

Issue 111, December '04 / January '05

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FLAGSHIP

THE MAGAZINE FOR GAMERS



*Boardgames, PBM, Roleplaying,
TCGs, Computer Games, Conventions,
MMORPGs and more ...*



The sweep and grandeur of Tolkien's Middle-earth brought vividly to life in an award-winning gaming system.

Battle of the Five Armies is a simplified version of the Middle-earth Play-By-Mail game designed to provide new players with an introduction to the world of Middle-earth. Set in the time of J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit* some sixty years before the events portrayed in *Lord of the Rings*, you can take the role of commanding the Goblins, the Warg Riders, the Elves, the Dwarves or the Northmen of Middle-earth.

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REPORT FROM THE BRIDGE

Greetings!

IT'S BEEN a busy couple of months here, with a trip to GenCon UK at Minehead and plenty of work going ahead on the new website.

GenCon UK was fun, and you'll find coverage of it in the magazine: a big welcome to those of you who subscribed there. September and October were a busy time for conventions: you'll also find articles here about Psychocon and the biggest European con of all, Spiel in Essen.

I'll now perform a little editorial jig about our new website, because there wasn't time to do this last issue. Find the new website at

www.flagshipmagazine.com

Yes, I know that this address is also printed in the adjoining column, but there's no harm in repeating details about something that's taken us so long to put together. Work is still ongoing, and constructive criticism about it will be welcomed from you all.

Many thanks to those involved in constructing the site. There's plenty of material still to go up on it, but already it's a useful source of information about games. We've started putting up files from issue #100 onwards, but note that we won't feature the two most recent issues to avoid discouraging subscriptions. We want the website to serve you as players, who'll be able to reference game titles easily and find out what our contributors think of them. We also want it to present games and their players to the general public, who are so often suspicious of the interest we all share in playing games - hey, we may not be perfect, but we aren't stupid: games are fun to write about, to read about and, above all, to play.

And the contents of this issue? Good surprises, I hope, including coverage of some games and genres that may be new to you and which all sound tantalizing to me. We've emphasised the convention scene, which shows the sociable aspects of gaming, as does the article about Megagames: after all, this is generally regarded as a sociable time of year. Our introductory article this issue is about Trading Card Games and it's the first time we've covered this genre. However, it's written by someone who's well known to our long-time readers, and we think that you'll find it an interesting overview. There's all our usual columnists, too, who make a very readable contribution. Remember, you don't have to agree with everything we print, so if you don't, write and tell us.

Fire Regulations don't allow us to book the chap who'd put this issue down your chimneys, so we're hoping to get copies into the post before any Christmas delays. Having stressed sociability this issue, I think that many of the games we feature here will suit family circles over the holiday period. Or simply scare the socks off everybody, in the case of Cthulhu.

Our very best wishes for the festive season and for 2005. May you play the games you love.

Carol



FLAGSHIP

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Contributions welcomed for Flagship 112. By January 9th, please.

www.flagshipmagazine.com

NEWSDESK BOARDGAMES



BOARD AND CARD



GAMES

Fantasy Flight Games have

produced **Doom: The Boardgame**, based as you might have guessed on the famous computer game. As in Doom 3, Marine players fight monsters through the Mars base corridors, while the Monster player has to bring them down. To be released this month, just in time for the Christmas market (titter), it costs £34.99.

Oh, and reliable sources reveal to us that there's a Doom film under way ...

Well, here's a contrast! (We love contrasts!) In **The Ark of the Covenant** from *Inspiration Games*, you have 'to move the Ark of the Covenant throughout the Promised Land and to develop the area by building roads, cities, temples and herding sheep. You may also decide to deploy a prophet into the cities to preach repentance!' Based on Carcassonne, it's for two-five players and will cost you £19.99.

Rio Grande announce three additions to **Carcassonne** itself. *Carcassonne: The Castle* is a two-player variant which takes place inside the castle walls, where you direct your knights, heralds and merchants. This costs £14.99. *Carcassonne: The City* gives its players the chance to build this beautiful city - in 3-D! This'll cost £24.99.

The Count of Carcassonne is a small expansion, which adds the 12 tiles representing the actual city of Carcassonne. During the game, players who help others score points may place followers in the city and later move them to scoring features outside the city. This expansion costs £10.99.

Hasbro/Avalon Hill have produced a new stand-alone game in the much-praised **Axis & Allies** wargaming series, *D-Day*. They reckon that this'll take around two hours for two-four players to play. The gameboard is extra-large, and there's a card deck 'with three types of card: Orders, Tactics, and Fortune. These add a new depth and complexity to play.' It costs £32.99.

Days of Wonder's award-winning **Memoir '44** is a two-eight player game that starts with D-Day, and then moves on to other significant battles of the Allied campaign. There are 15 scenarios altogether, which each reflect 'the historical terrain, troop placements and

objectives of a specific battle.' This costs £34.99.

Moving on to games with historical settings, *Out of the Box Publishing* promise their **Tutankhamen** for early 2005. It's a Reiner Knizia game, in which you have to discover (and hang on to!) the treasures of Tutankhamen. This'll cost \$12.95.

Fantasy Flight Games' **Senator** is a boardgame for three-five players, who have to protect Rome, advance their family and work towards proclaiming themselves Caesar: no easy task, since Rome itself is faced with all sorts of peril as well as the machinations of your rival senators. This costs \$19.95.

Different again is **Betrayal at House On the Hill** from *Hasbro/Avalon Hill*. It's a tile-based boardgame for three-six players which 'allows players to build their own haunted house room by room, creating a new, thrilling game board every time you play.' There are six possible characters, one of whom secretly betrays the group at a random point in the game: the traitor must then be defeated, but has his own victory conditions. This sounds like an ingenious idea. The game costs £34.99.

Two jolly-sounding family games from *Jolly Roger Games* are **Knock! Knock!**, where three-six players compete 'to host the coolest, hippest Halloween party possible.' One problem is that not all the would-be guests who knock on your door are desirable, especially when they're sent by other players. Hands take only 10-20 minutes to play. So is there a market in the States for Halloween games at Christmas? Fascinating! It's \$11.95.

Jolly Roger's **Clocktowers** is for two-four players, who compete to build as many neat and attractive clocktowers in the city as possible. This plays in 20-30 minutes and 'can be played by ages 8 and up (although there's enough skill involved that kids shouldn't beat their parents too often!)'. This one is \$12.95.

Finally, another game from Reiner Knizia is the two-player card game **Minotaur Lords**. It's a stand-alone game, though it comes from the existing 'Lords' series. In this one, each player is a minotaur lord trying to control the heart of an empire. From *Fantasy Flight Games*, it costs \$19.95.

Our regular boardgames columnist, Pevans, adds ...

EuropeMasters, the European board games championship, took place on Saturday 23rd October as part of the Spiel games fair in

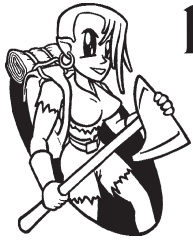
Essen. Teams from several European countries (Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Switzerland and the UK) fought it out to become European Champions.

The tournament is played over several games by teams of four. Everybody gets to play all the games against members of other teams. They score points according to their finishing position and add them up to give a total score for their team. This year five games were played: **Hansa** (*Abacus Spiele/Uberplay*), **Maharaja** (*Phalanx Games*), **Media Mogul** (*JKLM Games*), **San Juan** (*alea/Rio Grande*) and **Ticket to Ride** (*Days of Wonder*). A pretty good - and fairly demanding - selection.

The teams assembled at 10 am in the Essen room at the exhibition halls. By 10:30 they were into the first game, Hansa. With short breaks between the games, the final tables wrapped up the last game, Maharaja, just after 6 pm. This allowed the organisers to tally the points and award the prizes before the fair closed at 7. The winning team this year was 'Die Magier von Midgard' from Germany with 70 points (out of a theoretical maximum of 100). Second place went to Czech team 'KPP Mamutek' with 69 points and the 'Lille Old Squad' from France was third on 68. The top teams took away piles of games and there were trophies for the top three. Although EuropeMasters is a team competition, a prize is awarded for the best individual performance. A terrific performance by Antoine Eloy of the Lille Old Squad saw him win all five of his games and walk away with the well-deserved individual trophy. The top-placed UK team was 'The Largest Army' (Peter Dennis, Mike Fisher, Tim Humphries and Julian Pullen) in eighth place. They were just one point ahead of 'The Uninspired' (Chris Boote, Steve Campbell, Mark Jones and Marcus Pratt), who have won the European trophy on more than one occasion. The other UK teams finished 12th ('A Fistful of Dobbers') and 15th ('To Win Just Once' and 'Three Men and a Foxy Lady' equal on 51 points).

All the teams at EuropeMasters qualify through their national championships. The UK Board and Card Game Championship, SpielChamps UK, is the UK's qualifying event and takes place as part of *Maycon* each year. Next year's tournament will be on the Sunday of May Bank Holiday weekend at Maycon. Keep an eye on the website at www.maycon.org for up-to-date details about the event. Finally, our congratulations to the worthy winners of this year's EuropeMasters and our thanks to organiser Ronald van Lent and his team for all their hard work. There's more about EuropeMasters on-line at www.europemasters.org

NEWSDESK PBM



RPG AND ADVENTURE GAMES

DungeonWorld from Madhouse has been extended to include not one, not two, but as many as *five* entirely new areas, which all sound fun to explore.

There's the Dungeon In The Clouds, which can be reached by a magical ladder found in the foothills of the Sprit Mountains and which is thought to head straight up into the sky and into the clouds themselves. There's Pendleton Keep, which has been rediscovered within the dark woodland of Farlow Forest in Frost Ward, and which was once the seat of a powerful warlord; beneath the ruins lie expansive dungeons. There's Tamraa's Lair on the western edge of the Kyrian Mountains, where it's said that a mighty gem dragon slumbers among her piles of treasure, but is only too likely to awaken if any attempt is made to deprive her of her wealth. There's the Two Worlds Citadel among the frozen wastes of the Southern Glacier, where it's said that ancient barbarians made a pact with creatures from another world long ago; now the doors have opened, and pale lights flicker behind them. Finally, there's the Ski Trek Wildlife Sanctuary in the Ski Trek Mountains, which are a magical range of mountains that appear and disappear in a hundred-year cycle; its magical sanctuary preserves many creatures which have been otherwise lost; many of these are both strange and dangerous, and they've slain heroes in the past, who may have been carrying powerful treasures. Your characters will need to take skiing lessons for this area!

It's good to see so much happening in this popular game, giving its players fresh opportunities to explore and face new challenges.

www.dungeonworld.com
www.madcentral.com

Terry Crook moderates a variant of the not-altogether-serious historical game En Garde! called **Briny En Garde!** (Yes, this version has a nautical theme.) Terry reports that the game is going really well now, with more sign ups and a better social scene. The social scene is important in En Garde! games, of course, because you have to climb the greasy pole of social success. There's still room for more players:

webmaster@brinyengarde.co.uk



PBM FIRMS

Keith Burnham of Pagoda Games, reports that he's had to scale back his GMing because of time considerations, but will still welcome new applicants for the games that he runs: **Star Fleet Warlord**, **Godfather**, **World War 4** and the old favourite, **Adventurer Kings**. Keith says he plans to start a new scenario each time a game ends. However, it may take anything from a month to a year for a new game to start, 'time is my biggest enemy these days, with nowhere near enough waking hours available in the day.'

www.pagodagames.co.uk

Mindless Games report that they're rewriting their website bit by bit. The section for their new football management game, **Master of the Dugout**, is almost complete now, with a Chat Room just added, and Tables and Match reports being written up weekly. We'll be running a review in a future issue of *Flagship*.

Their new programmer is rewriting their version of **Serim Ral** to enable pbem play. A new game will be started once the rewrite is complete. It's good to see classic games being updated in this way.

They are still creating the map of Ancient Greece for their new version of the successful **Primus Inter Pares**, and are playtesting in-house.

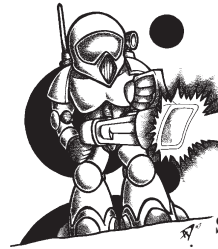
www.mindlessworld.net

PERSONAL NEWS



Who says that people who play games are only interested in making imaginary efforts? We're delighted to announce that on Saturday the 6th of November, our reviewer Eric Ridley, under his wrestling name of Eric 'The Fist' Canyon, wrestled for the NWA Scottish Heavyweight title. Under official NWA rules, he had to score two pinfalls within 20 minutes. He drew the match at one fall each, so that the title was retained by the current holder 'Conscience'. Our congratulations to Eric for getting so far, and achieving an honourable result. Further details can be found at

www.swa.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk



SCI FI GAMES

We reviewed **Laser Squad Nemesis** in issue 101. It's a two-player game of sci-fi skirmishes, with 3D graphics, in which you challenge your opponent with a force chosen from one of the game's human or alien races. Now, version 3-07 is available and it includes bug fixes, improvements to weaponry and some changes to unit attributes.

Our reviewer, Noel Campbell, reported how enthusiastic his fellow players are about this game, and everyone's comments seem to have been taken into account to improve it. A trial game can be played for free, though note that you'll need quite powerful computer resources to play because of the game's graphics:

www.lasersquadnemesis.com

KJC announce some minor increases to their turn fee for **Phoenix**. 'We hate doing this, but our accounts department keeps blowing all our takings on frivolous things such as bills.'

www.kjcgames.com



HISTORICAL GAMES

Enlightened Age Entertainment Inc (EAE) are now offering a *free 30-day trial* for their new multi-player online strategy game **Fall of Rome**. Rick McDowell of EAE says, 'We feel Fall of Rome has so much to offer fans of great role playing, war and strategy games that we wanted to remove the biggest obstacle (money!) perceived by new players, to give it a try... Anyone that appreciates the best of PBEM will love how much more vivid, enjoyable and error-free serious strategy game-play is with our graphic user interface. The level of detailed results description that have made Alamaze and its successors Hyborian War, Legends, and Middle Earth hits, is trumped in Fall of Rome. Our players enthusiastically comment we have more roleplaying elements that actually matter in our game-play than do straight, single-dimension RPGs, as well as better tactics and battle descriptions than exclusively war games.' Correct? Find out for yourselves and enjoy the free 30-day trial at

www.fallofromegame.com

NEWSDESK PBM



SPORTS GAMES

New from *Dracs Games* comes a horse-racing game, **Thundering Hooves**, which'll cost you £3.50 per turn or £40 for the season. This game includes both National Hunt and Flat racing, with seven races (three flat, two hurdles and two chases) per turn. Horses, jockeys, weights, apprentice jockeys and gambling are all included in the game.

www.dracsgames.co.uk

Mindless Games report that the playoffs in their new football game, **Master of the Dugout**, are 'progressing fine. Last match saw who got promoted to the English Premier. The rest stop in the First Division. Then it's the brand new season!' There are still some spaces in the English First Division currently, although they are getting a steady influx of players, and will have to start people in the Second Division once Div1 is full.

www.mindlessworld.net

PLAYTESTS

Nova Games closed their dragon game, **Mandragora**, a couple of years ago, but we've heard from their Bill Heron, who reports that they've branched out into mobile phone games too. Now they're back with a new free playtest PBEM game (again set in the world of the Mandragora) called **Mandragora Series: Ties of Blood**.

Bill describes this as 'a fantasy PBM game of politics and intrigue.' You lead one of the great Houses that vie for power in the island kingdom of Lonaraban, the home of the Mandragora, and you will seek to gain the throne by any means necessary. 'To become Empress will take skill, diplomacy, and cunning. The current Empress may be old, but misses very little and your Matriarchs (the leaders of your House) will need to use all the resources at their disposal to elevate the Head of the Noble House to this exalted position.' To depose the Empress, it's necessary to impeach her House, and you can select from a huge number of political manoeuvres (including dirty tricks such as blackmail, arson, inciting riots and outright warfare). There are rules for the use of magic in politics, too.

To sign up for the free email-only playtest, contact Bill directly at:

bill@themandragora.com

www.themandragora.com



FANTASY WARGAMES

Harlequin Games have been busy updating the rules for **Legends**, no mean feat. The new, third, edition covers 340 pages and is due out for Christmas.

GM Sam Roads announces that 'the biggest rulebook in PBM has been through a year of rewrites, edits, additions and addenda. Firstly we changed the structure, moving the details that matter to newbies to the front, and hiding the gory details of the combat simulator to the darkest recesses of appendix Q.

'Then we translated it from the native Brooklynese of the second edition into Common Tongue, sprinkling commas and semi-colons to taste.

'Lastly we utilised the latest shiny hyperlink technology to allow readers to zip around with leisurely ease, and find out exactly what those famous Legends Three Letter Acronyms all mean.

'We accept no responsibility for any repetitive strain injuries that may result from players attempting to flip through all 340 pages, nor from postmen who get back strain delivering them around the world.'

The latest Legends module, *Crown 23*, is nearly full. Harlequin have 90 players for it and the game will close when they reach 100. The next game will be a return to *Immortals' Realm*, the very popular module from new Austrian designer Klaus Bachler.

They'll run IR3 as a nine-day game - a first in Legends. The nine-day schedule will clump turns on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays, with no processing on the weekend causing turns to slip forwards to Monday from time to time.

'This will give an interesting twist to the Monday/Thursday effect of the more standard ten-day turnaround,' says Sam, 'Are there any other PBMs that have experimented with turnaround times which don't divide by seven?'

www.harlequingames.com

Mindless Games report on the two games that they're running of the fantasy wargame, **Serim Ral**. *MSR25* just starting a big Arena of Lost Souls "Final Battle" period to see who wins, but in a new twist, will continue after the Victor has been announced (there's several people who prefer a "never-ending" game, and we'll re-open to new players who want the same sort of game at that point).

MSR26 is still going strong and has spaces

for new players.

www.mindlessworld.net

ME Games report that their new module for **Middle-Earth PBM**, *Kin Strife*, is now well into development. It'll be based in the world of *Lord of the Rings* circa 1432, and they're 'very excited by the opportunity to create something new in the world.'

GM Clint Oldridge says that the conversion program to PC is coming along well, and plans for additional colour and basic improvements to the look and feel of the game are in the works.

'Inherently Middle Earth is a strategic game so we're looking at ways to improve this as well. Ideas always welcome!'

Clint adds that 'We went to *EuroGencon* recently and had a great time. We managed to meet up with a lot of our players and chatted with them for hours. We managed to spend some time with Carol, Tom and Colin as well and chatted about PBM - they were most constructive and helpful as always! The odd compliment about our stall was passed our way as well...'

www.MiddleEarthGames.com

LIVE GAMING

Intrigued by Paul Appleby's article this issue about *Megagames*, we've checked their website and can confirm that this defines a Megagame as 'a multi-player historical simulation game, in which the participants are organised into teams, and those teams into an hierarchy of teams.'

However, it then adds that 'This is a rather dull description for what is a very challenging, interesting, and fun activity. Teams of players take on specific roles - for example as a military headquarters, or a national government, and they interact with other teams representing their opponents or allies.'

Wargaming or roleplaying? - this seems to involve both!

The venue for a Megagame is usually in the south east of England: does anything similar exist elsewhere in Britain or abroad? Do let us know, if so!

megagames@btinternet.com

www.megagame-makers.org.uk

Please visit the new
Flagship website!
www.flagshipmagazine.com

NEWSDESK MISC



DICE GAMES

Flying Buffalo's Rick Loomis announces that he's been made the sales agent for the Rolled Bones collectable dice game. A 'starter set' is \$25 and a 'booster pack' is \$7. Flying Buffalo also offer Death Dice, which are 5/8" dice that have a skull instead of the 'one' spot. They have them in as many as six different colors: www.flyingbuffalo.com

MAGAZINES



In early October we were delighted to welcome the latest issue of *Warpstone*, which deals with

WFRP - Warhammer

Fantasy Roleplaying. Edited by John Foody, *Warpstone* looks impressive in black and white and contains interesting articles on many aspects of this RPG system. Issue 22 of *Warpstone* is £4.95 for UK readers or \$7.50 in the USA: www.warpstone.darcove.net

As we announced last issue, **Games International** has recently been revived. Edited by Brian Walker, it concentrates mainly on boardgames, with the November issue featuring an impressive host of these. Subscription details from:

www.gamesinternational.biz

We acquired copies of the relaunched *Dungeon* and *Dragon* magazines, both of which are owned by *Wizards of the Coast*, at GenCon UK in October. It's good to see that **AD&D** (see our coverage last issue) can still offer plenty of material for these two publications. Both are glossy, colourful, and full of useful material for AD&D fans. Among other topics, the November issue of *Dungeon* has a feature about the Thirty Greatest D&D Adventures Of All Time, while the October issue of *Dragon* discusses HP Lovecraft's influence on D&D (see Mark Alexander's article about Cthulhu this issue). Subscription details may be found at: www.piazo.com

If you read Bob McLain's article this issue, you'll be interested to hear about *Lotus Noir*, a glossy 84-page magazine which is produced in France in the English language. Dealing with Trading Card Games, it looks beautiful, and issue 4 has articles on **Magic**, the **Lord of the Rings** TCG, **HeroClix**, **Yu-Gi-Oh!** and **Pokemon**. One useful feature is a European price guide for TCGs.

www.lotusnoir.com

Harbinger is a magazine which specialises in miniatures. The issue that we saw was for last February, and contained articles about painting as well as reviews of systems and figurines. There's an article about assembling miniatures from different sources for a rendition of Pirates of the Caribbean, and how the resulting game played. Produced in the UK, *Harbinger* is also available to European and US subscribers.

www.harbingermagazine.com

Undeclared is a general games magazine which has been coming out bimonthly since last year. Produced in the US, issue 7 looks very smart indeed and includes coverage of boardgames (including a helpful article about **Settlers of Catan**), miniatures and TCGs. As an extra to its 108 pages, there's a pull-out section for the new TCG **Spycraft**: www.piazo.com

Last but not least, Chris Baylis's independent zine, *Games Gazette*, is still coming out to its two-monthly schedule and has now reached issue #140. Its 40 A5 pages are crammed with games news and comment, with *Wizards of the Coast*'s new **AD&D** campaign, *Eberron*, as the lead article and plenty of other gaming information: <http://gamesgazette.topcities.com>

COMPUTER GAMES

Doom 3 took computer games fans by storm earlier in the year with its splendidly scary appearance (see issue 110 for Globetrotter's review). Now *id Software* and *Activision* have announced the first official expansion, *Resurrection of Evil*, being co-developed by *id Software* and *Nerve Software*. The storyline will continue that of *Doom 3*, where you had to fight against demonic forces in a research station on Mars. Now, you will have gained possession of a 'timeless evil artifact' which the demons want back again. The new game will have 'new locations, characters and weapons - including the return of the trusted double-barreled shotgun.' (*On Mars?* Ah well...) We're also promised 'new multiplayer maps for up to eight players', which seems a major improvement: www.idsoftware.com

New from Vivendi Universal Games is **Evil Genius**, where you play an unscrupulous mastermind who plans to rule the world by constructing the ultimate doomsday device. You 'build a secret base, gain notoriety by completing daring missions, repel the forces of justice in real-time combat, and develop evil super-weapons to complete your nefarious master plan.' It's not altogether clear whether you have a white cat to stroke, but you do

control 'powerful henchmen, loyal minions, ice-cold beauty queens, and a host of hilarious gizmos.'

Yes, as you can tell *Evil Genius* is a light-hearted version of the old thrillers that we'll see repeated on our TV screens over Christmas. There's a demo and various videos to be seen at:

www.howevillareyou.com

Latest news is that a new patch has been created for *Evil Genius* PC European version. The files are available for download at the Vivendi Universal Games website.

STOP PRESS

Flying Buffalo report that they've gained access to a warehouse full of the old **Judges Guild** stuff (mostly for **D&D**). Also among Judges Guild material are a couple of adventures for **Tunnels and Trolls**: *Rat On A Stick*, in which the characters set up a 'Rat On A Stick' franchise, and *Jungle of Lost Souls*, which is a solo adventure. They add that 'there is a spreadsheet listing what is available (when it asks you for your name and password, just hit "cancel".)' www.flyingbuffalo.com/download.htm

Have you ever fancied playing an RPG with a crime background? *Hogshead Publishing* have produced a d20 series called **Crime Scene**, in which the separate sourcebooks describe The Mob, Supernatural, The Feds, Forensics, Yakuza, Sheriff's Office Red Pine Hollow, Lower East Side and Police Investigation. To take the last of these as an example, the amount of telling information that it contains is impressive. There are details about the job itself and police organization, and then about the possible character classes, skills and feats, procedure at the scene of a crime, combat equipment and GM resources. This material is likely to inspire anyone who likes to roleplay in a modern setting. And it's no problem that the setting is American, because we're all familiar with US cop series.

We also have news of a **Hackmaster** adventure from *Kenzer & Co* is **The Prophecy of Shardar**, which is recommended for levels 4-7 and costs £7.99. It's an adventure that can be played alone or as a prequel to *The Curse of Pen Griffen*, and is based on the task of fulfilling this prophecy by returning a long-lost emperor to his throne. Unusually, 'this adventure contains the first four rounds of the HackMaster Tournament of Champions that was originally run at the Origins 2004 convention for characters levels 4 through 7.'

NEWSDESK ROLEPLAYING



RPG GAMES

There are plenty of new sourcebooks, of course. New from *Steve Jackson Games* comes a GURPS sourcebook: **Fantasy 4th Edition**, which costs £19.99 as a full-colour hardback. It sounds extremely useful for moderators, with an indepth discussion of the genre and detailed advice about building a convincing game setting, 'from the basics of the landscape itself, through its inhabitants and cultures, to the details of believable histories and politics.' The nature and impact of supernatural forces is discussed, as are the ways that magic and users of magic can work in a fantasy world. Also, there's advice on the kinds of characters appropriate to fantasy, 'including ordinary folks, people with fantastic powers, and nonhumans.'

The Slayer's Guide Compendium is a hardback at \$34.95 from *Mongoose Publishing*. 'Gathering your favourite creatures from the Slayer's Guide series, updating them to 3.5 and adding a couple of never before seen texts, this is the



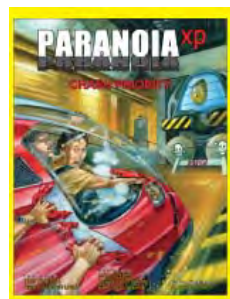
indispensable tome for making common monsters in your campaign far more than just cannon fodder,' Mongoose claim. The sourcebook describes the 'physiology, habitat, society and methods of warfare' of each creature, and there are chapters about how to roleplay them and bring them into a scenario, with suggested story hooks.

Also from *Mongoose*, **Ultimate NPCs** aims to help Games Masters create Non Player Characters, 'with a special focus on complex NPCs, such as multi-classed or monstrous characters.' This sounds a useful sourcebook for adding depth to any campaign, and the tables include 'names (divided into culture and region), clothing, appearance (divided by race), distinguishing features, alignment, mannerisms and traits.' The section called *Friends & Foes* contains 'fully fleshed-out NPCs, including stats, descriptions and backgrounds, ready to be inserted into your campaign or even spark off complete scenario ideas.' There's a section detailing how common certain characters are, rules about their organisation and there's an exhaustive listing of NPCs at the end. A hardback, this costs \$34.95.

Visionary Entertainment now offer **The Magician's Companion**, an Everlasting Sourcebook, at £11.99. This covers the magic of the Secret World, 'including an open-ended creative system that allows magicians to do whatever they possess the will, energy, and desire to achieve.' Traditional types of magic are all covered, and there's also a chapter on the Osirians, along with 'the many Secret Societies and an earth-like world openly ruled by mages and the organizations that exist there.' This book is compatible with the foundation books of the Everlasting series.

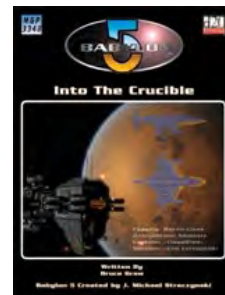
On a lighter note, *Deep 7* offer the **Red Dwarf Series Sourcebook** for £16.99. It's a supplement which covers each series of *Red Dwarf*, 'giving adventure seeds for each of the episodes, main cast stats as they grow and change throughout the series, as well as stats for characters and other specifics that not covered in the main rulebook or AI Screen.'

Moving on to campaigns, let's start by reflecting the theme of one of this issue's articles, with a **Call of Cthulhu** campaign: **Shadows of Yog-Sothoth**, at £14.99 from *Chaosium*. An updated version of a campaign first published in 1982, it contains seven scenarios, in which the brave investigators are required to counter a malign occult organization, The Silver Twilight. Backgrounds include New York, Scotland, the coast of Maine and the South Pacific. Also included is a Cthulu scenario which *Chaosium* recommend for new players, The People of the Monolith, and The Warren 'an unsettling challenge for even experienced players.'



After Cthulhu, it seems (suspiciously?) sensible to move on to a supplement for **Paranoia**. *Mongoose Publishing's* **Crash Priority** costs £9.99 offers new missions for this game. *Mongoose* start to try to describe their supplement by saying that GMs, 'always want new Troubleshooter missions in Alpha Complex - new ways to compel fear and ignorance - new reasons to loathe and suspect their fellow Troubleshooters - new methods of dying repeatedly in the most absurdly arbitrary ways. You enjoy having The Computer throw its Troubleshooters into new hose-job no-win deathtrap fiascos, so you work hard to invent the best fiascos you can, work your brains out, all under a crash-priority deadline so you wonder why, why

you ever became a Famous Game Designer... Oh, wait - sorry again - look, let's start over...' Oops! *Mongoose* sum up by saying that 'They're creative and funny.'



Also from *Mongoose Publishing* comes the **Babylon 5 RPG** campaign, **Into The Crucible**, at £24.95. This is set in the events of *Babylon 5's* second season, which was dominated by war between the Narns and the Centauri. This campaign is set among the events leading up to the war, and its players 'will eventually find themselves involved in the war one way or another.' There's more to it than that, however: 'In the end, they learn that the Narn-Centauri War is not, in fact, the true conflict... the greatest threat is still to come.'

Moving to RPGs with an historical setting, *Green Ronin* offer two d20 campaigns in their *Mythic Vistas* series.

The Trojan War aims to bring Homer's *Iliad* to life, and uses some of the Bronze Age material first expounded in their Biblical game, **Testament**. It contains a description of the Homeric World plus a map; an overview of the Trojan war; descriptions and game stats for all the major characters ('from Achilles and Hector to Odysseus and Aeneas'); details of Bronze Age weapons and armor; suitable character classes (charioteer, dedicated warrior, orator, runner, seer); an update of the mass combat system that originally appeared in *Testament*; advice on running campaigns and dealing with the gods. Oh, and suitable spells, like Divine Anger, False Omen and Stygian Armor.

Another is called **Egyptian Adventures: Hamunaptra**. At \$24.99, this continues their *Egyptian Adventures* theme in the new fantasy setting of a divided land, containing three different god/king pharaohs on the brink of war.

Does the Wild West count as an historical setting? Hey, why not? A third publication from *Green Ronin*, **Sidewinder: Recoiled**, costs \$34.95 and is based on **Sidewinder: Wild West Adventures** for the d20 Modern system. They present *Recoiled* as 'the definitive RPG treatment of the Wild West.' It contains a complete set of rules and there are 19 advanced classes, new feats and skills, new weaponry, new feats, specific combat rules, sample characters and plenty of background information. 'Create courageous gunslingers, low-down rustlers or high-stakes gamblers and test your mettle.'

NEWSDESK MMORPGS



MMORPGS

Some sad news is that work on **Warhammer Online** was discontinued in the summer.



However the good news as we go to press is that *Blizzard Entertainment's World of Warcraft* was launched in the States, Australia and New Zealand on November 23rd. Blizzard have already opened no less than 50 servers to cope with demand in the USA alone! It's certainly a game that's been eagerly awaited by its potential players.

Set in the universe created in the three best-selling Warcraft computer games, the first of which came out in 1994, *World of Warcraft* is expected to provide a richly detailed background. 'World of Warcraft has been our largest undertaking to date,' says Mike Morhaime, the president and co-founder of Blizzard Entertainment. 'When we set out to create a massively multiplayer online game, our goal was to expand the scope of the Warcraft universe by offering an incredibly dynamic game experience. We're extremely proud of the game we've created, and we believe players will be very pleased when they see what we have in store for them.'

