or normal), generates 1 IP; how many factories you can build depends on how many colonists you have: with industrial tech, the maximum number of factories you can have is equal to the number of colonists on a planet; with improved industrial tech, the numbers double, but the maximum number of factories you can build is still limited by how many colonists you have. With robotic industry, there's no limit to the number of factories you can have *but* the number of factories you can build per turn equals the number of colonists on the planet. Since you will pretty soon build the maximum number of robotic factories each and every turn, the amount of income a planet generates will still be directly proportional to its population.

Therefore, colonists are the key to this game.

How about a good start?

Knowing this, the best start of the game is the one in which the population (and industrial) growth is optimal. The ideal way to start a game is therefore to keep all colonists on the homeworld until the population exceeds 50. (With exactly 50 colonists on your homeworld, you have a population growth of 10, which gives you the maximum of 60 colonists at the end of the turn.) All colonists in excess of 50 at the start of the turn should be sent away to fill up other planets until all the planets you control are full.

However, there is one disadvantage to this tactic. If you delay colonizing other systems until your homeworld has more than 50 colonists (ie after four turns), your opponents will already have started colonizing and the best systems may have gone already! Furthermore, war is extremely slow in *Imperial Expansion*, so high population growth will only help you if you have enough planets to colonize: you have to find an intermediate between fast population growth and fast expansion.

So if you have terran planets within three squares of your homeworld, colonize them (with five colonists per planet) immediately: load your transports on turn 1 and send them away, unload your colonists on turn 2. You will lose a tiny bit of population growth (colonists on transports don't multiply), but I've calculated all this through and yes, you can neglect the loss in population (and industrial) growth. To be able to build

factories as soon as possible, use your initial 25 IP to research industrial technology on turn 1, regardless of anything else.

If you have terran planets at four, five or six squares from your homeworld, you can either wait until you've researched Ship Speed 4, 5 or 6 before you send out the colonists or send five colonists per planet and take the small disadvantage that the colonists on the transport won't multiply for two turns.

You should also colonize non-terran planets early in the game, in order to have enough space to put your colonists on later on. However, remember that every colonist you put there will make you lose population growth. Therefore, put only one colonist on these planets until your terrans are full, except for on the mineral-rich planets which can give a major boost to your IP income.

Some players prefer to research Ship Speed 4 on turn 1 instead of Industrial Technology, to be able to expand faster. I prefer to increase my IP production by building factories, despite a slightly slower expansion.

Logistics

Logistics matter in this game. Make good use of your IPs and your colonists to gain an edge over your opponents. Having 60 colonists on a terran-60 planet without a colony transport for your ten surplus colonists wastes those ten colonists. Investing in a technology that isn't really useful makes you lose ground compared with your opponents. Also, building lots of ships instead of factories or technologies and not using them is a waste of IPs.

In my first two turns of *Imperial Expansion* I made a few mistakes:

- 1 - Sending a ship to a system at the other side of the map by mistake, and watching it move towards certain death over five turns.

- 2 - Sending ten colonists to a sub-terran planet. This was stupid, since colonists multiply very slowly on sub-terrans: it would have been smarter to put only one colonist there and then bring more later on in the game.

- 3 - Forgetting to set the ship speed (more than once!). You have to set a ship speed, otherwise nothing will happen.

- 4 - Investing in a technology and then changing my mind and deciding to research something else - a waste of credits.

- 5 - Investing heavily in a level 3 technology without researching a level 2 technology in that field first - another waste of credits.

- 6 - After researching Robotic Industry I tried to build more robotic factories than I had colonists on a planet and I mixed up *BE XXX 1 60* with *BE XXX 2 60* for a terran-60: in other words, I tried to build normal factories as if they were robotic factories - since I already had the maximum amount of normal factories I blew 240 credits out of the window.

Therefore, before submitting your turn, make sure that you have your colony transports where you need them (build new ones if necessary). Before building/researching anything, ask yourself whether you really need it, or whether it may be smarter to wait and invest in factories so that you will have more IP income next turn. Consider whether there are any technologies that you'll need soon and that you may have to research first. Above all, make sure not to make any typos in your commands or submit any invalid commands.

You can also avoid trouble if you run a check on your commands using IECheck. If you are prepared to spend some time on it, you can even use IECheck to see what kind of influence a change in your current commands can have on your future development. (NB: In my case, IECheck only returns a new report if I turn 'interactive orders' on and run the check again: you may have to play around a bit before you get everything to work fine.)

Imperial Expansion at a glance

A basic Sci-Fi wargame. By exploring new solar systems, adding more ships to his fleets, colonising planets, and researching new technologies, each player guides his society to either victory or downfall.

From EMG. This is a free game, but donations are used to maintain the website.

www.islandnet.com/~dgreenin/emg.htm

The technologies to research

Since war is so extremely slow in Imperial Expansion, it is best to invest in Ship Speed research (for fast expansion) and Environmental Tech (to colonize barrens) and in technologies that allow you to increase your production. I wouldn't invest in any weaponry tech during the first turns of a game apart from Missile Base technology, as you need this for defence once an opponent tries to besiege your systems.

There's also quite a steep cut between cheap and expensive technologies. I think that it's best to choose 'Robotic Industry' as the first of the expensive technologies, simply because this enables you to build factories at a huge pace, and you can soon research the other expensive technologies.

Going to war vs diplomacy

Once you've filled up all your planets you may want to expand your empire. There are players who only colonize a few planets at the start of the game, and others who colonize many. Of course, the former will get to a point where they have to expand sooner than the latter. Since players with few planets usually have as many ships as players who have a lot of planets, those players who have colonized a lot of planets will be the first victims.

Therefore, if you decide to expand strongly at the start of the game, it is important to keep good diplomatic relationships with your neighbours. Their answers to your mails will reveal much about their future plans (even if they don't mean to reveal anything). Also, the chance of a player attacking a neighbour with whom he never had any contact is bigger than the chance that he'll attack someone with whom he had more communication. If you have colonized only a few planets and think about attacking other players, it's important to contact those who neighbour your potential target. It's always better to attack with one or two allies than to try to do it all alone.

Until now, most games of Imperial Expansion have been peaceful and it's been relatively easy to remain allied to your neighbours, even with a big empire. Considering this and the fact that conquering planets is a very slow progress, it's advisable to colonize as many planets as possible at the start of the game. They'll give a lot of space to put your colonists on, which in turn gives you the potential to generate a huge income if your opponents give you the time. Once you've done that, you won't be an attractive target any more. Therefore, fast expansion is a good tactic since it allows you to grow until very late in the game. However, it will only work as long as Imperial Expansion players stay as peaceful as they have been during the first seven games. If anything changes in the mentality of the Imperial Expansion players, I will let you know. Until then: expand, expand, expand!

No matter whether you're defending, attacking or at peace, it's always vital to have know what's happening around you: scouts are cheap, easy and important.

Dropouts should always be first on your target list, since their empires will be ruled by the (rather weak) AI of the computer!

The ships to build for war

To find out which ships are best, I've calculated how big the chance of defeating an enemy ship is when you spend 100 IPs on ships. I've concluded that there's no need to build (or research) Heavy Fighters. They are only marginally better than Light Fighters in all relevant categories. However, ten Light Fighters are more flexible than five Heavy Fighters and since you can only shoot at one ship per turn, it takes a fleet of two Destroyers longer to destroy ten Light Fighters than to destroy five Heavy Fighters (in other words, Light Fighters are perfect as cheap cannon fodder).

However, this is only true for space combat! For ship vs missile base combat, Heavy Fighters are best! Why? Well, in space combat, only one round of combat is fought each turn: therefore, attack values are much more important than defense values. However, ship vs missile base combats are fought until completion in only one turn, and in this case, it is also important how many rounds of combat your ships can survive. In a combat of ships vs Advanced Missile Bases, five Heavy Fighters have a much better chance than two Destroyers!

Although Stealth Fighters are expensive compared with the damage they can do, their use is obvious. Once you get to a stage of the game where most players can build planet shields, Stealth Fighters are the only means to attack a colony. After having conquered a colony, you may want to get rid of those nasty alien colonists, always waiting to revolt and not willing to build a planet shield or missile bases. You can of course destroy them, but it may take a long time, especially if your attack force isn't huge. An elegant and cheap way to empty your freshly conquered planets is to load the alien colonists on transports and simply send them away to a system of your liking.

Missile bases

Since Missile Bases cost as much as the corresponding Fighters, but can't be moved, you shouldn't build Missile Bases as long as you're able to build ships. However, (Advanced) Missile Bases are the only defense that you can build at a world under siege. Therefore, it's always useful to be able to build Missile Bases. Later on in the game, you will also want the ability to build Advanced Missile Bases, since they're the only planetary defence that can do something about enemy Destroyers and Stealth Fighters in your orbit.

War tactics

There used to be an easy way to block an attack on your colonies, provided you had enough information on your opponent, because a planet which is under siege couldn't serve as a command post. Once you noticed an opponent's ships arrive at your system, you could send a Light Fighter to each of his systems (or at least those that are near to your empire). If he attacked, his planets would be under siege from your Light Fighters: these planets were then not able to serve as command posts and all ships that were out of range would be destroyed. If you did it right, this meant that his entire attack force would be destroyed. Of course, your planets would also be under siege, so that you would lose those Light Fighters you'd just sent away, but that was a small price to pay.

The good thing was that one Light Fighter per system was enough to put it under siege. Due to this rule, a good attack as well as a good defense required a great deal of smart logistics, since neither the attacker nor the defender would be able to build new ships on the planets which were under siege. (By the way, ships that are located at a system in which you own at least one planet are never killed because they are 'out of range'.)

This tactic only worked as long as your attacker hadn't already obtained 'unlimited ship range'! But even if he had, you can still use ships to besiege his systems, and he couldn't build new ships on a system that was under siege.

From game 10, however, the rules have changed: a system is now only under siege if the attacker outnumbers the defender. This not only makes it harder for your attacker to put your systems under siege, but it also makes it harder for you to put your attacker's systems under siege!

An important point that isn't mentioned correctly in the rules is that you can use a ship to attack another ship at its starting system and then move it to another system in the same turn. But you can't move a ship to another system and let it attack a ship in the destination on the same turn. And you can't move a ship and attack a colony (whether it's in your starting or your destination system) on the same turn.

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Lords of the Earth

Campaign 1: The Diary of a Genocide

BEN LYNCH plays Lord Peregrin of the realm of Arnor ...

IN AMERICAN wrestling, we call the villains 'heels'. We love to watch them go forth in the ring, spew their vitriol, and receive their comeuppance at the hands of the 'faces'. I am, in **Lords of the Earth 1**, considered a heel. In my brief career of six turns, I took a small backwater position, inspired the powers of Asia with delirious and irrational fear as I grew into a unique role that generated great reams of anguish and violence, loss and regret, not to mention nearly igniting a world war, only to be crushed and put under their watchful eye like Weimar Germany. Strangely, for all the bad press, I have not started one war.

I consider myself an eminently reasonable and compassionate man given more or less to 'progressive attitudes'. In **Lords One**, however, my character, dictated by environment and historical circumstance, developed from a bland man of peace to a genuine war criminal with his own *Monster Island*(tm) action figure set! On the mailing list, I indulged in race-baiting, profanity, religious bigotry, and warlordism, holding out carrots and sticks while I sought to secure a Hussite position in India won by generations of warfare against the Muslims.

It was great fun, wallowing through all the blood. I publicly reveled in the misfortunes of those players whose positions were opposed to mine ethnically, racially, or religiously. Here's a sample, the 'Peregrin Drunk' Speech:

*'Damned Papist swine... they're frockin idgits, aren't they? Kowtowing to some ignorant little twit in Rome... damned funny innit... it's God's city an' all, but it's Hussite an' hell, who saved Jerusalem? I didn't see too many Catholics you know, measuring blades with the Steel Empress, Oniko... but we sent our boys an' didn't ask for a pot to piss in, because we're good manly types... who know better than to piss about in muck holes like Araby?... heck, if anyone really believed we weren't special, why did the Rashid the sh*t strike Venice with a monster oyster? Cause we're all that stands between the world an' barbarism and idolatry. Utter savagery, these Chinees and Mussulmens and Lencolars... never met a Lencolar, but I bet they're a damned sight better than any Republican Diego Catholic... killing off their God-ordained Kings and deluding the rabble... some fool named Weber, jawin' about the special nature of Catholicism... well, hell, we didn't sell our daughters to the mongrel Icebastards, did we, unlike them funny Swedish chaps... what was I saying? The only good Spaniard is a dead Spaniard... riling up the dagos in Marseilles... served em right... an England starvin'... ha! So much for Catholic mercies...'*

However, there was a method to the madness, so let us set the stage. With such scathing messages, I earned myself something of a fan club, but also many numerous enemies who would care for nothing less than my head on a pike.

The geography is the Indian subcontinent, which developed a radically different history and culture in **Lords One** from that found in real life. It is divided between Shi'ite Muslims and Hussite Christians, who dominate a Hindu underclass inimical to both. The Muslims arrived in India the

usual way, invading as nomads over the Hindu Kush in successive waves after the disintegration of Gupta India. The Hussites arrived by sea. The Danish Empire, which controlled the Egyptian canal and possessed a large Asian trade network, originally possessed a minor trading post named 'Schwarzkastel', or 'Black Tower', on what would be the coast of Pakistan. During one of the great wars in Europe a country called 'The Lahore Dynasty', believing the outpost lightly guarded, attacked the city, only to be repelled with major losses by elite forces availed of much more advanced weaponry.

At the conclusion of the European war, the Danes sought retribution against the Lahore, crushed them and took control of several coastal regions which were then converted to the Hussite faith. Things remained so until yet another war (getting the picture?) erupted in Europe with the Danes losing their Egyptian canal momentarily, thus cutting off the trade network from the Empire and stranding thousands of Danes in hostile Asian waters. These rallied to the Danish Indian territories, and after they declared independence, the exiles seized more territory from the Muslim inhabitants, driving them into the wilderness to die. So as you see, I am working with well-established tradition more than a hundred years old. Seize the land, slay the inhabitants. It's all very much like the 'American West' with elephants and tigers...

Soon the Indian Danes, named the 'Duchy of Aballach', embarked upon a series of wars against the eastern Muslim kingdoms, which were eventually destroyed by further Hussite incursions from Europe and new Muslim invasions by sea. With the constant strife and political instability, some of the most valuable real estate in the campaign descended rapidly into grinding poverty and barbarism. Muslims were slain by Christians, who were in turn slaughtered by other Muslims, both receiving aid from various patrons among the great powers with neither attaining a decisive victory. This state of constant anarchy caused some Indian veterans, who are legion, to dub the theater 'the shark tank'.

I took control of Arnor, Aballach's direct descendant, on turn 209. Peregrin von Hessen presided over the state. The year was 1747, and Arnor had recently emerged as the dominant power in India after vanquishing the Muslim Yasarid Shahs. Arnor embraced almost all of northern India, excluding a few Muslim provinces remaining in the Bengal. In the central Deccan, an independent league of Hussite barons, inimical to both Arnor and the Moslems, continued to fight against the Yasarid Shahs, who vainly sought to impose their rule over the Carnatic and the south. Meanwhile, Arnor's ally, the Khmer Empire, continued to press against the Yasarid strongholds in the east while Buddhist priests undermined the religious unity of the remaining northern Muslims.

I did not lack for other allies outside of India, either. The Albanian East Indies Company proved a generous ally, being committed to Arnor's development into a powerhouse nation. Vast amounts of cash were invested each turn, and anything I needed, would be bought. The other Hussite nations, all in Europe, also proved very warm in their welcome to Arnor.

The future appeared very bright for my kingdom. This did not prove the case.

On my first turn, very much a wide eyed puppy naively meandering through a jungle, I pried into the murky occult aspects of the game, sending my officers to search out and destroy various secret empire posts. My Muslim neighbor, intent on establishing good relations, informed me of their whereabouts. It seemed simple enough, so I dove right in. I also assigned an army to forcibly convert Muslims to Hussite Christianity. Here are the results:

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:

<http://www.throneworld.com/lords>

Massive infusions of Albanian gold kept the Duke's ship of state afloat. Armed with this largesse, Peregrin expanded his capital at Schwarzkastel and cleaned up the city. New public parks, theatres, sewer systems... almost modern! Missionary efforts began in Chandela under the watchful guns of the Arnorite garrison. Peregrin also announced the institution of the 'Rajah's Cup' - a horse race in Schwarzkastel set upon the first weekend of cool weather in winter. In '48, despite bombings and a suicide-machete-attack, a Chitorean rider - Dunher Filios - won the cup on 'Snowpeak.'

While the Rajah attempted to put a good face upon the state of the realm, the end of the war with

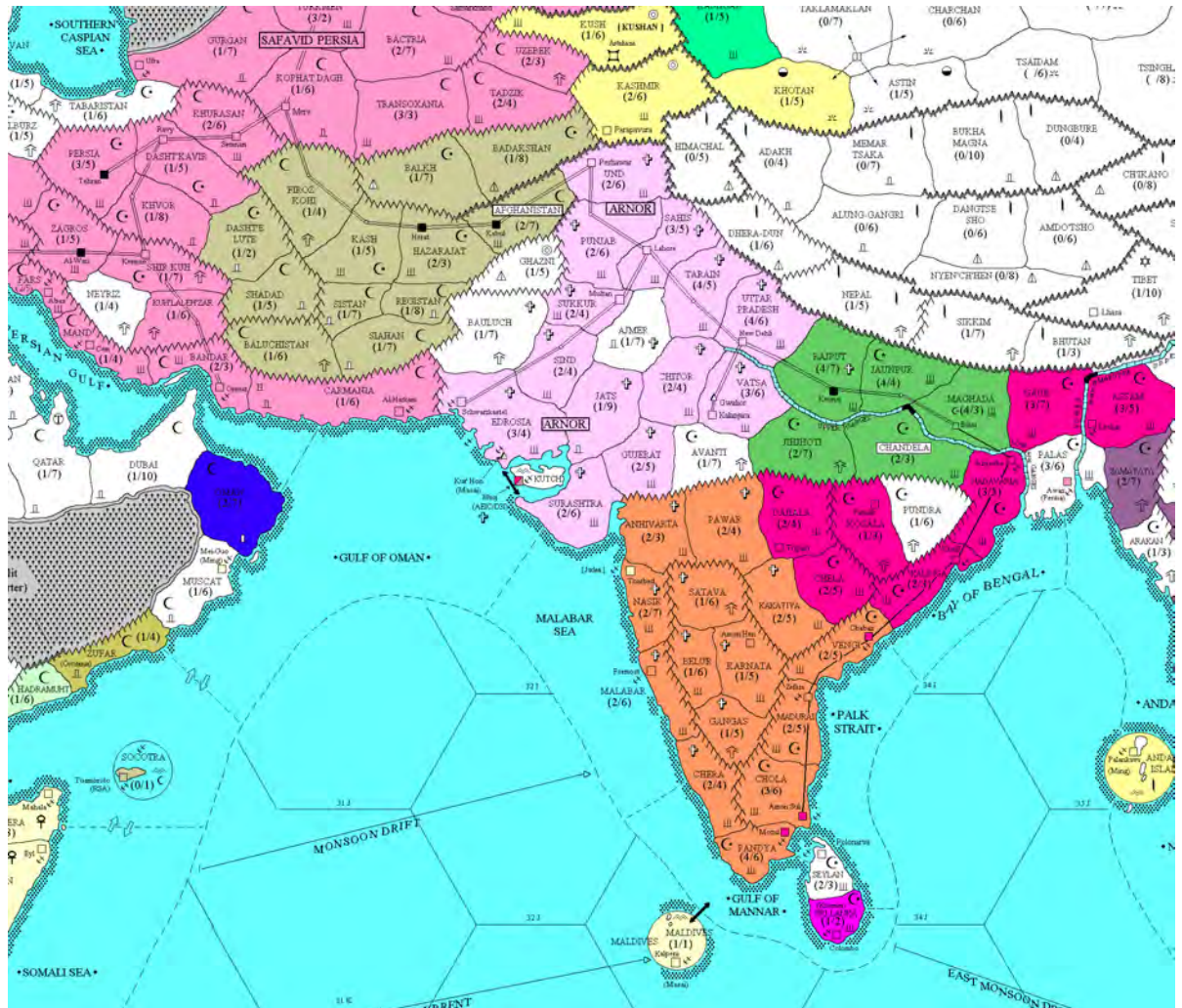
the Yasarids had not ended the divisiveness between the Hussite lords of the west and their Moslem and Hindu subjects. In fact, between '47 and '48, there were literally hundreds of attacks against the organs of government in Arnor-controlled lands. Dozens of ministers were murdered (mostly by machete attacks in the streets, or by gunpowder bombs) and hundreds of lesser civil servants, particularly tax collectors, judges and bailiffs were also slain. At the same time, Schiller's 'Black Watch' waged a brutal counter-war of repression against any kind of Hindu or Moslem communal society, burning temples and mosques, conducting widespread arrests and executions at all levels of civic life.

No one, on either side, seemed safe.

Even Peregrin moved amid a veritable sea of guardsmen. His efforts to find princess Arwen a husband bore fruit, however, in John of Dehli. The two were wed in early summer of '47. The wedding was nearly without incident - no terror attacks at least - but the bride's joy was a little tainted by the sickness (and eventual death) of Queen Katarine due to consumption. Still, the woman had not been her mother, so she did not shed too many tears.

The newly-married Arwen, meantime, spent her honeymoon in Jaunpur as commander of a strong army, during which time the Imamate was run out of the province and every mosque, madrasa and Moslem holy-place was put to the torch. A vicious and protracted effort was made to stamp out Islam in the region, which resulted in thousands of deaths, a great deal of property damage, enormous ill-feeling and - by the end of '48 - very little change in the beliefs of the populace.

To translate that into mechanics, the secret empire I was hunting launched nearly a dozen counter-attacks on my infrastructure and bureaucratic levels, and I had neglected to shield myself from intel assaults. Therefore, they were more than a little successful. I lost two out of five Infrastructure, and one out of four Bureaucratic Levels. It was a minor disaster, leaving me with an income of barely 100 gold points after



expenses. Replacing them could have potentially required thousands. Ouch. Well, at least I had built a new port city on the Ganges in Bihar, right?

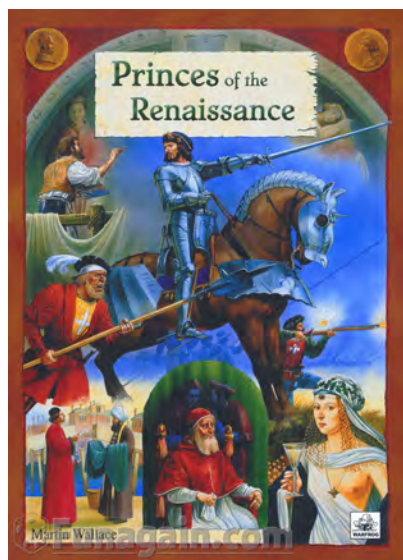
The secret empire in question established communication and revealed a previous arrangement with my neighbor, the ‘conciliatory’ Yasarids. The Moslems had been warned not to touch any cultic holdings, and if any of them were touched, bad things would ensue. The fact my ‘good’ neighbor failed to reveal this point to me when they suggested I attack the secret empire soured our relations, though I remained quite amicable even as I planned to see ‘them burn in Hell’. The secret empire and I came to a mutual understanding of ‘live and let live’ and I began to bend my mind to undermining the Yasarids while avoiding open warfare. Further setbacks to my international position occurred when the Khmer Emperor was overthrown by his Thai general, who had been suborned by the Yasarids. The northeastern frontier, formerly under heavy Khmer pressure, fell quiet. This was not something I enjoyed. As a silver lining, Buddhist missionaries continued their spiritual offensive against the Shiites, so all was not unpleasant.

