

FLAGSHIP

THE MAGAZINE FOR GAMERS

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Dark Age of Camelot

Industria

London Toy Fair

Lords of the Earth

Medieval Warlords

Timelines in Gaming

WWII Online

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REPORT FROM THE BRIDGE

Springtime's Games

WELCOME to issue 107, which lands on your doormats as the Spring arrives. Your editor has new shades, and is longing for enough sunshine to be able to wear them: because they have dark brown lenses, my world will be tinged with pink. Yes, this means that when summer comes I'll either see life through rose-tinted spectacles or through a red mist. Which to pick? Well, at least I'll see things clearly as well as crazily!

Issue 107 presents our usual range of facts and opinions dealing with many kinds of game. We hope that you'll enjoy it all! We depend on you for what you find here in our pages, and we aim to reflect your interests, likes and dislikes as players of games.

There are reviews here of email games, postal games, online games, board games and card games, which between them draw on all kinds of wargaming and roleplaying themes. We've plenty of news and discussion. Our columnists give their honest opinions and we've readers' own comments about the games that they play.

In other words, there's lots here to reflect the fun that all of you find in games playing.

It's odd - isn't it? - how sitting quietly at home playing games which do harm to neither man nor beast is so often regarded as an anti-social activity. Not at all. Indoor games are an intelligent and interactive way of using our imaginations. They teach us plenty about our own talents and the thought-processes of our fellow players. (Maybe this isn't always welcome knowledge, but it's valuable, all the same.) I spent my long-distant schooldays avoiding the discomforts and dangers of hockey, but if only I'd mastered the social skills of an indoor game like Bridge in my youth, what doors might have opened to me as a result!

As players, we gather friends as well as competitors in the games that we play, because getting to know other players is such an important aspect of our enjoyment. Games-playing really is a sociable activity.

The *Flagship* editorial team is planning to get copies of 107 to you before Easter, when I'm briefly away to the USA to visit my family. I'll be keen to get to work on 108 when I return.

Meanwhile, enjoy issue 107 and your games, this spring - oh and don't forget to enter this issue's competition. Where is it? Well, start turning the pages, gentle reader ...

Carol



FLAGSHIP

#107, April / May '04

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Contributions welcomed for Flagship 108. By May 9th, please.

NEWSDESK PBM



Here's some news to whet the appetites of those of you who are keen on tribal games. *Graham Halewood* is now in the alpha testing phase of his rewrite of the game **Clans**, which was originally run by Warrior Games, from whom he's bought the rights. Graham has converted Clans from the original QBasic code to run under Access/VBA and reports that *'the basic premise remains the same, but I have changed one or two things.'*

Once he's in a position to start the beta test, Graham will invite readers to participate. So we'll be able to supply you with the necessary contact and website details in due course.

Flying Buffalo now offer a new variant for their game of dungeon exploration, **Heroic Fantasy**. It's a four player-game called 'The Big Race', in which each player starts from one of the four entrances in a level one game. You win by being the first to have at least one of your party in all four entrances simultaneously. As you can imagine, it'll take some ingenuity to accomplish this, and there's a reward of 2500 experience points plus a magical prize for the winner.

www.flyingbuffalo.com

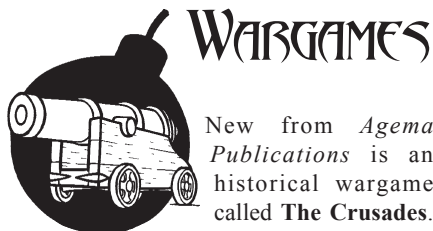
Mark Palin reports that the relaunch of his **Clansman (The Rebirth)**, which we reviewed in issue 104, has proved to be largely successful. The core of playtesters has been expanded upon and the game is going from strength to strength. He adds that *'Furthermore, player ideas are always worthwhile looking at and I am not averse to implementing changes for the benefit of the game and the players' enjoyment.'*

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New from *Agema Publications* is an historical wargame called **The Crusades**.

Set at the time of the First Crusade, it's possible to play as any of the positions active then: as a Crusader expedition, or as a Byzantine, Egyptian, Syrian, Seljuk Turk or Armenian faction. There are Assassins and Bedouins in the game, too, but these are for hire rather than as player positions.

The game has two main maps, both full colour and at the time of publication they're being sent out laminated to protect them. As usual with Agema's campaign games, a newsletter is sent out with every game turn. The game system itself is entirely new and Agema's Richard Watts reports that it has been created to reflect the unique military and political aspects of the era. Since Agema specialise in historical wargames, the game's historical aspects will be authentic.

The rules are fully illustrated, and cost £5, post free; game turns run every three weeks at £6 each, or just £2 a week. Agema already have a good number of players signed up, so anyone joining in the next few weeks can expect a quick inclusion into the game. *'Since there are numerous positions for each kind of player position, everyone should get what they want to play, more or less, although of course we can only have one Emperor of the Byzantines at any one time!'*
go.to/agema

Play By Electron Games offer free trial games of their **Iron Kings**, which is a medieval wargame based on the game engine of their fantasy wargame *Eldritch* (see under *Fantasy Wargames*, below). The difference is that *Iron Kings* omits the fantasy element, so that it's marching armies rather than spell-casting mages which are the focus of the game.

www.pbegames.com/ironkings

KJC are starting game 41 of **It's A Crime** with some changes to the old design. The game has been running for over ten years with the same 50x50 map, which obviously gets stale for experienced players while their prior knowledge gives them an unfair advantage over newcomers. For game 41, therefore, they have created a new map; each gang's starting members, starting block and weapons have been changed; even the type of buildings on each block have been changed.

The announcement of this development

has been greeted with enthusiasm by IAC players, with as many as 30 signups in the first two weeks. The game will be starting imminently, so if you're interested don't delay. If you're unfamiliar with *It's a Crime*, the rules can be viewed or downloaded at:

www.kjcgames.com/crrules.htm

As something a little different from the usual wargame, *Flying Buffalo Inc* are relaunching **Covert Operations**. In this, you run a secret group that's trying to take over the world, and *Flying Buffalo* now offer an online order entry form so that orders can be entered on their website.

There has been a minor change to the rules, in that you win by controlling half the world for two turns, and the other players are informed one turn in advance that you're about to win. This sounds an exciting modification.

The turns are daily, and the game has been designed so that it's not disastrous to miss a day's orders: players automatically gain seven orders per day, but it's possible to save them up and use them to give up to ten orders per day. So if you miss a day you can make up for it over the next three days. This seems an ingenious way to overcome what must be a common problem for players in any game with daily turns. The setup is \$5 and then the cost is 50c per day.

www.flyingbuffalo.com/corules.htm

Just as we go to press, we've heard of a website running a game for anyone interested in playing out a simulation of the Second World War. The game is called **WWII Open Warfare**, and is run by *David Clay*.

David describes it as *'a strategic simulation of world events from the 1st August 1939, up to the conclusion of hostilities, whenever this may be.'*

He includes every country that was at all significant at the time, usually splitting the countries into two or more positions: you'll need to be prepared to work with other players to make the country you share into an efficient fighting unit and you'll have to consider all aspects of running your own area. There are land, sea and air forces, with plenty of different vehicles available to command and construct.

Each turn covers a month of game time and at least eight turns are run over one real-world year. The charge is £4.50 per turn, with some discounts for block payment. It's not an especially cheap game, but the charge seems reasonable for a detailed representation of a period that isn't commonly dealt with in turn-based gaming. If you're interested, take a look at the site:

www.wwiioopenwar.co.uk/

NEWSDESK PBM



FANTASY WARGAMES

Incubus Designs have recently started a new game of **Serim Ral**, which they're calling **Serim Ral OceanLords**. As the title indicates, the game is set in a world of small islands that litter the Endless Ocean, so it's necessary to build ships for exploration, trade, defence and conquest. You start off with 'a castle, several heroic explorers and a menagerie of monsters.' From this small initial base, you can expand and gather wizards, fighters, thieves, priests and rangers until you're powerful enough to call on the very gods to support you.

There's room for up to 100 positions in the game, so you can still join it. Diplomacy is important, with the chance to form alliances with other players who share your own race, religion or neighbourhood. There are ten starting races, and plenty of gods, monsters and spells. It's a complex game, but *Incubus* emphasise that it's fairly easy to play: *'The HTML graphical turn sheets have been designed to be as atmospheric as possible and extremely easy to read. Orders are submitted in plain English, with no codes or translation needed.'*

Registration and your first turn are free, with the subsequent turns charged at £3.50 for email turns and £4.00 for UK postal turns. Turns run every two weeks, and *Incubus* now accept payment in UK pounds, US Dollars or Euros by credit card via the secure online PayPal system.

Players who enjoy **Serim Ral** like the game a lot. Check *Incubus's* website for more details: www.incubusdesigns.com

Play By Electron Games send the reminder that they run a free game called **Monsters!** and free ten-turn trial games of their fantasy wargame **Eldritch**.

Monsters! is a simple play-by-email game suitable for newcomers to the hobby, with straightforward orders and little delay in starting a new game.

Eldritch is a more complex game, which is available in varied settings. Each game of the **Eldritch** games is either open-ended, or runs until the victory conditions have been achieved. You control a group of champions in a computer-moderated fantasy world, where they can explore, trade, build an empire or study enchantments. In some variants this game world is large, allowing players to explore before they encounter other players;

in others, the world is smaller and more crowded. Head to head games are also available. www.pbegames.com

www.pbegames.com/eldritch

Harlequin Games announce that they're releasing the fourth **Legends** patch since they took control of the game April 2003. This is the big one, with over 70 fixes, enhancements and balance tweaks. It's amusing that **Legends** has enough depth for the hundreds of tactics that players use to have all somehow picked up names over time, so that the changelog includes reference to concepts like: Induce Abuse; Imp Express; Rolling Pop Sales and Infinite Runepower. It all makes perfect sense to **Legends** players...

The latest **Legends** game that *Harlequin* are starting up is North Island Campaign game 28. This module is a favourite in the US, the UK and Europe, with its rich background and well defined factions. The power balance is between five powerful factions:

The **Elves** are unpleasant imperialist colonialists with military organisation comparable to that of the Roman empire. They start the game with a beachhead in Stormhaven in the middle of the North Island and a huge head of steam. Their strength is military, but while their central location gives them maximum flexibility, it also enables every other faction to engage with them.

The **Alverans** are proud, human Arthurian knights set on crowning the rightful heir to the throne. They've a big human population to call to their banners, giving them credible long term strength; however their code of chivalry prevents them from directly employing powerful agents or assassins, leaving an obvious weakness for other factions to exploit.

The **Solarans** support the evil twin (yes really!) of Prince Alvera and can also attempt to influence the proliferation of humanity across the island. Just as the **Alverans** can call on the flying Daks and mighty Giants, the **Solarans** are allied to the leonine Maratsen and even certain darker forces. They specialise in deception and slander.

In the past the **Saurians** held sway over the North Island, but now they are a race in decline. Scattered to the corners of the map, they must attempt first to control their ancestral spawning grounds on the island of Ur'Rah, then regroup and then lead a crusade of extinction against the current mammalian inhabitants. Why does their unique religion centre on a giant iron golem and claim that they are Star Warriors?

Every fantasy land has its area of stinking

swamps and badlands and it is here that the Troll King holds sway. Countless legions of the undead do his bidding, though the current ruler's delight in Orcish bards gives the minions of evil an alternate method of expressing themselves. The forces of Darkness tend to be rich, but their isolation in the North East can make it logistically difficult to wage war into the rich heartlands of the humans.

There are other, less politically potent factions, including the Wyldwood Druids, who want no-one to be dominant over the island; the Chaos Lords, who seek the destruction of everything; and the Dragonriders, who only seek glory for themselves.

NIC 28 is already two thirds full, so hurry if you plan to get involved. However, the Dragonriders and Chaos Lords can accommodate any number of players. *Harlequin* especially advise anyone interested in playing **Legends** to try a Dragonrider in North Island Campaign, because this faction was designed with first timers in mind. **Immortals' Realm 2** and **Twilight Crusade 2** are now both closed.

Harlequin have issued a statement about their decision to close Crack of Doom, news of which reached us just before last issue went to press:

'We're sorry to have had to close CoD, after six good years. A variety of issues made it problematic to run, and after subsidising it for more than a year, we decided to call it a day. All the players got a long History of Lorasias with their final turn, to explain some of the plots, tie up loose ends and tell the story of what happened to their characters afterwards. Most of the players moved their credit to our other hand moderated game - Saturnalia: Exile.'

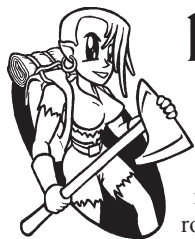
PEOPLE

We send our congratulations to *Madhouse's* **Steve Tierney** and his wife, **Marie**, following their wedding in December. Very best wishes to you both for a long and happy married life.

On the stroke of midnight on the February 29th our regular contributor **Eric Ridley** was proposed to by his beautiful girlfriend **Leona**. He didn't have to think about it very long. He said yes.

Congratulations, Eric. Felicitations, Leona. It's to hear of February 29th fulfilling its traditional role as the date when a girl can propose to her man!

NEWSDESK PBM



ROLEPLAYING GAMES

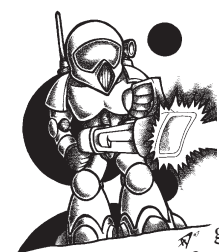
A couple of items of news about the historical roleplaying **En Garde!**

Paul Evans now offers two subscription rates for playing in his En Garde! game *Les Petits Betes Soyeuses*. If you choose to receive the report and character sheet online, the cost is only 50p per turn, which Paul charges as a start-up of £5 which includes ten turns. For the paper version, the costs remain the same as before, with the £10 startup including four turns and subsequent turns at £2. So playing by email is quite a saving here.

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

Scenting a sea breeze? Terry Crook reports that the sea-faring version of En Garde, *Briny En Garde*, is still going strong and that they're starting more players in it. He also points out that we were showing the wrong email address for the game, oops. Please note that the correct form is:

horseguards@brinyengarde.co.uk



SCIFI GAMES

DR Games from Italy are starting a new game of **Stars**, featuring interstellar empires and warfare. It will be fully automated, thanks to the efforts of *Imagetechn* staff and as a result will be completely free. Contact DR Games for details:

www.drgames.net

Flying Buffalo are offering a free trial game of their elegant classic, **Starweb**, and the first three turns of their s/f trading game, **Riftlords**, free to new players.

www.flyingbuffalo.com

Flagship needs YOU!



Do you play Sports Games?
Flagship is looking for a regular Sports columnist.
Interested? Write to carol@pbgames.com



PBEM FIRMS

Harlequin Games have previously reported problems with sending PBEM reports to their players, because some servers regard their messages as spam. Here's an update about this from their Sam Roads: 'For the last few months, we had to deal with AOL's aggressive targeting of not spam as spam. This article from PCWorld explains the phenomenon:

www.pcworld.com/news/article/0,aid,114993,00.asp

The only solution that has consistently worked is for AOL users to get a second email account (such as a free account from Yahoo).'

It's a problem that's likely to affect other games and their players, so Sam's findings are relevant to all.

Martin Burroughs has closed his long-running football game 'I'm sorry to announce that **The Premier League** has folded, following a rather traumatic hard drive and backup failure.' It's sad to see the end of Martin's game, after so many years.

Also closed is Tom Fyfe's firm, *Hunky Monkey*, and their computer-moderated empire-building game **Prometheus**. (We published a question about this in last issue's *Rumours from the Front* without including the answer, oops.) Tom regrets that time constraints have led him to this decision. Outstanding credit has been refunded.

We've heard from a firm who are running a web-based version of the Napoleonic wargame **Austerlitz**, calling themselves *Austerlitz PBEM*. This is in addition to *Supersonic Games*, who are still running their own version of the game. The new version appears to have a full colour graphical user interface for the PC, which seems both attractive and easy to use. Oh, and one intriguing comment that they add is that 'the majority of our players are Icelandic.'

<http://Austerlitz.britwar.co.uk/austerlitz@britwar.co.uk>

Congratulations to *Harlequin Games*, who are celebrating their tenth anniversary. We'll quote their own description of their history:

'April 1st 1994 we decided to go into business, buying a £100 license in **Saturnalia** to run our first game **Exile**. In 1996 we picked up the UK **Legends** licence, in 1998 we

formed **Middle-earth PBM Games** to run the UK Middle-earth licence. In 2000 we took over the US and Australian Middle-earth licence, in 2003 we took over both US **Legends** licences, the Australian licence and also acquired the game itself. Now, in 2004 we are negotiating with the owners of Middle-earth to acquire that game.

We've had our fair share of difficult games. Our in-house designed '**Endgame**' broke new ground in text description but failed to set the PBM world alight. **Iron and Steam** was sufficiently poorly coded that as the game got larger, turn processing got exponentially longer. We gave up once it started taking longer than 24 hours to run a turn!

We bought **Battle of the Planets**, only to find that the rights to the game had already been sold to a different PBM company. And of course we were then contacted by lawyers representing the TV program...

And we've lost count of the number of times someone has been in touch to say 'Do you want to buy my PBM game? I've drawn the map and written a 14 page history, if you can just code it and market it, we'll be rich!'. Whilst we can't necessarily follow through on these players' dreams, their enthusiasm is one of the pleasures of working in PBM.

We're one of the top five PBM firms worldwide. Why? Maybe because we set out with a certain philosophy. We decided that one of the main reasons that PBMs went bad was the terrible rates of pay the GMs got. Without even a small profit, wannabe GMs would burn out, decide to put on a suit and work in the City.

Rather than try and undercut the competition, we set *Exile* prices a clear pound more expensive than our rivals. We believed that players would be willing to pay a little more to get a professional service.

Since then we think we may have run the most service orientated PBM firm around and we certainly intend to try and remain that way for the next 10 years.

The other thing is that we love games! We gather every week for intense sessions, which often turn into game theory discussions and house rule designing. We play the games we run in order to really understand what its like to be a player. We eat, drink and sleep games, and hopefully it shows.

A huge thanks to every *Harlequin* player who has played, come to pubmeets, opined, complained, won or lost a *Harlequin* game.'

Flagship would love to hear from other GMs who have been going for a long time. We'd be happy to publish your memories of your time running PBM Games. Contact us at the usual address (see page 3).

NEWSDESK ROLEPLAYING



Starting off with some useful-sounding source-books, we've examples of both real-world and fantasy material.

Motor Pool (GURPS WWII) from *Steve Jackson Games* costs \$24.95 and gathers all the information that wargamers may need about all the combat vehicles of World War II. The war was fought by land, by sea and in the air, using a huge range of designs to fight over varied conditions. This source-book includes the vehicles used in all the theatres of war and by all the combatants.

Lore of the Gods, Book 1 (d20) from *Bastion Press* collects information from the Egyptian, Greek, Norse and Mesopotamian pantheons, for use with the d20 system. The lore, superstitions and mythology of these religions are presented in gaming terms: some elements may be familiar, but others won't and there are all sorts of ideas for magical artifacts, prestige classes, spells, skills, feats and forbidden lore. This costs \$29.95.

Complete Divine (D&D) from *Wizards of the Coast* also considers game religions, but here from the aspect of creating divinely inspired characters of any class. This supplement includes new base classes, prestige classes, feats, spells, magic items and relics. There are also guidelines for incorporating various religions, from mysterious cults to powerful theocracies, into a campaign. This costs \$29.95.

Moving back to solid objects, *Bastion Press* have also published **Arms & Armor v.3.5 (d20)**. At \$29.95, this is a revised version of their original release and updates all the weapons and armour to be used in d20 fantasy game campaigns, along with new artwork and monsters.

The Book of Unusual Treasures (d20) from *Bad Axe Games* costs \$13.95 and collects material from Philip J Reed's PDFs: 101 Spellbooks, 101 Spell Components, and 101 Mundane Treasures, books I and II. The material has been revised and expanded for this new compilation. Plenty of ideas for GMs here!

Wizards of the Coast have issued **D&D Map Folio One** for \$9.95, a folio of maps that will be very useful for **Dungeons & Dragons** campaigns. Compiled from maps that have appeared over the years on the D&D website, a series of folios will be made available over the next year, each containing 64 maps in a handy pocket folder.

Also from *Wizards of the Coast*, the **Expanded Psionics Handbook (D&D)** presents an update of the whole D&D psionics system. It's based on more than two years of player feedback and costs \$34.95.

Toxic Memes (Transhuman Space) from *Steve Jackson Games* costs \$26.95 and is a sourcebook for the world of Transhuman Space, which explores all sorts of cults, conspiracies, urban legends and fringe sub-cultures from around the world at the end of the 21st century, 'a very strange place indeed.'

Chaositech (d20) from *Malhavoc Press* describes the 'chaos-powered items that resemble both technology and magic, but are truly neither.' With its contents largely drawn from Monte Cook's long-running Ptolus campaign, this sourcebook describes tasty devices like 'the cohesion blaster, the darkness imbiber and chaosomatoons' as well as including rules for chaos magic, new spells, original feats, skills and prestige classes'. This costs \$19.99.

Thieves' Quarter (d20) from *Green Ronin Publishing* costs \$17.95 and covers the city of Liberty, 'where life is cheap, and only the bravest - or most foolhardy - venture out alone at night.' This sourcebook includes maps, NPCs and encounter tables.

Also from *Green Ronin Publishing*, **Mutants & Masterminds Character Record Folio** is a 16-page character folio for use with *Mutants & Masterminds*. It includes additional record sheets for minions, vehicles, and headquarters, plus Crime Files that allow you to track important events and NPCs, and costs \$4.95.

Based on the same system, *Green Ronin Publishing's* **Foes of Freedom (Mutants & Masterminds)** is a sourcebook costing \$23.95 which describes a wide range of possible villains and villainous groups.

Gathering Thunder (HeroQuest) from *Issaries Inc* costs \$19.95 and is the third book of the Sartar Rising campaign. Heroes are sought to continue the struggle against the oppression of the Lunar Empire, and this book contains scenarios set in Dragon Pass where the heroes can test themselves as they rise to lead the rebellion.

Towers of High Sorcery (Dragonlance) from *Sovereign Press* is designed to assist the careers of Dragonlance wizards. Young wizards are examined by the Orders of High Sorcery, and this sourcebook describes the Orders' Towers and the vital Test that wizard characters must undergo, along with scenario ideas about how such a Test may be effected. There are also new prestige classes, spells, magical items and artifacts, all at a price of \$34.99.

GAMER SURVEYS

The email server AOL has released the results of a survey run between mid-December and mid-January in the USA, which gives some unexpected results. From the 3,613 people who replied to it, it appears that American women over 40 spend almost 50% more time each week playing online games than men do, and they're more likely to play online games daily than men or teenagers. Over a quarter of the women over 40 who replied will play between midnight and 5am. Go, women!

Less surprisingly, around half the teenagers surveyed spend more time playing games than reading and more than a quarter spend more time playing games than in doing their homework. Ah, they will do it...

GameMore, which is a co-ordinator of gaming events in the UK, has also run a survey of players. This shows that most players prefer multiplayer games over solo play, and GameMore's technical director, Matt Bellringer, argues from this finding that computer game players 'like to compete and co-operate with other gamers, and that playing against the computer just isn't so much fun.' He stresses that game designers should always remember the social experience of playing games together, and emphasise this if their games are to succeed. It's an emphasis that will also bring more people into gaming.

Perhaps this news isn't a great surprise to *Flagship* readers, but an interesting development is that GameMore is planning to run a series of group gaming sessions around the country, to give players the chance to meet and talk as well as play online. Details are on their website:

www.gamemore.com

STOP PRESS

The PBEM Company, Harlequin Games, are holding a pubmeet in Reading on 8th May. If you're interested then get in touch.

pbm@harlequingames.com

Venue will be the pub immediately across the road from the railway station (it changes name frequently). The usual format is to chat about PBM for a few hours at the pub (2pm onwards), maybe play some simple boardgames, and then move to a player's house, talk, drink and play games (card and board-games) over the course of the weekend.

It is likely that *Flagship* will have a presence there, so come and see us!

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NEWSDESK MISC



BOARDGAMES

Our thanks to *Pevans* for the following news coverage:

Two interesting pieces of news for fans of Richard Breese's games (that's me!). First off, *R&D Games* (Richard's trading name) will be launching a new game at Spiel in October. I don't have many details of this yet, but the game will be of a similar standard as his previous games and is about coral growing on a reef. That sounds intriguing - I expect something fractal now.

The second thing is that German company *Pro Ludo* will be producing a second edition of *Keythedral*, which I reviewed in *Flagship 102*. The new edition will have revised graphics - by the same artist - and some tweaks to the scoring. If you didn't get a copy of the original, limited edition, this is definitely one to look out for.

I've also caught up with something that happened in December. Andy Merritt (a regular at board games cons and designer of **Too Many Cooks**) took over Eamon Bloomfield's (mostly) second-hand games concern, *MNG*. Ill health forced Eamon to give up and Andy, a long-term customer, offered to take over. Following negotiations, Andy started running things in December. He provides a monthly catalogue, which is free by e-mail - it comes as a text file. You can also subscribe to the paper edition, at an annual cost of £13 in the UK, £17 in the rest of Europe and £23 in the rest of the world. E-mail Andy at

Andy.Merritt@ntlworld.com

or write to MNG-AJM, 8 Hopkins Close, Cambridge, CB4 1FD. I have to say that I bought two games from the first catalogue I was sent. And Andy also buys games, if you want to clear your shelves.

US publisher *Days of Wonder* has a new game to commemorate the 60th anniversary of D-Day. **Memoir '44** is a wargame that covers World War 2 from the Normandy landings to the Battle of the Bulge. As the designer is Richard Borg, I'd guess that *Memoir '44* is to WW2 what Richard's **Battle Cry** is to the American Civil War. That is, a relatively simple game that's great fun and is has some great bits. The last certainly seems to be the case, as *Days of Wonder* tout the game as including '144 amazingly detailed army miniatures - including historically accurate infantry, tanks and artillery.' I shall look forward to trying it out.

Meanwhile, another US publisher has changed its name. Yes, *Diet Evil Games* is no more: long live *Dancing Eggplant Games*! That's what I like: from one silly name to

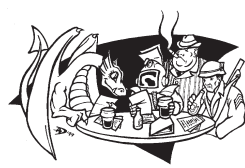
another. Their next game, due out in June, is **Employee of the Month**, a bidding card game designed by the highly successful team of Alan Moon and Aaron Weissblum. The aim of the game is to curry favour with both fellow employees and management (a tough job) to win the coveted title. At a playing time of 20-30 minutes, this sounds like a good filler (and maybe a game to take into work).

