Issue 113, April/May '05 ISSN 1743-6788

FLAGSHIP

THE MAGAZINE FOR GAMERS

Gaming news, views and reviews ...

Turn-Based Games, Boardgames, Roleplaying, Online & Computer Games, Conventions

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.

You've seen the movie, now dare you take the next step and lead your forces in conquest of Middle-earth?

Can you make the difference between victory and defeat? Contact us to find out.

Special Introductory offer for new players

Play a *Full Game* for only £10

Middle Earth Games
340 North Road, Cardiff, CF14 3BP, UK
tel: (029) 2091 3359

www.MiddleEarthGames.com
me@MiddleEarthGames.com

Middle Earth Games
PO Box 680155, Marietta, GA 30068-0003, USA
tel.: (770) 579 6813

FLAGSHIP

#113, April / May '05

Editorial Team
Editor: *Carol Mulholland* carol@flagshipmagazine.com
Consultant Editors: *Nick Palmer, Mo Holkar*
Assistant Editor: *Colin Forbes*
colin@flagshipmagazine.com
Regular Correspondents: *Paul Evans, Lisa Fordham, 'Globetrotter', Eric Ridley*
Webmaster: *Tom Fyfe* tom@flagshipmagazine.com
Advertising Manager: *Colin Forbes*

Founding Editors
Nicholas Palmer MP & Chris Harvey

Contributors
House Artist*: Larry Deyell*
Cover Art*: © Rick McDowell*
Illustrations: *William McAusland (p38). .All other artwork copyright free, © Larry Deyell or © the proprietors of the game or games mentioned in the accompanying article.*
Articles & Reviews*: John Bell, Mike Dean, Hans Jørgen Eck, Colin Forbes, Mike Lay, Bob McLain, Bill Morris, Carol Mulholland, Dave Panchyk ... plus our regular correspondents.*

SUBS, QUERIES & CONTRIBUTIONS
Flagship, 14 The Hollows, Exmouth, Devon, EX8 1QT
(01395) 276632 (9am-6pm)
carol@flagshipmagazine.com

ADVERTISING: *2A Guinea St, Exeter, EX1 1BS*
Tel: 01392 420582
colin@flagshipmagazine.com

Copyright © 2005 TimePatterns PBM Games.
Articles submitted to Flagship will be assumed to grant copyright for first publication and non-exclusive republication by Flagship, unless otherwise agreed.
The views expressed by contributors do not necessarily represent the views of Flagship, TimePatterns PBM Games or any of the editorial staff.

Published by: TimePatterns PBM Games
Printed by: Excel Printing: 351 Lichfield Road, Aston, Birmingham, B67ST

Contributions are always welcome!
Copy deadline for #114 is May 9th.

IN THIS ISSUE ...

News
Newsdesk 4
Meets&Conventions 48

Reviews
DragonWars 10
Neuland 12
Nintendo DS 17
Fall of Rome 23

Strategy, Design, Diaries and Guides
Star Fleet Warlord: the Midgame 18
Austerlitz Nations: Denmark 34

Featured Articles
Turning Digital 14
Games Workshop at 30 16
A Peer at the Past 20
Pevans' Perspective 22
On Screen 28
Running a Games Website 30
The Ridley Files 32
The Fordham Folio 36
Prisms from Another Galaxy 38
MUDs to MMORPGs 40

Regular Departments
Report from the Bridge *(Editorial)* 3
Editorial Comment 4
Advertisers' Index 8
The Mighty Pen / Feedback *(Letters)* 41
Rumours from the Front *(Your opinions on games)* 43
Games Shop Listings 48
Galactic View (*TBG listings*) 49

www.flagshipmagazine.com

Report from the Bridge

WELCOME to *Flagship* #113, which we hope you'll enjoy as a source of inspiration for all your games-playing. With the arrival of spring, it's time to be thinking of new campaigns.

We've plenty of reviews, including two for the new and very different turn-based games, Fall of Rome and DragonWars, and one for the new boardgame, Neuland. We've advice for success in the long-running science fiction game, StarFleet Warlord, and we resume our popular series, Turning Digital: it's heartening to see the vigour of this medium for playing games. Our columnists present us all with their lively opinions about games-playing in general as well as the particular games that they've enjoyed recently. We include some controversial discussion of our own approach to covering games, and, as always, comments from players about the games that they've been playing in our *Rumours from the Front* section.

Of course, we usually concentrate on games for experienced players, because that's who you are. However, we also mention games that are suitable for novices and youngsters. Igadi's Universe, for instance, features appealing pets and we review the new Nintendo DS, which will soon be a must-have for the young-at-heart. I was delighted to see that one of the British broadsheets was offering ten of these as prizes: perhaps consoles are growing respectable in the media?

Remember to use our pages as a way to draw your friends and family into gaming: their tastes may differ from your own, but if you look for a game that you reckon will suit them and recommend this, then the day will come when they'll thank you for it.

We can all remember the fun of playing a good game for the first time. I hope that you'll find such games in these pages.

Carol

Editorial Comment

THERE'S NO shortage of material for this issue, and I think that you'll find that *Flagship* #113 has plenty of indepth articles as well as a broad coverage of different types of game.

There are still new turn-based games for us to discuss, with reviews of **Fall of Rome** and **DragonWars** in this issue and one of **Kosumi** to follow shortly. We're also continuing Colin Forbes' overview of games on the web, **Turning Digital**. So there are still plenty of new turn-based games to play, as well as the old favourites, and there are still opportunities for new designers. The best commercial games now have cool digital graphics, but it's still possible to present new games at a low cost, and most of these have a perfectly adequate appearance. Take a look at Mike Dean's article about running games through a webzine, for example.

However, there aren't enough turn-based games to fill a magazine exclusively, like there used to be. I know PBM and love it; indeed, if I ever get round to organizing my time, I'll be running my own game one day. But I believe that I've made the right decision, to continue *Flagship* with an extended coverage of other types of game, rather than to shrink down to a photocopied A5 PBM-only zine. I like smart presentation and I like all games in general. Above all, let's admit it, I admire games players: as a group, you are lively, creative and unconventional individuals. We don't have to agree with each other, far from it, but if we all love games, we've a lot in common.

One snag about going for smart presentation, of course, is that it may make us look far more corporate than we really are. No, we're not on nodding turns with mighty newspaper proprietors, and we seek to cover our costs rather than make a fortune. Our aim is to represent you all, as games players. As you'll see from this issue's *Mighty Pen*, not everyone likes the direction we're taking. While I can sympathise with this attitude, I'm confident that I'm doing my best. But are we spreading ourselves too thin? It's up to you to let us know (preferably before ending your subscriptions!): we can always focus more specifically if that's what you really want. Write to us. Write *for* us.

Since Globetrotter wrote his article suggesting more online games should be available to buy and download without the need for a visit to the shops or a retailer such as *Amazon* or *www.play.com*, the latest expansion to **Dark Age of Camelot** has been made available for purchase and download. Nice to see our regular columnists being ahead of the game.

It's good to have our website up and running now. We have found that between six and seven thousand people are visiting our website each month (as opposed to individual hits), and our busiest day to date has been Sunday, February 20th. We know that the site needs a lot more work, especially with regard to putting up all our old material. We'll continue to do this, though it's a time-consuming job. Of course, barring some unforeseen emergency, we're not planning to switch *Flagship* itself to website presentation: I'm enough of an old fogey to prefer paper production. Do take a look at our website if you haven't done so already. And send us your reactions: we always welcome constructive criticism.

www.flagshipmagazine.com

Carol

Newsdesk Turn Based

WARGAMES

KJC Games announce that they've set up a new game of **Warlord**, #42, exclusively for experienced players. The game has just started but KJC have a couple of standby Empires available, so if you're an experienced player of Warlord who would like to take one of these, contact KJC's Cathy.

KJC also have a few standby gangs available in game 46 of **It's A Crime**, which is still in its early stages. Note that this is a game for novices rather than the experienced players, so if you are a more experienced player you should apply to join game #47, which will be ready soon.

www.kjcgames.com

Advanced Gaming Enterprises are still running **CTF2187**, the game of battling Bots. We reviewed the UK version of this game, which is no longer available, in issue #47, so it's good to see that it's still up and running from the States and that email service is available. It's possible to join games with varying conditions, like fast four-sided contests or standard two-sided contests. Check the website for details:

www.ageforfun.com

Doug Greening of *EMG* is developing a new game to add to the wargames that he already runs. **Empires of the Middle Sea**, which is nearing completion, is set around the Mediterranean some years after the death of Alexander, in 280 BC. New powers have arisen and are about to vie for territory, while Northern barbarians are conquering their way southwards. Doug's games are free, with donations gladly accepted.

http://members.shaw.ca/emg.pbm/emg.htm

News from *Supersonic Games*, have been developing a new program for their version of **Austerlitz**, which will allow colour 3d maps. They are also working on a variety of help programs for email players.

www.austerlitzpbem.com

ADVENTURE GAMES

A set of improvements to **Monster Island** has now been completed at *KJC Games*. Players will learn more about the improvements as they're introduced, but an early one is that all Monsters who are behind on their turns will be able to get unlimited catchup turns until they have caught up. There's a new GM for this game, David, who also works on **Quest**.

www.kjcgames.com

Life is never dull in *Madhouse*'s **DungeonWorld**, but its people now have a new danger to deal with: a Lord Of Death, the Reaper, who feeds on life, and who can assume many disguises by entering into a human being's body.

www.madcentral.com

ROLEPLAYING GAMES

A reader has sent us a couple of sample turns from *Jade Enterprises*' **Absolute Heroes**. This looks a good game for anyone interested in its superhero theme.

Turns come out every two weeks in the form of a newsletter, HeroWatch. Among the news items for June 20th in 2003 was an Attack of the Giant Purple Worms upon Hellpoint Prison, a new Anti-Crime Posse run by the superhero team Celtic Dawn, an attack

Newsdesk Turn Based

by supervillains on a horticultural company, a forest fire and clean-up work from two of the superhero teams after recent battles with super-villains. The turns also report on the activities of superheroes in action and training, and there are other news items including fashion news and applications for patents for the devices that particular superheroes have researched. There are a lot of these devices listed, but for examples readers may wish to consider Claws, Stun Arrows and the Super Gas Mask: all useful equipment in the face of super-villains!

jade.ent@ntlworld.com

FANTASY WARGAMES

Total Conquest has been taken over by an American firm and is being run by GM Justin Bunnell. The reason for the silence and the reduced game activity is that Justin is preparing a relaunch of Total Conquest and the new website is under contruction, although somewhat delayed. The game has not folded, but is being prepared for a re-launch. Justin says ' The website is being completely redone to make navigation and access to your kingdom easier and the client is being updated as well. We look forward to a great 2005.'

www.totalconquest.com

TRIBAL GAMES

Players who were disappointed to hear that **Crack of Doom** has closed in the UK will be interested to hear that the game is still being run by *Advanced Gaming Enterprises* in the States. It's a long-running game this, rather than one where victory can be achieved quickly, and player characters have plenty of decisions to make. In AGE's hands there are two game worlds, Panagea and Lorasia, and the attractive game newsletter covers both of these worlds.

www.ageforfun.com

SPORTS GAMES

A player in *Cleopatra Games*' **Postal American Football League (PAFL)** has replied to the query about it that we printed in last issue's *Newsdesk*: 'I have just seen your note on page 5 of Flagship 112. Chris [Sheehan] has definitely got PAFL up and running again, although he is only running two leagues (1 and 4). Both are running to a regular turn round and both have about 70% of the teams coached by players. I know Chris is happy to take new players for the un-coached teams, so I can't really understand why a query [from a would-be player] would not have received a reply. It would be worth having another go at contacting Chris as league 4 has just reached Superbowl so there will be a draft (in April) and then a new season. Chris is still running the game from the same address. Chris has made clear to players that he is now running PAFL as a hobby (hence only running two leagues - he hasn't time for more), and he is dropping the cost of playing to reflect this (from £54 to £40 for a season) as he says he now only wants to cover his costs.'

We're glad to hear that this long-running game is still going.

Here's an unusual racing game. **Snail Racing** from *Dreamworld Games* lives up to its name, by being based on the concept of computer-generated snails being chosen by the players and set to race. You have to judge what position your snail will achieve in any given race, knowing that it will have a certain ability and preferences for both distance and the lane it runs in. The game is internet-based, so you can watch your own snail run in a series of computer-generated movies: a neat idea!

www.dreamworldgames.co.uk

We've received *Dreamworld*'s newsletter for their football management game, **Logical Soccer**, which is called *The Soccer Gazette*. Neatly presented over eight A4 pages, this contains match reports, player profiles, the transfer list, an analysis of the Team of the Week and all sorts of other game-related information. It looks like the sort of news that any player of sports management games would enjoy:

www.logicalsoccer.com

KJC Games remind players in their football games **Extra Time** and **Extra Time: Chairman**, that it's now much easier to submit and receive turns by email, because they have been working very hard on updating this part of the game. Indeed, they're confident that anyone who looks at their website will be impressed by all the improvements that have been made. They also have plans for improving the game's mechanics, to make it 'the cheapest and most enjoyable football manager game available.' A season in Extra Time, playing by email, costs just £12.00, which is very reasonable. You can see a sample result sheet at:

www.kjcgames.com/extra/sampleturn.htm

FIRMS

Andrew Lloyd of *Ancient Guardian Enterprises* reports that he's currently working on an upgrade for his games, though play won't be suspended meanwhile in either **DragonLords** or **Medieval Warlords**.

www.agegames.com

Congratulations to *Constantine Xanthos* for reaching the 24th year of continuous play with his historical power game, **Renaissance**. What's more, some of the original players are still participating. This is quite an achievment for a mixed-moderated game. Furthermore, Constantine reports that, 'I am working on an interactive web-based version of Renaissance.' We send our best wishes for good progress with this.

cjxren@yahoo.com

Madhouse report that their Great Northern Pubmeet on the 25th-27th of February was so successful that they're releasing details of their Summer Minicon early, in good time for everyone to plan their attendance. It'll be held on 13th-14th August 2005: see our *Conventions* listing for further details.

www.madcentral.com

PERSONAL NEWS

On April the 2nd at the Matt Busby Sports Complex, Bellshill, Glasgow, our columnist **Eric Ridley**, under his wrestling name of 'Eric Canyon', will be challenging for the NWA Scotland Championship belt. The match will be held inside a *steel cage*, with the winner being the man who can escape the cage first.

We send him our very best wishes for this challenging contest. Eric has been asked several times 'who will win?', to which he can always confidently reply, 'the cage'.

TURN-BASED GAME FOR SALE

Chris Dempsey of *Spellbinder Games* reports that he's decided to concentrate on running the football game **Kickabout**, and so is offering the software to run **Bledian Diary** for sale. Bledian Diary has been running for some years now, as an updated successor to Spellbinder's Key's of Bled, which was one of the earliest of all UK PBM games. In Bledian Diary, players lead their tribes of people across the fantastic landscape of a mysterious planet, Bled. If you're seriously interested, contact Chris at:

Chris.spelbinder@btinternet.com

Newsdesk Boardgames

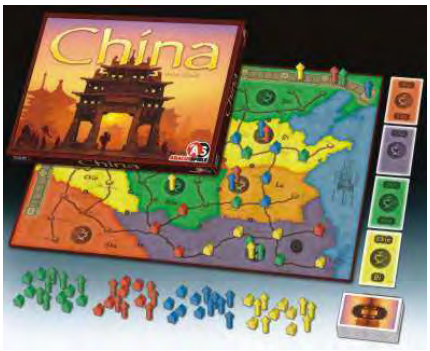
Our board gaming news is provided by our regular columnist, **Pevans**:

Many games players have a soft spot for the classic **Wildlife Adventure**. *Ravensburger* is publishing a new edition of the game, under its more recent name of **Expedition**, this year and, for once, Ravensburger UK will be producing an English version. Apart from the addition of a National Geographic logo on the box, the game doesn't seem to be significantly different from the original. Watch out for it in the shops later this year.

The latest game from designer Alan Ernstein and publisher *Hangman Games* is **Ars Mysteriorum**. Available from the beginning of April, the game's theme is alchemy. Players are apprentices, competing to gain approval from the various Masters and Princes by acquiring alchemical recipes. This is a resource management game with a clever bidding mechanism at its heart. It's also a complete departure from Ernstein's previous game, the strategy game of the Inca Empire, **Tahuantinsuyu**.

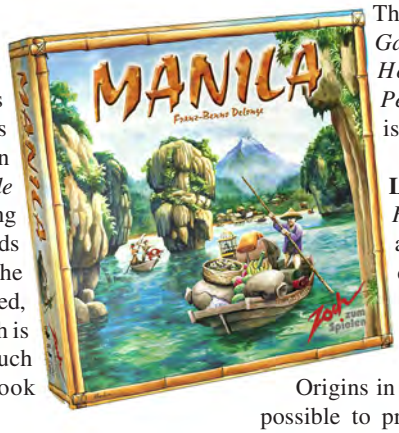
Quirky German publisher *2F Spiele* has expanded to four 'F's this year (picture right). Their new game is called **Fiese Freunde Fette Feten** (which means 'Mean Friends, Hot Parties', apparently) and is a collaboration between 2F main man Friedemann Friese and Marcel-André Casasola Merkle (designer of **Attika**, amongst others). Early reports describe this as a 21st century take on the Game of Life in Friese's own, inimitable style (expect green hair to feature somewhere). One to look out for.

As well as the card game **Louis XIV**, which previewed at Spiel last October, *alea* has a new game from Reiner Knizia this year. Called **Palazzo** (above), this is a bidding and set-collecting game with the theme of building a palace. Clearly it's not one of Knizia's deepest games, but it should be well worth trying. Rio Grande will be publishing English language editions of both games, so they should be readily accessible.



Web of Power (or Kardinal und König in the German edition) is one of my (Pevans') favourite games: it's a challenging strategy game that plays far more quickly than you expect. Designer Michael Schacht has come up with a revised edition called **China** (pictured above), which is being published by *Abacusspiele* (in German) and *Überplay* (in English). I can't wait for this one.

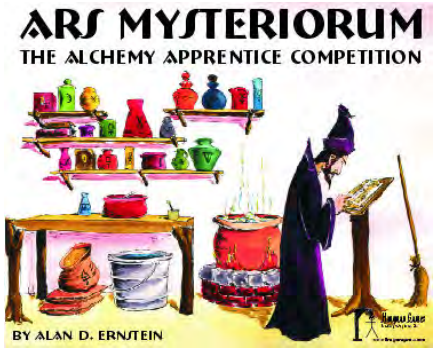
Hans im Glück has a Reiner Knizia game this year as well. This is **Der Turmbau zu Babel** (**Tower of Babel** is the title of the English version from *Rio Grande*), which is a race to construct the seven Wonders of the World, plus the Tower of Babel (no, I don't know why). It's a bidding game with one of Knizia's fiendishly clever scoring systems and is another one on the wish list. Coming from the same publishing duo is **Fjords** from Franz-Benno Delonge. This is a two-player territory-grabbing game with a Viking setting.



Another game designed by Delonge is **Manila**, which is published by *Zoch* (in German) and *Rio Grande* (in English). This is a betting game about getting goods safely shipped out from the port. There are dice involved, so it's not clear how much is down to luck and how much to planning. I shall look forward to finding out.

Hangman Games, publisher of **Tahuantinsuyu** (winner of the *Games Magazine 2004 Advanced Strategy Game of the Year* and finalist for the *International Gamers Awards' 2004 General Strategy Game of the Year*) is proud to announce the release of their latest game, **Ars Mysteriorum: The Alchemy Apprentice Competition**. The game is for three-five players and lasts 90-120 minutes.

In Ars Mysteriorum, each player participates in King Florim's Alchemy Apprentice Competition. As an apprentice, you will vie to see who can earn the most money by the end of the competion. You will barter favors for basic elements such as Brimstone, Verdigris, and Salt. You will use those elements not only to gain entrance into Masters' tents but to demonstrate to the Masters your ability to complete a recipe successfully. For an alchemist, they are simple recipes like turning lead into gold or sand into rubies. As you complete the recipes, they are added to your Recipe Book, and you are paid at the end of each day for the best combinations



of recipes. When the competition is over, the apprentice with the most money will be declared a new Master Alchemist.

The official release date for Ars Mysteriorum is April 1st, 2005 (no, this is not a joke). The game has been pre-ordered by a number of retailers so that it will be available for order on the date of release. These retailers include *Boulder Games*, *Funagain Games*, *RC Hobbies*, and *Games from Pevans*. The suggested retail price is $40.

LATE NEWS

Flying Buffalo Inc have produced a special limited edition of their cardgame **Nuclear War**, to celebrate the 40th Anniversary of its first release. 500 copies have been printed, for selling at Origins in Columbus Ohio, in June. It's possible to preorder this at $60.00 in the States, though non-US collectors must expect to pay extra for postage. Nuclear War is a comical cataclysmic card game for two-six players of all ages. It's a humorous confrontation between touchy world powers as each player attempts to sway his opponents' populations with diplomacy, propaganda, and finally nuclear weaponry. Invented by Doug Malewicki in 1965, this game seems to be perennially popular.

www.flyingbuffalo.com/nucwar.htm

Newsdesk Roleplaying

RPG Games

Starting this section with sourcebooks about dangerously uncanny creatures, **The Complete Guide to Werewolves** comes from *Goodman Games* for use in d20 games, and deals with these menacing shapeshifters. Menacing, that is, by night: in the hours of daylight they can deceive the world by passing as ordinary members of the human race. Based as they are on folklore from around the world, there's plenty of scope for introducing a werewolf or two into RPG campaigns.

Lords of Madness: The Book of Aberrations from *Wizards of the Coast* at $34.95 is suitable for D&D campaigns and deals with bizarre alien creatures: 'aboleths, beholders, mind flayers, and other aberrations.' These beings prevail by overwhelming their victims with utter terror. The sourcebook describes their society, physiology, psychology and their objectives. It also covers the suitable means for overcoming them, and includes new rules, prestige classes and sample encounters.

Glimpse of the Abyss from *Atlas Games* costs $29.95 and is a sourcebook from their Feng Shui line, containing details of a wide range of scary monsters. The creatures here have an Indian and Far Eastern basis, as 'the stuff of myth, the stars of urban legends, the source of strange and frightening tales', suitable for including in any Feng Shui adventure. 'Somebody has to learn about these monsters, go out there, and take them down in mortal combat. That somebody is you.'

Moving away from monsters to an extremely uncomfortable setting, **Sandstorm** from *Wizards of the Coast* at $34.95, is a D&D supplement about 'the impact of desert conditions and extreme hot-weather environments on every aspect of game play.' All sorts of perils which may be found in hot desert settings are described, along with some rules for surviving them. There are new races, spells, feats, magic items and prestige classes. And, yes, there are, of course, the 'monsters associated with deserts and other wastelands.'

Wizards of the Coast's **Races of the Wild** at $29.95, is also suitable for D&D campaigns. This supplement deals with the brave races who live in wild regions, elves, halflings and raptorans. Because they live 'in harmony with the natural world, these noble individuals embark on grand adventures that become fireside tales' for future generations. The raptorans? Yes, these are a new race presented here, and the supplement as a whole presents all that's needed for creating adventures and campaigns among the races who live in the wild.

Races of Eberron from *Wizards of the Coast* also costs $29.95, and of course, it's a supplement that deals with the Eberron setting. The races here are 'the warforged, shifters, changelings, and kalashtar', and the supplement deals with them all, along with enough information about them to make it possible to transfer characters to other settings as well as Eberron itself.