The usual round of wheeling and dealing on the international stage continued. Grain was sold on the market for huge sums this turn to the Albanians and the Africans, and some of the Intel assault's damage was undone. I received hundreds of gp for my troubles, which, due to the damage sustained by my government, was immediately sucked up by the bureaucracy. I assigned missionaries to work peacefully in the insignificant province of Chandella on my southeastern border, while also, in a 'clever' attempt to curry favor with the Persian empire while draining the region of Muslims, assigned an army to 'peacefully' remove what few Muslims remained in what was then a Danish and Hussite province, and send them to the Persians, where they could find a 'better life' among their 'own kind'.

The road to hell, as they say ...

Princes of the Renaissance

Eat your heart out, Machiavelli, cries PEVANS ...



MY FAVOURITE game at both the 2001 and 2002 Spiel games fairs was published by *Warfrog*. So I thought I'd better give their 2003 game some close attention. It was always going to suffer in comparison with the magnificent *Age of Steam* from 2002, but it does stand up pretty well.

Princes of the Renaissance - designed, as always, by Martin Wallace - is a very different game, however. It's also a fairly complex game, so the problem for the reviewer is where to start to get the idea of the game across.

Well, how about the board? The game has a smallish board, showing a map of Renaissance Italy. The main features are the major cities: Venice, Florence, Milan, Rome and Naples. Each of these has a counter on a track that indicates the city's status. At the end of the game, the cities are worth points according to their relative position. Having a stake in the top cities will score you a lot of points and is definitely one way to win the game. However, the ranking of the cities fluctuates during the game, so part of the tactics is to build up the cities you have a stake in. And do down the others, of course. For each city there is a set of tiles in the same colour. Players can have up to six of these - though no more than three different colours. It's these tiles that are worth points according to the city's ranking at the end of the game. Each of the tiles also provides some sort of bonus, income or special ability. So, as well as looking to score points from them, you buy tiles to provide a tactical advantage or to further your overall strategy. For example, Giovanni Medici is a Florence tile. He gives you a discount when paying to become Pope (!) and an income of 1 Influence point each 'decade'.

The game is played in three decades, during which players carry out actions in turn. As I'll explain later, the end of the decade is under the control of the players. At the end of the third decade, you tot up the points to see who's won. At the beginning of each decade players get income, which they will then spend carrying out their actions.

There are two forms of currency in the game: Money and Influence. Both are spent in carrying out actions, but some actions require cash and some need influence. It is easier to increase your money income than your

influence, but which you need will depend on your strategy for the game. The simplest action you can do is to buy a tile. Two types of tile can be bought: troops and treachery. Troop tiles represent different types of military force and have an attack and/or defence value. When a player is involved in a war, you add up the attack values of their troops if they're attacking, the defence values if defending. Some of the city tiles give bonuses for different troop types. These will be important to anyone pursuing a military strategy. Troops cost money to buy: the most expensive (cavalry and artillery) are the most powerful. These two also provide an influence income. A standard start to the game is buying both - with five or six players there aren't enough to go round, though. You're limited to one of each type, too, so you can't build a purely artillery army, for example.

Treachery tiles are one-off special actions and cost one money and one influence to buy. You're limited to holding two (some city tiles allow you to hold more) and, generally, you play them in your turn. Probably the most used type of Treachery tile is the 'Freeze Bid'. This stops someone else from participating any further in an auction - very effective when only two of you are left! The next most used is 'Bribe Troops' which removes one troop tile from consideration in a war. Other tiles are auctioned, rather than bought.

Starting an auction is the second action a player can take. So, if you want a city tile, you have to offer it for auction - it's bid for in money. The starting price is always double the status of the city it's from. This leads to an interesting tactic of deliberately reducing the status of city in an effort to buy tiles cheaply and then boosting it back up again. Easier said than done! The auction goes round the table, each player increasing the bid or dropping out. Last bidder remaining wins and pays whatever their last bid was. (See how useful those 'Freeze Bid' cards are?)

In each decade a set of four 'event' tiles is available. These, too, are auctioned off and each of the tiles shows whether it should be bid for in money or influence. Most of the tiles are artists: Michelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci et al. These are either worth Victory Points at the end of the game or raise the status of a city (purchaser's choice). In the first two decades, one tile is a Merchant bonus - very useful for anyone following a Merchant strategy (a lot of city tiles are Merchants, who bring in income each decade). In the third decade the tile is 'French Invade', which drops the status of a city by two levels. When the fourth event tile is sold, the decade ends. So, as I mentioned above, if you've done all you want to do in a decade, you put an event up for auction to hasten the end of the decade. However, my experience is that there's always something else you want to do - unless you've run out of money and Influence.

This leaves one other tile that can be auctioned off as an action: the Pope. The position of Pope is available afresh each decade and is bid for using Influence. In the first two decades it brings the holder some money; in the last decade it's worth Victory Points. Once per decade the Pope is also allowed to intervene in a war, using his troops to back one side or other in a 'Holy Alliance'. Which brings us to wars.

Starting a war is the third action available to a player, though only a limited number of wars can be fought in a decade. Except that certain tiles allow extra wars and certain tiles stop wars. Wars are very important to the game as they provide income for those involved, change the status level of cities and bring Victory Points to the winner. The player who starts the war nominates one city to attack and one to defend: eg Florence attacks Milan. Then there are two auctions (bidding with Influence) to be

Princes of the Renaissance at a glance

Designed by Martin Wallace and published (in English and German) by *Warfrog*. It is a strategic board game for 3-6 players aged 13+ and takes 2-3 hours to play. It is readily available in UK games shops at around £25 (\$40 or so in the US).

Condottiere - that is, to lead the fight for each city. First for attacker, then defender. Each Condottiere receives cash equal to the status of the city s/he represents; though they can't collect this until the start of the next decade. Both Condottieres roll a die: the attacker adds this to the total attack value of their troops and bonuses; the defender adds it to the total defence value of theirs. If the attacker's total is higher, the attack wins. If not, the Condottieres reverse roles and the defender counter-attacks. The status of the victorious city goes up one level (two if they won with at least twice the score) and the losing city goes down one (or two). The winning Condottiere gets a laurel wreath. The first of these is worth 1 Victory Point, your second is worth 2, the third 3 and so on. So, one or two laurels aren't worth very much. Six or seven, on the other hand, are worth 21/28, which is a large number of Victory Points. Gaining laurels is a major part of a military strategy. Over the three decades there will be up to 12 wars (15 with 5-6 players) - plus or minus any extras. So you're looking to win at least half of these.

You need to spend money on troops and Influence on bidding to be Condottiere. You also want the bonuses that improve your military strength or give you a discount on becoming Condottiere. The danger is that you miss out on other points scoring opportunities. You also need to look for ways of improving your Influence income in order to continue winning the auctions for Condottiere. You need to choose, too, whether your army is strong in attack or in defence. If one player is going for a strong attacking army, another player can compete by buying a strong defensive army. This way, they can halt the attack and win on a counter-attack (an attacking army will usually have a weak defence).

There are plenty of tactical options around the wars for other players. Apart from the laurels, there's the money. Players often participate in a war simply to gain income - particularly if they're following a strategy where they don't have much other use for their Influence. And then there's the difference it can make to the status of the cities. Remember that you get the points for a city for each tile you have for that city. It's well worth pushing a city up to the 10-point first position if you're going to score 20 or 30 points from that. Having said that, over the three decades there will be plenty of wars and other factors changing the status of cities. It takes a lot of effort to get a specific city to the top. So it works best if two of you are working together to promote the same city - though that usually means the other player is gaining as much as you. One final wrinkle is that you don't have to be the attacking Condottiere and win the war. You might bid to defend a city you don't want to see promoted and make sure you lose!

I've left out one sort of tile. At the start of the game, each player gets a tile for a particular family. This gives you some sort of bonus or special ability, which will often influence the strategy you follow. The obvious one is the Baglioni family, which gives the player a discount on paying to be Condottiere: a clear pointer towards a military strategy. I've mentioned the military strategy in some detail. It is very powerful, but can be derailed by other players winning the auction for Condottiere. It is also diluted if more than one player is following it.

The other obvious strategy is following Merchants. There are Merchant tiles for several cities - notably Venice, which has five. Merchants bring in income each decade. With the bonus event tiles - available in decades one and two - Merchants are worth more money and Victory Points at the end of the game. However, you can't get very many VPs for Merchant tiles (a maximum of 12 if you have both bonuses and 6 Merchant tiles, which is unlikely), so you also need to promote your cities to really cash in. Another possible strategy, since you don't know until the end of the game how well the cities are doing, is saving up your money and Influence and buying valuable city tiles at the end.

This is a game that you need to study. The subtleties of the game are in the various tiles and the bonuses they give you. So you need to know what these are and what's available to you. While there are lots of tactical nuances, the game is largely about the strategy you're following. And to win you need to be pretty single-minded about this. I have to say that I am still learning the game and trying out different strategies. Princes of the Renaissance is not as immediately appealing as Age of Steam, but it is proving to be a subtle and deep game.

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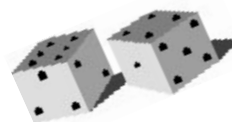
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Star Fleet Warlord

Game EH7 part 2

ROBIN ORMAN continues his diary of the US v UK game ...

Star Fleet Warlord is a PBM wargame based on the *Star Trek* universe - specifically the *Star Fleet Battles* tabletop game - and is run in the UK by Pagoda Games. It has several scenario types, one of which is a team game where the Alliance (Federation, Gorn, Kzinti and Hydrans) face off against the Coalition (Klingons, Lyrans and Romulans). EH7 is a rematch pitting the US Alliance versus the UK Coalition - previously WE Brits had triumphed as the Alliance. Of course, when the Americans requested a second bite at the cherry, British courtesy demanded we accept - after all we couldn't resist giving them another thrashing ...

State of play

In the previous turns, both teams have expanded into the neutral space separating them from each other. The West Lyrans are heading south through sector 01 to invade the Hydran homeworld; the Western Klingons are moving a fleet through sector 12 to support them. They're also sending ships to eliminate the computer-controlled WYN in sector 21. The Eastern Klingons are moving into the three neutral sectors on their border, in an attempt to hold off the Federation.

On the eastern front, the Western Romulans have sent ships to exploit sectors 62 and 71, each with a small fleet to hunt down pirates and space monsters. The Eastern Romulans are performing mirror-image manoeuvres in sectors 81 and 92.

The enemy Gorn have not been idle, however: as well as putting out their own prospecting ships, a small fleet of fast-moving ships has nearly reached the West Romulan home sector. As the Romulan commander, I've hastily assembled a fleet of destroyers which is moving to intercept the Gorn vessels as they cross the border, before they can make a scan of the area

...

The face of the enemy - Y175

The small Gorn fleet moved due south as I expected, allowing me to bounce a small freighter off them - this told me that the fleet consisted of a pair of scouts and an escort. It looks like my border patrol fleet was a good idea. I should know if I've made a successful intercept next turn.

My mini-fleet in sector 71 moved on from its successful strike on the Pirate base to eliminate the Nasty Space Monster (a Giant Space Brain; the same one that caused the Gorn some trouble a few turns earlier) which had been heading steadily south. Still weakened from its earlier tussle,

the creature didn't stand a chance - but my ships nevertheless earned a nice little bounty for the destruction of this menace.

Meanwhile, across both front-line sectors, a combination of ship scans and subspace battle reports pinpointed the locations of the two Gorn Warp Gates heading my way. Ships in SFW can only be built at two locations: a player's original Homeworld, and at Warp Gates, which are slow-moving, expensive ships. Eliminating these Gates is a priority for every player, since it not only scuppers the enemy's advance, but earns a 100 Economic Point reward at the same time.

As the Romulans, my own Gates have the advantage of being cloakable, and thus very hard to hunt down - another reason I like the Romulans and their cloaking device so much!

The Eastern Gorn Warp Gate is still hugging the northern border of sector 81 and is not an immediate threat -

although it is being escorted by a further 16 unidentified vessels, which could indicate a gathering strike fleet. The Western Gorn Warp Gate had the misfortune to run into an Orion Pirate ship on its last turn. Although the Gorn won the fight, the ensuing subspace report has told me the best part of their fleet composition. This

Gate is about a quarter of the way through sector 71, and is escorted by nine ships, including no fewer than four dreadnoughts - which is somewhat unusual.

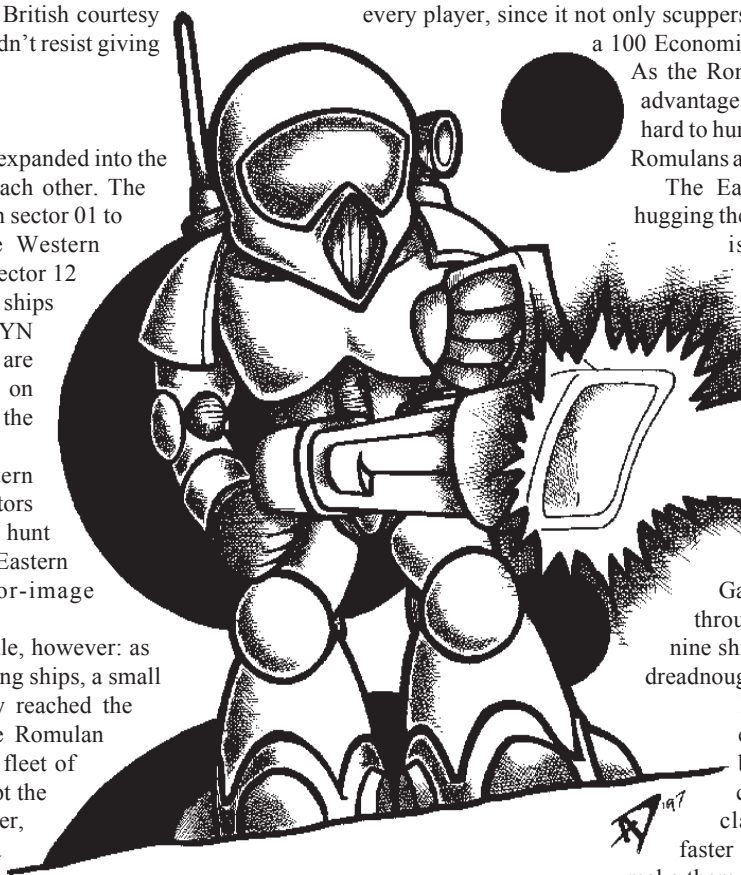
Dreadnoughts are large, expensive, powerful ships. Their bulk makes them slower than cruisers (the 'stock' warship class), although still somewhat faster than a Warp Gate. This could

make them appear a good escort for a Gate,

but... remember what I mentioned last time about damage division? For the price of four dreadnoughts, six heavy cruisers could've been purchased. Compared to the dreadnoughts, the sum of these cruisers would've boasted equivalent or better combat factors, split the enemy firepower over six ships rather than four, and given the option of sending them off at a later date to move with the rest of a fleet (where the slower dreadnoughts would lag behind). Not all of this is immediately obvious... hence buying the larger ships tends to be the mistake of an inexperienced player, and leads me to wonder if my opponent will commit other, similar mistakes.

This Warp Gate is also balanced at the north-western edge of a supernova. Since I can assume that they will take the shortest path towards my Home Sector, I can predict their movement around the western edge of the terrain feature. This leads them towards the planet where I constructed my Battle Station last turn - which they probably aren't aware of. The Gorn player will likely continue to swell the numbers of his fleet as the Gate travels south, but its overall slow speed will give me a couple of turns to prepare for it.

Since my own Warp Gate is on the border between 71 and 72, and I



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

have some EPs to spare, I think I'll prepare a nasty little surprise for the enemy at that planet...

First blood - Y176

The mood was tense at Romulan High Command, as they awaited news of the first Gorn-Romulan skirmish of the war. When word finally arrived, congratulations and Romulan ale were readily exchanged. The Gorn scouting fleet continued to move in a predictable pattern, and the cloaked patrol vessels were able to pounce on them as soon as they appeared in Romulan space. Our side sustained no casualties, although several ships will need repairs. This battle puts the Western Gorn a further 500 EPs behind, bringing the total to 800, which is beginning to sound like a significant disadvantage in terms of available material in the field.

The Western Gorn continue to move south along predictable routes, with the Warp Gate fleet still heading for my fortified planet in sector 71. Meanwhile, two of my cloaked scouts are nearing the enemy home sector, and one will attempt to fly across the border next turn.

The Eastern Romulan region is quieter, where the other Gorn player appears to be playing a cautious game - no sign of early scouting fleets here! His Warp Gate and accompanying vessels are continuing their steady advance, however, and will have to be dealt with at some point.

On the other side of the map, my allies are also clashing with their respective opponents. Of particular note is the West Klingon conquest of the WYN homeworld in sector 21, bringing another sector under Coalition control.

A fool-proof plan - Y177

The turn began poorly, with the first of the scouts I had earmarked for the West Gorn home sector failing to report for duty after a run-in with a stray Orion pirate cruiser. Fortunately, my other scout has continued unaffected (sailing happily past the oblivious Gorn fleet) and will make its attempt on crossing the Gorn border next turn.

At least the Gorn are moving predictably: they're now only a few hexes from the planet where I hope to bushwhack them. I've been building up my defences here over the last two turns, and it now features a fully functioning Starbase (with a 30-fighter defence force) and a 13-ship cloaked fleet, equipped with several optional accessories to boost their combat values. My hope is for the Gorn to retreat from this formidable opposition, allowing me to intercept and destroy them with the 13-ship fleet (plus another nine ships that are nearby) on my next turn. If my preparations are not quite sufficient and the Gorn decide to attack anyway, hopefully they'll be weakened enough that the second 9-ship fleet can mop them up. Success here will leave sector 71 open, allowing me to speed a fleet through to assault the Western Gorn home sector.

The East Romulans had an excellent turn. Two more space monsters were splattered, earning another 400 EPs for my treasury, and two East Gorn destroyers were also eliminated as they tried to grab one of my planets. Best of all, a pair of my scouts are now close to the enemy border after taking a short cut through some 'weak space' - a terrain that randomly teleports a ship to elsewhere in the same sector. One got a little

too lucky and landed on a Gorn prospector... rather unfortunately for the miners. The scout has been crippled by the encounter, but has the capacity to repair itself - if the Gorn consent to leave it alone for a turn.

The Eastern Gorn player is clearly preparing a major offensive: ship scans reveal more than two dozen ships gathering near the northern edge of sector 81. Still, as long as he's happy to sit in the northern section, I'm not too bothered.

Rather more worrying is a subspace report of a Federation Warp Gate in the south of sector 61. Not content with trying to invade the Klingons, the busybody do-gooders have decided to head for Romulan territory. I need to take out at least one Gorn player - and quickly, before I become outnumbered.

A sufficiently talented fool - Y178

Oh dear. I've been a bit too clever for my own good.

As expected, the Gorn wandered into my heavily fortified planet and decided that discretion was the better part of valour. Unfortunately, I'd forgotten that they'd probably bring in more ships (through the Warp Gate) at the end of the turn - which they did. This meant that when my own fleet moved to counter-attack, they saw a more powerful enemy than they were expecting... and retreated. Worse, they're now sitting a couple of hexes from the planet and its Starbase, which has been left to stare down the Gorn armada all on its lonesome. Oops.

Just to round off a perfect turn, my remaining scout was also fried before it could enter the Western Gorn home sector. To rub it in, the perpetrator was the same Orion pirate ship that eliminated my other scout last turn. Grrr.

Now that the Gorn know that I'm on to them, they're likely to be much less predictable. Will they plough through the Starbase (which will hardly scratch their paintwork without my fleet in support)? Will they decide it's not worth the bother and bypass it? And will my own fleet be able to catch them before they get to my home sector?

Fortunately, things are going better for the Eastern Romulans, who have repaired their scout and infiltrated the Eastern Gorn's home sector. While the vessel doesn't have a cloaking device, it will hopefully survive long enough to map out the terrain. The other scout that took the 'weak space' short-cut will try to enter the corner of sector 70 (the West Gorn home sector) this turn - unless another pirate wants to stick his cutlass in ...

Meanwhile, the East Gorn fleet has split off eight ships and sent them south. This is probably the opening move in an invasion attempt - perhaps a scouting fleet? Largely unimpeded by enemy interference, my own forces in the sector are now approaching critical mass, so he may have left it a little late. Not that he'll be aware of this of course, since all of my ships are cloaked.

While things are far from decided on my side of the arena, the western arm of the Coalition is beginning to penetrate Hydran defences, and the Lyrans have a fleet on the way to decimate the Kzinti. The Federation remains a threat however, and will no doubt make its presence felt in the turns to come.

To be continued...

10 L1	10 L2	20 Z	30 F1	40 G1	50 G2	60 i
11 d	21 W	31 F2	41 i	51 t	61 R1	71 R2
12 H	22 K1	32 K2	42 t	52 R1	62 R2	72 R2

Clix

The Miniatures System

DAVE PANCHYK finds Clix figures fun to play with ...

'Twenty years hard labor for vigilantism, perp!' Judge Dredd called out, interrupting a tall, muscular man in a black costume in his ruthlessly effective subdual of a mugger.

The man in the mask and cape, surprisingly agile for his size, leapt from the pedway onto a passing bus. Dredd leapt onto his motorcycle and gunned it in pursuit along the motorway. 'Drokk,' he muttered, 'It's going to be one of those days...'

EVER WANT to stage your own battle between Judge Dredd and Batman? **HeroClix** is the answer. It is probably the most popular among what are called the **Clix** system of games. The pre-painted Clix miniatures with their elegant and easy-to-use system have given a boost to the retail games shops, even as Spielers lose sales among semi-casual gamers to 'das klickenmadness'.

The Clix games are the product of *WizKids Games*, run by former FASA president Jordan Weisman. Weisman helped develop numerous popular licenses, including **Battletech** and **Shadowrun** -licenses that provide a degree of instant recognition for their Clix equivalents.

But that's skipping ahead. The first Clix game was **Mage Knight**, a fantasy battles game. Hmm... 25mm miniatures, each on its own base, each with a point value, gathered together in armies to fight those of other factions: sound familiar? But there are some differences that immediately set Clix figures apart from *Games Workshop's* **Warhammer** minis.

First and most obvious, they're pre-painted. No more futzing about with primer and paints and flirting with increased myopia. Mind you, some of the early figures were, ah, not of showpiece quality, but they looked good at the distance at which one generally plays with them.

The second difference is the price. The price of entry into Mage Knight is more like US\$30, rather than the US\$100 or more cost of fielding a small army in Warhammer. Of course, WizKids encouraged players to spend by making these 'collectible' miniatures: just as with collectible card games like **Magic: The Gathering**, each 'booster' pack of a small number of figures may contain a rare or 'unique' figure. (In HeroClix, these will be different 'versions' of the same superhero, often with an entirely different sculpture.)