Rio Grande have announced some new releases.

These include **Power Grid**, which is basically a reprint of **Funkenschlag**, but with various improvements that include new artwork, a bigger box and a bigger, two-sided board. Oh, and the game has been shortened, to play in 90-120 minutes. *Rio Grande* are charging \$44.95.

In **Goa**, you run a company that trades in spices in the early C16th, and need to make all the decisions that'll lead to wealth and glory in such a competitive area of business. This game costs \$32.95, is suitable for three-four players and lasts around 45 minutes. Its designer is Rüdiger Dorn.

Marco Polo is a new game from acclaimed designer Reiner Knizia, where you compete to get first to the East with Marco Polo, while collecting treasures en route. You move from place to place by trading goods, with the different places requiring different goods - tricky! This is a family game for three-five players, costing \$34.95 and lasting around 45 minutes.



CARD GAMES

A fun idea from *Flying Buffalo Inc*! They've offered their players a chance to appear in the artwork for the expansion of their card game **Nuclear War, Weapons of Mass Destruction** (WMD). Nuclear War has been available for many years now, so there should have been plenty of candidates. The charge for being immortalised in a cartoon likeness was a reasonable \$250, and of course the number of spaces was limited. WMD with its portrait cards will be released at the Origins convention in June.

Still on the theme of artwork, *Flying Buffalo* also announce that they've produced extra cards for the fantasy combat system that's based on the **Lost Worlds Combat Picture Books** and doesn't involve dice-rolling. Amara Wintersword, in a chainmail bikini with axe, is the character depicted.

www.flyingbuffalo.com

Rio Grande announce that they'll be releasing **San Juan**, the card game version of the boardgame **Puerto Rico**, around the time that this issue hits your doormats. This is timely news for *Flagship* readers, because you'll see the comment in *Rumours from the Front* from an enthusiastic player who's tried the original German version.

Their **Saint Petersburg** is set in the early years of this splendid C18th Russian city, as its impressive buildings are being erected. Players compete to build the finest edifices, while gaining the necessary income from traders to do this. This costs \$27.95, is playable by two-four players and lasts around 30 minutes. The designer is Michael Tummelhofer.



MAGAZINES

We've recently received the latest edition of *Warpstone*, the magazine which is based mainly on Warhammer, and is also a fascinating read for all aspects of fantasy wargaming. Its editor, *John Foody*, puts a good-looking, well-detailed magazine together. Issue 21 contains a mix of reviews, game scenarios, source material and discussion. **Corrupting Influence: the best of Warpstone, vol I** is still available from games shops.

www.warpstone.darcore.net

Pevans sends us the following item: News for roleplayers is the launch of a new magazine: **Legend**. The publishers, *Legendary Press*, aim to cover news, reviews, opinion, player aids and a lot more. Issue 1 is due out at the end of May (at Mayfest) with a cover price of £4.25 (I think, the information I have doesn't make this clear). For more information, take a look at the website:

www.legendmagazine.co.uk

You'll remember *Robert Rees*' interesting and wide-ranging comments about roleplaying games in our last issue. His issue of **carnel** which came out in December as number 25 takes a close look at **Hero Wars** and its land of Glorantha, moving on to its revised system, **Heroquest**. There's also discussion of related systems like **Pendragon Pass** and **Exalted**, and a campaign account based on **La Guerre des Heros**. We recommend a subscription to **carnel** for serious roleplayers: it'll cost you £10 for six issues in Britain, and £17 for six issues elsewhere in the world. Robert's postal address is TFF, 22 Victoria Square, Clifton, Bristol BS8 4ES and the website is:

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

Total Conquest: the 'Flagship' game

Readers were offered a special free game, TC0030. DAVE HARRIS reports on his progress ...

I'VE ALWAYS considered myself to be a war-gamer, but recently I've found myself playing RPGs almost exclusively. So imagine my delight when I saw that there was a free game of **Total Conquest** (TC) for Flagship readers. Of course, before I signed up for the game, I did a little research on their website.

TC is a fantasy war-game played online using a java client. On the downside, this means you have to download a sizeable program in order to play and you need regular access to the internet in order to submit turns. This is more than compensated for by the additional stuff you get from the client; it draws your maps, keeps track of resources spent as you input your orders, lets you review the effects of your orders and perhaps best of all, directly uploads your orders to the TC computer. No more worrying about our wonderful Post Office or errant emails.

The first thing you need to do is pick a race (the usual human/elf/dwarf/orc options) and a culture (six rather different options). Now, while there is a fair chunk of back-story regarding the rationale for the upcoming battle, it's not actually necessary to actually know any of it to play. If you want your dark orcs to ally with theocratic elves, then so be it. However, your choice of race/culture will affect which troops you are able to recruit. Clearly some combinations will be better than others and any particular combination will be suited to one style of play. It is worth spending some time reading the relevant section of the manual before making a decision.

Trying things out

Fortunately, you don't have to start a major game of TC without having any practice. There is a free-to-play one-player version that allows you to learn how to use the client and to practise some basic tactics against passive enemies for ten turns or so. These games are entirely automated and so you will usually get the results of your orders within 10-15 minutes of submitting them to the TC server. So you can really get things down pat before moving on to the next stage.

Not only are these practice games free, but you can also sign up for a two-six player mini-game and also play these free of charge. They generally run on a two- or three-day deadline and suffer from a depressingly high dropout rate. On the other hand, they allow you to get a good handle on how the mechanics of the game work. You can either start a new game or pick up a dropout position in an existing game using the search facility on the TC website. This allows you to get playing a game within a few minutes, which is kind of impressive. While you'll find yourself practising army building and invasion tactics by yourself in many of these games, occasionally you'll be up against a live opponent. I had a particularly enjoyable game when I picked up a fairly well-developed dwarf kingdom on around turn 20 in which I was up against two other players. The game can't end before turn 30 even if you do manage to accumulate the required number of victory points, so don't worry too much about rival kingdoms that have a VP lead when you are looking for a suitable position.

Total Conquest at a glance

A fantasy wargame played online using a java client:
www.total-conquest.com

Initial choices

On to the game diary. I'm not going to go into great detail with respect to rules, as there are 88 pages of them in the A4 manual but I'll try to explain as I go along.

My favoured style of play is a slow build up followed by blitzkrieg. To do that I need resources, and a civilised Human with a merchant King seems appropriate. Plus they also get great heavy cavalry, which are always fun to play with. As I had played one in my single-player practice game and I had been comfortable with it, this ended up as my choice. I later discovered that I really loved playing barbaric dwarves with their elite slayers during a mini-game, but it was too late by then to change.

Having chosen a kingdom type, you then need to order your priorities (King, Heroes, Kingdom, Armies). The higher the priority, the better your starting resources in that category. Now, I have already decided that I won't be going for a territory grabbing tactic, so I will concentrate on my King and Heroes, with Kingdom next, then Armies. So I'll have a smallish amount of territory to start and a tiny army. This means I should gain a head start when it comes to questing. Quests are an extra that happens 'off-map'. Otherwise unoccupied heroes can be sent off to deal with evil mages, explore dungeons and the like. There are four levels of quest, ranging from easy to very hard. Don't let the name fool you; an easy quest can claim the lives of all of your heroes if you aren't careful. As a rule of thumb, for an easy quest I won't send less than two heroes with at least a 50 survival rating (the attribute which determines both a hero's health and defence) with at least one of them having a minimum 50 combat rating. These questers will earn me extra money by finding treasure and will hopefully also find a pile of magic items and/or allies to aid my armies.

Heroes come in a variety of types. I will be using my King and two heroes to quest and then I want two more heroes to lead my initial armies. An army can't move without a general, so this is essential. What's more, the general also boosts the combat potential of your troops in direct proportion to his strategy rating. My King will be a merchant (good diplomacy/OK strategy). Then I'll have a warrior (good combat/OK strategy rating), a warlock (good combat/OK magic) to quest and a couple of nobles (good strategy/OK diplomacy) as generals. I'll then use my bonus points to boost my King and questers combat and survival. With luck, I'll be able to get them out bashing monsters fairly early.

There will be 22 players in this game, so the early stages are likely to be pretty messy. With luck I'll get a corner and I can just sit tight until I'm ready to make a move...

Turn 1 - Problems, problems

Argh! I'm right in the middle of the map with eight neighbours and no map edge to protect me. This is going to be complicated! OK, deep breath and here we go. There are three movement phases for armies: if I don't use the first one, I'll have time to train my army before sending it out which should reduce losses. Now, I could split my 12,000 troops into two armies and try to grab as much as possible of the no-man's land between me and my neighbours. This is fairly risky. While 6000 troops should be able to deal with most reluctant NPC armies, if they run into trolls or giants they will get slaughtered. That really put a crimp in my plans in one practice game, so I'll be keeping the army as one unit. My closest neighbours are to my east, although there are two hexes of impassable

terrain between us. I will send my army to the southeast to grab as much land there as I can before they do. I'll send my two scouting units north and south in order to see what's out there.

I'm also going to build a temple of balance and a shrine of neutrality. Without going into the magic system in detail, priests/mages can be good, neutral or evil. Good magic users can't use evil spells and vice versa, but everyone can use neutral ones. Having these buildings will allow me to research new neutral spells and to store the ones my magic users already know there. Stored spells can then be taught to any magic user in my kingdom that is capable of learning them.

My merchant house in my main province will be upgraded and a new one will be built in my smaller province. Merchant houses produce an income (depending on the diplomacy rating of the province rules as far as I can tell) and also give you access to the central resource market. You can buy or sell 1000 units of resources for each level of merchant house you own. As I appear to have very little forest, I'm going to be short of wood. Which is very bad given that the majority of human troops require wood in their construction. Therefore, I need to ensure I can buy in as much as I'll need. In fact, I'll need to buy some right from the off. Bah! Dwarf slayers only need metal. I hope I'm not going to regret my decision too much.

With my main army off to grab land, I'll need to start work on a new army to send off in another direction. I'll go for a mixed army of heavy elite cavalry, longbows, pike, elite infantry and scouts.

As this is the start-up turn, my heroes haven't had a chance to listen to any rumours and so I don't know of any quests to send them on. I'll have them just sit tight and train, listen to rumours and see if they can spot any likely hero recruits. Given I went for a small starting kingdom, I have a rubbish VP score. Early days though!

Turn 2 - Heroes for hire

Doh! My main army has hit impassable terrain before being able to conquer anything. What's worse is that I didn't attach any scouts to that force, so they can't see anything outside their hex. Which means I have to guess which way to go next. Annoying. I'll send my southerly scouts to try and help them out.

My new troops are ready and waiting, so I'll form them into my second army this turn. A new army can't move, so I'll have plenty of time to train them. I'll also recruit a small unit to be formed into army three next turn. I can add the troops to it once it's been formed, but doing it this way will mean I have a pre-existing army that can move straight away.

My heroes managed to discover some easy quests in between their bouts of ale guzzling, so I can send them out this turn. They've also located three heroes for hire; a mystic (good magic/OK diplomacy), a merchant and a priest of balance. I'll be taking them all, even though the priest is only level 1. As a guide, my King started at level 6, my two questers are level 3 and my generals are level 2. Levels determine how many actions a hero may make during a turn and, in the case of magic users like priests, the level of spell they can learn. A level 1 priest isn't going to be that much use: this one doesn't even have any starting spells. Of course, if he earns experience by commanding units in battle or by questing (not likely, there is no chance a level 1 priest is good enough to survive a quest) then he will eventually gain a higher level.

What with not conquering anything, I'm virtually in last place VP-wise. Oh well.

Turn 3 - Questing

Typical. I managed to get my trapped army away from the impassable terrain only for my scouts to spot a rare gem mountain hex near where they were. Mines on a gem mountain will earn a nice amount of cash, so I'll have to turn around and go back for it. The scouts to the north have found some troll hexes, which is great news. Although they are tough to fight, once you have them they provide brilliant shock troops. I'll send my second army to bring them into the fold. Meanwhile, army three will muster and I'll begin recruiting units that I will add to it next turn.

My questers were successful (and according to the website, only one quest has been completed, so I have a head start). They've earned me some cash and found a healing potion and a ring of mana (which boosts

the magic attribute). As my warlock was injured, I'll pass him both, although he'll be out of action next turn as it appears you can't pass an item and use it at the same time. The new heroes aren't strong enough to quest, so it'll be just the two remaining fit heroes that go out this turn. On the recruiting front, I've been offered a level 3 warrior and a level 1 merchant. I'll take the former, but the latter is not really of much use to me.

The completed Quest boosted my VPs a bit, as did the couple of territories that army one took, but I'm still very much mid-table.

4th Turn - Battles

The gem mountain was easily taken despite a major battle, so I just need to put a mine on it. The battle for the mountain has exhausted the army, so I'll have to rest them. Well, actually it just exhausted the shortbow infantry, but I can't afford to leave 3000 warriors behind. They are a pain as they have low endurance; I'll have to see about replacing them once the initial expansion is completed. Army two had a major battle with the trolls and battered them, nice one. I'll add my new units to army three and send it northwest, where my scouts have found loads of forests. Hopefully this will aid my wood shortage!

Another successful quest, but my King took a beating. My warlock can take his healing potion now though and should be fit to go on the next one with the warrior. I've been offered a load of new heroes; a level 3 mystic, a level 3 noble and a level 1 priest and merchant. I'll take them all except the merchant.

Battles earn VPs and what with the major battle with the trolls and another with the humans of the gem mountain and a completed quest, my score took a huge jump. In fact, I'm now top of the table! As the early stage of the game involves land grabbing and the dark culture kingdoms get extra VPs for conquering territory, these evil kingdoms usually dominate scores. I've had a couple of other players enquire if I'm a dark kingdom: not sure if they believe me, though...

5th Turn - A dangerous neighbour

Damn! I forgot to build the mine on the gem mountain. You can only build ten provincial improvements per turn and I got so carried away building other stuff, it slipped my mind. Next turn then.

Worse still, we have some bad news border-wise. Kingdom 15 to my southwest has managed an audacious move that has his new border right up against mine. Essentially he sent armies to the north and east and then met them up in the middle, enclosing a huge chunk of territory to be digested at his leisure. While it was a nice move, I'm not happy.

I'll have to send my newly rested (although still tired) army one to the south to try and capture some of that before Kingdom 15 gets any ideas about taking that too. I'll just have to hope it doesn't get exhausted again too quickly. Army two can continue to the north, but I'll have to bring army three to the south from its current northwestern position in order to try to stop Kingdom 15 from encroaching further, as they have another army in that area. I'll also get recruitment army four going. Depending on what happens, I may need that army as either a defence or invasion force.

Yet another quest completed and although the warrior took some damage, he'll be fine for next turn as at the end of each turn, a wounded hero recovers 10 survival points. The noble I recruited last turn has over 50 survival, so he'll go along with them for the next quest although as he has very poor combat he'll essentially be going as cannon fodder.

I've slipped back to second place VP-wise, but mustn't grumble too much.

I hope this has given you a taste of the game. Clearly I haven't revealed all in the diary as I haven't mentioned any of the player/player diplomacy. As the game is on-going, I don't think it's fair to mention the various behind the scenes shenanigans, but I can promise you it has been pretty active. The website includes an instant messaging system as well as allowing players to display their email addresses if they so wish.

I'm certainly enjoying the game and it's certainly going to be an interesting next few turns!

On Screen

The good, the bad, the indifferent - GLOBETROTTER reports on the latest computer games ...

THERE ISN'T some clear-cut formula for making a great game, but *Epic* hasn't ignored bullet-point features in expanding the **Unreal Tournament** series, which is now in its third instalment. The multiplayer-focused first-person shooter series started off in 1999 with great graphics, crisp control, solid networking (which led to smooth online gameplay), and hectic action. These basics haven't been neglected, even as expectations have changed--and have significantly increased--over the last five years. However, UT has never been just about settling for the basics, and to this end, the new Unreal Tournament 2004 has a tremendous variety of maps and modes of play. In the same package, you'll find cutthroat deathmatching as good as it's ever been, plus large team-based modes in the style that's become so popular lately. Simply put, this is the multiplayer action game that offers something for everyone--even those who prefer playing offline, since the UT bots are better than ever and are still the best in the business.

Seven Samurai 20XX

Though filmmaker Akira Kurosawa made many films that can be considered masterpieces, the one he's best known for is *Seven Samurai*, which is an amazingly crafted motion picture that has directly inspired films like *The Magnificent Seven*, *The Dirty Dozen*, and countless other 'men on a mission' films. Now, thanks to game publisher Sammy, development house Dimps, and Akira Kurosawa's son, the 1954 samurai epic has stepped into the realm of video games with *Seven Samurai 20XX*. Tapping a three-hour black-and-white Japanese-language film as the basis for a video game is already pretty strange, and it's a fact that's only intensified by the game's peculiar sci-fi setting. Ironically, though, the end result of this unlikely effort is just a straightforward, unevenly paced hack-and-slash action game.

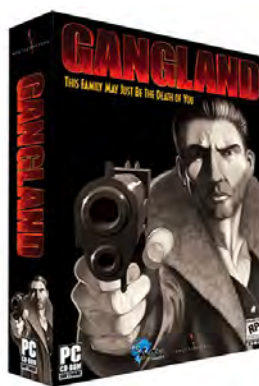


World of Warcraft

World of Warcraft has been on legions of gamers' most-wanted lists since it was announced back in 2001. The game has finally entered its beta-test stage, so obviously I had to have a look. This online role-playing game, styled after games like **EverQuest** and **Dark Age of Camelot**,

obviously takes place in Blizzard's immensely popular and richly detailed Warcraft universe and features the company's signature stylistic touches. The game gives a great first impression. Those familiar with Blizzard's **Warcraft III** will instantly feel at home using the game's streamlined, intuitive interface, and those familiar with other massively multiplayer online role-playing games would likely be flabbergasted at how quickly the game loads up. For now, Blizzard is focusing the beta test (which, for the record, truly is for testing purposes and is not just a promotional opportunity for the game, I'm pretty sure) on the Alliance races: the humans, the dwarves, the gnomes and the night elves. Of those, the night elves are by far the coolest. The game's interface is superstreamlined. You can easily and instantly bring up your character's backpack and character sheet, intuitively equip and unequip items, and more. Default controls have you manoeuvring around as if you were playing a first- or third-person shooter, and the mousewheel lets you seamlessly switch between a behind-the-back and a first-person perspective. I've never been able to just pick up and play an online RPG as quickly as this one.

Is World of Warcraft a revolutionary game? On the evidence so far I can't say that it is. Certainly, it's not drastically different by design than what I've seen before from this genre. It's heavily combat-oriented, and there's also a heavy emphasis on finding loot and questing. In fact, the game in some ways is reminiscent of Blizzard's own **Diablo II** (and Warcraft III, of course), more so than other online RPGs. The game looks impressive and the game ran smoothly. Thus far though I would question whether the plot devices are worth writing home about: to be truly revolutionary any new online game will need to raise the bar in terms of content. Then there's the question of balance and the all important player vs player system. But so far so good - watch this space for more.



Gangland

On the surface, it would seem like Gangland would be a surefire hit. It leverages the popular gangster theme and melds it into a hybrid game that is part action, part strategy and part simulation. You can run a number of illegal businesses, like speakeasies, brothels, chop shops and moonshine distilleries, while also raising a family, putting out contract hits and performing drive-bys. So, in theory, there's something for everyone here. Unfortunately, the execution of many of Gangland's different elements falls short of its lofty promise, thus leaving a game that has a lot of good ideas but is sometimes convoluted and often frustrating.

Nemesis of the Roman Empire

Nemesis of the Roman Empire (also known as **Celtic Kings: Punic Wars** outside the US) is Haemimont Games' follow-up to its well-received real-time strategy game **Celtic Kings: Rage of War**. Nemesis is built upon the same engine as its predecessor but adds two new races, the Carthaginians and the Iberians, to the Gauls and Romans that were available in the original Celtic Kings. While on the surface Nemesis offers features we've seen many times before in the genre, such as hero characters and a lack of base-building, it also includes a clever logistics model and better-than-average artificial intelligence to help it stand apart from the numerous RTS clones on the market.

Sacred

Take a bad **Streetfighter** game, graft it onto a clone of **Diablo** and throw in the worst aspects of **Baldur's Gate**, and you've pretty much summed up the lack of originality in Sacred. Skills for characters in the game seem at first nice but actually are not as individual as you would think. The horse combat feature lauded so much by the advertising turns out to be a disappointment with many skills and spells not even being able to be used from horseback. Oh and did I mention that the horses cause a lot of interface bugs and glitches that really hamper game play? I am afraid that the most amusement I gained from this game was reading the press release. Apparently the version sold in North America will have less gore than the European version as the developers feel Americans are more sensitive to violence.

The design concept for this game is so lazy that I won't even dignify the thing with a vitriolic review. Just don't buy this, ok?



Trials of Atlantis

A Dark Age of Camelot Expansion

JOHAN PETERSEN, on the good and not-so-good aspects of this MMORPG ...

Mythic Entertainment recently introduced its second paid expansion to the popular massively-multiplayer online roleplaying game **Dark Age of Camelot**. This expansion entitled *Trials of Atlantis* is Mythic's attempt to keep its MMO alive and prospering. Trials of Atlantis is primarily a group-based series of exercises or trials that take the Camelot player through a version of the 'mythical' watery world of Atlantis. These Atlantean trials provide skills, equipment and revenue as well as a healthy dose of adventure to the player willing exercise a bit of patience in forming his or her adventuring group.

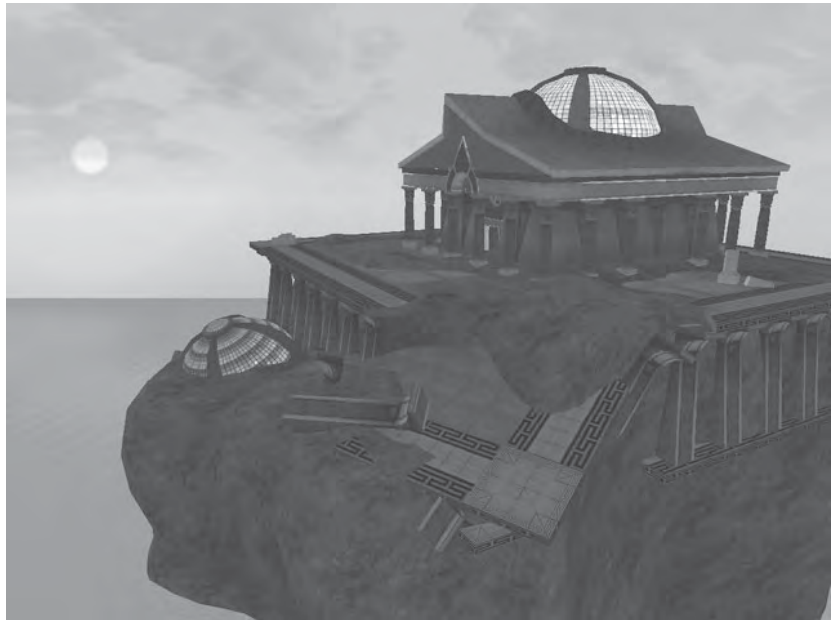
Atlantis was a fabled city destroyed in ancient times. Its story has captured the imagination of people ever since it was first described by the philosopher Plato more than 2,000 years ago. It is this blend of mythology and possible fact that Mythic has used to create its latest expansion.

Trials of Atlantis is a departure from the norm for Mythic in that it removes the voluntary aspect of grouping by requiring players to form larger groups to complete the trials. While this seems to enrich the group experience for some, it is the source of maddening delays and frustration for others. Each trial is much like epic quests from the original game, with the difference being that while only some parts of the epic quests need a lot of friends to complete, while most of these trials require large groups. These quests involve killing creatures, retrieving items and acquiring experience under certain conditions, much like other quests in Camelot.

One thing most players seem to agree on is that Trials of Atlantis has brought a substantial graphical improvement to the game. Trees look more realistic and hills have had protruding rocks added to give a more realistic view of the entire Camelot world. The biggest change to the game has to do with Camelot's lakes, rivers and bodies of water. Not only does water now look better in Trials of Atlantis, but players now have the ability to go underwater and play. Using a special breathing device, players can move underwater to complete quests and trials or simply to explore the Atlantean oceanic depths. Moving underwater has provided a third dimension of travel in the game. No longer does the Trials of Atlantis player just have to worry about moving forward/backward and side to side but now must control up/down motion as well, giving movement when underwater in Trials of Atlantis the quality of flying.

Not all activity in Trials of Atlantis takes place underwater: about half of all activity happens on land. Between the underwater adventures and those to be found on land Mythic has triumphed in bringing the mythical concept of Atlantis to the Camelot gamer in a way that inescapably propels the player into the world of Atlantis. Perhaps even more impressive, as it was an unexpected bonus, is the feeling of antiquity one gets when moving through this world. This gamer was awestruck the first time I gazed on the Necropolis.

Mythic has richly supported the myth of Atlantis by infusing it with existing cultures such as those of the Egyptians and the Greeks. As has been typical for Mythic, the introduction of myth and legend was done with great detail and is as good, if not better, than the integration of myth used when dealing with the Celtic, Norse and Anglo-Saxon legends of the original game. Storylines, quests and larger trials are permeated with the mythology that is reflective of a fine academic effort that in many ways turns a casual gamer into a real student of mythology. Still, as nice as Trials of Atlantis is, I am still left with a nagging question: why Atlantis?



Sobekite Eternal: Enter this dungeon through an underwater tunnel!

Dark Age of Camelot went from the middle ages to antiquity. The logic of that move escapes me.

As is true of most things, this expansion is not without faults. Many of the quests/trials are very buggy and Mythic appears to have taken a 'sucks to be you' approach to dealing with frustrated gamers who have spent substantial amounts of time working various quests only to have them fail due to a bug. That is not to say Mythic isn't trying to fix these bugs, but it is more reflective of the attitude in which Mythic tends to handle customer support issues.

I must call into question the introduction of any expansion before Mythic deals with the chronic problem of unbalanced and unfair competition in Realm versus Realm combat. Each of the last two expansions of Dark Age of Camelot were designed to provide skills and equipment that would strengthen players in their contests against the other two realms. Realm versus Realm is still the focus of the game and is ultimately used to determine the success of each individual Realm as it competes against the other two.

Dark Age of Camelot is a game where numbers of players on a particular server in a particular Realm contribute highly to the success of that Realm and its players. It is not the particular or even cumulative skill of players in Realm versus Realm that determines success. In other words, if a particular Realm has more players in relation to the other two, that Realm will ultimately be more successful. It is the equivalent of having a chess match where an opponent with half a set of pieces competes against a player who is using a full set.