World of Warcraft costs \$49.99 in the States, which includes a free one-month subscription. You'll have to pay to continue playing, of course, but the suggested rates range from \$14.99 for a single month to \$12.99 per month if you pay for six months, which seems pretty reasonable. Oh, and let's mention that there's a special collector's edition of *World of Warcraft* at \$79.99 which includes various goodies like a 'behind-the-scenes DVD, an exclusive in-game pet, a cloth map of the game world, a soundtrack CD, an "Art of the World of Warcraft" coffee table book, and a commemorative game manual signed by the development team.'

The game is designed to run on Windows 98/ME/2000/XP and Macintosh formats. We look forward to hearing more about it!

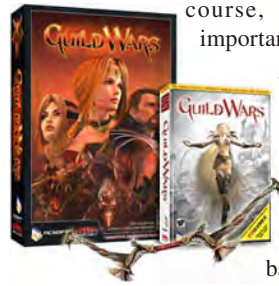
For upcoming MMORPGs, those of you who are interested in helping to construct and test a game can check out **Adellion**, from *HonourBound*. The game is being put together by volunteers: 'we are working on Adellion in our spare time, because it is the game we have always wanted to play. We are aware that developing a MMORPG is a very hard and long road to go, but our devotion is strong.'

This sounds a worthy enterprise, if a big one. More details on:

www.adellion.com

Still on the theme of new MMORPGs, *ArenaNet* and *NCsoft* have been holding free worldwide previews of their forthcoming **Guild Wars**, and report that the first of these, in October, was a huge success, with more than 40,000 players taking part. Continuing this method of beta-testing, they plan to release the game in early 2005.

Among other features, *Guild Wars* will be more structured than many existing MMORPGs, in that it has a mission-based design. 'You can meet new friends in towns or outposts, form a party, and then go tackle a quest together. Your party always has its own unique copy of the quest map, so camping, kill-stealing, and long lines to complete quests are all things of the past.' Of



course, guilds are an important feature in the game, 'with guild banners and halls, chat rooms and forums. Guilds can challenge other guilds to battle, compete for control of key parts of the world, and be ranked on a worldwide ladder.' And another interesting advance is that 'ArenaNet's unique streaming technology forever eliminates the concept of patching a game... Instead, the game constantly and intelligently streams new content to your computer in the background while you play. The world can change continually. This allows us to build a much more dynamic game world than any that has existed before.'

We've a player's reaction in this issue. Turn to page 32 and take a look at Dave Panchyk's article: www.guildwars.com

Many MMORPG players are delighted by the arrival of **Everquest II**, which updates and improves this long-popular game (by far the biggest of it's genre). Again we can refer you to Dave Panchyk's article in this issue for his first reactions.

Lineage II from *NC Soft*, which we reviewed in issue #109, will have had its new update, *Chronicle 2*, by the time this issue hits your doormats. www.lineage2.com/news/chronicle2_01.html

Ubisoft will shortly be releasing the expansion of their **Shadowbane** that they're calling *Throne of Oblivion*, and have reminded players

that this will need the latest video card drivers, so all players should upgrade. Meanwhile, they are offering a free ten-day trial of PC/Mac version of *Shadowbane*, which can be downloaded from:

www.shadowbane.com/us/FreeTrial.php

Mythic/GOA's Dark Age of Camelot (reviewed in issue 107) has an expansion pack called *New Frontiers*, which they're issuing free to active subscribers. *New Frontiers* improves the game's Realm vs Realm combat system by adding 'more tactics and diversity to RvR battles... strategic geography, more movement abilities, and expanded keep-building options... revised and expanded siege capabilities.' It'll also be possible to find battles more easily, and gain bonuses for participation. The next expansion will be *Catacombs*, soon to be released in the States: April seems a likely date for Europe.

Finally, some big news is that *Turbine Entertainment Software* is working on **Dungeons & Dragons Online**. This new MMORPG is scheduled for release in the second half of 2005, and will arouse a heap of interest. You can keep abreast of their progress on the website: www.ddo.com/

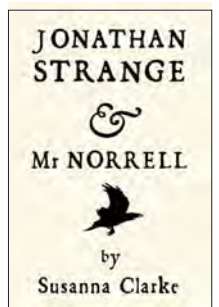
BOOKS

A brief mention that your editor has just finished reading a novel that may well interest anyone who plays RPGs and fantasy games.

Susanna Clarke's *Jonathan Strange and Mr Norrell*

(Bloomsbury 2004) opens in England in 1806, and its theme is that magic really exists. Initially, magic is only remembered by disreputable street magicians and a small number of respectable

gentlemen who regularly meet to discuss its theory. Mr Norris, however, has been amassing all the books about magic that he can, because he seeks to dispossess potential rivals and to set himself up as England's only practising magician, who can help the government to defeat Napoleon. Jonathan Strange also has magical powers, and a generosity that Norrell lacks, but they manage to work together until their rivalry grows too strong. Description is an important element in the narrative, and there can't be many books where learned footnotes are such fun: www.jonathanstrange.com



Mad Frenchmen and Terrible Turks

BEN LYNCH plays the Ottoman Empire in Struggle of Nations ...

A PBEM NOW in its third incarnation, **Struggle of Nations** opens in 1794 with the French Revolution in full swing. Players can control any nation on the map, be it the tribes of Nepal, revolutionary France or feudal Japan. Players can also play secret societies or a political party. At startup, players examine the maps and the list of open positions and their military assets, and submit their desires to the GM. Details of the economic strength of the nations appear in the 'World Economic Report', which lists every province in the game along with its economic value and tech level, or 'TL': this is updated each turn, as economies rise and fall. A turn, by the way, covers one year. Those who desire to control the destiny of a specific nation, such as, say, the British Empire, also submit bids, with the position going to the highest bidder.

I, having a perhaps less than practical fascination with the Ottoman Empire, put \$15 for the opportunity to control its destiny and see if this Ottoman Empire, at least, would not turn into the 'Sick Man of Europe'. Be it **Europa Universalis** or **Lords of the Earth**, I seem to have a propensity for running a multitude of Turkish Empires, striving to return to, or exceed, the splendid success of Suleiman. I cannot explain it, but writing a letter to a fellow and declaring him a 'seditious cur despised by God for lack of faith' provides a peculiar sort of enjoyment. Also, with the current mess in former Ottoman regions stemming from the Ottoman Empire's WWI collapse, I figure the bar for success is relatively attainable.

At first glance, *Struggle of Nations* appears to be a wargame, but one can have a very interesting game with a minimum of warfare, or even none. The main goal of successful players won't necessarily be to achieve a high economic growth rate or conquer their neighbors, but to maintain control over their empire by whatever means they deem most effective. Of course, you may be overthrown and if you're clever, ruthless and vengeful, you may come back, but it's best to avoid the uphill battle, correct?

The stats sheet and maintaining control

When I received the stats sheet, I discovered several important things about the nature of the game. First, while I run the Ottoman Empire as the Sultan, I am also beholden to a faction. A faction represents those people in the nation who support your rule: you appoint them to govern provinces, command armies, and write your laws. Should you govern in a way that disturbs your faction, you may be overthrown. It is perfectly possible to lose control of the nation as your supporters, disappointed with the thrust of your government policy, remove you from power. It does not require military defeat or even a civil war, though these can play their part.

Struggle of Nations at a glance

A pbem powergame that starts in the world of 1794. Each player controls one of the countries of the world deciding tax rates, government spending, foreign policy and military operations as he sees fit. Players submit their orders using a multiple page turn packet (using Microsoft Excel™.) Turns are processed weekly and represent the passage of one year in game time. The game design stresses realism. \$3.00 / turn.

www.webworldinc.com/son

<http://games.groups.yahoo.com/group/strugonations/>

Fortunately, you will be informed with each passing turn how the people feel about your government, and this runs the gamut from 'Beloved' to 'Hated'. Therefore, with intelligent policies and adaptation to circumstances, you have a chance to head off trouble before it starts - but not always.

Second, my nation, while wealthier than most, labors under the constraints of a feudal economy. Simply put, this means that the burden of taxation rests heavily on the merchants and peasants, while much of the wealth of the land, controlled by the nobles and perhaps the clergy, escapes direct taxation. The heavier taxation of the non-nobles discourages investment, economic growth, and technical innovation. Because of this, feudal economies grow hardly at all when compared to 'free' economies, and risk being left behind by more modern nations. However, they do get feudal armies, which can be nice because these are free, but free armies hardly outweigh the benefits of 'modernization'.

At game start, most players are in the same boat because only four nations in the world, the US, Britain, Holland, and France, are free of the feudal penalties. But most players will, as time passes, need to confront the necessity of reforming their societies to reap the benefits of modernization, and risk the possibility of rebellion.

Then there's the issue of taxes. Without taxes, the government will not function, the armies will go unpaid, the Sultan will not get clean underwear, and therefore, you must tax. How much, though, is up to you. You can tax anywhere from 1% to 100% of the national wealth. 1%, however, is practically impossible, and 100% economically self-destructive. If you maintain high taxes, the people have less to spend, meaning that economic growth will be constrained or even regress without investment on your part. Even worse, if you tax too much, the people will begin to dislike or even hate you, which means that you may be overthrown.

To offset the anger that taxation engenders in the working stiff of your empire and maintain the smooth governance of the state, you have several options, which I will elucidate from least effective to most effective. You may attempt to buy support by redistributing wealth, or you may choose to maintain large armies and flood your nation with propaganda, or, most effective of all, you may fund a massive secret police and rule as a despot without concern for the affection of your people so long as they obey.

Of course, not all options are available to all nations. If you are a constitutional monarchy such as the British, you will find it difficult if not impossible, to maintain control through using the secret police. The people may vote you out. However, as I learned, if you're the Sultan, beholden to none, the secret police will do very well. Buying support means that you attempt to do this through various 'social programs', ie law and order, primary schools, hunger relief, etc. These are least effective, and require more money than the others. However, in nations with free electorates, they are unavoidable. As there are very few of these at game start, most players can choose to do without them, but even in an absolute monarchy, they can make government less difficult.

Troops, for reasons easy to explain, are more effective at keeping people in line than social programs. They can enforce martial law, forcibly confiscate the wealth of the people, and daunt those who might oppose your will. However, if your armies are tied down in repressing a restive people, it will be more difficult for them to be deployed abroad in the most popular sport of kings: War. Should you launch a massive invasion of your neighbor, and leave nothing to keep the rabble in their place, you may find yourself overthrown. More effective than large armies, however, is internal

security. This means the secret police, the network of spies that you keep among the people ferreting out plots and dispatching your enemies. You may be hated, but who cares? This is the most favored method of aggressive militaristic players. It's cheap, and it works. One may also use propaganda touting the benefits of your government, manipulating popularity, or redirecting the anger of the people away from yourself. It is possible, with enough money, to have them hate someone else more than they hate you.

Once you figure these things out, you will pay your troops, if any, and look to see what you have left.

Warfare

Now that you have set your taxes and decided how you will attempt to maintain your government, you may have a surplus to vaporize in the purchase of arms, and lots of them! As a would-be world conqueror, you require armies. Your tech level (TL), will decree what sort of armies you can build. At the game start, the world is at the brink of the industrial revolution. Most of Western Europe and some provinces in Eastern Europe will be at 'TL3: Muskets'. The majority of the world will be at 'TL2: Pike and Musket'. Many nations will contain a mixture of higher and lower tech provinces. This information will be contained in the 'World Economic Report'.

The dollar value of your highest tech provinces will determine how many armies of that particular tech level you can raise. For example, if you control only one province at TL3 and it is valued at \$32, then you can only buy \$32 worth of armies. If you want more, you'll have to buy them from someone with spare capacity. Fortunately for players in less advanced nations, there's always someone willing to sell guns, and lots of them.

Raising armies is expensive. You pay not only the build cost, but the training cost on top of it, which will be the same as the purchase price. Further, to maintain them will cost you as much as you spent on them in the first place. Therefore, a TL3 army will cost you \$4 to purchase and \$4 to train. After that, each TL3 army not placed in the reserves will cost you \$4. If you choose to send it on campaign, it will cost, again, \$4. As the tech levels rise, you can be assured that the cost of the latest arms will be exactly

double of the ones before. Therefore, armies at TL4 will cost \$8, and those at TL5 will cost \$16. To be a naval power on the order of the British will be far more costly, as a single fleet will generally cost four times as much as an army to build, and about double to operate. War is not cheap.

Nor is it easy. If you are involved in a war against a power equipped with arms of similar technical sophistication, you will need a 3:1 advantage on the offensive to be certain of overpowering your opponent. Make no mistake: God favors the big battalions. God also favors superior technology. Combat between even TL2 and TL3 armies will be weighted heavily in favor of the TL3 units. The system of promotion embraced by your regime will also determine results. You may choose to promote based on merit, or you may choose loyalty. Armies promoting on loyalty will not revolt as easily as those based on merit, but those based on merit will perform better in the field than an army commanded by people chosen solely for their relationship with the ruler. Think the Spanish Armada and the Duke of Sidonia versus Francis Drake: the results are well known. As to writing orders for the armies, the player will find them quite simple.

The world of Struggle of Nations

Anyone familiar with the historical milieu of the world in 1794 will have no trouble recognizing most of the major players in Struggle of Nations. Europe is in turmoil. The streets of Paris run red with carnage, as the Terror hits full swing. Austria, Prussia, Britain, and Russia are either at war with France, or will be soon. The lesser powers of Europe, such as the Spanish, Portuguese, Dutch, and Ottoman Turks, strive to preserve their vast empires from the ambitions of their more powerful neighbors. The New World, excepting the newborn United States, is divided among the European powers, with the Spanish and Portuguese still in control of Latin America, while the Russians and British rule Alaska and Canada, respectively. Any book studying the world of the French Revolution or the rise of the British Empire will fill in many details for the curious reader.

In Africa, scattered European outposts, rebellious Ottoman governors, and tribal monarchies at the low end of the tech scale divide the land, making it of negligible importance to the destinies of the game. The Mamelukes hold

Egypt against the Sultan, and others, such as the corsairs of Barbary, harass European shipping, but beyond that, it serves only as a reservoir of slave labor for the New World's vast plantations and as a setting for propaganda stunts by the great powers looking for military glory at cut rate prices.

A quick survey of Asia surprises no one. Already, the European powers have made advances in the subcontinent and Indonesia. Wealthy but feuding princely states quarrel over the Mughal corpse under the shadow of

advancing British domination in India,

Turkish khanates in Central Asia quarrel at the foot of the Russian bear, the sprawling Arab possessions of the Ottoman Empire cover vast expanses of desert, and the supremely wealthy but insular Manchu Empire of China slumbers, Japan, Siam, and Vietnam forced to grudgingly orbit that eternal center of 'All Under Heaven' even as Europeans begin to intrude upon them with increasing regularity.

What the Turks learned about the game

In five turns, I am certain that this is a game of politics and war, and those who do not enjoy diplomacy, wheeling and dealing, will not enjoy this game. He who remains silent is likely to be carved up by his loquacious neighbors like a fine game hen. He who talks may also be carved up, but he stands a better chance for survival than he who remains aloof. With turnaround consistent at one week, neglecting



affairs of state can be exceptionally perilous.

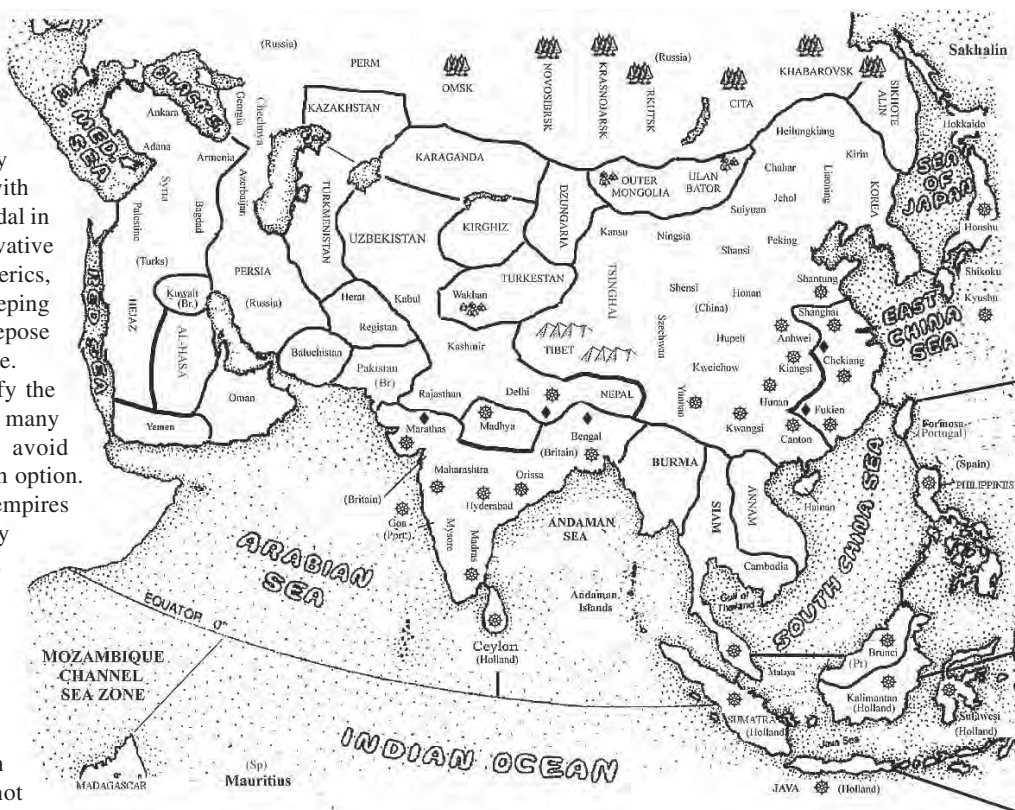
The power I played, the Ottoman Empire, proved a tolerable representation of the state of affairs confronting the Sultans at that time. My empire was definitively behind the Europeans in technical skill, with only one TL3 province, and still firmly feudal in mindset. The Sultan ruled through a conservative faction composed of provincial nobles, clerics, and janissary commanders, all dead set on keeping things eternally unchanged and willing to depose any Sultan that dared to take a different line.

As Sultan Selim determined to revivify the decayed Ottoman Empire, surrounded by many dangerous neighbors, while striving to avoid deposition, splendid isolation was never an option. To the North, the Russian and Austrian empires loomed ominously: how could I retake my richest territory, Egypt, if one of them, especially the Russians, chose to bear down upon me? With Russia more than twice the size of the Sultan's empire in wealth and availed of many more technically sophisticated provinces, this would, in my mind, determine whether or not the Ottoman Empire could manage the jump to the modern world, just as in our own history. If not friendship, then at least simple civility would be necessary. Fortunately, both the Russian and Austrian players turned out to be quite genial. Austria had his eye set on war with the French Republic, and I knew Russia from another game, so we had some common ground that would prevent us from attempting to murder one another out the gate.

Before the first turn, I would sign treaties of non-aggression with Austria, and, wonder of wonders, an alliance with the Russians. I had to sacrifice the Persians and Chechnyans, but it is better that heretics suffer the Russian boot than Ottoman subjects. Strangely, I also signed an alliance with Spain, mostly because he was the first to offer, but it did leave me free to concentrate on the first objective of the Sultan: the conquest of Egypt. Egypt, unfortunately, was not unplayed, and I entered into tentative negotiations with the current Mameluke Sultan. Playing in character, I demanded he tow the Turkish line as the loyal vassal, which he did not like. This impasse, along with Egypt's strategic location cutting off direct access to my other African territories, gave me strong inducement to crack his skull. However, even with the British sniffing around Egypt in pursuit of the fabled 'all water route' across the Suez, I did not decide to attack him until he mentioned that he had been busy attempting to sign treaties with foreign powers, which the Sultan regarded as symptoms of a treacherous disposition. The emissaries of foreign countries, including the Spanish, confirmed my suspicion.

Therefore, it was with little regret that I ordered the janissary corps, a wretched rabble compared to European troops, to Egypt along with four feudal cavalry armies drawn from Anatolia. I ran the nation into debt funding the war, but debt doesn't enrage the people like outright taxation, so it did not bother me too much. It was a screaming success, and in the end, the player realized his treaties would avail him nothing, dropping the game. Knock one up for the Sultan. Yes, the higher taxes imposed at game start made me unpopular, but I had been victorious, and that's all that mattered.

The next turn would see me knocking about with the remnants of the Mamelukes and Spain would explode into civil war, which would eventually engulf all of Europe and the Americas. I built some new armies, watched my economy decline a couple of dollars. The most important event of the game for the Turks was the abolition of feudalism in Russia and the freeing of the serfs. Thankful but not quite at ease with the Russians, I determined to follow along. After some consultation with veteran players, I raised my taxes to a whopping 50%, dumped half of my taxes into internal security, recruited more armies, and sent in my turns. Like all governments, I sought



to blame the coming turmoil on other actors, in this case, the nobles, by also pumping a large sum of money into propaganda vilifying them. To make sure the feudal vassals did not rise up in defense of their privileges, I sent the dear boys abroad to aid the Russian conquest of Persia. By the time they heard about the seizure of their property, they'd be 100 miles past the Persian border in enemy territory.

Here were the results. The year, by the way, is 1795:

The Sultan of Turkey signed an alliance with his hereditary enemy, the Russians. A combined army of Turks and Russians invaded Moslem Persia and defeated the Shah's army. Russian Cossacks plundered Tehran. Back in Constantinople the Sultan proclaimed an end to the privileges of the nobility and ordered the leading citizens imprisoned. Mobs of commoners attacked nobles in the streets, killing the Grand Vizier. The Bazaar was looted. The Grand Mufti called upon the faithful to overthrow the 'vile usurper who sits upon the throne of the Great Empire': mobs led by harem eunuchs drove him from the Great Mosque.

The commander of the garrison, Pasha Al Hazred, finally intervened by sending battalions of the Sultan's newly trained Westernized regiments into the streets. Order was restored after three days of bloody carnage. In the aftermath of the fighting, a massive forest of impaling stakes surrounds the city. Thousands have perished. In Egypt, the janissaries proclaimed Amir Mohammed Ali as Sultan and began to march on the capital. Arabia and Yemen rose in revolt. In Jerusalem, mobs slaughtered Jews and Armenians.

To explain in game mechanics, I turned on my own faction, a very dangerous thing, and escaped overthrow only due to the mobs of internal security thugs and propaganda blaming the upper classes for all the trouble. When it was all done, the conservatives no longer ruled, having been replaced by a new faction, that of the 'reformers'. For the high taxes, the purging, the chaos, I was reviled from Bucharest to Bagdad. And despite the defeat of the conservatives, that bastion of conservatism, the janissary corps, remained to challenge my authority, taking a little less than half my armed forces and many of the Arab provinces, splitting the empire in half. But I retained the wealthier part of the empire, now free of feudal drag on the economy, and most of the military. The rebels would not be able to destroy me. Neither Russia nor Austria would lift a finger to help the insurgents, rebels being the lowest form of scum in this game.

Time, I knew, was on my side.

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GenCon UK

How was it for you? ERIC RIDLEY and CAROL MULHOLLAND gives us their thoughts ...

This year's Gen Con UK, the biggest event of the UK gaming convention, was held from Thursday October 14th to Sunday October 17th at Butlin's Holiday Centre, Minehead, Somerset. Flagship had a stand there, and did a roaring trade if we say so ourselves! However first we turn to regular columnist, **Eric Ridley**, for his take on the weekend.

Not to be out done by Globetrotter and his trip to Indianapolis for GenCon US, I made my way to exotic Minehead in Somerset to enjoy the delights of the UK GenCon. GenCon UK has changed hands a number of times in the last few years and is now owned by *Horsemen Events*. Previously it was run by Wizards of the Coast and then by Peter Adkinson; eventually both ran into financial difficulty and the name is now franchised out to the folks at Horsemen.

After a few years at the ultra expensive, and frankly crappy, London location, this year saw Butlins hold the convention. It was held in a massive blue and yellow tent (although I think the colour was irrelevant) and was attended by much healthier numbers than the last few years. This is all good news. The accommodation was basic, but with six of us sharing the cost it came in at 55 quid each for four days, not bad in my book. A four-day pass was 35 pounds, which I thought was slightly steep especially as I was part of a demo team there to entertain the punters. None-the-less the whole four days of entertainment only cost 90 pounds, which I think represents a bargain.

GenCon is great and to my mind is a bit of a pilgrimage for gamers. Every one of us should at least try to attend once in our lives: this was my 7th year of going, how holy am I?

The tent was a good size and it seemed to hold everything with out being cramped. There were problems, the lights would occasionally fail and the place smelled powerfully of diesel a lot of the time, but these all seemed to add to the atmos. There was a plentiful trade hall, a large CCG, RPG and board games area and a lot of nice demo booths as well. Demos at GenCon are great; in my mind they are the biggest reason for going. Here is a run down of what I tried out and hopefully what others will be playing soon...



Cirondo: Easily the most eye catching game of the convention. It looks like a big circular game of chess in space, and it is. I almost bought this game on looks alone, and several people did. Unfortunately the game falls short of the visual impact. Everything in the game moves in spirals and that can be very hard for a linear brain to work out. I also thought there were too many pieces. It's nice, and will appeal to some, but it was just a little too hard/samey for me.

HeroScape: A good, fast-paced miniatures game. Published by Hasbro and presented in a big box, including pre-painted miniatures and terrain, it's a good start point for new minis gamers. It's hex based and the map is three-dimensional plastic and comes in sections. It allows you to change the map every time and

easily at that. The miniatures are good and the game system is sound. A lot simpler than Warhammer 40K and a lot cheaper. A great game but it won't stop me playing GW products. **Take it Easy:** An excellent thinking game that sees players (from one to an infinite number) draw random tiles, each with three criss-crossing lines on them, and try to form blockbuster style connections to the other side of the playing grid. Brilliant game but slightly expensive for what you get. But go and buy it, it really is great.

Magical Arena:

Another miniatures game set in a crazy alternate plane where spell casters battle it out on a hex map for control of the universe (possibly). You take charge of a Mage and have powers at your disposal to summon monsters and cast spells. It is a very

good and well-thought-out system that can play for as little as 20mins to as many as 90 depending on how many are playing. There is a depth of strategy and a wealth of tactics. The game comes with an optional miniatures line to spice up the game but includes all you need to play, including 4 minis, in the box. Excellent price point. It's my pick of the con.

DC/Marvel Vs. system: This is something like the fourth card game based on the comic licences of the two industry giants. It's quite a complex system for what is ultimately a game of 'this card adds to my power, and so does this' etc. It's clever but ultimately falls a little short. I have confused feelings about this one. It's standard TCG fare, but do I like it? Will it fail horribly, like the last three attempts? Great demo booth though.

Treasure Island: From the designer of Take it Easy, this board game, set among pirates if you didn't get the title, sees players roll dice to set down tokens which mark out their territory on a large board. You try to control as much of the board as possible. Each time you place a token on a treasure chest space you receive booty (oh yeah). The player with the most plunder at the end is the winner. It is a simple, fun game and is nicely presented and well designed. **Wars CCG:** Decipher, having lost the Star Wars licence to the goons at Wizards, have decided to repack the mechanics of their Star Wars CCG in to a new sci-fi card game. Wars is the result. It is one of the most visually pleasing games around. The art and graphic design is top notch. The mechanics are very solid and the game has been slightly simplified (only very slightly) from its original form. It's a great game, but any one could just pick up the old SW game for a fraction of the price. **D&D**

Miniatures: Technically not a new game (it is onto its fourth set), Wizards had a very impressive demo area to let you try out this one. All the minis are pre painted and plastic and come packaged like Hero Clix. But unlike the Clix they don't have the trade mark bases, instead they all come with stat cards and a wealth of information in each. I liked this product. The game system was sound, the minis (by enlarge) were well produced and it is also useful for the D&D RPG. Trouble was the demo was as dull as afternoon television; it was set on a wide-open map with no cover or objectives. Oh well, rough with the smooth I guess. There is also a new **Star Wars** minis game available from Wizards that is almost the exact same, so take your pick. **Track Mania:** Gasp, I took time away from traditional games to play a PC game. A car game with simple graphics and instantly gratifying game play, Track Mania's best feature is the track editor allowing you complete freedom to design pretty much any course you would like, from pure racing to dangerous raised wooden stunt tracks. There are reportedly *two thousand* tracks available to download from the website and a host of online play options. Go out and grab it by the gear stick.

And there you have it, GenCon UK in a nutshell, well a two-page spread really. The rest of my time was spent playing the excellent new **Call of Cthulhu CCG**, avoiding roleplayers, sleeping and buying stuff (oh, there was also a stand for a magazine called *Flagship*, or something, and they wouldn't stop yapping to me. Cuh.). It was a great con and saw the



*Queues outside on day one ...
... but what colour was the tent?*

UK's biggest gaming event return to its former greatness, or at least take a step in that direction. I expect to see you all there next year.

More on GenCon UK - Carol Mulholland

I'd never been to a GenCon before, so I had no idea what to expect beyond a high proportion of men in jeans. I'd never been to a Butlin's camp, either, so it all amounted to an educational experience for me.

The Butlin's site at Minehead is vast! There's a central white building with spikes and domes, which contains shops, pubs and a cinema. I think that this is new and I quite liked it because it didn't look as institutional as the other buildings. The accommodation around it, however, is rather depressing, being divided into areas with wildly implausible titles like Pacific Wharf, Surfers Point and Oyster Bay: ah, if only. Nevertheless, a Butlin's camp seems pretty good place for a big convention, with its on-site accommodation and holiday facilities.

GenCon itself was held in a huge marquee, which I remember as green rather than Eric's blue and yellow, ulp. Well, I suppose that blue and yellow do make green when blended together. This was freezing cold to begin with and took a couple of days to warm up, but it had reached a reasonably comfortable temperature by Friday because many of the players stayed in it to play all night and so the organisers kept the heaters on. Another problem was that in heavy rain the marquee leaked, and some of the traders had to be moved - though as they were moved to better positions, they did actually benefit from the bad



weather conditions.

Imagine a huge tent packed with games players of every size and shape, over 2000 of them. Plenty of black-T-shirts and anoraks, as you'd expect, though there were also some very strange costumes when LARPS players wandered in from their own allotted region (I chatted with a jolly, battle-sated orc). The great majority of players sat playing games throughout, happily absorbed. *Flagship* was stationed in the traders' area, of course, with players visiting this between their games, and I managed to play one of the boardgames being sold from the table next door, **Take It Easy**. Indeed, I purchased this game as a Chrissie pressie for my nephews. I was also impressed by a couple of stalls selling costumes and weaponry, and it was good to admire the work of various artists.

Despite being apprehensive beforehand, as a GenCon novice, I enjoyed GenCon enormously: it's always good to see lots of people happily playing games, and such a huge variety of games available for them - all this encourages me to believe that I'm doing something worthwhile. I think, too, that we managed to spread the idea that *Flagship* is

now includes general game coverage rather than just pbm, which was the main point of the expedition. Subscription signups were agreeably numerous. We met lots of nice people, including a large proportion of visitors from overseas.

From the number of players who'd struggled down to Minehead, I don't think that Horsemen Events, the new organisers, will have had difficulty in covering their costs this year. They certainly stayed good-humoured and helpful throughout. Well done, chaps and chapesses.

Printers Advert here

Call of Cthulhu

Horror in various guises

MARK ALEXANDER describes this popular but scary RPG system ...

IN THIS 30th anniversary year of RolePlaying Games in general and **Dungeons & Dragons** in particular, I thought it was a good time to celebrate another classic roleplaying game.

Call of Cthulhu dates back to 1981, and is still in print (£25 from anywhere that sells roleplaying games). Technically, you need all the dice to play: four, six, eight, ten, twelve and twenty-sided. In practice, most rolls are percentile or D100. The first ten-sided die is the tens, and the second is the units. 100 is 00.

An alternate rulebook is available using the D20 system. I would strongly advise newcomers to start with the original rules. They are simple and fast, perfect for those of us who like to concentrate on character and plot in our games.

What sort of game is it?