The third difference is the base of each figure, which is the foundation of the Clix system. Each has what is called a 'combat dial', which one turns a number of 'clicks' as the unit gets damaged. All the figure's essential stats - attack, defense, and movement values, for instance - are visible through a window on the base, so the effects of combat on the unit are immediately obvious.

This is a beautifully straightforward system. It also avoids the likelihood of a Games Workshop-style shakedown, in which certain units suddenly lose their effectiveness in a later edition of the rules, forcing one to buy more or ditch one's investment entirely.

Jerry 'Duke' Bolter turned his Peacemaker 370 into a sharp climb as he throttled down, slowing enough that Patsy Krait's Bloodhawk zoomed past. He dropped the nose again and banked, gaining back some precious speed for his heavier fighter.

In response, the Bloodhawk snapped into a tight right turn - the same direction Duke had aimed the Peacemaker. 'You zigged when you should've zagged, sister,' he muttered as his quartet of .60 Cheyennes sent lead slugs to tear up Krait's starboard wing.

The Bloodhawk did lazy loops in its downward spiral; Duke followed it down from a safe distance. He watched Patsy cut the engine, then time her jump when the fuselage was upright.

The Peacemaker dived below the level of the blossoming parachute. Duke cracked open his canopy. 'Have a good walk back!' he yelled,



eliciting an unladylike gesture from the receding figure.

Crimson Skies is an aerial swashbuckling game set in an alternate history in which a balkanized United States makes highways worthless, leaving zeppelins and airplanes to serve as primary transport for freight, passengers - and air pirates. It's kind of the unloved child of the FASA licenses, even though a couple of Microsoft games have bolstered its all-important brand recognition.

To be honest, **Crimson Skies** is the only Clix game I've tried out, aside from a desultory HeroClix one-on-one battle (which revealed it really is meant for teams of superheroes). It does great as a head-to-head dogfighting game, although it was meant for squad play (four planes come in one of the very large blister packages).

One thing that's hampered **Crimson Skies** is something that only PBM gamers wouldn't find bizarre: the rules, minus any figurines, are sold on their own. This has undoubtedly hurt sales, although the inclusion of movement tokens and navigation cards makes it understandable.

The movement tokens are large hexes which one lays out in particular patterns in front of one's plane, according to the selected manoeuvre. If you have a straight line of sight to a plane in range, you can shoot; if you end your move with your base on that of another plane, a collision is the price for your attempt at aerial fanciness.

The movement hexes are a fantastic way to put to death that hated implement of the Old \c6on: the ruler. Mind you, Mage Knight used a ruler. HeroClix, though, sets everything on maps with 1" squares, representing such popular venues for set-piece battles as banks and city streets. Not as elegant a solution as *Fantasy Flight Games' Disk Wars*, in which movement was expressed as the number of 'flips' end-to-end of the unit counter, but still. The hexes and manoeuvres in **Crimson Skies** do an excellent job of imparting the feel of dashing dogfighting.

Recently acquired by a major sports card maker, WizKids will be slowing down some of its game lines in favour of producing baseball 'SportsClix'. This could be a major crossover for them. Baseball is a good sport for Clix, since it's relatively stationary.

While not quite beer-and-pretzels gameplay, the Clix games are a good, easy experience for a lot of people who aren't looking for in-depth complexity with their strategy.

www.wizkidsgames.com

Batman

Gotham City Mystery

ERIC RIDLEY on playing superheroes or evil henchmen ...



BEING A BIG Batman fan I was pretty stoked when I found out that Leona, my put-upon girlfriend, had bought me a copy of a Batman game as a present. Especially one I had never heard of before.

Gotham City

Mystery is basically a more sophisticated, nicely produced, comic-based version of **Guess Who**. Everyone loved **Guess Who**, well I did anyway, and so it makes me happy to play this game.

The idea is that you take the part of either one of Batman's most diabolical foes or fight the good fight as a caped (all apart from Nightwing) crusader. During the game one player must be a villain and the rest are good guys. The villains you can choose from are quite impressive, ranging from Ra's Al Ghul to the Riddler. As said evildoer, you must command your five henchmen to steal various items from around Gotham city to complete your nefarious scheme. These can range from speedboats to kryptonite and can be found in various buildings around the board.

Each turn you move your henchmen in order to 'gain' one of these items. Once an item has been 'procured' it must be taken to the board's edge to be delivered to the boss. Once you have all ten items on your list you blow up Gotham / take over the world / launch the White House into space / take Live TV off the air or what ever floats your evil boat.

The only thing standing in your way are the good men and women in spandex: Batman, Batgirl, Robin and Nightwing. As a hero you must stop the henchmen in their tracks and find out what they have stolen. Once a henchman has picked up an item from a building it is theirs forever; however if you catch him and use the old BIFF! KA-POW! Combo, you can find out what he is carrying, giving you clues as to which villain is behind the master plan.

The board is small and compact but it also made from high quality materials and features nice artwork. The pieces, of which there are nine, are reminiscent of the Hero Clix figures without the 'clicky' bases, which

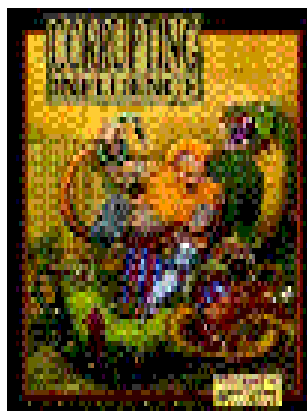
is nice. The best of the components, however, is in the form of the 'Bat Computer'. Basically it is a big black piece of plastic into which you can slot the items you take from captured henchmen.

Each item (represented by a piece of card) has black and yellow bands on it. Once slotted into the Bat Computer, a yellow band next to a villain means it could be them: a black band means you can eliminate them from your enquiries (like **Guess Who**, see). Other features that liven up the game are hero and villain cards, such as Jetpacks and Batwings, which allow you to bend the rules a little. And manhole covers, which allow henchmen to traverse the sewer system, where the heroes dare not tread for fear of laddering their tights (damn those stinky henchmen).

As the Heroes you only get one combined guess per game. If you get it wrong you lose the game and the villain stomps off to victory. The game is fast paced and light-hearted, maybe a little too light-hearted for some. It is simple, colourful (the box artwork is fantastic) and only slightly taxing. As a five-player game it can take longer and require more teamwork, as a two-player game it is more intense and adversarial.

I like this game, but probably only because I am a bit of a simple pimple and loved **Guess Who**. Serious war gamers and card floppers should probably take a side step.

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www.warpeddark.com

Batman: Gotham City Mystery at a glance

Who is trying to destroy Gotham City? The heroes must identify the culprit before he or she destroys the metropolis. One player takes the role of the villain with a secret identity. The others play as Batman, Robin, Batgirl or Nightwing and work together to stop the villain. If they fail, an evil plot will decimate the city. Comes with a Gotham City-themed game board, nine sculpted figures, a deck of cards and die. For 2 to 5 players.

Price: £12 Players: 2 - 5
Publisher: Mattel Playing time: 40mins

Faith

Era I - The Blood of the King

SVEN TOMMASSEN considers an online game in its early stages ...

Faith shows other web-based games how things should be done, though it still has its problems. Unlike most browser-based games, Faith features nice graphics and a very handy interface that combines everything into a portal. The core gameplay is similar to games like **Utopia** or **Planetarion**, although created more professionally and with some more features. On the downside, players face bugs, loopholes and everyday imbalances that could have been fixed in beta testing.

I like the idea of having a story, as in single-player games, and the opening of new paths, when you advance in level and visit new places in the Aloradius. You can choose to play as a Wizard, a War Master, a Rogue, a Merchant or a Jack-of-All-Trades and rule your province as you please. Features like an advanced War Engine, that takes your units, special abilities, maps and strategy into account, or the Tree of Knowledge function, that teaches your character new skills in the fields of economics, engineering and military, are well implemented.

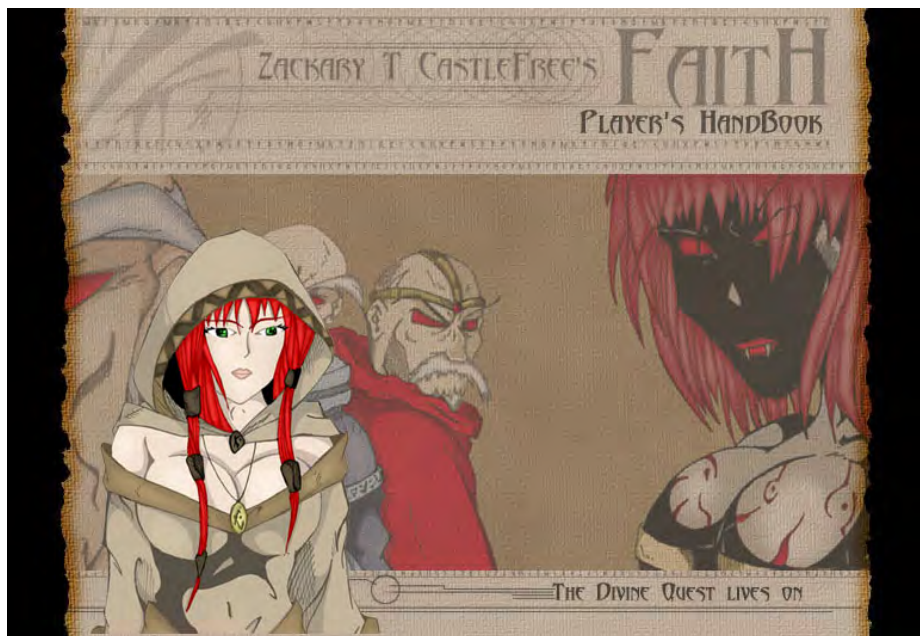
The goal of the game is to build a strong province and organize a perfectly working kingdom. This second task is rather hard, because the kingdom can consist of more than 20 provinces, which are played by other players. So if you have a player in the kingdom that doesn't play often or just lacks knowledge, the kingdom won't grow as fast. On the other hand, you may have players in the kingdom that help each other and are well organized and grow very powerful. To become a strong province is simple enough: explore, build up your forces, construct buildings, fight other kingdoms and play through the story.

The whole game is a big narrative, and your actions may affect your strategy and change things like what units you can train in your province.

The server that Faith is running on is very stable. Due to the high load on game images and actions that can be performed, the server sometimes slows down a bit, but longer waiting times do not appear, so the overall server performance is okay. The game was unavailable once in four weeks, which isn't bad, but I personally wonder whether the server will slow down if there are more users playing the game. There were never more than 30 users online at the same time, so the question, 'What happens when more than 80 users are logged in?' is an open one. My opinion is that the server could be better and made faster: since the game is pay-to-play, the server should fit any needs the players have.

The signup process is very detailed and easy to fill in. It also gets you involved in the story, and makes a good impression.

Unlike most other web-based games, Faith lets you feel the game through the graphical interface, which consists of a graphic 'Build City' function, your avatar, army units, buildings, NPCs, Noviaas City and other locations. The combination of the forum, chat, manual, tutorial and the faq, makes the graphical interface work like a big portal, where you can find anything that you need. The option to pop the chat up automatically when you log in, or the window that pops up on events, are only a few of the things that make the interface comfortable. You will also find statistics letting you know who the most powerful players are, and a customisable interface that allows players to choose how they want their game to look, and many other things that make the game user-friendly.



The player community is small and friendly: it seems to me that most people help each other, and posts get answered quickly and clearly. The atmosphere in the forum is an easy one and people don't take things too seriously. Once you are logged in you don't have to sign up or type your account information in, to join the forum. Still, I am not totally convinced from the community, since most things that get posted are bugs or complaints about the game rather than things to discuss, though that's only my opinion.

The way in which Faith shows other web-based games how things should be done, is in its graphics. The game is well illustrated, enjoyably designed and the almost-perfect interface works fine. There is so much to do in the first week of play that the possibilities look nearly inexhaustible, though after you are familiar with the game and everything is running, you will notice that most things can be done in minutes. It has everything most strategic browser-based games have, plus graphics. What I didn't really like at all, was the fact that you have to read every event, without knowing the context of the event. You can't continue at a certain point, and have to rearrange the event. I like the NPCs with interactive stories that will have an effect on your character's strategy, which I never seen before in a web-based game. I'm not a fan of 'comic' images, but they fit the game and are drawn well. The images are enjoyable and a big plus to the game. If you don't like pure text games, this is the game for you to play.

It seems as if the game still has many unbalanced parts, and I would say this is not acceptable for a commercial game. But as for most games, things are getting fixed all the time and since this is the first era (after the beta test ð, era 0), and the admin fixing things is very dedicated. Faith has no real issues that make it bad. Faults that exist now can be fixed.

If you like web-based strategy roleplaying games, be sure to sign up for a trial account (or pay for an Special Edition account) in the next era, since most bugs, loopholes and balance problems will be fixed. I personally hope *Dragon Claw Studio* does everything to unleash the potential that this game surely has.

www.dragonclawstudio.com

A Tale in the Desert

A Triumph of Content over Style

COLIN FORBES plays a formula-breaking game ...

THE MOST common complaint levelled at massively multiplayer online role-playing games is that they are all too similar. No matter what the setting, whether deep space or high fantasy, the genre tends to be stuck on what's come to be known as the levelling treadmill, where the basic gameplay remains the same, but the numbers get bigger. Plenty of games have attempted to find subtle variations on the formula, but until **A Tale in the Desert**, no game has done away with it completely. And while there are faults to be found with this peculiar game from *eGenesis*, a lack of originality certainly isn't one of them.

A Tale in the Desert is unlike any online RPG to come before it. Its emphasis on cooperation may sound vaguely reminiscent of *NetDevil's Jumpgate*, but the truth is that it is very, very different: in A Tale in the Desert, cooperation is the whole focus of the game. You will find this to be true from the moment you log in. The game will suggest you find a mentor to show you the ropes. It is not only a good idea to follow this advice - it is necessary. The game is daunting, because you don't just create a character and start fighting. There is no fighting, and your character, or what passes for a character in the game, is created entirely through your actions.

A good mentor will start simply. A Tale in the Desert is set in ancient Egypt. Very ancient Egypt: the only society to be found is that which has been created by the existing players. Your mentor will show you how to gather materials and show you the basics of learning and construction. These are the primary goals in the game - you learn from academies and universities, and then you use what you've learned to build things, such as structures and tools. As your character learns new skills, you can advance. But advancement is very different from how it is in traditional roleplaying games.

Advancement

There are seven disciplines in the game. Each discipline has a variety of 'tests' that you must pass to advance. For instance, initiation tests in the body discipline require you to explore areas of the world in a specific amount of time. Tests in the architecture discipline require that you build a house. Tests in the art discipline require you to build a sculpture and have it judged appealing by others. One of the leadership tests requires



that you successfully mentor seven other players, further illustrating how important helping others is in the game. Each discipline has seven tests, though many are not available yet.

Higher-level tests are much more complex and require you to enlist lower-level characters to help you complete them.

Players are directly involved in almost all aspects of the game, from the introduction of new technologies to the game's rules to the landscape itself. With a few exceptions, almost every structure you see in the game was built by a player or group of players. New technologies are introduced through research at universities, which is aided by players' donations to these institutions. Most interestingly, though, the game rules themselves can be changed through the legal system. If you don't like a certain aspect of the game, within reason, you can introduce a petition to have it changed. If you get enough signatures on your petition, it will be subject to a general vote. If it passes, it becomes a new law. This system is also used for permanently banning players who have, for some reason or another, made other players' in-game lives difficult.

Players' influence

A Tale in the Desert has been described as a social experiment, and that description is startlingly accurate. The actions of the game's inhabitants have such a direct impact on the game that it's interesting just to run around and look at the towns that have been created.

Pollution becomes a problem in highly populated areas and affects your ability to grow certain crops in that area. As a result, laws can be passed to prevent the construction of certain buildings in certain areas. It's uncertain what the long-term results of the game may be. With more players, the landscape could be overrun, and ridiculous laws could be passed. But that potential drawback is also what makes the game so refreshingly different—the future is fairly uncertain, and players have a stake in the long-term well-being of the world.

Something different

A Tale in the Desert certainly won't appeal to everyone. It is about long-term goals, and the short-term rewards aren't better weapons and armour, but rather better tools and crops. It doesn't look very good, and the simple graphics may turn off players with a desire for exciting landscapes. Further, there is really no sound to speak of, except for the footsteps of your character as he or she runs about. But it's so ambitious and offers so many interesting tasks for those who can enjoy its unique elements, that those who get past its aesthetic shortcomings will likely find themselves addicted to harvesting flax and making charcoal.

Online games are so often about the graphics, the sound effects or massive realm vs realm battles: A Tale in the Desert is much more subtle. A great deal of thought has gone into this game and, as such, it is a triumph of content over style. I recommend it thoroughly.

A Tale in the Desert at a glance

An MMORPG from *eGenesis* in which your character advances by completing, participating in, or leading large projects. Negotiation and politics are important.

Software: Free

Subscription: \$13.95 US

24 hours of play are offered as a free trial, and can be used gradually over many sittings.

<http://www.ataleinthedesert.com>

On Screen

GLOBETROTTER's up-to-the-minute report on the latest computer games ...



Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time
Just when you think you are on top of the world, you've proven to your father that you are worthy of his respect by retrieving the priceless Dagger of Time and now you get to unlock the hourglass in front of the entire royal court. Too bad it's all a setup and you will have to battle through a dizzying array of sand monsters, palace defences, and puzzles in order to put the genie back in the bottle. You can count on one thing, though. You will look great doing it!

Control issues are the only flaw that mars this release, because the graphics presented and the animation

are Disney-level quality. If you didn't know better, you could almost believe you were playing a movie. The camera swings around to show various perspectives as you move through the rooms of the palace, which generally help you play, though sometimes the camera shifts can be disconcerting. As you enter a new area, you are provided with a quick 'fly-by' of the various obstacles present which give you a hint of what you need to do to make it through successfully. At the save points, you are blessed with a much more dream-like vision of the high points of the next level, so you have an idea what you are getting into.

The attention to detail is amazing on this game. The gameplay flows from one scene to another with hardly a break. Health powerups are handled more naturally than in any other game I have played.

Prince of Persia: The

Sands of Time is one of those games that comes along and you simply must play. It should be considered as one of the best games of the year and may eventually rank as one of the top classics. Since this is so much more of a console/game pad type game, I would give serious thought to the Xbox/PS2/GC version, just to avoid the control issues, but there is so much to like, all platforms are great options to play Prince of Persia. Just play it!



The Sims Online

www.eagames.com

This game is about as fun as dental surgery. The repetition of skill building, working, and staying 'green', is mind-numbing. Apparently, it is to other players also - hence the lack of friendly chat, or indeed any chat at all. Many players are harsh, rude, belligerent and generally offensive. The negativism is much more so than one meets in the real world. Even in the real world, boring jobs and roommates still have some variance. The only hope of mental stimulation is meeting up with a

friendly sim or someone that wants to invest in a property.

The well established players have big houses, profitable businesses, and most treat new players like their peasants. And those would-be royalty don't want peasants rising up - ever. This game has managed to create a corrupt government and economy, and one can only imagine the real life of the players that struggle to keep it that way. To call TSO communist is a flattery. See the history of the Tsarist Russia and you'll get the picture. If you want to have fun, this is not the game. In short, don't buy this game, find a friendly chat room instead.

Lords of Everquest

<http://lordsofeverquest.station.sony.com/>

Excellent game that kept me entertained for hours on end. Don't judge this game on the demo alone, check out what people have to say that have played through the game. The middle and end missions in each campaign (I played through all three of them) are extremely rewarding. The first few missions in each basically get you up to speed on the units and the controls and the story. Not that they aren't fun, but they are definitely not where the 'meat' of the game is located.

The only real downside was that a couple of the missions were difficult to complete because the win condition was difficult to achieve... in spite of having killed everything on the map and walking everywhere. Maybe it was just me.



America's Army

www.americasarmy.com/downloads/

Hitchcock once said that movies were 'life with the boring parts cut out.' **America's Army** introduces the military with the boring parts cut out: a slick, first-rate PC shooter that lets you try out all the exciting things there are to do in Army life, from basic training all the way to ground warfare - and all without a single 5am reveille and slop-out duty. It should be said right up front that America's Army was funded by the US Army's recruitment budget, and is being made freely available by download and by CD-ROM at recruitment stations. It represents a clever 21st-century effort at getting smart young tech-savvy folks excited about the prospect of an Army career. I think I'll leave it to more politically inclined magazines to debate whether this development is good, bad, or neutral - we're gamers, and what we're interested in is games. So how does the free America's Army stack up against those brightly packaged, but expensive boxes in games shops?

I am vaguely annoyed to report that the answer is: brilliantly!

Two Thrones

www.strategyfirst.com

Two Thrones takes place in the years between 1337 and 1490, in a time where nobility and the church held the power. This chapter from the Europa Universalis series focuses in on medieval France and England during the time of the Black Plague and of feudal power struggles. Noble families in France and England are engaged in an epic war for the control of the Two Thrones of the kingdoms, a battle that will define the future of the medieval Europe. I've only just started this one, but so far so good.



**Lord of the Rings:
The Return of the King**
www.ea.com

The game follows *exactly* the movie's plot, and each playable character's branching path is based on their narrated historic adventure. The game's engine is very robust, without any visible stutters or pauses even when the action get frantic, with myriads of foes and monsters on the screen. Unfortunately this *cannot* make up for the horrible PC controls that make the game unplayable. The weird camera angles and the scripted path compound the frustration, where your little valiant hero jerks hastily along the beautiful 2D (it feels like it) environment. Worse, when you aim a ranged weapon somewhere, the player just jerks from closer to furthest foe without any movement arc or even in-between choice. To top it off, since the game's licence is bound by the movie's/book's plot, each character has a restricted pre-defined adventure path story, and must therefore follow a particular plot path.

The game looks good, is sort of fun too, but in the end, with such restrictions, go see the film. That looks even better!



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Red Emperor

A new internet games site

FLAGSHIP asks CHRIS TOMKINS about his plans ...

THE GAMING community has a new internet startup offering something a little different for those who believe that success in strategy games should be about depth of thought, not just the amount of time you can spend online. As a firm it has an interesting mix of veteran creative talent (**Mo Holkar**, *Undying King Games*) and newcomers with experience from various areas of business, with a common interest in all games from PBM and roleplaying to board games. The firm is called *Red Emperor* and it is headed up by **Chris Tomkins**, who combines business experience with a lifelong passion for game designing and GMing.

We thought you'd be about what Red Emperor

is seeking to do ...

How did you get the idea for Red Emperor?

I don't know about you, but I love strategy games for both the challenge and the sharing of beers around the table. But it's difficult getting people together these days, because of both distance and time. I've recently started a family, which is great except that I have even less time than before, so the obvious question to ask is... surely there's a way both to have the gaming and still have a life?

So what makes Red Emperor different from other games sites on the Web?

We are interested in turn-based strategy games free from the need for client software, so you can play anywhere you have access to the Web. There are plenty of cheaply developed play-by-Web turn-based games out there already, but you do get what you pay for, making the games usually text-heavy and reliant on the passion of the individuals running them.