Also from *Wizards of the Coast* at $29.95, **Lost Empires of Faerun** comes from the Forgotten Realms setting, and is a sourcebook dealing with the secrets of its lost empires, where the ruins of ancient nations await exploration by those daring enough to venture there. Included in the sourcebook are 'more than a dozen detailed adventure sites with maps, monsters and artifacts.'

For something completely different, **Weapons of the Gods** from *Eos Press* at $39.95 is 'set in an ancient mythic China, a world of Gods and monsters, heroes and heroines.' This is based on the popular comic series by Tony Wong, and deals with the divine artifacts that remain to be found or acquired in this world and which are drawn from five thousand years of mythology.

There are books dealing specifically with magic, among them **Houses of Hermes: True Lineages** from *Atlas Games* at $29.95 (picture above). Following the Ars Magica series, The True Lineages describes the four Hermetic Houses which between them comprise the Order of Hermes. Each house is responsible for passing arcane learning on to new mages, and for upholding its own aspect of the Order's structure.

The Wizards Cabal, at $21.99 from *Goodman Games*, is a sourcebook dealing with the Cabal that is the governing body of the world of Blackmoor, described by its publishers as 'a must for any wizard character in Blackmoor.'

Advanced d20 Magic is a useful-sounding sourcebook from *Guardians of Order* at $29.95, which 'provides players with a balanced, sophisticated magic system for d20 System roleplaying games, including BESM d20.' It also includes methods for upgrading earlier d20 spells to the Advanced system.

With an historical note, another d20 sourcebook is **d20 Past** from *Wizards of the Coast*. In the d20 Modern series, at $19.95, this covers the periods between the Renaissance and World War II, 'including new character options and rules for early modern firearms.' This doesn't present a tedious version of history, as it includes 'swashbuckling pirate adventures, Victorian horror investigations, thrilling Pulp Era escapades, and more, including three ready-to-play campaign modules.'

Guardians of Order's **Dreaming Cities: Tri-Stat Urban Fantasy Genre** at $39.95 follows their Tri-Stat dX series, and is described as 'the ultimate urban fantasy genre and setting book... Ancient gods and modern myths rub shoulders in night clubs, ghosts and goblins ride the subway, and the fairies are ready to rock and roll!' It's a hardback, crammed with information about urban fantasy gaming and including three original settings.

Moving onto game scenarios, **Steel and Shadow** from *Fantasy Flight Games* at $14.95 is a supplement set in the world of Midnight. This one is based on the premise that all weapons have been banned by a dark lord who's conquered Eredane, and the peoples of Eredane with their 'proud warrior heritages' aren't at all happy about this. 'In a world where an evil demigod strives to claim the world for himself, every weapon matters.' Hmm, so perhaps its designers have US opinions about gun control?

Finally, **Dungeon Crawl Classics #15: Lost Tomb of the Sphinx Queen** is a d20 scenario from *Goodman Games* at $10.99. A band of heroes discovers this lost tomb, but may be in for a perilous time as the entombed queen is a powerful empress called Ankharet, who has been bound by magic to contain her evil powers. It is the heroes' appointed task to enter Ankharet's tomb, to finally kill her and to destroy her evil crown ...

Presents

Pro-SoccerPBM

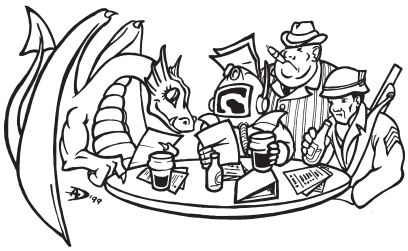
via post or email.

* Up to date squads for Britain, Europe and South America.
* Turns Cost £1:70 and are fortnightly.
* Send Your Details & 6 Favourite Sides to manage and get a FREE STARTER PACK.

POST: OlympiaPBM (Join).6 Sandy Lane, Bramcote, Nottingham, NG9 3GS. ENGLAND.
Fax: (0115) 943 6197 EMAIL olympiapbm@fsmail.net
www.OlympiaPBM.co.uk

Advertisers' Index

Austerlitz PBeM 45
Briny En Garde 21
Enlightened Age Entertainment Inc 52
Excel Print Ltd 15
Flagship 8
Games from Pevans 21
IRM 51
Kosumi ..... centre spread
Leisure Games 13
ME Games 2
OlympiaPBM 8
Mark Pinder 29
Ulaidh Games 35
Warpstone 45



If you are interested in advertising, please contact the Flagship Advertising office (details below) and we will be happy to discuss your requirements. A Media Kit is available for download on our website.

Colin Forbes, 2A Guinea Street, Exeter, EX1 1BS
EM: colin@flagshipmagazine.com TEL:: 01392 420582

FLAGSHIP

The Magazine for Gamers

Sample copies are available on request.
Back Issues only £2 (subject to availability)

Current Subscription rates

Currencies	4 issues	6 issues	12 issues
UK	£16	£22	£42
Eurozone	£19	£27	£50
Rest of the World*	£22	£32	£58

* including USA, Canada & Australia

Pay by Credit or Debit Card via our website or send a cheque payable to *'Flagship'* drawn in UK funds.

www.flagshipmagazine.com

I'd like to subscribe to FLAGSHIP for ☐ issues

Name

Address

Send this form to ... **Flagship, 14 The Hollows, Exmouth, Devon, EX8 1QT**

Newsdesk Misc

Magazines

Issue 2 of **Polymancer**, the Canadian RPG magazine, came out in March. There's a continuing series about play-by-mail games, as well a wide range of roleplaying material. Articles include: map-making on the computer, the first instalment of Polymancer's own RPG system 'Mojo', and a discussion of the advantages (or otherwise) of pen and paper roleplaying games compared to computer games.

www.polymancerstudios.com

Games International have switched their printing facilities to Hong Kong, so issue 20 has been delayed while this transition takes place. Issue 20 is now expected at the end of March.

www.pevans.co.uk/GI/default.html

Issue 16 of the specialist miniatures magazine, **Harbinger**, is out now, featuring a look at the Syntha faction for Void 1.1, an overview of Rag'Narok from Rackham and material covering a wide range of miniature gaming systems including: Full Thrust, Void, Confrontation and Pax Bochemannica, as well as painting guides and some BattleTech quick start rules.

www.harbingermagazine.com

IRM, the Independent Roleplaying Magazine, which will be produced bi-monthly, is packed full of scenarios, seeds (adventure ideas) rules modifications and suggestions. The current issue includes: Carlito's One Way - Tony Digerolamo's Complete Mafia for d20 from *Living Room Games*. As a special feature there is also the first two pages of the Blood of Heroes graphic novel soon to be released by Cursed Empire. Other material includes: StarWars, Stargate SG-1, A|State, CyberPunk, Vampire: The Requiem, and more.

www.stealthbrothers.com

The April issue of **White Dwarf** has materials for those of you who were interested in our guide to Warhammer (Flagship 112), in addition to rules and material for the Lord of the Rings battle game (which allows you to play Saruman as a good character!) And of course White Dwarf marks 30 years of Games Workshop - as do we, with Eric Ridley's article on page 16 of this issue!

http://uk.games-workshop.com/whitedwarf/

The latest issues of the two D&D magazines from Paizo, **Dragon** and **Dungeon** have hit the shelves of local games shops everywhere.

Dragon #330 has articles offering to teach us the secrets of cenebrotic blots and, more prosaically, the mysterious shadow elves of Eberron, plus lots of product reviews. Meanwhile Dungeon #122 provides a wealth of maps and tools for D&D gamesmasters. Recent back issues containing the huge four-part map of the World of Greyhawk are still available.

http://paizo.com/dragon
http://paizo.com/dungeon

Online games

From March 22nd, the rights to **MiddleEarth Online** are owned by *Turbine Inc*, who will be publishing the game that's been developed as a MMORPG by *VU Games*. Turbine Inc already run **Asheron's Call**, so know the MMORPG area well. They'll be launching MiddleEarth Online in 2006, and promise to announce specific details and dates about the game's development in due course:

www.middle-earthonline.com/

UK and some other European players in **Dark Age of Camelot** have been biting their nails recently, as the **Catacombs** expansion hasn't been made available for them, even though it was scheduled for release on the 24th March. A hiccup with distribution is to blame. However *GOA*, the company who own the European licence, pulled a rabbit out of the hat at the last moment and made the expansion available to buy and download from the internet. Readers may be interested to note that Globetrotter discusses the benefits of downloading software for online games in his column this issue.

Catacombs has 15 new underground complexes to explore, a new graphics engine and the option of made-to-measure adventuring or 'single-instanced' dungeons. Catacombs requires ownership of the previous expansions: however these are all available at low cost from the GOA website:

http://camelot-europe.com

Conferences

A conference entitled the *Games, Learning & Society Conference 2005* will be run over June 23-24, 2005 in *Madison, Wisconsin USA*, and the call has just gone out for papers to be submitted for this. The conference is sponsored by the University of Wisconsin-Madison and the Academic ADL Co-Lab, and is intended to 'foster substantive discussion and collaboration among academics, designers, and educators interested in how videogames - commercial games and others - can enhance learning, culture, and education.' Among speeches, discussion groups, interactive workshops and demo games, there will be 'a special track of selected, hands-on sessions designed specifically by and for practising teachers (continuing education credit may be available)...', which may be of interest to any US readers in the teaching profession.

www.glsconference.com

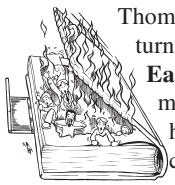
Muds

We've an article about MUDs (ie Multi-User Dungeons) in this issue, so will include the listing of Top Mud Sites fromthe authoritative *www.topmudsites.com*. As we went to press, the top ten of these were:

1: **Aardwolf MUD**,
2: **Achaea: Dreams of Divine Lands**,
3: **The Carrion Fields**,
4: **Discworld mud**,
5: **Imperian**,
6: **Aetolia: the Midnight Age**,
7: **Threshold RPG**,
8: **Lusternia: Age of Ascension**,
9: **Age of Chaos**
10: **Armageddon**.

There are, of course, plenty more! Do you play any of these games? Let us know what you think!

Books



Thomas Harlan has created the turn-based game **Lords of the Earth**, which is run by several moderators including Thomas himself, and which we've covered in previous issues of *Flagship*. Thomas also writes the Sixth Sun series of novels, which are set in his 'Core' Universe, developed for the games **Skies of Tenocha**, **Core**, **Corewars**, and **GURPS:Hellspace**.

House of Reeds, the latest in this series, comes out in paperback in June. Described as 'an SF/military-action novel set in a moderately high-tech future', its main character is Gretchen Andersson, a human xeno-archaeologist.

The following book, **Land of the Dead**, will be out in hardback later this year. It's possible to get a taste of this one by reading the first three chapters online at:

www.throneworld.com/sixthsun/land_of_the_dead_sample.html

DragonWars

BILL MORRIS, a beginner to web gaming, reviews this new adventure game ...

I CAME TO **DragonWars** from a conventional PBM background. This was my first attempt at playing a purely web-based game, so (rather unsurprisingly) I did make quite a few beginners' mistakes at first. There is now a player-produced FAQ list up on the site and I'd highly recommend you read it before playing. When it first appeared I read it and I was able to go through the list thinking 'Yep, made that mistake... That one too... And that one...' You may as well learn from other people's errors!

Set-up

Once you have registered for the game and chosen a name for your party you get to choose two characters from a list of eight of the usual fantasy archetypes: Warrior, Wizard, Ranger, Thief, Monk, Sorcerer, Cleric and Summoner. Each of these comes with a score in health, mana (required to cast spells), a little gold and five skills applicable to a character of that type. A fighter, for example, gets ratings in *Heavy Armour*, *Evade/Block*, *Hack & Cut*, *Range* and *Slashing & Piercing* (the last three of these are different categories of weapons he/she can use). You are then given a chance to improve these initial ratings by allocating a set number of points between them. I shouldn't worry too much about this, as it is quite easy to improve these ratings once you get going.

Your initial choice of character, though, is quite important, as you'll be stuck with these for quite a while. You can only recruit further characters once you build a citadel, which won't happen for a long time yet. Being a horribly conventional sort at heart, I went for the standard warrior/wizard combo and the Rollin' Weasels were born!

Your first actions once you create your party should be to buy them some equipment. Try to get them stuff they have appropriate skills in. For example a character with *Light Armour* skill shouldn't really be equipped with one of the heavy armours - there are major penalties involved. Remember also, that you won't be able to buy items of a level above that of your characters, so initially you'll need level 0 items. And you must also remember to actually equip the characters with the items, since when you buy them they just go straight into the purchaser's backpack.

Getting around

It's on the map screen where you will spend most of your time in the game. This includes a 7 x 7 graphical map of your characters' surroundings and the health and mana of your lead character (but you'll need to tab down to look at your follower's health and mana). It also displays text links detailing any actions your characters can take. If you want to take that action then all you have to do is click on that link. Actions can include places to visit (markets, healers and dungeons), monsters to attack, signs to read, doors to enter and so on. This part of the game works very slickly and I can't ever remember ending up in the wrong place. Movement is carried out by clicking on one of the nine directional arrow keys displayed below the main map. One problem with this is that the bottom three keys (SW, S & SE) don't quite fit on the screen, so you have to tab down first to move in those directions. Annoying when you're trying to go somewhere quickly - which is most of the time if you're congenitally impatient like myself.

Your characters initially start in the realm of Ryn but there are currently eighteen others to explore. You won't have access to all of these at the start, though, since some of them are protected by passwords to be discovered in game, or require a sum of gold to be paid or a specific item to be worn. There are three 'beginner' level dungeons to start off in, though their scale is slightly disappointing. I've got to admit when the designer talked about '...no limit to the size and types of worlds that can be created' I was imagining something larger than 40 x 21 sectors, which is the size of Ryn itself. You can actually run across the entire width of Ryn in 30 seconds if you don't attack anything, and the initial dungeons don't seem to be much larger. On the other hand, I've yet to set foot in the other fifteen realms, which may be enormous for all I know. I should imagine it's easy enough to add new realms if players get bored with the existing challenges anyway.

Combat

Combat in DragonWars is simplicity itself. You just equip some weapons and armour (unless you're a monk), set a flee amount at which point your characters will break off combat and click on one of the appropriate 'monster' links. You're then given a blow-by-blow description of the battle and its outcome. To avoid nasty surprises, I'd suggest you check the monster descriptions list accessible from the main menu before entering combat, just to see how tough your opponent is. Once combat is over (hopefully a success) you then hit the 'back' button on screen and the program should take you back to the map screen, allowing you to pick up any gold and items the dead monster dropped. I say 'should' because what generally happens next is my pet peeve with the game. What often happens is that hitting the 'back' button takes you back to the map screen but that screen still displays the 'live' monster link. If you click on that link it will tell you that the monster is no longer there (because you've killed it, obviously). So what you have to do is hit 'refresh' first then you get the 'dead monster' link and can continue. This sounds, and is, incredibly trivial and it's kind of ironic that someone used to fortnightly turnarounds can get so irritated by a delay of a second or two. The thing you have to remember, though, is that what previous writers have called the 'levelling treadmill' takes place in this game by this very process. You're going to spend 75% of your time in DragonWars doing this series of actions, so a small problem like this can get really annoying. Of course, just to be really frustrating, sometimes the whole thing works perfectly and 'refresh' is not required. I'm sure some of you with a better understanding of software design can tell me exactly what's going on here.

Anyway, that detail apart the combat system works very well. You don't need to understand it in any depth to take part in a fight unless you want to. Just equipping the most expensive weapon that you can afford (and that doesn't exceed your character's level or skills) and hacking away with that is generally successful, as long as you make sure not to take on monsters that are too tough for you. Note that some sections of dungeons are closed off by permanent 'guardian' creatures, which are usually quite a bit tougher and need to be defeated before you can go any further. Usually the best method of getting past these seems to be the old 'go away and level up a bit' trick. Works for me anyway!

If you defeat a monster then your fighters acquire experience points (xp) which can then be used to upgrade your characters' skills. At any time in the game you can go to the character screen and use xp to increase health, mana or one of their five class skills. Higher upgrades cost more xp, so although it's possible to specialise in one skill, it's also cheaper to build them all up at the similar rates. It's up to you really.

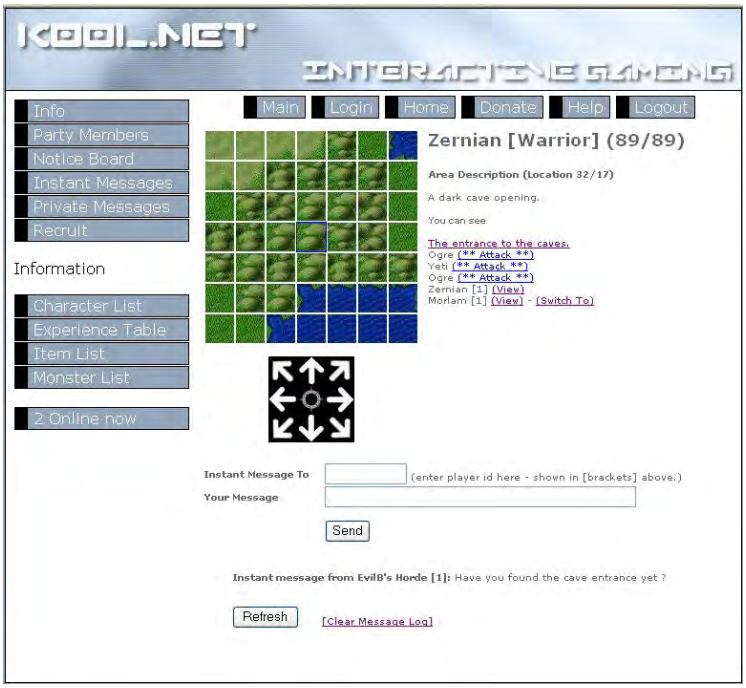
Remember that article in *Flagship* a while ago on the difficulties of programming monster AI? Well DragonWars has solved this problem by

DragonWars at a glance

A web-based open-ended game from eXtreme Webgames, which is the first release using a new game engine from eXtreme designed specifically for web-based play. Currently free to play, with a facility for making donations.

www.k00l.net

introducing an entirely new concept, 'Artificial Stupidity'. Monsters in DW respawn and then, well, just sit around mostly. I always imagine them hanging around chatting with their mates, smoking a fag or two, just waiting for one of those nasty adventurer types to come along and kill them. You feel kind of guilty taking on one of these convinced pacifists! Seriously, though, the fact that monsters don't pursue and attack you doesn't work out that badly in practice. The one problem it does cause is that it makes mapping a little too easy. If you want to map an area, the easiest way to do it is simply not to attack any characters while you move around - don't mess with them and they won't mess with you. While random encounters in other games can be enormously frustrating (I always seem to get attacked when, low in health, I'm just about to reach that save point!) they do, at least, put an element of challenge into the mapping process. This is only really present in DragonWars when you encounter areas cut off by guardian creatures or puzzles. Death in DragonWars doesn't seem to be a particularly permanent state. You can be resurrected by a priest, if you have one, automatically by the next game tick (every 30 minutes), or immediately if you take an xp penalty. It isn't too easy to get killed in the first place: unless you do something stupid, of course. I haven't managed it yet - and you'll have to forgive me for not trying the experience out for the purpose of this review. I did get pretty close a couple of times when attacking 'guardian'-type monsters, though.



Treasure

Items in DragonWars are handled in a similar way to monsters - there is a long list of them on the site citing levels, descriptions, prices and uses. Items up to level twenty can be purchased in one of the neutral markets you can find in various parts of Ryn. These can be a little intimidating at first, since when you enter a marketplace you can find literally hundreds of items on sale. Of course, when you start, 95% of them are too expensive, too high a level, or probably both. One of the differences between items and monsters is that items have a small colour graphic illustration applicable to them which appears in the character's page in the appropriate equipment slot when equipped.

It's surprising how much difference this makes. After a while monsters tend to just fall into two types; 'monsters I can kill' and 'monsters I can't kill yet', whereas items seem to retain more individuality. Maybe the designer should add some monster graphics at a later stage? You couldn't put them on the 7 x 7 map as there isn't the space, though, there usually being up four monsters per terrain square. Items can be manipulated on the character's pages by clicking on the appropriate box to equip / un-equip them, sell them, or give them to another character. This process seems fairly idiot proof (at least, this idiot didn't manage to do anything stupid by accident). There's even a button to protect you from selling them by mistake.

Communication

The game has a variety of in-game messaging options, which are all rather neat. You can post on the general game notice board, send a private message to a specific player (whether he/she's on or off-line at the time) or there is a specific notice board for each guild. The only problem with them is that there's no great incentive to actually communicate with other players at the start. If you get stuck at something, there seem to be plenty of experienced players on the general board willing to give advice. But, other than that, you cannot really form a party with other players so the only reasons I can see to talk are if you want to set up trade routes or gang up on another player. Both of these are fairly advanced aspects of the game, which you will probably not encounter for a time yet.

Guilds themselves have to be joined 'cold' in that all the information you have on them when you join is their name and number of existing members. You just invite yourself in (which doesn't seem very polite!). I can't help but feel a 'mission statement' for each guild would be useful so at least you'd have some idea of what you're getting into. Also, when you start the game there are only a small number of neutral markets you have access to. There are a lot of markets at citadels all over the map, but these will not trade with you unless you are a member of their guild. The rules imply that the best way to gain access to these is to join a guild but remember that there is no guarantee that a specific guild will have any citadels at all. I joined one only to find it had no players who had made enough money to build a citadel yet!

Summary

So what we have here can perhaps best be described as a boiled-down MMORPG without the flashy graphics. Obviously, if the graphics are why you enjoy MMORPGs you won't be interested in this game but, apart from that, who is likely to enjoy it? Well, I think it's easier to say who probably wouldn't be interested. I don't think role-players would have much to get their teeth into here. There's no 'grand plot' and, while this means the GM doesn't have a chance to inflict the usual fantasy clichés on his audience, it also limits role-playing opportunities. The message boards seem mostly filled with technical talk about game mechanics rather than in-character discussions. Neither would the empire builder types be interested. There are no grand armies to move around the map in DragonWars. While you can build up to three citadels, they don't deny others access to a territory - they're mostly there to provide trading opportunities, so you cannot gain an empire by conquest. I don't think this is really the game for pure explorer types either - as I pointed out earlier the game mechanics mean mapping is mostly too easy to be satisfying.

In the end, therefore, I believe the game is mostly orientated to the various achiever types of players. Those players who want to get a character to level X, or obtain artefact A or get N number of players in their alliance. You'll need to be able to set your own objectives since there aren't any set by the game itself, other than to obtain access to all parts of the realms. There are a number of ranking tables, however, listing top players/ alliances by different measures, which may be of interest. Players joining for the social aspects may find it fairly quiet at the start, although I imagine those aspects will be more developed once you have been able to build a citadel and start trading. The other group who would probably enjoy it are those who like a little in game player vs player action. Player character killing is limited to specific areas so those who aren't interested can stay away, but this would seem to be a minority as most of the top ranked players seem to have at least a few kills to their names. The only down side for these players that I can see is that death is disappointingly impermanent in DragonWars, so your enemies may come back at you fairly quickly.

DragonWars starts out as a simple but slick fantasy game and gradually adds more complexity as you go along. Due to time constraints, I wasn't able to investigate all aspects of the game, like building a citadel or doing research into creating magic items by alchemy, but they certainly sound interesting. While it's not going to appeal to all types of players I hope it can find an appreciative audience.

Neuland

A game of developing civilisation

PAUL EVANS masters the production chain and avoids analysis paralysis ...