The short answer is 'horror', but you can forget vampires, werewolves and other such traditional themes.

Call of Cthulhu is based on the writings of Howard Phillips Lovecraft (1890 to 1937). Lovecraft was an eccentric who loved history, especially that of his native New England, and hated the 20th century. His stories lack sophisticated characterisation, but his vision was unique. He invented the monstrous Cthulhu and other alien beings. In Lovecraft's bleak universe there is no God, no friendly aliens, nobody to save us from Cthulhu and the rest, whose motives are unknown.

Madness is a common theme in Lovecraft's stories and the call of Cthulhu game. Whenever a character witnesses a horrific thing or event, the player must roll a Sanity Check. This involves rolling under their current Sanity Point, or they will lose points. In most RPGs, being killed in combat is the way that characters usually meet their end. In Call of Cthulhu, going insane is also a possibility.

This, combined with a deadly combat system, means that the odds are stacked against the player. It is very easy for the Call of Cthulhu gamesmaster, known as the 'Keeper', to wipe out characters. It takes maturity and a fine sense of balance to run a Call of Cthulhu scenario.

Lovecraft, living when he did, set most of his stories in the 1920s. That

is the era in which most of the original rules are set. In 1992 a supplement called *Cthulhu Now* was published. This gives players the option of a game in the modern era. For those of you who preferred The X Files to Indiana Jones, this is a big improvement. Many players dislike playing contemporary scenarios. For them, Cthulhu is the 1920s/30s setting and no other.

For those who want to try Call of Cthulhu in a fantasy setting, there is *The Dreamlands*. The Dreamlands supplement was published in 1988.

HP Lovecraft's Dreamlands are ethereal and haunting. Things are distorted and slightly unreal there. Much unearthly beauty exists, and also cosmic terror. It helps to have read Lovecraft's 'The Dream-Quest of Unknown Kadath' or the writings of Clark Ashton Smith to get a real feel for the Dreamlands, but I'll try to explain what it's like. Imagine a fairy tale gone wrong. Earth's Dreamlands are an exact equivalent of all the people on earth, but distorted. Important people are nobodies, and vice versa. The subconscious desires of the Earth person become the personality of their Dreamlands persona. All this is set in a society at a pre-industrial technology level. When entering Dreamlands, a character's shotgun may become a broadsword, for instance.

Sounds weird? It is, and it's not for everyone, but Call of Cthulhu's greatest strength is its many setting throughout history and the Dreamlands. It's like having several different games in one. The most recently published alternate era is *Cthulhu Dark Ages*.

Call of Cthulhu has been translated into French, German, Italian and Japanese. It has had world-wide popularity for decades, and was voted

the best RolePlaying Game ever by *Arcade* magazine in 1996.

What's a typical game like?

For an explanation of what RolePlaying Games are, see Lisa Fordham's article in issue 110. So, I'm going to assume that you know how RolePlaying Games in general work. The wide variety of settings for Call of Cthulhu means that nobody needs to stick to the same old formulas. Games can be as complex or as simple as the players want. This is an example of a simple game, set in the 1920s ...

The players' characters are invited to an English country house, as wedding guests. The characters may have an inkling that there are paranormal, alien forces working against the good of the human race, but naturally the authorities will not believe them. A character discovers occult books in the bride's father's library. Another character reads of mysterious disappearances in the local newspaper. Lots of investigation follows and the characters discover that the bride's father intends to use her husband-to-be as a blood sacrifice to summon a hunting horror. At the garden party reception that night, the hunting horror appears to claim its sacrifice. The players' characters split into two groups: defenders hold the hunting horror



Call of Cthulhu at a glance

A horror roleplaying game based upon the writings of HP Lovecraft and a few others. Published by *Chaosium* for the past 20 years, the game has won over 70 awards. Sixth Edition hardback rules from £24.99.

www.chaosium.com

at bay with bullets and sources of light, while the others cast 'Curse of Darkness' to return the hunting horror whence it came. After two minutes (game time) of madness and mayhem, the husband is saved, but his father-in-law has gone. Was the bride involved in the plan? ...

Will I like it?

So, who should the game appeal to?

If you like history, the occult and horror fiction of the more intelligent and interesting variety, the strange, surreal and obscure you will like the game's subject matter.

If you want a RolePlaying Game that's easy to learn with minimal maths, that enables you to get on with creating characters and playing them, you will like the way the game works.

My first gaming experience was Dungeons and Dragons, but I started playing Call of Cthulhu twenty years ago and it remains my favourite. I've played 1920s and modern era, Dreamlands and 'real world'. I've recently started playing the collectable card game, too.

So if you're new to RolePlaying Games and don't know where to start, try Call of Cthulhu.

Some suitable equipment for Modern Era Cthulhu investigators ...

When playing **Call of Cthulhu** in the modern era, new players may be tempted to stock up on a vast selection of gadgets. Here's a few words of advice from my five years of weekly gaming sessions playing Cthulhu present day.

First, the 'must have' item, a mobile phone. This really helps with game mechanics from the start. Now, the Keeper no longer has to send players out of the room when their characters are not involved in current events. All characters can be in constant contact, unless of course they are in a coma or having one of those odd dreams that Cthulhu investigators often suffer from. The alleged health risks of mobile phones will not be a problem for the average Cthulhu investigator. He or she will be murdered/driven mad/on death row long before the effects of microwave radiation become a problem.

Next, the car. If you're looking for a single vehicle for the whole party, a large unmarked van is always useful. It can be used to transport large artifacts, dead cultists and stacks of stolen books. The van is also essential when pretending to be from the phone company/pest control/undertakers or whatever your current cover is.

Tools are, of course, essential for keeping the party's vehicles on the road. Keepers may want to roll for mechanical and electrical failures on classic cars. As anyone who's been poor enough or enthusiastic enough to drive a 20-year old car, it happens a lot.

A source of fire. Matches or a lighter are just as important as in the 1920s era Cthulhu. Fires are very convenient for getting rid of evidence and creatures that just will not die any other way.

A source of light. A torch is essential, but these can be seen by the Cultists, so the answer in some circumstances is a night-scope. Your investigators can now observe night-time cultist gatherings from a safe distance.

The bullet-proof vest. Only available in American settings. In a game where three bullets will kill a character more often than not, this is a real advantage. 1920s investigators weren't so lucky.

That concludes the 'must haves'. Obviously, adventuring in the wilderness requires more gear, but the above should get you through a conventional scenario. One final item that you might like to consider if the Keeper lets you play very rich characters: the helicopter.

A party helicopter could be the best half-million dollars you ever spend. I still remember the ease with which our characters dumped a body into the Pacific from our helicopter.

Remember, of course, that all the equipment in the world will only provide short term victories. In H P Lovecraft's universe, humanity is doomed, and Cthulhu will rise again ...



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The screenshot shows a character sheet for 'Margo' with the following data:

	Current	of current max	Recovery	Total max
Health	20	20	3	55
Mana	48	71	7	183

Attribute	Base	Advancements	Total	Overall modifier from attribute, race & gender
Strength	78	0	-2	15
Dexterity	80	0	0	15
Stamina	76	2	-2	15
Intelligence	86	0	6	11

	Current	of current max
Fire protection	20	20
Water protection	20	20
Wind protection	41	41
Earth protection	41	41
Lightning protection	41	41

The map shows various locations including Quorr, Brueckenwirt, Klan der Woelfe, Kapsstadt, Cateril Crasmed, and Training Islands. The text 'Fantasy Adventure PBeM' is visible in the bottom right corner.

Gunboat: A Diary

ALEX McLELLAN with the story of Admiral Yoshida Razan ...

HAVING DESCRIBED how I set myself up and proceeded to play **Gunboat** in last issue's review, I will now launch straight into a little chronicle of game play.

The date is June 1885. Japanese advisors are training a small force of Chinese for loyal Prince Li in Chungang, southern China, and the Dutch have sent a large military expedition to the region. Friendly relations with the American Trading Magnate Franklin J LaForce have recently resulted in the donation of an old armed sailing ship to the forces of Admiral Yoshida, a serious gift as the ship could be converted to steam propulsion and is worth over £35,000! In Japan, the crew intended to collect the American gift ship have refused orders to go to Seattle and recruiting is at an alltime low. Off the Chinese coast a British ship, *Imperatrix*, accused by the US, Chinese and Russians of piracy and other crimes, has just run aground on the treacherous shoals off Yeng-Cheng.

Admiral Yoshida pores over his charts and papers trying to decide on the best course of action ...

A diplomatic mission to Korea is long overdue thanks to a mass of delays, but the recent accident off Yeng-Cheng could be a chance to make political mileage. *Imperatrix* is part of the staunchly Colonial (and violent) British faction, so pulling her off the shoals would help offset the presence of Japanese advisors with Prince Li. On the other hand, if *Imperatrix* should take hostile action when *Hiryuu* comes to help her, then she could be captured or sunk legally and the US \$200,000 (in game terms \$1=£1) dollar bounty on her collected, as well as the ship or salvage. Best of all, the British would truly deserve such treatment for their appalling behaviour in China. It all seems a win-win situation: whatever we do is the right thing in some way.

Orders are swiftly drawn up to board the Korea mission but *Hiryuu* will divert via Yeng-Cheng to render assistance to the stricken *Imperatrix*. *Hiryuu*'s steam launches will be sent to help pull *Imperatrix* off the shoals. If they are fired on, then *Hiryuu* will bombard the stranded *Imperatrix* until it surrenders. If assistance is already there, then *Hiryuu* will steam away to Korea. Special orders are given about being careful while steaming off Yeng-Cheng in order to avoiding running aground.

Lt Saigo, Admiral Yoshida's aide, is promoted to Lt Commander and given command of the troublesome crew assigned to the new gift ship *Tikara*. He is ordered to try to get them into good order before heading to the US.

Due to the desertion of 100 pioneers (an entire unit) at Nagasaki, the 2nd Special Services Group is assigned to act as MPs and hunt the traitors down.

July 1885: a Chinese attack on Dutch forces

Surprising news arrives from Kowloon: the Chinese warship *Evening Star*

has sunk the Dutch gunboat *Wilhelmina* in a surprise attack. The report makes it clear that the Dutch ships are either unarmoured or very lightly armoured and that the Chinese are appallingly badly trained. Annoyingly, no assistance has been rendered to *Imperatrix* as *Hiryuu*'s steam launches had not been supplied with coal! At least Lt Commander Saigo has managed to knock the prospective crew of *Tikara* into reasonable order.

With *Hiryuu* sitting a few thousand yards astern of *Imperatrix* off Yeng-Cheng, Admiral Yoshida reviews his plans and orders both steam launches coaled from the *Hiryuu*'s bunkers. The ship's doctor is set to deal with an outbreak of sickness amongst some of the crew and marines on board.

The crew of *Tikara* are ordered to travel to Tokyo and from there take a civilian ship to Seattle.

At Chungang, the Chinese troops trained by the advisors are handed over to Prince Li's control.

At Nagasaki, Major Shimizu the senior marine officer is given orders to hold a court martial for seven deserters captured by the SSG.

As to the news from Kowloon, there is no action to be taken. The Chinese took the right action, but probably for the wrong reasons. The new Dutch expedition was and is planning to land grab and now the Chinese may have a better chance of stopping that.

August 1885: the *Hiryuu* runs aground

Two US ships arrive off Yeng-Cheng and demand the surrender of *Imperatrix*. Their deadline passes and nothing seems to happen. Just as the British are starting to think it's a bluff, the *USS Mars* opens fire and proceeds to pound *Imperatrix*, which remarkably fails to return fire. *Hiryuu* turns to leave the two sides to their quarrel but worse is yet to come. Annoyingly, despite strict orders, the bow watch are distracted and *Hiryuu* runs aground! Then quite unexpectedly the *USS Mars* seems to fire on *Hiryuu*! A barrage of shells tears holes in her light upper works, one bursts above an open-topped barbette killing the gun crew (ten men) and in the midst of this one of the broadside barbettes jams. (A barbette, in this article, is a limited form of turret with no top armour.) The American action seems to be a 'friendly fire' incident and they promptly stop firing. By now *Imperatrix*, taking on water heavily, has settled on the bottom. But her decks and superstructure are still above water due to the shallowness of the shoal she was stuck on. British survivors, including Gipper the hound and a butler called Jeeves, have swum across to *Hiryuu* and been picked up.

Meanwhile, the crew of *Tikara* have caught their steamer and are travelling steerage to the US. In Nagasaki Major Shimizu has executed an officer deserter and sent the others to a military prison. While in foreign news, the Dutch have effectively declared war on China and their government pledges aid to their military expedition.

Admiral Yoshida, aboard the stranded *Hiryuu*, once again reviews the confused situation and begins to regret this diversion to Yeng-Cheng. The US shelling must be an accident as it makes no sense otherwise, but despite this, defensive orders must be given in case they really are hostile. A fight would be tough if they are hostile, as the main US warship, *USS Mars*, displayed impressive gunnery and probably outguns *Hiryuu*: their main armament looks to be two batteries of Extra-heavy rifled guns, given the way they punched clean through *Imperatrix*'s belt armour.

Orders are issued for the Chief Engineer to assess and repair the damage to the ship. If the damage below the waterline permits, then the two steam launches will help pull *Hiryuu* free of the shallows. After further thought, the Admiral decides that all is not lost. *Imperatrix*'s superstructure is above water and *Hiryuu* has picked up the survivors. This seems to open a good avenue for a salvage claim, so a force of marines and Special Services men are sent by lifeboat to hoist a Japanese flag and lay claim to the wreck. As

Gunboat at a glance

A mixed-moderated powergame from Agema Publications. Historically placed in the Victorian era, which saw great turmoil in SE Asia, where the game is set. There were anti-Western riots in 1891, the Boxer rising of 1899, the Republican rising of 1906 and a revolution 1911.

It was originally entitled 'Gunboat Diplomacy', but this has been altered to avoid confusion with the Diplomacy variant. The startup is £5 and further turns are £6, with the option of paying more for some extras. The game is open-ended, and can be played by post or email.

go.to/agema

agema@lineone.net

a legal move and to placate the Japanese Navy Ministry and the British government, the most senior British officer aboard is to be politely asked to concede salvage rights to Japan. He begins to think that things may work out well after all: ships are very valuable.

In mid-Pacific, Lt Commander Saigo tries to find out why his crew morale is the worst in the entire force despite efforts to bolster it.

September 1885: trouble with the Americans

Hiryuu still lies stranded off Yeng-Chen, apparently with a large gash in the bottom of the hull. Repairs have fixed the jammed gun and other damage, but the hull tear will need further efforts to create even a temporary repair. *Hiryuu* will be visiting the naval yard at Nagasaki for serious work before doing anything else. There seem to be lots of unescorted foreigners wandering around our ship as the Americans have sent an officer, engineering crew and some 'Provosts' aboard. The 'Provosts' demand the handover of the British survivors and when told they cannot have them by James Gaunt, *Hiryuu*'s British first officer (on loan from the RN), they take some of them at gunpoint!? The several hundred marines aboard are not alerted to the problem until too late to stop this: they had orders to assist with repairs.

The troops sent to *Imperatrix* find British sailors and marines still aboard. Luckily, all are very drunk and in no state to cause trouble, their glorious leader, Bertie 'Binky' Fotherington-Smythe disappearing overboard with a cry of 'follow me men!' as Japanese troops board. The most senior British officer remaining confirms the Japanese claim on the wreck. *USS Mars* manages to ground herself within a few thousand yards of both *Hiryuu* and *Imperatrix*: apparently torrential rain off Yeng-Cheng is to blame.

Lt Saigo finds out that his men were afraid of going to Seattle because of the anti-Chinese race riots there. They don't want to be killed by a mob and think the Americans can't tell the difference between Chinese and Japanese (they are probably right). He and his men are now in Seattle.

The news from home in the paper is bad. A state of war between the Dutch and Chinese is confirmed, British forces are being sent from the home fleet to help take action against the Americans. The British press are howling for war. Finally, the Japanese government is demanding \$500,000 in compensation from the US for the incident off Yeng-Cheng. But an editorial from the *Tokyo Times* plays down the incident and calls for a reasonable approach (this an article I wrote pushing for a friendly resolution).

As the Admiral paces *Hiryuu*'s bridge he wonders what kind of idiots are the Americans and his own government? Recent actions by both are very worrying, as the US had been Japan's best friend. Beyond that, Japanese government policy is becoming more overtly colonial and militarist, which might not be a problem if there was a sufficient budget to back it up!

The seizure of survivors by force, without warrants, is like something out of the Wild West and not to be tolerated aboard an Imperial warship. Orders are given for armed escorts and for US 'Provosts' to be disarmed before coming aboard. The British are also to be disarmed and politely watched. The British remaining on *Imperatrix* will be brought off under armed escort and their weapons placed safely in the magazine. The troops guarding the wreck are sent orders not to let Americans aboard, even if they have to use unarmed violence to stop them. The relevant American commander is contacted, to advise him that British survivors may be handed over if a formal request is made.

At least the embarrassment of grounding is reduced now that the Americans have done it too: it's always cheering to see others suffer from problems.

Despite recent US actions, *Hiryuu*'s two steam launches are made available to assist the Americans in getting themselves free.

Repairs are to continue on *Hiryuu*, and the ship is to be refloated as soon as they are completed. Over on *Imperatrix* the damage is to be assessed, along with the possibility of refloating her.

In Seattle, Lt Commander Saigo and his crew proceed under orders to take command of *Tikara* and depart for Nagasaki with all possible speed. They hope to leave the US before anything can go wrong.

October 1885: is Admiral Yoshida being too reasonable?

Interesting developments and discoveries. The *USS Mars* is the *SS LaForce Mars*, a civilian 'fleet protection vessel'. A report from the officers who took the steam launches over to offer assistance makes it clear that we had overestimated their capabilities. We are probably an even match for her in battle.

Hiryuu is at last free of the shallows and ready to head home for repairs; the Americans still seem stuck fast. The report on *Imperatrix* is very good: if the hull can be patched then she can be pumped out and refloated, the ship's machinery all appears intact.

Prince Li is very pleased with the troops we trained for him and has offered Lt Hojo, our Senior Military advisor, 50,000 Manchu (probably £50,000) as a gift! Hojo has declined until Admiral Yoshida approves taking the money. Given that we pay our Naval Lieutenants £4 a month, this amount of money might lead to a bout of desertion.

Tikara has set sail for her new home and all seems well. Meanwhile, the British attacked some Dutch troops holding the Chinese town of Lukfung. After a short shore bombardment, the Dutch retreated to a defensive position in the middle of town. The British then landed 400 Sikh and 100 British troops equipped with modern rifles and four Gatling guns. Unfortunately, the Dutch were armed with shotguns (a cheap option) which were woefully outranged and slow-firing in comparison. After expending tens of thousands of rounds, the British found they had killed all the defenders and the town was theirs.

Finally, news from home contains an article from the *Tokyo Herald* full of jingoism and militarism, which calls for stronger action and says our policies are wrong. Apparently we should copy Britain and be a expansive colonial power. A 'strange but true' fact would be that I wrote this attack on myself. Why? Because I've been being all too reasonable and felt the counter to last turn's article would add entertainment to the game.

Standing on the bridge of *HIJMS Hiryuu* Admiral Yoshida considers recent events with Captain Hanza: *Hiryuu* will have to steam to Nagasaki for proper repairs, but the chance of salvaging *Imperatrix* cannot be missed. This would be a great gain, giving the Squadron two warships and one support ship. Even better, careful savings from the budget should stretch to fitting turrets (top armour) for *Hiryuu*'s main battery as well as fitting steam propulsion to *Tikara*.

On top of this, Prince Li is offering a gift of 50,000 Manchu, apparently. Hojo has proven his reliability and loyalty by not taking the money and disappearing off to Tokyo under an assumed name: he probably deserves a promotion for this and his work as a military advisor.

The whole affair seems to be taking a turn towards real success.

As the Admiral looks out across the sea at the half-sunken *Imperatrix* and the ominous dark shape of the *Mars*, he wonders, 'So, what's going to go wrong next?'

Summing up

Hopefully this gives an idea of the game which is strong on flavour and works best with a good player input. The account misses out the letter-writing and diplomacy which is a strong part of the game; it also misses out events which had no effect on me. During the above period there were all sorts of other events such as battles in China between Red Banner (communist) rebels and loyal governors, as well as dubious financial shenanigans in Hong Kong.

A little comment on others people's trouble is that the Dutch military expedition commander seems to have chosen a different approach from my slow buildup. The result of this is the recent spate of setbacks. The expedition's three ships are not good enough to win a real battle, even against the Chinese, and their troops are not well armed enough or well trained enough to defeat a serious foe.

For those who favour getting into the thick of the action immediately I would suggest a Chinese position because there is plenty of trouble and with the Sino-Dutch war there will be more. For those who prefer non-military approaches there are mercantile or missionary roles to play.

I'm certainly enjoying the game despite budget troubles, accidents and incompetent subordinates. When things work out it makes them so much more worthwhile!

Half Life 2

GLOBETROTTER is captivated by a game he finds stunning ...

THERE'S JUST so much to say. **Half-Life 2** is, simply put, the best single-player shooter ever released for the PC. What *Valve* has created is a work of art in the genre. It engages the mind with mysterious happenings, vagaries and mostly intelligent dialogue, and also captures the senses with a superb visual style. Once the initial shock of it all wears off and it becomes possible to peel back the polished layers of sight and sound, there is an excellent shooter here. *Half-Life 2* doesn't do anything particularly new, but what it does is set a new height for all other designers of first-person shooters to reach. It still isn't exactly perfect, but it's about as close as I've experienced.

The story continues

Last time we left Gordon Freeman, the unlikely scientist-hero from the first *Half-Life*, he was travelling. Yes, just travelling. The mystery was where he was travelling to and why all of the incidents at Black Mesa had happened (not to mention why the game was rife with so many horrific jumping puzzles towards the end). *Half-Life 2* begins with Gordon arriving via train with the G-Man teasing his mind with sickly whispers of warning. The train stops at City 17, a bastion of the alien Combine forces, yet another mystery in themselves.

For the rest of the story, you'll have to play the game yourself. I'm absolutely dedicated to getting through this review with your chance at an untarnished gaming experience intact. That means no spoilers. Suffice to say, there are lots of twists to curl your brain along the way, some a bit more predictable than others, but all welcome and interesting.

While the writing and plot points will act as flypaper to your attention, the real winner here is the way the story is presented. Through the eyes of Gordon Freeman, you'll experience roughly 17-20 hours of consciousness, which tests your senses and captures your mind. The simplicity and style with which this story is presented are perhaps the most graceful manoeuvres of the many that *Valve* has carried out. From the moment you take your first steps into the station at City 17, public service announcements, private conversations and the actions of characters around you, whether part of the Combine or simply waylaid citizens, create a stifling and threatening feeling that City 17 has become some sort of elaborate prison preaching the chance for freedom and opportunity without choice or desire.

While I was ultimately left a little bit frustrated by the open-endedness, the journey to get to the end of the story was assuredly interesting and opened up the doors to many more possibilities. It's easy to start speculating about this or that, just don't let it drive you nuts. The deeper you get, the darker and more intriguing it becomes until you get to the end... which you'll have to see for yourself.

A stunning visual style

This frightening vision of the future is only made stronger by a stunning visual style that expresses artistic vision while coming as close to reality as I've seen in my decades of playing video games. The first steps out from the train station and into the city proper are the wild realisation of a fantastic dream. The Combine citadel looms on the horizon as a testament to their power, authority and technological capabilities: both impressive

and oppressive at the same time, it serves its purpose with more presence than an army of a Combine soldiers and Striders ever could.

Light plays a significant role in the beauty of *Half-Life 2*, not only because of its quality, but because it tracks the passage of time. Each passing level brings the sun down a bit more until you're encased in an eerie canopy of unease at just the right moment in the game. The brighter points allow for the exquisite detail of the textures found everywhere in the game to become more apparent, while the colours of the city contrast with the Combine soldiers and citadel to keep them strikingly outside of the norm and easily identifiable as enemy.

Lifelike characters are found everywhere in *Half-Life 2*. Much of the life comes from the very human animations for running, climbing, jumping, reacting to pain and so on. Gone are the days of *Half-Life*'s chunky animation sets. Doubtless many of you have already seen the fluidity of motion in *Counter-Strike: Source*, the multi-player portion of *Half-Life 2* already released to those who pre-ordered over Steam, but even that game is hard to compare.

Scripted sequences that serve as cut-scenes (though they don't ever really 'cut' per se - the game never leaves the perspective of Gordon Freeman) bring out the true human touch of the animations. The special animations for Alyx (the female lead) in these scenes in particular have a soft and careful quality about them that makes her character deeper and stronger than it would have been otherwise. During these story-telling scenes, you'll catch yourself moving in as close as possible to stare at the realistic models. You can almost see the pores in their skin and the life force behind their eyes, especially when they start talking and the excellent voice acting and lip-synching brings their countenances to life.

Some of the credit for the enjoyment of the visuals is certainly due to the interface, which closely resembles that of the original. The only things on screen are those that have to be there: health, suit power and ammunition are the only permanent visuals and are shoved far enough out of the way so as not to block the view. Occasionally pick-ups will flash on the right and auxiliary power, if being used, on the left. *Valve* didn't want the interface to distract you from the experience of the game, and they did a good job with providing information while making you still feel like you're in the body of Gordon Freeman.

Super scientist to the rescue!

If there's one thing that I think all players of *Half-Life* have wondered, it's how the hell did an unassuming scientist named Gordon Freeman turn into a super soldier capable of destroying legions of zombies, aliens and special operations forces? Gordon is a bit of an enigma, as is his increasingly bizarre situation. Whatever, Gordon is a bastion of hope for the people of City 17 who have heard his name and waited for his arrival for many years.

Obviously, he's going to have to kick a lot more ass before the day is done. There are plenty of new enemies to be wary of, including two new types of head-crabs, different soldier types for the Combine, gigantic ant lions and several new vehicles. All of these enemies, whether biological or mechanical, have different levels of intelligence to confound your combat skills.

Some are a bit more involved than others. Head crabs and the zombies they create, regardless of their type, all have a singular drive to attack and devour. Combine forces, on the other hand, have much more complex procedures to exact punishment on nay-sayers of their regime. Fighting these, which can be anywhere from simple soldiers to giant Tripods, is the best part of the experience. They're smart and well-placed around the levels, but still have unflinching dedication to their duties. Frankly, they're just really, really fun to battle with. It's supremely satisfying to finish off Combine forces because of the quality of their AI and adaptability.

Half Life 2 at a glance

First person shooter PC game from *Valve*. £26.99 from www.amazon.co.uk, but check your local games shop first.

www.sierra.com

www.valvesoftware.com

The fun of battle isn't simply the enemy AI, either. Much of it comes from the perfect feel from each of the weapons and the impact of the sound of the action around you. The blast and recoil of each gun fits perfectly. Hitting enemies creates satisfying animations, lovely bloody splatter against the wall, and death moans. Downing Combine vehicles brings curious sounds that will have you speculating as to their true nature. Everything in the game has weight and bearing to the story, even the small details such as this.

You'll definitely need to use all of the weapons at your disposal, as enemies are able to navigate environments and use cover to their advantage no matter how much you screw with it. And screw with it you will. Probably the most impressive feature of Half-Life 2 is the amazing use of physics. Valve did not use physics as a simple tool for visual gratification. It's used to great effect in battle, tricky situations and puzzles. In terms of battle, it's quickly evident how gloriously entertaining this really is. When Gordon breaks out the gravity gun, it's all about using the environment to your advantage. If an enemy hides behind a car, flip it over on top of him. If ammo is in short supply simply use the gravity gun to pick up and fling deadly objects at enemies, including exploding barrels, saw blades and more. Block entrances to doorways with bookcases and tables. Use metal objects as bullet shields. The varieties of options that open to you are immense and only limited by your style of play and creativity. I encourage everyone who plays this game to experiment heavily with this wonderful device. It's totally rad. RAD, I say!

But the physics aren't simply used as a combat tool; puzzles that require problem-solving using the physics engine are a great part of the game-play. Figuring out how to manipulate objects in the game world to progress using what essentially are real-world rules of physics is a hell of a lot more fun than the jumping puzzles plaguing the first game. While there are some jumping puzzles, Half-Life 2's jumping puzzles have a major difference: they're much, much easier. I think I fell to my death once in the entire game simply because of operator error: most actually have a 'safety net' underneath that will only damage instead of kill. Better yet, some of these puzzles require even more use of the physics to complete safely. There isn't a ton of the more cerebral physics-based puzzles, but the ones that are there are interesting. If anything, I wish there had been more of them to mull over along the way.

Occasionally annoying AI

When I think back on the pace and variety of game-play, it's amazing how many different styles of shooters Valve was able to fit into one package. The game moves from one place to another, all with very different styles and challenges. One moment you'll be driving a buggy shooting enemies on the road and the next you'll be leading a group of ant lions into battle. Sometimes you'll be running from enemies, sometimes you'll be leading a charge with human resistance by your side. Sometimes you'll be fighting against vehicles in city areas while others will bring throngs of zombies moaning for your blood. Perhaps the driving segments lasted for a bit too long, but thankfully they're broken up by bits of combat. And even those least thrilling moments were still active and fun.

My only other complaint with the game-play, though it seems not to be shared by some of my colleagues in the industry, is that the AI of friendly groups could be a bit aggravating. For the most part, especially in battle, they act intelligently, seeking cover and firing positions, and indeed help with the fight. But when running from place to place, especially in close quarters, they have a tendency to bunch closely behind you and therefore

block you into rooms you only meant to search quickly. If there had been a 'stay put' command, most of this could have been alleviated easily. There is a 'go here' command, but they'll change that command themselves in order to follow. It wasn't a huge problem, but there were some moments when they would step out and get killed simply because they wouldn't stay put when I needed them to.

Gordon fights alone

Finally, it should be noted that Half-Life 2 does not come with a multi-player version of itself. Instead, Valve has opted to give Counter-Strike a new coat of paint with **Counter-Strike: Source** (basically the original CS redone with Source Engine graphical enhancements) and repackage it as the multi-player component of Half-Life 2. Once you play the game, you'll understand my disappointment at not having a multi-player portion set in the Half-Life 2 universe, especially considering the varied uses of the gravity gun.

Counter-Strike: Source may be great for all of the old Counter-Strike players, but I really think new players are going to have a hard time getting into the game and being successful against people who have had years to

play it. Yes, there have been map changes that modify the layout enough to confuse some old players initially, but it's still difficult to get in as a new player and learn the ropes since others have basically been playing the multi-player portion for years.

Still, all told, Counter-Strike was and is a very solid multi-player shooter. There is strategy and more than a little bit of skill involved. The new animations and polish to the textures add a new depth and style that wasn't available before. I'm sure it will be a very welcome addition to players who have wanted to experience better looking games but were too scared to leave their precious CS.



Technical notes

My system needs upgrading, but even so the game ran flawlessly, even in the most extreme environments with tons of geometry and lots of objects moving around, both with and without AI. The Source engine is an impressive piece of software from the outside looking in. There's a large chance my brain would melt like butter in a microwave should someone try to explain its inner workings. What's particularly impressive about the game running so well is that it does so without compromising any part of gameplay or design. Environments are complex, colourful and highly detailed; AI is certainly impressive in that NPCs work as teams, flank, react to sound and movement, and then engage with lifelike aggression.

Closing comments

It really is hard to stop talking about a game that is so good and this much fun. Yes, in terms of pure game-play innovation, this game doesn't do a whole lot more than other games in the shooter genre, but it takes existing styles, then mixes, matches and makes them better. It sets the standard in all areas, especially the use of physics as a game-play tool instead of merely a visual treat for gamers.

Half-Life 2 is a 'must buy' game. If you're a fan of the series, that was already obvious. Heck, if you're a PC gamer chances are you're going to get it at some point anyway. But if you're new or sceptical of the genre and want to see a prime example of the power and excitement of a first-person shooter, this is it. It'll hook you, reel you in, and hold you captive for serious hours of hardcore brilliance. This is gaming at its best and shows that the future holds no bounds when the might of technology, precision of design and touch of artistry work in tandem.

Opening Strategy in Fall of Rome

RY VOR presents the first three turns from a Thuringian perspective ...