Inevitably they vary in fun, but what I really miss is the visual aid of a map that changes and evolves with the game, similar to what PBM players get now. So a map is one of many key features of our launch game **Empires**, where you can see armies and fleets move, ownership change and structures appear, with mouse-overs loaded with useful information.

Also, many of the games out there have large numbers of players, so large that I feel vulnerable to those players who have the time to get to know the multitudes of others, making success very reliant on contacts rather than strategy. Nevertheless some diplomacy is critical - we believe that strategy games are played off the board as much as they are on the board. Therefore Red Emperor avoids large numbers of players in

each game (Empires maximum is 10), and provides in-game messaging and a collective 'Banter' area. We also provide instantaneous reports to other players on certain decisions the moment they are made - in the spirit of 'actions speak louder than words'. For example, if a player in 'Empires' issues an order to become friendly to a rival nation, then a delegation report is immediately sent to that player's Foreign Affairs page to tell them of the friendly advances. This speeds up the diplomatic process, as the other player can reciprocate.

In addition we're providing 'communities' - player groupings that people can set up and manage themselves. You can create social groups, based on a common interest, with their own games, and with the possibility of challenge games between communities.

Who are you expecting to be Red Emperor members?

Anyone who likes strategy games! Our format is designed for the 'mind rich, time poor' because once you are familiar with the game and have a clear strategy, it is possible to issue all your orders in 15 minutes, making it convenient for lunch breaks or dipping in occasionally throughout the day. Players can also select game speeds suitable to their lifestyle, so our launch game will have three speeds: one turn a day, three turns a week and two turns a week. The community aspect is optional and more a service to groups of friends who want to play games together. The only technology players will need is access to the World Wide Web.

TM *What sort of a deal will they be getting?*

We are setting the price to reflect that much of the game is automated and that we need to invest in generating new games and growing / managing the community. Full year membership (which allows you to play in three games at once) works out as just over £3 a month - an annual total of £39.50, so that's comparable to a quality board game or computer game. To translate that into cost per turn, if you play your three games and they're all processed daily, the cost is just under 4p a turn.

For those who want to find out more before committing to a full year we also have a trial period costing just £13.50 for three months' membership. For the first few months after launch we have a special starting offer while we bed in the community features and some other





support structures - we are offering three extra months free for those who buy a year's membership, and one extra month for those on a three month trial.

In terms of customer support we divide it into two areas. Your account is about your money, so it's really important and we take e-mails on that, and for game play we have the rules, Frequently Asked Questions and the online interactive Forum to answer player questions.

When will Red Emperor be live? Is there a free game?

Red Emperor's address is www.redemperor.com and it is live now, so come and have a look. You will be able to view games in play, but as for free games, we know from the experience of others that free Web games have a very high dropout rate, which makes strategy games much less enjoyable - so we won't be offering free play. The three-month trial period is cheap enough that if people are not so sure about committing to a full year it offers an ideal compromise.

Will members be encouraged to contribute suggestions etc?

We have an online forum to help players having problems, and this also makes an ideal format for suggestions. We certainly intend to update and improve our games constantly and we must do that with players' feedback! As I mentioned above, we want to know if people are having difficulties, so we will do what we can to take the majority's suggestions to improve the clarity of the rules and web pages.

What's the first game going to be about?

Aha! Empires is a games series covering a range of scenarios, the first of which is **Empires: The Ancients**. The Empires series is all about managing a portfolio of successive empires by making decisions on their social and economic development using both innovation and investment, while keeping military vigilance against rivals or expanding your own borders. At the end of each Age empires will either remain active or go into decline: so you bid for a new empire amongst the next generation of nations seeking to carve out its place in history. In the first scenario, The Ancients, you will determine the fortunes of such great Empires as Persia, Rome and Han China as individuals or as teams. Alternatively you can rewrite history by paving the way to glory for those Empires that never became more than footnotes, such as Urartu and Pahlavas. There are over 50 empires in this first scenario alone so you will be able to play it many times and each time will be different.

How has the Red Emperor game-play been designed to suit 'mind rich, time poor' people?

The site is built in HTML with Javascript - no slow-loading plugins or client applications are required - so inputting orders is as quick and easy as current web technology allows. Orders are clearly divided into Domestic, Economic, Foreign, Innovation and Military; then there are separate pages to review all the orders you have issued and reports from the past turn. The map is on most pages, cut to provide a local map around your empire for quick reference. (The full map loads into a separate window for ease of reference.) Although we do provide messaging, as I mentioned above, rather than rely on exchanging e-mail to negotiate, certain orders that do not require secrecy are transmitted directly to other players. We don't provide players' email addresses to other players, although they may do so themselves of course.

From our playtests we have seen orders taking between 15 minutes (for players with clear agendas and simple strategies) to a maximum of an hour for beginners getting familiar with the web pages. Most turns probably take around 30 minutes, but that could easily be split into two sessions of 15 minutes each, three of 10 minutes etc... In the event that you cannot enter a turn, then your policies (which you can set previously) will manage your empire for you, but nothing is as good as a human! We also provide a proxy function so that if you are away for work or pleasure you can ask another member to look after your positions.

What other game ideas are lined up to launch during the first year or so?

We have several scenarios lined up for Empires, including *Saga*, set in Dark Age Europe with a blend of history and the myths that so inspired Tolkien; *Anno Domini*, which spans from the fall of Rome to the rise of the USA; *Obsidian Blades* set in medieval Mexico; and *World History* to cover the whole human experience from the Fertile Crescent to the Great War. We also have a range of further games in different stages of development - it's all about priority of implementing them, so we will consult our membership as we develop our lead ideas: *Senator*, a game of commerce and political power; *Frontiers*, a game of colonization, trade and conquest; and the UKG Classic, *Pieces of Eight*.

What are your plans for Red Emperor, is it a hobby or something bigger?

It is great to be able to work on something that is also our hobby, but coming from a blue chip company like Unilever, I am keen to run Red Emperor as a business because that will ensure that we are efficient and use our resources to serve our customers as best we can. We are backed by a substantial amount of equity and bank funding guaranteed by the Department of Trade and Industry. So money is not scarce: we just have to spend it wisely and, given a good balance of creative and business heads, I am confident that will not be a problem. Therefore our biggest challenge is to really push ourselves to provide as varied and exciting portfolio of games as possible.

We know that strategy gaming is a niche in terms of the overall online games market, nevertheless we want to expand the hobby and take strategy games to more people over the next few years.

To find out more, visit: www.redemperor.com

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Boardgames for Fun

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



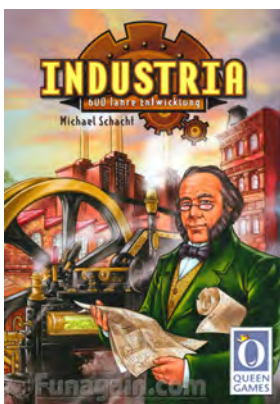
WELL, HERE we are in 2004. Time to finish off last year with a quick round-up of my favourite games before this year's crop start arriving. (The various Toy Fairs around the world are held at the end of January and beginning of February and a lot of new games

are previewed at these.) A quick look at *Brett & Board* (Mik Svellø's terrific board games website at www.brettboard.dk) gives a list of some 200 games that were published last year. I've only played a fraction of these, so my list is necessarily subjective.

Anyway, I went through them all and listed those that I particularly enjoyed playing. I was a bit surprised to find that **Mare Nostrum** came top of the list as I haven't written very much about this. The game was designed by Serge Laget and is published by *Eurogames* (in at least French and English). At its heart is a clever trading mechanism. Maybe swapping is a better word for it. The player with the initiative declares how many cards will be traded this turn. Every player puts that number of cards face up. The first player chooses a card and takes it. The player s/he took a card from has the next choice and so on. The aim is to put together sets: either all the same, if they're money cards, or all different, if they're goods. If you can manage a set of 12 (which is one of every good in the game or an awful lot of money!), you've effectively won. Sets of nine, six and three allow you to buy things that give you advantages in the rest of the game. What's wrapped around this is a game of expansion and war around the Mediterranean in the Ancient World. The (up to) five players are major powers: Babylon, Carthage, Egypt, Greece and Rome. Each has a particular ability, which is an advantage as the powers build cities, establish trade routes and use their legions and ships to attack each other. Cards are gained for cities (taxation money) and trade routes (goods, depending on the route) and are spent to buy legions, ships, cities and caravans (to go on the trade routes). The game is slightly reminiscent of **Civilization**, but plays very differently - and it's much shorter! Highly recommended, it gets a 10/10 on my highly subjective ranking scale.

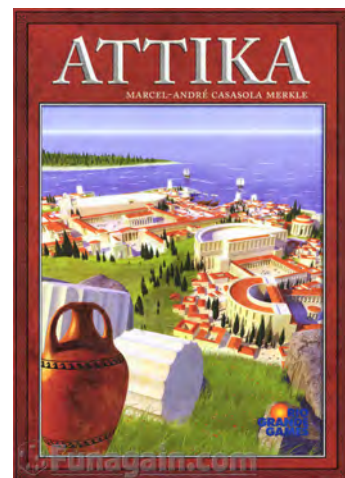
One of the games I found at *Spiel* this year is also high on my list: **Industria**, designed by Michael Schacht and published by *Queen Games*. The game (and board) is about the development of technology in different stages ('Epochs'). There is a clever auction mechanism for players to buy tiles representing buildings, goods, bonuses or technology. Players may then 'build' their tiles, which may mean paying money and/or raw materials. Money tends to be tight, though some buildings produce goods for extra income. There are several ways of getting bonus points, all of which adds up to a fairly intricate scoring system and lots of things to consider when choosing what you want to do each turn. I like it: 10/10 and a full review to follow.

I mentioned **Alhambra** (designed by Dirk Henn and published by Queen Games), which won the prestigious *Spiel des Jahres* (Game of the



Year), in last issue. This is high on my list, too: 9/10. I understand we can expect an English language version this year from *Uberplay*. I wrote about **New England** (designed by Alan R Moon and Aaron Weissblum, published in German by *Goldsieber* and English by *Uberplay*) in *Flagship 103*. I give this 9/10. It's a fine tile placement game that gives players lots of decisions to make and has a clever bidding mechanism. Issue 103 is also where I reviewed Reiner Knizia's **Amun-Re** (published in German by *Hans im Glück* and in English by *Rio Grande Games*). Another clever game with an Egyptian theme from the master: I rate it a 9. **Balloon Cup** (designed by Stephen Glenn and published in German by *Kosmos* and in English by *Rio Grande*), which I wrote about in *Flagship 104*, is also in my list as it's an excellent two-player game: 9/10.

This brings me to another of the *Spiel '02* crop: **Attika** (designed by Marcel-André Casasola Merkle and published by *Hans im Glück*). Players represent Ancient Greek city-states expanding across a board that also expands. The board is made up of tiles with a hexagonal grid: depending on the number of players, you start with some of these on the table. At certain points players can add to the board - just one tactical option. Some spaces show landscape features (forest, mountains, lakes etc) and there are shrines at the corners of the board. Players have round tiles of different buildings. The first to get a chain of buildings between two shrines or place all their tiles onto the map wins. In order to place a building, the right terrain has to be there - or played from the cards each player holds. So, if a building needs a lake, and two forests, you can play it adjacent to two forests on the board by playing a lake card (or any two cards - a neat touch, which reduces the effect of not having the right cards in your hand). However, some buildings can be placed free if they're adjacent to a specific building (each player has a mat showing these connections). The connections build up chains of buildings. A player who gets a full chain on the board and connected together gets a little wooden amphora. This s/he can use at some point to take an extra action on the turn. In their turn, players may turn over two of their face-down buildings. These can be placed on the board - if you have the resources to do so - or placed on your mat. Alternatively, players may place up to three buildings from their mat onto the board. Players may also forgo an action and pick up a card instead. As you can see, there are lots of tactical options in the game. As everything is displayed openly, it's very easy to see who's close to winning. Which means that they get stopped. A game between players who know what they're doing will usually be won by whoever gets all their buildings down first - and it's usually pretty close. Good stuff, I give it a solid 9.



Another game I saw at *Spiel* is **Santiago**, which was something of a surprise. Designed by Claudia Hely and Roman Pelek (new names to me), it's a board game about irrigating agricultural land. The board is divided into square plots, with each square of four bounded by an irrigation ditch. You start by placing a blue marker representing a spring (or maybe a pump?) at one of the intersections. Each turn, a number of

plantation tiles, which come in several different types of crop, are available. Players bid for the order in which they choose and place one of these. They then place their tiles and add farmers. Next there's some further bidding for placing water along a ditch - either from the original spring or extending the existing flow. The overseer, which passes round according to who bid least for a plantation, takes the money bid for the water or pays to place their own choice. Unirrigated plantations diminish until they become desert - which doesn't take long. Players have one extra water each, which they can place during the game. After 11 turns the game ends and you score points: contiguous plantations of the same crop are the key. Each set of plantations scores the number of plantations times the number of farmers on them. Add those up plus any money in hand to get your score. At first sight, I didn't expect much from this game, but it surprised me. The auctions work well and make for a challenging game. Okay, it's not particularly deep, but it's a rewarding 45 minutes - an English language edition is due from *Rio Grande* in the Spring. It gets 9/10 from me.

Warfrog's **Princes of the Renaissance** is the last of my top, umm, nine. Designed, as always, by Martin Wallace, this is a fascinating game that I am still trying to get to grips with. I've reviewed it fully in this issue and it's at least 9/10.

There are a number of other games just under this list, but I think that's enough to be going on with. I will add a few honourable mentions, though. These are for excellent games that were re-printed during 2003. **Domaine** is a re-working of Klaus Teuber's **Löwenherz** of a few years ago. What Teuber has done is replace one time-consuming mechanism with something simpler. The result is that the revised game works really well. It's published in German by *Kosmos* and in English by *Mayfair Games*. **Fresh Fish** is an English language edition of Friedemann Friese's game. It's a very abstract game of tile placement and spatial awareness. Luckily the brain-burn factor is low once you've worked it out



and the result is an excellent game. The new edition is the first game from a new American company, *Plenary Games*. **I'm the Boss** is a classic Sid Sackson game (it was last published, in German, as **Kohle, Knies & Knete** by Schmidt in 1994). The game is a series of deals, with players negotiating about who to cut in or out of the deal and how big their share is. You're constrained by the cards on the table, so there's lots of tactical card play as well. It's terrific fun. Again, the new edition is from a new US publisher, *Face 2 Face Games*. Finally, **PitchCars** is a new version of **Carabande**, designed by Jean du Poël. A car-racing game in which you flick wooden pucks along a smooth racetrack. Yes, and it's even more fun than it sounds! This has been brought back to us by a French company, *Ferti Games* (and is definitely available in UK shops).

PRINTERS

AD

Land Creation in RPGs

SIMON WILLIAMS describes the joys of creation ...

ONE OF THE more daunting (but rewarding) aspects of running a fantasy PBM roleplaying game (or indeed a tabletop campaign) is the work that goes into the creation and building of the land(s) / world where all the adventures are set.

Because you are, effectively, creating an entire world or at least a land or two, this is one of those jobs that can quite conceivably never come to an end, depending on the amount and scale of detail you decide to build into it. But it is also one of the more fun and rewarding jobs. It fuels the imagination and is one of those things where the more you think about it, the more you think of to add richness and depth to the setting you have conjured up.

The whereabouts

Drawing the initial maps is always great fun. I have drawn countless maps, all of them terrible (thankfully I have been relieved of the duty). Before building the detail of your world, it is always helpful to have an appreciation of where everything is. Mountains, forests, swamps, plains, villages, towns and cities- just the very fact that they are on the map can give you ideas about what goes on there, who lives there, what adventures might be had there, and so on. In short, a pictorial view can provide great inspiration. Your maps do not need to be artistically any good (that's the job of an artist- but if you can draw well then that's always a bonus) but provided they're clear and fairly well laid-out, with a geography that makes sense for the world you're trying to create, they will do their job more than adequately.

There is also an almost inescapable tendency for people to draw their maps with the 'frozen, barren North' at the top (I have been guilty of this on numerous occasions), an assumption based only on our residence in the Northern Hemisphere. In fact, I had never come across a fantasy novel whose world map had the polar region in the south until I read Ian Irvine's excellent *Geomancer* last year.

Always the question that crops up during the creation of your world is how much detail to go into. However much information you put into the sphere of existence you've created, there is always the possibility for more detail. I am currently in the process of writing highly detailed pieces on each of the towns in one of my lands, something which itself could take decades if I let it. The town starts off as nothing more than a dot on the map. But, obviously, player characters are going to go there, so you need to be able to describe what it's like- the architecture, the history, the people, any peculiar local customs, byelaws, etc. And then, beyond that, there will be certain people in the town who are more likely than others to crop up in player characters' adventures. Bartenders, stablemen, farriers, blacksmiths... the list goes on. Of course, player characters will be meeting some of these people whilst in the town, so you could provide each of these non-player characters with their own description, personality, family history, dark secrets, odd psychological quirks, etc. Again, the amount of detail to be channelled into this area is a matter of common sense (how much is required?) and to a certain degree a matter of restraint.

Quite apart from all the people in the town, you then have all the various places. Houses, shops, market places, fortresses, possibly a castle or two, maybe a guild here and there. As you can see, the more you think about the place you've created, the more you can see the potential for greater and greater detail.

Underlying structures

One major thing to think about is how society is held together. Who rules the land, and how did that rule come to be? Is the law of the land obeyed? What do the people think of those who have power over them? Are there great regional differences: for example are the people in one area more

subservient to their rulers than those in another area?

A driving force

One mechanism that GMs tend to use quite often is an overriding (or underlying) plot device which consists of some major ongoing event in the land - perhaps an invasion from a neighbouring territory, or possibly the disintegration of the current ruling regime.

This is not to say that any setting you create needs this 'driving force' behind it. It can work perfectly well if the land is at peace, with characters seeking out adventure in the far-flung and mysterious corners of the realm. However, if you eventually want to bring matters to a head, and have a finite end to a particular land or setting (no matter how far in the future it might be) then it can be quite useful to have a major change going on - be it grindingly slow or catastrophically quick.

An endless history

Sometimes the evolution of a setting can take many years. I originally set *Chaos Trail* in Aphenhast when I started it in 1993, but Aphenhast was originally used in a tabletop roleplaying group that I GMed in 1991-92 - and before then it appeared in a terrible novel I wrote in 1989, called 'Aphielos'.

Your lands always have a beginning, no matter how far back the first seed was sown... but they need never end!



[Ed: The world described and depicted above is in no way related to Columbia Games' Hårnworld (reviewed in issue #101)]

Roleplaying Answers

ROBERT REES, editor of the RPG zine Carnel, replies to Lisa Fordham's article ...

LISA FORDHAM's article last issue, 'Roleplaying Questions', asked a number of questions about what might be called roleplaying clichés. Although Lisa questioned a number of different genres I have decided to focus on the genre I have a soft spot for, fantasy. I am not going to pretend that there are any hard and fast answers to any of these questions. These are a few thoughts of my own. I am not going to say much about the points regarding 'zoo' dungeons as it is rare to come across them these days and it would be too much like tilting at windmills.

The good monster

Why can't a monster be good? Why do all orcs have to be violent, greedy monsters? Well partly this is because most of the fantasy monsters and creatures are metaphors for certain aspects of the human condition and therefore they always seem slightly one-dimensional. Seen another way though, a monster that is good is, by definition, not really a monster. A monster should be dark, evil and lurking in the shadows of our normal lives. That's what they are there for. If just one of them turns out to be simply misunderstood then you lose a lot of the power and fear inherent in the idea of the hordes of creatures that wait out there in the woods, hills and darkness. Sometimes though we are a little sloppy in our use of the term 'monster' and use it when we mean things that are not human (or nice; like elves and dwarves).

Should these be allowed to be more fully rounded beings with multiple elements to their personalities? As a GM I would say yes but in terms of the game does it really matter whether an orc loves his mum and enjoys playing the pan pipes when he gets the chance? NPCs tend to be determined by their key traits: if that orc hates humans and wants to kill them all on sight (whether out of xenophobia or because humans killed his grandparents, for example) then the deeper elements of the personality are irrelevant. Creating fully rounded non-human NPCs is as tricky as creating fully-rounded human NPCs. In fact the separation between human and non-human has to some extent slipped away.

Why trust the thief?

I think Lisa is saying something about her own prejudices here: after all, why not trust the thief? Just because he is a thief does not mean that he is automatically dishonest! However, if you generalise it to 'Why do the PCs trust other PCs?' then there are a couple of points to be made. The first is that games that feature groups of people who do not trust one another can be fun but do tend to be quite short with little opportunity to develop the characters and the situation they find themselves in. If the group do not trust one another then the game tends to revolve around that mistrust and its resolution. This is a lot like Mafia TV shows and films where frequently the main plot ends up being about who you can trust and knocking off those you can't.

Creating a game where the characters mistrust one another but continue to work together on a long term basis is almost impossible without the co-operation of both the players and the GM. The GM needs to create some situation in their game world that is 'bigger' than the mistrust of the characters, a goal that they can agree on without agreeing with one another. For example, in the face of an apocalyptic danger all kinds of different groups might co-operate out of mutual self-interest. On the player side, the players too need to do their share of the work. They need to create characters that are not fanatical but are instead able to be ethically or morally flexible without going to the extreme of having someone who simply doesn't care what kind of people they hand round ('Childkiller? Cool!').

Overall, though, it is far easier to have a conventional group where essentially the members of the group trust and like one another. Of

course, this relationship might have to be built up over the course of a few sessions and there will always be the odd bit of bickering and scamming but therein is the game!

The appeal of Lawful Good

Why do people play characters with extreme, absolute alignments? Why do people think that because their character class is 'thief' they have to steal anything that isn't nailed down? Why do people play characters that are really clever, or very stupid, or really beautiful? Well, to some extent we are back to the clichés of the fantasy genre. Characters tend to be low on the introspection and high on the visible and distinguishing traits. Why do so many dwarves have Scottish accents? Why are the elves blonde? Why does the hero use a sword and not a spiked mace?

Well, to some extent it is so you quickly know that they are dwarves and they are elves and that is the hero. In some cases people may exaggerate their character's alignment because they want to establish the nature of their character quickly, so for example if my character is Lawful Good perhaps I am not going to have the character drink or look the opposite sex in the eye. It is lazy roleplaying but it helps start the character off. Hopefully later I can introduce something far more clever that shows my character is not always a pious, teetotaling self-important idiot.

Of course, the problem comes when people never do move away from the cliché, particular if the rest of the group does. Generally people over-exaggerate 'game terms' like alignment in their roleplaying because they are either lazy or uncertain. Lazy players stick to playing out their alignment like a religion because they cannot be bothered to add the detail to the character that would distinguish the individual from the thousands of other 'Neutral Good' characters. Uncertain players on the other hand tend to cling to the cliché of their alignment because they are not sure what else to do.

There are all kinds of different techniques for helping an uncertain player find out more about their character's personality than what is written in the Player's Handbook, and more than a few involve filling out the character's backstory. Instead of saying 'what alignment are you?' the question should be 'how did your character get to be the alignment they are?'. Alignment is one of the vestigial tails of roleplaying, as are most game mechanics that try to define a character's personality. **Pendragon** for example tried using paired personality traits, **Vampire** for the surface and inner soul of the character to be defined by various archetypes.