ONE OF THE games which provoked a lot of interest at *Spiel* last October was **Neuland**, so I have been keen to try it. It comes in a large, but shallow, square box. The bits inside take a little sorting out. The most obvious are the fine, chunky, wooden blocks and pawns for the players. Then there are the card tiles that make up the board, showing the different terrain of Neuland (fields, woods and mountains). And then there are the diamond-shaped cards that represent the various buildings that go on the board - colour coded for the terrain they go on. It all looks - and feels - pretty good.

The idea of the game is that the players are developing their joint civilisation. They set up farms, factories and other buildings (those diamond-shaped pieces). Some of these represent cultural advances, such as the Library, Theatre or Town Hall. Players score points when they provide the materials the cultural advances need, usually at the end of a chain of production. The first player to score all their points (the number depends on how many are playing) wins the game.

The production chain is key to Neuland - it's the first thing players need to understand or they'll struggle to see what they're doing. Everybody starts with a Hunting Lodge and a Lumberjack, which demonstrate the start of the chain. The Hunting Lodge produces food from nothing. The Lumberjack takes the food and produces wood. Wood is the basic requirement to set up some new buildings and can be the raw material for other production (the Paper Mill takes wood and produces paper, for example). Other buildings can take food and produce something. The Quarry provides stone, which is needed to build the more advanced buildings. Mines use food to produce coal, iron ore or silver ore (you decide when you put a Mine on the board), themselves the raw materials for other things. At the end of the chain are the various cultural advances. Stone is required to place them on the board, but players need more complex input to claim the victory points. Gaining the points for the Cathedral, for example, requires paper plus coins (produced by the Mint from silver produced by the Smelter from silver ore and coal produced from two Mines).

Neuland in play

From this you can see the path the game takes. Players start with the simple buildings and produce wood and stone to add more buildings to make more advanced stuff. Then they use the chain they have set up to produce what's needed to score a cultural advance. Phew! Get your head round that and you have the game cracked. Interestingly, the markers for products are the large wooden blocks in each player's colour. The actual product is indicated by the building the block is standing on - a block on a Lumberjack is wood, for example. (There are extra markers to show whether the product of a Mine is coal, iron ore or silver ore.) The activity of the production chain is shown by taking markers on and off the board. So if the wood is used to create paper through the Paper Mill, the marker is removed from the Lumberjack and placed on the Paper Mill. Or, more likely, the player moves the marker from one to the other.

The only restriction on this is that players can't produce from a building that already has a marker on it. This is an interesting point. There is no ownership of buildings, but players do own the products. So I can spend several turns setting up a chain of buildings only for someone else to use them! A clever tactic on their part, not so clever on mine. So players try to leave product markers on key buildings. This stops anyone else using them and makes sure that the product is available on their next turn. However, players have to use products they have at the start of the turn or they'll lose them.

Which reminds me that I haven't described what happens in a turn yet. This uses a rather clever mechanism that provides some tactical opportunities itself. The turn is controlled by a short, circular track plus pawns for each player and one for the passage of time. A player takes their turn and moves their pawn one space forward for each action they take. However, they cannot land on or pass the time pawn, giving them a maximum of 10 actions. Once they've finished, the time pawn is moved on to the next player's pawn and it's their turn. So, by taking just a few actions, a player moves his pawn just a few spaces and can get another turn immediately. In effect, this means players can get anything from 12 to 17 actions at once - though it will then be a little while before they get another turn after that.

Neuland at a glance

A logistics boardgame designed by Tobias Stapelfeldt and Peter Eggert and published by *Eggertspiele*. It is for 2-4 players, aged 14+, and takes 1-2 hours to play. It is available from the publisher for 44 Euros (+ delivery). English rules are available at:

www.eggertspiele.de
www.boardgamegeek.com

Actions are used in producing things: at least one action every time a player uses a building. The further the raw materials have to come, the more actions it costs. So it makes sense to use buildings that are close to each other. But, if a player can afford the actions, there's nothing to stop them moving stuff right across the board. So if someone wants to use the silver mine you've built in front of you, the only thing stopping them is running out of actions. Unless you've parked your own silver on it, of course. Putting buildings on the board can cost actions. If the wood or stone used to construct the building comes from an adjacent area, there's no cost. It costs one action for each additional area the product has to cross. Players also have to consider where they can put the building: it has to go on the appropriate terrain and no more than three buildings can go on an area. In a clever bit of design, the diamond shape of the buildings means three of them make a smaller hexagon within a hexagonal area. An element of planning ahead can help here: putting buildings in a production chain close together to keep down the costs (in terms of actions) of building and producing.

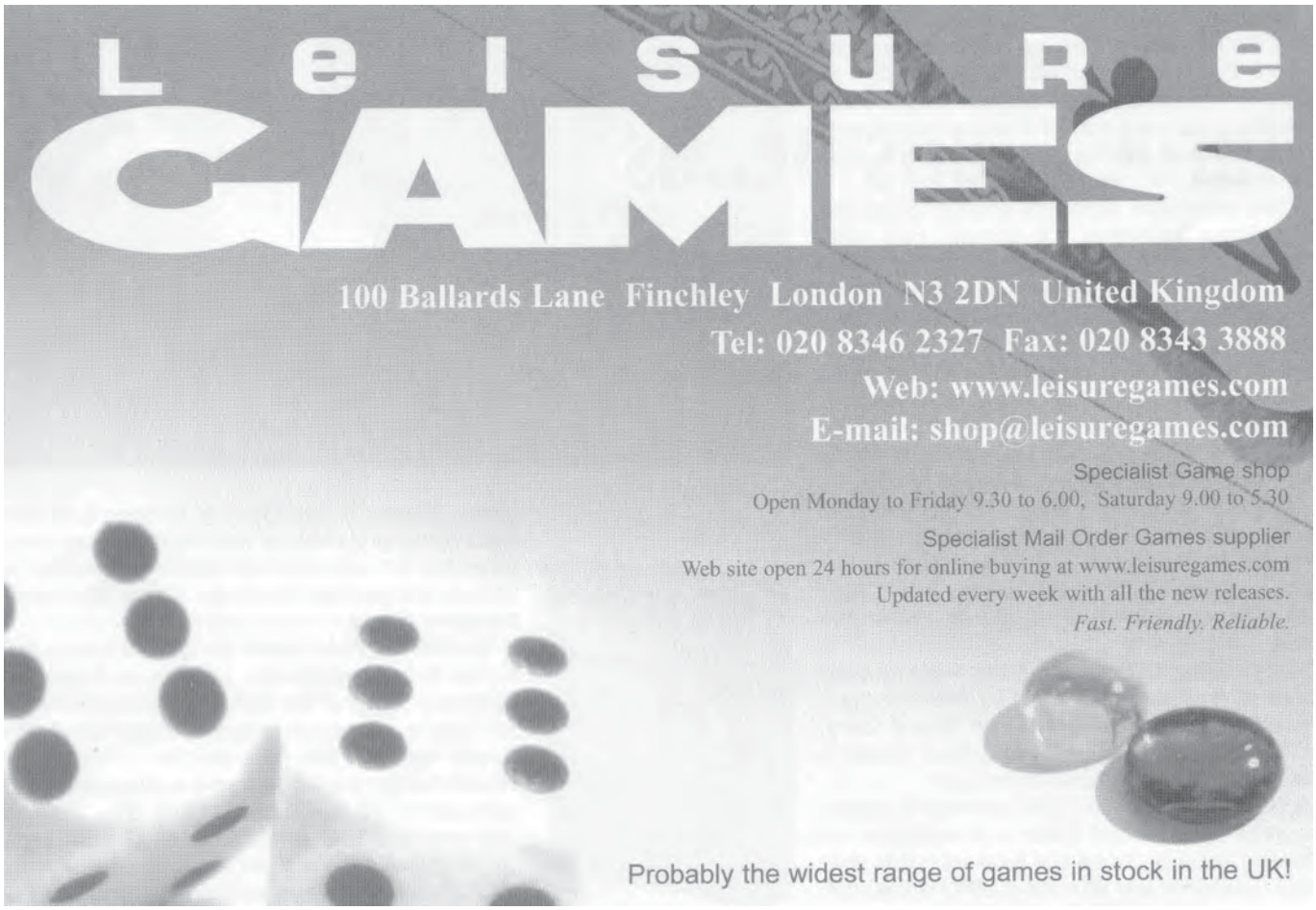
Consequently, the first thing that happens in a player's turn is that you spend some time working out what your options are. You have so many actions, certain products on the board and certain buildings available. What can you make of it? There is plenty to think about and the danger is that analysis paralysis sets in. My tip is not to take too long or the game will bog down. As a rule, spending more and more time does not produce an increased payback. The key thing is to look for opportunities to score the cultural advances. Failing that, build towards them - but try not to leave anything useful for the other players. Don't forget that empty buildings can be used by anyone, so look all over the board for opportunities.

Players need to keep an eye on what everybody else is up to, as well. There's not much point in planning a three-turn effort to grab the Cathedral, say, if someone else takes it next turn! Apart from this and the ability to use buildings other players have built, there is no real player interaction in the game. Players are essentially following their own development paths, but do compete for the same things and can block what their opponents

are up to. Neuland is a game that has many tactical possibilities. But, to take advantage of these, players must understand the central workings of the game - the production chain and the way actions are taken. Then they can plan what they want to do and put together a sequence of actions that will often span more than one turn.

The result is a challenging but rewarding game - if rather slow at times.

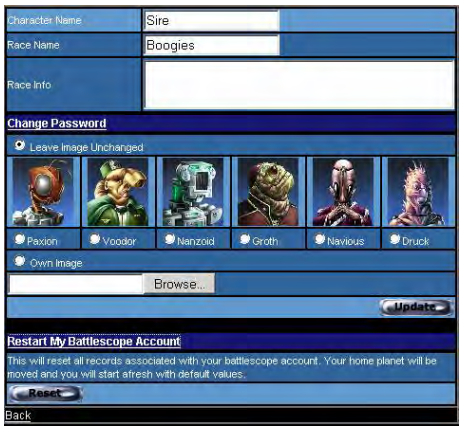
(A shorter version of this review was published in *Games International*.)



Turning Digital

COLIN FORBES resumes his popular series, discovering many new games ...

ONE SIGN of a healthy gaming community is change: older games go to the Great Game Graveyard in the sky while weaker games are quickly laid to rest. But the most important thing is that there are always new games coming along to challenge existing games and offer fresh choices to us, the players. Since my last Turning Digital column in Flagship #110, I've come across a wealth of new turn-based games on the internet. As one might expect, a good percentage of these seemed to appear then disappear with alarming speed. Internet Turn-based games mirror the development of play-by-mail TBGs twenty years ago, but the expansion and collapse process is much quicker. Of the games that seem to be hanging on in there, for the medium term at least, I present my latest selection, with more to follow in the next issue. Note that I have not really played many of these games, but have explored their websites and (where possible) talked to players and the GMs.

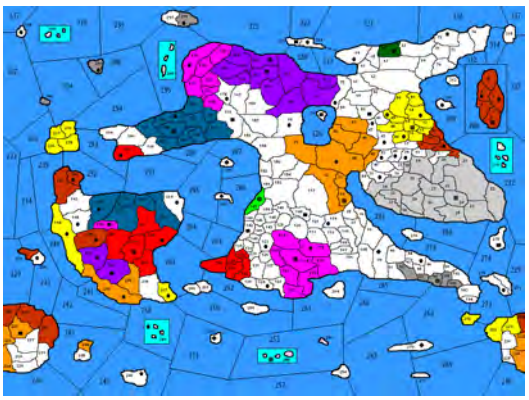


Battlescope
www.battlescope.co.uk
Battlescope is a multi-player space exploration game. This game is browser based and requires no download, so keeping up to date doesn't mean that you are chained to your computer at home. The aim of the game is to explore space, build bigger and better fleets, capture new planets from your rivals and research new technologies to make each task easier and more effective. Galactic domination is of course the final aim. The website and graphical user client are attractive to use, with control over your planetary resources and ships being achieved via a top down unit map.
Cost: Free

After Death
www.after-death.net/login.php
An online text-based gangster game where your aim is to reach the highest rank, be the strongest player with a large crew and run the game by using your hard-earned powers. In order to be respected you have to socialize with your fellow players, gain respect amongst the community and have other powerful players help you. When you step into this new world as a Rookie you will have to work your way up into the ranks by committing crimes, selling drugs on the local city streets and investing your hard-earned cash smart in the stock market. You will have to work hard in order to gain ranks but there's quite a bit of satisfaction in reaching a new rank and starting your own crew. Of course, you need to have enough respect for this amongst the other players otherwise you will not last long. From what I have seen, you'll have to watch your back in this world as there's a good deal of diplomacy and back-stabbing.
Cost: Free

Biker Battles
www.bikerbattles.com
A game set in the dark world of the Outlaw Biker. Beneath the image of the longhaired rebels with tattoos, lies a criminal underworld where rival gang members are beaten, tortured and killed over turf. Players take the part of a new gang leader bent on absolute domination and control. Starting from virtually nothing you have to use all of your skill and cunning to assemble a gang and amass a fortune from a variety of illegal activities. Your gang might be fuelled by multibillion dollar drug deals, or maybe car theft and prostitution, though there are many sources of revenue available. Intimidation, violence, arms and explosives will be your main weapons of choice. Each game starts on the 1st of the month and runs throughout that month.
Cost: Free

Empire Forge
http://empireforge.com/
A fantasy-based strategy game that should take less than half an hour per week to play for most people. It is similar to games like Axis & Allies and Global Diplomacy. Each turn players assemble their orders and enter them on the web site. There is a downloadable GUI to help players view the game data. A turn is usually once per week, but other turn frequencies can be arranged. Orders consist of troop movements, diplomacy, unit constructions, skills uses, and other activities (see Command List for details). The game server evaluates all the players' orders and calculates the results. It then posts updated game information to the website, which the game client can download. A sample set of orders is included in the rules, and the client comes with a sample data file - so it's easy to pick up. The documentation on the website is extensive and useful.



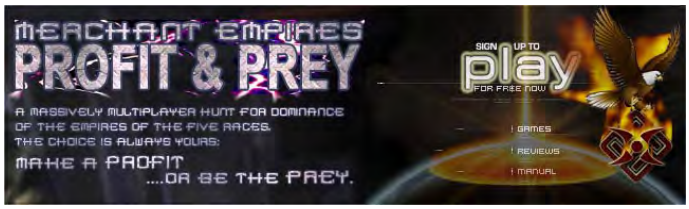
Cost: Free

Eldania
www.eldania.net
A web-based space strategy game, currently in development, but included here because the developers are looking for testers. Right now they are working on the travel and combat systems. Thus far the system for controlling planets looks ingenious, and I'd love to help with testing if I had more time. To apply, please visit their forum and follow the steps provided.
Cost: Free

Igadi's Universe
www.igadisuniverse.com
Adopt a pet and do things with it. Open a pet shop, play pet games and even train your pets for the Battle Arena. The pets look so cute that I haven't dared explore the game further in case the rest of this article didn't get written.
Cost: Free

Mafia Network
www.themafianetwork.tk
A gangsters simulation. Players start off as scumbags from the streets and struggle to raise their reputation and power all the way to Mafia Godfather. To do this you must gain respect from the other players, which in turn means becoming extremely wealthy, and getting enough hired hands to protect you from the other players. Naturally, at the same time, you need to spend considerable time and effort 'liquidating' other players - if you don't get them first, you can look forward to spending a lot of time with the fishes.
Cost: Free

Merchant Empires
http://advancedpowers.com



A game of space exploration and economic competition, Merchant Empires involves strategy, role-playing, combat and diplomacy'. It is loosely based on two earlier games, 'Trade Wars' and 'Space Merchant'. There are six differing galaxies, though it's important to note that all players start in the newbie galaxy and work their way out of it (though nothing prevents them from leaving it immediately). Your base (if you build one) can then be transported into a more advanced galaxy. A merchant gains a certain number of turns per server hour depending on the game settings. The turns he gains can be spent on any of the actions described. When you log in you will see how many turns per hour are currently given. The website is easy to use and full of information.
Cost: Free

Pardus
www.pardus.at
A Multiplayer Online Browser Game playing in a future where traders, pirates and other pilots of various races and factions strive to gain wealth and fame in space. Located in a technologically well-evolved but war-torn universe you play an adventurer who travels around in his spaceship and tries to make money and obtain power - as do many others. There are many ways to accomplish this: mining raw materials, manufacturing goods in your factories and trading them, carrying out assignments, bounty hunting, plundering buildings, etc. The focus, however, lies on trade, though it is possible to get rich just by doing jobs or vicious piracy.

At the time of writing the piraticial ambush system has just been completely overhauled, and with some success by the look of it. Ships can now set a retreat point before laying their ambush; they will automatically steer to this point and cloak after their ambush was triggered and combat has ended. This is a huge improvement and reduction of risk, as the old system required pirates to be online for being able to raid passing victims and hide from retaliations. A number of options have also been added to the new ambush-interface, including: conditions to include or exclude factions, alliances, individuals, and minimum bounty rewards for bounty hunters.
Cost: Free

Printers Advert here

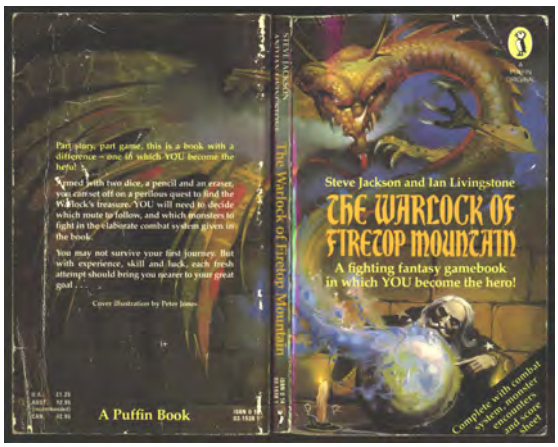
Exploring our roots

Games Workshop at 30

ERIC RIDLEY celebrates the occasion with a look back at some fond memories ...

THIS MONTH heralds the 30th birthday of fantasy games master, *Games Workshop*. For any company to have lasted 30 years in the fickle retail industry is an achievement, and for one in the hobby field to do so is truly remarkable. Games Workshop has its fair share of detractors (perhaps more than its share), however. I'm not talking about people slagging it off the hobby, but rather devoted gamers taking aim and knocking GW, mainly due to its young audience and of course because familiarity breeds contempt. But before people are too quick to jump on the bandwagon of insults, let's first take a look at all GW has done for the gaming community.

My first foray into gaming came via the **Fighting Fantasy** novels. If you are unfamiliar with these, they were a 'choose your own adventure'-type book with a simple die-based combat system tacked on. Penned by Steve Jackson and Ian Livingston, they were fresh and engaging. As a 12-year-old boy they had a great impression on me, taking me to far-off worlds, back in time, far into the future or to a gladiator pit: they were real *Boys Own* adventure stuff. Best of all, though, they only required one person to play and being a bit of a Nigel-no-pals, it was a huge bonus.



After the success of the books Ian and Steve (listen to me talking as if I know the blokes) set up Games Workshop in their flat. While the two men are no longer involved with the company, and despite the changes it has undergone, there is no doubt that what they started shaped the face of British gaming.

Shortly after my run-in with Fighting Fantasy, one of my friends invited me round to play a game he had made up. It used GW miniatures and floor plans, which they no longer sell, and was a kind of hybrid of 'choose your own adventure' and table top miniatures games. Heavily influenced by the miniatures he bought in Games Workshop, he enlisted his father to help paint them. Little did I know it then, but that was my 'first step into a larger world'.

Space Hulk in play

While lots of seasoned gamers deride GW, almost all the gamers I've met were brought into the scene via the company. How many of your gaming buddies started out with a Games Workshop product? Whether it be the excellent **Space Hulk**, the classic **Fury of Dracula**, **Rogue Trader** or just plain old **Warhammer**. If that product brought us, or our friends, into the hobby then it would be foolhardy to knock it once we grow out of it. The same principle applies to the current batch of new gamers introduced to the hobby through **Yu-Gi-Oh!** and **Pokemon**: they are the next core of gamers. For us to insult the games that they play is somewhat self-defeating. Each mass market gaming phenomenon fuels other, more diverse games. Peter Adkinson (former CEO of *Wizards of the Coast*) has said many times that he used the revenue from the success of Pokemon to bankroll the **D&D 3rd Edition** project.

As a side note, almost all current games can be traced back to four men, Gary Gygax (**Dungeons and Dragons**), Richard Garfield (**Magic the Gathering**) and Games Workshop's Iain Jackson and Steve Livingston. Without these men, the gaming industry would be a barren landscape indeed. No CCGs, no RPGs and no mainstream wargaming. Let us all partake in a moment of silent contemplation to honour these men before we continue with the article... Good, now let me continue.

All games, somewhat like the Naboo and the Gungans, form a symbiont circle. Without one there would be no other; without the Games Workshops and the Pokemon of this world there would be no **Shadowrun Duels** and no **Call of Cthullu CCG**. So next time you're about to take a pop at the (admittedly very irritating) over-exuberance of young GW players, think about what you were like at that age, and what you would be like now if it were not for Games Workshop.

Nintendo DS

ERIC RIDLEY reviews this new console and its games ...

I WOULD NEVER want *Flagship* to be accused of not having their finger on the pulse. So to that end I have gone out and bought not one but *two* brand new Nintendo DS machines to test and review for the, frankly, beautiful readership of this fine publication (come on, have you ever seen a better looking set of magazine readers?).

The Nintendo DS is the follow up to the incredibly popular Gameboy series. It is the first ever handheld produced by Nintendo that does not have the word 'boy' in the title, and as such marks a bit of a departure, in more ways than one.

First off, the 'DS' in Nintendo DS means Dual Screen. The machine boasts two fullcolour, backlit screens, each one 2.5 inches wide by 1.75 inches tall. But it gets better: the lower one is touch sensitive! This opens the floodgates for a whole new generation of games based on this control method. Ever since the days of the NES, gaming has relied on the same input device for their products, the control pad. No matter how complex or indepth the games got, you would only ever be able to connect with the characters via your D-pad and buttons. Now the touch screen comes along and revolutionizes everything. Just don't forget your stylus.

Not only that, the hand held also comes equipped with a built in chat / picture messaging service (pictochat it's called) and a microphone. It has a slot for the old Gameboy Advance games as well as the normal slot for the tiny new game cards. The GBA backwards compatibility gives you access to over 500 other titles; unfortunately the DS does not work with the normal (old) Gameboy games or GBC games.

The pictochat function is one of the reasons I bought two machines. It is a great idea that would be the bee's knees if I were a kid at school and could pass notes with my friends without actually passing notes. The DS is outfitted with infrared wireless connectivity to allow you to chat and play games with out the need for annoying wires. Wireless link up of games (such as **Metroid Hunters: First Hunt**, which you get with it) is flawless and astounding, though it does drain the juice somewhat.

The touch screen is fantastic and the price is right: it has a ton of games at launch, plus a massive back catalogue of GBA games. The size is somewhat bigger than the GBA SP but about the same size as the standard Gameboy Advance. But enough of the boring stuff: what about the games?

Zoo Keeper

This is a simple (in theory) puzzle game that revolves around a screen filled with animal symbols. You must use the touch screen to swap the animals into positions so that they line up and make rows of three or more. Once you do that they disappear and more fall into the screen to fill their place. Each level you must catch a certain quota of each animal before the time runs out.