THE THURINGIANS! Historically, these were considered the greatest heavy cavalrymen of the era, situated in Raetia in central Germania, in what is now the German state that bears their name. However, they are not among the well known tribes of the Dark Ages. This is due in part to the constant struggles they encountered from many sides in that central location. A major part of my strategy then as King Childeric of the Thuringians is to discourage intrusion by my many neighbors into Raetia.

My kingdom's unique starting advantage is an additional experienced leader: a Commander. He is capable of executing nearly any tactic and with his first important success will advance to the important level of Marshal. Additionally, I expect my initial treasury is a bit larger than the others, a nod toward the difficulty of the starting geography. I am inclined to select The Conquering Hero as my secret victory choice, which would dictate a more aggressive campaign. I can delay my choice on the secret victory choice until turn three, however, and will.

Planning turn 1

The Alamanni to my immediate west share my main concern: too many covetous neighbors. I will make an overture for a non-aggression treaty and hope for something firm in response - the message is off to him through the game's message board. I also send messages to the Huns to my east and the Visigoths to the southwest, just a little introduction and a hint of the possibility of future cooperation. In the middle game they are each positioned in likely spots for us to work together jointly in expansion.

Next, as nearly all kings will do, I turn my attention as to how to most rapidly conquer 'my' region, ie the region where their capital is located. In my case, this is Raetia. The first decision here is whether to target the region's city, Trier, as the centerpiece of the conquest, or alternately, to gain the city through its own proclamation by virtue of gaining control of Raetia through political coercion and conquest of a majority of its towns and villages. Gaining the city would best be done by likely the combined efforts of three high ranking nobles, perhaps the three highest - Prince, Duke, and Count. Two normally might suffice, but since all Kings know the location of all cities, another King may send a Baron or other noble to Trier to attempt to have the city maintain status quo and so possibly tip the balance against my politics. Trier being centrally located and so accessible to more Kings, this risk is increased in the case of the Thuringians. Meanwhile, cities are too well defended for a military conquest this early: I would not send my splendid cavalry against city walls - leave such marauding to the likes of the Teutons, Saxons and Norse, whose heavy infantry is better suited for such pillage.

I opt for the less direct route in my situation: trying to gain what I estimate might be two more towns in addition to the two I begin in control of in Raetia, as well as another three villages, and surmise this may be enough to gain control of the region and so have Trier come to me.

Now, how to make this happen by the end of turn 3? I deploy my Count to the neutral town of which I am already aware. With my King Childeric enamoring Raetia, the people should be receptive enough to accept the counsel of the Count and join us, and this will also allow my Provincial Governor to gain the nearby village without spilling blood.

I must discover early where the remaining towns and villages of Raetia are located, so this becomes the main objective of the first turn. I plan the movements of my legions, the area of focus for the High Priestess Vala to divine population centers, and have my available agents fill in the difficult nooks and crannies for exploration, all designed to reveal the greatest possible amount of the territory of Raetia to me. With luck, my legions or agents may also discover an unusual sighting where a lost and powerful artifact might be recovered through battle with its guardian.

I do not recruit mercenary brigades, or even hire additional characters, as I am already torn on how to prioritize the thirteen commands available to me, and because I know my economy cannot at this point bear the strain of supplying a larger military. King Childeric remains in the capital rather than joining a legion and campaigning himself. The initial plan is now set.

Turn 1 results

The Alamanni King gave me assurances of alliance. This is a very important development, for if the Alamanni and Thuringians battle early, likely neither will emerge into the middle game in good shape. All the commands for Turn 1 were executed flawlessly. We have no encounters with other kingdoms reported, although intelligence gathering was not as thorough as I would have liked due to the constraint on orders dictated by our Rulership of 13 - meaning only 13 orders beyond 'free' orders like transfers can be issued. In **Fall of Rome** there are really three resources to be concerned with: gold, supplies, and available orders. Our Baron in Köln will delay any Teuton King's plan to take that region on turn two by issuing a status quo order. Unfortunately, we could not afford the order and gold to do the same to the south against the Lombards in Milan.

Vala, our high priestess did well, uncovering both other towns in Raetia we had not previously discovered, as well as another village. Otherwise, everything and everyone is in good position. Time to plan turn 2.

Planning turn 2

While the first turn involves planning much of the early game strategy and planting the seeds of diplomacy, turn two is important for nailing down the first conquests within the home region. With King Childeric having enamored Raetia last turn, my Count should be able to move the people of the town of Duroco to see the wisdom of joining the Thuringians, as should my lower-ranking noble in the village of Giant Head.

My Prince and Duke will see their first action, each moving to one of the two towns Vala discovered last turn. The Duke will move to the slightly more hazardous duty of the town on the regional border - more likely to be discovered by enemies. My Baron in the Germania city of Köln will maintain status quo to delay the Teutons, who may be a target for our anticipated expansion outside of Raetia. Vala will rest this turn, and freshly trained to level 4, agent Leopard will perform his first advanced reconnaissance in the mountains in southeast Raetia.

A difficult but not uncommon decision regards my largest legion, a division, which is outside a neutral village. The choice is whether to attack the village, the successful outcome of which is assured, but will damage the

Fall of Rome at a glance

A turnbased fantasy wargame with an historical setting, lasting 24 turns and played online. From Enlightened Age Entertainment Inc.
Note the current offer of a free 30-day trial:
www.fallofromegame.com



Childeric was a masterful commander, defeating Saxons, Visigoths, and Alamanni in separate decisive battles. A true warrior-poet, he romanced the incredible Basina, a princess of unsurpassed beauty and wisdom who it was said could trace her lineage to the Aesir, the first children of the Norse Gods. Their son Clovis went on to build an empire. Childeric was also a capable ruler, turning his defeated Saxon enemy into an ally in the campaign against the Alamanni, and holding the Kingdom of Thuringia together against all odds. He was a fiery and charismatic personality that influenced events across Europe.

production of the village and could result in an unlucky death for one of its two leaders. On the other hand, one or more leaders could advance their rank and the brigades may gain experience, though these are less likely with lopsided battles as this will be. The village would surely submit merely by threatening it, therefore spilling no blood. In the end I decide to order an Assault in hopes of promotion and brigade experience. Regrettably, my resources are too few to allow for a costly King order, such as increasing our Rulership. Nonetheless, these moves should clear the way for the Thuringians to gain Raetia at the end of turn 3.

Turn 2 results

The big surprise was that five kings took their regions on the turn. Among these were the Lombards to my south, who I did not meddle with, instead giving some of my attention to the Teutons, who remain among those without regional control. My spy revealed the Teuton King did commit his Prince and Count to trying to take the city and was thwarted by my Baron maintaining status quo, in this case neutrality, there.

My own orders again were carried out without a hiccup. My division conquered the village easily, and while my casualties were quite light and no leaders were wounded, neither were any promoted and no centurion emerged as a new leader. The 1st Thuringian brigade did gain enough experience to advance to Old Guard status. The exchange rate for resources is now 17 supplies for 10 gold, meaning quite a few kings have been selling supplies for gold. Agent Leopard's advance recon found another village in the southeast corner of Raetia, and interestingly there is a Lombard Count there, and one of his patrols just south of the village. My Count and Provincial Governor were each successful in usurping control of the town and village. My influence in Raetia is now Substantial, which means I control somewhere between 40% and 59% of the population, with 60% needed to gain control. That will happen next turn, barring major surprises.

Planning turn 3

The most nagging aspect as I address updating my strategy is that the Lombards gained their region, and have already begun to meddle a bit in Raetia as evidenced by their Count. Meanwhile the Teutons, who had the same approach to the early turns as the Lombards, have been thwarted by my Baron and are now in deep trouble as their player has insufficient power to overcome my Baron's actions (an agent of mine recon'd the city so I know he has just his Prince and Count there). This could have been the same fate for the Lombards if I had sacrificed a different order on turn 1 rather than deciding against trying to maintain Milan's independence with a royal noble of mine. The Teuton player through the message board is desperate for relief, realising his quandary if I merely continue my Baron's actions.

Given that it appears the Lombards have the jump on resources by gaining control of Italia so early and are aggressively postured, I cannot myself turn north to press my advantage against the Teutons. I offer him a deal wherein I will remove my Baron for certain future considerations. He responds quickly with this message, 'Dear Blackmailing Tyrant, We accept your gracious offer. Seeing how my expansion has already been delayed too long, I agree to your conditions in return for removing your Baron Eamund from Koln.' It's fly to be given your due with that hard won street cred, no? I perhaps too cheaply also agree to mutual non-aggression.

Meanwhile, my dealings with the Alamanni to my west are growing warmer and can be cautiously termed alliance. The Huns too, to my east, have asked for non-aggression. He apparently has his hands full with the Norse who conquered Scandia on turn two and whose legions are poised to invade his lands. So my attention is now on completing the conquest of Raetia this turn, and beginning to address how to position my legions and nobles for what seems impending conflict with the Lombards to my south.

I now ask Priestess Vala to divine the population centers in central Italia to better learn where the Lombard bases of operation are. Oh, and one of my legions on the march performed a scouting move, thereby uncovering more unknown territory and chanced upon an unusual sighting. It is within range of my best leaders if I move there this turn. I also have remembered to set my secret victory condition, choosing The Conquering Hero, as anticipated.

Turn 3 results

Both Prince Frederic and Duke Rothesteos succeeded in usurping towns, bringing control of Raetia to us and the ancillary benefits that come with this, including all the neutral population centers raising the banner of the Thuringians, notably the city Trier as well as a few more villages. Two other kings also gained their regions so after three complete turns, eight of the twelve regions are controlled and four uncontrolled. Unfortunately, three of these uncontrolled are by my neighbors with whom I have spent most of my diplomacy - the Alamanni, the Teutons, and the Huns. I do not know the troubles of the Alamanni, but I expected the Teutons to have taken Germania as I indeed did remove my Baron from the city there. The Huns have told me that the Norse actually stormed the city in Scandia to conquer that region more through force than coercion. Vala did well, uncovering three towns including the Lombard capital as well as five villages in Italia.

Various transfers were made within my legions to begin to consolidate in anticipation of some brewing military action; however my best leaders are now occupied, ready to risk all to investigate the unusual sighting and hopefully recover an artifact. This is quite risky given that my leaders are not yet very experienced, but my Conquering Hero victory condition requires artifacts and if successfully recovered it may well help me decisively in battle. Now that I have control of Raetia, I gain Regional Intelligence, which informs me of large legions inside the region, and none have been reported, so to this point, no kingdom has overtly entered my newly claimed lands.

Conclusion

The strategy has been sound, if not spectacular. We have our region under control after three turns, as we had hoped. We could have taken the alternate strategy of trying to take the city directly and gain the region if unopposed at the end of the second turn, but as the Teutons learned, this could also result in not having the region after turn four if one or more players contest it.

With the region controlled and so the economy in better shape, our bigger concern now is that our diplomacy probably has not been extensive enough, and this should have been better addressed by using the message board more frequently.

In conclusion, here are some rules of thumb for the early game that can help new players indoctrinate to Fall of Rome:

- 1 Issue all orders you are allowed every turn, even if this means choosing less expensive orders.
- 2 Watch your economy carefully in the early turns. If you overspend in turn one, you may be handicapped on turn two. Consider how much you produce vs how much your military consumes.
- 3 Do not neglect gathering intelligence through reconnaissance, or use of your noble court to gain new population centers.
- 4 Develop a strategy to gain your region and consider the next steps early. Choose actions that support your secret victory condition requirements when in doubt.
- 5 Keep up your diplomacy by using the message board. It is free and you may be surprised how much information you can gain from the other players.

Good luck: see you somewhere in Germania or Gaul!

Megagame Makers

Are they the mass caterers of powergames? asks PAUL APPLEBY ...

I'VE ALWAYS liked crossovers between different genres. I blame my primary school! Set Theory was the in-thing back then and Venn diagrams appear to have made a permanent impression. Adult, I took a series of European holidays where the intersections between different languages took place. Folk-rock, ska-punk, you'll find me at the gig. More relevantly, I only got into PlayByMail games and thereafter *Flagship*, by being intrigued that the Leeds historical-wargames-with-miniatures convention *FIASCO* also had a crossover PBM hall. The set of wargamers *W* was much bigger than the set of PBM players *P* at that particular show and I'd initially gone as the former. Guess who found himself in the intersection set *W ∩ P* - and never looked back?

And having got into *Flagship*, which was almost purely about PBM in them days, I was equally intrigued when,

in their Meets And Conventions rubric, I found an organisation called *Megagame Makers* offering face-to-face games. Maybe it's just sheer perversity - being most tempted by what exactly wasn't Play By Mail!

But things change and here's

Flagship, now the crossover games magazine par excellence - so it seems an excellent opportunity to finally report on what I found there - because yes, I so enjoyed it I've been a member for several years now and played in six of their games, despite considerable difficulty getting to them. And I feel MM deserve it. 2005 is a major anniversary for them - the group's 100th Megagame, having apparently started in 1984. So it goes without saying they must have found a successful formula for games to reach that.

What are these Megagames? Most're not that different in theme and operation from a board wargame - let's say most obviously a **Diplomacy** variant. The actual rules and counters, while present, are usually a bit less germane than the interaction between players - or teams in this case - as in *Dip*. But here's a pretty feeble analogy! If a boardgame you buy in a shop is a takeaway with three or six friends, however often you do that it doesn't really make it less daunting to hold a dinner party for 40+, though the actual food on offer may be quite similar. Well, I think of the Megagame Makers as the friends who are so enthusiastic and skilled they are prepared to be mass caterers yet still only expect to have their costs covered and mainly just to do it so everyone can have a good meal.

While it should not be a total mystery to anyone who's played a war or pbm game how these games work, isn't it intimidating playing in this new environment, with one-off bespoke rules? Well, you get game briefings (don't expect wonderful quality) a number of weeks before a game, which may even give you time to read a couple of books, if it's a historical game, or to try and work out an ambition you want to achieve in the game. But also it is, unsurprisingly for a game with 40+ players, a team game, most often split into tables as well as factions. On each table, as well as others walking round dealing with specific areas of the rules, there will be an umpire to help you work out how to play. There will always be other people in your team to help you enjoy it more too.

It perhaps sounds intimidating that other people may have done far more of this than you, but I'm pretty shy and I've coped OK, though I didn't have much of a clue what I was really doing in many - perhaps all! - of my games. At two of these, and the two I've perhaps enjoyed the most, though most participants are males over say 25, one chap brought his children to play and they seemed to enjoy it. Everybody likes rolling dice,

yeah? I formed the Ruritanian Merchants' Party with two of them and we were pretty well the most effective political force in that turbulent 19th century emergent nation! And more generally, grown-up complete strangers have been very kind, not cliquey, particularly after we recognised one another from previous games.

What happens if you think you may want to play with this group? Their current address is Megagame Makers c/o 33 Willersley Avenue, Orpington, Kent BR6 9RT. Or email: megagames@btinternet.com

They will almost certainly send you a twice-yearly newsletter detailing their future games and what to do next. Just to save you bothering even to do that, here's the games confirmed for the next 12 months, which well illustrates the range of themes they cover - some of which I haven't sampled.

22nd January 2005 - *Alea Iacta Est* (The Die Is Cast). The typical historical political-military megagame of the type I've been to - the fall of the Roman Republic/rise of Julius Caesar. Or not! Depends who is playing him!

19th March 2005 - *Quadrant Zero*.

MM have a long history of running SF games. I can't say what they're like but they

were discussed at length and with enthusiasm in the pub

after the last game I went to. Seems there's a considerable back-story, which can be found at: www.jimwallman.org.uk/universe/quadrantzero

18th June 2005 - *War, Cruel and Sharp*. A strategic-level game of the beginning of the Hundred Years War.

8th-9th October 2005 - *The Last War*. The 100th Megagame is going to be whatever the superlative of Mega is - a 'Gigagame'. These people have run *BIG* games, as opposed to merely big games, before - and the nostalgia you get from people who attended them, even many years ago, is immense. So I imagine they're pretty unforgettable. MM ran a big simulation of Arnhem actually in Nijmegen with masses of Dutch wargamers taking part last spring, so they're definitely up for it. This won't be a typical game however: prices and venue don't apply as these have to be specially arranged. The theme is to be the *whole* of 1942-5!

21st January 2006 - *Pirates of Yendor*. Yendor is MM's fantasy kingdom. I've never played in it, but this one is tempting! Again, with the campaign having gone on before, there is history with (I get the distinct impression!) personal grudges and vendettas. But I'm sure it will also be accessible to new players.

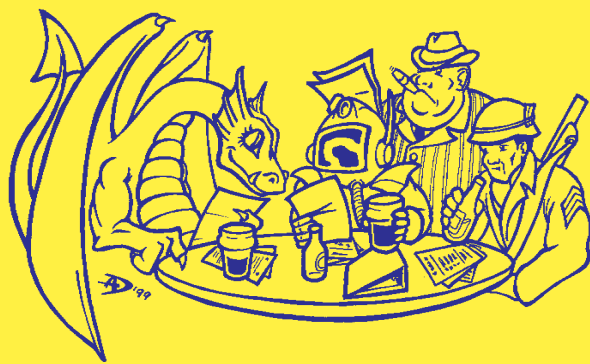
So, getting to a megagame in practice? Typically, you need to get to the south side of Greater London on a Saturday, generally for doors at 9:30 for 10:00am (ending about 5pm) and I think, though please, please check the website (www.megagame-makers.org.uk) which will anyway give you lots of fun and useful info, that for most of the normal games above, the venue will now be Anerley Town Hall (in the SE London suburbs quite near Crystal Palace). This has meant for me each time staying over in London on the Friday night as I can't get there for then otherwise. But that's quite a recommendation, isn't it, that I'm prepared to do that?

This is by far the highest cost of a game for me as the actual fee for a game is at most £20. Less, if you book in plenty of time. Or want to be a referee not a player. Or are unwaged. If you're a first-time player (50% off) and book in advance (£5 discount) - that's £7.50. Not bad for a whole day's gaming really, I feel.

[Illustration take from Megagames website]



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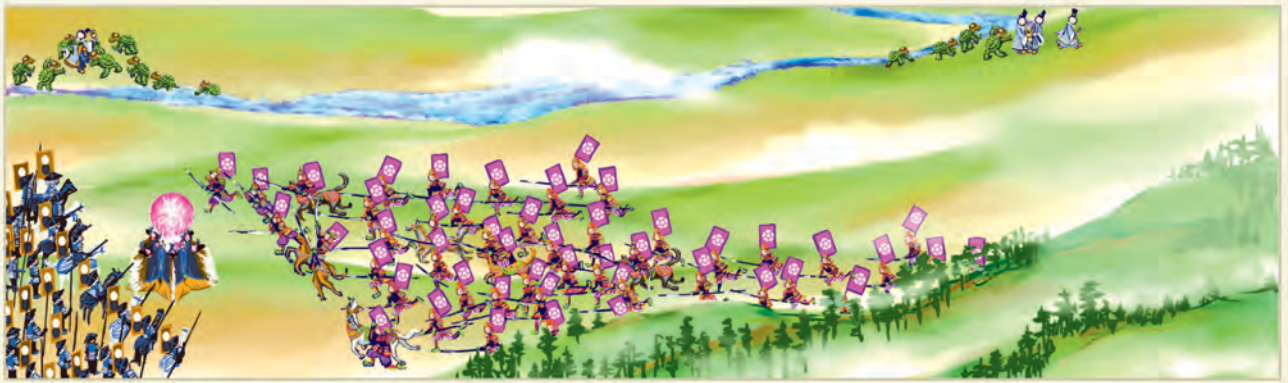
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On Screen

Where have all the PC games gone?

GLOBETROTTER mourns the big-name titles that will never see PC hardware ...

YESTERDAY saw the release of **Half-Life 2**, arguably the most important release for PC gaming in several years. So it may surprise some that the theme of this article is my disappointment over the lack of quality PC games available.

It's not that all the games out there suck. No, there have been several fine titles released for the PC this year, including games like **DOOM III**, **Unreal Tournament 2004** and **The Sims 2**. No, the issue is not one of quality, but rather of quantity. Lately, it seems, the console industry is slowly but surely swallowing up the PC industry.

I don't have anything against consoles. I understand why many people prefer them to the PC. You get to sit down on your couch, in front of a big TV, and play the games with your friends watching or participating. Consoles provide for comfort and fun social activity that the PC has a hard time duplicating (although the limited multiplayer that consoles currently provide of course doesn't hold a candle to the social functions that PC multiplayer titles have been delivering for years).

Though I have nothing against consoles, I also don't own any. I used to own a GameCube, but when I realized that I hadn't used it in over four months, and that I honestly didn't like some of the most lauded titles for the system

(including **Metroid Prime** and **The Legend of Zelda: Wind Waker**), I gave the system to my younger brother to take to college. This, again, shouldn't reflect poorly on the system or those games.

Quite simply, I don't have the patience that most gamers have, after so many years of playing with a critical eye turned toward the titles. It seems that the mechanics of many console games, including the two I just mentioned, revolve very heavily around basic repetition in order to defeat many tasks. I can't count the number of times that I became so frustrated with the controls in **Wind Waker** that I literally hurled my WaveBird across the room in frustration (resulting in sixty dollars worth of broken plastic, when all was said

and done).

The thing is: with either **Prime** or **Wind Waker**, if I'd had the opportunity to play them on the PC with a mouse/keyboard-driven control scheme, I'd have loved the damn things. **Metroid Prime** is a great game and a terrific FPS, but I've been trying to get used to playing FPS titles on console controllers since **GoldenEye**, and still despise it to the very core of my being. It feels clunky and cumbersome to me, and I've come to the conclusion that my old brain is too set in its ways to change, at this point.

I understand that Nintendo doesn't want to cannibalise sales on its own system, nor does Microsoft, nor does Sony. I understand also that the economics are sometimes questionable when developing for certain

systems. Does it make sense to spend five hundred thousand dollars developing a PC port of a game when it is unlikely to recoup that investment? Perhaps not, although I find it hard to believe that either **Prime** or **Wind Waker** wouldn't be able to earn more than they cost to develop, regardless of system.

Let's take some current examples. This Christmas PC fans get a pretty decent selection: **Half-Life 2**, **EverQuest II**, **Vampire: The Masquerade - Bloodlines**, **World of Warcraft** and several other high-priority titles. Sounds pretty good, right? I mean, as I complained a few weeks ago, most of us don't even have

the cash to pick up all the games we might like to have. But let's check the console releases (some of which are illustrated on this page) that either won't be coming to PC at all, or not for some time.

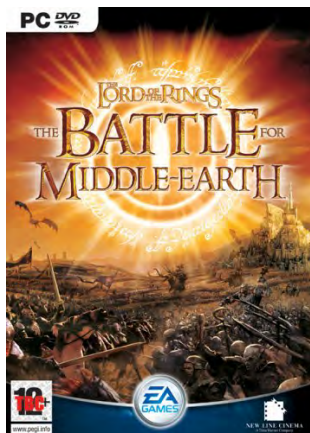
Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas, **Halo 2**, **Jak 3**, **The Urbz**, **Metroid Prime 2**, **ESPN College Hoops 2K5** (okay, you may not care about that one, but I do), **Metal Gear Solid 3**, **Viewtiful Joe 2**, **Gran Turismo 4** ... the list goes on, and on, and on, and on. Granted, some of these games may not be my cup of tea. Others will eventually make their way to my platform of choice, long after others have ceased playing them.

There are some columns I write where I honestly believe that change can happen. This isn't one of them. There are economic laws at work here that would require a massive social shift to change. But hey, sometimes a brother's just gotta vent, no? I like games! I like 'em a lot. And I'd like to play more of them on the platform with which I am most comfortable: the PC.

Anyone else feel like this? Or am I the last surviving holdout against the inevitable end of PC gaming and the emergence of the console as the only gaming platform? Send *Flagship* some email. Let us know what you think!



Globetrotter's Game of the Month The Battle for Middle Earth



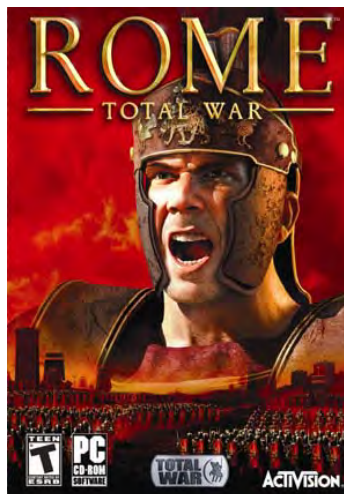
I could have made Half Life 2 my Game of the Month, but it seems unfair to give the game more laurels here when I've already reviewed it elsewhere in this issue. Happily I've already had a sneak preview of a game to be released next month ... namely, **The Lord of the Rings: The Battle for Middle Earth**. Based on all three films from Peter Jackson's magnum opus, this is a work of supreme detail and quality with both Good and Evil Campaigns being extensively entertaining and of equal excellence. The game brims

with references from the films, and also a few things left out of the celluloid tales. It's authentic enough to satisfy all but the most nerdy Tolkien fans, without being inaccessible to a Rings newcomer (if there is such an animal). This is not the place for a full review (I promise one for next issue) but suffice to say that The Battle for Middle Earth is a triumph. Circle the release date of December 10th in your diary, or make sure it features on your Christmas present list. To my mind this game sets new standards in presentation and polish, cramming in enough depth to seduce even hardcore strategists, yet remaining accessible to casual gamers. A shining light of a game, whose brightness is only eclipsed by that of my game of the year.

Genre: *Fantasy (Tolkien) Strategy*

From: *Electronic Arts* (www.eagames.com) Platform: *PC*

Globetrotter's Game of the Year Rome: Total War



What more can I say about this wonderful, scintillating game? A game great enough to make grown men cry. The AI is so great that it's easy to imagine a nano-version of Hannibal trapped within your PC. This game will grab your social life where it hurts. **Rome: Total War** is not only the best strategy game ever produced, but it is simply far and away the greatest battle simulator ever. Buy it. Beg for it. Get it!

Genre: *Historical Strategy*

From: *Creative Assembly*
(www.totalwar.com)

Platform: *PC*

Excerpt from Globetrotter's preview of the game, published in Flagship#108...

"The problem with most strategy games is that the end game is a foregone conclusion once you conquer your last major opponent: usually the climactic battle happens in the middle of the game and to get to a satisfying conclusion you have to mop up the rest of the map.

Not so with Rome: Total War, which gives a historical precedent for much cooler gameplay. Once you've conquered most of the known world, the Senate itself gets wary of your power, and a civil war is triggered. How do you win? By turning your armies inward, crossing the Rubicon, and attacking Rome itself!"

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The Ridley Files

ERIC RIDLEY reviews the card game *ABUSE* and the *D&D MONSTER MANUAL 3*, then discusses some bargains ...



A NEW DAY, a new card game.

In the playground of life I have never been that good at slagging people off, usually falling back on the old favourite of 'no, you are' whenever confronted with a berating. *Abuse* however, helps me expand from my, mainly sexual orientation based, insults. It must be hard to make a game about verbal attacks without littering it with swear words, although that opinion may be skewed by my upbringing in Glasgow: none the less Eos Press have managed it.

At its heart this game is bad, very bad indeed. Beginning

with a hand of seven cards you must match words and phrases, printed thereon, to make a coherent sentence in order to clear your hand. Apart from having to make grammatical sense, you must also have a 'beginning' card and an 'end' card in each of your sentences. Were this a game based on numbers, for instance, it would suck to high heaven. The game system is weak, very weak. There is hope though. Comebacks are cards that can be played out of turn and basically negate the opposition's insult. These include such classics as 'You talkin' to me?' and 'It's almost as if it's trying to speak'. The real saving grace however are the insults themselves; they are, on the whole, clever and well thought out.

The most alluring aspect of this game is the fun you can have. It's a light-hearted, fast-paced game and passes the time nicely. I always tend to imagine the players being smoking jacket clad upper classes engaging in a bit of verbal remonstrance with each other. Don't get me wrong, the game mechanics suck and the card quality is dire, but at the core of it, it's fun, and that's most important. If you think you would like this game, then you probably would.

Monster Manual 3

In my opinion, monster guides have always been a curious thing. There is nothing too difficult about making up your own adversaries for your players to fight, but it always seems better to have the 'official' bad guys to thump around. Then, when relaying your tale to other players around the world, everyone knows what you're talking about. This is never truer than in regard to D&D: lots of people know of Kobolds and Copper Dragons and the legendary Beholder, and so a sort of camaraderie is formed when talking of such creatures.

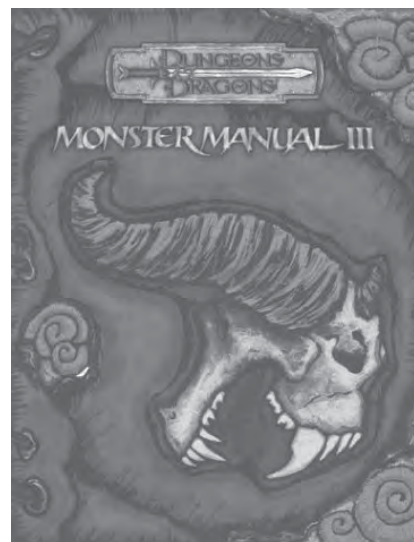
Monster Manual 3 is a weighty 224 page hardback tome of fiends and

adversaries to haunt your player's nightmares. The cover is one of the best I have seen from Henry Higgenbotham, far better than the other two *Monster Manuals*. *WotC* have changed the layout a little with this one. Each monster now has its own full page (or more) and every creature has its own picture (except, strangely, some of the living spell entries). This allows far more clarity in reading. Previous manuals had entries crammed onto pages with the pictures on a different page and sometimes the stats block on a different page still. I found it infuriating but this one has fixed it, and it only took two previous versions to strike upon the idea. Another thematic change is that each monster has a small paragraph phrased as if a DM were describing the monster to you. These are sometime quite evocative, sometimes dry and short, but always welcome. It is a good idea but I feel it would be better with more fleshing out.

A good number of creatures in this book have player character statistics, allowing you to actually be many of the races in the book, by far the best part of the package. I am particularly taken by the Kenku and the Harssaff. I was inspired to make up new characters right then: the book sparked my imagination, and that is surely its biggest role.

The artwork is good but I'm afraid the illustrations are far too small.

The average being about three to four inches in height, it is such a shame to see beautiful art reduced to near thumbnails. This is undoubtedly due to space constraints, background, combat tactics, stats blocks, and religion and where they can be found. But it is just this amount of information that prevents any real in depth background. Almost all the entries are just pure crunchy stuff. It seems to remove some of the intimacy that for instance the *GURPS* books have. Also, a lot of the monsters are a bit weak design wise. It lacks the grab-you-by-the-throat monsters that the *MM2* had and almost all of them are aimed at quite high level parties, making it an intimidating start for the novice adventurers. Technically the book is brilliant; by far the best monster manual for presentation, but the lack of original and kick ass monsters lets it down. It seems a little soulless. However the playable monsters really pull the book up and make it a worthwhile purchase for a hardcore fan.



Raiders of the Game Cupboard

Games, like all things in life, go through phases, have fashions and are somewhat cyclical. A TCG is all the rage and then a licence runs out, or a company goes bust and all their excess stock floods the market. Maybe the public just gets bored with a product and causes its demise. All these scenarios are sad days for the hobby - or are they?

Some of the games that fill my cupboards are old ones that I managed to pick up cheap in a sale. Worse, many of them were bought full price only to take a fiscal nosedive at a later date, leaving me with something I could have picked up at a fraction of the price. Often, when raking through a games bargain bin, I am made to feel like a social leper by my own mind insisting

Abuse & Monster Manual III at a glance

ABUSE

Price: 7.99
Players: 2 - 4
Playing time: 20 - 30 mins
Publisher: Eos Press

MONSTER MANUAL 3

Price: 21.99
Pages: 224
Publisher: WotC

that some one is silently watching me, tutting. But that's crazy. Nothing gives me more pleasure after game shopping than realising that I got a bargain, or three boxes of **7th sea** boosters for only 15 quid. When the notion hits you that the word you should be uttering as you leave the shop laden with gaming goodies is 'Yoink' or 'Score', life is good.