Summing up

Mythic has a nice expansion in Trials of Atlantis, but it's kind of like having a broken leg and instead of the doctor fixing your broken leg, he hands you a new set of track shoes. The actual workings of the expansion are well done and interesting, but much more work needs to be done in terms of providing balance across the whole world. The lack of other, long-expected features, like mounts, is also aggravating.

RAMPAGE

Battle for the Streets

Coming Soon...



Industria

Industrial Revolution

PEVANS praises a game of technological advancement ...

MICHAEL Schacht's designs are usually clever, abstract game systems with a veneer of theme. I find some of his games quite brilliant; others do my head in. I am pleased to report that **Industria** (published by *Queen Games*) is in the former category.

The theme is industrial development and Industria is structured into five epochs. These divide the board horizontally. It is also divided into two vertical sections. The larger section shows different 'factories' for each epoch. These start with quarries and mines and progress to biotechnology. The smaller section shows technologies: from steam engines to telecomms and the internet. There are also sets of square tiles for each epoch. One for each factory and technology, plus one each of the raw materials produced in the epoch. And a couple of bonus tiles.

The raw materials are needed to build factories and technologies. Each raw material is produced by a specific factory: the foundry (epoch two) produces iron, for example. Once the foundry has been built, players can buy iron from the owner. From epoch three iron can be bought from the bank, if the foundry isn't in play. Until then, the raw material tile is the only iron available. Which makes it very valuable in the short term.

The heart of Industria is auctioning the tiles. The first player draws some tiles and picks one to sell. Going round the table, players either bid (above any previous bid) or pass. When the round gets back to the auctioneer, s/he can sell the tile for the cash and choose the next item to auction. Alternatively, s/he can keep the tile, paying nothing for it. In this case, s/he is no longer the auctioneer and the next player continues the auction. The auctioneer's choice is between getting money or a tile. And money is tight: you start with four 'dollars'. Factories cost 2-3 dollars to build and need 1-2 raw materials (probably costing a dollar each). So, on the first turn, bidding even one dollar for a factory may mean you can't afford to build it that turn. Hence the value of factories that produce raw materials that other players will buy. And the value of being auctioneer and getting some cash.

The auction out of the way, players build tiles from their hand, placing them face-up on the table. As I've already mentioned, factories cost cash and raw materials to build. They may score victory points, if built in the same epoch. They may bring in income. And they may score bonus points at the end. Building a technology requires raw materials,

but no cash, and scores victory points immediately. However, they can only be built in the right epoch. Bonus tiles cost one dollar to build. You're allowed to build one of each type in a turn, so bonus tiles are often not revealed until the end. Just remember that you need cash to play them! Players mark what they've built with a cardboard chip in their colour and mark their score with another chip on the scoring track.

As you can see, a lot of factors must be taken into account when

bidding for a tile - particularly if it's a factory. How much does it cost to build? Are the raw materials available? Can I afford them? How many points does it score? How much income is it worth? Does it add to my bonuses? Having weighed up these factors, you have to think about tactics. What tiles will other players buy? Or will they all pass, forcing you to take a tile you don't want and lose control of the auction? Which is why, faced with a tile I really want, I may well just take it and pass the auction to the next player!

The tiles available in the auction are crucial. For example, if a technology comes out in the last auction of an epoch, you have to know you can get the raw materials it needs, or it's worthless. And it's a real pain if both technology tiles come up in the last auction of an epoch. There is, therefore, some planning in the game. You know what tiles will appear in each epoch.

You don't know what order they will come in. So you need to have an idea of which tiles you want and re-consider this after each auction. You also need to look for combinations - the raw material(s) that are needed for a particular factory or technology in particular.

Once everybody's had a chance to build, it's the end of the turn. The start player marker moves round, everybody gets a dollar and the new start player turns over the next set of tiles. At the end of the last turn, players score their bonus points. Each bonus tile scores two points for each factory with that symbol that the player owns. Each pair of factories or technologies connected on the board and owned by the same player scores three. And players score a point for every three dollars they have left. With factories scoring 0-4 points and technologies 2-5, the final bonuses are significant. Having said that, the games I've played have usually ended with close scores.

So, what makes this game so good? I think it's the scarcity of cash, which restricts your options, and the need to make decisions. It's certainly possible to have a strategy - after the first few turns anyway - but you can't afford to follow it slavishly. You also need to plan ahead: you have limited money and time. This is important for the last turn of each epoch, which is your last chance to score for that epoch's tiles. And also in the last couple of turns in the game - to make sure you have the time and money to build everything you need to.

All in all, Industria is a terrific game that provides a challenge each time you play it. At the moment it is only available from Queen Games in German. An excellent set of rules in English is available from the designer Michael Schacht's own website

<http://spiele-aus-timbuktu.de/>



Industria at a glance

Designed by Michael Schacht and published (in German) by *Queen Games*, this is a strategy board game for 3-4 players, aged 10+ and takes about 90 minutes to play. It is available in specialist games shops in the UK and US at around £20 or \$35.

<http://spiele-aus-timbuktu.de>

The PC Gaming Year

A review of the last 12 months

GLOBETROTTER, with disappointments and pleasant surprises ...

IT HAS been a year of multi-platform games, delays and rushed titles, but also a year of several pleasant surprises and growth in game quality. In a sense, last year was an inflection point, when PC games went back to their roots. Many large publishers have either abandoned the platform or lost market share due to their conservative attitude, and for the first time since the early DOS days, independent games have gained significant prominence. The year also reminded me of the NES days, when many games were published both for the console and for DOS. If history gets to repeat itself, we are in for a great decade in PC gaming.

Industry trends

2003 saw its share of companies disappear or pull back. Even though there were some other publishers that expanded, no newcomers stirred the waters. However, certain niches have gained prominence, and only one has contracted.

The big loser last year was the legendary publisher *3DO*. After several years of struggle and lacklustre sales, the company announced bankruptcy in May of 2003 and went into liquidation. In August, its assets were sold at an auction. *UBI Soft* acquired the **Might and Magic** franchise, *Microsoft* bought one of its competitors, **High Heat Baseball**, and *Trip Hawkins*, the company's CEO acquired *3DO*'s back catalogue. Too bad that the high profile project, **Four Horsemen of Apocalypse**, found no buyer and disappeared.

The second biggest loser was *Electronic Arts*. This company seems to me to have lost its innovative spirit and become a publisher of sequels and spin-offs. With the exception of **Command & Conquer: Generals**, EA has not published an original title, and it can be argued that even that game was merely a sequel. While still strong in the sports genre and offering expansions for its **Battlefield 1942**, **Medal of Honour** and **The Sims** franchises, EA is only a shadow of its past self and unless it's willing to invest into new, innovative products, in a few years it may follow *3DO*'s footsteps.

The most shocking moment came late in the year, when *Interplay* closed down its *Black Isle Studios*, the developer of games like the **Baldur's Gate** and **Icwind Dale** series. This came after Interplay decided to move more into consoles and reduce its exposure for PCs.

There were other companies that disappeared as well. In particular, I was sad to see the Italian adventure maker, *Trecision*, go. Even though its last game, **The Watchmaker**, was far from being a hit, the company has previously developed some high-quality titles. *Atari* shut down *Microprose*, which at that point existed only by name, as most of its former staff moved to either *Firaxis* or *Big Huge Games*. *Strategy First* closed its Ottawa studio, which employed most of the old *Sir-Tech* staff, ending the last chapter of the legendary developer of **Wizardry** and **Jagged Alliance**. *Mucky Foot*, the unofficial successor of *Bullfrog* shut down, as did *Rage Software* and *Data East*.

Other companies fared better. *Matrix Games* had an excellent year, as war games gained on prominence once again, and the company found some shelf space. Games like **Korsun Pocket**, **Massive Assault** and **Airborne Assault: Highway to the Reich** met with favourable reviews. *Dreamcatcher* was expanding aggressively as well. Its *Adventure Company* division has published an impressive amount of adventure games, and its action-oriented *Dreamcatcher* division wasn't far behind. The company also moved into consoles, with **Broken Sword: The Sleeping Dragon**. Both publishers capitalised on the independent games market, as they acquired some of the best projects available.

In the game media front, we experienced some major changes this

year. Thanks to the many crossover titles, PC games were piggybacking their console siblings in TV commercials, which helped the sales. More importantly, *IGN* and *Gamespy* have announced that they would merge. While both sides claim that the only purpose of the merger would be to pool their resources and offer extra value for advertisers, critics of the merger say that the new company would have the power to over-hype or underrate any game they'd wish to.

2003 marked also the renewed assault on violence in gaming. Imitating the *South Park* episode where the children lie about being abused, two teenagers got savvy and blamed **Grand Theft Auto: Vice City** for shooting at cars and killing one person. The anti-game crusader, Jack Thompson, has embraced the case, and is now leading the charge against the developer, publisher and Wal-Mart, which sold the game.

Year in gaming

2003 was a huge year for crossovers between console and PC games. Console games have finally caught up with PC games in quality, and their PC ports often became some of the best games available. While these titles still lacked good interface, the graphics and gameplay took major steps forward. Unfortunately, many PC-only titles didn't fare as well, as they were released prematurely. One genre, role-playing games, has all but disappeared, while two other niches, adventures and wargames, have shown a second straight year of impressive growth. Let us look at each genre separately...

Action games

Action games had their share of delays, but also some excellent titles. Both **Doom 3** and **Half Life 2** were delayed (sorry, Duke Nukem Forever jokes are no longer funny). *Half Life 2* in particular was an interesting case. Supposedly, the company's computers were hacked into, and the game code was compromised. Some sources, however, suggest that the developer may be using this story to excuse more delays and to justify the Steam technology again.

The second major disappointment in this genre was the low replay value of games. After **Unreal II** the year before, other companies followed suit and released games that could be finished in one extended sitting, in particular **Max Payne 2** and **Deus Ex: Invisible War**. As usual, movie-licensed games didn't fare well, and in some cases, like **Enter The Matrix**, they redefined the word 'terrible'.

On the bright side, the genre offered several great titles. Both **Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time** and **Grand Theft Auto: Vice City** were ports from console games, and both were outstanding. And despite the fact that the World War II niche is getting a little stale and crowded, the winner is yet another WW2 shooter, **Call of Duty**, which *Computer Games Magazine* calls 'Two and a half games in one'.

Adventure games

Adventure games showed a second year of strong growth. *The Adventure Company* was the main culprit, thanks to several high-profile offerings. Arguably the best adventure game of the year was **Dark Fall: The Journal**, an independent project that the company picked up after it has been sold on-line for several months. Other great titles included **Post Mortem**, **Mysterious Journey II** and the highly anticipated **Broken Sword: The Sleeping Dragon**.

However, other adventures also found their place on my hard drive. The most pleasant surprise was **Runaway: A Road Adventure**, which was finally published in the US with a two years delay. *Independent*

Adventures did well, too, with great freeware titles like **Space Quest 0: Replicated** and one of the weirdest games ever, **Dada: Stagnation in Blue**.

Racing games

Racing games have been stagnant for several years, with only the graphics and car physics being improved upon. This year was no exception, but there were still several good titles. In particular, **Need for Speed Underground** was a lot of fun, as was **Midnight Club II**, and **F1 Challenge '99-'02**, which was the best F1 racing game I've seen in a long time.

Roleplaying games

The fact that the best-received release of the year was a patch for **Diablo 2** is telling. This genre was the big loser of 2003. PC Roleplaying games, defined by their first-person perspective, are all but dead. The only two games that fit this definition were **The Elder Scrolls III: Bloodmoon**, an expansion, and **Devil's Whiskey**, an independent unofficial sequel to the Bard's Tale franchise.

Nevertheless, RPG gaming was not totally dead. It merely transformed into console-style action gaming and became very popular with many players, regardless of how much it left me dissatisfied. **Knights of the Old Republic** became a major hit and arguably one of the best PC games of the year.

Unfortunately, the two projects I had high expectations for, didn't fare as well. **Harbinger**, an unapologetic **Diablo** clone, lacked the kind of tight gameplay that made **Diablo** so much fun to play. **Temple of Elemental Evil**, from the makers of **Fallout** and **Arkanum**, became the buggiest game of the year.

The most disconcerting trend I observed was the use of old franchise names to entice people to buy their pseudo-sequels. *EA* has announced the development of **Ultima X**, which has little to do with the single player series, and should be called **Ultima Online 2** instead.

Brian Fargo acquired the rights to the Bard's Tale franchise and announced a new game in the series. Instead of the familiar first-person gameplay and turn-based combat, however, the new game will be a third-person action title based on the **Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance** engine. Finally, the **Fallout** legacy suffered another blow with the release of **Brotherhood of Steel**, and the release of **Fallout 3** became questionable after *Interplay* shut down **Black Isle Studios**.

Simulation games

2003 marked 100 years of aviation, and *Microsoft* took advantage of this milestone with a new **Microsoft Flight Simulator**. Arguably, this game has been the best of the series so far, but *Microsoft's* reluctance to release full paper manuals and instead force the players to print them out has hurt the sales. This was my main reason why I opted for keeping my older **MSFS**. *Microsoft* also scored another moderate hit with **Freelancer**, the sequel to **Starlancer**. Unfortunately, this game suffered from low replay value.

Other companies have either concentrated on add-ons for *Microsoft* products (*Strategy First*, for example, released train and flight add-ons), or cut back even further on simulation games. Still, several great titles, such as **IL-2 Sturmovik: The Forgotten Battles** and the underrated **X2: The Threat** were released. On the downside, this genre also featured the worst console port of the year, **Secret Weapons over Normandy**.

Sport games

This genre was stagnating, courtesy of *EA's* lack of innovation. While **Madden NFL 2004** received great reviews, as did other *EA* games, they offered nothing new. The **Backyard Sports** series was relegated to kids' shelves and other companies cut back on their sports games offerings. As was the case in 2002, the best sports games were the two golf titles, **Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2004** and **Links 2003**. And just like the previous year, **Links 2003** edged out its competitor for the best sports game of the year.

Strategy games

The year started out with a major disappointment. I predicted that

Master of Orion III would be substandard, but never in my wildest dreams did I think it would be such a disaster. Instead of a game, the fans of the series were treated to the interface, appeal and artificial intelligence of *Microsoft Excel*. The game was so bad that *Amazon* was actually giving it away for free, with a mail-in rebate. Other sequels fared only marginally better, with **Railroad Tycoon 3**, **UFO: Aftermath** and **Homeworld 2** also disappointing fans.

Still, there were some hits. In real-time strategy games, the biggest hit was **Command & Conquer: Generals** and its expansion. Both games featured great graphics and pushed the boundaries of what was allowable in strategy games.

Blizzard also released an expansion for its **Warcraft III** game, which was well received by the fans of the series. The Age of Empires gaming model was still going strong, with titles like **Rise of Nations** and **Empires: Dawn of the Modern World**.

Turn-based games had one of their best years in recent history. **Disciples II** came with three stand-alone spin-offs, and **Age of Wonders: Shadow Magic** drew very positive reviews. Later in the year, *UBI Soft* released the eagerly awaited **Warlords IV**, but the game fell short of expectations.

In the non-fantasy realm, turn-based strategy games also had a strong showing. Wargames like **Korsun Pocket**, **Combat Mission: Barbarossa to Berlin** and others proved that wargaming was far from dead. The **Civilisation III** franchise finally broke through with its **Conquests** expansion, which gave the original game a much needed sense of purpose. Independent projects, such as **Massive Assault** and **Galactic Civilisations**, also fared very well.

The only strategy niche that suffered was tycoon games. The only one worth mentioning, **Trevor Chan's Restaurant Empire**, didn't impress as much as Chan's other games, and titles like the **Airport Tycoon** series or **Casino, Inc.** were dreadful, to say the least.

MMORPGs

Multiplayer RPGs grew in numbers, but not in quality. The biggest disappointment of the year was **Star Wars: Galaxies**, which gave tedium in MMORPGs a whole new meaning. **Horizons**, too, turned out to be a total pig of a game, seemingly animated by monkeys.

Other major multiplayer games got new expansions, and in particular those of **Dark Age of Camelot**, **Everquest** and **Anarchy Online** were quite well received.

The brightest surprise was an independent project, though, **A Tale in the Desert**, which was the first MMORPG to come out with an original premise since **Meridian 59**. The **Final Fantasy** franchise joined the MMORPG crowd as well, drawing favourable reviews.

Other games

The Sims showed some strong sales numbers, but not on the scale seen in 2002. The on-line version of the game suffered from the lack of focus and abuse by players and the *EA* game administrators.

Atari: 80 Classic Games in One became a pleasant surprise, but the winner in this genre was the *Hoyle* series by *Sierra*, in particular **Hoyle Majestic Chess**.

Best games of the year

So which games really impressed me and made the list? The answers are right here:

Best Overall Game: **Knights of the Old Republic**

Best Action Game: **Call of Duty**

Best Adventure Game: **Dark Fall: The Journal**

Best Racing Game: **F1 Challenge '99 - '02**

Best Roleplaying Game: **Knights of the Old Republic**

Best Simulation Game: **Microsoft Flight Simulator 2004**

Best Sports Game: **Links 2003**

Best Strategy Game: **Command & Conquer: Generals**

Best Budget Game: **Hoyle Majestic Chess**

Best 'One More Turn and Then I'm Done' Game: **Massive Assault**

Biggest Disappointment of the Year: **Star Wars Galaxies**, **Pirates of the Caribbean** (tie)

Lords of the Earth I

The Diary of a Genocide, part 2

BEN LYNCH plays *Lord Peregrin of Arnor* ...

[Lord Peregrine has attempted to recover from the damage inflicted on him by a 'secret empire'. He has regained some wealth by trade, and is now sending the Muslim inhabitants of his provinces to Persia, in hopes that this will curry favour with the Persians...]

HISTORICALLY, the Persian Empire often proved the source of much misfortune (invasions, usually: assassinations, less often) to the Indian Hussites, and I hoped to prevent future unpleasantness by such gestures. As an addendum to my orders, I wrote conditionals declaring if anyone (re: the Yasarids) proved stupid enough to attack me, my armies were to drive them out, and then pursue and wreak havoc on their retreat. It seemed reasonable, as the Yasarids remained preoccupied with their 'Southern ulcer' and unlikely to mount a credible offensive northward. No one else was likely to take a swipe at me.

Feeling the worst was behind me, I sent in my orders. And then... Missionary work continued in the east, in Chandella, with explosive results...

Aleruk Svornad had been sent down to Jaunpur with a force of 2,000 Prince's Own Hussars to see about convincing the Moslem inhabitants of the province to pack up and leave - 'off to Persia with you then, my lads.' Unfortunately, this forced migration (always a nasty business, though Svornad was trying to be merciful towards them, donch'a know) combined with a simmering hate of the Hussites throughout Moslem India and the eruption of a religious jihad in Chandella, where the Hussite priests had taken to throwing buckets of pig-fat into mosques at random hours, to spark a religiously-motivated revolt all across Chandella, Jihjoti, Jaunpur and Maghada.

First, the city of Kaunaj (still ruled by an emir) closed up its doors and threw all the Hussites out into the fields. Lord Katlerstahl (having just completed negotiations with the local Hussite landowners) immediately invested Kaunaj with the local militia. South of the Ganges, the Jihjoti and the Chandellas (after murdering all the Hussites they could find) crossed in Jaunpur.

Now, Princess Arwen and ancient Brigadier Parachal had been encamped in Jaunpur with a cavalry army and they were in the process of chasing down the locals (with their airships, no less) when they ran into the Chandella and Jihjohti contingents. A lively set-to then occurred at Bansgaon between 8,000-odd Moslems and 5,000 Ducal Guards, assorted Princess' Own Hussars and the Multan City Battery. Despite completely deceiving the Arnori sky patrols, the superior firepower and élan of the Arnori troops proved decisive against the ill-equipped Moslems. The rabble were thrown back across the river.

Arwen, her ire sparked by this affront, pressed the pursuit hard, leading her forces into Chandella at full speed. Khuman Singh, the brilliant prince of the Chandellas, ambushed her army at Azamgahr and soundly defeated the superior Hussite force. Both princess Arwen and

Parachal were killed when their command brigade was overrun by Jihjoti hill-men and the remainder of the Ducal army scattered in disarray. Singh was pleased to capture so many fine horses. Now his entire force could ride. He crossed into Maghada.

There, Svornad and his 5,000 hussars had managed to fight their way out of the province and into Jaunpur (leaving behind a horrible series of massacres which annihilated the Hussite settlers in Maghada and left Bihar city a smoking ruin). This allowed Singh to join up with the Maghadan prince's men, and then strike northeast along the Grand Trunk Road into Rajput itself. By the time Singh's army had reached Kaunaj, the remains of Arwen's army had straggled in to join Katlerstahl and his militia, as well as Morgan Drake, the baron of Gwalior and his feudatory levies, who had come up from the south.

The Hussite forces now numbered 11,000 men against 8,000, so Baron Drake pressed an engagement and Singh fell back in disarray - harried by the Hussite airships - into the town of Kakori, outside of Lucknow. Drake's men swept out to envelop the town and the airship Constance ate a barrage of light rockets. The flat slap of a mammoth boom as the zeppelin blew apart from stem to stern signaled Singh's double-envelopment. Another three thousand men, hidden in drainage ditches along the Hussite line of advance, charged into Drake's flank as Singh's heavy horse (now mounted on the fine equines of the Princess' Own Guard) charged out of the cover of the town.

In the ensuing disaster, Kalterstahl managed to escape with the survivors of the Ducal Guard and fled into Uttar Pradesh. Drake and Svornad were both slain and nearly the entire army was wiped out. Peregrin would not be pleased when he received the news. Singh, for his part, was welcomed as a liberator in Kaunaj, though he did not attempt to garrison the town. Nor did he subject the Hussite landowners of Rajput to massacre and confiscation, at least... not yet.

Quiet, eh? My 'benevolent actions' resulted in the general insurrection of my Muslim population, the slaughter of my loyal Hussite subjects, the brutal annihilation of not one but two armies, and the death of my heir, costing me nearly everything Arnor gained from its victory against the Yasarids. I found myself in shock for a few days, and when I questioned the GM along the 'How the hell did that happen?' line, he informed me that the planned removal of the Muslims inspired him to roll a revolt-check on my Muslim provinces. Obviously, these failed miserably.

A new Muslim hero, Kuhman Singh, the Lion of Bundelkhand, 'greatest general of the age', emerged to seize control of the revolt. The loss of my Prince's daughter and Heir, Arwen, along with the slaughter of the Magadhan Hussites, sparked a personality change in Peregrin's outlook. At this point, I began race-baiting in character on the lists, terming all non-Hussite Indians 'darkies' and 'savages'. There was no talk of reconciliation or assimilation with Bihar a smoking ruin.

It seemed war was inevitable, and that I would be forced to slaughter all Muslim populations in the north. For various reasons, I did not want to do this. I considered war a beastly and brutal instrument for actualizing my goals, and even as I assembled an allied force of Arnori conscripts and reservists along with Afghan mercenaries totalling nearly 50,000 men, with air support funded by generous Albanian donations, negotiations were opened with the Chandellan rebel Singh.

As an aside, I tersely warned the Yasarids that if they interfered in the north, I'd see their heads hoisted onto spikes over the walls of Schwarzcassel and burn their capital to the ground via aerial bombardment. The Yasarids did not take this threat well, but with the continuing failures attending their campaigns against the Southern League, there

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>

wasn't much for the player to do except 'eat humble pie'. Also, the Yasarid player chided the new Thai player's intelligence on the list by calling him an 'idiot child', which resulted in the Thai, very much not a child, pulling out 'ye olde ugly stick o' war' and invading the Muslim North. Hurrah. Arnor and Thai speedily made plans to obliterate the Yasarids and the Chandellans alike.

Meanwhile, the Chandellan player, surprised to actually have someone offering him an out from war, said he desired to migrate out of India, leaving my former lands to me and bereft of Muslims. What a glorious idea. Islam, obliterated from the north without bloodshed, and the north securely mine. I contacted the Persian Empire again and began arranging details so that the Muslims might immigrate to Western Australia's Waruna territory. It was not the best or most hospitable, especially compared to the rich Ganges lands they'd be leaving. Then again, those Ganges lands were more or less barren, ravaged by decades of unrelenting warfare. In any case, exiling Muslims to the devoutly pagan Australian continent seems in retrospect akin to sending them off to the moon.

However, I was the one assembling the very large and vindictive army and arranging assassination projects to put paid to Mr Singh. So I thought it worth a chance. We had more guns, more money, and he didn't have very much at all, being a rebel breakaway position in India, which everyone tried their best to avoid mirroring themselves in. All parties, from Persia to Chandella, appeared eager to undertake the project, and I sent the Chandellans, in return for the province of Rajput, a huge pile of gold so that they could build a very large number of transports and depart India for the 'great adventure' of Australia. The Albanians pleaded for me to simply butcher them, while other Hussites thought it would prove quite the 'hat trick'. I liked the idea of pulling off a hat-trick.

So the orders were sent in, and for once, by crikey, nothing happened.

The Afghans, long my allies, issued forth from the mountains to take my side, while the Chandellans, living up to their word, withdrew from Rajput and took their people from the city of Kanauj. Not one fired shot, not one revolt, not one bombing, not one dead Hindu, Hussite, or Muslim anywhere! It was a minor miracle. Nothing seemed to threaten me. Recently, the Persian Empire had offered weak protests of a perceived policy to drive Muslim nations into the sea, but his officers had revolted, and Persia faced the crisis of civil war. An officer of the Persian army named Al-Qadir seized power for himself as 'Shah of Iran', and it appeared that Persia, whom I had cultivated good relations with, would not be able to take an interest in Indian affairs. As a joke, I had pushed the heretical Muslim nation west of Persia to attack the 'thrice damned Sunites', writing a few letters and the like attempting to convince him that he should get tough, and do something interesting. My motive was more to instill spine into the poor lad, but alas, my attempts came to naught, though these little amusements would bear fruit of unwarranted size in the coming years...

However, the province of Waruna in Australia, where the Chandellans wished to flee, had been occupied by one of the local powers; I never knew for certain, but I expect a little bird broke the news of the pending migration, and the locals, not interested in having Shi'ite Muslims set up shop in their pagan homeland, put in a claim. The Chandellans, in spite of his king being a bona fide military genius, decided not to migrate. It appeared I would have to smash his head in. And to think I had paid him that huge stack of cash. It seemed Peregrin would have to remain on the Albanian tit for awhile longer, and that the Afghans, one of the best allies you could hope for, would bleed with Arnor once again. On the plus side, with mass recruitment, I could increase my army by another 20,000 troops. Amazingly, the Chandellans were willing to not only return my money to me, as he would no longer be migrating, but he agreed to cede my lost provinces to me if I recognized his claim to the Yasarid kingdom. Sure, said I, and instead of raising those extra 20,000 troops, I planned to settle them in the vacated Muslim provinces, oblivious to the wheeling and dealing in central Asia between the Persians and Iran. Apparently, so the story goes:

The Persians were like, Prepare to die.