Zoo Keeper is incredibly addictive: I could not stop playing it for a whole day (even at work) until I bought the second DS and my girlfriend absconded with the game. She has not been able to put it down either. The link up function two-player battle is excellent. You only need one card and you can both play wirelessly. It is a truly genius game. If you have the chance you should definitely pick it up. Be prepared to say goodbye to your old life though. Zoo Keeper is the new **Tetris**, you heard it here first.

Details: from *Ignition,* 2 players, one card, stylus used, £29.99

Sprung: The Dating Game

This is a bit of an odd one. You play the part of a boy or girl (let's presume you picked boy, 'cause I did) in a ski resort, who is trying to get it on with members of the opposite sex. This is a really fresh idea, and the graphical presentation is top notch, but the game basically boils down to a 'Choose your own adventure'.

Sprung is made up of a number of scenes, each with its own objectives and plot twists. Each scene is basically a series of one-on-one conversations, during which you have to choose the right responses. If you make a mess of it, which is easily done, you have to go right back to the start of the scene. Sometimes this isn't a problem, sometimes it's infuriating. It's a pleasant idea and a novel one at that. But in terms of game play it is very limited and the novelty will quickly turn into frustration.

Details: from *UBI soft,* 1 player, £19.99

Wario Ware Touched!

Wario Ware Touched!, along with **Mario 64 DS**, is one of the games that is the back bone of the Nintendo first wave of games. Everyone who owns a DS should get this game. Wario Ware is a series of mini games that are fired at you one after the other, in quick succession. In each game you must do something simple, like wind a handle or pet a dog, but the twist comes with the incredibly short time limit you have, about four seconds at most, to achieve your goal. The game exclusively uses the Stylus and is great fun for it.

The games are fast and furious; the game can make you laugh and sometimes make you want to punch a hole in your screen. It's a great game and lots of fun: this should be one of the titles you buy with the machine.

Details: from *Nintendo,* 1 player, Stylus Used, £29.99

Project Rub

Project Rub is the most Japanese game I have ever played. It is just plain weird, and that's what makes it so good. The object of the game is to win the affections of your girl. To do this you have to do a variety of strange tasks, hitting scorpions off her body, saving her from wild bulls and firing pedestrians at a moving vehicle, for example. The plot is more or less irrelevant here; Project Rub is basically a mini games game. It employs all the tricks of the DS. You have to use the Stylus, shout into the microphone and even blow on the screen to achieve results in the game.

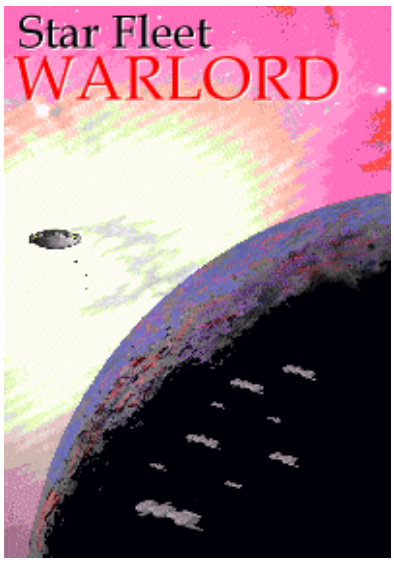
The graphics are, again, weird. On the back of the box they may look pointless and dull, but once you see them moving and get with the ideology, they are pretty cool. The game is definitely good, and having a story really helps you connect with the game. The problem is that it's just not quite as good as Wario Ware DS, which it is painfully similar. Project Rub is more involving, Wario Ware is much more fast paced. If you want variation get 'em both, if you are rooked, just get Wario Ware.

Details: from *Sega,* 1 player, Stylus used, £29.99

Star Fleet Warlord

The mid game

MIKE LAY offers strategic ideas for warlike trekkies ...



[This article expands on the advice given in Mike's earlier article, published in issue #100. Find it on our website *www.flagshipmagazine.com*, or buy a back issue for £2 from the address on p3.]

Star Fleet Warlord is a strategic sci-fi game based on the universe of the venerable **Star Fleet Battles** board game. Star Fleet Battles is itself based on classic *Star Trek*, so if you imagine fleets comprising ships of Federation, Klingon, Romulan and a few other races, you won't be too far out. Not that you need this background - the rules are self-contained. The basic theme is that you control a corporation, one of several bidding to control an area of the Lesser Magellanic Cloud. Being good capitalists, the Galactic Powers have decided that the simplest way to decide who will control this area of space is to allow the various corporations to fight it out and award the eventual exploitation contract to the survivor.

The game is based around the usual themes: move your ships to capture sites and defeat your enemies. Use the income from the sites to build more ships, build bases or for other things. The economic system has four types of resource (People, Ore, Dilithium and Food) which are used for various purposes. 'People' resources are required to train your crews, whereas Ore is used to repair and refit your ships. And so on. One of each type makes an 'economic point', used to buy ships and other toys. Different major sites produce different ratios of the basic resources. To add to the spice, some sites also have 'sector specials' (sites with odd abilities such as research centres, pilot or officer academies, pirate bases and many more), which can be well worth owning.

In a previous article I discussed the early part of the game. If you followed the advice in that article, you should have control over your home sector and be eyeing the adjacent sectors with interest. In most games the victory conditions are related to the number of sites or sectors you control, so expansion is a necessity.

Maps and other players

The galactic map is divided into sectors, each of which is itself divided into 256 hexes. Each hex can contain at most two sorts of terrain. 'Point' terrain includes things like planets, black holes, pulsars and similar. 'Distributed' terrain includes asteroid belts, meteor storms and similar. Certain sorts of terrain, usually referred to as 'sites', produce regular income. Most terrain types can cause unprepared ships damage. Most terrain types can also be strip mined (or 'prospected') for valuable minerals.

Sectors are arranged in a square grid and the entire map is wrap around; go off the west side of the overall map and you'll appear on the east side. This means that no one is advantaged or disadvantaged by a corner start position.

The sectors adjacent to where you start are usually of two sorts. Some will be the home of other player corporations. The terrain will be similar to your own home sector, though the presence of other players makes them dangerous. The other sectors will be 'wild' sectors. Although there are no players here, at least at first, the sectors are home to NPC corporations or monsters and can also have much more vicious combinations of terrain.

Player-controlled corporations present the usual problems. They are unpredictable and are run using sophisticated AIs. However, it's important to strike a bargain with most of your neighbours since they outnumber you four to one. Conversely, it's also true that in order to win, you'll need to take control of several other sectors, and this will involve eliminating at least one of your neighbours. Look carefully at your map and see who's easy to get to and who's protected by terrain. This may guide you. However, what I've always found to be the most reliable guide is to see who's talking and who's not. If your neighbours won't talk, then forming any meaningful alliance is going to be tough.

Wild sectors have two sorts of native opponents: NPC ships and terrain. Most wild sectors have various vicious terrain combinations that will require specialist ships or officers to deal with. The second opponent is the NPC ships and monsters. They are usually quite tough, but act individually according to a rather simplistic AI that is discussed in the rules. If you keep track of them, their movement becomes reasonably predictable.

Information is power...

Star Fleet Warlord shows its age in one respect: turns are run in sequence. Players are given a sequence number and turns are processed in that order. If you miss the deadline, you can still get a turn processed, but you are deemed to have slipped to the end of the processing order, and there you stay. This simple system means that it's impossible to deliberately run a late turn and then follow it up with a quick second turn on the next deadline. It also means that the information you have on the turn you are reading is automatically slightly dated because, between that turn and the next one, all the other players get the opportunity to run a turn. Some might regard this as a deficit, but I rather like it since it simulates the time lag in getting information back from your commanders in the Lesser Magellanic Cloud, and the time taken to get orders back to said commanders.

In practice this means that information becomes a very useful commodity. Simply knowing where an enemy ship is when your turn was run is not sufficient. The odds are that it has moved, so you need to make some estimates as to how far it's likely to have moved and in what direction. The direction question is often easier to answer; ships tend to move outwards from their home sector, and they tend to move to avoid nasty terrain and run over valuable sites. How far is a more difficult question since it depends on the ship, but there are a number of different sources of information available to the canny commander.

The most obvious source of information is the fleet scout. These useful ships are often expensive, but have two very useful orders. 'Scan Terrain', a mapping order, is discussed later, but scouts are most often deployed in 'Scan Ships' mode. This allows them to compile a list of the locations of enemy ships in the same sector as themselves. The usefulness of the order

StarFleet Warlord at a glance

Winnable science fiction PBM of medium complexity from Pagoda Games. Startup costs £5, with further turns at £3.
www.pagodagames.co.uk

depends on the crew level of the ship. Scouts with limited training can only list the hexes with enemy ships. Scouts with a reasonable level of training can determine the number of ships in a hex and expertly trained scouts can also determine the owner of each group of ships, which can be very useful in guessing which way they are likely to head. Consecutive scans can also tell you other things about the fleets. Ships often tend to move in packs whose composition doesn't change. The five ship fleet at the top of the map and then three hexes further in on the following round is probably a fleet of slow dreadnoughts. The group of four ships that moved five hexes must be a squadron of destroyers or other fast ships.

An often under-rated source of information is the 'heard in subspace' section of the turn. This lists randomly selected battle reports from nearby sectors. A battle report is actually the interaction of any two corporations, even if the interaction was only 'by the gods, that's a big fleet, I'm running away!' You always get told any reports that involve your own ships. Such battle reports contain information about which other corporations are in which sectors which can help you form opinions on who's coming your way and who's got no interest in your sectors. Reports also contain information about what ships are where, since they list the sector and hex of the battle. This can be useful since if you know the composition of the fleet, you have a feel for how fast it is and where it's likely to go next. Finally, in some instances, the battle report may contain information about local terrain and help locate important sites. It's also possible to provoke your own useful battle reports. Ramming a small ship into a much bigger fleet will not merely provoke a 'we came, we saw, we ran away' sort of battle report, but it will give a detailed breakdown of the enemy fleet.

Starbase orders are another under-rated source of information. They represent the fact that your bigger bases have sophisticated sensors with long ranges. The basic Starbase order is the 'scan hex' order which reports the terrain of a nominated hex as well as the size of a base, if present, and the number of enemy ships, if any. This can be very useful for identifying the headquarters of an enemy corporation; if the site has significant defences, then that's the site. Two Starbase orders can be combined for the more useful 'scan fleet' order. This gives the full identifiers for the ships in a hex, unless they are cloaked. Very useful for sizing up the scale of an enemy fleet that you've spotted. Three starbases can combine to a 'sector scan' which is the same as if one of your scouts had done a 'scan ships' order to determine the disposition of enemy ships throughout a nominated sector. This can be very useful if you haven't managed to get a scout into an interesting sector or the scout that was providing the information is destroyed or moving to evade enemy units.

The most vital sources of information are the sector maps. While it is possible for ships to blunder around in unknown space, it's amazingly dangerous and such ships won't last very long. The only ships capable of getting mapping data are your fleet scouts and they still have to get into the sector first (they can only scan a sector they are actually in). This means that the scout has to have a modicum of luck to avoid dangerous or scan-blocking terrain or some other information to cross the sector boundary. Starbase orders can help out in this instance, as can fortuitous 'subspace rumours'. The other way to compensate is to use either special 'exploration' ships or ships with excellent crews. Nevertheless, exploring across sector boundaries is a dangerous occupation and you should consider using two scouts at different points along a border if the scan is important. The final hazard is enemy action. It's entirely probable that your opponents are watching their own scans with a view to clobbering your scout before he can get the 'scan' order off, or at least punishing him for his temerity. Escorting your scouts or giving them a good supply of decoys (things that look like ships) can be a good idea since your opponents may well be patrolling the borders with a view to eliminating a scout before it has time to perform a terrain scan.

Battleships are more power...

Except in a very limited sense, you don't get to design your own ships in SFWarlord. The background explains that you are actually buying from the Galactic Powers' 'war surplus', but that's not really a problem. Each race is supplied with a large numbers of ship types and variants. Ships vary in size from frigates and police ships all the way up to the massive Klingon B11 battleship or the Seltorian Hive Ship. The smaller ships are faster and cheaper. The larger ships are slower, but provide more bang for your buck and last longer in a fight.

In the earlier part of the game, you probably want to concentrate on light, fast, ships. For the price of a single dreadnought, capable of covering three hexes a turn, you can buy three frigates capable of moving five hexes each, or fifteen hexes in total. They can cover a lot more ground and capture a lot more territory - provided they don't run into trouble. As the game progresses single small ships become more difficult to employ successfully. Early in the game they will most likely meet their opposite numbers and are unlikely to engage in combat. Later on in the game, as the heavier ships get further out, the smaller ships will simply get run over. This usually means that, as the game progresses, most corporations operate their ships in increasingly large fleets. It's important to consider whether you are going to go for slow powerful ships or faster, lighter, ships. Given the expression, 'a convoy moves at the speed of the slowest ship', the frigate's extra speed is wasted if it's escorting a plodding dreadnought. This is not entirely true, since you can try to use the frigate's extra speed to attack targets a little way off the dreadnought's path, but that's difficult to do.

However, 'supply and demand' also has an impact on what ships you might want to buy. Ships that are bought a lot tend to go up in price. Ships that are little used drop in price. Its worth keeping track of the prices - you get given a few randomly selected prices every turn - since it's often possible to find a bargain from unfashionable races and ships. Another consideration is where you want your new toys delivered. By default, the new ships are delivered to your home world, which may not be optimal since, if things are going well, the front lines are a long way away from your home world. To accommodate this, ships can also be delivered to 'warp gates'. These mobile facilities are slow, expensive, vulnerable and essential to get ships to the front line. Your warp gate must be escorted by other ships, preferably several ships, since their combat abilities are almost as low as their speed. Your warp gates are the limiting factor in your expansion, since they are so slow, and so it's important to have a clear picture of where you want them to go. They don't have the speed to vacillate.

Economics

Corporations have access to several sorts of income. Most of your income will come from cash derived from ownership of planets or other similar sites. They produce a continual, steady, income unless they've been recently raided. This income can be enhanced by using your survey ships to 'survey' any available moons. You also get an economic bonus for controlling all the income from a particular sector, which amounts to about one quarter of the sector's income.

A lot of your income, especially early on, will come from prospecting; this represents a one-off 'strip mining' of a hex's resource. It does not impact on regular income, but can only be attempted once in any one hex (long term players will know that there are a few exceptions to this, but let's not confuse the issue!). Most prospecting is done by small light ships, since they are cheap and expendable, and the value of the prospecting is only enhanced by the ship's facilities and crew level and has no relation to the size of the ship. One useful tactic is that of 'aggressive prospecting'. This means getting your prospectors as deep into contested space as possible, as early as possible. This is a little more dangerous for your small prospecting ships, but means that, if you get there first, you can come back to the safer prospecting later in the game.

There are other forms of income. Your ships can raid enemy planets and divert their income into your coffers. This becomes more difficult to pull off if the enemy has fortified the area. Corporations can also get some income by killing enemy warp gates and monsters. Bounty hunting is alive and well in the Lesser Magellanic Cloud!

Maximising your income is always an issue. Controlling one complete sector is more profitable than controlling half each of two sectors, because of the sector bonus. Raiding your own sites is a useful tactic if you expect to lose them; you still get the income. Hurting the other guy's income is the reverse of this. Taking a single site will remove the sector bonus as well the income from the site. Raiding an enemy site will reduce his income temporarily and transfer the difference to your own coffers.

[To be continued ...]

A Peer at the Past

CAROL MULHOLLAND dives deep into her collection of back issues ...

I'D NEVER win a prize for tidiness: it's just not my thing. Corners are for filling with chairs groaning under a load of cardboard boxes; shelves are for cramming; books fit anywhere and everywhere. This is how I like it. Every now and then a shaft of sunlight percolates through the chaos and I start to sort things, but then I get interested in what I've unearthed and abandon the task of rearranging it.

I love checking through my pile of old *Flagship*s. Yes, it can be a bit sad to wonder whatever happened to a particular game or player, but the different ideas and opinions in every issue entrance me. I've been taking a look at some early issues, and thought you'd be interested if I count back one hundred to *Flagship*s #11, #12 and #13. Gosh, how times change! Desk-top publishing didn't appear until issue #20, so in the early days every issue was laid out by a professional type-setter: this must have been hard work to arrange before sending copy to the printer.

I may occasionally use an editorial 'we' in this article, but that's an exaggeration: Nick Palmer was firmly in charge back in '86, and all that I had a hand in was an amateurish advertisement for the game that I ran, **StarGlobe**.

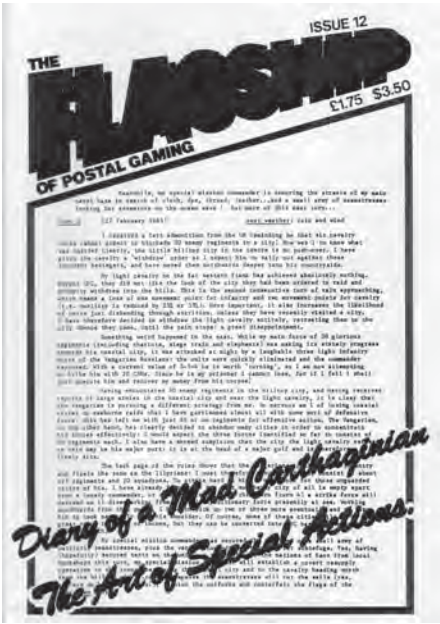
I see that issue #11 came out in the summer, #12 in the autumn and #13 in the winter of 1986: I was a little surprised to remember that yes, *Flagship* was quarterly rather than bi-monthly in those early days. It ran to two editions, however, a UK one and a US one, with some material shared and some separate for each player base: it's pleasing to think that one edition can reach readers internationally nowadays, because so many games are on the internet.

The first UK PBM convention was held in London in '86, and the UK PBM hobby was starting to expand rapidly. **It's a Crime!** had appeared in the States from *Adventures By Mail*. It was reviewed by a playtester in #11, as the first PBM game aimed at gaining a large, youthful playership from among the general public: controversy about its gang-war subject matter was soon reflected in *Mighty Pen*, where some readers protest at the subject matter and other readers defend the game against moral misgivings. In #13 there were 13 letters on this topic, representing all shades of opinion - fascinating!

Beyond the Stellar Empire has been covered in a series and **Company Commander** gets a detailed article. It's a Crime and Company Commander are still running in updated forms, and BSE is now revised, as KJC's **Phoenix**. Other articles deal with games that no longer exist for a variety of reasons, alas. Some lasted longer than others, so let's run a few of their names past you: **The Weapon**, **Warlords of Kaos**, **Capitol**, **Fleet Maneuvers**, **Vorcon Wars**, **StarGlobe**, **Kings of Steel**, **World of Vengeance** and **Epic**. No dirty folds among them, if I remember correctly. I hope that they are all remembered with affection by their players: Vorcon Wars, certainly, provoked a nostalgic enquiry not so long ago.

We're waiting for progress on our website before we resume our player-voted Ratings, which we'll continue to extend to all types of game.

Back in '86, this feature has just started. The highest rated games in various categories for issue #11 were **Starweb**, **Star Empires**, **Keys of Bled**, **Crasimov's World**, **Quest of the Great Jewels**, **Vorcon Wars** and **Illuminati**. It's worth remarking that some of these still survive, and so do some of the runners up.



I've found some lovely but vanished names for firms: Lorewarden, Nine Worlds Ents and - most striking of all, I reckon - Soulsucker Games. But firms, games and their players move on, inevitably ...

So, have players' expectations and reactions changed at all in the eighteen years since these three issues appeared? These were pre-email days, remember, when speedy turnaround was much more difficult than it is now. What did readers have to say then about the games that they were playing? Are their impressions of PBM games relevant to gaming in general? Because I want to give general impressions, I'll avoid printing the games' or the players' names ...

Let's consider a wargame with special actions, where its player vividly conveys some of the features of turn-based gaming: he has to guess what his opponents and allies are intending to do each turn and communicate with them about it before anyone's orders are placed: this gives him the opportunity to inform or mislead them. Elaborately, in this case, by pretending to be the ruler of China rather than of Carthage, 'I have sent him a note, using my father's address, enquiring after his attitude towards his southern neighbour (ie me). To cover future correspondence with him, I have set aside some blue notepaper (a colour I never normally use) and will use a typewriter with a smaller face. To complete the subterfuge, my wife has agreed to sign all the letters I send as the Chinese in her own distinctive hand! I thus hope to get some advance warning of his plans against me. Who knows, I may even find myself in alliance against myself ...' (Yes, notepaper - these are the days before the internet!) Oh, and the game has special actions, so in-game seamstresses were hired over several turns to make fake uniforms ...

We're still familiar with this sort of deception in a game, aren't we? The sheer craftiness of players hasn't much changed!

Players describe their gaffes as well as their triumphs. In a fantasy roleplaying game, 'Social Appeal, seemingly unimportant at first glance, turns out to be very influential in determining the way non-player characters respond to your persona. I made the mistake of allocating only 2 points to Social Appeal. As a result, I was arrested twice by the constables on suspicion of theft and other charges. Later, as a result of my 10 Intelligence, my character learned how to avoid further encounters with the cops. Once, the GM even had my character point to another character and blame him, whereupon I took a powder, dodging around the nearest corner ...' In a sci-fi game, another player finds he's been a little too enthusiastic with his starship's firepower, 'Battlestar 1 blew up the mass8

colony and invaded it, only to find a huge slag heap! the only thing in that colony was raw materials - hundreds of millions of raw materials - all vaporized by 100,000 missile-10s ...' While in a perilous roleplaying game, 'Beware the bluff. My first bluff was to have my finger pushing out inside my poncho, threatening to shoot another character. That worked a treat. My second bluff was when I was cornered by three troops. I explained that I had AIDS, bit my lip until it bled, and threatened to spit blood over them unless they followed orders. The only reason I'm still alive is because they shook so much with laughter...'

Not all of the judgments are favourable: 'the game is disturbingly similar to real life in some ways: there are no inherent goals except whip up on the other guy, take his/her loot, vie for prestige, and grind out a living. This stuff I gotta do already!'

What do players most enjoy, apart from the chance to mislead each other and blow things up? Another writer praises a computer-moderated wargame for its clarity, and because 'there is sufficient detail to keep you alert and interested, but not so much that you are swamped in calculations; and, above all, there is plenty of action ...'

Action? Yes, always an essential element. Let's repeat a verdict along these lines on another computer-moderated game, 'I have been aghast, worried, expectant and triumphant. I have never been bored.' Obviously, these reactions should still apply when playing modern-day games, if at all possible.

Is there any useful advice, which works for all types of game? Difficult to formulate anything that will apply across the board, of course, but I've adapted this list of wargame tips, which would help in many games: (1) set up a secure defence to restrict any damage from sneak attacks; (2) build stockpiles of key resources; (3) spread your key strategic points, to reduce your vulnerability to random strikes; (4) employ diplomatic means to keep well informed about events beyond your own immediate horizons, to learn your opponents' strengths and weaknesses and to direct hostility away from yourself and towards your rivals. Finally, (5) Silence is dangerous: always communicate with the other players, but not so frequently that they perceive you as a target.

Hey, this is a list that'd suit most situations in real life - who says that games are escapist fantasies? I'll quote a final tip that strikes me as particularly crafty, though it's only applicable for games where the players can communicate privately with each other: (6) 'Keep part of your alliance secret till the end. In our game, XXX was always apparently playing a lone-wolf approach, and this made us seem much less dangerous than we were, so that the remaining players didn't ally against us as soon as they should have.' So games may not be purely escapist fantasies, but it's clear that they are much more fun than real life.

Even if not all of the games described in issues #11-#13 have endured to 2005, let's hope that many of these game designers are still working to entertain us. And that many of the players who expressed their enjoyment back in 1986 are still eager to be entertained by what they're playing now: games and more games.