So what can be found by scratching about? In terms of roleplaying, **Star Wars** is a good bet; the old *West End Games* D6 system is a corker, and if you are lucky enough to find books they can be picked up cheaply. However it is far easier to find old source books than it is to find the core book. Also, in recent times the price has been going up because of the old players who refused to convert to the *WotC* version. Speaking of *WotC* and the *Star Wars* games they mangled, the original *Star Wars* TCG by *Decipher* is brilliant. It is very in-depth and very well made. As a player with a full set of all the cards, you can do almost anything that you saw in the films, from selling your speeder to flying into the belly of the space slug. It's brilliant, and now very cheap. I spent \$50 on a foil Darth Vader card that can now be picked up for five pounds on Ebay. You can also find up the Wizards version of the *Star Wars* card game for about 5 pounds a box for the first two sets, but don't, there is cheaper toilet paper out there.

TCGs are undoubtedly the easiest to find in bargain bins. Between the glut that was made after the success of **Magic** and then the second wave of them after **Pokemon**, there are plenty of games you can find, some of which are very good. **Netrunner**, **7th sea**, **Doomtown** and **Magi Nation** are all excellent games and worth the investment.

If tabletop wargames are your bag then may I suggest **Vor: the Maelstrom** from *Fasa*. As a game it is not a million miles away from **40K**. The background is good and there were a large amount of miniatures made. They are on the whole very nice sculpts with some excellent creature designs. Again this game is in the middle of a bit of a resurgence so prices vary, but if you look around you will be able to pick up some top quality metal for coppers. The Growler armies are particularly good and very easy to paint. In a similar vein is the *Heroclix* Spin off (and another *Fasa* licence) **Shadowrun Duels**. Based on the wildly popular *Heroclix*, *Duels* scales the whole thing up. Packaged as 6" action figures, each combatant comes with a variety of weapons and tools to use on the field of battle. Ranging from handguns to mystic totems, all the items have their power and use printed on the side of each so you can use them. The figures are of the highest quality and come with a detachable clicky base for play. Many of the models are excellent toys in their own right. I got a full set of the second series (six figures) for 32 quid. Each one comes with a rules book and all manner of other stuff. Two figures are needed to play, although you can use more if you like.

Now that I have imparted all my gaming knowledge, you surely want to know where to pick this stuff up. Well, your local gaming store is a good place to start. *Static Games* in Glasgow is excellent and run a variety of sales every now and again in which your wallets will run dry. Another good place (if you don't happen to live in Glasgow) is *TK Maxx*, yep they sell clothes but if you look round the toys section, which most stores have, you are 70% likely to find a board game of some description for a few quid. It is certainly worth the look. Lastly, and probably most obviously, is *Ebay*. It is a great place to find cheap old stuff. Be warned though, you have to know your prices: cyber clickery can all too often lead to a rip-off as opposed to a bargain. If you know what you are looking for, research your prices and then have a scout around. So with that in mind I hope you can find your way to old gaming heaven. It's a nice place and very satisfying when you reach it. Right, I'm off to look for my **Football Champions** deck to have a kick around with it.

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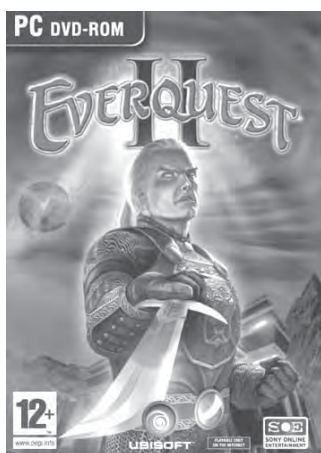
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Quest Wars

DAVE PANCHYK reports on the latest 'escapeware' ...



I FIRED UP *Everquest II* today, a couple of days after launch, determined to play for an hour. Two and a half hours later, the game thankfully crashed and I had good cause to step away for the computer. I figured it was time to actually go out into the world. I'd blown off a group exercise session with the excuse of a seminar presented by the local writing group; I'd blown off the seminar with the excuse that I had numerous deadlines to meet. Yet there I'd been, sitting at home, playing games once again to the exclusion of anything else, leaving important things undone. I asked, why do I do this?

I ran through the usual self-recrimination routine, realizing that I sabotage myself by retreating into fantasy worlds, which take me away from my mundane concerns and actually make them worse for my avoiding them and letting them pile up. It's an addiction, really, which is a sad thing to admit.

The writers' seminar was still going, so I dropped by the library to see. On this chilly Saturday not two weeks after George Bush had re-obtained the Presidency of my adoptive country, I stood at the back of a meeting room and heard a featured author speak about how her 'personal relationship with Jesus Christ' prompted her to write a pair of books about how the United Nations was stealthily creating one world government, with Prince Charles as a major player.

This, I realized, was why I preferred fantasy worlds to the real one.

The immersive nature of video games, with their strong visual element and behavioral feedback loops, makes them more powerful than my other distracting dependencies of choice (salt, fat, sugar, caffeine, and sleep). Since they're more readily obtained than pills (isn't it ironic there's a first-person shooter called *Painkiller*?), provide good value for the amount of time spent on them, and don't allow the user to build up a tolerance, computer and console games are the obvious path for any fugitive from reality.

It's been a standard in treating drug addiction to replace one drug with another. The Methadone to the heroin of *City of Heroes* was not a massively-multiplayer online roleplaying game, but a Real-Time Strategy game called *Dawn of War*. I usually won't play RTSs because of their fiendish difficulty and dependence on twitch skills, but I was willing to make an exception for one set in the *Warhammer 40,000* universe, and I'm glad I did. I've played every game they've made for it, and this is the best, narrowly beating out the harrowing *Space Hulk* and the X-Com-based *Chaos Gate*.

The difficulty and twitch-factor weren't so big a problem in *Dawn of War*. Things got more difficult in the single-player campaign as the storyline progressed, but not overwhelming, and the pause function let you basically ride that button and give numerous build and combat orders to units in a kind of stop-motion way to manage things when lots of stuff was happening.

And lots of stuff happens, indeed. *Dawn* creates the kind of cluttered, crowded, chaotic battlefield that the *Warhammer 40K* miniatures game tries to model, and it does it well. It's hard to imagine anything better capturing the savagery and brutality of the 40K battlefield. Ork Stormboyz

and Assault Marines cross axe with chain-sword as a Dreadnought picks up one of the greenskins, crushes it in one mechanical claw so a gout of blood sprays off the corpse, and spins the body on the whirling claw before tossing it a dozen yards away. Armies that take and hold strategic spots may ultimately gain enough of the 'requisition' resource to summon a demon - or an orbital bombardment.

The camera controls allow you to get extremely close to the action for a cinematic view. In fact, the cutscenes in the satisfying-but-short single-player campaign were obviously done using the game engine. Most impressive for an RTS. It'd be interesting to see if it gets used for 'machinima' animation using in-game actions.

The campaign seems to be more of a teaching tool and a way for players to get a jones for what some consider the real meat of the game: the multiplayer. I haven't played any humans, as humans want to use their superior RTS skills against me. I did, however, play far too much in Skirmish mode against the computer. It is here that all four army types in the game - the Space Marines, Chaos Marines, Eldar, and Orks - become available. Each has a slightly different play style, along with a unique and characteristic interface. Multiple forces are available, like the Goff and Evil Sunz tribes of the Orks, and can be given custom color schemes and banners.

A note here about my beloved Orks. Their play style goes beyond different unit types: they actually have a third resource to manage aside from requisition and power. Orks benefit from the power of the WAAAGH!, which is their way of drawing more Orks to gather together under a war banner and work themselves up into a fighting frenzy. The Ork player increases this by building towers with a big banner on them that says 'WAAAGH!' Pretty straightforward, really, in typical Orky fashion. It's not just that, but Ork population as well, that allows one to build more advanced units. This army alone among the others is encouraged to cover the battlefield in a sea of green. While the Orks tend to be successful computer players because of this, *Dawn of War* is finely balanced enough that the old 'build and spit' strategy of RTSs doesn't work so well.

I wouldn't recommend paying full retail price for this game, but even with the VAT and not-being-American punitive surcharge, it's a lot cheaper and less hassle than buying Games Workshop's overpriced minis and having to paint the little buggers. And this way, you get to watch them move, too!

Well, let's talk about the 'gateway drug' that lets MMORPG players and squad-based combat game players cross into each other's world: **Guild Wars**. This wacky little number will have the kids talking, I'm sure. And kids, whether sugar-hyped Westerners or the 'Chinese Adena farmers' that a recent *Lineage 2* refugee complained about, are likely to be the surest audience for this game. They tend to enjoy big, powerful groups and player-versus-player; forming into guilds, and PvP (and the preparation therefor) is what *Guild Wars* is all about.

And, yes, that's all it's about. Hunting monsters is the treadmill that's supposed to get you into buff shape for an arena battle (minimum two people per side) or a guild war (big, chaotic mess). *Guild Wars* is the first MMORPG not to have a monthly subscription; this means that, thanks to restrictive child labor laws, youngsters with a lot of time and no money will again be the natural niche for this game.

Here's how gameplay, guided by the breathless developer and marketing team, went: someone says, 'Follow me!' and you try to follow them (often getting stuck on the terrain, which only allows for certain 'paths' of movement), running headlong toward one spot or another of presumed

importance (the Tall Pole of the other guild), perhaps finally ending up at the other guild's stronghold. Along the way, you'll have pitched, chaotic battles in which you may kill someone, or you may die, and have to stumble to catch up to where the skirmish has now almost certainly run out of wind. In the jumble, a more savvy player will be using a function that calls out, 'I'm attacking Hunter Rose!' and gives you the option of selecting that enemy to attack as well. This facilitates huge gang-piles on single enemy characters, which is a remarkably effective way of whittling them down one at a time. Just try getting whittled that way; you'll see.

Now, the game isn't without its joy or subtleties, although the steep learning curve meant that without a dedicated staff member to show them off, they would not have been very obvious. For a magazine preview I was assigned the Mesmer class, which is one of the trickier 'advanced' classes (along with the Necromancer) that are not recommended for beginners. The Mesmer is all about subversion, and using the enemy's strength against them. It works pretty well, but it becomes obvious very fast that going it alone is not an option. As a support class, it's great. You have hexes that injure opponents when they strike someone or cast a spell, and some that depend on split-second timing to interrupt another player's spell or skill use have some pretty nasty effects. I predict the Mesmer will be the class whose name is most cursed by other players.

Aside from the occasional mean joy created by the Mesmer and Necromancer, Guild Wars doesn't have much to it. I mean, **City of Heroes** doesn't either, but it has an element missing in Guild Wars that is unlikely to be added before its launch: fun. When the pieces clicked into place as to how to play a Mesmer, I thought, 'This is just like a Controller in City of Heroes. Boy, I sure would like to play that right now instead.' For those who want a fantasy theme to a moderately-paced squad combat game - kind of like **Medal of Honor** with spells - this will fit the bill.

It's almost as if **Everquest II** knew about my deadline.

After one crash requiring a reboot, I played for a while, then got kicked off the server, which is now down. Whether it's supposed to be or not, I don't know. Technical issues after launch are kind of a tradition - unavoidable, like Americans view fruitcake at Christmas. (I just got chased 100 metres over land by a shark.) For minor quirks and bumps along the road, though, EQ2 is running pretty smoothly.

I guess 'smooth' is kind of the trademark of the Everquest franchise. You've got your basic fantasy elements, Tolkien with a layering-on of races of cat-people and whatnot, and you do quests and get better stuff and join with people to kill neat monsters, growing in power and wealth. It all goes down... smoothly, like a candy-flavored alcohol. Sure, there's originality in there, and some truly enjoyable moments, and of course crafting and guilds and many of the other things people want; all of it has been added with a sophisticated professionalism, as if calculated by some mathematical formula to ration out just enough Neat Stuff to keep people in the game.

With nearly half a million subscribers, Everquest was doing just fine, thank you. One imagines that after about six years, they felt it necessary to have a 'refresh' of the technical - especially the visual - aspect of the game. They took advantage of the insights those years offered in not just their gameplay but that of other MMORPGs, as well, making improvements, and more importantly, getting rid of the truly aggravating elements of the original game.

Corpse retrieval is a prime example. Rather than not being certain of where you were killed, losing all your stuff on your body, and being unsure you can get back there, get your belongings, and get out without dying again (and again and again, like a desperate gambler trying to win back his losses), Death's sting is not so painful. A glowing trail in the air leads you to a little bit of your soul, which ameliorates the not-so-terrible experience point penalty (or 'debt', a sign I took to mean someone on the development team had played City of Heroes and learned from the many, many things that game did right). Deaths from not knowing how to swim, and accidentally attacking shopkeepers, are also a thing of the past.

Everquest II is definitely friendlier to the newcomer. Everyone starts on the same tutorial island, after a couple of initial steps learned on the ship over. (Hmm... the 'rescued by a ship' routine is an old one, but any bets on whether they were, ah, inspired by **Morrowind**?) This means that all the newbies are lumped together, instead of trying to get help in a city with

a mixed (and sometimes decidedly unhelpful) population. There is a pretty rich number of quests on the island that will take one to the 6th-level cap in fairly short order. This is another difference with the original EQ: the first five levels were a major ordeal. The soft-lob nature of some of the quests - imagine, not all of them deal with combat! - that are class-specific, combined with the well-balanced threats of the island creatures, makes the learning process easier. It's a plus, as well, that very few of the monsters are overtly aggressive (aggro) or attack in groups, and if they're either of those things, that fact is clearly communicated.

The quests generally are very nicely done. The quest journal spells everything out very clearly, sometimes giving useful hints; when that isn't enough, though, there are the other players. I don't mind asking for help or getting into a group, if I can do so in character. The developers have indulged my kind by providing two roleplaying servers as of time of writing, and they are clearly marked. It's 'roleplaying encouraged' rather than 'roleplaying enforced', but as we used to say back in Canada, it beats a kick in the teeth with a frozen mukluk. As in the original iteration of the game, you can flag yourself as a role-player so it's obvious from the appearance of your name.

Once my little rat-person leaves the newbie island and enters the Ee-ville city of Freeport, he'll be hooked up with his own little room in an inn. It's nice that personal space is among the 'gimmies' in some games now; developers obviously realized that it makes much more sense to be generous rather than withhold things in the hopes of stringing players along to extend their subscriptions. I'll explore this neat world of Norrath, doing neat things (actually sneaking up on monsters and backstabbing them!), and it'll be a good while before I get bored with doing so.

We're still a long ways off from MMORPGs creating environments that truly feel like the Everhome, the alternate-world home away from home that escapists like me are looking for. But in the meantime, we have something like it: between this world and the Everhome lies the Shadow, and it's in the shadows that you may find me, beady little eyes looking out from behind a saucy pair of shades.



Pevans' Perspective

PEVANS competes in the EuropeMasters tournament ...

A COUPLE of people at Spiel asked me why I was participating in the *EuropeMasters* tournament. Neither of them fancied spending a day playing boardgames competitively. I was nonplussed: I've never looked at it this way. I don't approach the tournament any differently from any other games-playing occasion. I realise other people take it very seriously, but for me it's just another chance to play some good (I hope!) games against good players. This year the games were pretty good, too.

The first game was **Hansa**. I've mentioned this in an earlier column (*Flagship 108*) and it's a game I rather like. Essentially, players have to optimise their actions between gaining victory points and putting in place what they need to score the victory points. My play was clearly sub-optimal on this occasion: I came third in my game. Unfortunately this was my team's average in this game, so not a good start. Next was **Ticket to Ride**, which I reviewed in *Flagship 109*. Success in this game really depends on building the right rail network to connect all the cities on your 'Tickets'. I got into a fight with one of the other players and we each took vital links in the other's network. The result was that we languished in third (him) and fourth (me)! And fourth was pretty much all the rest of my team could manage: things were not going well. The third game was **Media Mogul**, designed by Richard Huzzey and published by *JKLM Games* in the UK.

Despite some bad press, *Media Mogul* is not a bad game. Players are moguls, generating cash by selling advertising through their newspapers and radio and TV stations. At the end of the game players add up the value of their media and their cash: the highest total wins. The game starts easily enough. Everybody buys media outlets and places them on the board. Each turn, players gain pawns from the continents where they have media, representing their readers, listeners or viewers. Playing cards as advertising generates income for the player, according to how many audience pawns they have and the effectiveness of the advertising. There's an unfortunate side effect of advertising: it bores people. Clearly, advertising that bores fewer people is more valuable. So there is a luck element in the game in getting hold of the 'best' cards. The immediate impulse when playing the game is to put some media on the board, grab an audience, play advertising and earn cash every turn. The problem with this is the boredom that takes pawns away again. By building up the audience for a couple of turns and then advertising, another player can generate as much cash while playing fewer cards and retaining an audience. A large stock of pawns gives a player a cash cow - if there's the advertising to cash in on this. As the game goes on, players begin to compete. First, if players are retaining pawns between turns, there are fewer on the board. Second, as players invest in new media outlets they want the same audience as their opponents. Players use cards to bid against each other for the audience in each continent. Which means players have to decide how they want to use the cards in their hand - as adverts or for bidding. The result is a game that starts quietly, but gets pretty cut-throat at the end.

Having said that, there really is only one strategy for this game. Okay, it may differ in detail (newspapers versus radios, say) depending on the



Maharaja in play

circumstances each time you play, but it is essentially the same. Overall, then, a decent game, not a great one. The British teams in *EuropeMasters* had an advantage: we'd played *Media Mogul* in the UK's national tournament, *SpielChamps*, earlier in the year. This was reflected in a spate of wins for British players. I won my game - though it took the tie-breaker to do it! - and my teammates recorded two wins and a second place.

After which it was time for a little light relief: **San Juan** (you can find my comments on it in *Flagship 108*). While it's a fun to play, I consider it was the weakest game of the tournament. Essentially, like most card games, a lot depends on the luck of the draw. While skill may well prevail in the long run, luck is likely to play a big part in a single game. Of course this may just be sour grapes: I got hammered, finishing well last in my game. My teammates did much better with a string of second places between them. If only I could have managed third, we'd have had an average result overall!

The tournament finished with **Maharaja**, designed by Michael Kiesling and Wolfgang Kramer and published by *Phalanx Games*. This, I think was the best game in the tournament - though *Hansa* isn't far behind. The aim of the game is to build seven palaces in the cities round the board. Doing this requires a bit of planning. You need to: move your architect to the city, choose the right action and have the cash to pay for it. The focus of the game play, however, is the Maharaja. He visits the cities in turn and players get money according to their presence in the current city. This encourages players to build palaces in the city the Maharaja is about to visit to earn the money to build their next palace. Players can also build houses: these are much cheaper and boost your presence in a city, but don't count towards winning. Houses are also needed in the villages between cities. Without them, nobody's architect can travel along that road. With them any architect can - but you have to pay up if you don't own the house(s). (And you really want that money for your next palace!). And then there are the actions. Players secretly choose what they're going to do at the start of the turn. If your tactics are obvious, expect at least one player to throw a spanner in the works. In fact, one way to succeed in this game is to do the unexpected and screw up everybody else's actions. If you can pull this off, you've gained an advantage. Do it a couple of times and you're on the way to winning. This means that the game is played with rather more than half an eye on what the other players are up to. Are they doing the obvious or do they have some devious manoeuvre up their sleeve? The result is a tense, tactical game as players try to get one over on each other. Terrific stuff! I regret that I've not played *Maharaja* more as I have hugely enjoyed it each time I've played. Including this game, where I came a strong second.

There were mixed results from the rest of the team, giving us a completely average finish to the tournament. This left us in joint 15th place (with another British team) out of the 25 competing teams. Ah well, roll on the UK Championships in May and let's see if we can qualify for *Europe* again!



Media Mogul in play

PsychoCon

MIKE DEAN reports from this boardgames convention held in Scarborough ...

PSYCHO CON 2004 took place from the 8th to the 10th October at the Clifton Hotel in Scarborough. Representatives from all four corners of the land attended (Scotland, England and Wales) with a contingent from Ireland also over for the duration of the con.

National rivalries certainly came to the fore during the **Formula Dé** tournament with each nation trying to assist their teammates in ensuring a win for them rather than for the other countries! The tournament took place over two rounds, with the top three in each heat going through to the final. This has to have been one of the most participated in games of the whole convention and was hugely enjoyable - even though we later discovered we hadn't quite got the rules right - next year we will know better! In the end Brian O'Farrell took home first place for Ireland, with Stephanie van Bommel, who had led the way for the whole of the race, coming in a close second. Both first and second place were awarded a £25 voucher from The Board Games Company towards their next purchase.

Puerto Rico was perhaps the second most contested tournament, and certainly in terms of number of games played it was the most popular game of the convention. In the end it was close, with Mike Dean managing to scrape into first place, and Tash Turner a very close second. Third and Fourth places were not far behind being claimed by Brian O'Farrell and Jerry Elsemore respectively. Both first and second place were awarded a Puerto Rico Expansion Set by Rio Grande Games.

The **Settlers of Catan** tournament was not a particularly popular event, and having played in one of the games personally perhaps it is easy to see why. Due to the random board set-up the game was long, tedious and boring, which was a real shame as normally Settlers can be a fun game. The particular game in question, having taken over two hours, was eventually abandoned at 2:30am as the participants were too sleepy to continue! There are lessons to be learned for the future - perhaps tournament games should follow the 'standard' set-up to ensure a more even distribution of tiles, which would also probably make the tournament fairer to all participants! The winner of the tournament was Steve Turner who was awarded a Settlers of Catan cap by Mayfair Games.

John Stratford has a very successful weekend walking away with tournament prizes for both the **Acquire** tournament and for the **Tigris & Euphrates** tournament. Acquire was sponsored by Flagship and John takes away a year's subscription to Flagship (*see picture, top left*). GamesWeb sponsored the Tigris & Euphrates and David Lunn from GamesWeb was there to award the prize personally, a copy of Avalon Hill's Betrayal at House on the Hill. David also set up his wares on the last day of the tournament and business was brisk! Perhaps the most sought after game was **Trans America**, which although it did not feature as a tournament game was extremely popular as it was quick and easy to learn.



John Stratford celebrates winning the Acquire tournament, and a year's free subscription to Flagship.

Steve Turner, CyberBoard guru, has already begun development of a CyberBoard version to be played on the **PSYCHOPATH** website in the near future.

Eagle Games kindly sponsored **Age of Mythology** and **Attack!** and offered the winners a 25% discount voucher off their products purchased online. These were won by Ally Bain and Donogh McCarthy respectively.

Some special awards were also made: Spirit Games provided a £20 voucher to the player exhibiting the 'Most Sportsmanlike Behaviour' over the weekend. Jerry Elsemore was awarded this prize for his enthusiasm, for his patience in explaining rules to games, for his organisational skills, and for ensuring that the whole convention was a success. Thanks Jerry! The 'Sleepiest Gamer' award was provided to Tash Turner for being asleep at 2:30am on Sunday morning while games were still going on around her. She was awarded a copy of The Haunting House. And finally, the 'Youngest Gamer' award went to Jennifer Edwards (13) who was given a copy of Say What? The prizes for these awards were provided by Twilight Creations.

A number of other tournaments were not contested this year, but prizes have been retained for PSYCHO CON 2005! A large number of other games were also played over the weekend and included: **TransAmerica**, **Ticket to Ride**, **Empires of the Ancient World**, **Alhambra**, **Birth of Empires**, **Chrononauts**, **Carcassonne**, **Merchants of Venus**, **Nuclear War**, **Frank's Zoo**, **A Game of Thrones**, and probably lots more I've forgotten about!

Thanks go to all the participants at PSYCHO CON 2004 for making it such a success, to the Companies who provided sponsorship for the tournaments and awards, and to the games designers without whom none of this would be possible! All in all the attendees at the con had a fantastic time, enjoying the games playing, the good company and the bracing sea air! Although Scarborough is a wonderful seaside town and the weather was kind to us, next year we will be in a much more convenient location for travellers. It is most likely we will be in Leeds, West Yorkshire, in a location convenient for the airport as well as for those travelling on public transport. Watch this space for further details, and make sure you book your space early!

PSYCHOPATH, a great place to play many board games via e-mail, can be found at <http://www.psychozine.co.uk>. PSYCHO CON 2005 is already in preparation and will take place in LEEDS which is likely to become its permanent home. Keep an eye out on the PSYCHOPATH website for further details.



Introducing ...

Trading Card Games

BOB McLAIN knows how to hold 'em ...

WHEN I WAS a kid, 30 years ago, my trading card collection consisted of a few dozen Marvel superhero cards that I found in nickel packs of bubble gum. The cards always felt gritty from the sugar residue and they never lost their tantalizing bubble gum aroma.

About all you could do with these cards was sniff them.

When my son showed me his first **Pokemon** card several years ago, I did what came naturally and sniffed it. Not a whiff of bubble gum. What good is such a card?

You don't smell it, Dad, he told me; you play it. Each card is different. There are hundreds of cards, and they each do something different. I need more cards, he said.

Pokemon trading cards have surpassed \$15 billion in worldwide sales. A fair chunk came from my wallet. Other trading card games such as **Magic** and **Yu-Gi-Oh** have sold even more. There's obviously something here besides a good hunk of bubble gum.

I asked my son to tell me more about the thousands of Pokemon and Yu-Gi-Oh cards that he has pedantically sorted into binders and boxes. After a few moments, my eyes glazed and my heart raced. I can't grasp games where most of the rules are printed in tiny type on multitudes of cards and where my multitude had better be bigger than your multitude, or else I'd find myself in the graveyard. (I love games that remind me of my own mortality.)

Seeking wisdom, I undertook my own investigation. Here's what I found out.

It's a game you play!

Flagship has spent most of its existence covering play-by-mail (PBM) games, so let's use PBM games to illustrate the first vital ingredient of great game-playing: a steady stream of new players.

New players weren't always easy to find. In pre-Internet days, the chief appeal of PBM games was the moderators' ability to organize different groups of players for each game. You'd always meet new people who presented new challenges. That kept the game fresh.

Nowadays, of course, multi-player Web games have supplanted most PBM games, but even the Web games can become stale if the player base dwindles.

So much for the player side of the recipe. Now let's look at it from the other side. Let's examine the keen insight of Richard Garfield, who invented **Magic: The Gathering**, the first trading card game, while a math professor at Whitman College in 1993.

Garfield didn't worry about finding new players.

Instead, Garfield thought out-of-the-box, literally: why not keep changing the game? If players could buy thousands of new rule modifications and rule extensions, the game would never grow stale. And if these rule modifications and extensions came in the form of nicely illustrated trading cards, players wouldn't object to paying for them. And collecting them.

No, it's a game you collect!

Richard Garfield took a quirk of human nature - our joy of collecting things - and turned it into a game, and himself into a very rich man, indeed.

The game is the collectible - and the collectible is the game.

And here's the best part, if you're the game designer: each collectible, each card, costs money, and you never know which ones are in the packs you buy.

Since you need lots of different cards to do well in the game, you buy lots of packs. You can then trade cards with other players. Card trading becomes a meta-game in itself. For many young gamers, it's a social

experience, too. My son has benefited from the hurly-burly of card trading. Once a shy boy, he can now negotiate better than a London fishmonger.

In the new trading card culture, it's not designer sneakers or urban hand gestures that matter: it's good cards. When you play Risk, nobody cares if you get the blue or the yellow pieces. But if you don't have the left leg of Exodia, well, you just ain't down with the duel.

Most TCGs are simple to learn: you and your opponent each construct a deck of cards, and then you draw these cards on a turn-by-turn basis, launching attacks against your player's cards and defending yourself from his attacks. Basic game rules determine how you can construct your deck and play the cards in it. But everything else is in the cards.

Each trading card, from the lowliest dime common to the priciest double-secret-ultra-cool-super rare, does something unique. In effect, it changes the way you can play the game. With more cards, you have more options, more potential strategies. Even if you play against the same opponent over and over again, as long as you each have access to new cards, the game should not become boring because it's always different, always surprising.

Clever, eh? It's so clever, in fact, that *Wizards of the Coast* holds an exclusive patent on the play mechanic of trading card games. Their products include Magic and **Duelmasters**. But their patent hasn't stopped a flood of imitators, most originating in Japan.

According to Bill Gill, owner of *pojo.com*, the Internet's leading independent Web site for trading card players, over 226 trading card games have been released in Japan since 1993. But only three of these games - Pokemon, Yu-Gi-Oh, and Duelmasters - have been what Gill calls 'megahits': games that generate more than \$100 million in a 12-month period.

Let's take a brief look at each of these megahits, starting with Magic.

Magic: The Gathering

In 1993, Richard Garfield debuted his trading card game Magic at GenCon. Or rather, he debuted Mana Flash. His publisher, Wizards of the Coast, wisely changed the name to Magic before releasing the first set of cards, called Alpha.

Since its GenCon debut, Magic has flattened itself to over 6,300 different cards, with several billion cards in circulation worldwide, and over six million players. Annually, the best players compete in the Magic Pro Tour, with more than \$3 million in prize money at stake.

It makes those Scrabble champions look like pikers.

In Magic, as with most TCGs, two players select in advance the cards they wish to include in their decks. Strategy involves making the best use of land, creature, and spell cards. The 'power' generated by land cards lets you play the creature and spell cards. Keeping straight all the interactions possible between different cards is a feat worthy of a chess master.

For those interested in doing well, Magic can be an expensive game to play. Some decks cost hundreds of dollars to build. On eBay, for instance, a seller has currently listed a 'power' set of nine cards. How much to put them in your deck? The opening bid is \$3,000.

Given the game's complexity and cost, Magic appeals to teenagers and young adults. Those of more tender age are drawn to simpler, colorful games like Pokemon.

Pokemon

Remember those Japanese imitators? In 1996, a game called Pocket Monsters appeared in Japan, using similar concepts to those invented by Richard Garfield for Magic. In 1998, the game was rechristened Pokemon and released in North America. In that same year, my son Robby took me

into a comic book shop and asked me to buy something called a holographic Charizard. I gave him a dollar and asked for the change. He asked me for \$45 more.

Since its release in Japan, the Pokemon franchise has generated over \$15 billion in worldwide sales. More than 13 billion cards are in circulation. A cottage industry of Pokemon card resellers sprang up on eBay, with fathers and sons buying unopened boxes of Pokemon cards, sorting out the better ones, and selling them on eBay for profit. (One such Pokemon card reseller, Randy Smythe, took his profits and established Glacier Bay DVD, the second biggest eBay seller with around 400,000 feedback and annual sales in excess of \$5 million.)

Unlike Magic, Pokemon appeals to young kids, mostly boys between the ages of 8 and 11. The game play is simpler. The creatures are fun little fellows that never duel to the death. And even though the shameless Pokemon folks remind you on their official Web site that 'one of your goals is to collect each of the cards', you can effectively play Pokemon for much less than it costs to play Magic.

Eventually, kids outgrow Pokemon, often before they're old enough to tackle Magic. What are these kids to do in the interim? I suppose they could play outdoor sports, but more likely they'll turn to an intermediate game like Yu-Gi-Oh or Duelmasters.

Yu-Gi-Oh

It's interesting that both Pokemon (which was created as an electronic game for the Nintendo Game Boy) and Yu-Gi-Oh were not originally meant to be trading card games, even though that's how we think of them today.

In 1996, Kazuki Takahashi debuted a new Manga comic book called Yu-Gi-Oh that became so popular it morphed into a television series and later, in 1998, a trading card game.

Unlike Pokemon, where you train your monsters, in Yu-Gi-Oh you take what the cards give you, but your strategic options are far more varied and subtle. Deck construction is an integral part of the game, with experienced players often creating and naming their own special decks, which they may (or may not) share with less savvy players.

Taking the statistical sample of one child (my own), Yu-Gi-Oh appears to be a way-point on the pilgrimage from Pokemon to Magic. Now 11 years old, my son won't look at his Pokemon cards any more, and his few brushes with Magic have left him uninspired.

But his Yu-Gi-Oh duels are spirited affairs. The players often disagree about the rules, or what a particular card can or cannot do, and these tiffs are adjudicated by experts who plan and run local tournaments. As I watch these kids play Yu-Gi-Oh, I'm amazed - and a little unnerved - by their hawkish stares and the vigor with which they slap down their cards.