And the Iranians replied, Go ahead. I give not a toss. I will burn everything to the ground.

Persia: Oh please don't, I've done 100 turns here, and that would

suck.

Iran: Negotiate.

Persia: No!

Iran: Where're my matches?

Persia: I give. Okay, let's negotiate.

Iran: I want to move out.

Persia: Where?

Iran: I have a brilliant idea.

I wasn't ignorant of the threat; I had voiced it on the Hussite list that the Iranian rebels could prove dangerous to India. No one in particular seemed too interested, expecting a big dust-up, but the whole thing left one of those nagging worries in my gut. I had a letter from the guy seeking my friendship, and I had sent him a rather tart letter saying that crossing the King of Kings was a bad idea. It was all true, you know. Persia: Big country, Islamic, controlled by a player with 100 turns under his belt. It's not something for an impoverished Indian country to muck about with and expect anything but grief... I returned to gathering my money from the combines and coordinating the downfall of the Yasarid player with the Southern League, the Thai Empire, and the Chandellas. The voice of Peregrin waxed terribly loud at that time, promising destruction to the Yasarid player on the mailing list:

What now? Dost the bitch of the south, Abdullah, cry from the darkness? Wait a little while yet for day, dear colleague, and a Bangkok mattress shall be your reward at the point of a Muslim dart driven forth with careful amusement by yours truly: though you will cry aloud like a sodomized boy, it will last only a little while... And we shall see you not only imprisoned, but under the prison...

We people of Arnor are not merely the bastards of the Danes, but the better part of the Hussite race, more devout, more courageous, more arrogant than any of our occidental brethren. Our land is wild, gorgeous, even salubrious, and erected on the detritus cast down by vanquished peoples and created to train the faithful. Here the weak grow strong, the dull grow clever, and the hopeless gain hope: Or they die. Die like the people of Maghada, like the city of Bihar, swallowed in a tempest of rapine and jihad, overrun with green banners refulgent in the humid wind... Die like Outremer, Arthedain, and proud Mughals.

Die like Yathrib in my absinthe-startled dreams under a bath of lambent comets and iridescent zeppelins sailing on into the maw of infinity while monkeys crack fresh water oysters by the banks of the Ganges and sing of old Shiva, his indigo face emblazoned upon the stellar canopy in a watchful visage, though he long departed for the country of dreams and legend...

I fancied myself at that moment the master of India, the graveyard of so many players' aspirations, and believed that soon, sooner than others would credit, I would transform my little backwater nation astride the rich but neglected lands of the Ganges into a player on the world stage. Then rumors began to circulate all was not well in Northern India, that visitors had come knocking down the Khyber pass with heavy guns in tow singing songs about Muhammad's Fusiliers and the like. Indeed, I wrote the Iranian player to determine whether or not he had attacked me, and it turned out that, yes, he had attacked me while my army was at the other end of India, colonizing the regions that the Chandellan Emirs agreed to abandon. Orders existed in regard to such a situation, but apparently, certain clauses would cause great grief...

To be continued ...

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Medieval Warlords

BOB BOST finds that alliances are vital, but not entirely trustworthy ...

PRINCE YAROSLAV looks over the assembled army before him. Spearmen at the front, heavier Boyar Guards behind them, and then the nobles on their massive mounts. The trumpeter is beside you waiting for



your orders. Riga is in sight and only a motley band of Teutonic Knights stand between you. You signal the trumpeter and the call goes out for the charge. Let your enemies beware the might of your armies.

Medieval Warlords is a PBEM war game set in Europe and North Africa of the 1300s. Turns are weekly and there is a program you download that allows you to process your turns quickly and easily.

There are 22 kingdoms that are grouped into four regional areas: the Western, Central, Eastern, and Muslim realms. The main influence this has is on what troop types are available. Most alliances cross all lines and often include both Muslim and Christian kingdoms.

Alliance

The key to this game, as any other, is alliances. There is no gain in attacking another kingdom by yourself and this is especially true in the early stages of growth. But with a second kingdom joining you, your enemy will have to spread his defenses against an attack by superior forces. In MD, you have three diplomatic stances for each other kingdom: War, Neutral and Alliance.

The difference in this game is that alliance does not necessarily mean a true working alliance. Since you cannot go from alliance directly to war, having an alliance with a neighbor may be nothing more than having an early warning system. This is something that fools many players who are used to alliances meaning you work together.

Another aspect of alliances in Medieval Diplomacy is that the winning 'team' can be anywhere from one-four players. And a team will find it easier to win than a single kingdom. For example, a three-player alliance would need 550 gold to win compared to 250 gold for a single kingdom. Twice the gold but three times the number of players spreads it around more easily. To give a feel of how much this is, there are roughly 190 land provinces with an average 9.2 gold.

One thing to be particularly careful about is passage rights. You can grant another kingdom the right to travel through your lands. This is very useful if you are fighting a joint enemy, as your troops will combine to attack. But if the kingdom you grant rights to is treacherous, he could move troops into your heartland and then declare war.

Gold

When you first conquer a province it will produce nothing for you. You need to annex it into your kingdom and that costs gold. Once this is done, the province will produce gold each turn. Normally, fighting a battle to conquer the province will initially reduce how much it produces, with each turn of peace having a chance to regain some of the lost production until it is back to full production. If you lose a province to another kingdom, but recapture it before they can integrate it, it will immediately begin producing for you.

The main use of gold is to build and maintain your military. There are 38 different troop types and nine different ship types. Which ones you can build depend on your location. If you capture a province that can produce a previously unavailable troop type, you will now be able to produce it, but only in that province. And only provinces that have population centers can raise troops, with cities able to produce the most and villages possibly only able to recruit the greenest of troops.

Troops

While there are many different troop types, for my money there are really only three 'types'. The offensive troops are the heavies: Nobles, Knights and Muslim Mounted Archers. These troops can move quickly and do lots of damage. The defensive troops are those that are slower but can absorb a lot of damage before being killed such as Saracen Guards, Boyar Guards, and Heavy Infantry. The third group can be used for both offense and defense on a short-term basis and I call these the 'scrub' troops. These are the light infantry, spearmen, Berbers and other similar lightly armed and armored troops. They serve the purpose of shielding your more expensive troops while the enemy flails away at the trash. I call these short-term troops because it costs almost as much to maintain a scrub unit as it does to maintain a knight.

Many of the troop types in the middle I consider useless. Why raise crossbowmen when you can raise knights? A single knight is equal to two crossbowmen in combat, costs nearly as much to raise, costs less to maintain, and is faster.

You can also raise naval units that can be used to protect your own coasts and transport troops to other lands. In reality, you are limited to three-four ship types because of your location. Be careful when planning invasions to have some warships in your fleet, unless you want to see how long your knights can tread water.

When organizing your armies and fleets, you can order your troops by rank. This lets you put your trash troops in the front rank so they take damage first. Your heavy defensive troops would be in the second or third ranks, while your most expensive troops would go into the fourth rank. For fleets, always have the merchants in the back with your brigs and war galleys in front.

Commanders

Another thing you can spend money on is hiring commanders for your armies. When you order a commander hired, your court scours the area and hires one of these leaders. The problem is that each has different abilities and you won't know what they are until they report for duty. It can be discouraging to find a naval genius when you are located in Central Europe.

You will need only a few of these people in any case, and make sure they are always attached to your largest forces. Their abilities will not apply to other army or navy units, even if they are attacking the same location.

Medieval Warlords at a glance

A medieval PBEM wargame, which offers free positions, or paying ones at a cost of \$1.99 per turn.

www.agegames.com

Proclamations

There is another source of money each turn that many seem to ignore. Each kingdom can make one proclamation each turn. If you do this, you receive 3 gold. Not a huge sum, but it is equal to a small province so why pass it up? You can't just write a nonsense sentence and receive the gold, but surely anyone could come up with a sentence or two about what is currently occurring.

Playing for free and for payment

There are two levels of play in the game. You can play for free but you are limited to annexing seven provinces and you cannot hire commanders. The other level is a reasonable fee of £1.1 (\$1.99 US) per turn. Why \$1.99 US instead of a nice, round \$2.00? I don't know but I do know it would make things easier.

While it would appear that playing for free would preclude being successful, it is possible. You need to find a neighbor who is trustworthy (and is paying the weekly turn fee) and willing to work with you. When you capture a province over your limit, you can transfer that province to your ally who can then annex it and receive the gold. He can then transfer the gold back to you for use in raising and maintaining troops.

Conclusions

Overall the game is very well organized and the turn program makes it easy to enter your move. For the price, it is an excellent game that will appeal to experienced gamers as well as novices. The only disappointment



Europe 1300 AD (map not from game)

is the rules themselves, which are not well organized. This is compensated to some extent by having a large FAQ section at the end of the rules.

You can contact the GM at gm@agegames.com or visit their web site at www.agegames.com.

PRINTERS AD

Star Fleet Warlord

Game EH7 part 3

ROBIN ORMAN succeeds intially, but then ...

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) compete with the Coalition (Klingons, Lyrans and Romulans). EH7 is a re-match pitting the US Alliance versus the UK Coalition - previously the UK had been victorious as the Alliance. The Americans requested the re-match and, anticipating another enjoyable game, our team accepted the challenge.

State of play

As we enter the mid-phase of the war, the two teams are clashing with each other all across known space. To the west, the Western Lyrans (L1 on the map) are preparing to launch their invasion of the Hydran home sector - supported by the Western Klingons (K1), who have recently acquired economic bonuses from the subjugation of the neutral WYN in sector 21. Simultaneously, the Eastern Lyrans (L2) are beginning their attack on the Kzinti (Z on the map) and their homeworld. The Federation remains relatively quiescent, only clashing with pirates and the Eastern Klingons (K2) over some of the neutral sectors.

Meanwhile, my Romulan forces are engaging Gorn ships across sectors 71 and 81. Despite an early economic lead, a carefully-laid ambush has just back-fired for the Western Romulans - although this has blunted the Western Gorn's advance, a Starbase is in jeopardy, and my opponent now knows what I have nearby.

The eastern Romulan/Gorn conflict is escalating more slowly, with my opponent playing things cautiously. However, that is all set to change as my listening posts begin to track a small fleet of Gorn vessels heading south towards my border - and the East Romulan fleet...

Y179 - Reprieve

The West Romulans breathed a sigh of relief this turn as the Western Gorn armada opted to bypass the undefended Starbase (presumably thinking the fleet was still there), and have moved on south towards another planet on the Romulan border. While this site is undefended, my own fleet has now reassembled and I will attempt to intercept the enemy as they celebrate their 'victory' in orbit. The battle will be a tough one but I believe the odds are somewhat in my favour.

Good news continues to pour in from my reconnaissance units. Frustrated by my lack of success infiltrating a scout into the Western Gorn home sector, I ordered my Starbase (the one the Gorn fleet bypassed) to scan a randomly-chosen hex in the enemy's territory. As Lady Luck would have it, this just happened to be the site of the enemy homeworld! If my fleet survives the battle with the Gorn armada, I may be able to exploit this good fortune.

The Eastern Romulans had similar success, with one of my intrepid scouts succeeding where their brethren had failed in penetrating sector 70, whilst another obtained a full terrain scan of the Eastern Gorn home sector. This latter has located the other enemy homeworld, which will

allow me to send some ships in to raid his planets.

Raiding will place a crimp in my opponent's economy - but it will be difficult to equal the economic blow he has suffered elsewhere this turn. Remember the small fleet that he'd sent south? They acted predictably (as has been a general failing for both Gorn players) and flew a course that took them from one site to another. Anticipating this, I had my own ships move along an opposing path. They lucked out and the Gorn fleet - comprising ten fast battlecruisers - were easily eliminated. Imagining the look on the face of the enemy fleet commander as 40 Romulan ships shimmered into view around his puny force gave me great satisfaction! This blunder has cost him nearly 1700 Economic Points, giving me a sizable lead.

With the positioning of my eastern fleet, I can (and will) attempt an intercept of the East Gorn fleet and Warp Gate this turn. This has a lower chance of success than the effort against the Western Gorn since my opponent has not been moving as predictably, so it is entirely likely my ships will simply fly past the enemy. Of course, there's always the possibility that things will go really well and that my next turn will reveal that both East and West Gorn fleets have been decimated...

The only bug in my ointment this turn has been a couple of reports of Northern Federation activity in the north of sector 62. It's possible that this is the start of a major incursion, which could put the Western Romulans under pressure. Hopefully things will go well in sector 71, and I can turn my attention to facing this new threat (if it materialises).

Y180 - Game, set, match...

The people of the planet Juno trembled in fear this turn, as two mighty fleets clashed in the skies above their world. More than sixty vessels were involved in this epic battle, and the two sides were almost evenly matched in terms of firepower. However, the numerical superiority of the Romulan fleet carried the day (due to the effects of damage division and my opponent's reliance on smaller numbers of large, powerful ships). Romulan ale flowed freely at Imperial Fleet Command to celebrate this victory.

The Gorn Warp Gate was destroyed along with the rest of the enemy ships during the battle, whilst mine was merely crippled. The only significant Gorn presence anywhere near sector 71 now comprises a small ten-ship scouting fleet that just managed to hop over the border. They'll get a scan of my home sector, but should be eliminated before they have a chance to make use of it.

Not unexpectedly, the Eastern Romulan armada failed to run down the other Gorn fleet, which has begun to move directly south for my border. Rather than spend more time trying to hunt it down, I have decided to split off my cruisers and send them straight for the enemy homeworld at maximum warp. Under full cloak at all times, my opponent should have no idea they're coming. The Warp Gate will follow along at its own pace, bringing in a few more ships in case more firepower becomes necessary.

The success of my scouts continues to accumulate with the arrival of the terrain scan of sector 70. Hopefully my Western Romulan fleet can quickly repair itself and get under way to threaten the enemy there.

Looking at the bigger picture, things continue apace on the western side of the map, with the East Lyrans preparing to strike the Kzinti homeworld next turn in sector 30, the West Lyrans taking on the neutral LDR in sector 11, and the West Klingons softening up the defences of the Hydran capitol through orbital bombardment, prior to a West Lyran attack the turn after. The progress of a South Federation fleet on the

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

border of the East Klingon home sector is a cause for some concern, but things seem to be turning in the Coalition's favour.

Y181 - Barbarians at the gates

It couldn't last. After two marvellous turns, things had to go wrong somewhere. And it's all my fault.

After a batch of predictable turns' movement, the Western Gorn threw a spanner in the works and sent eight of the ships in their scouting fleet deep into my home sector. This was unexpected: remember that this is prior to them acquiring a terrain scan, and before they would've heard of the destruction of their main fleet. I had thought that the risk of flying into a supernova or other nasty terrain would've deterred them from this course - apparently not. Now, whilst I managed to destroy the other two ships from the fleet, these eight are sitting just off of my homeworld - and my opponent knows it because he's just got a scan. And I only have a small base station to defend it. Oh. Frell.

The fortunes of the Eastern Romulans are also in decline (although thankfully not as drastically), as my fleet was detected by an enemy ship bouncing off of them between turns. This will give my opponent three turns to prepare his homeworld's defences to meet them... which could be enough to bring things in the east to a stalemate. Suddenly the Romulan ale has turned sour.

The West Romulan forces are going to have to play a damage-limitation exercise: parking fleets on sites (to deprive my opponents of them - ships remain even if a corporation is wiped out, although they no longer move), distributing as many resources as possible to the Eastern Romulans, and buying ships at the homeworld (on the off-chance it's not taken) in a 'closing the barn door after the horse has bolted' mentality. The East Romulan fleet has no choice but to continue heading for the Gorn homeworld, in the hope that my opponent fails to beef up his defences sufficiently to stop them.

On the bright side of things, my teammates are having greater success over to the west, with both the Kzinti and LDR homeworlds falling to the Lyrans, and the Klingons reducing Hydran fortifications to a couple of sandbags and a pile of rubble. The Southern Federation have now entered the East Klingon home sector however, and they are now coming under pressure to stop the juggernaut before it's too late.

Y182 - The fall of Rom

The people of the planet Romulus could only cower in terror this turn, as the orbital base station was rapidly annihilated by the eight Gorn destroyers. RIP the Western Romulans...

The final orders of the Imperial Senate were carried out with mixed success. Half-a-dozen sites were taken from the Western Gorns by raiders, and a couple of locations will be well-protected by Romulan fleets... who will sit there, patiently, waiting for orders that will never come. The planned evacuation of resources to the eastern side of the Romulan empire failed to take place, however, since the order required a homeworld to work.

The remaining Eastern Romulans - whilst mourning for their cousins, now under the cruel oppression of the Gorn - were heartened by news of the destruction of an enemy battle station and Warp Gate in sector 81 by the fleet. Further, long range scans showed no increase of defences at the Eastern Gorn homeworld. With my fleet only two turns away and raiders stealing resources from them, it now seems unlikely that the enemy can muster sufficient forces to defend it. The Eastern Gorn fleet heading south through sector 81 continues to move slowly - it cannot reach my homeworld in less than three turns. Just to be safe however, I will purchase a decent size fleet for protection - I am now understandably cautious about homeworld defence! These ships might ultimately be used to recapture sector 72.

Over to the west, Alliance losses continue to mount with the conquest of the Hydran homeworld by the Western Lyrans and their huge fleet. The entire west side of the map is now under Coalition control, with only the East Klingons under threat. However, many Coalition forces are now a long way from the frontline (due to being directed against the Hydrans or LDR), or have been pinned down (the Lyran force in the former Kzinti sector is being menaced by a Northern Federation fleet).

The scores are almost level at this point, with the Alliance holding 108 sites to our 106 (a team wins if it possesses twice as many sites as the opposing team). However, the Coalition has scored an impressive 217 kills to the Alliance's 87, which suggests that we have more firepower hanging around - if only we can get it to somewhere useful.

Y183 - Sneak attack

The invasion of the Eastern Gorn home sector continues apace, and my attack fleet is now waiting just off the enemy homeworld. Scans continue to show no military build-up, so my opponent's days are surely numbered... Unless he's got a huge fleet that's moving over the homeworld each turn, but never ending the turn at it, so that it didn't turn up on my scans. This is rather improbable, and would play to the strengths of the Romulan navy - strong defensive abilities, including a bonus from the cloaking device - but you never know. More likely, he simply missed the report of my fleet a few turns back, or thinks that he can take out my homeworld before it will reach him.

Assuming the Eastern Gorn fall, I can direct my ships westwards towards the other Gorn homeworld. The additional ships at my Warp Gate (on the 80/81 border at the moment) can be used to reinforce my current fleet, but the W Gorn will have plenty of time to prepare a defence. There's also the Southern Feds to worry about, since I don't know what's become of the Warp Gate I spotted in sector 62 several turns back.

The Southern Federation are also about to launch their strike on the East Klingon homeworld - and things don't look good for our side. With the Hydrans, Kzinti and Western Romulans defeated (and potentially the Eastern Gorn and Klingons to follow), empires are dropping like flies - but the war is far from over.

To be continued...

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

A map of sector ownership at the start of Y179.

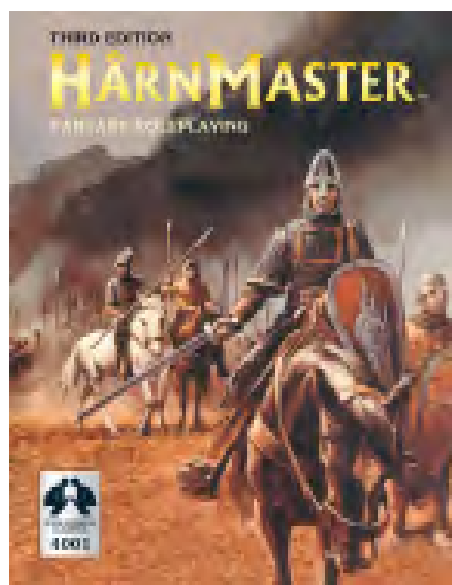
Larger text denotes home sectors, whilst light grey squares are neutral or contested.

It's a Beautiful World

Sunsigns, Chinese history & Queen Victoria.

LISA FORDHAM considers three contrasting systems ...

GAMERS ARE a diverse lot. Some enjoy running pre-packaged modules with very simple characters whereas other like to create their own worlds rich in detail with complex and well thought out characters. For those who prefer the latter, but don't have the time or the ability to do so themselves, *Columbia Games* has published the *Hårn* series.



HårnMaster is no exception. It has richly detailed character creation, including 'sunsign' relationship to family and clan, medical and psychological scars, and occupational skills as a result of your background. The skill system is equally detailed allowing up to three attributes and two sunsigns to affect your base ability in a skill. The combat system continues in this manner with individual weapons and armour having different abilities to affect each other.

Most actions are dealt with by skill rolls. You have a percentage chance of succeeding at a skill and a 20% chance that any success or failure is critical. This leads to four possible outcomes for any skill use: critical success, marginal success, marginal failure, or critical failure. Obviously, the better you do, the better your results. For example, a critical success on healing has twice the effect of a marginal success. A marginal failure does nothing whereas a critical failure infects the wound.

A similar approach can be used for any skill with suggestions made by the authors for the varied effects, but with the GM overall determining what is most appropriate. When skills of two different characters come into play, the better success wins. If both characters achieve the same level, it is a tie. If a tie is *not* appropriate to the situation the person who rolled lower wins. In combat there is a table that compares successes and determines damage done by attacker or defender as a result of the levels of success or failure.

As in all *Hårn* products, the level of detail and the care taken in integrating the rules are exceptional. They go so far as to determine the effects of layered armour on its protective value and to determine different effects on damage depending on where you aim on your target.

This level of detail is a strong (if not the strongest) positive for me, but is one of the few negatives that some might find. It can be difficult for a novice to absorb that level of detail. They can get caught up in the intricacy and never get to a point where they can comfortably play this game. But, for a GM with some experience, who is used to evaluating on his/her own many of the details that *HårnMaster* subsumes, it can be a pleasure to have it included in the system itself.

My only other quibble is purely commercial. While I understand that *Columbia Games* wants to sell their detailed magic and religious systems and that the modular nature makes it easy *and* convenient for them to do so separately, I really would have liked for the game system to include

at least some level of the magic and religious systems that they refer to occasionally in this book. I am not saying complete detail need be there, but some indication as to how spells are used and maybe a few lower-powered (or lower-levelled) spells would have been enough to get a spellcaster started (and, incidentally, given the usual *Hårn*ic richness of detail) and wanting more.

As I have said previously, *Hårn* is one of the best systems that people do not know. All in all, I would highly recommend *HårnMaster* to experienced GMs and players who, like myself, love detail in their roleplaying.

So you want to be a monkey monk?

As we walked past the *Sanguine Productions* table at a Convention last, I was intrigued. Unless you count **Toon**, I had never played an anthropomorphic animal in a roleplaying game. So, when I had the chance to review **Jadeclaw**, I thought it would be interesting.

I was not wrong. The creation system is fairly simple yet allows for many possibilities. First you choose a name (always a good start), then a race and career. Then you assign six different dice levels to your four basic traits (body, speed, mind and will) as well as your race and career abilities. You can then choose additional skills, gifts and flaws to customise your character.

Using your abilities is a matter of contests. Essentially, every time you get a skill (whether through race, career or choice) you get a die associated with it. You roll all of those dice and take the highest number



from all of them, comparing it to a similar roll for the difficulty of the task. If another character is opposing you, the dice from that character's skills are used in the same way yours are. Highest number wins and if you beat your opponent by 5 (overwhelming), you may get special effects. Rolling a 1 on all of your dice is a botch. And can have very bad effects.

When dealing with damage, your dice are compared with your opponents, in order, from highest to lowest. Each time you beat the opponent it counts as 1 damage point, with an overwhelming success counting as 2.

The system allows for the strong to almost always beat the weak, *but* the very strong will not always beat the strong. In this case, there are many situations where other skills and abilities can be brought in. The GM and player are encouraged to find 'creative' uses for their skills to add dice to a roll.

Playing a basic character is fairly simple. Where it seems to get complicated is adding martial arts or magic. To maintain the flavour of Chinese history, many different paths to both martial arts and magic were included. Accommodating those paths requires a large list of martial arts manoeuvres, spells and other abilities, which can be themselves overwhelming to one who is not familiar with the system.

As a player you would only need to deal with a limited number of such abilities, but as a GM I can see it being very difficult to deal with unless you have an excellent memory or are constantly referencing the rule book.

All in all, I really like the game. The ability to customise characters and advance them as they experience is beautifully done. But, I am a little wary of running it - I would love to hear from anyone who has tried this one with their games group.

Afternoon tea and thaumaturgy

I have long thought that Victorian Britain (or indeed the Empire as a whole) would be an excellent setting for a roleplaying game. Although I've run a few successful *Call of Cthulhu* scenarios set in this period, I have continued to search for a specifically designed game system.

Hey presto! *Heresy Games* have used the *Fuzion* system to present scenarios of class warfare and liberation of the masses in a modified Victorian England. An excellent sourcebook, it presents a very nice overview of the Victorian setting, adding classic fantasy races and magic seamlessly into it.

Victorian England was an interesting time. A time when people still knew their place but often struggled to get beyond it. A time when women were property but were starting to realise it. A time when the likes of Sherlock Holmes wandered through the imaginations of those who could barely put food on their tables.

This is the setting that Heresy Games has chosen for its new book, **Victoriana**. *Fuzion* is a generic game system created in tandem by R Talesorian and *Hero Games*, though it's new to me. Heresy have done an excellent job of taking this genre, adding fantasy roleplaying elements, and bringing them both to life: much in the way that Mary Shelley had her hero bring together many elements to breathe life into his creation. However, I think the game's outcome will be better than that of Shelley's creation.

The first 100 pages are essentially a sourcebook for the genre that can be used in any system. No references are made to mechanics at all, but rather we are given through story and description a glimpse into the various factions of Britain's lower, middle and upper classes as well as the unique role of females in that same time.

For each group presented we are given information about their background, their resources and then their approach to their world via a series of quotations regarding money, magic, marriage, the other classes, religion, honour and education.

Once we have learned about the different classes of society, we are taken on a tour of the various institutions of that same society from 'the Afternoon Tea' to 'the Public House (Pub)' and get an excellent glimpse into how each person fits into the society. And, of course, we are also introduced to the fact that the PCs don't always fit into this society. Modern players don't always have the mindset to fit into such a rigid society where your 'place' is defined from birth.