None of these systems really works out in my opinion because we simply don't know enough about psychology to say, mechanically, what makes people tick. It is better to give the whole issue over to the player to decide. About the only thing I think alignment might be good for is 'factional' concepts. In general you wouldn't want an angel to pick up a Devil's Pitchfork, an occultist to wield a piece of the True Cross or a vampire to throw Holy Water round. If you have abstract values like good and evil or principles such as order and chaos being physically manifest in the world you probably want to have some way of recording the affinity an individual character has towards such ideas. In this case I prefer to reverse the situation and, (somewhat like the system used in the **Stormbringer** RPG and the **Neverwinter Nights** computer game), have the character's actions influence their alignment. This seems to give uncertain players something concrete to work with in terms of numbers and keeps the emphasis on the roleplaying.

[Details of Robert's zine Carnel may be found at:
<http://carnel@sdf.eu.org/metazine>]

Gaming...

With Children - Part 2

NICK ROSEBY weighs his parental responsibilities ...

THIS PAST game day, my wife was planning on taking both of the kids out of the house to the store.

W00t! A game day without my two-year-old climbing in my lap and trying to eat my dice! A game day without my six-year-old needing help with the tough parts of a PS2 or Gamecube game!

Then my wife started to feel ill. She told me not to send everyone home, but she was going to take a nap. I had to take care of the kids. Dang.

Don't get me wrong, I love my children. They are simply not conducive to gaming. I don't blame my wife at all. She was sick. She takes care of things when I am sick and I do the same for her. Everyone in my group knows who comes first. When my daughter comes in crying or needs a diaper change, the game goes on hold until the crisis is resolved. No questions asked. They all know the way to the door if they don't like it. There would be no hard feelings. They are my friends. If they are not enjoying themselves because of my family dramas, I would not begrudge them the chance to find a non-child environment in which to game. They knew what to expect coming in. They are pretty cool about it, too.

We have missed a lot of gaming sessions due to family illnesses. There are eight people in our gaming group. Half of us have kids, half of us don't. Kids get sick. It's a fact of life. They also have this nasty tendency to pass it to their parents. For the last three months we have missed almost all of our sessions. We have three game masters, two of whom have kids. Our

Werewolf: the Apocalypse GM had sick kids, so she couldn't run her game. The **Amber Diceless** GM was supposed to fill in for her with his game when this happened, but the games are hosted at my house. My kids were sick, too. I run the **Buffy the Vampire Slayer** game, so we had a lot of off days there, too. Needless to say, we spent a lot of time jonsing for our gaming fix.

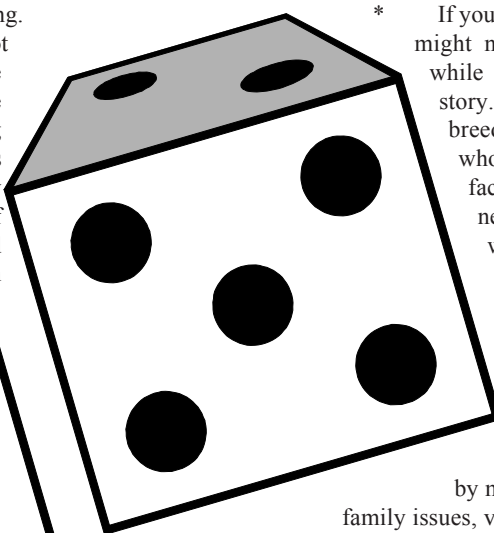
I am very fortunate to have a group who understands the situation. I wouldn't say that our non-parents are happy to let a game or four slide, but they are not angry about it either. When they are sick, we don't jump down their throats. When our kids are sick, they understand that we have our priorities: children, spouses, jobs, and gaming. I have played with groups where this was not the case. I have seen people thrown out of gaming groups for having too many family-related issues. If they couldn't devote the time to play, they were out.

My advice? Chill out.

If you have someone in your group who has a family, accept the fact that what you are doing is playing a game. It is not real life. If you know that the player is not going to be around all the time, design the story so that it is not reliant on that character. I have become quite inventive with

removing and replacing characters. I almost always have an NPC or two who could be set up to need medical attention or safeguarding. The missing character has the responsibility of babysitting. If they take extra time to reintroduce, they understand the need for it.

Set up ground rules before a game starts. Here are some of ours:



* If you are out for any reason, you might need to wait next session while we get you back into the story. No complaining or you will breed bad mojo with the people who were there. We respect the fact that you had to be out, you need to respect the fact that we were there.

*If you are out, it had better be a good reason. Going to a movie is not a good reason. People are relying on you to be a part of an ongoing story. Show a little respect

by making it a priority. Illness, family issues, visiting relatives, work, etc. are all good excuses. Flaking out is not.

* If a person is out for several sessions for a good reason, deal with it. Don't give them grief because they had sick children. If this is an issue with your group and you knew that this person had children, you should not have invited that person in the first place. I respect groups who do not admit people with children. It's better than kicking them out later.

* Unless authorized by the GM and the people under his/her roof, do not bring your children to a game session. We had this happen a few times and my wife had to baby-sit and keep the children from destroying the house while we played. It was not fair to her or to the kids. They were not used to the rules of our house and headed straight to my wife's doll shelf. You know, the one with expensive porcelain dolls? Our kids know better, but the newbies didn't. Much chaos ensued. There has since been an understanding amongst all of us that the kids need to stay at home. YMMV.

* If you drop a die, find it immediately. Two-year-olds and dogs like the way that they taste. Do not bring tiny dice into a house with a young child or a dog. You are just asking for trouble.

* If you bring canned drinks, don't pull the pop-tops off. The two-year-old likes those, too. The dog isn't so crazy about them, but she is more discriminating that way.

Those are just a few, you will no doubt think of more which may be pertinent to your particular circumstances. For those of you who do not have kids yet, it's probably going to happen sooner or later. As we get older, some of us do settle down, have kids, and find safe places to hide our dice. Give up Gaming though? Never!

Superstition in Roleplaying

LISA FORDHAM discusses issues and reviews material for RPGers...

AS A GM, if you can create something more startling from your imagination than from history, it is probably unbelievable. Now this is not necessarily a bad thing: for the High Fantasy world, if your players will buy the idea of a sky-borne empire whose rulers float above their subjects in aerial castles built of the stuff of clouds, and who are constantly at war with the elemental power of Earth personified in mighty wyrms who leach their power from the soil itself, then I envy you. In fact, let me know when I can join your campaign! But for believable, rich campaign worlds with excitement balanced by realistic settings, then look no further than a quick digest of our own history.

An important point, however, is that the example given above was not always so unbelievable. Bishop Agobard of Lyons reported during the rule of Charlemagne in 810 that the rumour was rife amongst the populace that the country was being invaded by the cloud-people of 'Magonia', borne aloft in flying castles and stealing the Frankish crops after beating it down with hailstones! After investigation, however, he was able to declare that this was not the case, but that means that a learned bishop felt it necessary to check. Now if that is the case in a world without Magick, imagine one where a month or two of experience can find one summoning up explosive balls of fire! And there is the first pointer to creating a believable but 'authentic' fantasy world. If the worst, third-rate wizard can summon up displays of dancing lights and deadly missiles, think how superstitious the average peasant will be. Think of the awe in which they will hold that supposedly weak 1st level Sorcerer!

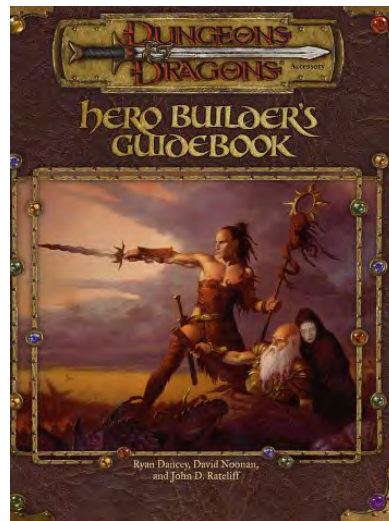
I grew up in Scotland. It is less than 350 years since we last burnt witches - my great, great, great-grandfathers were alive at the same time as people whose fathers saw it happen - and we were arguably amongst the most liberal of nations at that time. Now imagine the fear and suspicion with which a farmer three hundred years before *that* would regard someone who in all probability could kill him with a word. That's a first level Wizard or Sorcerer in the D20 system.

The Oracle at Delphi was regarded throughout the ancient world as infallible (if persistently obtuse). A negative augury from the priestess Pythia sitting amidst the narcotic gases of its cave would stop a tyrant launching an invasion or drive a Roman to supreme power. When the first famous Brutus, 400 years before the descendant that stabbed Caesar, and two companions were told by the Oracle that the first to kiss their mother would achieve the highest office, his friends rushed home to Rome. Brutus knelt and kissed the ground, only to become Consul of the Republic.

But no-one ever wrote down the predictions in advance. Every report for hundreds of years was written down after the 'prediction' was true. So imagine the power of the lowliest D&D diviner who can actually read a mind or sense a motive! When Scipio Africanus led the army of the Roman Republic - with little doubt the best soldiers of their time, and victorious in scores of battles - in the invasion of Carthage, he fell over as he clambered ashore from his boat. That could have spelt the end of the invasion: his legions saw him stumble, and this was such a disastrous omen that they might have refused to go any further! But he quickly quipped that they should note how he had hit Africa hard, and the omen was transformed into a good one.

So your players (if they are role-players) and your non-player characters (if you want to make things interesting!) should be superstitious to an extent that makes a Californian, new-age crystal-clutcher seem

rational. Make it a tradition that adventurers setting out have a priest read the entrails of a goat (one which they have to purchase, of course!) before they leave. Inform them that they see a hawk kill a dove before the entrance to the caves they are approaching. If two party members are arguing, make things a little more interesting by telling them that they see two ravens fighting over a scrap of meat. It all helps add flavour!



Review: Hero Builder's Guidebook

You know how it is: you're in the local games store, and you really want to buy something. You've got all the 3rd Edition sourcebooks. You've got a stack of adventures that will see your campaign for the next year. You've even bought all the *Knights of the Round Table* back-issues you can feasibly need. You're in the realm of the ill-conceived WotC money-making spin-off. It's not like you haven't been stung before. You bought the Dungeon Builder's handbook, and found word-

for-word reprints of stuff from the Campaign and Catacomb Sourcebook, which was a straight lift from the Adventure Builder's Guide, which you felt cheated buying because you already owned the 1st Edition Dungeoneer's Survival Guide. But surely this time it will be different.

Well, it is and it isn't.

The good news is that this stuff is original. I didn't recognise any of it from before. Sixty-four pages on character background, and on examples for each class of how each race would behave. Want an idea for a halfling barbarian? Read this. No, don't! Want an idea for a halfling barbarian? Think one up! Ask your GM for info on a suitable area! As for the tables of background ideas? Well, for one thing, why make them tables? Why not just a list to be picked from as you see fit for your character? Who actually rolls dice these days to see if your character is a lord or a street urchin? The product reads like someone has said: 'Gee, all those backgrounds and character archetypes from White Wolf products sure are popular. Let's put them in random tables and they'll be great for D&D!'

But that's just me being picky: you can use them as lists to choose from, after all, and eschew the dice-rolling. No, the bit I hate most of all - the bit that I got really depressed about - was the section on how to min-max your character based on race and class. It really is that blatant: what stats to put in what attributes for the 'perfect' half-orc fighter, elven bard, human rogue etc. From the school of thought that brought you the old Unearthed Arcana 'get your pair of 18 stats here' character generation methods.

A must-buy for munchkins and min-maxers. I feel embarrassed going back into the shop where I bought it. They probably feel embarrassed having sold it to me.

Fantasy Economics

Why economists are obsessed with online role-playing games

ROBERT SHAPIRO, on drawing economic parallels ...

[We thought readers might be interested in the issues raised by this article: it first appeared on the web at <http://slate.msn.com/id/2078053/>]

THE MOST popular article in the leading economics Web archive doesn't concern tax policy, international trade, or the theory of the firm. It's about an online fantasy game.

During the past year, nearly 16,000 people have downloaded a 40-page economic analysis of **EverQuest**, Sony's popular online fantasy world of Norrath. 'Virtual Worlds: A First-Hand Account of Market and Society on the Cyberian Frontier', by California State Fullerton economics professor Edward Castronova, is the No.1 article in the history of the Economics Research Network, an Internet library of tens of thousands of professional journals and research papers in economics. The article* not only outpaces the online works of every Nobel laureate, it is also the fourth-most popular article on the entire Social Science Research Network, which contains more than 75,000 professional articles and abstracts in range of social sciences.

For cybergaming naifs - most males over age 30 (me included) and almost all women - virtual worlds are elaborate, multiplayer, roleplaying online environments in which each player's actions can affect many others. At any given moment, 50,000 or more people from more than 120 countries are online at EverQuest, moving their personal 'avatars' - wizards, trolls, amazonlike women, and a dozen other types - through the fanciful landscapes of Norrath. These dramas unfold on more than 40 dedicated Sony servers, each accommodating up to 2,000 players interacting with the program and each other. (EverQuest is only one of several popular MMORPGs - 'massively multiplayer online role-playing games'. The oldest, **Ultima Online**, has 225,000 players; and the largest, **Lineage**, has more than 4 million subscribers, mostly in Korea.)

What intrigues Castronova and other economists about EverQuest - beyond the fact that more than 500,000 people pay Sony \$13 a month to participate - is that something resembling a nascent economy has emerged in Norrath. Inadvertently, EverQuest has become a virtual experiment in some of the fundamental questions in economics: What are the necessary conditions for markets; how much government does capitalism require; and how do equality and inequality affect economic development?

According to Castronova's account of it, EverQuest has something to gratify economists of all political stripes. For natural-law types, Norrath suggests that the conditions for vibrant markets to develop are pretty minimal. Libertarians can delight that 'government', in the form of rules restricting a player's activity, is also limited in Norrath. And liberals can take heart that Norrath's market and society rest on initial conditions of radical equality.

The most basic condition for market activity built into EverQuest is that resources in Norrath are limited. In particular, a player chooses his avatar's initial traits, but a character with the power to heal wounds, for example, will lack agility; and another smart enough to decipher codes will be physically weak. Unlike real life, therefore, everyone in Norrath starts out with roughly equal resources.

The second basic condition of self-regulating economic life in this virtual world, as in our own, is that nothing is free. An avatar's initial assets aren't enough to make much headway in the game, so players intent on navigating Norrath's challenges have to work at either developing new skills or earning new assets.

The intriguing part is that most MMORPG players expand their assets and abilities not through violence or chicanery, the modus operandi of a typical single-player computer game, but through virtual market transactions. Hundreds of thousands of EverQuest players spend most of



their time in Norrath trading or cooperating with other avatars, buying goods from creatures ('bots') built into the program, or using auction sites inside the game. To facilitate this, EverQuest adopted two other key conditions from real economic life: A currency called 'platinum pieces', or PP, can be earned by completing various tasks, and there are rudimentary rules for buying, selling, and bartering.

These few conditions are apparently all it takes to precipitate capitalism in cyberspace. As in a real economy, virtual market conditions change in response to how players behave. For example, shrewd players who know Norrath's nooks and crannies will purchase goods in a game zone where they've become abundant and then sell them in another where they're in greater demand.

The kicker for economists is that these virtual economic relationships have broken into the real US economy. When players found EverQuest's bartering rules inadequate, they started exchanging the armor, spells, and other Norrathian objects of value at real-world auction sites. These transactions are conducted not in Norrathian PP but in US dollars and then completed between avatars inside the game. (You pay in dollars at a real-world site, then the seller's avatar gives your avatar the goods in Norrath.) You can even buy another player's avatar, complete with its accumulated skills and assets. Sony tried to stop all these transactions and persuaded eBay and Yahoo! Auctions to bar them on the grounds that they involve Sony's intellectual property. But this kind of protectionism is hard to enforce whether the goods are real or virtual: trade in Norrathian goods and services simply migrated to other sites.

The exchange of goods and services in Norrathian PP, inside the game, and US dollars, outside, creates an exchange-rate relationship between the two currencies. Based on surveys of these market exchanges, Castronova calculated that one unit of PP was worth a little more than one US penny. That technically makes Norrathian PP a 'stronger' currency than the Japanese yen or Italian lira, albeit a thinner and less liquid one. (But Sony apparently could use lessons in central banking: as in real-world Japan, price deflation has hit the market for Norrathian goods.)

The economic dynamics of EverQuest also allow Castronova to calculate wage levels in Norrath. Take the PP value of an average avatar's skills and assets, divide it by the average number of hours required to accumulate those holdings, and an average avatar 'earns' 319

PP/hour, or \$3.42/hour at the prevailing exchange rate. (This doesn't sound like much, but Norrath's deflation means that 'real' wages are actually rising.) Castronova estimates that Norrath's per capita GNP is higher than India's or China's.

The similarities to real-world market behavior certainly owe much to the fact that EverQuest players know how real markets work and probably believe in markets. In this respect, Norrath resembles the more successful transitional economies of Central Europe, whose citizens had a history of capitalism to draw on when their communist regimes crumbled. (Russia, by contrast, had no history of market capitalism and has struggled to make the transition to free markets.)

EverQuest liberates its players from some of the dismal restrictions of real economic life. Norrath is a truer meritocracy than our own, with no one hindered or helped by personal history or family background. The game also offers the ultimate safety hatch (a super-enhanced version of Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection): fail at one of Norrath's deadly challenges, and you can start over with a new avatar and new identity.

What may be most striking about Norrath is that the virtual market doesn't require a powerful government. Norrathian economic life, conducted in PP or dollars, proceeds without laws stipulating the terms of exchanges, regulations dictating who can participate in various activities, or authorities enforcing contracts. There are no monetary or fiscal policies to manage demand and prices, and no safety net.

In this virtual world, a powerful government appears only briefly at the start, in the iron rule that everyone starts out with roughly equal assets. Then it retreats and lets economic nature take its course. In Norrath, more equality permits freer markets. This may provide the most important lesson of all from the EverQuest experiment: real equality can obviate much of a democratic government's intervention in a modern economy. Many of our own US government's current policies - progressive taxation, securities regulation, social insurance - are aimed at offsetting some form of inequality. If EverQuest is any guide, the liberal dream of genuine equality would usher in the conservative vision of truly limited government.

* This article can be freely downloaded from:
http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=294828

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VALKYRIE

A Day in the Life ...

... of a First Person Shooter Protagonist

JASON BROWN's hero beats the nasties ...

JAKE SNAPSHOT was a man like you or I. He was a man with responsibilities and obligations to his friends and loved ones, with too much to do and not enough time to get it all done in. Jake Snapshot had a beautiful girlfriend, a modest but pleasant apartment in the suburbs, and a good buddy from the office. The difference between Jack Snapshot and you is that Jake Snapshot is a hero in a First Person Shooter, and this is his journal in his own words.

6:00 AM: Alarm went off. Attempted to hit the snooze button but was not able to from bed. Got up and strafed until I was directly in front of the alarm and then acted. Snooze button activated.

6:05 AM: Alarm went off again. Got up, sprinted into the shower, and acted. The shower turned on and water phased through my chest for several seconds. Sprinted into the bedroom and decided to wear my mega armor to work. It had respawned on top of the dresser. I repeatedly ran at the dresser trying to get dressed but the mega armor was not cooperating. Decided to jump on the bed and from there to the dresser but the low ceiling prevented me. Then I realized I could crouch and jump simultaneously and I managed to get on top of the dresser. Armor Level was raised to 200%.

6:15 AM: Phone began ringing, so I used the phone. Two weird black bars closed in from the top and the bottom of my vision and my perspective was wrenched out of my body. My boss at the office was screaming at me that two people had called in sick and I needed to hurry in and finish preparing the IT report for the Thursday planning meeting. It was like a nightmare. I couldn't control myself and just made some smartass sarcastic comment before hanging up the phone. In a rush I jumped up on the counter top and sprinted over several cans of soda to restore my health to 100%. Then I sprinted to the front door and used the front door. As if in a dream again the black bars returned and I saw myself driving to work. When I came to from this vision I was standing in the lobby of my office building.

6:50 AM: Arrived at work and headed immediately into the break room for a donut and a can of soda. The donuts were still in their crates so I took out my infinite ammo blaster and destroyed three crates, each of which contained a single donut. I was only hungry enough to eat one but making the crates explode is just too much fun to pass up. After that I headed to the soda machine and attempted to use it but nothing happened. I bashed the soda machine once with a crowbar and it made a breaking window sound and sparked. A soda was dispensed. While enjoying my donut and soda by running on top of them I was joined by fellow coworker and best friend Ching Chang Darkie. He's a great guy. He's half Asian and half black and he has a totally in your face attitude that just makes me laugh at all times. He said 'Herro Snapshot-san, you got any flied chicken and watelmerron?' That crazy Ching Chang!

8:40 AM: I used my computer over three thousand times today in my office cubicle and the IT report for the planning meeting was finally almost done. I used my computer one last time and sprinted to the printer to begin printing and then photocopying the document. Horror gripped me like a monkey grips a magical banana as I realized that we're all out of 40 pound Hammermill stock. I ran over several unlabeled reams but they turned out to be low quality Xerox paper inadequate for the report.

I sprinted to the supply room and opened the door by using it. It made a loud creaking sound and swung slowly open. Some asshole had used all of the 40 pound stock at the printers and had used all of it in the supply room. All that was left were a few dozen boxes of shotgun shells neatly lined up on the floor and I couldn't even pick those up because I didn't have a shotgun.

Just as I was working up the nerve to head downstairs into the basement supply room Ching Chang approached. He stood there staring at me like I should do something so I sprinted up to him and used him. He said 'Yo homesrice, whatever you are doing I wirr be your main man' and then he brandished an Uzi. I tried to decline his offer, but Ching Chang insisted. He's a great guy but he is not the sort of person you want around in a dangerous situation like heading into the basement. Not too bright if you know what I mean.

9:00 AM: I descended the steps into the basement with Ching Chang close behind. He kept prodding my back with that machinegun and I was really worried he was going to unload on me at the first sign of trouble. We entered the lair of the rat monsters and were immediately besieged by several dozen mutant rats. I dispatched the first wave fairly easily with my infinite ammo and began to sprint around picking up the assault rifles and grenades that they had dropped. By the time the second wave of fire ball rats spawned Ching Chang had managed to get himself stuck against the wall and was spinning really fast shooting his Uzi. I grunted with pain every time a fireball slammed into me while Ching Chang screamed 'Snapshot-san, I am under attack!' Oh great, thanks Ching Chang, I couldn't see you there spinning like a tornado and shooting randomly with that Uzi of yours.

Finally I dealt the last of the fireball rats a fatal blow with my infinite ammo pistol and we headed into the refinery section of the basement. I knew that this would be one of the most dangerous areas thanks to the hundreds of oil filled barrels lining the catwalks and Ching Chang's tendency to fire at anything. I sprinted forward on the catwalk and Ching Chang immediately got stuck behind a cluster of exploding barrels. I figured this was for the best and left him standing there while I rushed forward to face the cyber zombie troopers beginning to appear. I blasted through them with my assault rifle, taking advantage of fortuitous exploding barrel placement to destroy clusters of them within the barrel's radius of death. Near their spawn point a cluster of them had actually clipped through the wall and were stuck right next to an exploding barrel. See you in hell, zombie troopers!