Yu-Gi-Oh is serious business. The sweet naivete of Pokemon ended for me when my son built a 'first turn kill' deck and then proceeded to kill someone on the first turn.

Checkers, anyone?

Duelmasters

The leap from Pokemon to Yu-Gi-Oh is too much for some kids. So, in 2004, Wizards of the Coast imported Duelmasters, the newest - and biggest - trading card game from Japan, where it has sold well over 120 million booster packs since its release in 2002.

Although the game hasn't caught on quite so rapidly here in America, it has already spawned a television series, electronic games, toys, and enough other merchandise to choke a Charizard.

Duelmasters is Yu-Gi-Oh Lite. It has simpler rules, simpler creatures, simpler spells. It doesn't favor rich players. The rare cards in Duelmasters aren't nearly as rare as their counter-parts in Yu-Gi-Oh. Moreover, you're limited in the number and type of cards you can play by the finite amount of 'mana' at your command, and so even if you did buy every Duelmasters card in creation, you wouldn't have an unbeatable advantage.

It might be too little, too late. For a kid who has a substantial investment of time and money in Yu-Gi-Oh, it takes a big leap of faith to chuck the lot for Duelmasters. By marketing Duelmasters as a 'simpler' game, the publisher may actually have alienated some potential customers who consider themselves serious players eager for challenge.

Again drawing on my statistic sample of one, my son dutifully bought

several packs of Duelmasters cards when they came out, learned the rules, played the game with some friends, and then stopped. Maybe there aren't enough Duelmasters cards on the market. Or maybe it's all just a build-up toward Magic, with Duelmasters an unnecessary detour.

Too bad, really. I learned how to play Duelmasters. And now I have no one to play it with.

Time to fold 'em?

Remember what our friend Bill Gill from *pojo.com* said: over 226 trading card games have been released in Japan since 1993. And that's just Japan! The industry is much deeper than Magic, Pokemon, Yu-Gi-Oh, and Duelmasters. Movie studios and comic book companies have licensed their characters for TCGs. There's even a card game for Mighty Beanz.

As with any market that has high demand, a saturation point will be reached, but until then, the pace will quicken as more publishers enter the market for a piece of the action.

Wizards of the Coast and *Upper Deck Entertainment* (the Yu-Gi-Oh distributors) release new card sets at a blistering pace. Since April 2004, there have already been three sets of Duelmasters cards, with a fourth expected before Christmas. New Yu-Gi-Oh sets are released, on average, every three months. Serious players have to buy the new cards.

For the short-term, at least, the trading card market will continue to grow, but competition is brewing in the form of collectible miniature games, often called clix. So far, cards and clix have minimal player overlap, but clix are just one hot property away from the big time.

How the world has changed since the days when I sniffed bubble gum on my Marvel cards.

Oh, if you'd like to know my guilty secret, I still sniff cards. And yes, people do stare.

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A Lifetime's Voyage to 'Treasure Island'

PETER BURLEY on what it's like to design and market a new boardgame ...

I STARTED inventing games when I was a child, after finding a game that my father had invented when he was at school himself. Made some time in the 1930s, the game involved throwing dice and placing painted drawing pins into holes drilled into a small block of wood. This rudimentary board had a drawing of an island on it, and the idea of the game was to enclose and occupy as much of the island as possible (including certain key features) by placing the pins in the holes.

This was the start of a lifelong passion. We played the game, as a family, for many years after this. By now, I was hooked not just on this game, but on the idea of inventing others. I'd play these new games with both family and friends, who kept asking, 'Why don't you get your games published?' The problem was that I just didn't know how.

Early struggles

In the 1970s, I invented three or four games that I thought might be good enough to interest established companies. I sent homemade prototypes to them: some took the games as far as 'final decision' meetings, but the result was always the same: rejection letters, saying things like 'we really like your game, but it doesn't quite fit in with our current product line'.

Then I got my first lucky break. An old school friend introduced me to John Ede, who had invented, produced and sold an excellent football game called 'Matchday'. Through the intervening years we have helped each other out by play-testing each other's games and suggesting improvements and enhancements where appropriate. John persuaded me to place a couple of my games with an agent he knew. Within two or three weeks, John told me that Spears wanted me to sign an agreement allowing them to produce both of them. Ironically, I had sent both of these games directly to Spears myself about a year earlier, only to have them rejected.

Getting published with Spears

Spears brought out my games in 1983 under the names 'Hextension' and 'Square Routes'. Although Spears produced 'Hextension' to a high standard, I was disappointed with 'Square Routes'. What had been intended as a two-player strategy game for adults had been turned into something resembling a game for young children.

Spears produced and marketed the games for about three years. Sales were modest, so I didn't earn much in royalties. Then I suffered a major setback: Spears were bought out by a larger company, who changed most of their product line and discontinued both of my games. I continued to invent games, but didn't attempt to place any for a number of years. Then in 1992 I got another lucky break.

Take it Easy - a second chance

John Ede phoned to say that the German company FX Schmid had seen 'Hextension', and that they wanted to produce the game. Naturally, I instantly signed a contract with them. I didn't realise then exactly how successful this move was going to be.

FX Schmid renamed 'Hextension' as **Take it Easy**. When Take it Easy was launched in Germany in 1993, it immediately started doing very well. In 1994, it received a nomination for Game of the Year (Spiel des Jahres) in Europe. Shortly afterwards, FX Schmid requested worldwide rights, which we agreed to. They then started selling 'Take it Easy' throughout Europe, and in the United States.

Later on in the 1990s, we nearly suffered another major setback: FX Schmid got into a few problems, and were bought out by Ravensburger. Fortunately, Ravensburger retained Take it Easy, and they are still selling it now. So far, FX Schmid/Ravensburger have sold over half a million copies. In 1997, *Games Magazine* named it Best Family Strategy Game of the year.

The birth of 'Treasure Island'

I tried to place more games with major companies, mainly FX Schmid and Ravensburger, but again met with disappointment.

Around the same time, I took my father's original pin-game and overlaid it with a pirate theme, introducing treasure chests, Jolly Rogers, cannons and all sorts of other piratey stuff. I also created a new scoring system, and new rules allowing players to steal treasure from each other and fight skirmishes to decide tie-breakers at various vital points in the game. I called this game **Treasure Island**.

When I showed it to Ravensburger in 1999, they very nearly signed an agreement for it. They took it to their 'Year 2000 decision meeting' and arranged for me to meet them at the Toy Fair in Essen to discuss the outcome. So I went to Essen in October 1999, only to be told that they had decided not to take the game but that they 'wanted to tell me face-to-face'!

But Essen proved to be an interesting experience. It was the 20th anniversary of the Spiel des Jahres that year. As I was a previous nominee, Juergen Valentiner-Branth, at that time the Product Manager for Ravensburger, kindly invited me as his guest to the celebrations on the Saturday night. This evening was my first real experience of German-style 'gamers' games'. What an eye-opener it was, to play all the latest games such as *Samurai* and *Ra*, with the top inventors, notably Alan Moon. I must confess that it was all so new to me that I probably came last in every game!

Going it alone

Two and half years ago, I went to the Toy Fair in London (as I had done for a number of years) intending to seek out companies who might be willing to take my games. Instead, I started talking to Jonathan Self, who had just started his own company, making a game called 'Cat Attack'. I was so impressed that I started thinking about doing the same thing myself. But which game should I choose for such a big gamble? Each game tends to raise its own problems, such as production costs and the feasibility of manufacturing particular components. Finally, I decided to go ahead with producing *Treasure Island*. Now I had the huge task of finding how to design and manufacture the finished product. I approached Carta Mundi to do all the printing and manufacturing. They recommended a graphic designer to me, to convert my *Treasure Island* prototype into artwork in an electronic format suitable for creating their printing plates which would be used to mass-produce the game, starting with an initial run of 2500 copies. The artwork required included a double-sided board, two other smaller boards, a deck of 130 playing cards, a set of rules and the box - which, surprisingly, provided the greatest challenge.

For the double-sided board, there is a small island on one side and a larger

Treasure Island at a glance

Boardgame with a pirate theme costing £30 from Burley games. Their other boardgame, *Take It Easy*, costs £15. For a list of stockists check www.burleygames.com

one on the reverse. You play the game exactly the same way on each side, but the game lasts twice as long on the larger side. I created the smaller island to match almost exactly with my father's original island, but added pirate treasure squares. For the larger board, I 'stretched' the island and added a few more 'anchorages' and pirate treasure squares. The graphic designer added some nice 'sandy' texturing and palm trees and a really professional finish. In other respects, the boards were close to my prototype.

It was the box lid that caused me the most problems. The designer produced about half a dozen 'thrown-together' ideas to decide upon a broad-brush approach. The layout of one showed promise: it had an old-fashioned compass symbol as a background, an antiquarian map and a Tintin-style pirate with a peg-leg. But I hated the pirate! Rifling through books about pirates, I found a brilliant illustration of Blackbeard. I immediately set about trying to track down the illustrator, Peter Dennis, via a publisher who promised to contact his agent for me. After about three months, Peter's agent emailed to say that he had a few days to spare, and that he might be able to help me out if I described exactly what I wanted. I asked if he could create for me my very own Blackbeard illustration. He did this in a matter of days, and the spectacular result fitted perfectly with the box design. The map posed similar problems. After weeks wandering round all the specialist antiquarian map shops in London, I found exactly what I wanted: an original 1600s map of Hispaniola, the stronghold of the 17th/18th century Caribbean pirates. I bought this map, and was able to copy it with no copyright issues involved.

The next challenge was to trademark the name 'Treasure Island' as the title for a board game. I was sure that someone would have grabbed this name years ago. To my surprise, the Patent Office website showed that it was still available for a board game. So now, after going through an approval process lasting about six months, I have my own Treasure Island trademark.

On the front of the box I have put my name and my father's name as co-author of the game. Sadly, he died in 1997 and didn't even see the prototype of the pirate version I had made of his original game. I like to think he would be proud to see his name on the game box, and on the lists of game authors at major events such as Essen.

We took delivery of Treasure Island last December. Since then, we have placed it in specialist games shops nationwide, and in a number of outlets with a nautical theme, such as the National Maritime Museum in Greenwich. Treasure Island has recently been assessed for an entry in the Good Toy Guide and we heard in September that it had been awarded 'Recommended' status. This means that it will appear in the Guide for a year, commencing in October.

We took a stand at the ExCel Toy Fair at the beginning of the year, which was our first experience of promoting our games at a major exhibition. More recently, we attended the GenCon UK event in Minehead as exhibitors and immediately following that we had our own stand at Spiel '04 in Essen. Both events were great fun and also opened up lots of great opportunities for Treasure Island in terms of distribution and licensing agreements.

Hints for budding designers

Inventing your own games can be a very exciting and rewarding experience. However, you must be prepared for your ideas to be rejected many times before you get that first breakthrough.

Research the Market: This is vital. You need to know what types of games people are likely to be interested in, and to make sure that your own ideas aren't too similar to anything that is already out there. A visit to your local specialist games shop will enable you to see all the latest games, and by joining a local gaming group you will be able to try these out with fellow enthusiasts. You should determine the target audience for your game. Is it suitable for the family market, or for more serious gamers (there are several varieties of these!)? For what age range is it appropriate?

Play Test: To be sure your game has popular appeal, and that it works well in different situations (eg different numbers of players, different age groups) you will need to enlist play-testers. Your family and friends are an obvious choice, but honest opinions are important at this stage, and those closest to you may be wary of criticising your creation: the wider the spectrum of people you can involve the better. As your game idea evolves, it is important to get the rules written out in a clear logical format. A play-testing evening is an ideal time to try out your rulebook: invite a set of testers who have never seen or played the game before, give them the rules, and stand back (or go out for a while) to let them get on with it. When you return, the number of complaints you receive will very clearly indicate how much work still needs to be done! Do this several times if necessary (with different groups of people) until the rules are perfect.

Prototypes: Once you are certain how your game should look and work, you must create prototypes

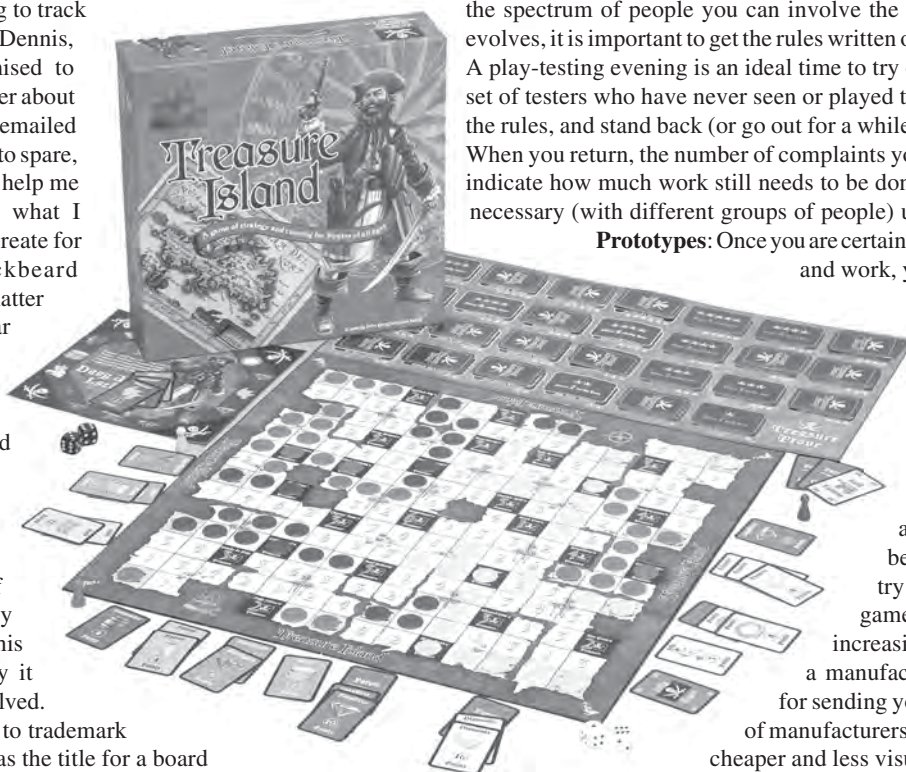
to be shown to games manufacturing companies (if that is your chosen route for getting the game produced). I believe that it is worth taking the time and effort to produce attractive prototypes, because this entices people to try them out and makes the games more fun to play, thus increasing the chances of attracting a manufacturer's interest. However, for sending your game to a large number of manufacturers simultaneously, a quicker, cheaper and less visually attractive option may have to be used. A manufacturer may keep your

prototype for a long time prior to making a decision on it (and that decision may still end up as a 'not interested'). The prototype may not be returned to you in the condition you sent it out, or not returned at all.

Finding a publisher: Finding an established company that is willing to publish a game submitted by a member of the public has always been extremely difficult. Many of the larger companies have a policy of not dealing directly with inventors at all and will only consider ideas that are supplied via agents. Lists of agents are available in publications such as toy and game fair handbooks and on the internet. If you go direct to an established company and are lucky enough to be successful, then you will have to be prepared to negotiate your own royalty deal with this company. If you go via an agent, then the agent will perform the negotiations on your behalf. Naturally, however, the agent will want to take a large slice of the royalty in exchange for setting up the agreement for you.

Going it alone: The other option is to take a big risk and produce the game yourself, as I have done with Treasure Island. This involves investing money and considerable amounts of time. There are many different ways of financing such a venture, about which I am not particularly qualified to give advice. I funded Treasure Island from my own savings, and I did think long and hard before taking the plunge.

It's something you need to be totally sure about. I just felt that if I hadn't done it, I would have spent the rest of my life wishing I had, and wondering what the outcome would have been. It has involved a massive learning curve to enter the world of design, manufacture, sales and marketing. But it's something I will never regret doing. It has been very hard work for me and for my family, but it has changed our lives in countless ways.



The Fordham Folio

Character backgrounds? Don't pad them! cries LISA FORDHAM ...

I HAVE COME to the decision that I really hate character backgrounds. Let me re-phrase that: I really hate those overly long, badly written, pieces of florid prose that people write as justification for their character. Don't get me wrong, I like characters to be well conceived, and to have a feeling of depth about them, it's just that I rarely see that in character backgrounds.

Part of this, I imagine, comes from having played and run many a LARP. 'Give us a character background and you'll get experience,' says the storyteller, not knowing what is awaiting him. The logic initially seems good: if the storyteller knows about your character's past, then he can map the future with greater ease and know what kind of plotlines will interest you. The logic seems fine, until the storyteller in question gets handed a fifty page essay, filled with, well, padding.

You see the problem is that for many people it has become ingrained in them that a character background, no matter what it actually contains, is a good thing. I would certainly disagree with this. As a storyteller/referee/GM, I have little concern with what your character had for breakfast the day before he was made into a vampire. I don't care about the annoying minutiae, or useless facts like 'My character doesn't particularly like cheese, except edam.'

Conflict and motivation

What I want are the key points, the motivators, the conflicts, the interesting people your character knows, the things that will kickstart your character into the action. Who does your character love, who does he hate? What unresolved conflicts are there in his past? These could be anything, from the enmity of the Dark Lord(tm), to an unresolved disagreement with the character's brother. These conflicts are the things that can be woven together to make an interesting story, and one in which your character is an integral part. If I can quickly create a conflict based on what you tell me, you've got adventure waiting to happen.

Sure, a bit of extra info is fine, but if I have five (for a tabletop game) or fifty (for a LARP game) backgrounds to read, it can get really dull going through them all, and I'll end up skimming, looking for the interesting bits. Once I start doing that, the chances of me missing cool stuff goes up dramatically. The important thing is not to hide the interesting parts of your character's background in fluff; don't barrage me with appalling Goth poetry, or a diary that accurately describes the last ten years for your character. Instead write a list of bullet points. Think of the key factors that I should remember when writing scenarios to involve your character.

Making it easy for the GM

What should you write? Well, it depends on the game, and personal tastes. The easiest thing to do is look at the films or novels that inspire the genre. Think of how you would sum up the characters in question. To give an example, do we know about Han Solo's background? Not really. It's not important to the role he plays in the story. My current preference for character backgrounds is that they contain some of the following: Concept, Important events, Motivations (including one recently acquired), Connections, A statement of intent, Internal and external views.

The first thing I like to see is a simple summary of the core character concept. Something that tells me exactly what your character is about. 'Happy go lucky trickster', 'hate filled ex-cop', just a basic summary, nothing too flashy. One of the reasons this is useful, is that by distilling down all those thoughts you have about your character into a single sentence, you become aware of the core traits you'll want to roleplay. As a GM it tells me which way you are likely to jump if presented with a particular situation, ideal for planning plots. A good thing to build in here is an idea of your character's approach to solving problems. Is he a cautious strategist or a both-guns-blazing kind of guy?

Important events come next, in my mind, as they help to build the

motivations. How many you give will depend on the character, but the important thing here is that they are events that have changed the character's life. Take Batman: the turning point in his life is when his parents are murdered, it sets him on his path and provides his core set of motivations. Again, keep it short and sweet. The details probably don't matter, only the event and how it affected the character. If an event didn't have a profound effect on the character, then what is the point in your GM reading it?

Motivations are a key part of a character background, and most will spring from those events you just described. Again, because they help a GM work out which way a character will jump if pushed. If your character is motivated by greed, then pulling him into the story by offering him money is an easy option. Motivations can be vague, 'believes in justice', to specific 'searching for her brother's killer', but they instantly give the GM an idea of what sort of story you want the character involved in.

Another key thing here is that motivations that have only recently come to the fore can be a real advantage. They kickstart the story, especially if the GM is aware of them beforehand. Particularly good motivations of this kind can kickstart a whole campaign. Unless all the player characters happen to know each other anyway (and how cliched is that), such recent motivators can provide an ideal way of drawing a disparate group together.

Who you know, and who you care about should be written down. All too often characters in RPGs seem to exist as islands, not actually having anybody they know or care about outside the group. The archetypal brooding loner seems to be a common RPG character, and this can be a wasted opportunity. Every character should have family, friends, colleagues, associates, and minions; people who can be kidnapped or betray them, because these are the things that make for interesting plots.

The most important element of any character background though, is telling the GM either explicitly or implicitly, where you want to take the character from here. I call this the statement of intent. It'll avoid those moments of 'My character has no interest in this plot', that occasionally occur. Or at least it should if you have a good GM. If the planned game has a literary bent, then think of the theme your character will address, phrasing it as a conflict or question helps: 'Family vs Personal Honour' or 'What will you do for power?'. If your game is more concerned with pure action and adventure, then imagine your character doing something cool: what would it be?

Finally, a good practice is to note down how your character views himself, and how others view him. Getting a handle on this will help you play the character, and help the GM fit him into the world.

On the fly character creation

Something to remember is that it's often more fun to discover things about your character through play, to make them up on the spot and run with them. If it's all predefined, it leaves you little room for manoeuvre. Sometimes it's fun to have gaps to fill in later, or during roleplay. It can take a little work - 'What do you mean you are the son of the dark lord, didn't you think it was worth mentioning?' - but it allows you to learn from playing the character, and then apply that knowledge to the background, rather than the other way around. After all, you won't always come up with the good ideas all at once, and this method can also allow you to introduce new plot elements should the character need a new direction after a few sessions.

Conclusions

While this form of character creation isn't suitable for all roleplayers (or indeed all forms of roleplaying), I find it more helpful in story-orientated games than the bloated, over-written character backgrounds I've too often seen. Hopefully you will too.

Spiel '04

PEVANS makes his annual pilgrimage to the German Games Fair

I ENJOYED Spiel (21st-24th October) as ever. It is always refreshing to see the enthusiasm everybody (customers, publishers, designers, journalists at al) brings to the show. Not to mention all the new games. Experience has taught me that it just isn't possible to see everything at Spiel. Scour the halls for the four days of the show and still someone will tell you all about a great game that you missed. Nowadays I don't even try. Particularly this year when another hall has been added to the show, making it bigger than ever, and I only had two days to do the rounds. So this report is very selective: it covers just a few of the 400 or so new games that were on show. But then, I was only one of 149,000 visitors!

Der Untergang von Pompeii (The Downfall of Pompeii) comes from *Amigo*. 'Escape from Pompeii' might be a better English version of the title as that's the theme of this board game from Klaus-Jürgen Wrede. The immediate attraction is the conical volcano in one corner of the board. Yes, you get to chuck your opponents' bits into it! (Sound effects are optional.) The first stage of the game has everybody placing wooden cubes in their colour around the city. Then Vesuvius erupts. Now you move your cubes out of the city and spread lava tiles across it. Whoever saves the most pieces from the destruction wins. The game encourages you to think carefully about where you're placing your cubes in the first place. And then to plot their moves in the second part - there's a clever movement mechanic, which provides some tactical options. For me, the thinking doesn't match the fairly lightweight theme in what is meant to be a fun game. I can see that the game is aimed at the family market, but I'm not sure throwing my nieces and nephews into the volcano will go down too well!



Bootleggers in play

mob bosses, competing to produce bootleg whisky and sell it to Chicago speakeasies. The whisky is wooden cubes and players stack their whisky in model trucks to deliver it. Add in the plastic mobster figures in different colours and the atmospheric artwork and you have a good-looking game. The aim is to accumulate the most cash over a set number of turns. But the key to the game is getting 'influence' (those mobster figures) into the different speakeasies. A player without influence can't sell, while having a majority gets you a rake-off on sales. Cue mob wars! And Jimmy Cagney impressions. With a nice bidding mechanism at the start of each turn, the game repays a bit of thought as well as being fun to play.

Mind the Move is a new Italian publisher whose first game, **Oltre Mare**, was well received at Spiel (I'm not sure how London Underground will react to the company's logo though). The game has a small board, showing the coastline of the Mediterranean, but this is only a small part of the game. It is the cards that are the central feature, along with the trading between players. The cards are used to limit the number of cards a player holds and the number of cards they can play in a turn. The cards played then give the players their actions for the turn. And the cards stack up and are the main source of Ducats at the end of the game (and the player with the most ducats wins). There are several other ways players can score points during and at the end of the game - including moving your ship around the Med. This means there is always something useful to do, whatever cards you hold.

However, the game also allows players to trade cards (and ducats), another way of getting round the limitations of the cards you draw. The end result is an entertaining little game that gives players plenty of food for thought. My only quibble is that the trading can drag on if a player can't make his mind up. Apparently the game was a limited edition and sold out at Spiel. Let's hope there's a second edition - or it's picked up by a big company.



Flanders 1302 in play

There were a couple of games from *Queen Games* that I wanted to try this year and this is the one I managed to play. **Flanders 1302** is designed by Wolfgang Panning, whose **Lucky Loop** I enjoyed last year. This game is a rather different kettle of fish. Players add districts in their colour to the six Flanders cities on the board. The aim is to have the most districts in a city when it's complete, as that player scores most points for it. Highest total of points when all six cities are complete wins the game. This is another very tactical game, the core of which is trying to outwit the other players. You have a limited number of actions available and must choose one each turn, playing the appropriate card (face down, initially) from your hand. Since picking up their cards again is a full turn, you can work out what options are available to their opponents. But there are sufficient options to allow bluffs, double-bluffs and simple outmanoeuvring. It's clever stuff, but a bit dry for my taste.

Bloody Legacy is a card game from a newish British publisher, *Surprised Stare Games*, and is very much in the **Family Business** and **Kersplatt!** mould. Or perhaps *Kind Hearts* and *Coronets* was designer Tony Boydell's inspiration. Players want to be the last surviving heir to a fortune. Which means removing all the other claimants - that is, eliminating the other players. So you play traps and try to dodge the traps played on you. Lose too many points and you're out of the round and lose a life. Lose all your lives and you're out completely. Last man standing wins. This is a very silly game. It's also great fun! Yes, it's an elimination game, but it's over quickly enough that nobody minds. And the action is fast and furious - if someone takes too long reading their cards (to find out what they are), it could be too late for them. A lightweight bit of nonsense: I love it!

I got to play both the new games at *Winning Moves*. First up was **Karibik**, designed by Mikhail Antonov and Jens-Peter Schliemann. My magpie eye drew me to this game as soon as I saw it. Model galleons on a map of the Caribbean dotted with gold bars! Okay, calm down, it's all just cardboard. Players move the galleons to pick up treasure and deliver it to their home port. The highest value of treasure at the end wins the game. The twist is that the player who moves a ship is the one who bids highest. A tie means nobody moves it. Since each player has the same set of chits to bid with, this comes down to out-guessing your opponents. There are opportunities for clever play, which enlivens the game. For example, moving a ship alongside another allows you to steal the treasure. So bidding high for a ship that isn't able to pick up treasure from an island may give an opportunity for piracy. The game is pleasant enough to play, but it's a family game rather than a gamer's game.

Spiel '04 was not a vintage year though. There were lots of good games to try out, but nothing outstanding amongst the new publications - perhaps the best games were all published early this year? Be that as it may, there are even more games than usual waiting to be played... (One final point: why were there so many pirate games at Spiel this year?)



THE MIGHTY PEN

Authenticity?

The review of *Fall of Rome* last issue was enthusiastic, and the game may be exciting and easy to play. I wonder, though, whether 'historical accuracy' is an appropriate claim for a game that introduces the Holy Grail, the Spear of Odin and the Bow of Hercules. From the map, it also seemed that there were liberties taken with geography, eg Lugdunum (Lyons) in the Massif Central, when its reason for existence was its location in the Rhone Valley. From the review, it seems that the game devotes much attention to building temples, markets, monuments and all the other things that rulers during the fall of Rome didn't much bother with - barbarians because what was already there was much better than they were used to, and Romans because they didn't have the money to build much.

It sounds as if a generic fantasy power game has been given Roman and Barbarian names and a version of a European map. Change the names, and it could be 'Medieval Warlord Conquerors', change the map and it could be 'Universal Conquest of Empire'. Which all raises the question in my mind, 'How legitimate is it to produce games which are really repackaging a single generic approach, and passing them off as a game based on a specific situation?' It's been going on for the thirty years that I have been involved in gaming of one sort or another, and it tends to produce games which lack the flavour of the period.

Interestingly enough, *Decline and Fall*, rightly described as a beer'n'pretzels game, manages to capture the flavour of the period much better than any of the more complex simulations I have tried. It did so by setting different objectives for each of the players: Huns - kill and plunder, Germans - look for land and towns, Romans - defend cities. Since that, basically, was what the various groups wanted, the game works and gives an historical flavour.

Chris Morris (Ulaidh Games)

[Hmm, interesting points, though I tend to approve of the old justification that fantasy elements can be used in an historical game if the people of that time believed in them.]

Sexy wargamers? Political campaigners?

I tried very hard not to like Dave Panchyk's article [You Sexy Wargamer, You: last issue]. Though a wargamer since I was ten, not a real-life pacifist and not even very PC, I still felt a bit uneasy with even a tenuous connection between wargames, real war and sexiness: real war, while requiring certain skills and 'military virtues', almost always involves atrocities on civilians and prisoners. But though I tried, I couldn't in the end pin this rap on the article, as I don't think that wargamers are 'preparing for war' in anything but a vague way.

If you look at the skills that Dave extols in what are usually called 'wargames' rather than 'first-person shooters', they're not a lot to do with the sharp or visceral end of war. They're the skills of officers, if not generals. It's a delusion of grandeur to think most wargamers'd be the officers in any real war. There are, in mitigation, good gaming reasons why we play the roles we play in games - the private soldiers don't get many interesting choices to make. ('Oi, Ken, ya wan' plastic meths or Buckfast?') Actually, too, in any real war I was conscripted into, a wargamer is the last person I'd want in my section, using their initiative all over the shop and trying to be clever. Assuming he's not a headcase when sober, I'd rather

have the lad whose hobby is scrapping outside nightclubs looking out for me. The officer-type skills wargamers do practise are largely equally applicable to civilian life, as management skills. Logistic skills too are equally valuable in civilian and military enterprise, though not gamed quite as much as the front-line bits. They'd equally apply in simulations of 'peacegames'.

Despite all that, I've wargamed for more years than I want to say. Why game war at all? Well, as there've been precious few years in any country's history when wars haven't fought, it's probably engrained in our ancestral or genetic memories - though many anthropologists will say it's actually vice-versa, with war originally invented to solve the problem of aggressive young men thumping hell out of one another outside nightclubs, ziggurats, stone circles, whatever. So given the impulse exists, wargamers' way of sublimating that is a pretty civilised one.

And war's also as dramatic as it gets. It actually is about life and death - which, say, one old expansion set for a railway game which excitingly promised you would be able to simulate 'bus routes in Norfolk in the 1950s' - er, isn't. But let's just occasionally remember what real war involves alongside all the strategy, tactics and decision-making that Dave and I both enjoy.

I have to whinge, too, about your editorial! Until you get to the dizzy heights of an MP, where it actually pays your wages, being involved in party politics in a minor way seems not unlike gaming as a hobby. Almost no-one you meet thinks it does have anything at all to do with real life and can't really see why you find it interesting.

It's equally connected with anoraks by most people - though with more reason, as with our climate you need one if you're going out putting leaflets through doors or canvassing. And as for real power should you actually succeed - not much, unless you're leader of whatever it is. I agree that the megalomaniacs should stick to power games, but somebody has to do these jobs. Spare a thought next year for the politics hobbyists out in the cold, shredding their knuckles in letterboxes with dogs snarling just behind the door and massive public indifference (or occasionally lonely old people who want to buttonhole you for hours!).

Paul Appleby

[Aaah... OK, the Flagship editorial staff have differing political sentiments, but we promise not to tell campaigners to 'go away and play a fun wargame'.]

Distasteful games

May I quote from a press release from Replay Studios. And don't mistake me, I have no intention to advertise, merely to expose ...

'Survivor is a 3rd-person Disaster Survival Game with highly interactive locations, based on famous, authentic-historical disaster scenarios. In independent game episodes, the player will experience some of the most dramatic disasters of the 20 - 21st century. The original single player game concept has never been seen before. We call this unique genre Reality Gaming. Anyone who likes to know how it feels like being aboard the Titanic after she has hit the iceberg, could go for a try. Survivor offers GTA like player freedom game play mechanics that forces the player to participate in the most dramatic and well known disaster scenarios: sinking of the Titanic, Hurricane Andrew, 9/11, Hiroshima, the Paraguay Mall Blaze and the giant earthquake in Mexico in 1985. While many subquests must be fulfilled within the disaster scenarios, the main goal of the game is always pure survival.'