The position of other races is also defined within the society of Victoriana, including the Eldrin, who are often upper class and have a touch of magic and the Ogres who are invariably lower class and believe whatever they are told by their 'betters'.

The mechanics are almost secondary, as they are introduced after the source material as they should be in an RPG. *Fuzion* is a fairly simple skills based system using points to allow you to buy your characteristics and skills. You can spend option points allowing you to improve your skills, talents and abilities, to get exceptional abilities such as the ability to use magic, or to buy property/special equipment.

If you run out of option points, you can further choose to take 'complications'. These give you additional option points as well as giving you roleplaying hooks and a few weaknesses.

Available skills are limited by social class and early character history. For example, anyone who grew up in the streets is much more likely to know how to pick pockets than to hold a high tea with the Queen.

Magic, if you are capable of it, comes in various flavours largely based on how it is accessed and used. For example, player characters (PCs) can be thaumaturgists, working for the guild who control the very limited amount of official magic, mediums who are born with a gift to sense and channel the realms beyond, or petty conjurers who can enchant items with long dangerous rituals to be able to use them for spells at a later time.

Forbidden to PCs (although I am sure some will find their way to it) are the magics of chaos: demonology, where those from hell are summoned and sometimes even controlled, and necromancy, where the dead are brought (mostly) back to life.

The book also included descriptions of standard NPCs, monsters, and other important GMing information.

All in all, I would recommend Victoriana even if you never intended to play with the *Fuzion* rules. Simply as source material, the first third of the book is well worth the cost. Since the mechanics are simple and integrate well, it might even be worth playing this game.

A good addition to any gaming library.



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Austerlitz: Spain

GERRY ELLIOTT offers vital strategic advice for this major position ...

AT THE START of the game, Spain has a potentially powerful position if the opportunities can be realised. In Europe, the Spanish economy and population is on a par with other nations. As with all the nations, the starting army is relatively small and needs prudent expanding. Economically, the factor to point out is that Spain has one ore mine, much like most of her neighbours.

In India, Spain's holdings are small and the main nation with influence is Great Britain.

In the Caribbean, Spain has the major holdings with the best opportunity for expansion and exploitation.

So, on turn one and probably for the first year at least, Spain should be regarded as a bit of a sleeping giant. Spain needs time to build its European economy and army, make a grab for land in India and expand vigorously in the Caribbean.

How can this strategy be put into practice?

It is best to look at the economy first. Spain will need economic power to make it a powerful European nation. In Europe, growth will be steady. Building of the ore mine and associated factories will take money and this needs to be realised by trading. This is a major advantage for Spain, as you start with three trading cities in the Caribbean. You will note that Spain will grow much like France in Europe. In India, you should attempt to take Haiphong, a trade city that starts the game neutral. To do this, you need to load a brigade with Kts from your start position in India. You will see that the brigades selected will have to 'exchange' battalions because each start battalion weighs too much to be able to be loaded on to the available shipping. This loading must be done on turn one as there will be a race with the Confederation of the Rhine to see who can take Haiphong. Its importance lies in that it gives you a trade city in India, early on, when making money is vitally important. On turn two you move and land in Haiphong and try and take the city on turn three. If you are lucky enough to secure Haiphong, note that it is not a barracks and one will need to be built on the location. The ownership of Haiphong is also a launch pad into the surrounding area, which starts neutral and has an abundance of strategic mines which should be taken if at all possible.

In the Caribbean Spain should exploit as follows. The Isthmus should be controlled by Spain so that the major holdings are not split in two. To do this will require a brigade, with a general in the same co-ordinate, to move unfederated to the Isthmus. Again, 'exchanging' battalions to obtain an all-cavalry brigade is desirable because it will move faster. It is paramount that as many mines as possible are taken by Spanish forces.

Militarily, Spain starts no stronger than others, except maybe in the Caribbean. The fleet, at the start of the game, is the second largest. Great Britain has the largest fleet. The French fleet is as nearly as big as the Spanish.



Spain & Portugal: 1805 (map not from game)

Your ability to expand your armed forces faster than your European neighbours will be largely dependent on how your economy generates money and economic points. If gold becomes plentiful, as it should, the supply should be used to feed mints in mainland Europe in order to generate extra money.

Your initial consideration will be to decide how many new Kt European troops should be built and sent to the colonies. The Caribbean should be the emphasis: you want to be a superpower in the Caribbean and be able to influence other nations. A powerful Caribbean will eventually lead to significant amounts of money becoming available for use in building forces in Europe.

All of the options that Spain can consider are underpinned by the political situation. Spain starts the campaign militarily weak and would prefer no conflicts, certainly in Europe, for the first year and a half. Spain needs this time to build an army that should help dissuade other European nations from seeing Spain as easy pickings.

It appears obvious that Spain would like to start with agreements, if not alliances, with Spain and Portugal. The benefits are obvious. If Portugal wishes to expand at the expense of Spain, then Portugal will normally attack in the first year: any later and Spain's economy should have resulted in the Spanish army having superiority over their Portuguese neighbours.

An agreement with France is quite often forthcoming, as it allows France to look eastward with a secure western flank. France can be often persuaded to look at the Confederation of the Rhine as somewhere to expand as there is little threat to France's colonial holdings. Quite often, Holland will join in such an adventure. Italy is also a typical target of France. This can help you as you are in the best position to exploit the colonial possessions of Italy.

The one nation you most definitely do not want to irritate is Great Britain. A lot will obviously depend on the alliances that other nations will make, but you must invest time in political dialogue. You should

Austerlitz at a glance

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

www.austerlitzpbem.com

also be wary of open alliances with countries too early, especially Great Britain, as such an alliance is immensely powerful in the colonies and may persuade the other smaller nations to all act together. Divide and rule!

By now, if Spain has survived, we should be into the early part of 1809. The situation for Spain should be something like a good economy in Europe, an expansion and consolidation in the Caribbean and some limited growth in India.

Now is the time for reflection. Starting in the Caribbean, Spain should have a factory as soon as possible. One may already have been built. The reason is twofold. Economic points will allow the building of colonial troops without affecting the European economy. Secondly, if a stock can be obtained it will potentially generate a lot of money through trading. This is why the initial three trade cities are so important. Spain should be, by far, the main strategic power in the Caribbean.

In Europe, the economy should have at least four factories. The extra ore required should be being supplied from the colonies or, if the ore is being used in the colonies, zinc should be in enough supply to keep economic points production at a maximum. I would also expect to be feeding enough gold to maintain two mints at maximum money production.

Now may be the time to look at European expansion. If no obvious route is visible, the annexing of Portugal should be considered. The reasons are obvious and include the fact that the country is small and so a campaign should potentially be short in time. Another reason is that the conquest of Portugal would only leave one European border that needs defending.

If Portugal is a major ally, then the expansion route is not obvious but the game may be all the more interesting for it.

And then?

Trying to give advice after this time horizon is difficult because the permutations are too numerous. Needless to say, diplomacy will have the greatest effect in colouring the picture that you will encounter.

Always remember that a tenacious defender or ruthless attacker will always prey on the perceived weak-willed or apparent inactive nations. Even if you don't do a lot, make a lot of noise in not doing it!

Historical fact-file

Spain at the time of the French Revolution and Napoleonic Wars was a shadow of its former power and glory.

Corruption, cronyism and almost non-existent leadership from King Charles IV had brought this once-great empire to its financial knees and left its military in a very poor state. Charles IV was dominated by his wife, Maria Louisa, and she in turn was advised by her lover Manuel Godoy in matters of state.

Originally, Spain allied itself against France's revolution but in 1795 entered a peace with its northern and powerful neighbour. By 1796, it was actively allied to her and Spanish fleets backed French ships against Britain's Royal Navy.

In 1807, Spain allowed French troops to move through its territory to deal with Portugal, which had been openly defying Napoleon Bonaparte's Continental trade blockade of Britain.

French troops not only reached Portugal, but also managed to unofficially occupy important military positions in Spain. Bonaparte then took advantage of quarrelling within the Royal Family to not only have Charles IV abdicate, but also secured the renouncement of the throne by his son and heir Ferdinand.

When it was announced that the French emperor's brother, Joseph, would become King of Spain there was a revolt that resulted in Bonaparte being forced to keep an extraordinary number of troops in the country to try to maintain peace.

The Peninsular War against a British army led by the Duke of Wellington and the accompanying constant guerrilla warfare against French troops were two of the major factors in the eventual defeat of Bonaparte.

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EINSTEIN'S LOT

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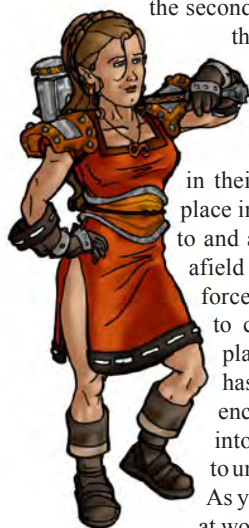
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Einstein's Lot and Xott Grande

CAROL MULHOLLAND compares and contrasts two roleplaying games

I'M CURRENTLY playing in two PBM roleplaying games, **Einstein's Lot** and **Xott Grande**, the first from Chris Morris of *Ulaiddh Games* and the second from *Antony Dunks*. As you'll already know, the term 'roleplaying game' covers a huge range of possible experiences, and yes, these two games are pretty different from each other. So let's take a look at them both ...



One major difference between them lies in their settings. The action of *Einstein's Lot* takes place in the modern world: current affairs are referred to and although my character hasn't ventured further afield than England, it seems likely that the sinister forces which threaten her are only biding their time to conquer the whole world. *Xott Grande* takes place in the fantasy world of Xott, which of course has its own problems: here, Prince Julien has been enchanted by an unidentified enemy and turned into a pretty girl, so he calls on his friends for help to undo the spell as quickly yet discreetly as possible. As you can see, both games have supernatural forces at work in them. There's a sense of hovering menace in *Einstein's Lot* and there are clearly useful or

dangerous enchantments in *Xott Grande*.

In *Einstein's Lot*, it's difficult to pin down what the evil forces are and what they want, but the threat is urgent and it's important to discover and counteract it. The dark powers seem to be rising from ancient times, eek. In *Xott Grande*, the catastrophe of Prince Julien's transformation has already happened, so the player characters have to find out who's responsible and remedy it. *Xott Grande* is a bit like a mystery whodunnit, *Einstein's Lot* resembles a spine-chilling ghost story (Its moderator, Chris Morris, describes it as an 'occult thriller'.) They both work well in their different ways, and I enjoy them both.

Player characters face danger in both games. *Xott Grande's* characters are attacked by horribly squelchy monsters, while my character in *Einstein's Lot* has been pursued by an invisible serpent and attacked by a vampire. And who, oh who, can she trust to help her?

Differences in play

Apart from their different scenarios, the two games are very different to play.

Einstein's Lot is an open-ended game with no set deadlines, which suits me pretty well for a long-running game. Send in your orders when you like, and a turn will follow promptly. Contact with the other players isn't forbidden, but it isn't at all necessary.

In contrast, *Xott Grande* has regular monthly deadlines, and it's a team game which will end when the solution has been found to Prince Julien's predicament. Players are encouraged to communicate in character with each other between turns, over a shared email link. It's possible to send open or private messages. This game is nearing its conclusion so can't take new players now, but there are other games set in the Xott world.

The turns

As you'd expect with a solo game, in *Einstein's Lot* every player receives an individual turn: this is beautifully written and covers two sides of A4, sometimes accompanied by a relevant map and/or the game newsletter. The moderator prefers to send turns by post because of his maps, but it's possible to submit orders by email.

Because *Xott Grande* is a team game, the same account of the turn is sent to every player, together with some private details describing what's happened to your own character. These turns are long, at 20+ sides of A4, and take a bit of studying. Worry not, though, the moderator reminds everyone of the date and time of the next deadline. The game can be played by post and by email, but email makes communication easier between the players.

Characters

Character setup is fairly easy in both games. Both my characters are female: the one in *Einstein's Lot* is a student and the other in *Xott Grande* is a resolute dwarf. I was a bit disappointed that *Xott's* moderator wouldn't allow my female dwarf to keep her gender mysterious by growing a beard, but ah well, if that's the way that dwarfs appear in *Xott*, Ingerjald will have to stay smooth-chinned. Fortunately, female dwarfs are regarded as superior beings among their own race. Lack of a beard doesn't mean Ingerjald can't fight, of course, though her female clothing may explain why she had a particularly nasty experience with this yukky tentacled monster:

'Like jelly it slid through her fingers no matter how tightly she squeezed, though now she had its attention, it turned on her, slithering up her arm, its tentacles flailing towards her face. Each time she clawed it back, the creature slipped out of her grasp and back towards its target. The impasse was broken when the creature changed tactics. In a combination of holding it in her hands and squashing it against her body Ingerjald gained a brief respite from its constant escapology trick, which was just when it gave up going for her face, slipping into her blouse instead. With the same remarkable agility it had shown in moving across the floor, it moved within her clothing, with Ingerjald almost powerless to stop it going where it pleased. Twice she chased it down one or other trouser leg only to have it turn around and come back up, on the third time she felt drastic measures were needed. Drawing her book knife, she ran the blade down the seam of her trousers, cutting the fabric and exposing the creature...'

Einstein's Lot at a glance

A non-deadlined RPG with a modern setting from Ulaiddh Games. Startup and first turn is £4.50 with subsequent turns at £3.50. Orders may be sent by email, while turns are sent by post. Last reviewed in *Flagship* 91.

chrisjan.morris@virgin.net

Xott Grande at a glance

A team-based RPG set in the fantasy land of Xott, from Antony Dunks. The charge is £25 for the whole game, however long it takes, though other Xott games cost £10 for startup + 2 turns, with subsequent turns at £2.50. Play is by email or post. Xott was last reviewed in *Flagship* 33.

www.sark.net/~xott

I was amused to see that my character in Einstein's Lot has gained skill in Running by a hasty retreat from danger - this will no doubt come in handy the next time danger threatens her. I decided to make my Einstein's Lot character ambitious, thinking that this would give her the option of deciding to turn to evil if it'll help her career. The evil in the game does sound scarily nasty, however, so flight will probably remain the best option throughout:

'She paused and listened. The rustling and scratching were still there, and she shouted "Stop it! Now!"

For a moment there was silence, as if she had triumphed and brought exorcism, excision to the cancer of darkness within the church, and then there was a little voice whispering like a rustle of paper within her mind. "Yes! Yes! You pull, and I'll push till I'm through. Yes, I'll push and you pull."

Alison opened her mouth, but it was dry with fear, and she could make no sound. Nothing was further from her mind than obeying the hideous little voice, but she had no idea how to avoid doing its bidding.

"You pull, and I'll push. I'll push and you pull, and then I'll be through."

"No! I won't!" she thought as clearly as she could manage, for whatever it was, it was aware of her in some mysterious way. She could see plainly the masonry of the wall before her, and the steady flow of powder from the cracks between the blocks below the bronze plate... There was room within the base of the wall for a coffin to be inserted, and burial within the walls was sometimes practised. She had seen somewhere or other the tale of the knight who had been told by the devil that buried without the church or within, the devil would have his soul, so the knight had been buried in the walls to escape the logical trap. The walls were the sort of betwixt and between place, like crossroads, where a suicide or mercy killing victim might be buried.'

My examples show how vividly both moderators can write. Xott's Antony Dunks conveys the sensuous horror of his tentacled monster, while Ulaidh's Chris Morris builds suspense effectively and enjoys drawing on his wide knowledge of history and folklore.

Other characters

Non-Player Characters are important in Einstein's Lot, of course, and my character has met a fair number of these. They're well created and appear to have led well-detailed lives of their own, though it was a bit dismaying for Alison to hasten by bike and train from Somerset back to her base in the West Midlands, only to discover that the lecturer who set her the task of deciphering a mysterious message has had his head blown off by a shotgun just before she can tell him that she's discovered the solution. So poor Alison is left with no-one to trust except for a possibly unreliable couple who may know more than they've yet revealed about what's going on. Loneliness is an important feature of this game.

Loneliness isn't an option in Xott Grande. Although this particular Xott game will end soon (we players know that we've taken longer than the GM anticipated to crack the case!), it's set in Antony Dunks' game world, so it's a variant within the established Xott setting. Indeed, several of my team members have brought their game characters over from previous games. They make a colourful if somewhat disreputable group. Take Scalene for example, who's a seductive princess. Then there's Arglend the Ranger with his wolf, Math the gnome, Thana the priest and the pyromancer Che-arr, who possesses both a crude sense of



humour and a pet badger called Percy that's inclined to break wind. Ingerjald is surprised to see how ready they are to quarrel with each other at first and how insulting Che-arr can be towards Prince/Princess Julien, but once the action starts they don't hesitate to work together.

In conclusion

I hope I've shown enough of these two games to give you some idea of what they're like to play.

It's perhaps easier for newcomers to play in a team game like Xott Grande, because you can be carried along by the ideas of the other players. However, you'll need to study the long turns with care to remember who all the PCs and NPCs are and what they're doing. You may need to ask about unfamiliar aspects of the game world, like Xott's geography and religions. Fortunately, both the moderator and the other players are keen to offer helpful advice.

Einstein's Lot will suit you if you're happy to play without contacting the other players, and are reasonably imaginative about your objectives. The moderator won't always end a turn with a clear indication of what to do next, and concentrates on building a frightening atmosphere rather than swift action. This may suit you, or it may not.

I like both games: Xott for its swift action (though we still haven't solved Prince Julien's problem!) and Einstein's Lot for the shiver that a new turn always sends down my spine.

Both moderators obviously put skill and love into their games, and it's a pleasure to experience their writing.

Aliens vs Marines

Half Life: Natural Selection

SAM ROADS reports on an online wargame ...



We had relocated to Generator Room early, and I had secured all of the Res Nodes in the upper level. The TSA marines guarding the lift were still relying on the light MGs they had spawned with, but my star Rambo 'BlackCherry' had cut a swathe through the Kharaa defences at the bottom of the 'Foreboding' lift with a shotgun. The whole team was benefiting from

armour upgrades, and motion tracking had nearly researched, but I was completely stymied by the constant harrying of a pack of Skulks and Gorges on the fringes of our territory.

Should I research siege guns and clear out the offence chambers protecting the Red Room so I could send a couple of Jetpackers in to establish a phase gate? Would I do better to save for high tech Heavy Armour and entrust our fate to the abilities of two or three squaddies' teamwork in an HA train? Could we afford Grenade Launchers or would the money be better invested in a Turret Factory outpost covering the other vital junction at the top of the 'Foreboding' elevator?

If I continued to give BlackCherry gear in preference to the other marines would morale suffer? Could I trust those two who had died to the Fade to handle heavy MGs? Why had no-one built the Proto Lab yet? Aarrgh!

THIS IS A typical moment spent playing the 'Commander' position in *Natural Selection* - a free module for the PC game *Half Life* (created by Charlie Cleveland of *Unknown Worlds Entertainment*).

Half Life is famous not only for being perhaps the best PC game of the 90s, but because its game engine was modified to produce **Counter-Strike**, the most popular online game ever. *Natural Selection* (NS) is occasionally similar to *Counter-Strike* (CS), in that the Marines fight against an alien foe with ranged weapons in a 'First Person Shooter' style. However it is also much, much more.

The concept in a nutshell: Marines battle Aliens for control of territory.

The Aliens

The Alien race are quite different to the Marines, who are all, well, Marines, with each 'class', or evolution of Alien suited to performing a different and specific role - as a Scout, Builder, Support, Assassin or Tank. The aliens share vision, each player able to see what the others see, and so work much better in teams than as individuals. Their 'evolutions'

- which is to say, the special abilities of each alien - are permitted through the growing of structures throughout the Marines' territory. And yes, I know... evolution takes generations and the game lasts 30 minutes. But hey, this is Sci-Fi...

The Skulk is a Scout, small and fast, with an unparalleled close combat attack but a complete inability to survive more than a couple of bullets. Parasite attacks 'paint' the enemy for larger life forms to attack, whilst the ability to Xenocide allows for kamikaze-like self destruction - the largest source of damage in the game.

Building is achieved through the Gorge - a waddling, hopping, lump of cuteness. Healing Spray looks after fellow Aliens whilst the area-effect Bile Bomb is the closest thing the aliens have to a siege weapon.

Lerks (*see above, left*) swoop and soar before dive-bombing their prey and attempting a lethal fly-by biting. The flight model is great fun, though given the Lerks' weakness it can shine more by supporting other aliens with protective Umbra or acidic Spores.

The hit-and-run class is called the Fade. It's moderately tough, with a good melee attack, and excels at movement, blinking in and out of combat faster than enemies can react.

The best in the Aliens' arsenal is the Onos - the size of a rhino, capable of both inflicting and surviving great damage. It can even Devour a single enemy, the ultimate counter to marine Heavy Armour. This tank's size is a vulnerability, however, and it is hard to manoeuvre unless there is a long straight corridor and plenty of room to build up speed on a charge!

The Commander

The jewel in the crown of NS is the role of the Commander - a top down strategic role similar to those taken in Real Time Strategy games like *Starcraft* and *Command and Conquer*.

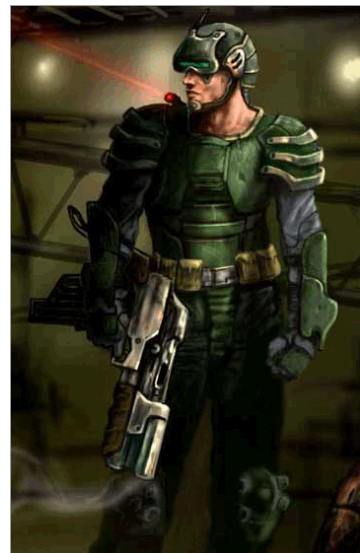
The player taking on the role of Commander, as the title suggests, commands the other players running the Marines. In addition, the Commander gets to spend the Marine resources on a variety of technologies, balancing the need for immediate firepower against long-term improvements or static defences.

Firearms range through pistols, light MGs, shotguns and heavy MGs to grenade launchers, each with different costs, strengths and limitations. Marines can also be equipped with hand grenades, mines, and welders for repairs and opening new routes across the map.

During firefights the Commander supplies the Marines with Ammunition, Med-Kits and Combat Stimulants. In exchange, the Marines build structures where the Commander dictates.

Not just technology-related structures such as the Armoury, Arms Lab, Observatory and Proto Lab, but also Sentry Turrets, Siege Cannons, and Phase Gates, which allow the Marines to teleport to vital locations across the map.

But managing these resources is only half of the Commander's role.



Natural Selection at a glance

A free module for the computer game *Half Life* (£10.00), which allows for online play.

www.natural-selection.org



The other is actively commanding the Marines. The Marines have very little information beyond what they can see, and what the Commander tells them. The Commander, meanwhile, has the ability to see

everything that any marine can see, plus whatever they choose to view with their observatory. The Commander, therefore, can formulate plans which the marines simply cannot comprehend from their limited perspective. And in this aspect, the game mimics the reality of battlefield command better than any other game I've played.

The role of Commander is not an easy one. Sometimes the Commander doesn't understand the difficulty of a situation and will send wave after wave of marines 'over the top' into certain death, because he or she is too short-sighted to perceive the problem.

On other occasions the marines can shout out vital information about things they've heard, or inferred, which can allow the commander to make deductions about how to defeat the opponent. And this is not to mention the difficulty of organising a squad of egotistical gamers into working as a co-ordinated, loyal team.

Sometimes, when repeated typed requests are ignored and waypoints are forgotten, I find that shouting into the microphone actually does make people do what you ask of them...

Command versus cooperation

If the Marine team is a microcosm of traditional battlefield hierarchy, the Aliens are an example of biological Marxism! No-one is in charge, but in order for the Aliens to win, all the players must take a share in the role of decision-making. Each player needs to take their turn at playing different classes at the appropriate time, sometimes in a supporting role, at other times attempting to take the glory for themselves.

The Gorge makes most of the strategic decisions about where to build chambers to assist the Alien encroachment, and to foil the Marine Commander's plan. But the whole team tends to constantly advise the Gorge as to what they've seen and heard, and where it would be better to apply pressure or fall back.

Conclusions

Natural Selection is not that easy to pick up. Not only is there a steep learning curve which must be climbed in order to gain the skills required to win the fights between Marines and Aliens, but the strategic elements of the game can lead you into making a lot of tactical mistakes in your first games. However, there is a training option called 'Combat' mode, which does away with Commander and any kind of building, and allows you to get to grips with the other aspects of the game first.

The designers have constantly brought out new versions of the game since its release in October 2002. It's not clear why they have coded such a great game for little to no remuneration - perhaps they used to be PBM GMs?

I don't think that any other game blends gaming genres as successfully as Natural Selection. It's very re-playable, as each game pans out differently, and the players' styles can greatly affect the direction of the strategy. In addition, I've learned a great deal about how to organise humans in pressure situations just from playing!

If what I've described sounds appealing, you'll need a retail copy of Half Life to play Natural Selection. You can get this for £10. from any computer gaming shop. The module itself is free, though consists of a 100+ meg. download. You will also need a fast internet connection.

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Zombies and Pirates

Plus Fantasy and B-Movie Horror

ERIC RIDLEY examines a mixed bag of games ...

ONCE MORE, Eric dips into his seemingly inexhaustible collection of fun board, card and tile games - something for every occasion!

Torches and Pitchforks

'Tis a dark and dreary night as an angry mob, wishing to dish out justice the only way mobs know how, gathers on the moors. An orange glow illuminates angry faces as torches flicker in the wind and drizzle. Darkness consumes all else. A howl is heard in the distance as 'Buff Hardback, Wannabe Hero' is disembowelled by a very angry 'Wicked Witch of the South-Southeast'. The mob turns in panic, only to face the diabolical 'Vlad the Inhaler'.

Torches and Pitchforks is a beer and pretzels card game for up to five players. Set in the world of B-movie horror films, the game plays pretty fast and the rules are easy to pick up. Players start off with a mob of five people, get a total of 30 points and you win. Each turn you flip a card: if it is a monster you fight it to try and gain points, if it's an event then you must suffer the consequences of said card. Run away from the monster or draw an event and you can go hunt for creatures on the moors. Combat is straight forward enough, you total up the strength of your mob, including any bonuses from weapons and the like, if your total is higher than the monsters you win.

The box's artwork is fab and draws your attention to it on the shelf. All the art on the cards is of a similar high quality: problem is it's all in black and white. Black and white monsters, black and white townsfolk, black and white rules booklet. For such an expensive card game I would expect glorious Technicolor. Hell, the game doesn't even come with a dice. I know we all have hundreds, but come on, seventeen pounds and no dice, do us a favour!