Games from Pevans

Mail order board and card games in the UK

Expand the Inca Empire

Tahuantinsuyu
from Alan Ernstein
and Hangman Games

Colonise Indonesia

Sunda to Sahul
from Don Bone and
Sagacity Games

Available in the UK through
Games from Pevans
Buy these and other games at www.pevans.co.uk/Games/
Contact Games@pevans.co.uk or write to **Games from Pevans** at 180 Aylsham Drive, UXBRIDGE UB10 8UF

Games from Pevans is a trading name of Margam Evans Limited

Briny En Garde

***The** year is 1791, and there's trouble afoot...! Not in England, where Good King George III of the House of Hanover-Pumpernickel is apt to deal sternly with troublemakers, be they Whigs, Irish, Quakers, or just Furry ...er, Foreigners. But it's a different kettle of fish in France, on the other side of the Channel, where the political situation has deteriorated into a public free-for-all, no holds barred! "La Revolution mange ses enfants!". Nobody is safe any more. Emigrants arrive in London in ever increasing numbers, stating that declarations of war are expected monthly from Berlin, Vienna, Madrid, Moscow, and Lisbon. They also complain that taxes are higher than ever and the cost of nearly everything has doubled. And they shake their grizzled heads (powder being very expensive nowadays) at the unheard-of idea of raising armies by conscription, the brainchild of a certain young Corsican artillery officer about to enter French politics. Nevertheless, they all agree that the great shipyards of Toulon, Brest, and Cherbourg have never been busier - beehives ain't in it, they say. France is obviously marshalling its forces. And the French Navy seems to have plans of its own...!*

To play Briny en Garde simply visit our website at **http://www.brinyengarde.co.uk/** and get the rules and then contact us to play and receive your character. The game is free and is played by email only. As usual silly names are a must!!

Pevans' Perspective

The view from the Toy Fair

PEVANS describes the latest games that were on show ...

THE TOY FAIR is the industry's annual showcase where manufacturers try to second-guess what's going to be in vogue for next Christmas. It's organised by the British Toy and Hobby Association and held at ExCeL, late each January. I go along to winkle out the new games from the array of exciting new toys (this year there seemed to be a lot of **Scalextric** look-alikes, but I didn't waste any time on them). I tend not to pay too much attention to the bigger companies at the Toy Fair, since what they are producing is pretty predictable. So this article concentrates on the smaller and newer publishers.

Bored No Longer is a fairly small, fairly new company which has a range of toys and games. Two games caught my attention. The first is **Blanko**, a word game along standard board-and-tiles lines that incorporates forfeits/ tasks. The second is an abstract game called **Disx**. This uses rings dropped over pegs on a square board. Adding the fourth ring to a peg scores the player a point. S/he then has to re-distribute those rings to the four pegs next to them. Which may trigger further scoring and re-distribution and so on. The game clearly has some tactical options and looks rather good.

Britannia Games had more board game versions of television shows: **The Vault** and **I'm a Celebrity, Get me Out of Here** were launched at the end of last year. The first is a quiz game where all the contestants can earn money (by selling answers to whoever's in the hot seat) and potentially win the game. The latter has players using their action points each turn to move round the board and collect things to earn the votes that could win them the game. There are, of course, hazards around the board and players have to find some food occasionally or they'll run out of energy. This is quite a clever game with some interesting tactical options. Coming up this year are **Countdown** and **Concludo**, an original word game. No details are available on either yet.

Another attractive abstract game is **Cubi-Cup** from Hungarian publisher *CubiTeam*. The game is somewhat reminiscent of **Pylos**, in that players build up a three dimensional shape - a tetrahedron in this case - and win by placing the last piece on top. The key tactic is setting up a three-cube 'cup', which forces the next player (two-three can play) to play twice and lose the initiative. The game is simple, plays well and comes in an attractive wooden version and a colourful plastic version.

There aren't many games amidst *Feva*'s range of toys, but they do have **CSI: Crime Scene Investigation** - the board game. Yes, it's a TV tie-in, but it looks more interesting than most. This is a deduction game with some eight cases included. Players have to emulate the characters in the television series in working out who carried out a crime from the forensic evidence. The game sounds pretty challenging and I, for one, would like to give it a go.

Blag! is, quite simply, **Fictionary Dictionary** (or **Call My Bluff**) with pictures. One player shows a picture to the others, who write captions for it. All the captions, including the original, are read out and players vote on their favourites. Players score votes for their caption as points. The first game from *Futurus Games*, this is a nice variation on an old favourite.

Knowall Games is a new publisher with its first game, **Knowwhere**. This is a good-looking Memory game with an educational slant. Instead of finding identical pictures, players have to match countries and their capitals. Each card shows the country's national flag and highlights it on a map, helping players who don't already know the capitals. The first version, of European countries, appeared last year and has been a big hit in classrooms. Coming up is an Americas edition, featuring the countries and capitals of North, South and Central America. The game is nicely produced and its educational content is sufficiently well disguised not to put off its potential audience.

I expect to see a lot of different games on *re:creation*'s stand, as the company handles marketing for quite a few small publishers. Only two games were new. **Lifestyle** is a 'trivia game based on exclusive brands and knowledge of the finer things in life.' Hence the questions are pretty eclectic, but all have a common theme of celebrity lifestyles. Gameplay is pretty straightforward, but players have the option of gambling on getting the answer right to win extra points. Not a game I'd do well at, but **World of Wines** sounds more my kind of thing. The topic of the game is pretty obvious and cards have three levels of difficulty to give everybody a chance of competing. Now if only it contained a few bottles to sample...

RTL Games already has a success on its hands as **Destination London!** did well over Christmas. This is a family board game in which players are cabbies delivering fares around London to earn money. While the topic is the same, it is a different game from the earlier games I know: **Taxi!** and **The London Cabby Game**. Destination has several little wrinkles, such as the need to re-fuel and random event cards. It's bright, fun and makes a good family game.

Shannon Boardgames made their first appearance at last year's Toy Fair with a couple of games. This year they're back with a range of around a dozen. Designer Ewan Shannon has come up with lots of new games, only a few of which I'll mention here. **Antonine** is a dice and pawns two-player game of Picts vs Romans over the Antonine Wall. It's a game of tactical manoeuvring, though with a substantial luck element. **Dribble!** is a clever football game using four- and six-sided dice to dribble and pass the ball and to tackle other players. Moving to the countryside, **Sheepdog Trials** pits one player's sheep against the other player's attempts to round them up - and the timer. Swapping sides, the players try again to see who does better. Again, the game uses dice to control movement, but the time element adds another dimension. In **Yachting** the dice show the actual movement directions as players try to manoeuvre their boats around the board. This looks rather neat and provides an interesting challenge. As if these weren't enough, the range also includes a version of **Hnefatafl**, the Viking board game, and several children's games.

Not Tonight Josephine is a good-looking trivia game from Australian company *Toss Ink*. The subject matter here is history, with players looking to correctly answer questions on half a dozen different aspects of history. The questions and answers provide all sorts of fascinating and entertaining trivia and the whole thing is very well produced.

Backpacker is a new card game from *Wildcard Games* and reminded me a bit of **Grass**. Players score points by playing cards for different countries, with a hefty bonus for visiting five continents in one trip. However, you don't score anything until you get home. Which is where everybody else gets in the way, playing cards to stop you or reduce your score. There are, of course, cards to clear obstructions and get you home quicker. The game's pretty chaotic, but it generates the right atmosphere and is quite fun. It doesn't take long to play a single hand either, so this makes a good filler.

(Versions of this report were published in *Counter* and my own 'zine, *To Win Just Once*. For those who want all the details, the full version is on my website:

www.pevans.co.uk/Reviews/ToyFair2005.html)

Fall of Rome

Colour in the Dark Ages

BOB McLAIN enjoys this new game's rich political system ...

FOR OVER 20 years, I've sought the perfect turn-based game. (Back then, junior, we called 'em play-by-mail games, and we liked it!) I've not yet found the perfect turn-based game. I never will find it.

But every so often, I find a game that I like enough to play more than once. It's rare, very rare, to find such games. When I do find one, I run through the house yelling 'Huzzah!' until my kids call the cops.

Huzzah!

I just found another one.

Web, web, on the wall

In the old days, you based your initial judgment of a game on its rulebook. Nowadays, you look at its website. When I first looked at the **Fall of Rome** site, I saw another dark, pimped-up gamer's site with a Flash intro. Even worse, this site was like Jason Voorhees: just when you thought it was over, another Flash intro began to load.

So I complained to the owner. And you know what: he listened!

The new Fall of Rome site has an optional Flash intro. If you want to see it, you click the button. For everyone else, especially those like me with dial-up connections, the site loads fast with a snappy overview of the game.

Obviously, the site didn't change just because I complained, but I bet others complained, too. And doesn't it make you feel good when the owner listens? Gee, I wonder if that means he also cares about making his game work.

Let's find out...

Local boy makes good

In the 1980s, Rick McDowell designed a popular play-by-mail game called **Alamaze**. Unlike most play-by-mail games from the 1980s, you can still play Alamaze today, and it inspired many other game designers who borrowed from its ground-breaking concepts.

After Alamaze, Rick took a step down and became Treasurer and Senior Vice President for Blockbuster Video. But you can't keep a gamer from his games for long. Two years ago, Rick left Blockbuster, gathered a team of developers, including well-known Playstation/Xbox programmer Fletcher Dunn, and identified a big hole in the on-line gaming market: the near complete lack of multi-player, turn-based strategy games.

To fill that hole, Rick made an interesting choice: an historical wargame set after the fall of the Roman Empire. In 2004, the game went live, and today it has hundreds of players, convincing proof that a sizeable audience exists for turn-based strategy. Of course, it helps that the game-play is pretty darn good.

Of GUIs, orders, and opportunity cost

You play Fall of Rome on a map of Dark Ages Europe, just you and eleven other players, each situated in a large region that you must struggle to control by the second or third turn. The GUI shows your region in sumptuous color, with nice icons and the ability to see the world in three views: tactical (a single hex), operational (a region-sized area), or strategic

(a geographic or political view of the entire map). You'll spend most of the game in regional view, where you can issue orders to your forces with a few mouse clicks. When I first saw the game, it was the GUI that got me. It is one of the slickest pieces of on-line game software I've ever seen. Using the GUI, I can enter my orders within minutes, and I get instant feedback on whether my orders are legal.

Issuing orders may be simple, technically, but deciding what orders to issue is quite the challenge. You're given a set number of orders each turn - typically 13-16, depending on your actions in the game. It's never enough. All you economics students out there will remember that when there's scarcity, there's opportunity cost. Allocating one of your precious orders to move your Prince into position to usurp control over an enemy town might mean that you won't have an order available to recon that town or to order a patrol to scout the area around it. I love games that force me to make hard choices. It gives a game replay value.

And you don't have forever to make your choices. Every three days, the game is 'closed' for a short time while the server processes the orders submitted by all the players. The game then reloads itself automatically so you can view the victory won by your stunning tactical maneuver on the battlefield - or its dismal failure.

You don't have much leeway for poor choices, either. Players can attack other players on the second turn. By the third or fourth turn, someone is almost always attacking someone else. The average game lasts 24 turns, or about two months of real-time, and can end sooner if a player meets his victory conditions quickly. You can even choose your general victory conditions. You might, for instance, choose to become the Rex, a mighty conqueror, or perhaps the Visionary, a mighty builder, or maybe something else entirely. Various achievements in the game yield status points, essential in themselves for victory.

Enough jibber-jabber. Let's peel back the lid and have a look inside.

Brother, can you spare some supplies?

The economic model in Fall of Rome is deceptively simple. It encompasses gold and supplies. Period. Gold is, well, gold, and supplies everything else. Most orders cost gold and supplies. Some orders cost only gold. You get both gold and supplies from controlling population centers, from trading, and occasionally by stealing it from other players.

Mastering the economic model is essential for success in Fall of Rome,

Fall of Rome at a glance

An historical fantasy wargame from *Enlightened Age Entertainment*, lasting for 24 turns. The first month of play is free, then turns are $12.95 per month.

www.fallofromegame.com

but it doesn't get in the way of you enjoying the game. In 200 words or less, here's how to master the economic model:
If you need gold, conquer towns. If you need supplies, conquer villages. If you need lots of gold, conquer cities; but remember cities consume lots of supplies. Once you've conquered some population centers (PCs), start building improvements in them. Supplies running low? Build storehouses in your villages. Need more gold? Build markets.

The neat thing about improvements is their symbiotic effects. You can increase supply production with either a storehouse or a mill. But if you build both in the same PC, each of them produces more. Some improvements, such as a market, can lower the defense or counter-espionage level of your PC. Others raise them.

Of course, building improvements takes orders. And orders are scarcer than gold or supplies. You have to choose the best improvements to build, and the best places to build them. See? There's that choice thing again...

Additionally, you can trade gold for supplies, or vice-versa, in the open market. Each turn, the exchange ratio of the market fluctuates based on current supply and demand. The market makes sense when you have a disproportionate amount of one resource over the other.

Done - 186 words! I'll bank my remaining 14 words for the next round, please.

Damn, I just used them!

How to win without swinging a sword

I like to swing a sword. I especially like to swing a sword when the other guy's back is turned. (You didn't hear that from me.) But there's an undeniable attraction in capturing villages, towns, and even cities with ... words.

As we saw, you need population centers for gold and supplies. You acquire population centers through combat, the obvious way, and through politics, the not-so-obvious way.

You start the game with a court of nobles running the gamut from Prince to lowly Ambassador. Their chief purpose is to capture PCs in bloodless political coups (or to help you prevent the capture of your PCs from enemy nobles). Each noble has power equal to a percentage of your king's influence. Their power, along with other factors such as the resistance level of the PC and the regional reaction to your King, determine their success in carrying out their orders.

Sound complicated? It's not, really. A serious player might try to determine the various factors and then calculate his chances for success, but most times, you just draw a bead and let fly.

For example, I know that if I send my Prince and my Count to the (single) city in my region on the first turn, then they will have enough power to usurp control on the second turn. Unless, of course, another player sends one of his nobles to the city to stir unrest. Or perhaps denigrates my region, making it harder for my nobles to carry out their orders.

Here's a good example. In a recent game, I decided to stab my friend the Ostrogoth. To soften him up, I moved some nobles to his city and to one of his villages. In the city, I ordered two of my nobles to stir unrest, making it easier for my third noble to successfully usurp control. I took the city, just like that, depriving him of substantial gold income.

I then moved a small legion outside the city, making it impossible for him to move his nobles into the city and usurp control back again. Of course, he sent a larger legion to attack my small legion, but I surmised his intent and moved an even larger legion to the city, combining it with my small legion and annihilating him.

And all this neat maneuvering arose from a few simple political orders!

Of course, the real politics in any game, including Fall of Rome, occur between the players. Some games make it difficult to communicate with other players, even 'hiding' their identities until you 'find' them in the game. Dumb!

You won't have that problem in Fall of Rome. You're able to contact the other players from the get-go, and you even get a special slice of software, called the message board, to help you do it.

The Fall of Rome message board is integrated right into the GUI. It lets you send messages to other players without ever knowing their real names. The message board is slick, but I like communicating by e-mail so I have a permanent record of my brilliant negotiations, and so I don't have to fire up the GUI whenever I want to read or send a message. It's also annoying that I can't use other parts of the GUI, such as the map, when I'm using the message board. If I want to share information about my turn with another player, I have to write it down first and then type it into my message. Still, the message board is undeniably convenient for rapid diplomacy, and I use it all the time.

The rich political system in Fall of Rome makes the game so much more than a simple movement of armies into battle. Of course, it's best to have a strong court and a strong army. Some players try for both; others focus on one or the other. I never skimp on politics. How glorious to watch my enemy send his military juggernaut into battle only to look back and see that many of his town and villages have fallen to the clever words of my nobles!

> Scouts had reported earlier that Xorix was contained by long ramparts, which shielded archers and formed flanks for pikemen. The defenders were exclusively militia. Xorix made due with brave souls from its citizenry as no other leaders were on hand.
>
> The Huns leader ordered his Division to advance upon the village. The Assault tactic, it was determined by the Huns leader, was best suited for this battle given the opposition. As the Huns force reached the rocky outskirts the battle was joined.
>
> Early in the battle, defending archers were courageous, but able to inflict only light losses against the invaders. As the attackers closed the distance, the bows of the defenders proved even less effective, and did not deter the attackers. It soon became apparent that the defending troops were of typical quality for the region. The Huns force was overwhelming and quickly breached the wall and forced a hasty surrender from the astounded (and frightened) defenders.
>
> Huns losses were 1100 troops. No brigades were eliminated as a result of the losses. A new Huns leader, Centurion Aratus, has emerged as a fearsome warrior with a promising career.
>
> 6th Huns brigade is now completely fighting as a veteran brigade! 5th Huns brigade is now obviously operating as a veteran force! As a result of the fight, Falcon's morale has was not notably affected.

Tactical smorgasbord

Forget about economic and politics. We're talking combat now. Serious stuff. Harumph!

Each kingdom in Fall of Rome has different military units available. The Teutons, for example, have lots of heavy infantry, perfect for battering down walls, but the Huns have just the opposite: horse archers, terrible at battering down walls, but when used correctly, unstoppable in the field. Other kingdoms fall between these extremes.

The game designer spent many, many hours researching the actual troops and tactics prevalent in 5th century Europe. Within those historical parameters, the combat system gives players much room for tactical flexibility, including many different offensive and defensive tactics that players can choose based upon the terrain, the composition of the armies involved, the strengths or weaknesses of their native troops, the skill of their leaders, what they think the other guy will do, and so forth. It's never an easy choice. The right tactic can win a lopsided battle.

You learn the results of battles through well-organized, well-written narratives that convey the flavor of the fight and provide clues for what you may have done right or wrong. If you don't have time to read the narrative, you can glance at the map to see whether the icon for your army has disappeared - and if it has, then frantically read the narrative!

In my first game, I played the Hun. As you might expect, the Hun are horse archers, blazingly fast in the plains. They are less effective in forest and mountains, and they shouldn't be used to attack anything larger than a village.

I sent a large Hun legion into the Ostrogoth's home region of Noricum with orders to intercept any Ostrogoth legion within range. Since the Hun move so fast, the intercept order almost always works for them: their range of movement is greater than any other kingdom. I intercepted a legion slightly smaller than mine outside a fortified Ostrogoth town.

Ostrogoth troops are a mixed bag of cavalry and infantry. In close-quarters fighting, they're better than Huns. If I chose a standard battle plan, I'd suffer significant casualties, and I might even lose.

Here's when it's important to study tactics. Each tactic requires the legion using it to meet certain criteria. Better tactics have more stringent

criteria. Take Hunt, for instance. To use the Hunt tactic, my legion must be at least two speed ratings faster than yours, with 25% greater short-range missile capability and a (high) morale of 105 or better.

Of course, if you take the 't' out of Hunt, what have you got: Hun!

So I chose Hunt. I lost 400 troops. The Ostrogoth lost over 2000 troops. He might have avoided those high losses if he had chosen a retreat tactic, but instead he chose to fight. He then pulled his remaining troops into his fortified town, perhaps hoping I would order a suicide charge of my Huns against its thick walls. Instead, I sat there, ordering my legion to intercept his legion should it venture into the field, and sending my nobles to usurp control of his villages, the source of the supplies he needed to feed his protected legion. I love games that offer multiple paths to victory.

Of agents and artifacts

The triple colossi of economic, politics, and combat is further enlivened by several minor design features, most notably agents and artifacts.

Agents are nasty nobles - think of them as sociopathic second-born children whose inner rage has corrupted their early love of the classics into such amoral escapades as sabotage, poisoning, theft, and assassination. With a properly trained agent, you can assassinate your enemy's high-ranking nobles or military leaders, even their king, sap their economic vigor by stealing gold and supplies from their population centers, recon distant hexes, and really stir the ... stew.

Artifacts are magical items defended by guardians in hexes denoted as unusual sightings. If you find an unusual sighting, you can send your leaders to battle the guardian and recover the artifact. Some artifacts are better guarded than others. As you play the game, you'll learn to spot these from the descriptions given: for example, the best artifacts, and consequently those with the toughest guardians, are located behind 'prismatic waterfalls'. If you find one of these, bring lots of leaders.

Some players think that artifacts are too powerful. Depending on the type of artifact(s) you possess, you'll be able to attack other leaders directly, heal instantly from wounds, and gain significant tactical advantage in battle. A good early strategy is to acquire as many artifacts as possible.

Falling for Fall of Rome

Well, here we are, breathless at the end of our prose, and wondering whether we've fallen for Fall of Rome. I've fallen for it, despite a few blemishes, such as the Message board hogging the GUI and a few other quibbles. Since I'm a tough reviewer, I'll mention some of those quibbles.

As an old-school paper-and-pencil gamer, I'd like to have a single report that I can print showing all of my characters, resources, population centers, and so forth. The information is there in the GUI, but I'm used to paper reports and I wish I could have one to peruse when, for example, I'm sitting on my other throne, if you get the drift.

It's not possible in Fall of Rome to trade resources with other players, give things to other players, nor to combine forces with other players in battle. That seems like a pretty big problem. Some veteran players, in fact, cite it as the one thing they most want the designer to change. It seemed like a problem to me, initially, but then I changed my mind. Other games are often unbalanced when one player decides to give his resources or even his entire position to an ally. That's not fair. If such transfers in Fall of Rome were possible, the veterans would exploit the opportunity and make it even more difficult for newcomers to do well. In my first game, I was able to beat a veteran only because his veteran pals couldn't prop him up with resource transfers.

I'm not completely enamored with the victory conditions. Most of them require artificial events, such as the successful construction of certain improvements to population centers. And they're tied in tight with the abstract notion of status points. Since each game lasts no longer than 24 turns, many players begin to divert resources to achieve their victory conditions early. I wish, first, that a game lasted more than 24 turns, and I wish that victory went to the last king standing. Why stop just when it gets interesting? Maybe the designer will offer a special 'last king standing' variant.

Quibbles, quibbles. See for yourself. You can play the game free for a month, and then it's just $12.95 monthly to continue playing that game or to start a new one. You can upgrade your subscription at a reduced rate to play multiple games.

If you're still waffling, go the website and read some of the posts on the active Forum, or take a small bite of the apple first and join Centurion, a stripped-down version of Fall of Rome where you have just five turns to conquer your opponents on the battlefield.

Fall of Rome is immersive and addictive gameplay at its finest. The designer says that the game, especially the GUI, is a '5 alarm breakthrough'. I thought about being the wet blanket and saying that it's only a '4.9 alarm breakthrough'. Just then, the fifth alarm went off.

I think it means the designer is right, but first let me check out the window, because I'm still yelling 'Huzzah' and I'm pretty sure it's the cops.

Kosumi

コスミ

Which Clan Will You Be?

Dragon
Mythical Creatures

Fujiwara
Crafty Courtiers

Geisha
Mystical Courtesans

Honinbo
Magical Go Masters

Ikko-Ikki
Warrior Monks

Imperial Family
Descended From Gods

Jesuits
Cursed Missionaries

Kappa
Vampire Turtles

Minamoto
Eastern Warriors

Ninja
Feared Assassins

Oda
Conquerors Of Japan

Oni
Demons From Hell

Taira
Seafaring Samurai

Tengu
Buddhist Man-Crows

Yamanba
Evil Mountain Witches

www.kosumi.com

Kosumi

コスミ

A Japanese Fantasy for Fifteen Players

Kosumi is a game of strategy, diplomacy and war set in mythical-medieval Japan.