I am glad to say that this game has yet to be picked up by an actual publisher. However, at a time when gamers are being portrayed as heartless zombies by the likes of the *Daily Mail*, to even contemplate such a sickly inappropriate game simply beggars belief. I am no lily-livered liberal, but this smacks of ghoulishness.

Globetrotter (name and address supplied)

[Yuk! But what do you, our readers, think? We checked Replay Studio's website www.replaystudios.de to see they argue that 'The greatest disasters have always been source of inspiration for dramas, artworks or films, why not for a video game as well? Though the scenarios are based upon authentic events they remain in parts fictional.' Hmm (See www.fappin.com/articles/show_article.asp?id=67 for the full text of this interview)

Your Feedback

WE OMITTED *Feedback* from last issue because we ran out of space: but you've indicated that you miss this feature, so let's continue it for as long as comments come in from you. 'It's always interesting to see what other readers think. They often disagree with what I'd thought ... But well, I suppose it's their right,' says **M Ashton**. We were tickled that **Larry Deyell** found issue 109 'very good, lots to read - although it could just be that I was in dire need of something to do.' Ah, yes.

Several of you liked 110's splendidly purple cover, including **Paul Appleby**, who calls it 'groovy!' Of course, we didn't get much specific feedback for 110, because we didn't print a set of questions.

Items that you praised in 109 included the reviews of *Empires: The Ancients* ('partly because of the way it was written and David Ames learning through error - I know the feeling - and partly because I am heavily into History from the rise of the first civilizations right up to the present day' - **Brian Hooker**), *Ticket to Ride* and *Exalted*. The article that many of you favoured was Lisa Fordham's article on promoting roleplaying, 'though having savaged website authors for not providing resources, she then failed to give a link to the resources she was commenting on!' adds **Mike Lay**. The piece on D&D in 110 raised some nostalgic sighs. Several of you praise Pevans' and Eric Ridley's columns, while **J Tompson** adds, 'Globetrotter's always great to read.'

Articles that you disliked were mainly those about the types of game you don't play yourselves, like **Mike Lay**, who's 'not a wild card games fan, so articles on cards leave me a little cold.' Oh dear, do take a look at this issue's introductory article: it really is fun to read. 'Most of the articles on online stuff bored me, I'm afraid,' says **Larry Deyell**, 'I've been a player of computer games since the days of the ZX81 (think I've still got one up in the loft, to tell the truth!) but I'm yet to be excited about online roleplay.' 'Why oh why did Kosumi [#109] need magic?', asks **Brian Hooker**. 'Japanese history is so full of action that there is no point in making things even more chaotic...' **Martin Mills** disliked the review of *Fall of Rome* in 110, 'it struck me as so gushing as not to be worth much in guiding my own decisions.' Well, the game's just out of playtest, and we thought it was worth publishing a playtester's favourable reaction: stand by for a formal review in due course.

Let's just add that **Bob McLain** winced at being described in 109's Feedback as a "reviewer who couldn't quite bring himself to say bad things about [the game]" - 'All those years acting as a heartless bastard, gone.' Yes, indeed. Somehow the nickname 'Beelzebob' arose...

Our thanks to everyone who writes to us. We do value your opinions.

Feedback on Issue 111

- 1 - Please rate this issue from 1 (poor) to 10 (praiseworthy).
- 2 - Which articles/sections did you most enjoy, and why?
- 3 - Which bored you, and why?
- 4 - What sort of game would you like to see more coverage of in Flagship?
- 5 - Would you use Flagship coverage to invest in a game as a Christmas present?
 - (a) yes, for myself,
 - (b) yes, for my family or my friends,
 - (c) no, I don't buy games for Christmas.
- 6 - Will you pick a new game mainly if
 - (a) it's favourably reviewed,
 - (b) there are favourable comments in Rumours,
 - (c) if there's an attractive ad,
 - (d) only if I'm already looking for a new game.
- 7 - How important is 'authenticity' in any genre of historical game?
 - (a) I like a game to reflect the issues of that period with some degree of accuracy,
 - (b) I think that it's that game system that's the priority,
 - (c) I like all the players to provide characterful diplomatic messages,
 - (d) I enjoy/dislike magical weapons in historical wargames.

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

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RUMOURS FROM THE FRONT

[This column attempts to simulate a crowded bar full of gamers 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 after October 10th from ...

Brett Anderson, Paul Appleby, Steve Armstrong, Christine Biancheria, C Foot, Globetrotter, Michael Grant, Jason Holt, Ryan Knight, Roy Levien, Chris McCarthy, Carol Mulholland, David Nicholas, John Parry, R Peek, Graham Perks, Mike Snedeker, Robert Treadwell, Chris Upton, Wayne Yeadon.

PLAY BY MAIL/PLAY BY EMAIL

Aspects of Might (Silver Dreamer)

Michael Grant - 'Malachai Sicklemoon's time at the Lions Field has come to an end. After all, there's only so much excitement to be had from rolling, pushing, lifting, balancing and throwing rocks, right? Decided it was time to present him to the Loremasters' Guild and very welcoming they were, too. Such gifts shall not be soon forgotten. Now this is done, it is time to de-clutter the old back-pack at the local market. Might even be some combat to look forward to next turn, as there are a couple of Wildmen nearby, just asking for sling-shot trouble!'

DungeonWorld (Madhouse)

Michael Grant - 'Running skill has just gone active for Grishnak Axehand, my Dwarven Warrior. Amazing what a difference an extra point of movement can make! A side effect of this skill is a rather sweet 2-point boost to Willpower, giving my character a very sturdy 20 in this score. Now to work on Strength and Dexterity, both of which sadly have a long way to go. Votes for the weakest Dwarf in DW, anyone?'

Robert Treadwell - 'DungeonWorld has had brand new bits added to explore. After the fun of travelling to the moon via the magic telescope and seeing mini-clangers on the moon and having to be careful or dying from lack of oxygen, we are all wondering what fun things can be found in these new areas.'

DungeonWorld - Broken Lands (Madhouse)

Michael Grant - 'Jai Of The Dragon, my Human Monk, is doing very well within the Halls of Stone & Iron. There are lots of friendly travelling companions around ready to aid one another at a moments notice. What more could an adventurer ask for? Just had battles with a Troll upon a bridge and two Schools of Gnatti in the surrounding water. Will find out what they all left behind next turn. Still hoping for a lucky Magical Bo Staff to replace the currently used plain one. Well, I can dream, can't I?'

DungeonWorld - Frontier (Madhouse)

Michael Grant - 'Could it be that my eyes have failed me in this shadowy place? Could have sworn I just saw my old friend Chunthalanka stumble down the stairs. Badly battered and bruised, but still alive. Must be dreaming... Anakine Oakhart (Nature Girl)'

DungeonWorld - Kyr (Madhouse)

Michael Grant - 'Certainly having fun finding out what my Djan can do with his special summoning powers. Abd Al-Misbah has called forth a Lesser Azure Djinn to do his bidding. Hear me well, Morte Bloodletter, and do not fail my commands! Something called An Arachnoskull approaches from the east and this will be our next target. Just hope it doesn't have any of the superpowers some of the beasts around here have had!'

Einstein's Lot (Ulaidh Games)

Carol Mulholland - 'My character, Alison, has sat through a dull public lecture about Ramases II in Birmingham City Museum, and now that it's ended she has to decide how to get hold of the Ank of Isis, which has somehow ended up among the exhibits there. Her new friend, Maria, seems well restored to what passes for health with a vampire after a scary brush with some garlic. Indeed, having washed and changed her clothes, Maria seems attractive enough to gain admiring glances from the surrounding scholars of Egyptology.'

But why does one of the elderly gentlemen claim that he recognises her? Is this just a chat-up line, or is Maria's true identity more significant than I've realised? And how does Alison find, get hold of and implement the Ank of Isis without ruining her academic career? If it's the only way for her to escape from being enchanted by a sinister serpent, maybe she'll risk setting the alarm bells off...

GM Chris Morris writes well. Einstein's Lot isn't particularly fast-moving, but this suits me fine as a player, and there's no shortage of hidden depth in it for my character to worry about!'

Fall of Rome (Enlightened Age Entertainment)

Steve Armstrong - 'I decided to give Fall of Rome a whirl after reading the review in Flagship #110. What a pleasant surprise! I expected a game priced so low would be bland, but that was a mistake. This game is a blast and I find myself revisiting my commands frequently between turns. I enjoy the messaging system which allows a virtual chat room and has been spicy and entertaining. The mouse-driven interface makes it almost impossible to make mistakes giving orders. I'm also one who doesn't want to wade through streams of numbers, and gratefully this game doesn't bombard a player with numbers to dissect; virtually everything is in English instead of numbers, but the program clearly is ciphering a maelstrom of calculations under the hood to sift the number of factors in play in many order outcomes and to derive the variety of results that appear to the players.'

Here's what's happening in my game, #74. First, Fall of Rome is (as you might guess) set in history in 5th Century Europe. So the 12 players in each game each manage a barbarian Kingdom. Mine is the Norse, set in the far northeast. We are now on Turn 9 (with a turn every three days) and there have already been some high profile confrontations. This is not a game with a long build up period - widespread battles occur beginning on the second turn. Early splash in the game was with the Alamanni in Gaul audaciously attacking his neighbor the Thuringians just to his west in the center of the map in a bold move that caught his rival off guard and from which he has not recovered. Many Kingdoms were able to conquer their regions after the second turn, including the Celts, Visigoths, Ostrogoths, Vandals, and myself, the Norse. I made a deal through the messaging system to work with the Ostrogoths and squeeze the Huns who were sandwiched between us. This really worked well and I am proud to say we were able to eliminate the Huns at the end of turn 9, which all found impressive. The Huns are generally considered one of the bigger threats due to their impressive speed and horse archers. Since all games are won no later than the 24th turn, I am in fairly good shape and have a chance to win. We have now also seen the Saxons recently eliminated, leaving ten kings vying for the win.

I've been impressed with the strategy in this game: many different approaches are possible with success. We'll see what happens next time!'

La Gloire du Roi/The Glory of Kings (Agema Publications)

Paul Appleby - 'I rejoined Agema, unsurprisingly for a reactionary like me, one of the most traditional pbm firms still going. La Gloire du Roi/The Glory of Kings this time - though as I'm Archbishop of Cologne in it I prefer to confuse things still further linguistically by thinking of it as "Der Ruhm aus der Koenig"!'

It's perhaps the most expensive game I've played, as turns are £6 about every 10-14 days but what the hell, I'm enjoying it. Much more than their "Ground 8" when I played that. Why, as the latter is virtually "La Gloire in Space"? Well, it comes down mostly to the position I got, which was about as militarily puny as my current one - but in addition no-one diplomed with me and I had no treasury reserves. So I couldn't see a way to achieve much.

Neither of those is true of Liege-Cologne in my "La Gloire" game. Agema games are slow, too - but in the early 18th century that actually means that it's not easy for others to attack me, particularly on land it's hardly the era of the blitzkrieg. Whereas in space I was always being trashed by (randomly-encountered?) ships/space monsters. The equivalent random nasty in "La Gloire" is probably the harvest failing, but I reckon I could survive even that. A sustained other player attack probably not - but I've got the diplomacy and cash to at least try.'

Heldenwelt (*SSV Klappf-Bachler*)

Chris McCarthy - 'I've actually started paying to play this. Since my last email to you, I don't think I've missed more than a couple of days play.'

Hannes, the GM, is very helpful and happy to answer questions and provide tips. My party has now grown to six characters and although they've been severely beaten up a couple of times I'm enjoying exploring and trying to complete the quests whilst learning the ropes.'

Michael Grant - 'I'm certainly enjoying this particular Fantasy Adventure game. My group is improving all the time and having plenty of battles. Even completed a few of the set missions. Think it might be about time to leave the beginners' training island even though I'm having fun there.'

Neutral Zone Football (*Neutral Zone*)

David Nicholas - 'It's a big moment for my team, the Quebec Wildcats. As we come to the end of season 5 I've finally made it to the playoffs. However, with three weeks of the regular season remaining there was still a great deal to play for this week as we faced our divisional rivals the Dublin Celts. We've both had a successful season and are guaranteed at least a wildcard spot, but the winner of this game would clinch the divisional title and a bye straight through to the second week of the playoffs. For the loser, a tough first week playoff match against the very capable Bora Bora Blue Fins awaits.'

The general consensus amongst the other coaches was that they expected Dublin to win, so I confess to some nerves as I downloaded the game turn. As I reviewed the match play by play it did not disappoint. By half time I'm winning by two touchdowns to a field goal and I'm daring to believe. But then in the second half I watch as Dublin stage a comeback and eventually take a 4 point lead with only moments to go. I then mount a do or die drive all the way down the field with time rapidly running out. I get to the 12 yard line, but I've only got time for one more play. It's thrown. It's caught. But my receiver is brought down at the 1 yard line and the game ends.

Aaarrrghhh! One yard! Oh well, get ready Bora Bora and the wildcard week, here we come! Even worse, though, is the fact that the game saw an injury to one of my key players, Fullback F Stuewe. I brought him in mid-season in a big trade for my next season's first round draft pick and he's lived up to expectation, bringing on my running game to a new level. But the forecast is that he's out for the rest of the season. Still, he's only one player. I can work around it. I hope! Time for some serious gameplanning before the Bora Bora game.

Wish me luck.'

Quest (*KJC Games*)

Michael Grant - 'KJC have announced a small price increase in turns, from £2.10 to £2.20. Effective as of December 1st.'

They've also been discussing their plans for the proposed Magic System, so everyone can have a say. The ideas certainly sound very promising, and should make Mages' spells potent once again and open up many tactics in the game.'

Quest Game 31 (*Naralia*): Big news this month has to be the collapse of the formidable Holy Ghosts alliance. They were the first to form in this game world and went out in a blaze of glory against their ancient enemy, the evil Anarchy's Mantel.

Leadership of the GITS Alliance has proven much harder work that I'd ever imagined. Before, there were three experienced players sharing the meany duties, whereas now there is only me. Still, it's always fun to learn new aspects of the game and I think I'm managing to keep on top of everything.

Moderation has been going very well. GM David has really got to grips with the system and is very flexible and approachable. The official missions have certainly been exciting and sometimes downright dangerous, enlivening this area of the game no end.'

Wayne Yeadon - 'Events in game 31 have generated some heated debate on the game's email forums and all this before what is likely to be a major pubmeet! A multi alliance action to drive out a hoarde of demons that were threatening the world has been the cause of all this chaos. One of the alliances took off with an artefact and planted a fake in its place. The Magic Cycle are apparently behind this incident, but this requires verification.'

The alliance I am involved with has fallen for an old trick of not believing everything you are told. Credit to the GM David for his handling of the whole affair. He certainly had some of us fooled. It will all come out into the open at the pubmeet anyhow, apart from the usual discussions relating to gameplay changes.

Quest has an interesting few months ahead by the looks of it.'

ONLINE GAMES

Utopia (<http://games.swirve.com/utopia/>)

Wayne Yeadon - 'This is an online wargame along the lines of a host of

others like Kings of Chaos and Darkthrone.

As a new player, it has taken me a while to figure out what was going on, but once you get into it, the actions available are relatively simple to complete. There is plenty of good information available and other players are also keen to help newcomers out. The players I have met have been in the game for some time now and this seems to be the way of things for each kingdom. The game gets too much like a maths lesson for me, though, and thus felt like hard work, so I have ignored this aspect of the game and just play blind. Good if you can be bothered to make full use of the support programs but not really my type of game. Very much a team game too.'

Darkthrone (www.darkthrone.com/index.dt)

Wayne Yeadon - 'This game is more suited to my level of abilities! Easy to play and not too demanding. It does not seem to suffer from the flaws of Kings of Chaos and is therefore a better game for it. If there is a cheating system in operation, then I am unaware of it. Build up your defences and train/equip your army to go on the rampage by beating everyone else who is trying to do the same thing and advance up the rankings. The game has more options than Kings of Chaos, too, making you think that bit more about what you want to spend your hard fought cash on.'

Adventure Quest RPG (www.battleon.com)

Wayne Yeadon - 'Graphic Final Fantasy type of game that is still in development, which means some aspects of the game are still to be implemented. This seems to be aimed at a younger audience with the cartoon-like graphics, but it is still fun to play and no-one knows how old you are in reality! Logging into the game can be tricky as there are limited places on the server for the free game. Pay to play as a Guardian character, though, and you bypass such problems and gain access to a whole host of goodies unavailable to free characters. Simple fighting fun with a bit of story attached and more in the pipeline.'

COMPUTER / CONSOLE GAMES**Pro Race Driver** (*Codemasters*)

Globetrotter - 'This is the sorriest excuse for a racing game I have ever come across. When you drive the car in simulation mode, the game becomes more of a battle with the force-feedback to keep the car in a straight line than a competitive race-against-others endeavour. It's as if there are two little gremlins having a tug of war inside your wheel. Join the battle against gremlins: don't even borrow this game.'

Halo 2 (*Microsoft*)

Globetrotter - 'Almost certainly the best looking XBOX game to date. With an incredible campaign and intense multiplayer combat, other first-person shooters are facing something of a challenge. Ultimately though, I have to prefer the PC based Half Life 2 to this, or any other console game.'

Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas (*Rockstar Games*)

Globetrotter - 'I loved GTA3 & GTA: Vice City. Alas, San Andreas has more faults than Californian geology. From appalling characterisation, to graphics rendered on an old BBC Micro, this is proof of the law of diminishing returns - a sequel too far. If you don't believe me, then rent it before you buy. Please?'

BOARDGAMES**Hansa** (*Uberplay Entertainment*)

Mike Snedeker - 'I currently own three games that deal with the Hanseatic League: Die Hanse, Kogge, and Hansa. Hansa is the cleanest of the three by far. As Michael Schacht did in Paris Paris, ease of play, speed, down time between turns and a bit of player involvement are paramount. Players set up businesses (markets) across the board, and utilize them to buy and sell commodities: buying, selling, establishing markets form a triangular business relationship. Without maintaining all aspects of the business triangle, you will fail to win the game. The "chicken" aspect of who's going to spend the bucks to refill all the cities offers a bit of player chicanery as well. My local boardgames club has played Hansa three times so far, and all were quite close. We found all three games to move at a good pace, even when teaching it to two new members. Clean game board graphics, standard bits, clear rules make Hansa a great starting game for new European boardgamers, and an easy "filler" game for veteran gamers.'

C Foot - 'I very much enjoyed Hansa. The first game we played lasted over one hour. After the learning curve was passed each game lasted less than an hour, perhaps closer to 30 minutes. In each turn a player is able to do only

a few things, as he is limited by scarce money. The trick is to figure out how to make the most of the money you have. There is a moderate screwage factor, mainly by leaving the ship in a port that will cost your opponent extra money, or placing more market booths in a city he has grown accustomed to thinking of as his own. There is no direct interaction between players which is normally a big negative for me. I will overlook that fact for much the same reason as for Puerto Rico, Hansa is a very good game. Hansa has a well written, short rule book. It is four pages long, much of which are examples and pictures. Hansa is simple in mechanics, but a little too strategy heavy for non-gamers to enjoy. Hansa may be at its best with two players, yet it shines with any number, and by any number I mean two, three, or four. Solid game, good components, destined to be a classic. I have no doubt.'

Roy Levien - 'Hansa is yet another example of a solid European-style game with simple and easy-to-learn mechanics that nonetheless provides a variety of both strategic and tactical options, constrained just enough to keep play balance on a razor's edge at all times. Though new players may find it challenging to keep up with more experienced players at first, there are no "secrets" and the few big mistakes (notably making unnecessary moves or forgetting to take free goods tokens) are easily avoided. Plays well with two players and is highly recommend as a "couples" game.'

Chris Upton - 'This is a deceptively simple game, with only four pages of rules. There are only three basic actions one can take, with a pyramidal interaction: purchase goods (requires cash), set up a market (requires goods), and sell goods (requires goods and a market). You can also perform only one action in a city, so you need to move the ship to another city for each action (requires cash). Unlike most business-themed games, cash does not count towards victory - victory points are awarded for goods and for markets. Other things to consider are interactions with your opponents (buying goods gives your cash to the player with a market majority in the city, selling goods forces the other players to discard a good of the type sold), and the trade routes (the ship can only move along a few specified paths). All of these factors give the game a considerable strategic depth in spite of the simplicity of the rules, requiring a delicate balance to optimize your limited resources with the possible actions.'

Ticket to Ride (*Days of Wonder*)

Dann Brewer - 'Ticket to Ride isn't a bad game, it's just not a really great game. I realize it is designed for the mass market and is more for families than for gamers, but I think even in its niche it has problems. It can be a bit too cutthroat and even if you try to be "nice", you easily can ruin another player's plans accidentally. Alan Moon is a great designer, but I don't think this is one of his best. A better choice, in my opinion, for both the gamer set and for family play, would be Union Pacific, which is significantly cheaper with just as good components.'

Jason Holt - 'It has a short set-up time, is easy to learn, and is great for people new to "gaming". It's much more fun when played with 3+ players, but is fun with just two. My wife and I play this frequently and the key seems to be going for the long routes. The person who claims the longest routes seems to win the game every time.'

Christine Biancheria - 'I have enjoyed each of the many games I've played so far, with any number of players. Importantly, I've introduced a number of people to the game, and it has received rave reviews from each. It's accessible with simple-to-learn rules, it looks great, it's full of tension and difficult decisions, and it usually takes less than an hour to play. It's just fantastic. In my crystal ball, I can see the awards piling up now. Highly recommended!'

Media Mogul (*JKLM Games*)

John Parry - 'A profound disappointment. The idea of a Machiavellian game of media rivalry really appealed to me, but alas my enthusiasm was soon doused by several buckets of cold water in the form of poor game design. There isn't much scope for strategy and too many games fall apart in the early stages, generally from sheer boredom. I've taken this one to my local charity shop.'

San Juan (*Rio Grande*)

C Foot - 'You knew they were coming. Spin-offs of that immensely popular game, Puerto Rico, were sure to arrive. San Juan is the first of them. San Juan takes several of the concepts of Puerto Rico and tweaks them into a card game. The interesting aspect of the design is that cards are used for everything. When a plantation produces goods, cards are drawn from the deck the same as if you were replenishing your hand, and placed face-down on the plantation to represent a harvest. When you pay to build a building a number of cards are discarded from your hand equal to the building's cost to build. As spin-offs go it isn't bad. It wouldn't see a second printing if it had to carry its own weight, but as it is, with the fame of its predecessor to pave the way San Juan will likely

be around for several years. Like its predecessor, there isn't any player interaction. Players choose a role. Each player utilizes that role for themselves, as they try to accumulate victory points by building buildings that each provide the owner with some advantage. Unlike its predecessor it needs more interaction to make it interesting. Mostly, players are trying to maximize the cards they can draw, so they can build better buildings. Players do have lots of choices, but none of those choices will directly affect the other players. I will play it occasionally and like it, but not twice in the same night. It is an average game that will get more attention than it deserves because of the Puerto Rico tie-in.'

Chris Upton - 'This is a fun, addictive little game, borrowing some of the mechanics from Puerto Rico, but being different enough to have its own flavor. It is much lighter than Puerto Rico, and does not have the strategic depth and complexity of the parent game, but it is easily learned, relatively quick to play, and entertaining.'

Maharaja (*Rio Grande*)

R Peek - 'Sometimes I read about a game before its release and I get a feeling about it, a sense of anticipation. If I get the chance to read the rules, I start to get excited about these titles. Mind you, this doesn't happen that often. The last time I felt it was when I first read about Puerto Rico and its clever role mechanisms. I got that feeling with Maharaja. After reading over the rules I knew that this was going to be another winner, and now that I have game in hand I can see that my intuition was right. The game itself is visually sumptuous, with heavy glass drops for the palaces, a huge board, lots of nice wooden houses and some good thick tiles. Overall, the presentation is excellent. The presentation, no matter how good, would be nothing if the game isn't up to snuff. Thankfully, Maharaja is up to the task. The idea is that players are minor nobles in India, the rajas, and your task is to impress the heck out of the Maharaja by building palaces in various cities. Oddly, Dr. Knizia mined a very similar vein in the excellent Taj Mahal, but the mechanisms here are completely different. Without going into excruciating detail, players send their architect pawns between the seven cities and make use of the varied abilities of several other characters as well. One might provide a discount on palaces while another might provide free travel from city to city. Generally you only have one of these characters at your disposal and other players might force you into trading one for another that does not meet your immediate needs. After the Maharaja makes his move to a new city, players must decide what they are going to accomplish on this turn. They can take two actions from a limited set of options, and these choices are programmed onto a clever little wheel mechanism last seen in Die Handler and even earlier in El Grande. Woe to those who plan on using a character's ability only to have it wooed away before your turn! There is a huge amount of strategy going on under the surface here, and plenty of room for sneakiness. I am looking forward to playing this with more than two players. Highly recommended.'

CARD GAMES

Rage (*Amigo*)

Ryan Knight - 'I purchased this game because it was listed in the Top Five under the best-seller category on my favourite game vendor website, and because it was only 10 dollars. The reason this game is so bad is because of the special cards added to the game. They create chaos and one particular card is especially bad because it changes the trump for the rest of the round. At the beginning of the round players are responsible for predicting how many tricks they'll win. This is often based on the amount of trump cards a player has in his hand. Well, all that goes out the window when the trump changes in the middle of the round. If you're looking for an easy to understand intro game go with Settlers of Catan. If you're looking for a game that supports many players go with Der Groe Dalmuti (The Great Dalmuti), Apples to Apples, or Bang! If you're looking for a trick-taking game try Wizard. Wizard is similar to Rage in that players predict the amount of tricks they'll be taking but it doesn't have chaos cards that create lots of randomness and frustration.'

John Parry - 'This game rocks. You should try putting together two decks and playing cancellation Rage! Every good game has a perfect blend of luck and skill. Rage combines both and you'll never have the same results. The game changes radically with number of players, their personality and skill. Not to be played with those weak of heart as friends and/or family will dash your hopes of achieving success with a "change rage" just because!'

Brett Anderson - 'If you haven't enjoyed Rage it's because you're not playing it properly. It really is the coolest card game for a bunch of friends to play together and chat around. The ultimate is probably five-seven people, less is too little and more is too crowded, but grab some coffee and snacks and play a couple of games and once you get into it, the game really can be quite addictive. Once you get over the necessary annoyance of explaining the rules

to new people, they are generally hooked and you can play until the birds begin to chirp. I have played this right through to the early hours of the morning many, many times!

Bohnanza (Rio Grande)

C Foot - 'I bought this game because it looked like a good game to play with kids. My gamer friend has three kids between the ages of eight and twelve, and I was looking for a good game to include them in. Bohnanza fits the bill nicely. The game worked well for that purpose. However, I couldn't imagine playing Bohnanza with a bunch of adults, it is w-a-a-a-y too light. It might work well as a party game, if you think UNO is a great game. It is only slightly more complex than Go Fish or Hearts (granted, the rule book makes it seem more difficult).

One hint, when playing with kids between the ages of 8 and 12, just forget the rule about keeping the cards in your hand in the exact order you draw them. It is futile. A player should never have a large number of cards in their hand and the game doesn't change that much if you let them move cards around. Kids may need to move cards in order to better visualize their hand.'

Wyatt Earp (Rio Grande)

Graham Perks - 'Earp gets plenty of play here. It doesn't take too long; some games are quick, once in a rare while we finish by getting through the deck twice (it always takes less time than Bohnanza); and it's pretty simple. After reading the rules and seeing R Borg as one of the designers, I was afraid this would be like Hera and Zeus. In that game, each card has its own special effects and we were continually referring to the manual. In Earp, while there are several different cards it's not at all confusing. I even tried it out on my wife and another non-gaming couple with some success. Mix a bit of strategy and a bit of luck; makes for a good game that comes out often!'

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www.funagain.com

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Exmouth, Devon
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Reading, RG1 7AG
0118 950 7337

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01865-721348
shop@gameskeeper.co.uk
www.gameskeeper.co.uk

Games Legion, Ashlar House, 15 Mason
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The Games Store, The Manor House, Eagle,
Lincoln, Lincolnshire, LN6 9DG

Gaming Crypt, 50 Castleton Road, Great
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02380-710550
enquiries@hidden-fortress.com
www.hidden-fortress.com

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Taunton, Somerset, TA1 4ER

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WC1A 1LH

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Paradise Circus, Birmingham B3 3HJ
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

If you know of any games shop we don't list, please contact us and we'll be delighted to include them.

Meets & Conventions

CONVENTION NEWS

We realise that many of you like to book in advance, so please visit the Flagship website for a more complete listing of conventions throughout the coming year. If you have news of any convention or games-related meeting, please post details on our website or email us!

www.flagshipmagazine.org

carol@flagshipmagazine.com

DECEMBER

DRAGONMEET: 4th December at *Kensington Town Hall, London*. Dragonmeet covers all aspects of hobby-gaming, from boardgames and collectible card-games to roleplaying, miniatures, play-by-mail games and live-action. Dragonmeet is fun for new players and serious gamers alike. There'll be hundreds of games to play, two trade-halls, guests, signings, seminars and special events all day. Doors open at 10am, entrance is £7.00 for adults, £5.50 for concessions (students, OAPs, unemployed) and £3.00 for Under 16s.

www.dragonmeet.com

JANUARY

WINTERSTABCON: 7th-9th January, at the *Britannia Hotel, Stockport*. The latest in a very long-running series of friendly, small-scale general games conventions, always featuring a good number of RPGs.

Registration is £12.50 before November 30th, or £15 thereafter. (Single days are £6.25 or £7.50 respectively.) Accommodation is of course available in the hotel, £30/night for a single room or £39/night for a twin/double; the convention will provide a booking number to use.

Stabcon, 17 Davenport Park Road, Stockport, Cheshire, SK2 6JU,

Tel: 0161 483 9131.

bookings@stabcon.org.uk

OXCON: 22nd - 23rd January 2005 at *The Mitre, The High Street, Oxford*. A boardgames convention organised by the Oxford University Diplomacy Society.

Featuring huge Settlers tournament (qualifier for Southern England representative to World Championships), Diplomacy tournament, Lost Cities championships, 15-1 Quiz, Gamesweb games retailer stall, bar, restaurant, and lots of informal gaming.

<http://users.ox.ac.uk/~diplo/oxcon/>

MARCH

THE OLD CONTENTIBLE'S 50th: 11th - 13th March at the West Retford Hotel, Notts. You are cordially invited to join Jerry Elsmore in celebrating his 50th Birthday for a weekend of playing games. All sorts of games: Boardgames, Cardboardbox Simulation Games, Fluffy games, Free-form games, Lawn Games, Matrix games, Roleplay games and Silly games. There will even be a dollop of Wargames thrown in for good measure. For further details and booking forms, join:

Consummation@yahoogroups.co.uk

CTHONICON: 11th - 13th March at Honicombe Holiday Village. Scary Cthulhu roleplaying event. Places are limited to 60 people - so book now to avoid disappointment.

www.horsemenevents.com/cthonicon/index.php

cthonicon@horsemenevents.com

DECIKON - The 10th AKFT KONVENTION: 11th-13th March at the *Fircroft Hotel, Bournemouth*. Registration is £25 in January, £30 thereafter and room rates at the hotel are £33 per person per night, which includes breakfast and evening meal. A number of artists will be attending, and the

organisers promise 'lots of silly games, video program and a 24-hour bar (for residents)'.

Dave Pratt, 12 Greenfield Road, London N15 5EP.

David.pratt@blueyonder.co.uk

DOMINICON: 11th-13th March at the John Hume Building, National University of Ireland, Maynooth, Kildare, Ireland. Annual games convention run by the Games Society of the National University of Ireland, Maynooth. Throughout most of its ten years of existence it has had a reputation for primarily focused on roleplaying games. However over the past two years it has expanded rapidly to add strong support for wargames, collectable card games and boardgames. Contact Sorcha Nic Amhalai at:

saoili@gmail.com.