When I finally fought my way to the door to the adjacent room I used the door and it wouldn't open. A disembodied voice informed me that '[I] can't leave a companion behind in the level' so I had to backtrack all the way through the catwalks and shove Ching Chang out from behind the barrels he was stuck to. Not even a word of thanks from him as we rushed back to the door and proceeded to the Spider Queen's Burrow.

9:25 AM: Spiders were everywhere! Endless waves of them in varying sizes and colors attacked us as we sprinted through the spider queen's lair on our way to face the demonic monstrosity herself. Somewhere along the line Ching Chang had picked up a shotgun to match mine and he turned out to be a menace with that thing. Every time spiders attacked us I had to strafe quickly out of the way before Ching Chang would bury half of a spread of buck shot into my back. Then whenever I would be ready to open up with my own shotgun Ching Chang would run forward at the last



second to block my line of fire. Eventually I tricked him by running up and down a set of stairs until he got confused and just started walking constantly into the wall. I left him there and gunned down an increasingly large swarm of spiders that frequently just appeared

bikinis and they made this horrible orgasmic moan when you shot them to death. There were even robot zombies. I don't know what kind of retard makes a robotic zombie, probably the same kind of retard who puts our office supplies at the far end of a monster infested basement. I should have just dipped into petty cash.

By the time we finally made it into the Cathedral of Pain area of the basement it was almost my lunch hour. Pretty typical that I would bust my ass through another day eating lunch on the go while my boss sits in his air conditioned office earning overtime for taking a dump after five o'clock. I sprinted up to the giant skull-encrusted double doors and used them. They swung open and immediately in came those black bars as the cyber demon zombie overlord stomped out towards me and Ching Chang. Again I would have loved to have emptied about three magazines of assault rifle ammo and at least a dozen rockets into his head, but no such luck.

The thing had a chain gun rocket launcher. I don't know if you're aware of what that is but it's not pleasant and amounts to about one explosive rocket hurtling directly at you every half second. Luckily no one put any furniture in the Cathedral of Pain so I was restricted to strafing and even jumping over

out of walls to attack me from all sides.

The spiders were really taking it to me after a while, but I stumbled upon a hidden room accidentally that contained a clean mega armor outfit and several first aid kits as well as plenty of ammo. I took advantage of this good fortune by sprinting over everything and topping myself off. I would have liked to have been able to pick up the spare medical supplies after I got myself up to speed but for some reason once I felt healthy I was not able to pick up any first aid kits.

Shortly after this I found myself in the spider queen's lair itself. Those damn black bars came in from the top and bottom again and I was paralyzed as I watched the spider queen slowly descend from the ceiling and strut around before she began attacking me. I would have loved to have blasted her into little gory pieces while she was showboating, but those accursed black bars robbed me of my opportunity. Instead I had to fight off the baby spiders that kept jumping off her back while simultaneously trying to shoot her in the mouth whenever she did her acid spray attack. Needless to say I had my hands full, but somehow I managed to finish the bitch and her cronies off. Then I had to walk all the way back to the stairs to get Ching Chang.

10:30 AM: I hope I never have to jump again in my entire life. Minutes earlier I had to leap from platform to platform over an infinite gulf of despair and for some damn reason these hovering platforms were moving. Ching Chang would just fall into the pit repeatedly and then reappear on top of whatever platform I was on; I wished I had it so easy. For some reason Ching Chang can survive that fall, but I knew I would be dead the instant I missed one of these damned platforms. It certainly did not help that my inability to view myself from another perspective made gauging the distance to the next platform almost impossible. Somehow I did it though and we made it into the final level of the basement.

It was thick with zombies, red zombies that would explode when they got close to you, super zombies that were twice as big as normal ones and carried mini-guns, flying succubus zombies that looked like women in

his rockets. I tried to go back into the narrow hallways that would confine him but I guess all the doors locked when we came in. Ching Chang went down after about five seconds, blasted into pieces by a direct rocket hit. I figured this would ruin my day but for some reason I was able to keep fighting the boss of office supplies. At last a well-placed rocket took the beast down!

The black bars came back and I saw myself and the mysteriously intact Ching Chang loading our arms with Hammermill 40 pound stock. Now all we had to do was back track through every level that was sure to be full of monsters once again.

4:10 PM: I was thinking I might get home on time after all. Ching Chang and I had made it back from the basement and had printed, copied, and collated all of the IT reports and it was still almost an hour before it was time to leave. We headed into my boss's office to drop the reports off. For some reason my boss had decided to redecorate with a shitload of those exploding barrels from the refinery in the basement. I thought that seemed like a pretty dumb idea at the time but I just wanted to unload those damn reports. Unfortunately, my boss was feeling chatty. While he was telling me about some fishing trip and flipping through the report Ching Chang must have noticed something. He sprinted over to the nearest cluster of exploding barrels and drew his shotgun. Before I could say anything a rat emerged and Ching Chang opened fire indiscriminately. The barrels went up like a propane tank covered with C-4 and gibbed Ching Chang completely.

When the dust had settled I looked at my boss with dismay. 'These reports are worthless without Ching Chang!' he exclaimed to me, 'You're going to have to start over.'

I blinked and I was back in the spider queen's lair with Ching Chang in tow. I had always thought my life autosaved after every door.

Maybe now that you kids realize just how hard Jake Snapshot has it, you won't try to emulate him and go on your spree killings or harass old people like your favorite Wolfenstein character. Hooligans.

THE MIGHTY PEN



Roleplaying questions

Lisa Fordham's recent article asking questions of roleplaying conventions had two questions that seemed to ask a lot about religion as it is used in games.

Firstly there was the point about having evil gods being expected to heal their followers. Well, this entirely reasonable in my view as one of the things that all gods are asked to do is intervene on behalf of their followers, and protection and recovery from disease and injury (even death) are the most common requests. Even gods that are antagonistic towards people can be propitiated to avoid getting ill or hurt. What seems interesting to me here is what the purposes of evil gods are in games. Thinking back to historical religions, most evil gods exist to either explain why the world is imperfect or to provide a rival that the good gods defeat. In most PBMs I've played, though, the evil gods tend to exist to do evil to those that do not worship them and reward those that do. Which makes them the same as the good gods: interesting. Same goals, different means. I'd be interested if any moderators can say whether they have ever gone into why the evil gods are evil and what evil means for the game?

The other related question was about 'Jewish vampires' and why vampires are repelled by crucifixes and not, say, the Star of David. Well, the interesting thing here is the idea that all horror stories exist in the same universe, all obeying the same rules. Some games do follow this line, so that in the **Vampire** RPG vampires are either immune to all holy symbols, repelled by their cultural icons or repelled by anything that is intrinsically holy or charged with virtuous belief. **Call of Cthulhu** takes the opposite tack and says that religions are essentially meaningless in this bleak physical existence we endure in which god-like beings are to be found and yet even they, who are far beyond human measure, are clearly circumscribed by an indifferent physical universe. I personally don't like the idea of one homogeneous United Theory of Horror as if you have vampires being repelled by the Seal of Solomon or a Buddhist mantra then equally it means djinn being command by the cross or a Gaki returned to the Hells by a piece of the True Cross.

It's only natural to want to build up a rational and sensible approach to the supernatural, but fundamentally to be scary (in a horror sense) a game has to break rational rules. At some point the impossible has to seem to occur and the accepted rules have to break down. That was the secret of some of my favourite *X-Files* episodes where by the first half of the episode was spent discovering the supernatural was at work while the second half was spent rationalising it back to normality.

On a totally different topic: positive mentions of roleplaying in the modern media. Well, the *Buffy* and *Angel* series seem to have lots of references to roleplaying and I cannot remember a negative one off the top of my head. The penultimate episode (of the series that was just shown on the BBC) had four characters relaxing before the big climax with a game of what was clearly meant to be **D&D**.

Robert Rees (Carnel)

Last issue, Lisa Fordham asked some good questions about fictional conventions, though her reference to the Sunnydale Syndrome (people who don't move despite ongoing mayhem and grue in their area) has been

addressed. In a recent episode of *Buffy*, folk were finally moving out and causing traffic jams. Mind you, it did take the Apocalypse to achieve this.

Chris Morris (Ulaidh Games)

Are games damaging?

In Larry Deyell's letter last issue he offered me some advice. Larry, I did seek professional advice, and I am still haunted by images that I will not go into here. I can face my demons, so I do not need your advice!

You decided to twist my words, but readers can see what I wrote for themselves. Not once did I call for a ban on kids playing PBM or PBeM, nor did I call any inmate 'sociopaths'. Perhaps you might like to explain your 'spin', because it detracts from your views. All I did was offer some words of caution. What people do as regards their games or their children is their own affair. If you and others do not like what I said, then tough. If I do not like your reactions, then tough on me!

You ask if you're a 'sicko' because you find it a laugh to fly a 'great many aeroplanes into skyscrapers in flight simulation games'. Well of course you are not! (but then again, I am not a 'professional'). Myself I like to avoid them. Anyway a psychiatrist in response to your question might ask, 'What do you think?'

PS: You're not a pilot or train driver by chance?

Les Jones

Listing shops

The Games Shops list in *Flagship* is a great idea. I've had dealings with some of the companies before but some I knew nothing about. I buy via mail order from *Leisure Games* all the time and find them very helpful and up to date. About twice a year me and some mates make a pilgrimage to *Spirit Games* in Burton. *Krackers* games shop in Exeter got me into PBM as while on holiday several years ago I nipped in and bought a roleplaying magazine which had an advert for KJC's *Quest* game. *2nd Games Galore* is a great source for old out of print games.

Michael Grant

Binders?

Have you ever considered a binder? I'd find one (or five!) pretty useful.

Paul Appleby

[The trouble with us supplying binders is that we'd need to order a large number to keep their price reasonable, and even then they'd be tricky to send on to readers. It's probably easier and cheaper to find suitable binders in a stationery shop, though I go for Pile 'Em High storage myself.]

Seeking Diadochi

About five years ago there was a superb PBM game called *Diadochi*, which was run by Dave Ford of Cyclops Games. I am trying to contact Dave or any ex-players out there to see if they are interested in starting the game up again. Can you help please by asking around or indeed asking in *Flagship* for people to contact me?

Tony Elbourn

[If you would like to contact Tony, get in touch with the Flagship office and we will pass the message on.]

WRITE FOR FLAGSHIP

We are continuing to expand our coverage of all times of game (whilst maintaining our PBeM roots), and welcome YOUR contributions. Is there anything you feel we should be including in future issues? Have we missed mentioning your favourite game? If so it's YOU we're looking for! See your name in print and receive FREE copies of *Flagship* as payment.

Contact Carol at the address on page 3, or carol@pbmgames.com

Feedback on Issue 105

ISSUE 105 was rated at 8.12, and your favourite articles included Rumours from the Front ('I do enjoy reading about other players' games' - **Michael Grant**), Phoenix, Middle Earth, Newsdesk, Lords of the Earth, Lisa Fordham's roleplaying questions, Jason Brown's suggestions for game monsters and Colin Forbes' reconstruction of fairy tales as game scenarios. It's nice to see that the humorous articles were enjoyed, as well as the serious ones. You'll see that Lisa's article has inspired a couple of letters in *Mighty Pen* as well as an article discussing the questions she asked. **Paul Appleby** says: 'I've failed totally to answer any of Lisa's questions satisfactorily. As for asking one, it's derivative of me to suggest it, but how about Peter Ansbach's *Fifty Things I'd Do If I Were An Evil Overlord?* - "If mega-villains are so damn clever, why do they always build their hideout on a volcano?"'

Most of you found nothing boring, though of course one of the troubles with extending our coverage is that not everyone enjoys all sorts of games. **Bill Moore** disliked, 'The boardgame stuff, because I don't play them. Strangely enough I still seem to be interested in the MMORPG articles, even though I'm not in any of those either!' 'The SIMS online article holds no appeal for me at all,' says **Michael Grant**, 'I just never saw the attraction in this type of game,' while **Chris Morris** found the Wildlife review 'hard to follow without the game.'

Question 4 asked how highly you value game materials. No-one junks stuff or leaves it lying around. 24% of you chose option (a), that you store everything away tidily when you stop playing, while 76% chose (d), that you've still got games and game notes from way back. 'Have developed a nasty hoarding habit over the years,' admits **Bill Moore**, 'Still got a whole set of turn reports from a "Starlord" game somewhere (now that really does show my age!)' 'I still have game notes from way back,' agrees **Paul Appleby**, 'It shows how much I've enjoyed games, but...'

Question 5 asked whether you'd consider buying/selling positions in an online game for real money. Everyone who replied would rather start from scratch, agreeing with **Phil Taylor** that 'building up a position is such a personal thing to do, and for me it's where the fun lies in a game.' Well, sales do certainly happen in online games! Maybe it's easier to sell a character if you're running several of them?

Question 6 asked how much time you spend in playing games. Several of you pointed out that this varies according to real-life commitments, but at present 67% use 1-2 evenings per week, 19% use most of the weekend and the remaining 23.8% use just a couple of hours every week. Oh, that's apart from a couple of you who are currently 'between games'.

Feedback on Issue 106

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

- 1 Please rate this issue from 1 (knackered) to 10 (a knockout).
- 2 Which articles/sections did you most enjoy, and why?
- 3 Which bored you, and why?
- 4 We've a couple of articles from players of piratical characters this issue. Do you prefer to play games with (a) people who are obviously co-operative, (b) people who make no bones about being aggressive, (c) people who'll react to your own aggression, (d) no contact with other players?
- 5 We think that the appearance of game materials has improved greatly within the last year or so. Do you agree? (a) Yes, it's hard to resist spending my money, (b) I always check reviews before buying a game, whatever it looks like, (c) I'd feel let down if a game doesn't look nice, whatever it's like to play.
- 6 Perhaps we can put an article together on this theme: Is there any particular game (of any sort) that you've played which you'll always remember? Interesting reminiscences welcomed!

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

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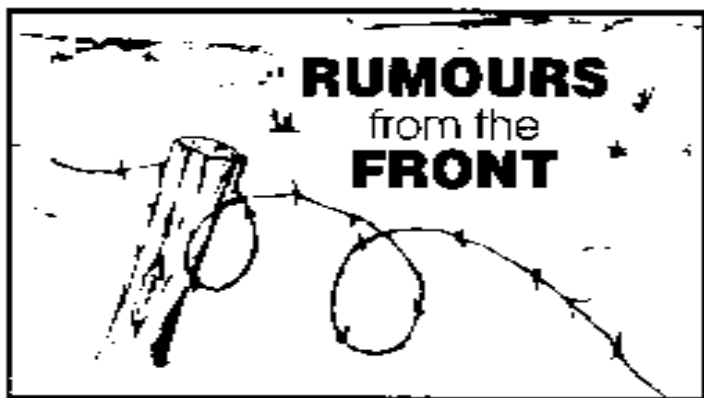
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Ulaidh Games
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[This column attempts to simulate a crowded bar full of players swapping experiences. It contains readers' uncensored comments, with no attempt to maintain fairness and balance; editing 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 November 14th

Curt Carpenter, Jay Christensen, Gunter D'Hoogh-Naets, C Foot, Colin Forbes, Michael Grant, Dave Harris, Mike Lay, Bob McLain, George Martinez, Craig Massey, Bill Moore, Henry Mueller, Carol Mulholland, Dave Panchyk, Dave Petersen, Robert Rees, Jason M Roberts, Stephen Taylor, Graham Turner, Wayne Yeadon

PLAY BY MAIL / PLAY BY EMAIL

Aspects Of Might (Silver Dreamer)

Michael Grant - 'Decided to start a free character in this game after reading about it in this magazine. Looks fun with lots of active and helpful players. My character is a tough Male Wodemis named Malachai Sicklemoon who holds the Aspect of the Moon. He's had a friendly chat with the local loremaster and been gifted with a clay mask. I'll have to wait and see how things develop from here.'

Austerlitz (Supersonic Games Ltd)

Graham Turner - 'If you have any interest in strategy/wargames, I would strongly recommend that you give Austerlitz a try. The complexity involved in getting your economy up and running, raising armed forces, developing colonial holdings, trading, diplomacy and if necessary fighting to hold what you have, and expand, makes this game the best PBM I have ever played - and I have played in many over the years. I must also comment on the standard of the GM, which over the years has been exemplary - turns are received on time, almost without exception, and queries via telephone always answered. Anyone who has read the introductions to the nations that Flagship is running and has any inkling that they would like to try - give it a go. I doubt you will be disappointed. It really is this good! By the way, I have not been bribed to send this report, I just want more of you to play.'

Destiny (Madhouse)

Mike Lay - 'Dropped the sci-fi game based on the Nexus game engine. The sci-fi style didn't do it for me, and the need to spend time maintaining, feeding, sleeping characters was a bit more onerous than the simple Dungeonworld system.'

Dave Harris - 'There's a fair bit of action in the game at the moment. Typically, if you want to get involved it's pretty easy. Either join the Stellar Patrol on one of its missions (you'll need at least one LEA trained crewman on your ship or in your party, the rest can be deputies) or start something off yourself. You can go exploring, bounty hunting or something a little shadier if you so wish and it seems plenty do the latter!

On the news front, Phil McCavity, murderer of the Stellar Patrol commander, and his gang were killed resisting arrest. The Stellar Patrol has also destroyed the four Pirate Lord vessels that had been menacing space in the Fantasm region.

Captain Squish, the greebly terrorist, has kidnapped the Governor of High Earth and is holding him for ransom. Squish has apparently passed his demands to the leader of a Cobalt Vulture marine squad, but for some reason the details have not been made public.

Terrorists have blown up an ECG administration building. No one has yet claimed responsibility. Fortunately Cobalt Vulture marines were in the area and so were able to lend a hand in the clearing up operation.

Still no word of colonies appearing yet, despite being told several months ago that we were now only waiting for the rules to be tidied up. I'm still very much enjoying the game, although it appears that all of the action is on the email lists. I think postal

players may be wondering if anything is actually happening.'

Destiny Marines (Madhouse)

Dave Harris - 'There are now three theatres of action now that the Damocles mission has ended. Things are proceeding well on Tariah, with the mission's objectives rapidly being fulfilled. However, a stargate has been located which leads to a pirate base, which will take a huge effort to neutralise. Another gate from the pirate base appears to lead to the heart of High Earth itself. Can these pirates be connected with any of the happenings there?

On Tarantia, the mechanical Shan are gradually being whittled down. Apparently the first of the four Shan stargate temples has been destroyed. Three more to go and with luck the invaders won't be able to bring in any more reinforcements, leaving the marines home base secure at last.

Several players have a presence on the Regency Fall station, which has been invaded by Kztich in a similar manner to Damocles. Except this time, the aliens appear to have brought in the heavy mob. The Brood Queen guarding the entrance to their infestation has driven back two entire squads of marines, with only the mission leader being able to match her blow for blow.

In related news, the Regency Fall mission leader has been named as a traitor by Admiral Esterhaus. It appears that Lt Commander Cardinal is in some way connected with the Kztich infestations as he was present despite having no orders to be there at both Damocles and Regency Fall just before the Kztich arrived. Anyone brave enough to take him on will earn a 50,000 Sterling reward if they win. Lt Commander Cardinal is the company commander of the Cobalt Vultures. Hmm, coincidence?'

Dungeonworld (Madhouse)

Mike Lay - 'Madhouse's extended plot lines continue to inform the game. And recent additions to various areas (new skills, character types) expand the game even further.'

Michael Grant - 'My Dwarfven warrior continues to wander lonely as a cloud. Still lots of zombies and plenty of around so he's happy. Just 177 gold required to finally complete his dream of owning a magical battle axe+5. Then he'll show the beasties around here what a hardnut Dwarf can do! I've also recently discovered the joys of skills within the game so will be attempting to learn 4 next turn.'

Dungeonworld - Frontier (Madhouse)

Mike Lay - 'Dungeonworld with an African/Jungle theme. Lost cities and the Ancient Imperial Palace beckon...'

Michael Grant - 'Still enjoying this game immensely. My Ranger and another player's Elf Fighter called Kassie decided it was time to be moving deeper into the old imperial palace as we got bored just waiting in the entrance room while everyone got their characters sorted out. *Big Mistake!* We now find ourselves trapped in a side room by lots of skeletons. All we can do is fall back while firing our bows for all we're worth. I've sent out a damsel in distress call to everyone fairly nearby but the big question is 'Will they arrive in time?' Nature Girl is injured as per usual thanks to a skeleton's sword slicing through her rent leather armour.'

Dungeonworld - Kyr (Madhouse)

Bill Moore - 'I agree with Robin Orman's comments from the last issue that the limited ammunition for ranged weapons is annoying. It's particularly annoying when you charge up to a monster through a hail of arrows, kill it and then find all it leaves you with is a bow with nothing to fire from it! Don't see myself dropping out, though, as it's providing plenty of amusement just trying to keep my minotaur alive at the moment. It's dangerous out there!'

Dungeonworld - BrokenLands (Madhouse)

Michael Grant - 'At long last Jai of the Dragon, my Human Monk, has found like-minded companions within Inner Slythia. Plans are being made for us to move down to the Crawling Islands. Not a pleasant place as that's where I lost my lost character! At least Jai has a ring+5 and a shield to match to keep him safe from harm. To say nothing of the stout Bo Staff at his side.'

Einstein's Lot (Ulaidh Games)

Carol Mulholland - 'My character has decided to trust the couple who've been sheltering her, and so far this trust hasn't been betrayed. But she's learn more than she feels comfortable with about the presence of a man who seems to have survived over the centuries and taken part in witches' ceremonies... Surely mere superstition? And won't she wreck her chances of advancement by staying with these obvious losers?'

Middle Earth PBM (ME Games Ltd.)

Jason M Roberts - 'It is my distinct pleasure to write to you this day on the Middle Earth Play by Mail game. I have played this game in two protracted stints over a 12 year period. I have played several scenarios and have enjoyed them all.

I always feel like the game is well designed and although anyone with as much imagination as it takes to get into such a gem may also want to tweak things a touch,

I believe this system works well.

The company that runs this game and moderates it for us has been timely in their information-giving and with keeping us up to date on the monetary situation so we don't miss out on a turn or two. All in all I feel they do a first rate job and should be commended for keeping things running smoothly. I appreciate their hard work and willingness to enterprise such a diversion as I am sure many others will attest.

I do hope the chaps across the pond do know how much they are appreciated and will continue to keep the system running and keep the variants a'coming.'

George Martinez - 'I truly enjoy it. It brings a little bit of everything to the table. You have military strategy, player interaction, undecided neutrals that can sway the game and team coordination is a must. And you can play each nation any way you want, even throw in some roleplaying. I have been in Middle Earth for 12 years and it looks like I'm in to stay.'

I have been though GSI, DGE, and now MEPBM and I must say that the best, fairest, and most customer oriented of the three has been MEPBM. I sing their praise and sing it loudly.'

Monster Island (*KJC Games*)

Michael Grant - 'I've had a chance to try the PDF format email turns and they look very impressive. Think I'll be sticking with this method of receiving turns.'

Haliok has become a devotee of the Dark God Shroud. He has also discovered a Far Inn offering training in some unusual arts. Time to spend some of those hard won Oculars!'