You lead a historic or mythical Japanese Clan. You battle against fourteen other Clans for complete control of Kosumi. Your tools include Samurai, Mages, Ninjas, Emissaries, and Armies. But your most valuable tools are your own devious strategies and wily diplomacy.

Each turn in Kosumi is treacherous. Should you attack to the north or west? Should you advance with Armies or with Emissaries? Should your Ninjas assassinate another Shogun - or protect your own?

You never have enough to do everything in Kosumi. So you must choose. Choose well and claim victory. Choose poorly and hope your enemies allow you time to cut your own belly to leave Kosumi with honor.

Sign up for a free-trial game today at www.kosumi.com.

On Screen

The Winds of Change

GLOBETROTTER welcomes the prospects for online distribution, and for mobile gaming...

AS FAR AS I know, when *Valve* released **Half-Life 2** via Steam, they became the first developer/publisher to offer a top-tier AAA title using online distribution, right from the release date. Hopefully, this will become the first of many. It doesn't look like there's a tidal wave of titles just waiting to be distributed online right now, but I'm hopeful. The toe is well and truly in the water - at the moment, the online purchase-and-distribution outfits seem to be ending up with what I'd call the 'rental market' games - games that are approaching the end of their shelf life, those that the developer or publisher has essentially nothing to lose by distributing online. I don't know if the market is big enough to be called 'fragmented' at the moment, but it currently breaks down to Valve's Steam and Everything Else. Of Everything Else, the most visible provider of recognizable commercial titles seems to be *Gamespy/IGN*'s Direct2Drive.

I was thinking about this because I was wondering why **World of Warcraft** isn't available online. If ever there was a candidate for online distribution, you'd think it'd be an MMORPG - there's no way you can play without having an account. Let the world copy the base CD image again, and again, and again, but charge them the 'setup fee' when they first sign up to play. Everyone pays, everyone wins. With traditional (eg, non-multiplayer games with no central authentication server) titles, the games end up wrapped in lockboxes, waiting to be unlocked by an activation code. The same thing applies here (really simplified) - if someone copies a game, it's not usable without the appropriate unlock code. I don't know how this compares to the utterly annoying CD-ROM-in-the-drive requirement that most games use for copy protection, but if it means I don't have to constantly keep the discs for the games I'm using near the computer, I'm all for it.

The market may not be ready for buy-online-only games (heck, it might be - are you?), but when it is, what do you think will happen? Will we see Indie co-ops offering games from their own co-operative online store? Publishers transitioning from traditional publishing to online distribution, or farming the work out to third parties? Price drops across the board from reduced manufacturing and distribution costs? Ancient and rare titles offered for download once again, just in case someone wants to buy **Fallout**, **Sam'n'Max**, **Descent II**, **EF2000**, **Edge of Chaos**, or **Wing Commander 3/4** (again in many cases, due to lost CDs)? A plea to the publishers - c'mon people! My credit card is ready. I don't want to have to drive to the shops to buy stuff. Please give me what I want, online (and what I want is everything)!

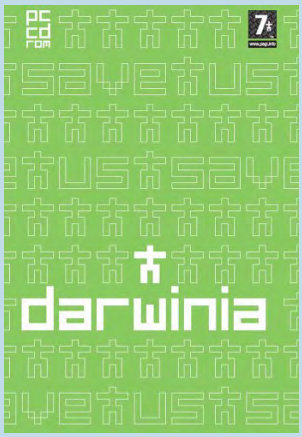
Mobile gaming

In the mid-1990s, a cell phone game meant one thing - a digital snake scrolling across a monochromatic screen. But nearly a decade after *Nokia* embedded handsets with its first **Snakes** cell phone game, the company's new N-Gage gamer phone mirrors the upward trajectory of the mobile gaming market. With this market heating up, companies looking to mine the bank need to follow a few fundamentals: convince serious gamers to give cell phones a go, exploit mobility, and distribute goods globally.

Mobile gaming should bring in $4 billion in worldwide revenues this year, according to Boston-based telecom consulting firm Adventis. In 2008, revenues will exceed $8 billion. South Korea and Japan dominate handheld gaming, with more than half of worldwide revenues last year. Europe and the United States are quickly gaining ground as the leading revenue markets, and India and China are expected to see explosive growth several years down the road. The mobile gaming market is new, but the more potential revenue the billion-dollar market starts to generate, the more companies will swarm the space. Over the past several years startup

Globetrotter's Game of the Month
DARWINIA

Regular readers will be aware of my one-man crusade to support innovative games produced by smaller companies. Yet even without this personal bias, **Darwinia** thoroughly deserves to be Game of the Month. It's difficult, far from populist, and was apparently rejected by the major computer game publishers. Yet here it is, and it's awesome. Don't take my word for it, download the free demo and have a look, then decide which purchase method will secure you a copy in the shortest time.



The plot is superlative, the gameplay is simple to start with, but gets considerably more complicated as you progress, until you are using several squads in conjunction. The graphics are very retro, and yet the game looks absolutely stunning. And the sound effects, no, the score, is almost worth the money on its own. On the downside, there are a few minor bugs, but none that detract from the game in any serious way.

Darwinia has been designed by people who care about gaming more than money, and the result reminded me why I loved gaming so much. As one review I have read put it, 'It's a pure, faintly religious experience, understated yet deeply memorable' *. I couldn't agree more. Buy this game!

*Tim Stone in *PC Gamer*, March '05

Get a free demo at: *http://www.darwinia.co.uk/downloads/index.html*
Genre: *Retro* From: *Introvision*
Platform: *PC* Price: *£29.99*

publishers like *Sorrent*, *MFORMA*, *IN-FUSIO*, and *Digital Chocolate* raised millions in venture money. *JAMDAT* went public in September, proving that successful exits are a real possibility.

Traditional gaming companies are now turning their best games into mobile moneymakers. *Electronic Arts* plans to release a mobile version of **The Sims** this year. For their part, cellular carriers are looking to use game publishers to justify the cash spent on new networks and to tap the burgeoning mobile content market. In the US, *Sprint* and *Verizon* have led the way with Sprint's **PCS Vision** plan and Verizon's **Get It Now** game system. Japan's *Vodafone* and *NTT DoCoMo* provide extensive gaming content and European carriers like *Nokia* and *T-Mobile* are leveraging their gaming platforms. Though carriers crave all types of mobile entertainment, mobile games are pushing to the front of the pack. Technology research firm IDC recently released a report saying that by the end of 2005, mobile gaming will replace ring tones as the largest mobile content market in the US.

Filling commute hours and downtime during meetings has been the backbone of the mobile gaming market. 'Right now mobile gaming is a time killer,' says *Gartner* analyst Daren Siddall. Still, the casual gamer is the industry's bread and butter. JAMDAT found huge success with its basic JAMDAT bowling game. It may seem like a snore, but the game triggered the market and helped priced the company's initial stock at $16 per share. So far, simple games have convinced most major wireless carriers to sign up. The tactic has worked until now, but with so many companies developing basic games and fighting over the small amount of casual commute time, the market will need to lure new blood. 'How many poker games can you sell before the market can't handle anymore?' asks Ben Zackheim, managing editor of gaming blog *Joystiq.com* and a cell phone game tester.

Enter the traditional video game player. Tap the gamer market and you get an audience willing to pay to download complex games and play them for extended periods of time. Tech research firm Informa Telecoms & Media says that multiplayer networked games, like those driving the PC and console markets, present the greatest revenue potential. Mr Zackheim says he loves and fears the idea of mobile gaming. If the game is compelling enough and always at the user's fingertips, the right audience will no doubt keep the meter running.

Too small to play?

The only problem is that serious gamers have so far shied away from the cell phone. Mr Zackheim is still waiting for the market's first killer app - 'and no, it's not JAMDAT Bowling,' he says. A gaming experience to rival or even come close to a first-person shooter or a real-time strategy game on the PC or console might be years away. The latest Nokia N-Gage, the company's attempt to use the gaming platform on a cell phone, has received mixed reviews. Avid gamers nicknamed the device the 'sidetalker' for its awkward handset. According to Gartner's Mr Siddall, 'the mobile platform has not been optimized yet to enable the rich gaming experience of the large digital home screen.' Limited handset capabilities, which require Java as a minimum, mean a lot more tinkering before gamers cut the wires. That's not to say that companies aren't moving in that direction. Greg Ballard, CEO of San Mateo, California-based Sorrent, says his company recently released several 'gamer' titles like Atari's **DRIV3R** and **Deer Hunter**. Mr Ballard says the 'gamer games' have done well and he partially attributes this success to titles that are recognized franchises in the game-playing world. The brand name is critical. Imagine the response to **Halo 2** on a handheld.

But the trick is not simply to convert PC and console games to the cell phone. 'The key to the mobile device world is leveraging the mobile platform,' says IDC analyst David Linsalata. A 40-inch flat screen with surround sound will never compete with a handheld gadget. Ideas abound, like adding use of the cell phone's camera, location-based applications, or using SMS to interact with other players in real time. In Europe, where SMS-messaging has flourished, companies like Edinburgh-based *Digital Bridges* are adding interactive testing to multiplayer games. Digital Bridges' CEO Brian Greasley says viral, multiplayer games with incorporated text messages are one of the newest categories for the company. He estimates this market is a little over a year away. *IN-FUSIO* includes what it calls Massive Multiplayer Online Role Playing Games (MMORPGs) to its next-generation strategy.

Beyond devising applications and cutting-edge technology, which will push the market forward, companies looking to dominate will have to cover the globe. 'It's all about distribution,' says Gartner's Daren Siddall. A company without a global game plan will sink before it can even set sail. Sorrent acquired London-based Macrospace last December and the acquisition has developed Sorrent's European arm. The company now sees close to 50% of its revenues coming from Europe. 'As the battle in mobile gaming becomes increasingly about who has the best brand, the company who has the best distribution will have a leg up on companies who don't,' says Sorrent's CEO Greg Ballard.

Sorrent also is trying to get into the most advanced markets like South Korea by creating an initial partnership with SK Telecom. But while South Korea and Japan have booming revenues this year, the next-generation growth markets will lie in fast-developing countries like China and India. JAMDAT has been aggressively pursuing the Chinese market, and recently invested in Chinese wireless content distributor C-Valley. JAMDAT CEO Mitch Lasky says that even though the Chinese market is volatile at the moment, the sheer might of the numbers will justify an early gamble in the next two or three years. MFORMA also made an investment in Chinese game developer Magus-Soft and formed 'MFORMA China' last June.

It's only been a few years since the current form of mobile gaming has landed on consumer's cell phones. The global projections for mobile gaming are estimated at billions of dollars in revenues per year, and the cash grab will lead to a competitive and consolidated market. Recently Nokia re-released its late 1990s Snakes classic as a multicolor, 3-D gaming experience. If Snakes can survive an upgrade, so can the industry.

THE LANDS OF ELVARIA

Do you yearn for the good old days of table top roleplaying but have no one to play with ? Well think again because you could be playing with someone anywhere in the World. The Lands of Elvaria is a long established contemporary fantasy roleplaying Play By Mail covering a multitude of genres with humour and parody featuring quite strongly. You take on the role of an adventurer exploring the expansive game world.

Start Up Pack (Printed or MS Word PC CD) and 3 Turns is £10.00 with further turns £4.50 each.

** Costs based for UK players, unless playing by email players in Mainland Europe and Overseas should consult me for prices to allow for additional postage costs.*

For more details or for a start up package:

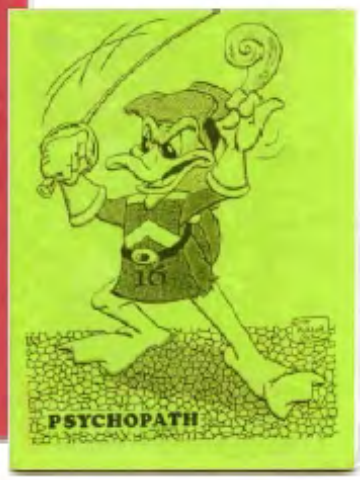
Please make all cheques or postal orders payable to MARK PINDER and send to Mark Pinder, 139 Nelson Way, Laceby Acres, Grimsby, DN34 5UJ.

Email: Wilecoyoteuk@aol.com.
Website: Http://groups.msn.com/elvaria

Running a Games Website

MIKE DEAN describes the joys and responsibilities of running a website ...

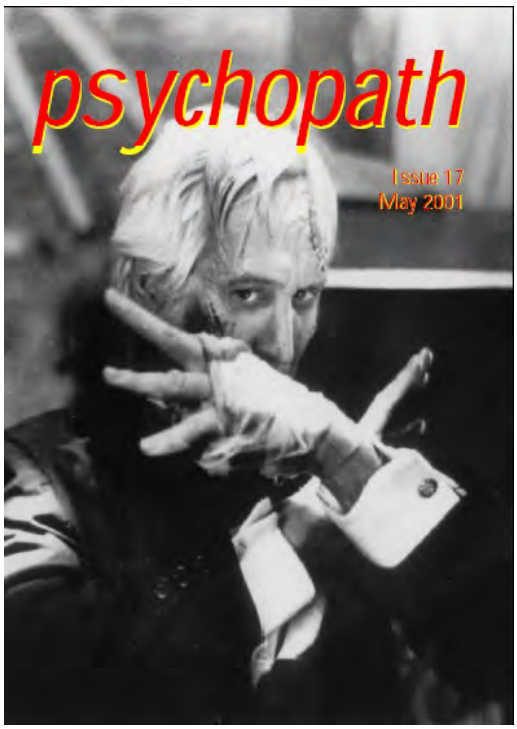
WHEN CAROL approached me to see if I would (or perhaps even could) write an article about running a Games Website, I thought about it for a little while and agreed, but said it would have to wait until after I finished my CELTA (teaching English as a foreign language) course was over. It is now, so I have no excuses!



The first thing you need to decide is *why* do you want to run a games website? What's in it for you? Are you really that mad? Do you really have so much spare time on your hands that you want to take on such a beast? If you can come up with some valid reasons why, then you are halfway there - but I'd recommend that you spend some time as a GM on another site before taking the plunge. Get yourself a bit of a reputation and name for reliability before you do it yourself. Reputation goes a long way in finding you new subscribers, so try and make sure it's a good one!

So that begs the question, 'Why did *you* do it, Mike?' - damn you, you weren't meant to ask that! *PSYCHOPATH* started off as a paper based postal zine back in the 1980s (see picture, above). It ran for two and a half years with sixteen issues before being handed over to new editors and a new name. It continued to flourish for about another three years under its new editors and name and then folded. I lost touch with the postal games hobby at about that time too. Then, around 2000, I started looking on the internet for places to play **Diplomacy** and came across *Diplomacy 2000*, started playing, got the 'bug' for publishing again, and in May of 2001 re-launched PSYCHOPATH as a PDF format zine - downloadable from the internet only (see right). The concept wasn't appreciated; I kept it like that for three issues only, and then went for the full-blown webzine approach instead. From there it has flourished and gone from strength to strength.

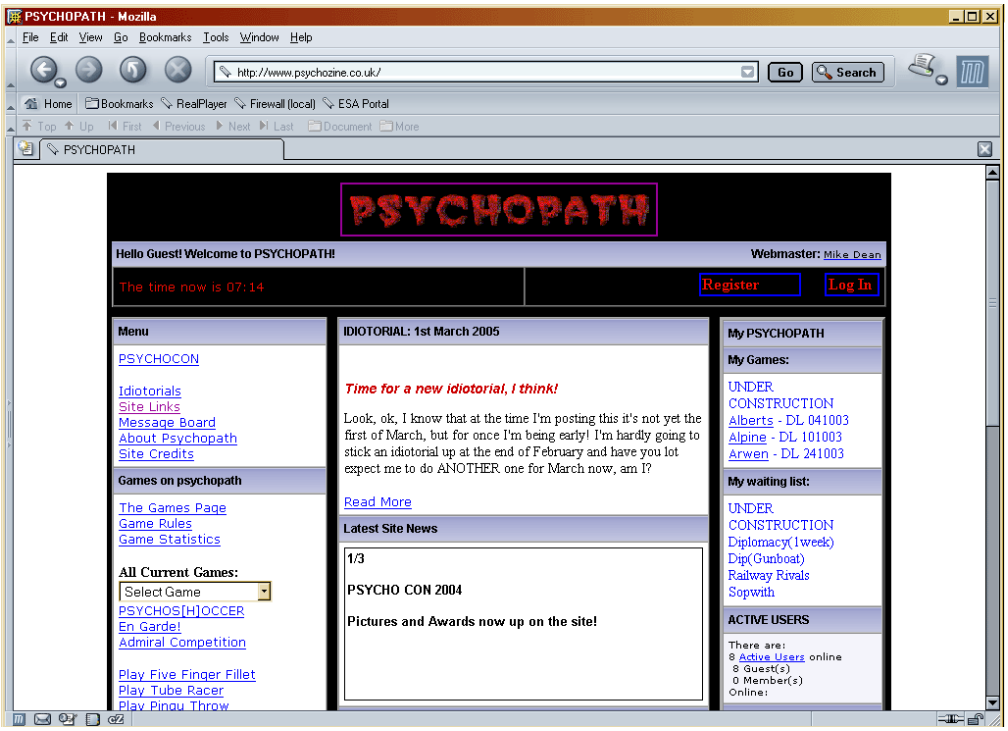
One of the first things you need to do is work out what type of games you want to offer. Diplomacy 2000 was 98% standard Diplomacy, 1% Diplomacy variants and 1% **Sopwith**. I had always liked a variety of different games, so set out to differentiate PSYCHOPATH from Dip2000. I decided very early on to host a number of Diplomacy variants, a number of 'unlimited player' games, a number of multi-player games, and to try and offer more obscure games that could easily be converted for postal play. We got games of **Psychos(h)occer** (the hardest and meanest **United** game on the internet!) and **En Garde!** going very quickly and these have been run very reliably by committed GMs ever since. The other games that are being played, or have been played on the site, are too numerous to mention, but include: **Puerto Rico**, **Circus Maximus**, **Formula Dé**, **By Popular Demand**, **Where Is My Mind?**, **Scrabble Challenge**, **Survive!**, **Swashbuckler**, **Machiavelli**, **Acquire**, **Witch Trial**, **Railway Rivals** and even **Snowball Fighting**! A quick tally of the number of games shows we are now up to around 140 (current and archived) which means we have averaged over three game starts each month! According to the message board, we have just reached our 300th member.



So how do you find time to run all these games and keep the site afloat? You don't! You need to find a good bunch of committed GMs to do all of this. The best advice here is, Don't try to run before you can walk. Start small and let it grow naturally. At the start, I managed to find a good bunch of around four or five GMs

Psychopath Web Details

PSYCHOPATH: http://www.psychozine.co.uk
PSYCHO CON: http://www.psychozine.co.uk/psychocon
Diplomacy 2000: http://www.lancedal.demon.co.uk/dip2000
Brinkster: http://www.brinkster.com
Webwiz: http://www.webwizguide.info
Yahoo Groups: http://groups.yahoo.com



to get the whole ball rolling. Along the way, GMs have come and gone, with the total participating somewhere around 20. Over the last few years we have fallen foul of two GMs who offered what looked to be good games and disappeared off into the night without trace almost as quickly as they appeared. These days, if I am approached by somebody who doesn't already play on the site or cannot demonstrate a track record of playing and/or GMing elsewhere, then they get a polite refusal! Just remember, though, that your GMs are doing this for free. Real life always comes first, so be prepared to step in to take over for a while, or to find alternative GMs to rescue orphaned games when real life prevents one of your GMs from continuing.

How do you find your players? This is a tricky one. One thing *not* to do is SPAM people! I learned this very early on as I got a real slating for writing to people directly inviting them to take a look at PSYCHOPATH and to join in the games. I naively thought that they would be interested in knowing about a new site. I couldn't have been more wrong! The people concerned weren't impressed and the result of the exercise probably only brought in one or two people - the rest were put off completely. Don't do it! Other options are: Set up a links page on your site, and start writing to other games sites offering a link exchange - this has worked very well for us and continues to grow and bring in new members. Join different gaming groups - Yahoo Groups is a good place to look. Let them know about your site and what it has to offer. Contact postal games magazine editors and ask them to give you a mention. Visit games conventions and distribute flyers. Finally, nothing beats word of mouth. As your site grows and improves and gets a reputation, others will join on personal recommendation.

As far as hosting your site is concerned, this is really up to you. PSYCHOPATH has a paid-for host, but currently also utilises individual personal accounts set up by the GMs using the free Educational Package available from Brinkster. The main body of the site uses ASP for much of the coding, and as far as possible this is made reusable so that any changes made can be reflected across the whole of the site quickly. I also opted to find a message board that I could use as the hub of the whole site. The best free one I could find comes from Webwiz and is easily configured for your own use. If you want true integration to the site (something I have been aiming for and slowly achieving) you will need to do some tailoring of the code - but take care here not to tailor things so much that you can't upgrade the message board software! Keep it as simple as possible - and keep a note of any changes you do make so that you can recreate these in later versions. That's the techie bit over!

Other stuff? When I first started running PSYCHOPATH, I wanted it to reflect, as far as possible, a traditional postal games zine transferred to the medium of the internet. This has proven more difficult than I envisaged, although my ultimate aim would be to take the site back in that direction. The introduction of the message board has helped enormously, and takes the place of the traditional letter column. I wanted to have articles, hobby news and reviews (film, books, CDs, etc), but this just hasn't happened. This is probably because such material is so widely available on the internet that those who do want it will find it elsewhere anyway. So, for the moment, the only exception is that I do still write an 'idiotorial' giving my views on where my life is heading, world events and site news. It's supposed to be monthly, but it now tends to be more like once in a blue moon!

Let's just revisit those opening paragraphs. What are you doing this for? I guess my main reason is because I enjoy playing and GMing games. I have met a lot of people through this hobby whom I would probably not have met otherwise. Although some of these have come and gone, I have now met quite a number personally through games conventions, including our own PSYCHO CON that we started last year. I am privileged to count them amongst my friends.

So, in conclusion some reminders:

* Work out what you want to get out of running a site.
* Don't try to run before you can walk. Start small and let it grow.
* Find some committed GMs to help you run the site.
* Make your site different - you have to have some unique selling points!
* Most importantly: have fun!

The Ridley Files

Raiders of the Game Cupboard 2

ERIC RIDLEY wrestles his way through a mixed bag of low cost games ...

IT'S A BIT of a mixed bag this month: collectable games of all sorts, but also some ideas on cheap games thrown in.

The *Wizkids*-produced game **MechWarrior** is a great table top battle game, superior to Heroclix in many ways, and you can find cheap boosters on Ebay, some shops and other internet sites. You don't need a ton of them to get started and it is a lot of strategic fun to play. As an added bonus, the sculpts are better, as is the painting, than most clix games (mainly due to the nature of the units).

If you are a card game fanatic, I recommend *Deciphers*' excellent **Dot Hack** CCG. Based on the popular media product of the same name, it is a fast paced and enjoyable game. The only thing that puts new players off is the strange graphical concept of the game. Everything is presented as computer game graphics, which fits very well with the background but can be daunting for those un-clear of its history. You can pick up booster boxes (if you hunt around) of the older sets for about £30. I should warn you, though, that they could be quite hard to find.

Anyhow, you guys came here to read reviews right? Well don't let me disappoint you. You will find no Lisa Fordhamesque, well-written and thought-out articles here, baby. Oh no, I shoot from the hip and I'm as blind as a bat. Let's go!