TOWERCON: 18th-20th March, at the Norbreck Castle Hotel, Blackpool. A full weekend of role-play, card, and board game events. Membership is £110. This covers entry to the convention and twin room accommodation (with four-course dinner and breakfast) on Friday and Saturday nights. TowerCon, 13 Wembly Road, Thornton Cleveleys, Lancs., FY5 4JN.

www.towercon.co.uk

enquiries@towercon.co.uk

BAYCON: Thursday 31st March to 3.00pm Sunday 3rd April, at the Exeter Court Hotel, Kennford. The main event of the weekend is the *Victor Ludorum* tournament to find the UK National Board Games Champion. An account is kept of all games played throughout the convention and the player with the best overall score receives the Victor Ludorum Trophy. See website for details of cost etc.

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

glen@baycon.co.uk



11th - 13th March 2005

The Old Contentible's 50th

or Consummation Too?

West Retford Hotel, Notts.

You are cordially invited to join Jerry Elsmore in celebrating his 50th Birthday for a weekend of playing games.

All sorts of games: Boardgames, Cardboardbox Simulation Games, Fluffy games, Free-form games, Lawn Games, Matrix games, Roleplay games and Silly games. There will even be a dollop of Wargames thrown in for good measure.

Even if you don't know Jerry, please feel free to turn up and play. All gamers are welcome, especially those who play, sing or dance in the English Tradition...

Join Consummation@yahoogroups.co.uk for further details and booking forms.

Galactic View

GV is a list of (mostly) European PBM/PdEM 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 Intio Games , PO Box 605, Bromley, Kent BR2 0YQ WEB: www.plm4sports.com EM: danny.mcconnell@virgin.net TEL: 020 8325 2448	Adams, David WEB: www.throneworld.com/lords/foie04/index.html WEB: www.throneworld.com/lords/foie10/index.html EM: davster@aol.net TEL: 020 8325 2448	Advanced Gaming Enterprises , POB 214949, Sacramento, CA 95821, USA WEB: www.ageofjfin.com	Agema Publications , 3 Workshop Rd, Off Carlton Rd, Sneinton, Nottingham NG3 2BA WEB: go.to/agema EM: agema@lineone.net	Ancient Guardian Enterprises , WEB: www.agegames.com EM: gm@agegames.com	Andrews, Colin , 26 Brown Edge Road, Holts, Oldham, OL4 5QG Arnot, Steven, WEB: www.sjastystems.co.uk/ EM: gl3@notrally.co.uk	Austerlitz PBM WEB: www.austerlitz.biz EM: gm@austerlitz.biz	Baird, Phil , 930 NE 63d Ave, Portland, OR 97213, USA WEB: www.throneworld.com/lords/foie11/index.html EM: philphaird@sprintmail.com	Briny En Gardel (Terry Crook) , 11 Laurel Close, Burnistone, Scarborough, N.Yorks, YO13 0JQ WEB: www.brinyengarde.co.uk EM: horseguards@brinyengarde.co.uk	Burrows, Pete, Buzzwack PBM , 8 Magnolia Court, Beeston, Nottingham, NG9 3LG WEB: www.buzzwackpbm.freemove.co.uk EM: pete@buzzwackpbm.freemove.co.uk TEL/FAX: 0115 9224901 (pre 10pm)	Central de Jocs SL , C/Númancia no. 112-116, 08029 - Barcelona, Spain WEB: www.centraldejocs.com EM: torrisnips@mentia.net EM: hoptop@cpp.com	Chaos Trail , 8 Osier Close, Ely, Cambs., CB7 4AY WEB: www.chaostrail.com EM: (Simon.Williams)@chaostrail.com	Clay, David , 20 Malden Close, Cramlington, Northumberland, NE23 6AY WEB: www.willowpenwar.co.uk EM: dave@willowpenwar.co.uk EM: www.clayton-le-woods.com	Crastworld , 4 Bartleyfield, Clayton-le-Woods, Preston, Lancs., PR5 8JQ WEB: www.crasworld.com EM: andy@crasworld.com TEL: (Andy Smith) 01772 334878	CSPP , Alfred-Bucherstr. 63, 53115 Bonn, Germany WEB: www.the-ashes-of-empire.de (German) WEB: http://home.online.de/home/ashes_of_empire/ashes2.htm (English) EM: hoptop@cpp.com	Dark Wolf Games , BCM Darkwolf, London, WC1N 3XX WEB: www.darkwolf.ie EM: pbm@darkwolf.ie	Dracs Games , 21 Chipperfield Drive, Kingswood, Bristol BS15 4DP TEL: (Kaini) 070 2099 WORG (0674), FAX: 0870 052 7521 WEB: www.dracsgames.co.uk EM: derck@dracsgames.co.uk TEL: (Derek Rainey) 0117 9607173 (9am-6pm Mon-Fri)	Dreamworld Games WEB: www.lovelisoccer.com / www.realityracing.com TEL: 01380 81522	Dunks, Antony , Fur Horizon, Sark, Guernsey, GY9 0SE WEB: www.sark.net/~sark EM: vort@sark.net	EMG EMG WEB: www.islandnet.com/~d-green/en/emg.htm WEB: fallfrodo.com	Entertainment Age Entertainment WEB: www.entertainment.com	Entertainment Plus More Games , PO Box 2578, Appleton, WI 54912, USA WEB: www.epmgames.com EM: d@epmgames.com	Evans, Paul , 150 Aylsham Drive, Uxbridge UB10 8UF EM: twjo@pevans.co.uk EM: paul@wanadoo.nl
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Neutral Zone , 33 Rockall Close, Haverhill, Suffolk, CB9 0LU WEB: www.neutral-zone-football-pbm.co.uk EM: info@neutral-zone-football-pbm.co.uk TEL: 01440 713124 (7pm - 9pm)	Oates, Jason , 6 St. Georges Rd, Dorchester, Dorset DT1 1PA EM: jason.oates@virgin.net TEL/FAX: 01305 251451	Olympia Games , 6 Sandy Lane, Bramcote, Nottingham, NG9 3GS EM: pbm.dexter@talk21.com TEL/FAX: (Trevor Dexter) 0115 9436197	Pagoda Games , PO Box 5155, Tamworth, Staffs B77 4QQ WEB: www.pagodagames.co.uk EM: orders@pagodagames.co.uk	Mark Palin , Claussen, 5 Burford, Brookside, Telford, Shropshire, TF3 1LQ TEL/FAX: (Keith Barnham): 01827 703251 EM: mp004@9903@blueyonder.co.uk
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Pinder, Mark , 139 Nelson Way, Lacey Acres, Gimsby, S Humberside DN34 5UJ WEB: http://groups.msn.com/elvaria EM: Markpinder@aol.com TEL: 01472 753430	Play-by-Electron Games WEB: www.pbegames.com EM: moderator@pbegames.com	Quixel Games , Quixel Games Ghr, Am Pannofen 7, 47608 Geldern, Germany EM: quixelgames@online.de	Rebus Games , 70 Greenfield Crescent, Brighton, BN1 8HJ EM: dontlucan@zoom.co.uk	Received Wisdom , 9 Oundle Road, Aylsham, Peterborough PE7 3UP WEB: www.receivewisdom.org EM: stu@receivewisdom.org
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Zine Listings

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

Abyssinian Prince , Jim Burgess, 664 Smith Street, Providence, RI 02908-4327, USA (Email: burgess@world.std.com)	Carnel Robert Rees , 10a Eldon Grove, London, NW3 5PT EM: carnel@talk21.com (www.geocities.com/shudder/fjc/camel)	Devolution , Tony Robbins, Lincoln House, Cretaton Rd, Hollowell, Northants, NN6 8RP (Email: tony@hollowell.plus.com)	Diplomacy 2000 , www.lancedal.demon.co.uk/dip2000/ Flights of Fancy , Philip Honeybone, Email: phil@melly98.freemove.co.uk For Whom The Die Rolls , 14 Stepnells, Marsworth, Nr Tring, Herts., HP23 4NQ (Email: Keith@Thomassons.com)	Mission From God , John Harrington, 1 Churchbury Close, Enfield, Middlesex, EN1 3UW (www.fbgames.co.uk)	Ode , John Marsden, 91 Westwood Avenue, Lowestoft, Suffolk, NR33 9RS (Email: John@ode.online.net)	off-the-shelf , Tom Howell, 365 Storm King Road, Port Angeles, WA 98363, USA (Email: off-the-shelf@olympus.net)	Psychopath , www.psychozine.co.uk (Web publication only.)	Rhein-Neckar-Zine , (German language), Lukas Kautzsch, An der Rosswald 18a, 76229 Karlsruhe, Germany, (Email: lukas@oberloft.de)	S.O.B. , Chris Hassler, 2000 S. Armour Ct. La Habra, CA90631 USA (Email: chassler@adelphia.net)	Strangitude , Paul Webby, Topfereihe 4, 38259 Salzgitter, Germany (Email: jweibley@aol.com)	Strangitude , Paul Webby, Flat 2, 432 Birmingham Rd, Wyle Green, Sutton Coldfield, B72 1YJ (Email: strangezine@lineone.net)	To Win Just Once , Paul Evans, 180 Aylsham Drive, Uxbridge UB10 8UF (Email: twjo@pevans.co.uk)	Variable Pig , Jim Reader, Vredelanstraat 20, 3633 EC, Vreeland, NETHERLANDS (Email: cj.reader@wanadoo.nl)
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HOW TO READ THE GALACTIC VIEW TABLES

Process shows if the game is run by computer (C), human (H) or mixed (M). The **Duration** of the game is shown by O (Open-ended) or F (Finite). **GM** is the GM's code shown in our listing of European & Web-based firms. **Medium** shows whether a game is available via email (e), paper (p) or web-based play (w). Language is also indicated here where a game is offered other than in English. (G) German.

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

Free Turns - many GMs will give you a number of free turns at the start of the game

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

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

Flagship Ref. shows the issue of Flagship where you can find an article describing the game. • indicates a 'Euro-friendly' game: deadlines at least two weeks apart and prices for Continental players not more than 30% above those listed here.

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

All prices are generally for the UK and are given in £'s except where noted. Non-UK European players should note that rates are often about 25% higher than

for UK players. If in doubt, contact the GMs.

Game	Process	Type	G.N	Medium	Start-up	Free Turns	Turn Fee	Xtra £	Flag/£
Absolute Fantasy	MO	Power: Fantasy	SIL		£15.00	2	£4.00	-	9
Absolute Heroes	MO	RPG: Superhero	JAD	p	£4.50	2	£4.50	(b)	98
Absolute Power 2	MO	Power: Fantasy	SIL	p	£20.00	2	£5.00	-	98
Adventure Kings	CF	Wargame: Fantasy	PAG	p	£5.00	0	£2.50	-	35, 72-74, 88
Adventurers Guild	CO	Adventure	EM	e	Free	1	£10	-	103
Alamaze	CF	Wargame: Fantasy	PAG	p	£15.00	1	£3.50	-	71, 80
Antares	CF	Wargame: Fantasy	AGM	p	£6.00	0	£3.50	-	-
Ancient Battles	MF	Wargame: Historical	OAT	e, p	£4.00	2	£3.25	£1/month	58
Ancient Empires	MF	Power: Historical	Sci-Fi	e, p	£4.00	2	£3.25	-	-
Ancient Empires 2	MF	Power: Historical	Sci-Fi	e, p	£4.00	2	£3.25	-	-
Asides of Empire	MO	Power: Fantasy	SIL	e	£2.50	0	£2.50	(c)	90
Asides of Empire 2	MO	Power: Fantasy	SIL	e	£2.50	0	£2.50	(d)	90
Asides of Empire 3	MO	Power: Fantasy	SIL	e	£2.50	0	£2.50	(e)	90
Asides of Empire 4	MO	Power: Fantasy	SIL	e	£2.50	0	£2.50	(f)	90
Asides of Empire 5	MO	Power: Fantasy	SIL	e	£2.50	0	£2.50	(g)	90
Asides of Empire 6	MO	Power: Fantasy	SIL	e	£2.50	0	£2.50	(h)	90
Asides of Empire 7	MO	Power: Fantasy	SIL	e	£2.50	0	£2.50	(i)	90
Asides of Empire 8	MO	Power: Fantasy	SIL	e	£2.50	0	£2.50	(j)	90
Asides of Empire 9	MO	Power: Fantasy	SIL	e	£2.50	0	£2.50	(k)	90
Asides of Empire 10	MO	Power: Fantasy	SIL	e	£2.50	0	£2.50	(l)	90
Asides of Empire 11	MO	Power: Fantasy	SIL	e	£2.50	0	£2.50	(m)	90
Asides of Empire 12	MO	Power: Fantasy	SIL	e	£2.50	0	£2.50	(n)	90
Asides of Empire 13	MO	Power: Fantasy	SIL	e	£2.50	0	£2.50	(o)	90
Asides of Empire 14	MO	Power: Fantasy	SIL	e	£2.50	0	£2.50	(p)	90
Asides of Empire 15	MO	Power: Fantasy	SIL	e	£2.50	0	£2.50	(q)	90
Asides of Empire 16	MO	Power: Fantasy	SIL	e	£2.50	0	£2.50	(r)	90
Asides of Empire 17	MO	Power: Fantasy	SIL	e	£2.50	0	£2.50	(s)	90
Asides of Empire 18	MO	Power: Fantasy	SIL	e	£2.50	0	£2.50	(t)	90
Asides of Empire 19	MO	Power: Fantasy	SIL	e	£2.50	0	£2.50	(u)	90
Asides of Empire 20	MO	Power: Fantasy	SIL	e	£2.50	0	£2.50	(v)	90
Asides of Empire 21	MO	Power: Fantasy	SIL	e	£2.50	0	£2.50	(w)	90
Asides of Empire 22	MO	Power: Fantasy	SIL	e	£2.50	0	£2.50	(x)	90
Asides of Empire 23	MO	Power: Fantasy	SIL	e	£2.50	0	£2.50	(y)	90
Asides of Empire 24	MO	Power: Fantasy	SIL	e	£2.50	0	£2.50	(z)	90
Asides of Empire 25	MO	Power: Fantasy	SIL	e	£2.50	0	£2.50	(aa)	90
Asides of Empire 26	MO	Power: Fantasy	SIL	e	£2.50	0	£2.50	(ab)	90
Asides of Empire 27	MO	Power: Fantasy	SIL	e	£2.50	0	£2.50	(ac)	90
Asides of Empire 28	MO	Power: Fantasy	SIL	e	£2.50	0	£2.50	(ad)	90
Asides of Empire 29	MO	Power: Fantasy	SIL	e	£2.50	0	£2.50	(ae)	90
Asides of Empire 30	MO	Power: Fantasy	SIL	e	£2.50	0	£2.50	(af)	90
Asides of Empire 31	MO	Power: Fantasy	SIL	e	£2.50	0	£2.50	(ag)	90
Asides of Empire 32	MO	Power: Fantasy	SIL	e	£2.50	0	£2.50	(ah)	90
Asides of Empire 33	MO	Power: Fantasy	SIL	e	£2.50	0	£2.50	(ai)	90
Asides of Empire 34	MO	Power: Fantasy	SIL	e	£2.50	0	£2.50	(aj)	90
Asides of Empire 35	MO	Power: Fantasy	SIL	e	£2.50	0	£2.50	(ak)	90
Asides of Empire 36	MO	Power: Fantasy	SIL	e	£2.50	0	£2.50	(al)	90
Asides of Empire 37	MO	Power: Fantasy	SIL	e	£2.50	0	£2.50	(am)	90
Asides of Empire 38	MO	Power: Fantasy	SIL	e	£2.50	0	£2.50	(an)	90
Asides of Empire 39	MO	Power: Fantasy	SIL	e	£2.50	0	£2.50	(ao)	90
Asides of Empire 40	MO	Power: Fantasy	SIL	e	£2.50	0	£2.50	(ap)	90
Asides of Empire 41	MO	Power: Fantasy	SIL	e	£2.50	0	£2.50	(aq)	90
Asides of Empire 42	MO	Power: Fantasy	SIL	e	£2.50	0	£2.50	(ar)	90
Asides of Empire 43	MO	Power: Fantasy	SIL	e	£2.50	0	£2.50	(as)	90
Asides of Empire 44	MO	Power: Fantasy	SIL	e	£2.50	0	£2.50	(at)	90
Asides of Empire 45	MO	Power: Fantasy	SIL	e	£2.50	0	£2.50	(au)	90
Asides of Empire 46	MO	Power: Fantasy	SIL	e	£2.50	0	£2.50	(av)	90
Asides of Empire 47	MO	Power: Fantasy	SIL	e	£2.50	0	£2.50	(aw)	90
Asides of Empire 48	MO	Power: Fantasy	SIL	e	£2.50	0	£2.50	(ax)	90
Asides of Empire 49	MO	Power: Fantasy	SIL	e	£2.50	0	£2.50	(ay)	90
Asides of Empire 50	MO	Power: Fantasy	SIL	e	£2.50	0	£2.50	(az)	90
Asides of Empire 51	MO	Power: Fantasy	SIL	e	£2.50	0	£2.50	(ba)	90
Asides of Empire 52	MO	Power: Fantasy	SIL	e	£2.50	0	£2.50	(bb)	90
Asides of Empire 53	MO	Power: Fantasy	SIL	e	£2.50	0	£2.50	(bc)	90
Asides of Empire 54	MO	Power: Fantasy	SIL	e	£2.50	0	£2.50	(bd)	90
Asides of Empire 55	MO	Power: Fantasy	SIL	e	£2.50	0	£2.50	(be)	90
Asides of Empire 56	MO	Power: Fantasy	SIL	e	£2.50	0	£2.50	(bf)	90
Asides of Empire 57	MO	Power: Fantasy	SIL	e	£2.50	0	£2.50	(bg)	90
Asides of Empire 58	MO	Power: Fantasy	SIL	e	£2.50	0	£2.50	(bh)	90
Asides of Empire 59	MO	Power: Fantasy	SIL	e	£2.50	0	£2.50	(bi)	90
Asides of Empire 60	MO	Power: Fantasy	SIL	e	£2.50	0	£2.50	(bj)	90
Asides of Empire 61	MO	Power: Fantasy	SIL	e	£2.50	0	£2.50	(bk)	90
Asides of Empire 62	MO	Power: Fantasy	SIL	e	£2.50	0	£2.50	(bl)	90
Asides of Empire 63	MO	Power: Fantasy	SIL	e	£2.50	0	£2.50	(bm)	90
Asides of Empire 64	MO	Power: Fantasy	SIL	e	£2.50	0	£2.50	(bn)	90
Asides of Empire 65	MO	Power: Fantasy	SIL	e	£2.50	0	£2.50	(bo)	90
Asides of Empire 66	MO	Power: Fantasy	SIL	e	£2.50	0	£2.50	(bp)	90
Asides of Empire 67	MO	Power: Fantasy	SIL	e	£2.50	0	£2.50	(bq)	90
Asides of Empire 68	MO	Power: Fantasy	SIL	e	£2.50	0	£2.50	(br)	90
Asides of Empire 69	MO	Power: Fantasy	SIL	e	£2.50	0	£2.50	(bs)	90
Asides of Empire 70	MO	Power: Fantasy	SIL	e	£2.50	0	£2.50	(bt)	90
Asides of Empire 71	MO	Power: Fantasy	SIL	e	£2.50	0	£2.50	(bu)	90
Asides of Empire 72	MO	Power: Fantasy	SIL	e	£2.50	0	£2.50	(bv)	90
Asides of Empire 73	MO	Power: Fantasy	SIL	e	£2.50	0	£2.50	(bw)	90
Asides of Empire 74	MO	Power: Fantasy	SIL	e	£2.50	0	£2.50	(bx)	90
Asides of Empire 75	MO	Power: Fantasy	SIL	e	£2.50	0	£2.50	(by)	90
Asides of Empire 76	MO	Power: Fantasy	SIL	e	£2.50	0	£2.50	(bz)	90
Asides of Empire 77	MO	Power: Fantasy	SIL	e	£2.50	0	£2.50	(ca)	90
Asides of Empire 78	MO	Power: Fantasy	SIL	e	£2.50	0	£2.50	(cb)	90
Asides of Empire 79	MO	Power: Fantasy	SIL	e	£2.50	0	£2.50	(cc)	90
Asides of Empire 80	MO	Power: Fantasy	SIL	e	£2.50	0	£2.50	(cd)	90
Asides of Empire 81	MO	Power: Fantasy	SIL	e	£2.50	0	£2.50	(ce)	90
Asides of Empire 82	MO	Power: Fantasy	SIL	e	£2.50	0	£2.50	(cf)	90
Asides of Empire 83	MO	Power: Fantasy	SIL	e	£2.50	0	£2.50	(cg)	90
Asides of Empire 84	MO	Power: Fantasy	SIL	e	£2.50	0	£2.50	(ch)	90
Asides of Empire 85	MO	Power: Fantasy	SIL	e	£2.50	0	£2.50	(ci)	90
Asides of Empire 86	MO	Power: Fantasy	SIL	e	£2.50	0	£2.50	(cj)	90
Asides of Empire 87	MO	Power: Fantasy	SIL	e	£2.50	0	£2.50	(ck)	90
Asides of Empire 88	MO	Power: Fantasy	SIL	e	£2.50	0	£2.50	(cl)	90
Asides of Empire 89	MO	Power: Fantasy	SIL	e	£2.50	0	£2.50	(cm)	90
Asides of Empire 90	MO	Power: Fantasy	SIL	e	£2.50	0	£2.50	(cn)	90
Asides of Empire 91	MO	Power: Fantasy	SIL	e	£2.50	0	£2.50	(co)	90
Asides of Empire 92	MO	Power: Fantasy	SIL	e	£2.50	0	£2.50	(cp)	90
Asides of Empire 93	MO	Power: Fantasy	SIL	e	£2.50	0	£2.50	(cq)	90
Asides of Empire 94	MO	Power: Fantasy	SIL	e	£2.50	0	£2.50	(cr)	90
Asides of Empire 95	MO	Power: Fantasy	SIL	e	£2.50	0	£2.50	(cs)	90
Asides of Empire 96	MO	Power: Fantasy	SIL	e	£2.50	0	£2.50	(ct)	90
Asides of Empire 97	MO	Power: Fantasy	SIL	e	£2.50	0	£2.50	(cu)	90
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Asides of Empire 100	MO	Power: Fantasy	SIL	e	£2.50	0	£2.50	(cx)	90
Asides of Empire 101	MO	Power: Fantasy	SIL	e	£2.50	0	£2.50	(cy)	90
Asides of Empire 102	MO	Power: Fantasy	SIL	e	£2.50	0	£2.50	(cz)	90
Asides of Empire 103	MO	Power: Fantasy	SIL	e	£2.50	0	£2.50	(da)	90
Asides of Empire 104	MO	Power: Fantasy	SIL	e	£2.50	0	£2.50	(db)	90
Asides of Empire 105	MO	Power: Fantasy	SIL	e	£2.50	0	£2.50	(dc)	90
Asides of Empire 106	MO	Power: Fantasy	SIL	e	£2.50	0	£2.50	(dd)	90
Asides of Empire 107	MO	Power: Fantasy	SIL	e	£2.50	0	£2.50	(de)	90
Asides of Empire 108	MO	Power: Fantasy	SIL	e	£2.50	0	£2.50	(df)	90
Asides of Empire 109	MO	Power: Fantasy	SIL	e	£2.50	0	£2.50	(dg)	90
Asides of Empire 110	MO	Power: Fantasy	SIL	e	£2.50	0	£2.50	(dh)	90
Asides of Empire 111	MO	Power: Fantasy	SIL	e	£2.50	0	£2.50	(di)	90
Asides of Empire 112	MO	Power: Fantasy	SIL	e	£2.50	0	£2.50	(dj)	90
Asides of Empire 113	MO	Power: Fantasy	SIL	e	£2.50	0	£2.50	(dk)	90
Asides of Empire 114	MO	Power: Fantasy	SIL	e	£2.50	0	£2.50	(dl)	90
Asides of Empire 115	MO	Power: Fantasy	SIL	e	£2.50	0	£2.50	(dm)	90
Asides of Empire 116	MO	Power: Fantasy	SIL	e	£2.50	0	£2.50	(dn)	90
Asides of Empire 117	MO	Power: Fantasy	SIL	e	£2.50	0	£2.50	(do)	90
Asides of Empire 118	MO	Power: Fantasy	SIL	e	£2.50	0	£2.50	(dp)	90
Asides of Empire 119	MO	Power: Fantasy	SIL	e	£2.50	0	£2.50	(dq)	90
Asides of Empire 120	MO	Power: Fantasy	SIL	e	£2.50	0	£2.50	(dr)	90
Asides of Empire 121	MO	Power: Fantasy	SIL	e	£2.50	0	£2.50	(ds)	90
Asides of Empire 122	MO	Power: Fantasy	SIL	e	£2.50	0	£2.50	(dt)	90
Asides of Empire 123	MO	Power: Fantasy	SIL	e	£2.50	0	£2.50	(du)	90
Asides of Empire 124	MO	Power: Fantasy	SIL	e	£2.50	0	£2.50	(dv)	90
Asides of Empire 125	MO	Power: Fantasy	SIL	e	£2.50	0	£2.50	(dw)	90
Asides of Empire 126	MO	Power: Fantasy	SIL	e	£2.50	0	£2.50	(dx)	90
Asides of Empire 127	MO	Power: Fantasy	SIL	e	£2.50	0	£2.50	(dy)	90
Asides of Empire 128	MO	Power: Fantasy	SIL	e	£2.50	0	£2.50	(dz)	90
Asides of Empire 129	MO	Power: Fantasy	SIL	e	£2.50	0	£2.50	(ea)	90
Asides of Empire 130	MO	Power: Fantasy	SIL	e	£2.50	0	£2.50	(eb)	90
Asides of Empire 131	MO	Power: Fantasy	SIL	e	£2.50	0	£2.50	(ec)	90
Asides of Empire 132	MO	Power: Fantasy	SIL	e	£2.50	0	£2.50	(ed)	90
Asides of Empire 133	MO	Power: Fantasy	SIL	e	£2.50	0	£2.50	(ee)	90
Asides of Empire 134	MO	Power: Fantasy	SIL	e	£2.50	0	£2.50	(ef)	90
Asides of Empire 135	MO	Power: Fantasy	SIL	e	£2.50	0	£2.50	(eg)	90
Asides of Empire 136	MO	Power: Fantasy	SIL	e	£2.50	0	£2.50	(eh)	90
Asides of Empire 137	MO	Power: Fantasy	SIL	e	£2.50	0	£2.50	(ei)	90
Asides of Empire 138	MO	Power: Fantasy	SIL	e	£2.50	0	£2.50	(ej)	90
Asides of Empire 139	MO	Power: Fantasy	SIL	e	£2.50	0	£2.50	(ek)	90
Asides of Empire 140	MO	Power: Fantasy	SIL	e	£2.50	0	£2.50	(el)	90
Asides of Empire 141	MO	Power: Fantasy	SIL	e	£2.50	0	£2.50	(em)	90
Asides of Empire 142	MO	Power: Fantasy	SIL	e	£2.50	0	£2.50	(en)	90
Asides of Empire 143	MO	Power: Fantasy	SIL	e	£2.50	0	£2.50	(eo)	90
Asides of Empire 144	MO	Power: Fantasy	SIL	e	£2.50	0	£2.5		

C-O	Heroic Fantasy	CRA	Adventure	FBI	5	0	40	
C-O	High Seas	CRA	RPG: Pirate	e	p	\$5	\$3	-
C-O	Hooplun	M&M	Sport:Basketball	p	-	\$25.00	5	\$5.95
C-O	Horses&Horses:Epom	SCR	Sport: Horse-Racing	p	-	\$5.00	4	\$3.25
C-F	Imperial Expansion	EMG	Sci-Fi	e	-	\$10.00	2	\$3.00
C-O	IronKnights	PEG	Wargame: Fantasy	e	-	Free	0	Free
C-F	It's a Crime!	K&C	Misc: Crime	p	-	Free	2	\$2
C-F	Kickabout	SPE	Sport: Soccer	e	p	\$7.50	2	\$1.85
HF	Kings of Steel	WHS	Wargame: Fantasy	p	-	\$25.00	1	\$2.50
M-O	La Gloire du Roi	AGM	Power: Historical	e	p	\$5.00	0	\$6.00
HF	Lands of Elvria	PN	RPG: Fantasy	e	p	\$10.00	3	\$4.25
HF	Legends	HAQ	Wargame: Fantasy	e	p	\$20.00	1	\$3.70
C-F	Legends	SSV	Wargame: Fantasy	e	p	?	?	5 Euro+
M-O	LoE: 1	HAR	Power: Historical	e	p	?	?	?
M-O	LoE: 4	LLO	Power: Historical	e	?	?	?	?
M-O	LoE: 10	ADA	Power: Historical	e	?	?	?	?
M-O	LoE: 11	BAI	Power: Historical	e	?	?	?	?
C-F	Medieval Empires	SQF	War: Historical	e	p	\$5	3	\$2.00
C-F	Medieval Warlords	HAQ	Wargame: Fantasy	e	p	Free	3	Free
C-F	Middle Earth FBM	HCN	Wargame: Fantasy	e	p	\$10.00	2	\$4.50
M-O	Middle Earth FBM	RCW	Wargame: Fantasy	e	p	?	?	?
M-O	Mighty Heroes	WHS	RPG: Superhero	w	-	\$29.90 a year	0	n/a
C-F	Mighty Oaks	WHS	Wargame?	e	-	Free	0	Free
C-F	Monks	EMG	Sci-Fi	e	-	\$8	0	Free
C-F	Monks&Island	K&C	Sport: Soccer	p	-	Free	0	\$2.10
C-F	Monsters!	PBE	Wargame: Fantasy	e	-	Free	0	Free
M-O	Moosier	HAY	Tribal	e	p	\$10	2	\$3.00
C-O	MoriaMaximus	MAD	Sport: Fictional	e	p	\$10.00	2	\$3.00
C-O	Napoleonic Battles	AGM	Power: Historical	p	-	\$6.00	0	\$3.50
MF	Nightfall	CRA	RPG: Horror	e	p	\$25.00	5	\$5.95
C-O	Neural Zone	NEU	Sport: American Football	e	w	\$3.50	0	\$1.40
C-F	Nuclear Destruction	FBI	Wargame	e	-	\$5	0	\$2.50
MF	Panzergruppe II	AGM	Wargame	p	-	\$5.00	0	\$3.50
C-O	Peldere	CRA	RPG: Fantasy	e	p	\$25.95	5	\$5.95
C-O	Phantasm	CRA	Adventure	e	-	\$20.95	10	\$2.95
C-O	Phantasm	K&C	Sci-Fi	e	p	Free	?	-
C-O	Play On	MC	Sport: Aussie Rules	e	p	AUS\$10	?	AUS\$5.50
HF	Pop Parts	RCW	Economic: Pop Music	e	p	Free	0	\$9.99 per year
MF	Primus Inter Pares	INT	Power: Historical	e	p	\$10.00	1	\$6.00/month
C-F	Pro Soccer	OLY	Sport: Soccer	e	p	Free	1	\$1.60
C-O	Puma	BUR	Sport: Soccer	e	p	\$4.00	5	\$1.00
C-O	Quest	K&C	Adventure	e	-	Free	0	\$2.20
C-O	Quest Online	K&C	Adventure	e	-	Free	0	\$2.00
C-O	Reality Grand Prix	MC	Sport: Motor Racing	w	-	Free	0	\$2.00
M-O	Reality Racing	DRE	Sport: Horse Racing	p	-	\$5	0	\$2.90
M-O	Renaissance	XAN	Power: Historical	p	-	\$5	0	\$2.50
M-O	Riddle of the Sands	SIL	Power: Fantasy	p	-	\$20.00	10	\$2.00
C-O	Riftlords	FBI	Sci-Fi	e	-	No	3	\$4
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C-F	Serim Rai	MC	Wargame: Fantasy	p	-	\$5.00	3	\$2.00
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C-F	Speculate II	SQF	Economic	p	-	\$5.00	3	\$5.00 for 4
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C-O	Tartarus	FAR	Misc: Robots	e	-	Free	0	Free
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