Nuclear Destruction (*Flying Buffalo*)

Bob McLain - 'Can you believe it? Nuclear Destruction has been running since 1970. And it hasn't changed a bit since then. When last I played, I could fit into a size 36 trouser. I played it again a few months ago. Both my trousers and my ego have gotten bigger, so I decided to announce my return in the World News that appears on each turn report. As a result, I hooked up with a couple old friends. But one guy, who still bore a grudge over my sack of Alexandria, or some such slight, real or imagined, from generations past, made it his business to fire his missiles at me, regardless of the consequences. The consequences, unfortunately, were minimal, and I died. I'll play again. Nuclear Destruction is my kind of game: few calculations, some planning, plenty of diplomacy. And this time I'll keep my name out of it.'

Prometheus (*Hunky Monkey*)

Bill Moore - 'Haven't heard anything from Tom for a good few months now. While the game has been a bit stop/start in the past he's never left this long between turns. I was wondering if you had heard anything else?'

Star Fleet Warlord (*Pagoda Games*)

Mike Lay - 'Still fun, even after several years. The European Team won the recent "Historical" game *EH7*, making it 2-0. *E18* is hotting up as it enters the mid game.'

Quest GME (*KJC Games*)

Wayne Yeadon - 'There are now only two moderated worlds left, as game 30 shut down due to the mass migration to game 31! The fate of game 32 hung in the balance, but survives for now. To help keep game 32 alive, I have taken over as head of one of the major alliances in the game, so I have my work cut out for me now! Somehow, I've got to build on the fearsome reputation we had before, but without the same kind of resources. I will have to lie low for a while, to rebuild and get my bearings in this new role of leadership. Heaven help me.'

Michael Grant - '*Game 31*: The 14th alliance has just formed within the Mageocracy of Torsalyer city. Haus Tepes is its name and is currently made up of powerful ex-Apotheosis members. They seek to aid the Magic Cycle and push the very boundaries of magic to its limit.'

The Naralia tournament is well under way. It involves two randomly selected parties having two fights against one another with the first battle as challenger and the second as replier. One of my parties has been defeated in both legs so is out for good. Another resulted in a draw but I won overall on kills by 5-4. Talk about a close match! Another of my groups has won their first fight 1-0 and should be having the return match very soon. And my final party involved is awaiting a reply to their VA (visit arena) challenge. I'm not really sure any of my groups will make it much further in the tourney as there are some truly mighty parties taking part.'

Xott Grande (*Antony Dunks*)

Carol Mulholland - 'My character has managed to avoid smearing herself with blue paint in order to call up the ghost of another character's grandmother, and is concentrating on persuading a male dwarf who's an Illusionist to be of use in discovering the villain. Her persuasion isn't especially difficult - the male dwarf quite fancies her...'

WEB GAMES

Kings of Chaos (*www.kingsofchaos.com*)

Wayne Yeadon - 'This is a web based game that Dungeonworld and Quest players have got involved with. It's a simple game of build and conquer, but fun nonetheless. Build an army to fight with, build a defensive force and fortify your camp. Buy weapons, armour and siege weapons, as well as train up spies and battle others to go up the ranking system. It's basically a numbers game that doesn't require a great deal of thought, although it is fun to play. Worth a look for some light-hearted fun.'

MMORPGs

Dark age of Camelot (*Mythic / GOA*)

Colin Forbes - 'In common with a large number of these online games, DaoC is sometimes higher on the addiction than fun. Some things in the game seem to take an inordinate amount of time - crafting items can take an age, yet it one feels an awful compulsion to improve one's weaponcrafting skill so you can make that really big sword - you know, the one you've always wanted but never been able to afford?'

Then you join a guild and discover what the game is really about. It's a whole social environment online. Politics, economics and more come into play and you can spend hours chatting with like-minded people while doing even the most mundane of tasks online. I'm also lucky that my own guild also enjoys a fair degree of roleplaying, so it's not all power play. There's a surprising number of adults playing this game - give it a try, you'll soon be hooked ...'

Horizons (*Artifact Entertainment*)

Dave Panchyk - 'Horizons, the MMORPG mentioned in #105, is now out -- and the launch in the EU actually came before the American one! Though there have been some lag and login issues, it's a beautiful and highly entertaining game that offers great opportunities for people who like to craft items as much as for those who wish to kill things. Player housing, and the ability to play as a dragon who will eventually be able to fly, are a couple of attractions.'

BOARDGAMES

Dracula (*Rio Grande/Kosmos*)

Robert Rees - 'At first play Knizia's new two-player game is a sexed up version of **Concentration** with both players hunting cards on a grid representing London. The idea is to trick and bluff your opponent into your traps while remembering what they have been doing with their own cards. It is clever and challenging as you might expect but also dry and somewhat overly technical with little magic to draw you back for another game. I cannot shake the feeling that you win by your opponent's mistakes rather than your own strategies. The game does look fantastic, though, so perhaps a second chance is in order.'

Curt Carpenter - 'I like most of the Kosmos two-player games, even the ones that are pretty simple, and love the theme and artwork of this one. But it just relies too much on memory (it's really *all* about memory). And with a changing board, it just feels like work. I've heard there's some strategy there, but I didn't see it, and I'm probably not going to go through the effort of playing again to try to find it.'

Formula Dé (*Eurogames Descartes*)

Robert Rees - 'Formula Dé confirmed itself as the number one party game over the holidays with family and friends swishing their plastic race cars round the beginner-friendly Watkins Glen board and graduating to the car-pummelling Monaco board (which comes with the game). Lots of fun and the basic game is easy to explain to pretty much anyone who is willing to give it a chance. Interestingly it does seem to convert anyone who plays it even if they are not regular boardgamers. Probably the best birthday present I've ever had!'

Hammer of the Scots (*Columbia Games*)

Henry Mueller - 'Wow, only six pages of rules and a third of that is historical information. This game was up and running in a half hour with a non-wargamer. The first game actually required very little in the way of the typical scanning of rules for answers. After the instructional first game ended and we had a solid grasp of the rules we chose to play a second more strategic game. After the game was done we both agreed that it went fast and were surprised that it only took about an hour. Until we looked at the clock! Holy Cow, it was a three hour game. Did the company lace the event cards with some time-altering chemical?'

This game, while short in rules, is not short in strategy or tactics. It has a quick learning curve and is not bogged down in the typical wargame minutia. The cards add a real element of strategy. The dice do have a tendency to create a luck factor. However, it does not seem to be excessive when coupled with the other game stratagems and tends to balance itself out. Highly recommended if you like war games. I would also recommend this as an entry level game. Don't take me the wrong way when I make this last statement. This is a game that seasoned war gamers will enjoy but the rules are just that simple to comprehend.'

History of the World (Hasbro)

Robert Rees - 'A monster of a game and the hundreds of pieces don't come cheap, but it does capture the ebb and flow of civilisations and empires over the course of recorded history. Scoring is cleverly biased to ensure that nothing too ahistorical happens but is also cleverly balanced against the play order. Although played over just seven turns, this game is very long, easily five to six hours even with people knowing what they are doing. It does seem to keep everyone in the game till the end, though, with the possibility of shrugging off even disastrous turns. A simple bonus system tends to keep consistent players in the top ranks but nothing succeeds like conquering the Far East and having your dynasty rule it for hundreds of years.'

Gunter D'Hoogh-Naets - 'I already bought this game about ten years ago, first the original from Ragnar Brothers (with a 'cloth' as gaming board), then the second edition by the old Avalon Hill. Some days ago we also bought the third version by the New Avalon Hill. I only tell you this so you would know that we're really hooked on the game.'

In this third version we were happily surprised by the fine quality of the plastic pieces (one typical for each epoch) and the overall huge content of gaming material in the box. One less positive point is that the colour of the different regions on the gaming board could have been more luckily chosen. I mean that some colours are too much alike, a difficulty especially by neon light. But that's the only thing that could have been better.

The rules themselves are explained very clearly, much less confusing to non-gamers than the rules in the old Avalon Hill classic of the same name. There are also some improvements made to the original, including the event cards. Those are neatly balanced, although some are - of course - more powerful than others. But that's no disadvantage, because it's extremely important to know exactly *when* to play them. There is also a basic version of the game and a version for experienced players. Just begin with the basic version (which is very good in its own way) and then go over to the experienced version if you feel ready for it. Although this is no necessity, because the game is already very good in its basic version.

This is a "must have" for every serious gamer, it *has* to be a part of your gaming collection. And this is the case for non wargamers and wargamers alike! We played it numerous times and in our gaming collection (we own almost 600 games) it is still on our list of top five games. The fact that this new version is also extremely beautiful to look at, can even enhance its already big popularity among (avid) gamers a few steps more. Or isn't that possible with a game already very high among most gamers' favourites?'

New England (Uberplay)

C Foot - 'In my heart I want to like this game but there is a problem. I bought this game several months before it was named "Game of the Year" by *Games Magazine*. There was an internet buzz about New England and I had anticipated the arrival of this game more than any other in recent history. It arrived, I had the rules down in just one or two readings, and we played it twice the next game night. I found New England to be very dry (read: not fun), with a pasted-on theme (which is not necessarily bad, but in this instance it doesn't work at all). I can see how it could appeal to certain hard-core gamers, but... "Game of the Year"?''

I was disappointed to say the least, but thought I would like it better on subsequent plays. Therein lies the problem. There have been no subsequent plays. Nobody in the group will play it again. There is a collective rolling of the eyes and groaning whenever I suggest playing New England. People are unmoved when I point out that the critics love it. To be fair, I didn't think it was a bad game, it was dry with some potential, but not a complete dud.

I would love to have the opportunity to revise my rating upward but no one else seems the least bit willing to play. Truth be told, there is a chance my rating would go lower given the chance to play again. Definitely play before buying.'

Stephen Taylor - 'New England is a fine game that's not getting the recognition it deserves. I've now taught the game to six people, and everyone has enjoyed the game. It's a meaty game with excellent components that can be played in 1 1/2 hours. However the big plus is that the rules are very simple. The sequence of play contains just three simple steps. The game can be explained in just five minutes, and newcomers will understand the game by the second turn.

Despite the simplicity of the rules, the game has interesting play and strategy. After three plays, I have no idea what the best strategy is. I need a lot more experimenting. For example, I was explaining the game and telling people that I didn't think the ship development card was a good buy. Naturally, on the very first turn, it turned out that buying a ship development card was an excellent play.

I won't go into a detailed description of the game. The basic idea is this. You need to buy land tiles which you hope to develop. To develop the land, you must also buy development tiles. There is a very simple bidding system which determines the order of selection of the nine tiles (land and development) offered for sale each turn. What you bid is also the amount that you pay per tile. You can buy up to two tiles per turn. For example, if you bid 6 and you buy two tiles, it will cost you 12. Therefore if you want the first selection you will have to bid a higher amount and therefore pay more

per tile. So money management is important. In my three games, half the time I bid low to save money, and half the time I bid a higher amount to get first or second choice. If you are last, the pickings will usually be slim.

It's important to see what development cards an opponent needs. This is one reason why having a barn is useful. Normally, when you buy a development card, you must have the correct configuration of undeveloped land and develop it immediately. If you can't use a card, you can't buy it - that is unless you have a barn. Having a barn enables you to buy and store one development card even if you can't use it on the turn it is purchased. Therefore, if it's the last turn, you can be nasty, buy a development card that an opponent needs (maybe a 10 point development card), and store it in your barn.

I think this game fills an important niche; certainly it does in my gaming library. I have over a hundred games, but when I went to a gaming session, I was at a loss as to what games to bring. I would bring a simple, quick game like *Carcassonne* where most people know the game or could learn it quickly. Now I can bring New England which is a longer game, is a true boardgame, and is even easier to learn.'

Wildlife (Uberplay)

Jay Christensen - 'One always approaches games of evolution with a certain amount of trepidation. Do I want to be an animal? Will the game involve jumping around on a chart for millions of years?'

You receive ten cards at the beginning and replenish your hand to that number at the end of your turn. We played a three-player game (up to six can play), and I was the crocodile. Don't ask me why; the crocodile was preferred to the snake or the human. One of my opponents, the bear, immediately, and with precision, started an orthogonal march through the Savannah to the Forest. Instead of placing all my crocodiles (entitled to eight tiles at the beginning) on the Water squares, I opted for the forest. Suddenly, I was surrounded on adjacent squares with eagles and bears.

The game begins to absorb you. You want to win the best abilities. You want to at least bid the minimum three food points in the auction. You want to fill an entire terrain, such as the Steppe, and attack the other player by removing one of his tiles. The scores at the end reflect how competitive the game became: 46 (Bear), 34 (Crocodile), and 24 (Eagle). The largest and smallest herds of organisms had to be counted to help arrive at this score.

Again, Wolfgang Kramer has created a game worthy of note. I would definitely play this game again. For sheer competitiveness and just plain fun, try Wildlife. You will be transported into another dimension.'

[Reviewed by Pevans in our last issue.]

CARD GAMES

Wyatt Earp (Rio Grande)

Robert Rees - 'This weird cardgame (which is quite abstract despite the beautiful components' dedication to the Wild West theme) reminds me of lots of playing card games (such as *Canasta*) but is better than all of them in my opinion. Although unloved at first the game really comes into its own with an odd number of players which is where the scoring becomes very interesting. A hand can be exceedingly quick but the ability to play over a few rounds is just the thing to while away a few minutes while waiting for taxis, buses or friends to turn up.'

Dave Petersen - 'Wyatt Earp is one of those games that needs to be in everyone's collection. It's perfect for hard core gaming sessions as well as for those who just want to have some fast paced fun.

First off, the game looks great. The wanted posters, and playing cards have top quality artwork, and are on excellent quality stock so they'll last a long time. And for all you educationally minded folks, you might actually even learn a thing or two about some of the outlaws in the old west.

Second, each page of rules has a summary on the side bars that goes over the important points of play. That way teaching people how to play is much easier.

Finally, the game plays great. 'Shooting' for success or failure is a truly unique component and makes things a little more interesting. Other than that, Wyatt Earp is the right combo of luck and skill. Do yourself a favor and pick this one up!'

Craig Massey - 'Let me start by saying that I'm not a huge fan of rummy games. This being said, the Mystery Rummy series and now Wyatt Earp have thoroughly impressed me.

Wyatt Earp uses the same basic mechanics as the other Mystery Rummy games - Jack The Ripper, Murders In The Rue Morgue and most recently Jekyll & Hyde. The twist in Wyatt Earp is the scoring. Players are competing for shares of reward money for seven different outlaws. The greater the value of a meld, the greater the reward.

Where the Mystery Rummy games use gavel cards for special actions, Wyatt Earp uses a wide variety of sheriff cards. Players can play one sheriff card per turn. These can be used to increase the value of melds, draw extra cards, search the discard deck or steal cards from opponents' hands or already-played melds. It is the manipulation of the sheriff cards that give the game a lot more depth than a traditional rummy game as well as giving players more interesting choices during the course of a hand.

Games play fairly quickly, under an hour, with a winner usually determined in

3-5 hands. I have really enjoyed this game—much more than I thought I would. I highly recommend it to fans of card games, especially rummy games, non gamers, and gamers as well. If you like any of the other Mystery Rummy games, then this is a must try. If you haven't tried any of them, then Wyatt Earp is a great place to start.'

ROLEPLAYING GAMES

Burning Wheel (*Burning Wheel*)

Robert Rees - 'A new indie RPG that is extremely handsome and appears so far to be excellent value for money. The heart of the system seems to be dice pools of six sided dice which seems nicely balanced but nothing special. What is going to make the difference for me is whether the systems built on top of the mechanic actually lead to the exciting flavour of the game fiction. See more at www.burningwheel.org'

Midnight

Robert Rees - 'Finally ordered the setting that is fairly summed up as "Sauron wins the War of the Ring". What with the *Return of the King* out the moment, felt right. The book certainly delivers a good "dark fantasy" feeling and superficially has a Tolkien feel. So far so satisfying: where things bog down slightly is in the nature of the evil tyrant that rules the land and how, if he's won, he hasn't won. The start of the book also seems crammed full of rules stuff which seems cart before the horse for me in this case.'

Heroquest

Robert Rees - 'Very much my pick of the year in terms of RPGs. While an update of the original **Hero Wars** rules, the difference between the two is vast. All the power and flexibility of the original rules system, but a new rulebook and layout that dramatically improves the clarity of the text and makes clear the purpose of the game. A huge extended example that runs through the rulebook makes it very accessible even to beginning gamers.'

Talisanta

Robert Rees - 'A massive book but comparatively clean, simple and pleasant rules. Magic in particular seems to have been handled satisfyingly. However at page 50 there are still about another 500 to go.'

COLLECTABLE MINIATURES

Dragoneye

Robert Rees - 'I am starting to think that it would probably be cheaper to buy a dragon off E-Bay than search for one of the elusive bastards in this expansion for the **D&D** game. The paint and model quality for Dragoneye is better than Harbinger but still all over the shop with some nice pieces and some total duffers. The various Clix miniatures are perhaps a little more expensive per figure but far more handsome.'

Critical Mass

Robert Rees - 'Lots of nice heroes and Spiderman villains in this set but the inevitability of getting a SWAT officer, a Brood and a copy of Ulik is taking the shine off for me. While SWATs are nice miniatures and handy for any modern games, RPG or miniature, there is a distinct feeling of filler with most of these Marvel HeroClix expansions.'

COMPUTER GAMES

Hordes of the Underdark

Robert Rees - 'Fantastic expansion for **Neverwinter Nights** that seems to have knocked the bugs on the head and instead delivers an entertaining if slightly slashy fantasy adventure. In game cinematics are fantastic and very dynamic but the trade-off is that the game is almost unplayable now at the minimal machine specification. For those with the power, though a no-brainer purchase. Bioware's trademark flashes of wit and solid plotting are much in evidence and the story seems to just go on and on with one of the best twists in a computer RPG yet seen.'

Morrowind Tribunal/Bloodmoon

Robert Rees - 'Excellent expansions to the basic game (probably best played after the main storyline has been completed but predictably no restrictions are in place) that add the city of Mournhold and a Norse island to the main game. Both are smaller than the massive original island but the smaller scope seems to lead to greater detail and a great deal more inventiveness with the game engine. Building up your own mining community has been one highlight so far. In the final analysis, though, the expansions are probably more **Morrowind** for those who loved Morrowind. Those who disliked the game's open-ended and freeform nature are probably not going to find anything to change their minds.'

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

Games Shops

Funagain Games
www.funagain.com

Leisure Games, 100 Ballards Lane,
Finchley, London, N3 2DN
020-8346-2327
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Orcs Nest, 6 Earlam Street, London,
WC2H 9RY
0207-379-4254
www.orcsnest.com

2nd Games Galore, 23 Reynes Drive, Oakley,
Bedford, Bedfordshire, MK43 7SD

Bishop Games Ltd, 32 City Arcade, Coventry,
Warwickshire, CV1 3HW.

Bookstop Bookshop, 28 Mayfield Grove,
Harrogate, North Yorkshire, HG1 5HB.

Dream Dealers, 94b Barker Butts Lane, Coventry,
Warwickshire.

Games & Puzzles, 6 Green Street, Cambridge,
Cambridgeshire, CB2 3JU

Gameskeeper, 105 Cowley Road, Oxford, OX4
1HU
01865-721348
shop@gameskeeper.co.uk
www.gameskeeper.co.uk

Games Legion, Ashlar House, 15 Mason Close,
Great Sutton, Cheshire, L66 2GU

The Games Store, The Manor House, Eagle,
Lincoln, Lincolnshire, LN6 9DG

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

The Hidden Fortress, 51 East Street, Southampton,
SO14 3HX
02380-710550
enquiries@hidden-fortress.com
www.hidden-fortress.com

Krackers Games Shop, 1-5 The Fore Street 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

Spirit Games 98+114 Station Street, Burton on
Trent, Staffs, DE14 1BT
Opening Hours:
10-6 Tuesday - Friday, 10-5 Saturday
... or email at any time.
Tel/Fax/Ansaphone: +44 (0)1283 511293
email: salphil@spiritgames.co.uk
Web address: www.spiritgames.co.uk

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, Canterbury,
Kent, CT1 2DR
01227-457257
andrew@westgategames.fsnet.co.uk

Meets & Conventions

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

MARCH

CONCEPTION: 3rd-7th March. *Naish Holiday Park, Christchurch, Dorset*. Accommodation, which starts from £60, covers all five nights, and in the form of centrally-heated holiday chalets with showers, microwaves, fridges etc. The organisers promise a full range of both classic, living, LARP and wargaming events, both scheduled and ad-hoc. Hot food and drink will be available on site (8am-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

MASTERCON: 12-14th March 2004. *Elizabeth Hotel, Rockingham Road, Corby, Northants*. Single room at £40 per night, Twin/Double room at £59 per night. The organisers need people to contact the hotel the hotel promptly, as its staff don't understand our tendency to leave things until the last minute. For details of what's planned, check:

www.ellought.demon.co.uk/mastercon

APRIL

TOWERCON: 2nd-4th April. *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. Boardgames, free-form, RPGs and wargaming are all supported. We hope there will be a *Flagship* presence here.

www.towercon.co.uk

BAYCON: 15th April-18th. *Exeter Court Hotel, Kennford, Devon*, approximately 5 miles south of Exeter. 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).

B&B accommodation at £26.50 per person per night in a shared room or £39 per night in a single room. All rooms have en suite bathroom and colour TV. 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

MAY

MAYCON: 30th April-3rd May. *Thistle Hotel, St Chads, Queensway, Birmingham City Centre*. Boardgames, Spielchamps UK, Silly Drive, Freeforms, RPGs, Playtesting, 'and anything else you want to do'. B&B at £35 per night per person for a double room, £40 for a single. Convention fee of £25 in advance or £30 on the door for the whole weekend. £8 per day up to March 30th, £10 up to April 1st, £15 on the door.

maycon2004@btinternet.com

JUNE

FIASCO: 19th June (TBC). *Armley Sports Centre, Carr Crofts, three miles from Leeds city centre*.

JULY

MANORCON: 16th to 19th July. *Chamberlain Hall, University of Birmingham*. ManorCon is a large board games convention that has been running since 1983. The 200-250 attendees each year stay and play in a large, modern University Hall of Residence with bar and canteen facilities and ample room for both tournament and open gaming. There is free car parking available and the site is also within easy reach of public transport and the City Centre of Birmingham with its pubs, restaurants and nightlife. Details: Kath Collman, 14 Westover Road, Handsworth Wood, Birmingham, B20 1JG.

manorcon@diplom.org

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

CONTINUUM: 23rd-26th July at *Digby Hall, Leicester*. Continuum is the successor to the fondly remembered Convulsion. It is a convention featuring, but not exclusive to, games and worlds created by Issaries Inc and Chaosium. Held across a weekend attendees can participate in traditional table-top roleplaying games, boardgames, cardgames, freeform games (large and small), discussion panels, and all manner of general silliness.

Accommodation is available for Friday, Saturday and Sunday nights, at a cost of £25 per night, bed and breakfast.

AUGUST

BATTELMASTERS: Friday 3rd September to Sunday 5th September. *Digby Hall, Leicester University*. More details to be confirmed but expect 16 PC LAN, D&D, UK Cthulhu Nationals, Heroquest.