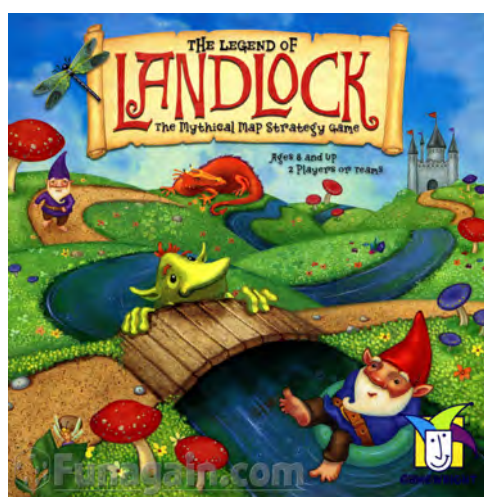
The trouble with this game is that it's just too similar to other better, funnier games out there. If you think of it as a cross between **Munchkin** and **Grave Robbers from Outer Space** then know exactly what this game is like. It is just these two games combined. There are no new mechanics or ideas, not even a hint of one, seriously. It's a bit insulting and annoying. I have both of the aforementioned games, and the fact that I was made to stump up seventeen quid for this one sticks in my craw.

There are some good points about the game. If you don't have any B-movie card games then this is a good start. It's solid and fun, easy to play with people who don't play many games and has a nice feel to it (despite being black and white). But it is *so* expensive and a bit of a rip off when

you look at the originality and components of the game. I would avoid it if you have a choice, and since this isn't Stalinist Russia, you do. Go democracy!

Landlock

... or to give it its proper title, **The Legend of Landlock**, is a tile placing game set in a mythical fantasy kingdom. As such, there are lots of nice fairy-themed things like trolls under bridges, gnomes and dragons. This



game, it says on the box, has been honoured for excellence by Mensa, the high IQ society (as opposed to any other Mensa you may have been getting it mixed up with). The games artwork and blurb seems to aim it at parents with children, but it also includes advanced rules for older players who want more depth.

The game comprises forty tiles, each printed with either a waterway or a pathway reaching from one corner to the other. There are also different tiles with other abilities, to mix it up a bit. Players place tiles each turn to eventually make up a joint 6x6 grid. The object of the game is to try and connect a continuous pathway or waterway (depending on what you are playing) to all four sides of the eventual board. If you connect all four sides with an unbroken path you get ten points. Three sides, you get seven points and two sides, you get five points. There are other ways to earn points but the most readily available of these is gnomes. Specific tiles have a gnome in the corner, allowing you to make up a hagggle (the scientific term for a group) of gnomes. If you get a contingent of pointy hatted, creepy faced, wee butt munches facing each other then you get as many points as there are gnomes. I don't want to talk about this aspect any more as ever since 'Labyrinth' gnomes have terrified me. Another method is to create ponds or islands by blocking off your opponent's routes. This is difficult and only really happens when both players know what they are doing. More importantly, however, the ponds and islands aspect focuses your mind for every tile placement: each time you are trying to leave your path open enough so your opponent cannot close you down into a pond.

It is usually quite easy, if the tile drawing is in your favour, to connect all four sides and score the maximum ten points, the game then comes down to making sure you can score points by gnomes or ponds / islands. However, using the basic rules, far too often the tile drawing ends up badly and each player draws all water, for example, at the start of the game. This gives the water player a huge advantage: if it carries on for more than a few turns the game is basically lost before it begins. The 'pro' rules step in to solve this and make it quite a different game: I suggest that players who aren't playing with children / my fiancée use this rules set. The pro rules allow you a limited choice as to which tiles to play and make the game far more strategic and enjoyable. No longer are you totally

Torches and Pitchforks at a glance

Publisher: Green Ronin Publishing
Players: 2 - 5
Playing time: 30 to 60 mins
Price: £16.99

Landlock at a glance

Publisher: Gamewright
Price: £9.99
Players: 2
Playing time: 20 mins

bound by the whim of lady luck and her fickle finger of fate.

The game is simple; there is no getting around it. But that isn't necessarily a bad thing. Playing it is very relaxing indeed, a nice way to spend half an hour with a friend. The game is also very attractive: when the board is complete the effect is quite soothing and the red mist of loss / condescending tone of victory quickly ebb into an understated 'ahh' of happiness. Not the most strategy in the world, but a nicely designed light game.

Mutiny

I am a big fan of *Fantasy Flight's* games, so it didn't take the decision-making part of my brain long to force me pick up and buy **Mutiny**, the latest of their offerings. It took far longer to explain to my sagging games shelf that I was going to force this game onto it. To look at the back of the box the game isn't that exciting in terms of components, but on perusing the rules you can tell you are in for an exciting time of corsairs and cut-throats.

Captain Blackheart lies in a drunken stupor and the pirates must choose a new leader. This is the scenario, and it is up to you to bribe and influence the remaining five most important members of the crew in an attempt to become the new captain. Doubloons and Rum are the weapons of choice in this closed fist bidding game.

Each turn all players must try to gain favour from the Deck Hand, the Gunner, the Cook, the Navigator and the First Mate. Each of these people have different services they can award you if you happen to win the bid: for instance, the Cook can award you more rum, with which to increase your future bribery. Each crewmember has two services to give away. If you are the highest bidder you get the first, and best, ability, if you bid the second highest you get the next. Any other players get nothing. An interesting game element is the 'lookout': this is a spyglass token that will break any ties. If there were a tie between two players bidding the same amount then the player with the spyglass gets to break that tie the way of his choosing. This can lead to some very strategic play if the 'lookout' is not the one involved with the tie.

Ten cutlass tokens is what will actually win you the game but there are many other aspects and things to try to control, the most notable being the navigation charts. Every turn a new chart is turned over, giving a choice of either north or south to sail. Each direction has a different outcome on the game: for example, if you sail north you may have the opportunity of gaining extra cutlasses or doubloons, if you sail south the person who controls the Gunner may lose a doubloon. Only he who has bribed the Navigator the most will get to decide on the route to sail. Again this adds a huge amount of strategy to the game. 'I want to control the Deck Hand but if I don't control the Navigator I could lose two cutlasses' is often the naturally spoken type of language I hear around my gaming table.

Regardless of my cack-handed writing ability, this game has strategy aplenty. In a two-player game, the 'lookout' becomes of huge importance; in a four-player game, you must be wary of wasting all your bidding pieces too early. An incredibly enjoyable game with great depth of strategy. Well worth the money.

Mutiny at a glance

Publisher: Fantasy Flight
Player: 2 - 5
Time: 30 - 60 mins
Price: £14.99

Zombies 3.5 at a glance

Publisher: Twilight Creations
Price: £8.50
Players: 2 - 5 (with original game)
Time: 1 hour (with original game)



Zombies!!! 3.5: Not Dead Yet!

Not so much of an expansion for **Zombies!!!** as it is a sub expansion. It is a set of fifty cards packed lovingly into a small box and sold for around £8.50. What you get is twenty-five different cards, which are each presented twice, to add to the ever-growing card set for **Zombies!!!**. Each card serves a purpose with only one or two being completely useless.

Of most interest is the fact that the set comes with new (optional) deck construction rules. Each player can now have her own deck of cards (at least fifty), which she can bring to play. The restrictions are that there can only be a maximum of two of any card and that some powerful cards can only be included once. The rules are exactly as you could come up with yourself, but they are welcome none-the-less. Problem is that the game has such limited card manipulation: it is basically impossible to get through even half of your deck during play. It's a nice idea but until *Twilight* brings out some more cards it is not really worth doing.

The cards are cool, the art is fantastically gory and the price isn't too steep. If you're a **Zombies!!!** fan then give it a shot: you'll remember how much fun the game can be.

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Games at the Toy Fair

PEVANS reports on the latest arrivals ...

IF IT'S JANUARY, it must be time for the Toy Fair. Organised by the British Toy and Hobby Association and held at ExCeL in London's Docklands, the Toy Fair is the annual showcase for the British industry. The primary audience is the buyers for the big chains, buying groups and independent retailers. So the show is very much about products aimed at the mass market, though a few 'hobby' companies are there as well.

Of course, only a small proportion of those exhibiting have games to show. So it only takes me a day (or so) to get round them all. Here's my report on some of the new games I saw at this year's Fair.

I'll start with the regulars, move on to the newbies and then round things up at the end. As always, if I say a game is like another, this does not imply that one game is a copy of the other. This is just a shorthand description of the game by referring to a different game that readers may be familiar with. And let me warn you that all my comments are highly subjective.

Regulars

A wedge of jungle appeared to have materialised in the middle of the North hall. This turned out to be *Britannia Games* promoting their latest licensed title, **I'm A Celebrity, Get Me Out of Here!**, and offering 'bush tucker' to passers-by. This game will be in the shops later this year.



Britannia is also producing a new edition of its very first title, **Soccer Master** (see left). This is a card game in which players try to beat their opponent with a better 'team' of forwards, defenders and midfield players. As well as the 'vanilla' edition, this will appear in Arsenal and Liverpool strips. Britannia has a couple of other TV

tie-in games just out. **Wish You Were Here...?** is a **Lost Cities**-like game of playing cards to build up tours of particular parts of the world. Cards must be played in numerical order, which gives players some decisions as to what cards they keep in their hand or discard. However, your tour has to reach a minimum total to score points. **The Vault** is a quiz game where players earn money by answering questions. The format, like the TV game, allows all the players the opportunity to gain some cash by selling answers to the main player. The player with the most money wins.

I first saw *Creative Conceptions* a couple of years ago with **Monogamy**. This year they have a range of over a dozen adult games. **Lust!** is a two-player game of exploring sexual fantasies. Players earn love-making cards by acting out various fantasies. Then they can cash in their cards for one of their fantasies with their partner. **What the F*ck** is an **Apples to Apples**-like drinking game, with a series of ridiculous questions (hence the name of the game). Players have to guess what one person's response to a question will be - and they have to have a drink if they get it wrong. Other new games due out later this year are **Fetish!** and **A Hot Affair**.

Distributor *Esdevium* had a larger presence this year. They were showing off titles from *Rio Grande Games*, *Mayfair*, *Uberplay* and others. The only new game I spotted was **War of the Ring**. I'm told this is an **Axis & Allies**-style treatment of *The Lord of the Rings* from an Italian publisher. *Fantasy Flight Games* is producing an English language edition, which *Esdevium* will bring into the UK. *Esdevium* is also the source for *Hasbro Avalon Hill* games in the UK, as *Hasbro UK* does not carry them.

The venerable *Gibsons* was present, as always, though their games range is only a small part of the company these days. **Faces** was a new

game, rather like **Apples to Apples**. In this game, players have a set of faces in front of them. One player picks a card and reads the question - 'Which face is trying not to break wind?' for example. The other players each choose a face, trying to guess which one the questioner has picked. It should be fun. Also from *Gibsons* is the compendium, **Box of Silly Word Games**. It does what it says on the tin: 25 short, sharp word games. The cube-shaped box includes a timer and scorepad.

Hasbro was a large presence, as usual. The company is celebrating the twentieth anniversary of **Trivial Pursuit** with a new version of the game under the Parker label. **Trivial Pursuit 20th Anniversary Edition** has questions covering events and celebrities through the last twenty years. Another new



game is **Cluedo SFX** which is a prequel to the original game. This gives the stories of the various characters in *Cluedo* and why they are suspects. It also features an electronic board with speech and sound effects. **Super 5** is a card game that's rather like **Uno**. Players aim to get rid of their cards quickly without breaching the 21-points level. **Candyland** is a game for pre-school children that was a big seller in the USA in 2003. It's a simple game of colour-matching to be first to reach Candy Castle. Under the *Wizards of the Coast* label, *Hasbro* will be bringing us **Duel Masters** later this year. This is a trading card game (or CCG), originally from Japan and with Manga-style artwork. It appears to be aimed at those new to this type of game with relatively simple mechanics.

The Green Board Game Company have several new games for the pre-school age range: rather younger than the company's usual audience. These include two **Snap** games in the company's card games selection. Then there are two **Lotto** games and **Farmer's Market**, a colour-matching game. On the board games front, two new games will be out in the Autumn: **Cultural Attaché**, and **Knowbody**. Both were only on show in mock-up form. In *Cultural Attaché* players travel round the world, aiming to collect five 'Cultural Attaché' cards from different areas and return to their home before anyone else.

While I always associate *Paul Lamond Games* with 'adult' games, the company's range is much wider, including educational, children's and family games. With the adult titles now branded as *McNaughty Games*, the Paul Lamond name remains on everything else. This year's crop of new titles includes a UK edition of the US hit, **Marry, Date or Dump?**. This is another party game in the **Apples to Apples** mould. Faced with three well-known people, which will you marry, date or dump? And can the other players work out your choices? **Word of Mouth** is a dice-based word game. With dentures as a dice-shaker. The latest addition to Paul Lamond Games's murder mystery range, *Murder à la Carte*, is **Death in Venice**.

Re:creation was a revelation! Last year they had a medium-sized stand to publicise **Cranium** and the children's version, **Cadoo**. This year they had a large stand with a profusion of games - mostly from small, one-game companies. Amongst the new games on the *re:creation* stand was **Mensa Connections**, a Reiner Knizia design. Unfortunately, no-one was able to tell me more about it.

Go Mental comes from *HL Games*. The object of the game is to spot the odd one out from the list on each card. It's a game that needs a bit of lateral thinking to identify the connections. I was completely flummoxed. But then amused and rueful when I realised what I'd missed. From *Tadpole Games* comes **Ntropy**, an action game that I didn't get the chance to try out. **Jenga** meets **Kerplunk!** is the best way I can describe

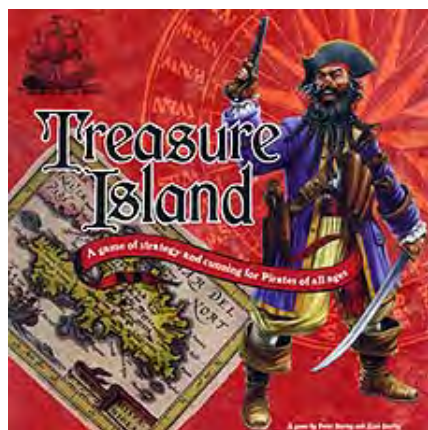
it. **Zobmondo!! Would you rather...?** is a party game in which one player has a choice and the others guess which option they will go for. The decisions are given in form of 'Would you rather...' questions. 'Would you rather eat a head of rotten lettuce - OR - drink a glass of sour milk?' for example. Apparently the game's been around for a while in various versions, but this is the first time I've come across it.

The big draw at the *Upstarts!* stand was Rick Parfitt of **Status Quo** fame, launching Rick Parfitt's **Name Game**. Players have to identify people in a specific category with initials that match the letter cards played. Other cards allow players to tamper with game play - changing the initials, for example. **Spooks** is a tie-in to the BBC TV show. The board looks rather **Escape from Colditz**-like, but I didn't get an idea of how the game plays. It looks like being a busy year for Upstarts!. The company is starting a range of DVD games with **Mr & Mrs**. It has a number of travel games, including **Mr & Mrs** and **Who Wants to be a Millionaire?**. This range also includes a new game, **Fruit Dice**. This is a fruit machine simulation using dice. Players have token money to bet with.

FHM Games is another new range: 'adult' games developed with *FHM Magazine*. **Boys Night Out** is a collection of dares, pranks and tests to play in the bar. **Bar-Room Jokes** challenges one player to keep a straight face at a collection of jokes. **Two Pints** is a drinking game in which players score points by bouncing corks. All three are due out in July. And then there are the BBQ Games: a set of party games for the summer patio. **Tea-Tray Water Polo** is an old joke involving soaking an unsuspecting partygoer. **Griller Warfare** has players throwing plastic foam chops at each other. In **Chuck Another Shrimp on the Barbie** it's plastic foam shrimps, which one player is trying to catch. And **Sunny-Side Up** is about hitting foam fried eggs with a frying pan. You score a point for each one that lands 'sunny side up'!

Newbies

Battle Command is the first game from *Armada Scale Replicas*, based in Dublin. This is a strategic Second World War wargame using model tanks. Each player has one of a set of objectives, depending on which nation they are playing. Battles are fought on the tactical, battle board using the models. The strategic game includes elements of logistics - keeping your troops supplied. The game should be available from March, with distribution through Esdevium and Hobbygames.



Treasure Island was designed by Paul Burley and is published by *Burley Games*. As the title suggests, the game is about collecting treasure from an island. The various treasure chests around the island are represented on a separate board, with treasure cards dealt into the space for each chest. Players find the treasure by expanding their tokens across the board from the various landings on the coast according to the roll of the dice. At first

glance, it looks like there's an interesting, if fairly abstract, game at the centre of this. However, there also seems to be a strong luck element, with lots of dice-rolling.

Games for Fun is re-launching its football game in a new version: **The Euro**. This is intended as a simulation of football tournaments and is timed for Euro 2004. Each player gets a number of teams and tries to get their teams through the tournament. Matches are resolved fairly simply using dice, modified by a seeding handicap. In the case of a tie, there are golden goal dice and even penalty shoot-outs. The game is being distributed through Hobbygames and there is also a tie-in to a charity to support the treatment of sports injuries in children (and particularly Osgood Schlatter's Disease). The World Cup version of the game has

trivia questions as well.

Beat the Traffic Warden comes from *Gladstone Design*. It was first produced at the end of 2003 and got into a few shops for Christmas. The game has a basic roll-the-dice-and-move-the-dobber mechanism. The players are drivers, running foul of various penalties as they move round the board. However, some cards allow you to give the traffic warden back the ticket! A straightforward family game that looks quite fun.



Prospecting in Gold is an interesting name for a company. The name of their game is just as interesting: **Grab a Pig**. It was launched last year and was well-received in shops in East Anglia (the company is based in Thetford). The game has some great model pigs plus cards representing six farmyard animals. Players start with a hand of cards dealt at random. Everybody passes one card to their left. And again. And again. Until someone has a full set of the animals and grabs one of the pigs. Then everybody else has to grab one - except that there is one less than the number of players. So one player is out, you reduce the number of pigs by one and play another hand. It's played quickly, it's very silly and it's good fun.

Despite what I took to be an Irish name, *Shannon Boardgames* comes from Glasgow. The company has two games, **Crazy Circles** and **Tycoon**, which were both designed by founder Ewan Shannon. The first is a clever numerical version of **Snakes and Ladders**. The board has a grid of interlocking circles and players roll dice to move around it - where you end up depends on the die roll, but you do have some decisions to make. It's aimed at children and families. **Tycoon** has a board that shows city blocks and streets, but turns out to be a **Monopoly** variant. Players move around the streets by die roll, having the opportunity to buy property they land on - or paying rent if the property's already owned (and paying more if the same player owns the whole block). The winner is the player who drives all their opponents into bankruptcy. However, some neat mechanisms make the game stand out. For a start, the streets give players a lot of scope for where they move, allowing them to avoid already-owned buildings and get to property that's still available. Buying property is on a hidden bid system, which is only resolved at set points. By which time other players may have put bids in for the property you want! It looks an interesting challenge.

Round-up

Having finished wandering around this year's show, I reckoned there were fewer games companies than last year. So I did a quick totting-up of the stands I'd visited: 25 versus last year's 32. But re-creation had some dozen publishers on their stand, so there's a strong argument that there were actually more games companies present this year! A few people were definitely missing, though. First of these was *Cheatwell Games*, who have a large range of fun family games. A quick look at their website suggests that they have half a dozen new games for 2004, so the company seems to be in good health. Also missing was *David Westnedge*, a distributor of classic games (**Chess**, **Backgammon**, **Go** etc) and playing cards. I'd guess that the show is no longer particularly useful for them.

[A longer version of this article is available on Pevans' website: www.pevans.co.uk/Reviews/]

Timelines

The timelines are colliding! It will destroy the universe, Doctor!

CHRIS MORRIS of Ulaidh Games juggles with a design problem ...

THIS ARTICLE has been prompted with the problems that I have been having with the design of my game **Roma Capta**. I would like to run a game set in 395 AD that would allow players to operate at one of a number of levels, and to shift from one to another when appropriate. So a player can start off as a soldier hunting hairy barbarians through the wild forests of Germania, win promotion to command a cohort and defend the frontier, and then in due course, become Magister Militum and lead the armies of Roma, whilst conducting a passionate affair with the Emperor's sister (or even the Emperor!).

So what's the problem, I hear you ask. After all, these things happened in real life, so there's no difficulty in designing a game to fit, surely? That's what we pay GMs so much to do. Get on with it!

There's no difficulty, of course, in designing a game for any of these levels in isolation. It's matching up the three sub-games so that they interact sensibly that is hard. If General Ficcus Plancus takes his army to fight the barbarians (or the emperor), this impacts on the survival chances of Tribune Fastus Runnus and legionary Fallus Gaius, though they may get lucky or make their own luck, somehow. That has to happen if the game is to have any sort of credibility at all, but the timelines of the characters don't make it that easy. In fact, they keep drifting apart or intersecting in a way that tends to destroy the credibility of the game universe.

How long have we got, Mr Spock?

The time horizon of our three characters is very different. Fallus Gaius probably does not think too much beyond today, while his intrepid leader Fastus Runnus is worrying about next week and the noble general Ficcus Plancus is thinking a month ahead.

How do we represent that? In theory, it's simple, so long as you keep Einstein out of the game (which is not a great problem when it's set in ancient Rome!). A day is a day, and there are seven days in a week and twenty-eight or twenty-nine or thirty or thirty-one days in a month and three hundred and sixty-five or three hundred and sixty-six days in a year. Actually it's not so simple, after all, is it, Mr Spock? The time units aren't constant and they don't match up either. So the GM makes an executive decision and there are now four weeks in a month and thirteen months in a year (that's only three hundred and sixty-four days, but the GM gets to keep the missing day). We're already

drifting away from the Julian calendar that our Roman player characters are meant to be using.

This is just nit-picking, I hear folk cry - we are gamers and if we want a world with 364 days in its year, you're not going to stop us. That of course is even more valid in any true fantasy or sci-fi game, where reality is what the GM says it is.

All we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given to us. Unfortunately, there is another problem with time, and that is what can be achieved in it.

If I can run (or more accurately, lumber), 100 metres in 30 seconds, then mathematically I can cover 288 kilometres in a day.

Except of course that it's impossible.

For a variety of reasons, we can't

keep up peak performance at anything - we get tired, we have to sleep and eat, and we have to devote time to other things.

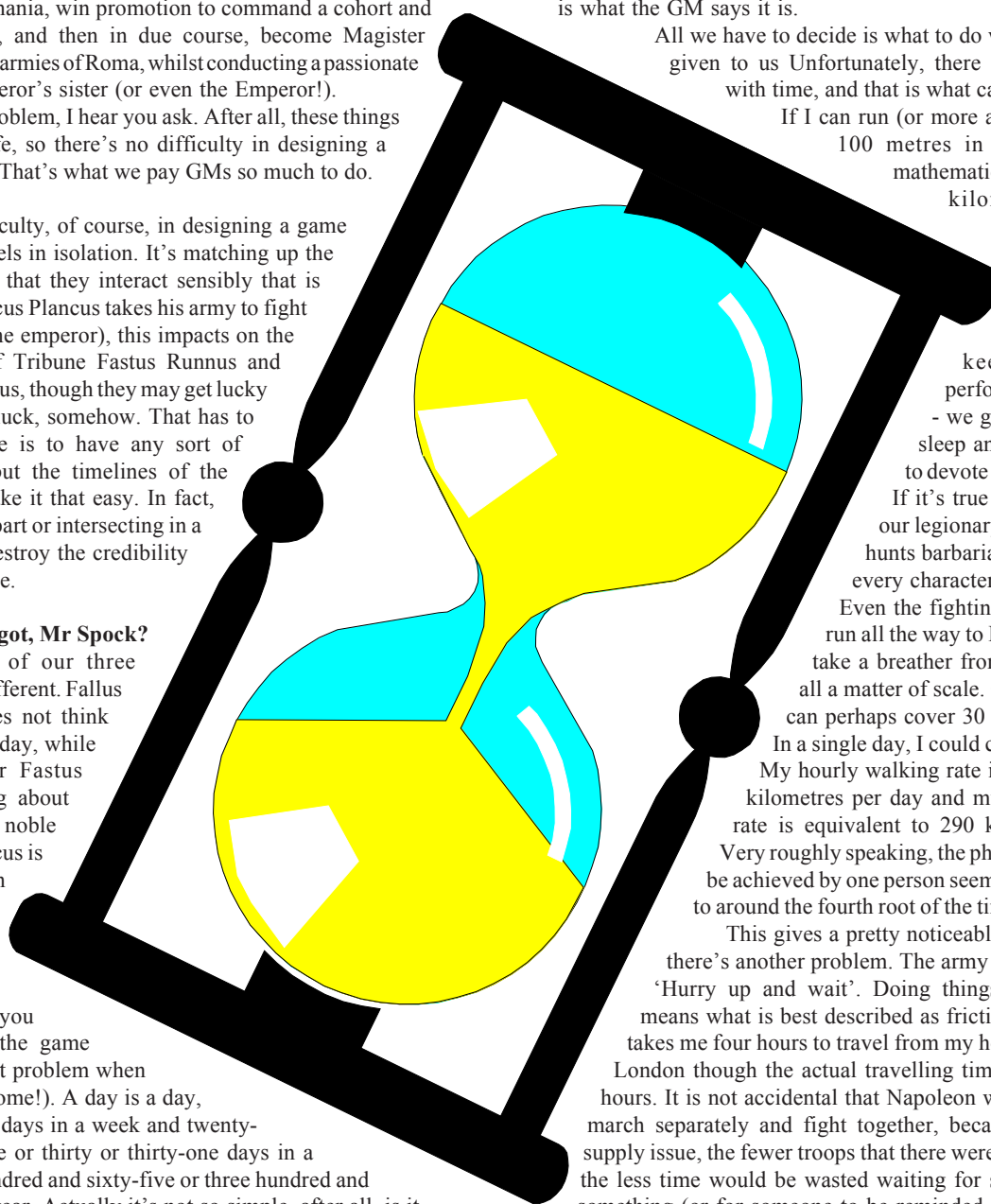
If it's true for us, it's true for our legionary Fallus Gaius as he hunts barbarians, and it's true for every character that is not a robot.

Even the fighting uruk-hai couldn't run all the way to Isengard, and had to take a breather from time to time. It's all a matter of scale. Over the long run, I can perhaps cover 30 kilometres per day.

In a single day, I could cover 50 kilometres.