Pirates of the Spanish Main

Wizkids are renowned for their ingenuity and fresh approach to gaming. **Mage Knight** and **Heroclix** took the gaming world by storm a few years back and now they are attempting the hat trick with the first ever Constructible Strategy Game. When the news first reached my well-formed ears of another style of collectable gaming, I was slightly apprehensive (does any one remember collectable dice games? Thought not). All too often the emphasis is on gimmick rather than substance.

Pirates of the Spanish Main is a map-based ship game set among the high seas of, oh, I don't know, the 16th Century. Without really thinking about it I had decided that I wasn't really into the setting, it was a bit vanilla and it didn't really grab me. This was all without the benefit of seeing the game and ships of course, an opinion that would soon change. Maybe I should pull hard to stern and back up a little.

Pirates is presented in a booster pack, each one containing a full colour play map/ rules sheet, three dice, treasure tokens and two constructible ships (you might also get some personnel cards if you are lucky) and a check list. One pack has everything you need for two people to start playing straight away. The ships and all other tokens come on die-cut plasicards; simply pop out the pieces of the ship and start building it (a la Kinder Egg toys). In around about a minute you will have a rather cute and attractive looking clipper ship, or some other variation.

The basis of the game is treasure collecting (frankly any game with the word 'pirate' in the title should forced by law to be about treasure) and all the exciting combat that goes with it. The basic game involves sailing your ships from one side of the map to the other, collecting treasure while there, and sailing back. The player with the most treasure at the end wins. The treasure tokens are placed face down on 'Wild Island'. Each token has a certain value printed on it, and it is only when you get back to port that you can discover just exactly how much booty (I love that word) you have plundered. You can also loose the game if all your ships are destroyed.

Each ship has a points value, and it is suggested that each player games with 30 points worth of ships. I got 53 points worth of ships and characters in my first two packs and it is perfectly acceptable, and more importantly, fun, to play with what you get in one booster. Every game statistic you need to know is listed on the card that represents each ship; its cargo capacity, sailing speed and cannon range, making the game easy and flowing rather than getting bogged down in looking for different abilities and modifiers. Mage Knight always claimed to be a game where all the info you needed was on the figure and there would be no rules referencing; Pirates of the Spanish Main actually delivers on this promise and is lovely to play because of it.

Arrrgggh, me hearties ....
Pirates of the Spanish Main in play

The combat system is simple, yet strategic enough to keep you humming and hawing about what is the best course of action. The movement is of the same vein. While the strategy in the game isn't mind boggling, it was never intended to be; it is an entertaining, pleasant, eye-catching and original way to spend half an hour. It is a simple and stimulating game, which is a welcome break from all the CCGs and non-collectable card games out there.

At the price of £2.69 for a full game you can't complain. Everything you need is in the one booster. There are more complex and indepth rules available at *wizkids.com*, but the basic ones are an excellent way to get started. For the love of the South Winds, get out and grab yourself a pack, they are even available in some record and main street shops.

Details: from *Wizkids (www.wizkidsgames.com/pirates),* Constructible Strategy Game. 2 - 4 players, £2.69 per booster.

Humaliens

For those who haven't heard of **Humaliens**, and don't feel ignorant if you haven't, it is a Constructible Card Game designed by *Aliens of the Universe* and published by *AEG*, or at least it was. I recently managed to pick up a whole slew of these cards very cheaply. The publishing company had to stop selling the game due to 'market reasons' (read - 'naff sales') and as such, if you can find any to start with, you can get them quite cheap indeed. The actual reason that the game folded was that no retailers were willing to buy into another anime CCG with so many out there and with so many having a mainstream presence. Pokemon, Yu-Gi-Oh! and Yu-Yu Hakusho all have their own cartoon series, Humaliens did not.

The game is a colourful card game based on different races from around the galaxy. There are several factions: Humans, Aliens, Clones, Robots and more. These factions are vying for power and are slugging it out to get it.

To claim mastery of the galaxy you have to defeat your opponent(s), and to do that you must end up with a super-being, or more precisely, three super-beings. You start the game with 400 points to spend on your 'frontline'; this is where you put your Humaliens (characters) to fight. Characters range in value from about 50 to 220 points, so what you pick can be important. Throughout the course of the game you can never have a frontline whose printed total is more that 400 points.

To these characters you can attach weapons, pets and ethical notions, which can give in game bonuses and other effects. You have two actions to spend each turn; you can only attack once, and that must be the first action you do. Other choices include drawing cards, playing weapons etc or playing other Humaliens. Combat is a simple affair, but also quite smart. Each Humalien is worth X amount of points; this value doubles as its strength / defence and is noted by using paperclip type things attached to the side of the card. If you get damaged your points drop and you become less useful: simply slide the clips down the card to the new level. Every time you KO one of your opponent's Humaliens you get to put a token on the character that delivered the decisive blow. If you get three tokens on a card, it becomes a super-being. Get three super-beings and you win the game.

Each of the Humaliens has quite different abilities and there are a number of attachment cards that work nicely with them. The variation of the game is its main strength. There is lots of room for creative deck building. The art is good but not brilliant, it is manga inspired, but some of the images are a bit basic. The energy point system (with its paper clips) is a neat idea, and providing you have a base dexterity skill of about 4 you should manage without too much hassle.

It's not a great game, but it is a good one. It is more strategic than a lot of CCGs for the younger audience out there, and contains plenty of fun for full on hairy gamers as well. The concept is clear and clean, the tactics are many and varied, the cards are crisp and bright, but best of all it is cheap. I picked up a box of boosters for £8 and decks for a pound a pop; you could certainly buy worse games for a tenner. If you have younger gamers, definitely get it, if you don't, then certainly have a think about it. That's if you don't mind hunting through the bargain bin.

Details: from *AEG,* Collectable Card Game, 2 or more players, Price Varies

Acceleracers

As if the presumed social standing of this reviewer could fall any lower in the eyes of his readership, I am about to let it sink further with the following announcement. I am a huge Hot Wheels fan. I have hundreds of cars (still in mint packaging) pinned to my walls. I also have a healthy amount of tracks and video games to go with them.

With that in mind, imagine my joy (if you can) when I discovered that there is a Hot Wheels Collectible Card Game. The game comes in a two-player starter deck, packaged with a car and a hard deck box, and in three-card boosters that are packaged with a car as well. The presentation for the game is second to none. I can't ever remember a game that had all the graphical brilliance of this one. The art is fantastic, the card stock is good, the rules book is concise and colourful, and best of all, all the cards come with Hot Wheels cars. How cool! But smart graphic design and clever selling maketh not a game: let us delve further ...

The game is based on racing cars round massive circuits called realms and each game consists of four realms. The 'Racing Realms' were created by the mysterious Accelerons to test the greatest drivers in the world. It is your job to hare round them like Bluebird 2 with a cooler paintjob. To win, simply progress three of your cars through all four racing realms. Each realm and car has a set of SSP numbers, representing Speed, Power and Performance and a number printed on it that you have to exceed to escape the realm, for instance 5 Power. If your vehicle has 5 Power at the start of the turn then you may proceed to the next racing realm.

To make things interesting there are a number of other cards like Mod, Hazards and Accele-Chargers. Mods are modifications that you can slap onto your car; things like an Asphalt Anchor and a Megacharger, all of which increase your SSP numbers and help you escape realms. Hazards are cards like Hairpin Turn and Carnivorous Plants, which you play on your opponent to damage their vehicle. If any of your SSP numbers are reduced to 0 your vehicle is destroyed. Accele-Chargers are like better versions of Mods, but they only stay on your car until you leave the realm you are in.

The game flows quite quickly. You have 3 points to spend on playing cards each turn, so you get to play one or two cards, keeping it moving. The rules are very easy to pick up and make good Hot Wheels sense. The game is very simple: it has choices for customising your deck, but this only really extends to what cards and cars you like, rather than any deeper strategic choices. There are a few other factors in the game than I have described here, but not many: it is not so much as a subtle nuance game as a quick 20 mins for fun game.

If you, or anyone in your family is a hardcore Hot Wheels fan then this is fun and you can get cars that match your cards in the game (that is cool). But if you have no interest in the subject then you have probably just trawled through this review for nothing.

Details: from *Mattel,* Collectable Card Game, 2 players, £7.99 starter, £1.99 booster (includes toy car)

Pimp the Backhanding

If you ever had the thought 'I wonder what a game about pimping prostitutes on the street would be like' then may I suggest this rough approximation of that profession in the handy format of a card game.

Pimp the Backhanding is a card game for two-four players, and is a fairly simple affair. Each player starts out with five pimps and a handful of five cards. There is a pot of five Ho cards on the table and each round (of which there are three) Pimps compete to gain control of the Hos. Each pimp has a 'macking' score and a 'backhanding' score. To gain control of a Ho, attach a pimp to it, and then if any other pimps also want the Ho then you compare macking scores. You may play cards from your hands to alter the scores; finally both players roll a die and compare totals. The highest total wins control of the Ho.

After the macking phase is over you begin the backhanding phase. This is exactly the same as the macking phase only you attack your opponents' Hos in an attempt to make them too ugly to turn tricks.

Any Hos that are left after the backhanding phase are put in your score pile in the Money-laundering phase (all the Ho cards are worth different amounts). Again during this phase players may interfere with others by playing cards from their hands.

And that's it. Repeat these steps three times and the game is over: highest scoring player wins. The art work and card quality are both good, and the box the game is presented in is great, but if you read this review and thought it was a bit un-inspired, you'd be right. The game, while competently made, is nothing special. There is humour there, but it is very base and sometimes just plain nasty. The game is suggested for mature audiences, but unlike **Chez Geek**, the game contains foul language and graphic sexual details. While I admit that the premise is funny, (why do you think I bought the game?), the end product is more like a reflection of the very unfunny world of real prostitution than the glossed over 'Huggy Bear' type image we all like to think of.

The game is OK, I have certainly played worse, but depending on the crowd you play with, this game can either be a party starter or a very uncomfortable 30 minutes spent with a lot of frowns coming in your direction.

Details: from *Arthaus / One Hit Wonders,* Card Game, 2 - 4 players, £9.99

Austerlitz Nations: Denmark

JOHN BELL advises on the Danish options ...

PLAYING Denmark, diplomacy is of the utmost importance. Allying with Sweden can be very beneficial to both nations. In doing this, it means that you can concentrate on building your army in the south of Denmark where Holland, Rhine and Prussia all meet on your border. Because Denmark is split across sea, your startup brigades are also split, leaving the south unprotected from invasion with the exception of a handful of brigades. Denmark really does not need its war fleet at the start of the game and this can be used to build up a strong alliance with the likes of France or Great Britain. If you offer the war fleet in Europe to either of these nations, not for money but for an alliance, then this can greatly help Denmark's cause in the game. An alliance with France can be strong, as Holland will be wary about attacking you with such a large neighbour, likewise with the Rhine. An alliance with Great Britain can also stand you in good stead if you have a further alliance with the Rhine or Holland. Due to the size of its navy, Great Britain can land troops should France be an aggressor to any of your allies. Holland or the Rhine can also help should Prussia be aggressive towards you, so as you can see there are a few options there.

At the start of the game, if Sweden does not entertain an alliance with you, then contact Russia: Sweden will be less likely to attack Denmark if Russia is allied to you. Sweden does not have the resources to fight an east and west battle in the first year.

Economy

Denmark is in the lucky situation that it has three mines: two ore mines and a gold mine. It is a good idea to build these three mines on the first turn: although costly, money can be made from the goods straight away. For every factory you build, try to build a weaving mill and four sheep farms. You should have enough wood and stone in your warehouse to supply you over the first couple of turns should you need to raise any population densities. By May 1808 ultimately you should have three mines, four factories, four weaving mills, sixteen sheep-breeding farms, four or five lumber camps and four or five quarries. It would also be beneficial to have a couple of estates and horse-breeding farms operating by this time. After May/June 1808 continue building estates, quarries, lumber camps and horse-breeding farms: you should not need any more factories etc.

At the start of the game Denmark has a few highly populated densities, which it does not need. Demolishing two highly populated densities within the first couple of months will give you ample citizens, to build up your production sites and your army. If your trade city is at a low rate, it is wise to buy as much food and as many economic points as you can. Due to the bad winters in Denmark, food production is low until the summer months. If you can afford to put around 500 thousand Louisdore on each of your baggage trains, do this. Trade cities within easy reach are Karlskrona, Amsterdam, Berlin and Munich, where you can buy food and economic points.

Denmark also owns Martinique in the Caribbean at the start of the game. You won't need much in the Caribbean warehouse for the first few months apart from food. Sell everything you can when the rate of Martinique is good, thus giving you that little bit extra cash that can be moved between your European warehouse and the Caribbean warehouse. Cash will be tight for Denmark in the first few months, so buy and sell wisely.

Colonies

Denmark starts with three islands in the colonies, one being Martinique. On the first turn, federate all Caribbean ships together and board the brigades onto the fleet. The next turn take the brigades south and land the troops on the mainland. Don't waste valuable resources building new brigades in the colonies to begin with: get a foothold on the mainland and build a barracks. After that you can start building brigades. Be wary of Spain and Holland in the Caribbean, as they will be after the same coordinates as you.

Brigades

It is vital that you do not squander what little money Denmark has at the start of the game on expensive troops. On the first turn you will be able to build troops of reasonable quality and you should be looking at building either 48 battalions of Line Infantry and eight battalions of Cavalry or around 40/48 battalions of Grenadiers. In the up and coming months do try to build as much as possible, but remember to train troops that will be used to fight another empire's army: untrained troops are no use in battle. Try to build a strong fighting federation, which contains Line Infantry, Riflemen, Grenadiers, Cavalry and Artillery. Veteran reserves are cheap and cheerful to build and train, but really aren't too great in combat. However, having two or three federations of ten brigades of Veteran Reserves make good land-grabbers.

With Denmark it is a good idea to work out all costs down to the last penny in the opening months: the last thing you want is a stack of untrained troops that you plan to use in battle.

Strategy

Denmark can become a powerful nation in a relatively short space of time, if played correctly.

Gameplan 1: Attacking Sweden

Attacking Sweden is difficult if you do not have Russia on your side. In Denmark, the main barracks is two months marching time from Sweden's homeland. A good idea is to build troops straight away in the north. You should be able to attack Sweden comfortably by around July 1808. When you feel you are ready to make an attack, march your troops to around coordinate 37/6. Once they arrive, build a barracks so that you can train troops and increase headcounts of your main army. Don't bother with the garrison troops or land-grabbers. Go to war with Sweden in the same turn as you build the barracks. When you attack, ideally have three federations of untrained Veteran Reserve and one fully trained fighting army of around 150 battalions. This means you can take 12 coordinates per turn. Send the

Austerlitz at a glance

Detailed PBM Napoleonic wargame from Supersonic Games Ltd in the UK, Quirxel games (the designers) in Germany, SSV in Austria and Austerlitz-Pbem on the web. UK charges are £10 for startup, £3.75 per turn. This series of beginners' guides is based on the Supersonic version of the game.

www.austerlitzpbem.com
www.austerlitz.biz
http://members.aon.at/postspiel/
www.quirxelgames.de

strong army towards Karlskrona (providing your spy reports tells you that this is of the same size or less) and spread the remaining three federations throughout Sweden. If you have Russia on your side, make sure to synchronise the attack. After the initial attack, build troops in the new barracks to backup up your strategy. It is also a good idea to transport commanders by merchant ship early on, so that you have plenty in the north of Denmark. Another handy hint is that if you have built land-grabbing troops, you can exchange battalions with brigades with only five battalions in them strengthening your fighting army, or once you have built land-grabbers, move them to a diagonal coordinate away from the barracks: this means that spies can't really tell how many battalions you have. For instance, build 50 VR troops and move them out next turn: they don't need to be trained, as they are only land-grabbers. If you build 50 quality battalions next turn, it looks on the spy report as if you haven't built any troops this turn. Sneaky, but effective.

Gameplan 2: Attacking Confederation of the Rhine or Holland
To do this, it is best to be on good terms with Sweden. If you launch an attack on mainland Europe, you leave yourself wide open to attack from Sweden and will not be able to maintain enough production or tax income to keep you going. Like attacking Sweden, it is best to have four attacking federations: one very strong and three land-grabbers. Be wary of Holland, if he is allied to France. If he is, remember to use your fleet to try to interest Great Britain into an alliance with yourself.

Gameplan 3: The Sleeping Giant
If you can remain on good terms with Sweden, then you can focus on building an excellent economy and a very strong army. Although a little boring, it makes attacking empires a year or so into the game a little easier. You would be able to wipe out empires the size of Holland or Confed within a couple of turns (providing you stay away from their homeland armies).

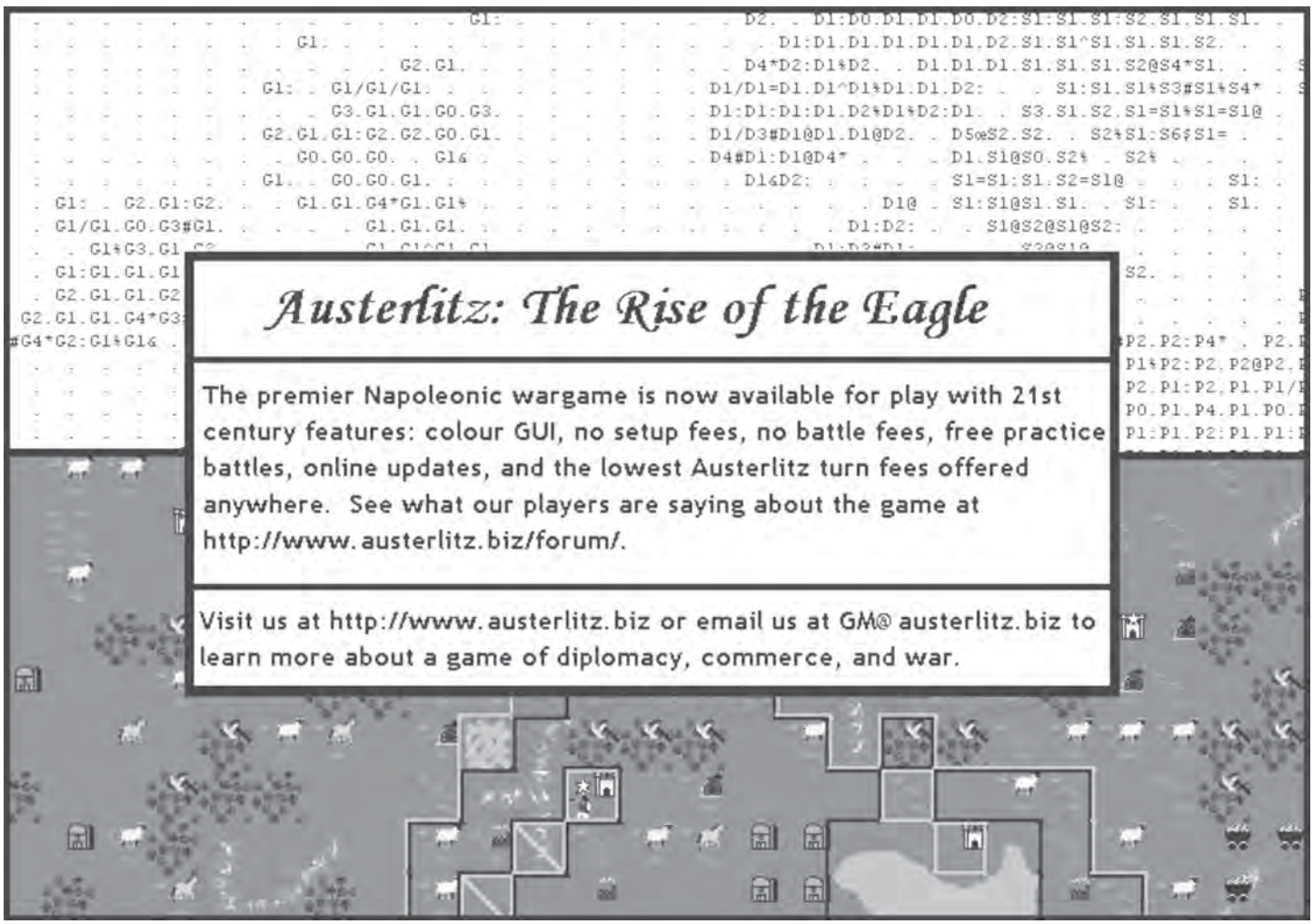
Use your spies wisely in the game. Your main threats are Holland, Confed, Prussia and Sweden: you are able to get spy reports on all of these empires. You can also find out state relations of Spain or France using your colonial spy.

Historical Fact File

The following extract is by courtesy of the *Royal Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs.*
www.um.dk/Publikationer/UM/English/Denmark/kap6/6-5.asp

The Napoleonic war came to Denmark in 1807 when Britain attacked Denmark, bombarded Copenhagen and sailed away with the entire Danish fleet. Denmark had already provoked Britain in 1798 by letting her warships act as escort vessels providing protection for the many, not always strictly neutral, activities which were conducted under the Danish flag. In July 1800, the convoy conflict gave rise to the Freya affair, in which Britain forced Denmark to put an end to the convoys. When Denmark then sought the help of Russia and entered into the League of Armed Neutrality in December 1800, Britain responded with war. On 2 April 1801, Admiral Nelson defeated the Danish line of defence in the Sound off the capital during the Battle of Copenhagen. Under threat of bombardment from the British ships in the Sound, Britain forced Denmark to suspend its membership of the League of Armed Neutrality and relinquish its policy of offensive neutrality.

The British attack in 1807 was designed to prevent Napoleon from gaining control of the Danish navy and thus putting him in a position to cut off Britain's vital Baltic trade. Denmark then allied herself with Napoleon and joined the Continental System. In 1808 a French-Spanish auxiliary corps came to Denmark, and, trying to keep themselves warm, Spanish soldiers accidentally burnt Koldinghus (Castle of Kolding) to the ground. However, the situation in Spain changed and on 2 May 1808 Spain rose in rebellion against Napoleon. Thus, in the summer of 1808, 9,000 of the 13,000 soldiers of the Spanish corps under General la Romana were brought back to Spain with the help of the English navy in order to fight against Napoleon. Despite the efforts of the Danish gunboats and privateers, Denmark did not succeed in blocking the passage of the strong British convoys through Danish straits. The result of the war was the State Bankruptcy in 1813, and at the Peace of Kiel the following year Frederik VI had to cede Norway to the king of Sweden.



The Fordham Folio

Alternative roleplaying systems

LISA FORDHAM looks at some popular independent games ...

WITH ALL the different role-playing systems and settings out there, how come so many people want to stick with one thing? My problem is with gamers' hesitation to try new things (my gaming group in particular). Of course, this isn't an across-the-board problem with gamers in general, but I do hear and read a lot about how hard it is for people to convince their groups to try a different system or even setting. Maybe I'm spoiled, but I grew up playing many different games; like many people, my first was D&D, but my group of friends was always willing to try new things. Over the years I've learned that there is no perfect system, but instead many great systems that all cater to different settings and moods of play. I am going to talk about why I perceive this to be a problem and how to convince the stragglers in your group to try something new. I'll conclude the article with a look at some popular independent games that you might enjoy.

Too much of a good thing?

I guess the biggest problem about sticking with one game is that there's so much you'll miss. I've heard people argue before that when it comes to choosing your RPG system 'Why have hamburgers when you could have steak?' I like steak, but trust me - if you ate steak every day three times a day you'd get sick of it really quick. The same goes with RPGs. The other problem, and this relates to the previous point, is that there are lots of other game companies out there that make great products but don't get the attention they deserve.