Chris@eurolog.org

www.eurolog.org

OCTOBER

GENCON UK: Thursday October 14th to Sunday October 17th. The *Butlin's Holiday Centre in Minehead, Somerset*.

GenCon UK will have an extensive programme, including industry guests, role-play games, card game tournaments, board games, computer games, an art show and a huge trade hall. Celebrations will be held to the 30th Anniversary of Dungeons and Dragons. With the majority of Butlin's Holiday Centre's facilities being available for use this seems an ideal games convention for families. Attendees will have a range of accommodation options (including self-catering and half board) and free car parking.

Gen Con UK has been scheduled in the week prior to the Essen Spiel games fair, to help US and other non-UK manufacturers combine both events in a single trip. In late February 2004 information packs will be available for delegates and traders; to pre-register for an information pack, please contact Horsemen Events: contact@horsemenevents.com

www.horsemenevents.com

SPIEL with COMIC ACTION: Thursday October 21st to Sunday October 24th. *Messe Essen, Germany*. With 150,000 visitors and 612 exhibitors from 21 nations, showing all kind of games - from family, adult, children and parlour games to strategy, mail, adventure, fantasy and science fiction games, an increasing number of CD-ROMs and electronic games and a wide range of classic board games, this is traditionally an important event in the gaming calendar.

www.merz-verlag.com/spiel

Flagship welcomes news of any games-related convention, pubmeet etc.

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/PBMfirms 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

AD Infio Games, PO Box 605, Bromley, Kent BR2 0YQ
WEB: www.pbnsports.com
EM: danny.mcconnell@virgin.net
TEL: 020 8325 2448

Adams, David

WEB: www.throneworld.com/lords/late04/index.html
WEB: www.throneworld.com/lords/late10/index.html
EM: davester@oz.net

Advanced Gaming Enterprises

POB 214949, Sacramento, CA 95821, USA
WEB: www.ageforfun.com

Agema Publications

3 Workop Rd, Off Carlton Rd, Sincinton, Nottingham NG3 2BA
WEB: go.to/agema
EM: agema@lincone.net

Andrews, Colin

26 Brown Edge Road, Holts, Oldham, OL4 5QG
Arnot, Steven,
WEB: www.sjaysystems.co.uk/
EM: gl3@notrally.co.uk

Baird, Phil

930 NE 63rd Ave, Portland, OR 97213, USA
WEB: www.throneworld.com/lords/late1/index.html
EM: philipbaird@springmail.com

Briny En Garder (Terry Crook)

11 Lurle close, Burniston, Scarborough, N Yorks, YO13 0JQ
WEB: www.brinyengarde.co.uk
EM: davester@oz.net

Martin Burroughs

15 New Earth Street, Oldham, OL4 5ES
WEB: myweb.tiscali.co.uk/teepeyell/index.htm
EM: martinburroughs@tiscali.co.uk

Burrows, Pete, Buzzwack PBM

8 Magnolia Court, Beeston, Nottingham, NG9 3LG
WEB: buzzwackpbm.freemove.co.uk
EM: pate@buzzwackpbm.freemove.co.uk
TEL/FAX: 0115 9224901 (pre 10pm)

Central de Jocs SL

C/Numanacia no. 112-116, 08029 - Barcelona, Spain
WEB: www.centraldejocs.com
EM: torstimp@menta.net

Crashworld

4 Bartleyfield, Clayton-le-Woods, Preston, Lancs., PR5 8UQ
WEB: www.crashworld.com
EM: andy@crashworld.com

CSPT, Allied-Bucherserit

63, 53115 Bonn, Germany
WEB: [www.the-ashes-of-empire.de \(German\)](http://www.the-ashes-of-empire.de (German))
WEB: [home.t-online.de/home/ashes_of_empire/ashes2.htm \(English\)](http://home.t-online.de/home/ashes_of_empire/ashes2.htm (English))

Dark Wolf Games

BCM Darkwolf, London, WC1N 3XX
WEB: www.darwolf.ie
EM: pbm@darwolf.ie

Dracs Games

21 Chipperfield Drive, Kingswood, Bristol BS15 4DP
WEB: www.dracs-games.co.uk
EM: drak@dracs-games.co.uk

Dreamworld Games

WEB: www.logictodocercer.com/www.realitytracing.com
TEL: 01380 811522

Dunks, Antony

Far Horizon, Sark, Guernsey, GY9 0SE
WEB: www.sark.net/~sark
EM: xat@ark.net

Entertainment Plus More Games

PO Box 2578, Appleton, WI 54912, USA
WEB: www.epmgames.com
EM: aq@epmgames.com

Evans, Paul

180 Aylsham Drive, Uxbridge UB10 8UF
EM: paul@pevans.co.uk

Faraway Games

3 Maslem Rd, St Albans, Herts AL4 0GS
EM: pjphons@faraway.co.uk
WEB: <http://www.faraway.co.uk/>

Flying Buffalo

<http://www.flyingbuffalo.com/>
EM: rick@flyingbuffalo.com

Games by Mail

Bridge Street, Neston, S Wirral CH64 9JL
WEB: colin@ycreachywill.co.uk
TEL: (Colin) 01507 555555, Trigg: 0151 3364142
FAX: 0151 3361009

Glover, Adrian

4 Stevane Court, Lessness Park, Belvedere, Kent, DA17 5BG
Hartlin, Thomas, 3210 East 23rd Street, Tucson, AR 85713, USA
WEB: www.throneworld.com
EM: thomas@throneworld.com

Hartlequin Games

340 North Road, Cardiff CF1 4 3BP
WEB: www.hartlequin-games.com AND www.middleearthgames.com
EM: pbm@hartlequin-games.com

TEL: 029 2091 3359 (9-4.30 weekdays) - Middle Earth only
TEL: 029 2062 5665 (9-6.30 weekdays)
FAX: 029 2062 5532 any time

Haynes, Nic

33 Clatsworth Road, Chichester, West Sussex, PO19 7XD
EM: onlyfatpig@hotmail.com

Incutus Designs

POB 263, Loughborough LE11 1ZG
WEB: www.incutusdesigns.co.uk
EM: inbbs@globalnet.co.uk
TEL: 01509 217957
FAX: 01509 558788

Interesting Times

10 Belmont Avenue, Barnet, London, EN4 9LJ
WEB: www.interesting-times.co.uk
EM: startup@interesting-times.co.uk
TEL: 07050 658383
FAX: 07050 658384

Jade Enterprises

127 Queen Adelaide Court, Penge, London, SE20 7EB
EM: jade.ent@ntlworld.com
TEL: 020 83256307

Kamikaze Games

WEB: www.kamikazegames.com
EM: lord54@throneworld.com

WEB: www.kygames.com
EM: enquiry@kygames.com
TEL: 01253 866345

Lloyd, Rich

79 Farmersville Road, Califon, NJ 07830, USA
EM: lord54@throneworld.com
TEL: (908) 832-3176

Madhouse

6 Alexandra Road, Wisbech, PE13 1HQ
WEB: www.madcentral.com
EM: madcentral@aol.com
TEL: 01945 583811

Mindless Games

5 Basford Road, Nottingham, NG6 0JP
WEB: www.mindlessworld.net
EM: andy.mindless@ntlworld.com

Neutral Zone

33 Rockall Close, Haverhill, Suffolk, CB9 0LU
WEB: www.neutral-zone-football-phem.co.uk
EM: info@neutral-zone-football-phem.co.uk
TEL: 01440 713124 (7pm - 9pm)

Oates, Jason

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

Olympia Games

6 Sandy Lane, Bramecote, Nottigham, NG9 3GS
TEL/FAX: (Trevor Dexter) 0115 9436197

Pagoda Games

PO Box 5155, Tamworth, Staffs B77 4QQ
WEB: www.pagodagames.co.uk
EM: orders@pagodagames.co.uk

Mark Palin

Clansmen, 5 Barford, Brookside, Telford, Shropshire, TF3 1LQ
TEL/FAX: (Keith Burnham) 01827 702521
EM: mp04@8903@blueyonder.co.uk

Pinder, Mark

139 Nelson Way, Laceyby Acres, Grimsby, S Humberside DN34 5UJ
WEB: <http://groups.msn.com/elevaria>
EM: Markpinder@aol.com
TEL: 01472 753430

Quixel Games

Quixel Games Gbr, Am Pannofen 7, 47608 Geldern, Germany
EM: quixelgames@t-online.de

Rebus Games

70 Greenfield Crescent, Brighton, BN1 8HJ
EM: dominien@zoom.co.uk

Received Wisdom

9 Oundle Road, Alwalton, Peterborough PE7 3UP
WEB: www.receivewisdom.org
EM: sl@receivedwisdom.org

Rolling Thunder Games Inc.

PO Box 310, Eastlake, CO 80641-0310, USA
WEB: www.rollingthunder.com
EM: rus@rollingthunder.com
FORUM: www.rollingthunderforums.com

Rechorzek, Peter

WEB: www.geocities.com/TimesSquare/Alley/2187/tribenet.htm
EM: tribenet@nspcage.net.au

SSV Klipp-Buchler OEG

Postfach 1205, A-8021 Graz, Austria
WEB: www.heldentwelt.com
EM: sw-grae@uon.at

Scriven, David

15 Alandale Grove, Garforth, Leeds, LS25 1DJ
Sevenson Games, 57 Olympia Gardens, Morpeth, Northumberland NE61 1JQ
WEB: www.sark.net/~sark/teet/greensun.htm
EM: greensun@nickelglobalnet.co.uk

Silver Dreamer

174 Charles St, Greenhithe, Dartford, Kent DA9 9AJ
WEB: www.silverdreamer.com
EM: silverdra@aol.com
TEL: (Justin Parlier) 01322 387195 (Mon-Fri, 11-6)

Software Simulations

PO Box 2758, Yewil, Somerset, BA20 2XH
WEB: www.pbnsports.com
EM: peter@pbnsports.com

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

Supersonic Games

PO Box 1812, Galston, K4 8WA
EM: sam@stanterlitz.co.uk
TEL: (Scott, Sam, Chris) 01563 821022, fax 01563 821006

Tempus Fugit PBM Productions

96 Bishopswood Road, Tadley, Hants RG26 4HG
WEB: tempusfugitpbm.co.uk
EM: enquiries@tempusfugitpbm.co.uk

Terre de Jeux

88 Avenue de Jussey, 91600 Savigny sur Orge, France
EM: issad@club-internet.fr

Time Patterns

14 The Hollows, Exmouth, Devon EX8 1QT
WEB: www.timepatterns.co.uk
EM: carol@timepatterns.co.uk
TEL/FAX: 01395 276632

Total Conquest

WEB: www.total-conquest.com
EM: support@total-conquest.com

Unidh Games

62 Beechgrove Avenue, Belfast BT6 0NF
EM: christian.morris@virgin.net

White, Stephen

14 Wiltshire Avenue, Burnley, Lancs., BB12 6AD
Williams, Simon, 8 Oster Close, Ely, Cambs., CB7 4AY
WEB: www.chaosrail.com
EM: ct@chaosrail.com

WOW Games

WEB: www.wow.phemgame.com/

Xanbbs, Constanine

7080 NW 75th Street, Pompano Beach, Florida 33067, USA
EM: cxen@lycos.com



Zine Listings

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

Abyssinian Prince, Jim Burgess, 664 Smith Street, Providence, RI 02908-4327, USA (Email: burgess@world.std.com)

Armistice Day, Stephen Agar, 47 Preston Drive, Brighton, BN1 6LA (Email: stephen@armisticeday.com)

Boris the Spider (Email: pblooduc@aol.com)

Camel Robert Rees, Top Floor Flat, 22 Victoria Square, Clifton, Bristol BS8 4ES. EM: camel@alk21.com (www.geocities.com/studder/jfx/camel/)

Devolution, Tony Robbins, Lincoln House, Creation Rd, Hollowell, Northants, NN6 8RP (Email: tony@hollowell.plus.com)

Diplomacy 2000, www.linceadl.demon.co.uk/dip2000/

Flights of Fancy, Philip Howe/bone, Email: phil@melly98.freemove.co.uk

For Whom The Die Rolls, 14 Stepnells, Marsworth, Nr Tring, Herts., HP23 4NQ (Email: Keith@Thomasson.com)

Mission From God, John Harrington, 1 Churchbury Close, Enfield, Middlesex, EN1 3UW (www.fbgames.co.uk)

Off-the-shelf, Tom Howell, 365 Storm King Road, Port Angeles, WA 98363, USA (Email: off-the-shelf@lympus.net)

Psychopath, www.psychozine.co.uk (Web publication only)

Rhein-Neckar-Zine, (German language), Lukas Kautzsch, An der Rosswald 18a, 76229 Karlsruhe, Germany, (Email: lukas@oberford.de)

S.O.B., Chris Hassler, 2000 S. Armour Ct., La Habra, CA 90631 USA (Email: chassler@adelphia.net)

Serendipity, John Webbley, Topferehe 4, 38259 Salzgitter, Germany (Email: jwebbley@aol.com)

Strangitude, Paul Sands, Flat 2, 432 Birmingham Rd, Wyde Green, Sutton Coldfield, B72 1YJ (Email: strangezine@btinternet.net)

To Win Just Once, Paul Evans, 180 Aylsham Drive, Uxbridge, UB10 8UF (Email: twjo@pevans.co.uk)

Variable Pig, Jim Reader, Vredelstraat 20, 3633 EC, Vreeland, NETHERLANDS (Email: cj_reader@wanadoo.nl)

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)

GM indicates deposit returnable if you play to the end of the game, or prepayment discounts available (see

moderator for details).

Start-up shows how many 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 start of the game

Turn Fee - how much each turn costs. * means that return postage is paid by the GM each turn. \$ 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. (G) higher start-up fee for paper rules

Flagship Ref. shows the issue of Flagship where you can find an article describing the game. * 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

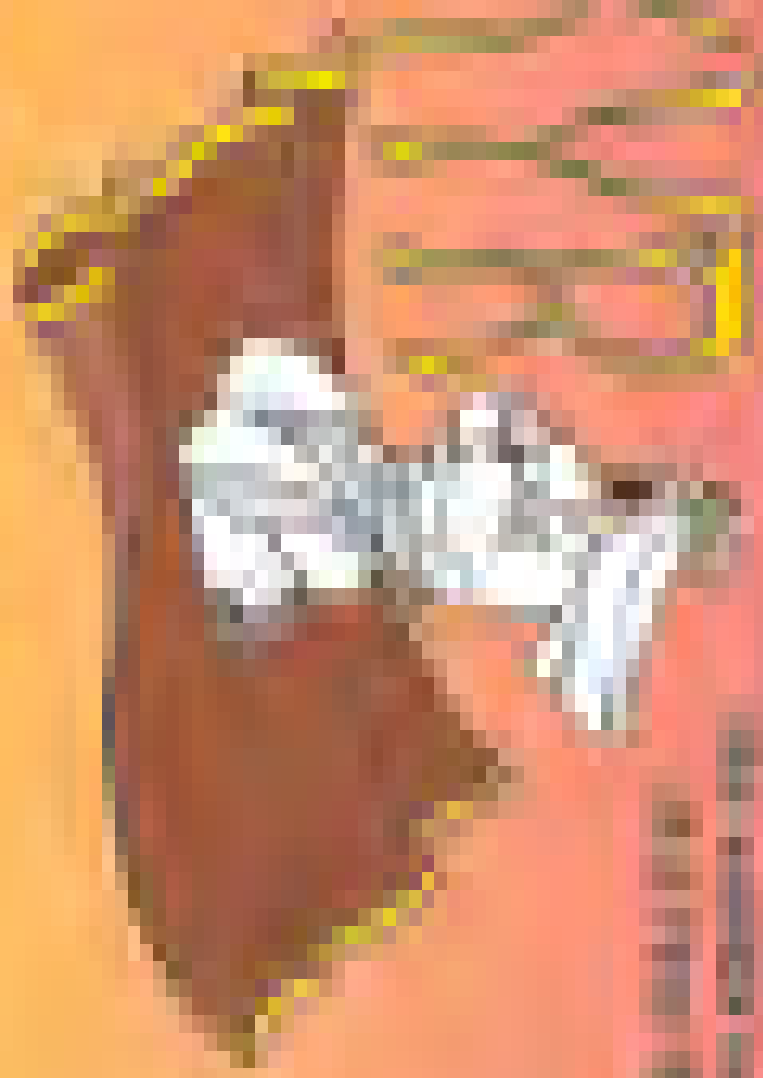
give discounts if you pay for a batch of turns in advance. Some offer reduced fees for email play.

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

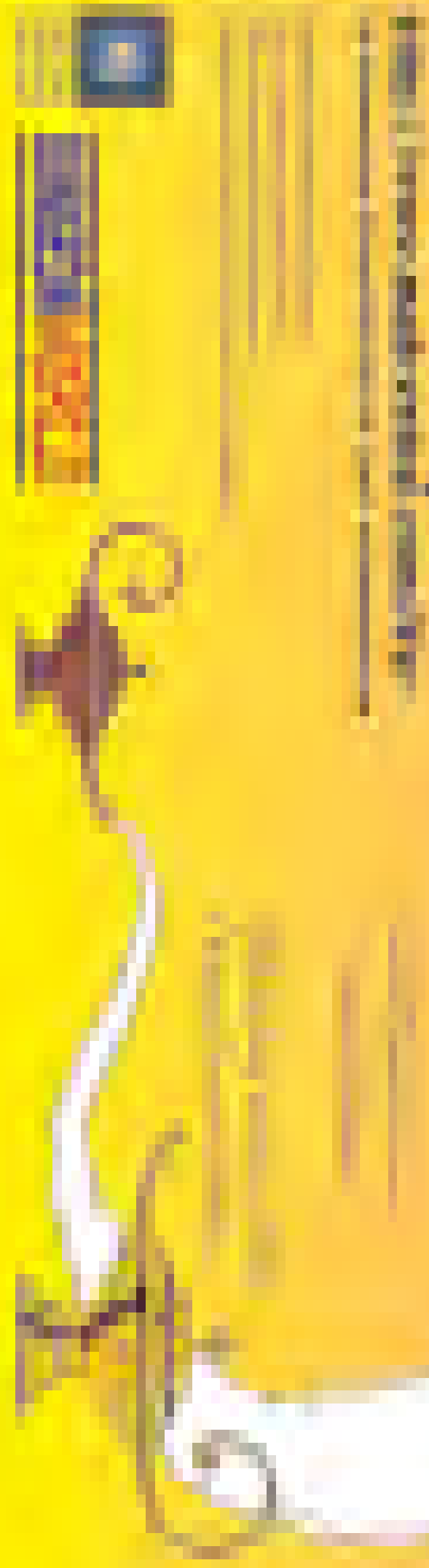
in doubt, contact the GMs.

Game	Process	Type	GM	Medium	Start-up	Free Turns	Turn Fee	Xtra £	Flagref.
Absolute Fantasy	M-O	Paper: Fantasy	SIL	p	£18.00	2	£4.00	-	-
Absolute Heroes	M-O	RPG: Superhero	IAD	p	£15.00	2	£4.50	(b)	91
Absolute Power 2	M-O	Power: Fantasy	SIL	p	£20.00	2	£5.00	-	98
Adventurer Kings	C-F	Wargame: Fantasy	PAG	p	£5.00	0	£2.50	-	35, 72-74, 88
Adventurers Guild	C-F	Adventure	EPN	e	Free	1	\$1.0	-	103
Alamaze	C-O	Wargame: Fantasy	PAG	p	£15.00	1	£3.50	-	71, 80
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	58
Aspects of Empire	C-F	Sci-Fi	CSP	e,p	Free	*1, 53	-	-	-
Aspects of Might	M-O	Adventure	SIL	e	£2.50	0	£2.50	(c)	-
Assyria's End II	M-O	Power: Historical	AGM	p	£5.00	0	£6.00	(d)	90
Austerlitz	C-F	Wargame: Historical	QIR	G only	?	?	?	(96)	-
Austerlitz	C-F	Wargame: Historical	SUP	e,p	£10.00*	0	£3.75	(a)	96, 103-105
Austerlitz	C-F	Wargame: Historical	SSV	e,p,G	?	0	£6 Euro	-	(96)
Australian Empires	C-F	Wargame: Futuristie	SOE	e,p	£5.00	3	£2.00	-	-
Barbarians at the Gate	C-F	Wargame: Historical	SOE	e,p	£5.00	3	£2.50	-	-
Battle Plan	C-O	Wargame	FBI	e	\$5	0	£3.50	(a)	19
Beyond	M-O	Adventure	CR A	e,p	£25.95	5	£5.95	(a)	86
Beyond the Stellar Empire	M-O	Sci Fi	KJC	p	Free	1	£2.50 - £6.00	-	22, 83
Championship League	C-O	Sport: Soccer	SUP	p	Free	0	£1.95	-	-
Chaos Trail	H-O	RPG: Fantasy	WIL	e,p	£1.75 S	0	£1.75 S	-	86
Chicken Run	M-O	Tribal	RCW	e	£0.50	2	£5.00	-	104
Clansmen	M-F	Sport: Motor Racing	PAL	e	£10.00	2	£5.00	-	-
Company Commander	M-F	Wargame	OAT	e,p	£12.00	2	£3.50 + £1.50/month	-	96, 97
Cover Operations	C-O	Economic	FBI	e	\$25 per game	0	n/a	-	-
Crack of Doom II	M-O	Tribal	AGE	?	\$?	?	?	96
Dark Age II	C-F	Power: Historical	SOE	p	£5.00	3	£9.00 for 3	-	51
Dark Lands	M-O	Adventure	CR A	e,p	£25.00	5	£5.95	-	-
Deathgate Arena	C-O	Adventure: Arena	EPM	e	Free	1	\$6.00	-	-
Destiny	C-O	Sci Fi	MAD	e,p	£10.00	4	£3.50	(a)	100, 101
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	-	79
Dragoneth	M-O	RPG: Sci-Fi	CR A	e,p	£25.00	5	£5.95	-	-
DragonWorld	C-O	Adventure	MAD	e,p	£5.00	2	£2.00	(d)	92-94, 100
Egypt: Briny	H-O	RPG: Historical (EGI)	BRI	e	Free	-	Free	-	-
EG1: Dangerous Liaisons	M-O	RPG: Historical (EGI)	EPN	p	£5.00	5	£0.80	-	93
EG1: LPPBS	M-O	RPG: Historical (EGI)	SV A	p	£10.00	4	£2.00	-	34, 93
Einstein's Lot	H-O	RPG: Modern	ULA	p	£4.50	1	£3.50	-	91
Election Year	C-F	Misc: Political	FBI	p	\$25 per game	0	-	-	-
Empires	C-O	Wargame: Historical	SOE	e,p	£5.00	?	£2.00	-	-
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Federal Lords	C-F	Wargame: Historical	FBI	e	\$5	0	\$1	-	3
Federal Lords: Right of Kings	C-F	Wargame: Historical	LWG	e	?	?	0.75 Euro	-	-
Galactic Conflict	C-F	Sport: Soccer	SSV	G only	?	?	£3.50	-	-
Galactic Invasion 3	C-F	Sci-Fi	FBI	e	Free	0	Free	-	-
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Gameplan	C-O	Sport: American Football	REB	e,p	Free	6	£1.50	-	20
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Haunted Manor	C-F	Adventure	MAD	w	Free	0	Free	-	97
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