My hourly walking rate is equivalent to 130 kilometres per day and my minutely running rate is equivalent to 290 kilometres per day. Very roughly speaking, the physical work that can be achieved by one person seems to be proportional to around the fourth root of the time period involved.

This gives a pretty noticeable drop-off rate, and there's another problem. The army has a saying for it - 'Hurry up and wait'. Doing things involving people means what is best described as friction, which is why it takes me four hours to travel from my home to the centre of London though the actual travelling time is two and a half hours. It is not accidental that Napoleon wanted his troops to march separately and fight together, because apart from the supply issue, the fewer troops that there were in any given place, the less time would be wasted waiting for someone else to do something (or for someone to be reminded that they should be doing something). The figures that I have seen, suggest that the friction effect for 800 troops (that's Fastus Runnus) is roughly 12 and for 15,000 troops (Ficcus Plancus), it is 42, if the friction effect for one person is taken as 1. Combine the declining work rate and the



increasing friction, and it turns out that the amount of output that can be achieved within the normal time horizons of the people concerned are not the same.

Time is what stops everything from happening at once

But what does it matter that Fallus Gaius can achieve 1 unit of personal level output in 1 day, whilst Fastus Runnus achieves 0.9 units of tactical level output in 7 days and Ficcus Plancus achieves 1.5 units of strategic level output in 28 days? Surely that is all just a matter of game scale?

A fair point, except that these are not three scales in three different games, but three scales in the one game. There is no reason why Ficcus Plancus, within a given turn covering 28 days, could not decide to spend 1 day with the Emperor's sister, 3 days training his bodyguard and 24 days leading his army. That means that he clocks up 2.67 units of sundry outputs and, assuming that report length is proportionate to output, his player gets 2.67 pages of report. Meantime, Fallus Gaius, in the same period, achieves 28 units of output (and his player gets 28 pages of report).

It gets worse. Because Fallus Gaius has such a short time horizon, he absolutely needs to know the outcome of today's turn before he decides what to do tomorrow (that may also be true for Ficcus Plancus, since depending on just how that day with the Emperor's sister turns out, he may be dead, Emperor or a fugitive, which impacts on his plans for the rest of the month).

So, in the real world, Fallus Gaius's player may well want to run through as so many as 28 turns, covering 28 separate game days in the game month, and that cannot possibly take less than two months of real time (probably, much more). And what can Ficcus Plancus' player do in the meantime? He or she has read the whole 2.67 pages of the report and knows exactly what needs to be done, but it will be two months before anything will be done to implement the new orders.

Yawn! Yawn! I'm bored. Drop out alert! All this while Fallus Gaius's player and the GM are both thinking 'Good grief! This isn't a game, it's slave labour!' And of course, there would be aggro from the players who

have devoted a page to micro-managing strategic orders and one sentence to personal encounters, and then discover that a third of the report that comes back covers the personal encounters.

The triumph of time?

I think a lot of games that I have run or played in have suffered from the problems described above. Come to that, reality has suffered from them! Managers and planners have endless difficulties in running systems whenever they forget the impact of scale - lots of people working over a long period of time don't behave in the same way as a few people working over a short period of time.

As for how to overcome the problem in games, I don't know. I think it can only be tackled by setting the game firmly and explicitly at whichever level is preferred, so that it works properly at that level and scale. That is essential. If the GM also wants to allow players to operate at different levels, to add colour, realism and fun, I think that the way to achieve this is to have an orders module that will allow them to divert some specified fraction of their character's available game time to activities at a different level.

It would have to be made clear, up front, that the higher level activities would run more slowly, possibly painfully slower, and lower level activities will lose out in detail. Fastus Runnus can divert time from commanding his cohort to assisting his general plan the invasion of Persia - but the plan can't be ready for eight game turns - or he can investigate reports of a suspicious intruder in the basilica - but he won't get full detail of conversations etc.

That sort of approach might work, given time.

Afterthought

If you check the chronology at the back of *The Lord of the Rings*, you'll find that Sam must have been lying unconscious outside the Tower of Cirith Ungol for something like 24 hours while the rest of the world's events caught up with him. I'm glad I'm not the only one given a sore head by this sort of thing.

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VALKYRIE

Blitzkrieg

World War II Online

An online game for wargamers! KEN SHIMA plans his strategy ...

IT'S THE SPRING of 1940. The vaunted German military is invading Europe with its lightning attack. The French and British forces are pressed trying to hold back the assault. If the playing field was balanced, could the great invasion be held off? This is the premise for the first release of **World War 2 Online** (WW2OL) named **Blitzkrieg**, after the invasion. Boasting a virtual battlefield, this massive multi-player online game (MMOG) brings air, land, and sea units together in order to fight for control of Europe.

Originally released in the summer of 2001, the game was met with severe criticism. At that time the game didn't follow the specifications advertised, had bad frame rates per second (FPS), poor response time, numerous bugs, as well as a lack of customer support. However I must report that the game is now very much improved.

Gameplay

As an MMOG, WW2OL requires you to have an online account to play. By creating an online game name, this creates the account that you will use. When the game is newly purchased, Cornered Rat Software (CRS) does allow the first month to be free as an evaluation period. For those players who quit prior to this new release, CRS kept their original accounts and will allow them to play for another evaluation period.

Once logged into the game, a world map is displayed asking you to pick either the Allied or Axis side. Once you choose a side, then the Theater Map is displayed. This shows the status of the front lines, which countries control specific towns, and the missions available to the player.

Missions depend on what units are available as well as the town or firebase chosen. For example, if an airbase is chosen, sorties range from bomb runs to fighter cover. Civilian towns may require defense or may be a staging point for attacking the next town. Once a mission is taken, you choose a unit based upon the town or base taken. Towns and firebases will have infantry, armor, transporters, and anti-tank guns. Airbases will have bombers and fighters while docks will have gunships. Weapons and goals vary depending on what unit is chosen. Infantry are the main force as they are the only ones who can capture towns. Armor provides cover for infantry, provides scouting info, and fire support. Anti-tank guns (ATG) remove the strong presence of the armor, but can also become anti-infantry weapons. Transporters haul ATGs and troops to a target quickly. Gunships provide transport and fire support. Aircraft can bomb targets, strafe towns and armor, and provide scout info.

Unit availability depends on whether a town or base is considered as 'supplied', ie towns cannot be under attack. It also must be in a direct line with the rest of the towns owned by your country. If a town is not within the supply line, then heavier weapons such as armor or heavier ATGs won't be available. It is up to infantry to defend or attack.

Attacks are unique because they are basically a progressive form of **Capture the Flag**. Towns have buildings with flags that represent the country that control them. Infantry go into the building and can switch the flag to their country. Once all the flags have the flag type of the same side,

that town is considered captured. For example, a town may have both British and French flags because they are allies.

The roleplaying aspect of the game is based on your rank. The more kills and mission successes you have, the more you gain in rank. Once a high enough rank is achieved, then players can post their own missions to help define targets or to defend bases. Teamwork is a large part of the game. As simple as it sounds to have infantry to capture a flag, it takes a lot of work to get those troops into a town. Transporters can get infantry to their target quickly, but then have to contend with enemy infantry, tanks, ATGs and fighters. Tanks can roll in to clear away opposition with their firepower, but can't capture flags. Planes also provide great firepower, but they can't capture towns either.

Communication is important in order to co-ordinate attacks as well as defenses. A small chat window is part of the main screen, but many players are starting to use voice based applications. With teamwork and communication being a strong part of the game, players are banding together in squads to provide better, more coordinated attacks and defenses. This gives WW2OL a more social feeling and allows for better interaction between other players.

There is even a command structure for both the Allied and Axis forces. A prime example would be the squad I joined, The Legion (www.legionhq.com). Many of the senior members are not only high ranking in the Blitzkrieg theater, but they also communicate directly with the Allied command structure in order coordinate forces.

After all the bugs originally encountered, CRS has been able to fix almost everything, although there are still some annoying quirks that occur. At certain times, infantry can run through the walls in order to capture a flag. Aircraft appearing overhead can slow down the frame rates for ground forces. A player should have use a cable modem or DSL to play. WW2OL supports 56k, but the slower response time may negate communication because the chat window may be scrolling by too quickly. Also, FPS tends to be slower for those on 56k modems.

Graphics & Sound

The graphics are sharp and detailed. Units are very distinctive, and distance between players is shown very well. Units that are far away are really shown that way. As units come closer in range, then their size perspective changes. Gun scopes are unique to each unit and give the feel of looking down the barrel. Troops can be seen as they come across the battlefield. Flashes can be seen coming out of cannons as they fire. Markings on planes can be seen as they do a fly by. Exploding tanks display flames and smoke that can be seen from distances. Tracer fire can be seen going across the field and hitting their targets.

Sound is very crisp and distinctive. Cannons, gunfire, explosions, and engines can be heard over distances. Rifle bolts being pulled back and reset give a realistic feeling.

Summary

When WW2OL was first released, it had one of the worst deployments known. Despite all this, CRS has made significant improvements and now, six months later, the game delivers everything that was advertised. This virtual battlefield gives players action with a modern version of Capture The Flag, variety with multiple units, and interaction with multiple players. CRS did a good job by following actual technical specs to design the units. They also were able to recreate the map from actual European towns and geography.

WW2OL: Blitzkrieg would be near perfect except for a few nagging bugs. It will be interesting to see what the next theater will bring.

WWII Online at a glance

An Internet based simulation of WWII.

www.wwiionline.com

Free 30 day trial available

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From Wargames to MMORPGs

GLOBETROTTER traces an evolutionary thread ...

There's a direct lineage from wargames to today's MMORPGs. Wargames, for those not familiar with them, were board games with often very complex rules and usually maps, playing tokens, etc. The goal of a wargame was to either win the game (ala, **Axis and Allies**, **Risk**, etc) or to complete the simulation of the historical battle (which may or may not result in similar results to the original battle). A great resource for learning more about wargames is *Complete Wargames Handbook* by James F Dunnigan. I have the second edition of this book and it's a real classic.

Comparing a traditional wargame to game theory will expose some very obvious similarities. For instance, in a wargame, attacking someone in a defensive position will make it more likely that you lose the battle. Attacking from a defensive position may not make it more likely to win, and may negate your defensive stance complete. As the defender, waiting to be attacked is your best strategy. If you wanted, you could make a simple matrix of choices (attack, defend, or wait) for both the attacker and defender, enter appropriate modifiers to a dice roll (if any) and resolve the situation.

The early editions of pen and paper role-playing games were like this as well. **Chainmail**, the bridge between **Dungeons & Dragons** and wargames started the trend away from pure statistical play and towards roleplaying. Computer mediated **Dungeons & Dragons** games (like **Adventure**, and later **MUD**) took the next logical step. While wargames had successfully moved to computers (**Trek**, and later **NetTrek**, a slew of **Avalon Hill** games for microcomputers, and even **Kingdom**), the computer-based D&D games moved toward narration and could be seen to take the form of a self-guided adventure tale.

However, in migrating games to the computer, the greatest loss was roleplaying flexibility. The computer program, unless programmed to 'fudge' the game rules, would unemotionally let your character die. And while graphics, sound and game play were improving on the PC, the pen and paper (PnP) world was about to undergo a revolution. For years, PnP gaming had been getting more and more complex rules, with bigger rule books and more ways to handle all the situations player characters could get into. Games like **GURPs** tried to model the whole world, while games like **Shadowrun** had players rolling dozens of dice to complete a single action. The revolution, quiet at first, was the **Storyteller** system, where dice became secondary to the tale being told by the GM. In time, the **D20** system was introduced and balance was brought back into PnP gaming.

Online games, MUDs, were influenced by these trends. Some removed game mechanics completely from their systems, and concentrated on communication requiring people to act as arbitrators - essentially, they put the live nature of a PnP game back into an online game, but required people to handle the mechanics. Other online games concentrated on setting, and some on automating mechanics.

Pay to play systems were being developed by online services, like **Genie** and **CompuServe**, but were generally based in whole or in part on MUDs or computer ports of wargames.

Doom (even more so than the ID Software remake of the classic **Castle Wolfenstein**) changed people's perception of what a computer game should be. The First Person Shooter became the model for interaction, and the first commercial graphical on-line game rode that to moderate commercial success. While other games were also in development (such as **DragonSpires** and **Ultima Online**), **M59** hit the market first. **Ultima Online**, however, with creative direction from a Legend MUD builder/developer, Raph Koster, was far more successful commercially.

With these on-line games, some of the old wargaming values were kept: characters had armor rating, strength, skill with weapons and health. The player could chose if the character would attack something within the game, determining for themselves if the risk vs reward was high enough. And, interestingly, the games themselves involved many other players, so that it wasn't always obvious what the best solution would be. A single character might not be able to survive an attack on a very difficult monster, but if the player could convince other players to join in, all of the characters could help in the fight. While this would mitigate the risk of personal injury, it created a new risk: would the reward given upon the death of the monster be shared evenly, or would someone else take it? And if player characters were easier to kill than monsters, and certainly a more intelligent foe and therefore more exciting to battle, why not earn rewards by killing other player characters?

Now, of course, this leads to the inevitable problem faced by **Ultima Online**: with so many Player Killers (PKs) in the game and starting to drive off other customers, how do you change the risk-reward ratio? **UO's** solution was to implement a reputation system, again a kind of game theory mechanic. If the one character attacked an innocent player character, he would be flagged as a criminal. If, however, a character attacked a criminal, there was no risk (aside from death) and all the reward (improved reputation and the items of the slain character). With the computer mediating the assignation of criminal flags, there was no room for protesting one's innocence or reversing the flag because of trickery or an exploit. The justice system was harsh, and was again gamed by those same PKers in order to maximize their return.

Game designers have long seen player versus player conflicts as the key to making a successful game. Games like **UO** and **Shadowbane** have enforced a literal PvP conflict, while **EverQuest** (for the majority of players) and **Horizons** have moved the point of contention into conflict over access to resources. Game theory states that it's only a game when you're working against one or more opponents - an online game becomes a perfect laboratory for that.

All multi-player games, therefore, should promote competition between players, choosing to work with one another and share rewards, or work against other players and possibly gain a bigger reward. Keeping this in mind, it should be possible to look at ideas for game designs and identify those concepts that are more likely to appeal to players and, depending on how the competition between players is developed, attract or repel segments of the game-playing population.



THE MIGHTY PEN



Roleplaying questions

I was struck by Robert Rees' comment 'In general, you wouldn't want... a vampire to throw holy water around.' Why not, if the vampire was Angel or Spike? Obviously as dangerous as a human throwing acid around, but that is no more than a matter of risk assessment. In *Good Omens*, the demon Crawley sets a booby trap with holy water to even the odds when a couple of Dukes of Hell come visiting. Given the character of Crawley, such a booby trap was quite reasonable (and terrifyingly dangerous for him to set).

In general, Robert is quite right, but there are exceptions.

Chris Morris

[For readers who don't already know it, 'Good Omens' is by Neil Gaiman and Terry Pratchett. Your editor recommends it.]

Looking for WWII online game

I am looking for a second world war era web based strategic wargame but I can't seem to find any. Lots of fantasy and sci-fi, but not a lot of war around. I don't mind paying to play, generally via 'donations' rather than turn fees.

Phil Shulkind

[We've found quite a few WWII web based games out there, and a good many of them are free. We've listed a few games below you might like to take a look at. Some require purchasing software first.]

Call of Combat (www.callofcombat.com)

A team based strategy game where you engage the enemy. Set in the WWII period, using similar guns and tactics, your team tries to eliminate the opposing force while capturing the capture points.

Chain of Command (<http://coccentral.com/>)

WWII strategy game. You will be supplied with four soldiers from either the German or United States side, and with the help of your teammates, capture the victory points to win.

Hidden & Dangerous 2 (www.hidden-and-dangerous.com/hd2/usa/hd2.html)

A squad-based tactical action game with FPS and RTS aspects and is set in WWII era. Multiplayer modes include occupation and deathmatch.

Medal of Honor: Allied Assault (<http://mohaa.ea.com/>)

Powered by the Quake® III engine and set in WWII, Medal of Honor: Allied Assault, features 11 multiplayer maps and 4 gameplay modes as well with support for up to 32 players. Single player mode has over 20 levels.

WinWar II (www.silicmdr.com/winwar.htm)

WWII game where your given all of the basic unit types: infantry, armor, fighter, bomber, submarine, transport, destroyer, carrier and battleship.

WWII Online (www.wwiionline.com)

An Internet based simulation of WWII (basically a MMORPG). This major online game has a monthly subscription in addition to the initial software cost. Reviewed elsewhere in this issue.]

Austerlitz Nations

I'm finding your series on the Austerlitz Nations of interest, but must admit to not knowing anything about the Confederation of the Rhine (last issue). Was this a historical entity or just a division of the Napoleonic Empire invented by the designers for the purposes of game balance?

Mark Gordon

[Thanks for your question, Mark. It's inspired us to add some details on Napoleonic Spain to the article in this issue. Meanwhile, we're happy to report that the Confederation of the Rhine existed between 1806 and 1813. It was formed in 1806 when 16 German minor states decided to throw their nations' futures in with Napoleon Bonaparte and ally themselves with France. A further 19 joined later. The more than 15 million people living within the Confederation provided both a physical barrier against enemies on France's eastern borders and also sent large contingents of troops to join its armies.]

The members of the Confederation included large kingdoms and duchies, together with smaller principalities and city states. The key ones were: Bavaria (3.5 million subjects), Saxony (2 million), Westphalia (2 million), Wurttemberg (1.5 million) Baden (1 million) and the Duchy of Warsaw (4 million).

The others were Cleve-Berg, Hesse-Darmstadt, Anhalt-Bernburg, Anhalt-Dessau, Anhalt-Kothen, Hohenzollern-Hechingen, Hohernzoller-Sigmaringen, Isenburg, Leyen, Leichtenstein, Mecklinburg-Schwerin, Mecklenburg-Strelitz, Ebersdorf, Gera, Gtreiz, Lobenstein, Schleiz, Saxe-Coburg-Saalfeld, Saxe-Gotha-Altenburg, Saxe-Hildburghausen, Saxe-Meningen, Saxe-Weimar, Schaumburg-Lippe, Schwarburg-Rudolstadt, Schwarzburg-Sonderhausen, Waldeck, Wurzburg, Erfurt and Frankfurt.

Disaffection within the group over continued support for France began after Bonaparte's invasion of Russia and the Allied victory at Leipzig saw many of the confederation switch sides to help the Allies during the 1813 War of German Liberation.]

Games in books

It's fairly common for adult game-players like ourselves to grumble that in the media at best we're regarded as over-grown teenagers, and at worst as sinister chat-room perverts.

There must surely be examples of game-players being treated as thoughtful people rather than as lunatics in films and novels? But off hand, I can't think of examples. Can you or maybe other readers suggest any?

Ed Atkinson

[I'm sure that there's a fair number, and I think that the subject might make an interesting article. So let's turn this into a competition: Readers are invited to send in titles & authors of any books where game-playing is important, and we'll run a draw of your names and extend your subscription by four issues as the prize!]

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Feedback on Issue 106

YOU RATED issue 106 at 8.25. 'I just loved the cover. It's so nice to have something that's obviously game-related rather than simply atmospheric,' enthuses **Phil Taylor**. Well, we always try to find something that readers won't be ashamed to read on the way to work, and last issue's map seemed ideal. 'Even though Flagship covers a wide range of game types, and not just the ones that interest me most, I enjoy reading about them all anyway,' says **Michael Grant**.

Favourite sections were (as usual) Rumours and Newsdesk, with the articles on Supernova and Imperial Expansion following closely behind. The piece on Fantasy Economics was also enjoyed, as was the interview about the new PbeM firm, Red Emperor games. **Michael Grant** was impressed by the way that Red Emperor's designers plan to cope with dropouts, 'Some games do suffer very badly when this happens and it often spoils the fun for the others involved.' Our columnists, too, were praised: 'They seem to know their stuff, and not be afraid to say so. I only wish I'd played as many games!' says **J Combes**. 'I like the friendly, chatty style of columnists like Globetrotter, Eric Ridley and others, while at the same time it's clear that they know what they're talking about,' says **Pete Barnes**. For once, nobody singled out any article as boring.

Question 4 asked about other players taking piratical action, and whether 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. You all seem to expect contact with other players, and aren't too thrilled to find them co-operative: (b) gained 56% of your votes, and (c) gained the remaining 44%. **Michael Grant** picks 'Definitely (b)! Never knowing when an enemy (or friend ;-)) might strike makes for a more exciting game! Certainly stops you from getting complacent or bored. And then you've the violent retribution to nurture deep within and spring upon them when they are least prepared.>:-)' Clearly, many of you are cheerfully piratical at heart!

Question 5 asked whether you agree with us that the appearance of game materials has improved greatly within the last year or so: (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. I'm a bit of an impulse buyer for most things, myself, but you all claim to be cautious shoppers. Or at least, shoppers who start out intending to be cautious! "All that glitters is not gold" quotes **Chris Morris**, 'It's nice to see stuff looking good,' says **Tim Parrish**, 'but I've been caught out before...'

We didn't get much response to question 6, asking if there's any particular game that you've played which you'll always remember? 'I'll always remember any game I've *nearly* won!' says **Phil Taylor**. I, myself, will never forget my first experience of **Diplomacy** as a boardgame: but that's not, alas, for the game itself but because out of the six players one of the husbands and one of the wives were just starting a steamy adulterous relationship. You'll remember that Diplomacy requires secret negotiations between the turns, which seemed to allow far too many opportunities for furtive embraces in the broom-cupboard. An embarrassing but memorable evening! **Chris Morris** remembers that 'I've never forgotten my first human encounter in **Terra II** (many, many years ago). No communication - just an attack by someone who obviously couldn't count (or wanted to look like an injured innocent to his friends). My much bigger tribe splatted him, and he went whinging to his friends about the pommie bastard who'd attacked him. Since the bulk of the local population was Australian, this was the end of any hope of establishing a position anywhere within many turns' move.' Chris adds that 'The first game I played was **Universe II**. I parted company with that when the GM told me that the only way to discover the effects of a particular type of star-terrain was to fly my ship into it! (No doubt when he wanted to find out whether the cooking fat for his chips was hot enough, he put his hand into the chip pan.)'

Ulp, and I have been claiming that gamers are friendly people - only up to a point, obviously!

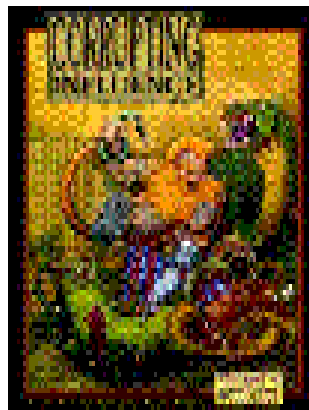
Many thanks to all who wrote in. You don't all include quotable comments, so won't see your names here, but your votes are still appreciated.

Feedback on this issue

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

- 1 - Please rate this issue from 1 (lousy) to 10 (limpid).
- 2 - Which articles/sections did you most enjoy, and why?
- 3 - Which bored you, and why?
- 4 - We're continuing to cover as many different types of game as possible. Would you like more about,
 - (a) online games,
 - (b) board and card games,
 - (c) tabletop roleplaying,
 - (d) anything else?
 Feel free to say that you don't want to read about games you don't play!
- 5 - Do you feel that you share the aspirations of your fellow players because,
 - (a) we need to work out a joint strategy,
 - (b) they may be ready to offer assistance if I have a problem,
 - (c) it's not always clear what a game design requires, so we need to check this together,
 - (d) they're out to get me, and I'm out to get them!
- 6 - Do you feel that you've much in common with players who don't enjoy your kind of game?
 - (a) there's room for all types of taste in the gaming hobby,
 - (b) I try to be patient, in hopes of converting others,
 - (c) nah, they're clearly weird no-hopers.

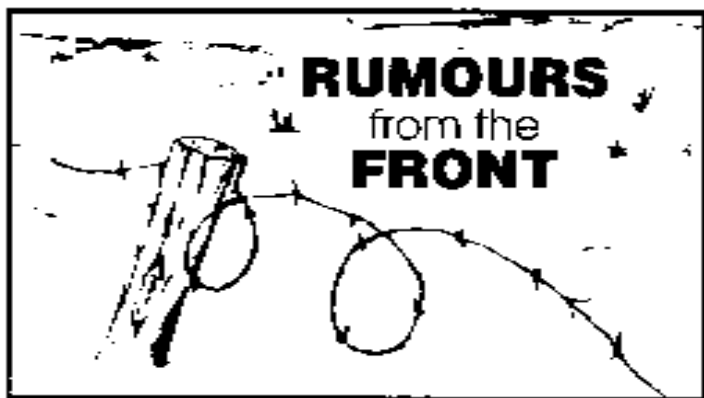
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[This column attempts to simulate a crowded bar full of players swapping experiences. It contains readers' uncensored comments, with no attempt to maintain fairness and balance; editing is only done for grammar, clarity, brevity and (occasionally) 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 February 20th

Dann Brewer, Martin Burroughs, Jose Pedro Carvalho, Bill Eldard, Colin Forbes, Michael Grant, Mike Harrison, Kevin Hyam, Kasper Johannsen, Greg Jones, Michael Kamine, Brett Laker, Andy Malakas, Y Manning, Hank Porter, Alan Richards, Robert Treadwell, David Umberto

PLAY BY MAIL / PLAY BY EMAIL

Aspects Of Might (Silver Dreamer)

Michael Grant - 'After wandering White Rock falls for a while Malachai Sicklemoon has settled down to some arduous training at the Lion Field. He'll be working out there until the Ducats run out. The intense meditation for personal enlightenment also continues. Everyone has been very helpful with ideas for character improvements and development of the land.'

Dungeonworld (Madhouse)

Robert Treadwell - 'The latest guild upgrades have come though and the GM (Steve) has shown that he has a wicked sense of humour as the Guild of the Way of the Five Paths just asked for a item to equip the legs and ended up with the now famous *PINK LEGGINGS* (just what your barbarian needs to be running around in). A group of other guilds combined their upgrade to offer protection over all the central courtyard to stop PK happening.'

As one of my characters is the deputy of the Way of the Five Paths it has fallen to me to produce the newsletter - first time - but it gains points for upgrade for the guild so it's worth it in the long run.

My new character, which I won at the last minicon (convention for Dungeonworld players) that was run by the GM, is one of a group of Derwent characters and from the messages on the notice board on yahoo looks likely to be as welcome as a bad smell, but should be fun to road test them!

Michael Grant - 'My stalwart Dwarven Warrior continues to save for a suitable magic weapon. Just 119 gold left to earn and a magical battle axe will be his! Managed to learn the Berserking, Awareness, True Grit and Melee Combat 1 skills, so not doing too badly at all. Awareness skill has just kicked in giving an extra sector's viewing. He can now see further than he can travel in the heavy plate mail! There's a Cave Squeem quite nearby just asking for trouble. Looks like a flying wyrm of some kind. Will be going in to face the beast in a few turns time.'

DungeonWorld: BrokenLands (Madhouse)

Michael Grant - 'For a short while there were three of us Monks working together against the hoards of monsters. The three Monks of the Crawling Isles! Has a nice ring to it eh? But now others have joined us

in our wanderings. The trusty backpack is starting to fill up once again so a trip to the local magic trader will be planned very soon. Hoping to gain enough gold for a +5 helmet.'

DungeonWorld: Frontier (Madhouse)

Michael Grant - 'Finally we are all ready for the big push into uncharted territory ever deeper into the old imperial palace. The undead seem endless but we'll not be daunted! There are many of us now and all sworn to protect one another. Thank MadHouse for the Overwatch order as it should allow us to plough on in an impressive fashion. All missile users set to protect a heavily armoured point guard. This tactic should work very well for us all although we are slowed down to a crawl because of the heavy armour on the frontrunner. Still it'll be nice not to have Nature Girl (my ranger) injured all the time.'

DungeonWorld: Kyr (Madhouse)

Michael Grant - 'Things are looking up in this game. My two characters are now travelling with friends and since there are some monsters around this part of the deep desert we should have some combat fun. Be very careful of thirst in this place as the damage done is quite severe. Takes ages to recover all that lost health.'

Godfather (Pagoda Games)

Robert Treadwell - 'This is my first time with the game, and it looks like it from the way the game is going. Other players are much more experienced and run ahead of me in game terms as well. No hits between players or any outbreak of block wars between ganglords at the moment, but only time will tell if Jo Adonis will live to the end of the game (fingers crossed).'

Mighty Heroes (Received Wisdom)

Robert Treadwell - 'Well, things are all happening in Crystal City over the last couple of turns - last turn, Blackbow was killed by an explosion due to a henchmen and Elastica is in a coma after a misadventure into the World wide web - the power was cut as the team were locked in battle. Green Guardian is locked in a battle against arch villain Dr Vincent, who could just turn out to be a vampire!

New addition XRayman has been at the hospital looking after Elastica and now rushes to the scene to see if he can help Green Guardian and the rest of the team - but will he be too late????'

Middle Earth 1650 (Harlequin Games)

Michael Kamine - 'Still a great game to play, with lots of good innovations coming via the GMs, particularly Palantir (a mapping programme) and Automagic (an automatic order writer/checker). With a very active bulletin board and polarised views on the latest development, tempers have started to fray and a select minority have begun flinging personal insults. Unfortunately, this has caused the GMs to act like big brother and not allow players to post comments under game names. Since the majority of the vocal minority tend to have game names, who knows what will happen to the up-till-now great bulletin board.'

Colin Forbes - 'It's great playing a game run by a company who are so dynamic. Of course there is controversy, but Harlequin listen to their players and are open to discussion. I have been very impressed with the player friendly mapping utility (Palantir) and the order input programs (MEOW and Automagic).'

Monster Island (KJC Games)

Michael Grant - 'My Norman Monster, Haliok, has joined fellow worshippers of almighty Shroud, the Dark God, under the banner of Eternal Void. Let the misguided of Monster Island beware! They've kindly teleported a powerful silver studded club over for me to use. For the time being my search continues for a Tuvian Shovel.'

Phoenix (KJC Games)

Michael Grant - 'Honestly, I tried to resist this game! But I'm only flesh and blood not made of steel and ice! Despite Sci-Fi not being one of my favourite genres I'd heard how good it was based on the system alone and

with a chance to try it for free my meagre defences soon crumpled. My guild leader has been extremely helpful when I've got stuck or bogged down and has organised missions which have helped me learn the basic rules. My ship, the Diamond Soul, may not be the best in the fleet but it gets from A to B in its own wobbly fashion!

Quest (KJC Games)

Michael Grant - 'Game 31 Nalaria: Rumours of the 14th alliance within Nalaria are beginning to circulate. It is named the Darkling and is based upon the island state of Athabaska (14) if the gossip is to be believed! Word has also spread like wildfire that one of their members has forced a formidable Holy Ghosts party to flee combat. It is hard to know what to believe these days! Two of my groups are through to the second round of the major arena tournament. I'm up against members of the warlike Holy Ghosts Garthrana alliance so may not be getting much further in this competition. Won't stop me from trying my best though!'

Total Conquest (Total Conquest)

Michael Kamine - 'Only recently converted to this game. After years of searching and trying out various games, I feel like I've finally managed to find another great game without the masses of rules to numb the mind. The icing on the cake for me was the ability to play solo and mini (up to five other player) games for free while I learned enough of the game to feel confident in a fee-playing game. The four-day turnaround is tough to stick to, but the game interface is so like a turn-based PC game that it's not hard to put something together quickly... though that might be why I'm not doing too well :) Give it a go, it won't cost you anything to try.'

Jose Pedro Carvalho - 'TC is a very good game, easily rating 8/10. It is only in version 0.95, and it will surely get to 9/10, once it reaches the full version. It is a power fantasy wargame, with strategical and economical elements. In other words, it is like a computer RTS, only it is not real time, but turn based. You have to harvest resources (six - food, leather, wood, metal, horses and stone), build (buildings and units) and fight. The game is well balanced and you can follow your own style of play, without fear of being penalised for that. One of its main features is the graphical interface, which makes issuing orders quite easy, overcoming the game's complexity. Also, with the maps, it helps to understand quite easily what's going on. Turn reports are quite detailed and extensive, but very easy to read.

The game has a lot of forums, an internal message system (very helpful) and a chat system (this is not very used by players). Total Conquest has almost everything you could wish in a strategy game, so there's no point in telling here all its features. If you want to know more about that go to the website and download the neat pdf manual. The Gamemasters are always ready to help in what you need, answering all your questions regarding the game's more obscure points. On the downside, the game still has some occasional bugs, which the staff readily tries to correct and compensate the players. Also, the server has some problems and more often than not the turn deadlines are not respected. Both of these aspects will surely be overcome, once the game reaches version 1.0.

Last, but not least, it should be stated that you won't get the grasp of the game by simply reading the rulebook. You have to play and learn by trial-and-error. But since you have free solo and minigames to play and get experience, this not a fault. Nevertheless, you should start by those games (mini and solo) before putting your money on the game. And, since they're free, it is surely worth a try.'

Andy Malakas - 'I had difficulties when I first logged in, because some things did not work. Fortunately one of the game masters helped me install the stuff. I took over an abandoned kingdom somewhere in the center of the map. A guy next to me thought himself tough because his kingdom has expanded while my kingdom was inactive, and tried to bully me. Big mistake! First I said that I agree to his demands, and that I do not want a great power like himself attacking me and blah blah blah, and when the next turn when we were supposed to change to ☐ friendly ☐ relations, I declared war and attacked him!

Then it was time for consideration (yes, I shoot first and ask questions later) His kingdom was bigger, but my sudden attack was devastating, he

was not ready for a war. He was playing Elves, and his armies I expected to have many archers. His armies were also stronger, but out of place at the start of the war. What was I to do?

I built lots of cavalry. Fast units, with no infantry or engines for support, charged everywhere in elven lands killing and plundering! The initial damage to his economy was considerable, and my armies razed and burned production sites, a gem mine that he was so much in love with (har har), and overran a small border guard. The would-be-bully in his arrogance, tried to claim a very large piece of land in the Central Isle, surrounding it with sectors all around to exclude everyone else, so that he could claim the neutrals quietly later. I forced my way through his lands and the neutral ground beyond, taking over areas on his back that he was so sure would be his own! At the same time I launched a propaganda war with letters, and soon the war spread over the TC forums as well.

It was quite funny at the start, as he was too shocked to believe I actually attacked him, I was less than half his size! I continued to expand on the neutral areas on my south while I was attacking him, since I had heroes with good diplomacy ratings, that brought many people to my side. Well that was at the beginning, because later something bad happened: He fought back!

A gang of his cowardly heroes tried to assassinate my Queen the next turn, who was leading a regiment of Knights in his territory. The duel lasted only one turn since I had given my Queen retreat orders, but it was enough for him to be seriously wounded by enemy weapons and magic. Just then, I realized my enemy had another advantage: His heroes were very strong.

Plundering and raping and mayhem continue to happen in his lands, and I kept destroying small units using the terrain to my advantage (a unit of my Rangers decimated a unit of Elven Heavy Archers who tried to intercept them, big mistake to attack Rangers with heavy troops in forests!) However, the guy was a good player and did not panic by the devastation my troops brought. He formed a new battle line deeper back, almost outside of his capital, and slowly the attack had to halt, my scouts reported a large army was training in his capital. Then bad luck struck me like a hammer. With fast movements back and forth I managed to unite my main army (from three smaller ones) at a critical point making a sum of over 40,000 Humans, where his own army of 12,000 Elite Elves was attempting a counter attack on my provinces, since he had only seen my 9,000 defenders and not realizing I had speedily returned back! I attacked him next turn with 'Tactical Advance' orders, that would beat his 'Ambush', the favourite tactic of the Elves because the Archers attack twice. (Tactical advance against ambush means the archers would not play at all, and 6,000 out of his 12,000 were the notorious Archer Guard!) At this crucial time, he was lucky: A poor tribe of Goblins he had recently hired happened to cross my patrolling main army while I was about to intercept him, stopping me two sectors away from his 12,000 army & the tribe was obliterated of course, but his own Elves move uncontested and I lost the surprise attack. Next turn, having seen my 40,000 of the bastards run like hell... I lost the chance to destroy 12,000 VERY expensive troops.

Anyway, it was a good war, but I had to leave for a 2 weeks and I had to give up my kingdom, (Silver found a replacement very soon.) I made a mistake on my last run by underestimating the strength of fortifications and I lost many good troops by having my cavalry charge a level 2 castle LOL! When I came back there was very little of my kingdom left!

But hey Celestus, (I know you are probably reading this as the game was mainly for Flagship people!) I will look out for you next time, and then you are in for it! When I have some time I will definitely play a big scenario again. What I really like about the game is that it gets you hooked. Man, for some turns I was online watching the "Being Processed" message of the game!

I know the game masters made Total Conquest simply to see if they could do it and that they do not run it to make money but I say this: if all the bugs are corrected (there are still bugs, especially with spells) and the technology it uses becomes simpler to use, from a political, economic and warfare level the game is simply the best one I have ever seen on the net! Yours truly, Emilio Portas (Undead Lord).'

ONLINE GAMES

Dark Age of Camelot (*Mythic Entertainment / GOA*)

Michael Kamine - 'What started out as a great online game with lots of player interaction soon led to my realisation that in order to be good... no, in order to develop a great character, you had to invest heavily in both time and money and do repetitive tasks to gain experience. Since monsters re-spawn after a certain time interval, the basic ploy is to group up with similar ability characters and head to a hot spot, killing all monsters systematically and then waiting for them to re-spawn before doing the same thing over and over again. Fun for a while, but once the fog lifted, I realised I was wasting my time and money.'

Hank Porter - 'Having graduated from Everquest (EQ), I was looking for a game none the less challenging than EQ but less time consuming. Dark Age of Camelot was the answer. It is highly polished, good graphically, and the Realm vs Realm / Battleground system leaves little to be desired. While being one of many MMORPGs, DAoC proved itself to be unique, original, and equally entertaining to Soft (like myself) and Hardcore players. I haven't got Trials of Atlantis yet, but if I find I have the CPU memory and cash to get it, I will. (*Kiradeth*, 29th level Thane, Excalibur/Midgard)'

Kasper Johannsen - 'I've played DAoC for a couple of months now, and I quickly learned how highly addictive this game is, first thing after school, work etc. You go home, turn on the computer, and play. I don't have any experience of the new Trials of Atlantis expansion. (*Hadda*, Excalibur/Midgard)'

Colin Forbes - 'Lots of controversy raging over the new game expansion (*Trial of Atlantis*), but the new graphics are superb and there are some interesting quests. Still loving this game.'

BOARD GAMES

Formule De Mini

Martin Burroughs - 'Formule De Mini (or is it Mini Formule De?): Anyone who likes the original Formule De will probably like this twice as much. All the fun of the original, but slightly simplified, smaller board, and far quicker. Excellent.'

La Città (*Rio Grande*)

Brett Laker - 'I find La Città to be a very stimulating game experience. I disagree with those who have suggested that this game is like Settlers of Catan. I consider Settlers of Catan to be a rather simple, let's-all-get-along type of game. La Città is more like a knock-down drag-out fight as the players scramble to get citizens, keep citizens, attract more citizens, and feed citizens. The game moves fairly quickly despite the complex strategy involved. I have played this game with three, four and five players. And much to my surprise, this game was outstanding in all three scenarios. Due to the flexible game board, the game is virtually identical regardless of the number of players. Having said that, I must admit that I myself prefer the five player version because it feels the most "challenging". I think the game that is most similar to La Città is Tigris & Euphrates. Both games involve building cities (or kingdoms) while maintaining a balance of services. Both games have conflicts which ultimately decide who succeeds and who fails. I like this game because I find the game play to be intense and I like the idea of building cities in hopes of attracting people to live there. However, this is not a light game. It is very deep and the strategy can be mind-numbing as you try to balance all of the goals that the game presents.'

New England (*Uberplay*)

Kevin Hyam - 'Played this game several times and enjoyed it each time. Some reviewers have been harsh and I can see their point. If you don't care for these abstract, tile laying, bidding type games, fine. But if you have enjoyed Aladdins Dragons, Carolus Magnus, Settlers, Amun-Ri, Tigris & Euphrates, and other similar types of games, you would most likely enjoy this game too. The various options to score points, to develop your lands, to plan for future moves, makes this fun and challenging. A bit dry perhaps with the somewhat abstract board and tiles, but not boring at all. There is interaction, there are tough choices, the quality components, a fine package altogether.'

Pitch Car (*Ferti*)

Y Manning - 'One of the most enjoyable games I own. It's also a rare game that can easily accommodate up to eight players with minimal downtime. The interlocking jigsaw track pieces are incredibly well made, and I've had very little trouble with the guard rails. The pieces have held up very well to the constant wear and tear, as we play several games back-to-back a few times each month. While not the game for an entire night, it is the perfect pre-game warmup as you wait for other players to arrive or cool down after a few people have had to leave early. There is some strategy, there is a lot of luck, there are times when your pieces fly off the track. But there is more laughter, more congratulations (for shots well made), and more fretting during this game than any other I own. The tag is a bit pricy, but PitchCar has returned that many times over in the quality of play and the great gaming experience.'

Greg Jones - 'This had a chance of being a fun little game, but unfortunately defective pieces got in the way. One of the corner track pieces is not cut properly so it will not join--which further limits available track options. In addition, the rails won't stay attached and there is a lot of down time during the game reattaching the rails. If this were a \$20 game perhaps I could forgive the junky construction, but at this price I say spend the money on something else.'

David Umberto - 'Some games you like because they give you a good mental workout. Some because you take the time and effort to create something. Others are just about making trouble for everyone else at the table. Pitchcars you play because it's just plain *fun*! It's the kind of game where everyone just has a big smile on their face as they play and people are up and moving about the table. It's not about strategy or endurance or resource management. Those are other race games. Nevertheless, Pitchcars is a hoot and should be treated as a medium weight experience done for the fun of it.'

Princes of the Renaissance (*Warfrog*)

Bill Eldard - 'Princes of the Renaissance (PotR) is the latest game released from Warfrog, and it may be that company's best design to date. Classifying the game may be trickier than assessing on its value. Basically, each player represents a condottiere family in Renaissance Italy, building professional & specialized armies, acquiring wealth and influence, buying off powerful political and Church figures in various cities, and interfering in others' affairs through the timely use of bribes and treachery. The components are quite attractive and functional, and the artwork is excellent.'

Is it a strategy game? Yes - and more. PotR is teeming with player interaction and strategic options, plus some clever tactics. All of these make for a very challenging strategy game, in which a player's fortunes can change quite suddenly if he/she isn't careful. But, unlike so many European designs, this game isn't just a couple of pages of rules with a theme loosely applied. PotR actually offers a rich flavor of power and treachery in the Renaissance, right down to the historical characters on the pieces. It takes a bit longer to play than most strategy designs, but it's worth the time.

Is it a simulation? Perhaps not in the strictest sense. For one thing, the rules are much simpler than games that claim to be simulations, and while it takes a bit longer to play than most strategy games (two-four hours), it plays far more quickly than most simulations. The richness of the theme in this game raises the game above standard strategy gaming toward the "simulation" side, without inhibiting play with a lot of special rules or cases.

Is it a wargame? No, certainly not in the traditional sense. The building of armies and the warring between players would tend to push PotR into that category, were it not for the fact that the warring in this game is not about conquest, but about glory and profit. It's true that winning wars earns victory wreaths, and those wreaths add up to Victory Points at the end of the game. But players bid for the opportunity to fight for either of two warring cities, and warring players are paid by their respective cities regardless of who wins. Furthermore, in keeping with the period flavor, specialized troops are never lost, reducing that risk in going to war. The opportunity to raise or lower a city's status and/or earn cash may be more a driver of a player's participation than the victory

itself. A player need not be a frequent or successful warrior to win this game, as there are alternative non-military strategies to earn VPs.

So, in the end, just what is *Princes of the Renaissance*? I would describe it as a serious strategy game with enough period flavor to appeal to simulation and wargame enthusiasts. It's tremendous fun to play, especially with five players, and I highly recommend it.'

[Our regular columnist, Pevans, reviewed Princes of the Renaissance in Flagship 106: interested readers are invited to contact the editor to purchase this back issue.]

Tigris & Euphrates (Mayfair)

Mike Harrison - 'I have played this game online and enjoyed it the one time that I played. A easy to understand game that adds the fun element of having a "screen" to hide your tiles and an interesting end of the game scoring method. Reminds me a little of chess. I look forward to buying the real version sometime soon!'

Dann Brewer - 'I'm not a Knizia fanatic, but this one is great! It is one of the "heavies", though, so if you don't like to think, this one is not for you. As for the general opinion that the theme is weak, I may be the only person to disagree. To me it feels just like developing civilizations with all the internal power struggles and external conflicts for territory. This may be why I love Tigris & Euphrates but don't like Amun Re, for example. Anyway, give this one a couple of tries before you pass judgement.'

Alan Richards - 'The theme is totally irrelevant and pasted on. Can't we make a law that bans giving completely misleading titles to games? Typical Knizia--totally abstract & dry, but very strong system. I despise this game personally but have to respect the depth and begrudgingly admit it's a good fit for other gamers. But it should just be called Red Blue Green Black. There is no feel of any conflict or civilization or building or expanding or progress or *anything* whatsoever. Also, there is a fair chunk of luck involved depending on what tiles you draw, but the

bone dry nature of it was my biggest problem. Basically, if theme is important *at all* to you do *not* play this, you'll hate it. But if you like unique and balanced mechanics and don't mind the totally abstract and mathematical, this could be for you.'

Brett Laker - 'I have been a serious "gamer" for about two years now, averaging at least two games a week over that period of time. I have played numerous games that I thought were outstanding only to tire of them over time as the newness of these games wore off. However, Tigris & Euphrates is the one and only exception. This game is beautiful in its complexity. In my opinion, it is the ultimate "Gamer's Game". Some may argue that it is too complex to be fun. But I instead would argue that there is a certain level of enjoyment out of playing a game that has more plot twists than the most thrilling movie. Monuments, treasures, rivers and kingdoms in conflict are all interwoven into a fantastic game where lots of strategy and a little luck will reign victorious. On a side note, if you enjoy Tigris & Euphrates I would highly recommend La Città.'

CARD GAMES

San Juan

Martin Burroughs - 'The biggest hit of the last few years for boardgames has been Puerto Rico, which uniquely comes close to the popularity of Settlers. Personally, I have to say I wasn't the biggest fan, but I was in the minority. Now San Juan has arrived, the card game of the board game, and I have to say that it even has me convinced. All the strategy of Puerto Rico, but in half an hour, with lightning fast play and a real feelgood factor. I played this in the German edition, but I guess the English one will be out soon. Highly, highly recommended.'

Coyote

Martin Burroughs - 'Kind of like Liars Dice but with an added humiliation factor, especially if played in the pub, as players have to wear coloured headbands with cards stuck in them. Odd, very odd.'

[Comments on all types of games are welcomed by surface mail to the UK office or by email to carol@pbmgames.com. By May 9th, please.]

Games Shops

Funagain Games
www.funagain.com

Krackers Games Shop, 1-5 The Fore Street Centre, Fore Street, Exeter, Devon

Leisure Games, 100 Ballards Lane, Finchley, London, N3 2DN
020-8346-2327
shop@leisuregames.com
www.leisuregames.com

Orcs Nest, 6 Earlham Street, London, WC2H 9RY
0207-379-4254
www.orcsnest.com

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

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, 5 Bath Place, Taunton, Somerset, TA1 4ER

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

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

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

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

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

Westgate Games, 20 The Borough, 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.

APRIL

BAYCON: 15th-18th April. *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, £15 for a day.

maycon2004@btinternet.com

BEER AND PRETZELS GAMES WEEKEND: 15th-16th May at the *Town Hall, Burton on Trent, Staffs*. A mixture of boardgames, cardgames and miniatures games, with a bit of roleplaying thrown in. There is good food and beer, a selection of B&Bs within walking distance, and a free 300-space carpark. It is also two minutes from the railway station. Tickets are £4 per day or £7 for both, use of the boardgames library is free and playing space guaranteed.

TENTACLES MONSTROUS: 28th-31st May at *Fest Castle, Stahleck, Germany*. HeroQuest, Call of Cthulhu and Eternal Champion. Sandy Petersen will be running a Call of Cthulhu FreeForm, 'Evil High Priest'; Loz Whitaker will spearhead the Eternal Champion events and has written a fresh Hawkmoon scenario called 'Skay'ana's Tears'; Simon Bray will host his new Glorantha FreeForm 'Harem Nights'; Wolfgang Schiemichen will be ready to unleash CoC horror upon unwary victims.

Residential membership costs 100 Euro and includes bed, breakfast and dinner. Non-residential membership is 25 Euro for the whole event:

<http://www.tentacles-convention.de/regs.htm>

JUNE

DICECON: Sunday 6th June at the *Quality Hotel, Glasgow*. A day of playing games, with tournaments for Settlers of Catan, Galloping Pigs, maybe Carcassonne, Up Front and whatever else can be sorted. There will be all the usual free play options. Charges TBC.

ellis.simpson@golds.co.uk
webmaster@dicecon.com

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

ORIGINS: 24th-27th June in *Columbus, Ohio, USA*. The biggest US games convention!

www.originsgames.com

JULY

MANORCON: 2pm Friday 16th-2pm Monday 19th July. *Chamberlain Hall, University of Birmingham*. A large boardgames convention which has been running since 1983. This year Manorcon will be hosting World DipCon XIV. Trophies are also promised for champions at Settlers of Catan, Puerto Rico, 18XX, Outpost, Acquire and 'that well known board game' Croquet. The 200-250 attendees stay and

play in a 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 night life. Details: Kath Collman, 14 Westover Road, Handsworth Wood, Birmingham B20 1JG.

manorcon@diplom.org

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

CONTINUUM 2004: 23rd-26th July at *Digby Hall, Leicester University*. 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

MIND SPORTS OLYMPIAD: 21st-30th August 2004 (yes, it's long), *UMIST, Manchester*. All sorts of board and card games, with some of the world's best players. For the really serious, there are things like Chess, Bridge, Othello, but for the rest of us, the final long weekend (Friday to Monday) is stuffed full of hobby games contests (Acquire, Settlers, Puerto Rico, Lost Cities etc etc), for the princely sum of £15 for the lot. All tournaments have cash prizes and medals, which is nice, although tournaments such as Poker are extra. No fees at all if you want to spectate/play casual games. Mind Sports Olympiad, 51 Borough Way, Potters Bar, Herts EN6 3HA, UK.

entries@msoworld.com

<http://www.msoworld.com/2004/schedule.html>

(Hobby games enquiries to martinburroughs@tiscali.co.uk)

SEPTEMBER

GAME STARS LIVE: 1st-5th September, *ExCel Exhibition Facility, Docklands, London*. The UK's largest videogames consumer show, which this year will include the European Online Gaming Championships.

www.gamestars.co.uk

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

Chris@eurolog.org

www.eurolog.org

OCTOBER

GENCON Europe: Thursday October 14th-Sunday October 17th at *Butlin's Holiday Centre, Minehead, Somerset*.

The extensive programme includes industry guests, roleplay games, cardgame tournaments, boardgames, computer games, an art show and a huge trade hall. Celebrations will be held to mark 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 carparking.

GenCon UK has been scheduled in the week prior to the Essen Spiel games fair, to help US and other non-EU manufacturers combine both events in a single trip. To pre-register for an information pack, contact Horsemen Events:

contact@horsemenevents.com

www.horsemenevents.com

SPIEL with COMIC ACTION: 21st-24th October, *Messe Essen, Germany*. With 150,000 visitors and 621 exhibitors from 21 nations, showing all kinds 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 traditional boardgames - this is an important event in the gaming calendar.

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

UK, EUROPEAN & WEB-BASED GMs

AD Infinito Games, PO Box 605, Bromley, Kent BR2 0YQ

WEB: www.pbmsports.com

EM: danny.mccormell@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

EM: davester@oz.net

Advanced Gaming Enterprises, POB 214949, Sacramento, CA 95821, USA

WEB: www.ageforfun.com

Agema Publications, 3 Work Sop Rd, Off Carlton Rd, Sincinton, Nottingham NG3 2BA

WEB: go.to/agema

EM: agema@lineone.net

EM: agema@lineone.net

EM: agema@lineone.net

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Waterlily is a leading provider of online gaming services, offering a wide range of casino games, sports betting, and more. We are currently looking for experienced and motivated individuals to join our team as Customer Support Representatives. This role involves assisting players with any queries or issues they may have while playing on our platform. The ideal candidate will have previous experience in customer support, preferably in a gaming or online environment. We offer a competitive salary, flexible working hours, and the opportunity to work from home. If you are interested in this role, please send your CV and a covering letter to recruitment@waterlily.com.

Waterlily is an equal opportunity employer. We do not discriminate on the basis of race, gender, age, or any other protected characteristics. We are committed to creating a diverse and inclusive workplace for all our employees.

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T: 020 7183 1000 F: 020 7183 1001
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