There are many reasons, more then I could possibly list here, as to why some people don't want to try a new system. The most obvious is that they don't want to learn a new rule set: why learn a new rule set when the old one works just fine? Well, because each system lets you try new things, or old ones in different ways. Some systems encourage more role-playing, some have intricate combat rules, others are simple and lighthearted, while others may have incredibly deep character generation. Each game brings something new to the table.

The people who always stick to one game system or setting confound me. It goes back to my steak analogy: how could someone play the same game for years on end without a change? I've been playing d20 **Forgotten Realms** now for almost four years and I almost want to just stop playing completely; I can't take it any more. How can others stick with the same things so stubbornly? It's sad that there are those out there who don't want to experience more in life. The sad truth is that humans have a tendency to avoid change once they get comfortable with something.

Be kind to your bank balance

Then there's the money issue. Frankly, roleplaying can be expensive. A person can easily spend $100 just on core books. Getting into a new game is rarely cheap; few games are totally playable from just one book. This is, in part, the fact that the RPG business is just that: a business. The publishers need to make money, and what better way than to make you buy two to three books (sometimes more) just to play a game? Many times the reason for multiple books is more benign: if everything was in one volume, it could get really big and expensive. Not many people want to shell out for an $80 800-page book and then lug it around. Multiple smaller books also allow the player base to just pick and choose what they want from a setting, and then be forced to buy all of it.

On the other hand, it isn't always expensive. Most RPG groups have a 'collector', as we like to call them - a person who buys as many RPG books as they can because they enjoy reading them, so many times you never have to buy a new book to try a setting. Also, there are places like *DrivethroughRPG* that have weekly, free, legal PDF downloads of books, though it's not always a system book and you may never see the one you want for free. Buying books off *ebay* is another great way to save money. Then there's the library: hey, you never know, they might just have something.

Try something new

So what if you're in this horrible situation, being forced to play the same setting, system (and if you're like me, same general plots) over and over and over again? Volunteer to GM something next time your GM cannot make it, or ask if your group wants to try something new just once a month. Of course, you've probably already thought of that and no one wanted to. That's where you have to sit people down and find out why they don't want to: if one person doesn't want to learn another rule set because the current one is complicated, then suggest a simpler system. If you're already playing a fantasy game, don't suggest another fantasy game, suggest a sci-fi or modern game. If you actually explain what's different about the game you want to play you may find people more willing, especially those who have never played a different system; to them, they all could be more or less the same.

Independent games

Let's not kid around here, folks, there are a lot of role-playing games on the market. Way more than any of us have time to fully explore and play. Most of us just stick to one of The Big Three (**D&D**, **World of Darkness** and **Palladium**) as we hold fond memories of these and it's easy to find players. Not me, but I admit I'm a game-buying addict. I buy any game that sounds cool even though I know I'll never get to run/play it. **Feng Shui**, **Orkworld** and **Amber** have sat longing to be played for so long. I do my part though... **Savage Worlds**, **Deadlands** and **Buffy/Angel** are all lines I support as much as I can and do my best to play and run.

In the last few years there has been bunch of small press efforts that have come out that you may not have heard of. They comprise the 'indie' role-playing scene. A lot of these games are small and are only available

through PDF. Others are hardcopy efforts. Virtually all of them take roleplaying and push our ideas of what it is. For those that subscribe to GNS (Gamism, Simulationism, Narrativism) theory, something I am not fond of at all, a lot of these are narrative games where players and GM vie for who tells what happens in the next scene. Sadly, there is a lot of rubbish out there, so for the rest of this article I'm going to clue you in on some of the games that deserve to be given a look. Even if you'll never run them, most of these have concepts and mechanics that are worth your perusal alone. Check them out ...

The Shadow of Yesterday
http://anvilwerks.com/tsoy/
This game has just recently been released and there's been quite a buzz about it in certain nooks an crannies of the internet. It's high-fantasy-post-apocalyptic fun with some absolutely fantastic mechanical takes on genre conventions, especially experience. This is *the* game if you'd like your game to emulate the feel of the Final Fantasy games. The bulk of the rules are free online and a print version is also available for purchase. You may also want to check out some of the other games at *Anvilwerks*: like *Paladin*, they're good and they're cheap. If we had some 'Rising Stars in RPG Creation', Clinton R Nixon would easily be included, methinks.

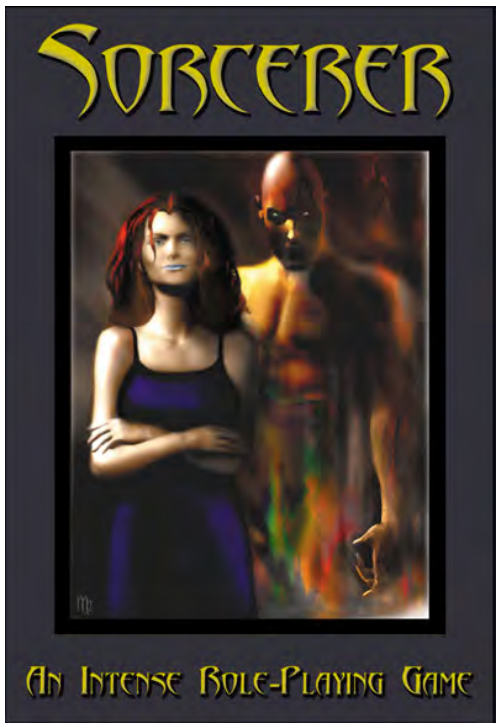
Primetime Adventures
www.dog-eared-designs.com/games.html
We've all had games inspired by television and now we have a system made specifically to emulate the structure and flow of our favourite TV shows. From Airwolf to Knight Rider, this game has got you covered. Well worth the $15 price tag.

Octane
http://memento-mori.com/octane/
I love the concept behind this game even if I'm not a fan of the mechanics. The character sheet actually sold me on this game, which should tell you something of my willpower when it comes to buying games. The setting is tough to describe, but you'll know exactly what I'm talking about because it lies in our collective subconscious... it's a post-apocalyptic game set in a landscape of trashed Americana. It's pop culture turned on its head in an Elvis fan's fever dream. Psychotronic is the adjective that describes it, in fact. It takes a good deal of influence from the movie Six-String Samauri and goes from there to include just about every B-movie convention you've ever seen when you stayed up too late watching USA. Worth it for the setting and bibliography alone. As above, you may want to check out more of *Jared*'s games... The Farm looks to be one of the more frightening role-playing experiences I've ever read.

Dust Devils
www.chimera.info/dustdevils/index.html
A different take on westerns, focusing on the grey moral area that westerns are known for. It has cowboys, Indians, and dark secrets in a setting very near and dear to my heart. Players portray gunslingers, gamblers, cowboys and outlaws who must not only survive in a rugged land, but conquer their inner Devil - those dark secrets that keep folks from being honest and decent. The game uses a deck of standard playing cards and poker chips or other tokens. At moments of conflict, players build a poker hand combo based on a number cards received from their character's attributes & traits. The highest poker combo wins the round, but the highest card earns rights to narrate the scene. Characters are driven by their Devil, a character trait mechanic that reflects the characters' troubled pasts and transgressions.

The Riddle of Steel
www.theriddleofsteel.net/
This game has the most detailed and incredible combat system I have ever seen. It's even been approved by the Association for Renaissance Martial Arts. That's pretty hot. It's complex and pretty complicated, but man is it cool. The game is also noteworthy for its take on experience. The game uses 'Spiritual Attributes' that give your rolls bonuses and a way to get XP. For instance, your 'Loyalty to King Hammershans' can be used in the middle of battle to swing the tide, if appropriate. Their website has a ton of support for the game, too, including a quick-start rulebook.

Sorcerer
www.sorcerer-rpg.com/brochure.php/sorcerer-intro.html
No discussion of indie games would be complete without mentioning Sorcerer. This is the granddaddy of indie roleplaying games written by one of the biggest proponents of the subniche, Ron Edwards. This has been around for a few years and is a great take on modern myth and magic. Magic in most modern fantasy fiction has become too nice. That's right: too nice. Wizards are sad-eyed fellows who say cryptic things ... or they're Just Folks who raise cats or struggle for social reform. What has happened to Maleficent, to Elric, or to those wonderful fellows in black robes who wielded curved daggers and swore by Set? Whatever happened to the sorcerer as cosmic outlaw? The one element missing is the classical sorcerer who, by himself or herself, wields *no* magic: no spells, no powers, no senses. He or she just knows how to call up demons (whatever *they* are) and how to bind them. That's all. Demons are wonderfully versatile: the sorcerer may bind them into his or her own body or into the bodies of others, or directly send them at enemies or goals. And they can be subverted! Your own bound demon is easier to control, and someone else's bound demon is harder, but it's not impossible to be served one day by the demon you were fighting the day before. In this game, 'magic' is a load of hogwash: fantasy, frippery, and swindling. But you play a person - a normal person - who knows how to summon and bind beings of horror and madness for personal purposes.



And if you really want to delve into the world of indie roleplaying games, you'll want to check out The Forge (*www.indie-rpgs.com/*) an excellent discussion forum for anyone who has played one too many D20 game.

Prisms from Another Galaxy

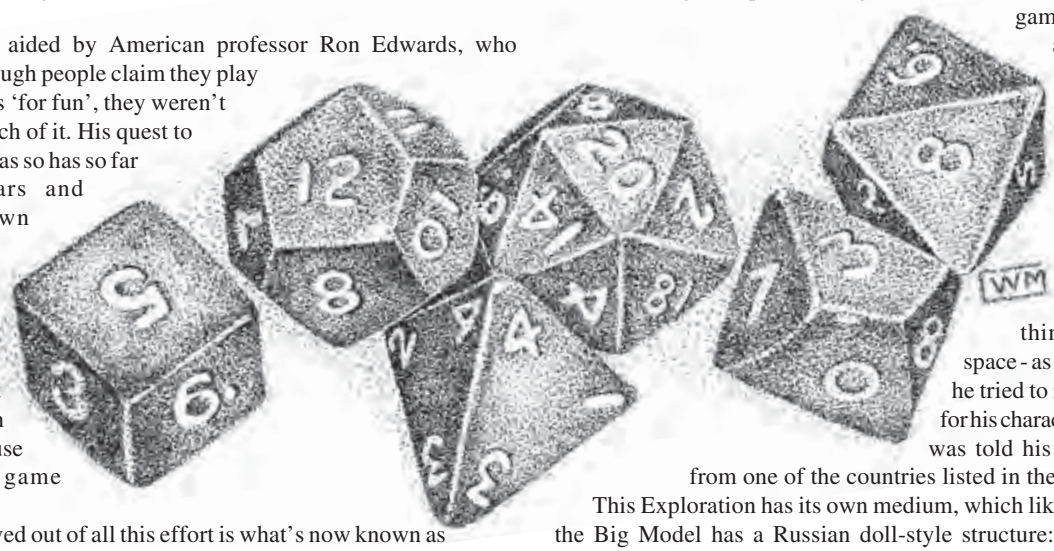
DAVE PANCHYK examines the Big Model of how role-playing games really work ...

IT STARTS with the clatter of a die hitting a table.

Actually, let's go back a bit further. The polyhedral freezes, then reverses its skittering bounce and leaps up to stop again, suspended in air centimetres below the hand that cast it. The hand is Lee's. Lee, sad to say, isn't having fun. He answered an ad in a gaming shop for 'good role-players' and is now jammed into an existing group with another new person. The group's specialty, Lee observes, seems to be playing bog-standard sword and sorcery adventures.

Fortunately for us, Lee's discomfort can help us examine the unspoken and un-thought-about intricacies of this very human pursuit of role-playing gaming. Examining actual play reveals the elements of role-playing's inner workings. It's too late for Lee, but we can learn from his experience.

In this, we're aided by American professor Ron Edwards, who observed that although people claim they play role-playing games 'for fun', they weren't having terribly much of it. His quest to find out why this was so has so far taken eight years and spawned its own website, which in turn has not only fueled vigorous testing and debate of Edwards' theories, but birthed an enthusiastic hothouse of independent game design.



What has evolved out of all this effort is what's now known as the 'Big Model' of game design. It puts every part of the act of playing a role-playing game into perspective, pulling apart and examining the elements that could prove obstacles to fun. Consciousness of these helps one gain greater clarity into one's own games - as a gamemaster, designer, or player.

That time-stopped die roll is one of many moment-to-moment activities that make up a gaming session. Searches through the rulebook, changes to a character sheet, narrating dialogue between the player characters and NPCs: these are the minutiae that carry a game forward. These are the Ephemera. Let's draw a box around that, as Ephemera, being capitalized, is a Very Important Term.

Earlier in the evening, Richard, the gamemaster, explained how the group resolves skill rolls (such as in combat), and led the new players through character creation. As it turns out, everything is rolled randomly for the sake of 'realism', something Lee's not happy with as he prefers a system whereby one can spend resources to deliberately shape one's character or to declare a skill success in-game. Happy or not, though, Lee must accept these as the Techniques the group uses. (We'll draw a box around Techniques, this one larger, as it contains the Ephemera. A group's Techniques, such as the random die rolls, determine the Ephemera - the die Lee cast.)

Every playing group, then, uses Techniques. But techniques of what? Here we get to the heart of role-playing: Exploration, the effort to create a 'shared imagined space' through communication among the players and gamemaster. (This is yet another, larger box, containing the other two boxes within it). Exploration, like Techniques, has some potentially contentious issues, such as who is allowed to create things that enter that space - as Lee discovered when he tried to invent a new country for his character's background and was told his character had to be from one of the countries listed in the rulebook.

This Exploration has its own medium, which like the nested boxes of the Big Model has a Russian doll-style structure: every game has its particular 'color' (which in this case Lee dismisses as 'standard Tolkien-derivative hack-and-slash'). The color is expressed primarily through the 'system'. The system helps bring into being the 'situation' of play, which has two elements: the 'setting' of the game, and the nature of the 'characters'.

One box to hold them all

Role-playing gaming, then, is comprised of Exploration, the Techniques that express it, and the Ephemera that move the action forward. Thus far, this model hasn't included the most critical ingredient in the hobby of role-playing: people.

Lee's roll, free at last, tumbles along the tabletop, careens off a book - and promptly falls off the table.

'It's a 12,' says Gina, the other new person in the group, looking at the die on the floor.

'Nope, gotta re-roll it,' Richard, the gamemaster, says.

'I'm used to taking whatever it shows when it lands,' Gina says.

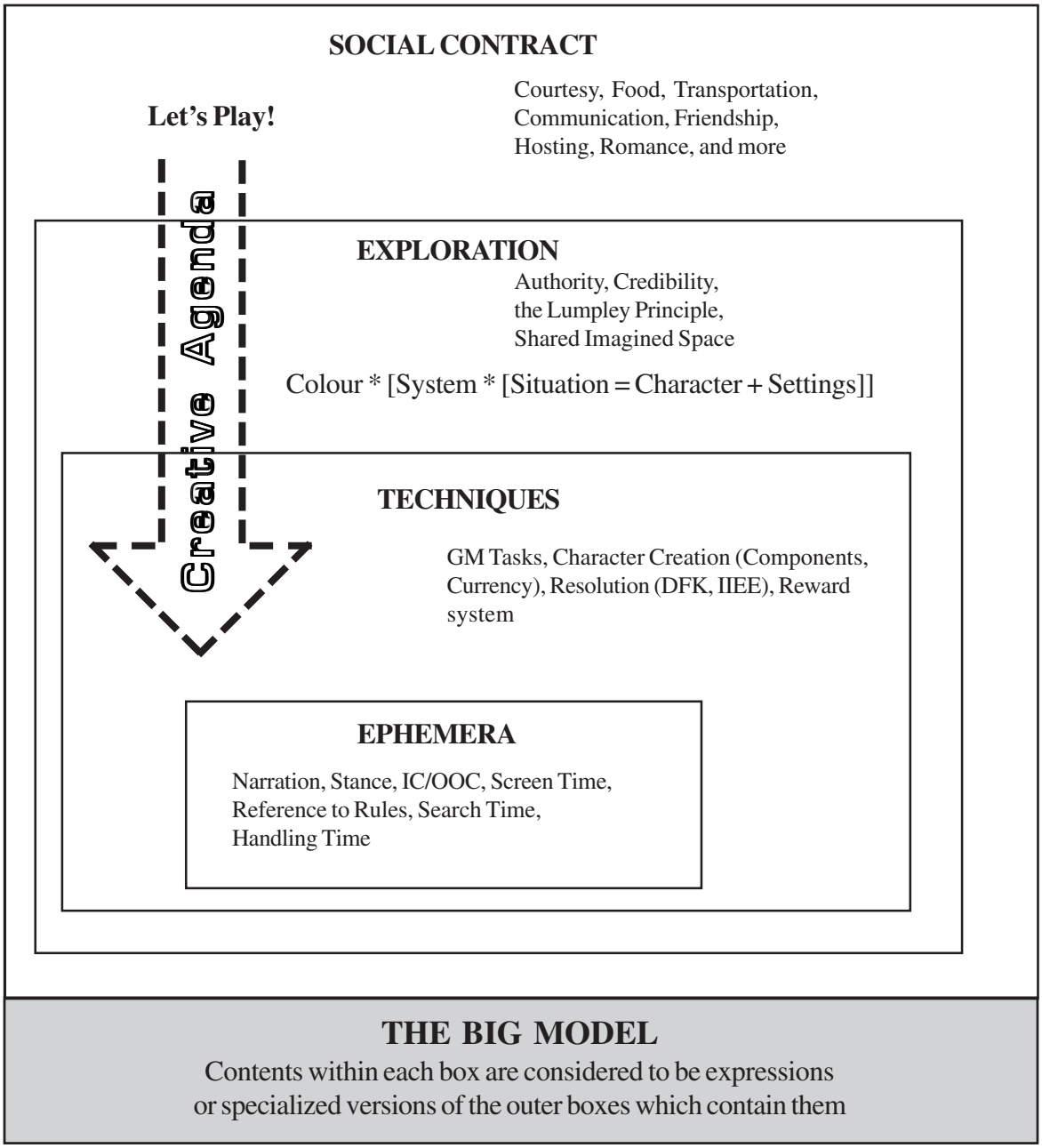
'Well, we play it that every roll has to be on the table,' Richard says.

This exchange is a good example of how the human element of role-playing gaming is unavoidable. After all, the Ephemera don't perform themselves, and Techniques aren't decided upon totally by rulebooks. The sum of a group's interpersonal matters comprise the largest and all-encompassing box of the Big Model: the Social Contract.

Acknowledgements and Links

The author is indebted to Ron Edwards, Vincent Baker, and Timothy Kleinert for useful 'steering' after the first draft of this article.
Ron Edwards (creator of The Big Model): *http://indie-rpgs.com/_articles/glossary.html*
The Forge: *www.indie-rpgs.com*

The author: *mandrake@mandrakegames.com*



THE BIG MODEL

Contents within each box are considered to be expressions or specialized versions of the outer boxes which contain them

The most obvious part of the Social Contract is comprised of the 'normal' social behaviours: the fact Richard took everyone's coat on arrival; the banning of snacks at the table; the angling of a car-less male member of the group to get a ride home from Gina in a (to Lee) transparent ploy to spend time with her. More importantly, all role-playing gaming in a group falls under the Social Contract as well.

The Social Contract affects gaming primarily through Creative Agendas, the particular ways in which people approach the act of role-playing. Each person at the gaming table has a Creative Agenda, though it may be unarticulated. These Creative Agendas may be different or even incompatible; this is the single greatest cause of friction in gaming sessions from Brighton to Beijing.

There are three Creative Agendas; every gamer tends toward one of them. Every game promotes one of these agendas by influencing player behaviour; it exerts that influence through its published material, especially rules sets.

The most competitive of the Creative Agendas encourages players to 'Step on Up' - to challenges within the game, to competition among players, to the possibility of being 'the best' among a group of peers - and perhaps coming away with greater esteem.

Another of the three Creative Agendas promotes 'The Right to Dream': the impulse among gamers to simulate the gaming world and immerse themselves in it. Creating and maintaining that verisimilitude are paramount.

The final Creative Agenda demands 'Story Now!', if need be at the expense of self-interest or the illusion of the game world. Emotional depth and dramatic power are the desired ends of in-game action.

Playing well with others

Knowing that game systems influence player behaviour, game designers can fine-tune their ruleset to encourage a desired kind of play. If rolling a success allows the player to narrate the action that called for the roll, then Story Now! becomes the Creative Agenda the players are moved toward. Consciousness of the Big Model lets designers ask themselves penetrating questions about what kind of game they want, who they want to play it, and how they want them to play; each question answered further hones their conception of their game.

The Big Model is arguably more important to players and play groups. After all, the rules of a game are much easier to change than a person is. Since most of us tend to think of gaming as transparent, we don't get to the deeper issues underlying rifts in a gaming group. After all, it's 'just gaming', right? But minor differences between people magnify each other in a group setting. Being clear about Creative Agenda and the Social Contract can eliminate the problems many people experience, sometimes before they even begin.

A good analogy is seeing a gaming group as a rock'n'roll band, which requires its members to have some social compatibility if they are to work well together. Nor do they 'just play' without first establishing some common goals. It's critical during any overt Social Contract discussion that everyone be honest about his or her preferred play style. In actual practice, a Social Contract discussion can be a little stilted, as people are often uncomfortable examining and discussing their game philosophy, beyond nearly-useless statements like 'I don't like hack-and-slash.' Someone familiar with the Big Model mustn't start trying to couch the discussion in technical terms, but use their knowledge to ask focused questions: 'Is it the risk involved in combat for your character? Do you not feel effective enough in combat? Or do you wish to avoid a high level of combat in-game?'

Playing a role-playing game is a subtle kind of social alchemy. The people involved, the game played, and the agreements reached can create golden moments of memorable play or leaden, tedious play sessions. It all depends on the consent and compromise forged at the gaming table, and I guarantee the time invested in Social Contract matters will pay huge dividends in fun.

MUDs to MMORPGs

HANS JØRGEN ECK describes the evolution of online games ...

MULTI-USER dungeons, or MUDs for short, have been around for over 25 years and have attracted thousands of players into their text-based environment. As computer technology improved and the internet grew it was only a matter of time before graphical online games saw the light of day. The pioneers were few and brave and had to tackle a number of challenges that I will discuss in this article.

In the beginning

A MUD is a text-based environment where players log in, create a character and play along with others. Think of the old text adventure games where you moved around by typing compass directions, add some role playing elements like character stats, chat functions like IRC (Internet Relay Chat), and you have a basic mud. The MUD I grew up with, **SWmud**, is a *Star Wars*-themed MUD where players can take on the role of different races and fight for the Imperial, Rebel or Neutral side. If you have never tried a MUD and want to see the predecessor to the Massive Multiplayer Online Role Playing Games, use telnet and connect to *swmud.org* on port 6666.

Converting text to graphics

A couple of the very first graphical online games were **Ultima Online** and **Meridian 59**. I only ever played Ultima Online and I'm going to write a little about the problems *Origin*, the company behind Ultima Online, encountered. When Ultima Online, or UO for short, was released, people were using a modem to connect to the internet. The first immediate problem for gamers playing UO was the lag and frequent disconnects. MUDs usually only had from 20 to 200 people online at any given time, but now someone was hosting servers which would have many hundred and even thousands of players, and even today companies have a hard time optimizing their network code. It took a few months for Origin to stabilize the connectivity which was the most immediate problem.

It didn't take long before another problem arose, as player killers started to plague the game. In most MMORPGs the players kill computer-controlled monsters to gain experience and levels. Some games, like UO, allowed players to attack other players, this is known as PK'ing, PvP'ing or Player Killing. There were few, if no, game mechanics in place to limit this in the start, so it was basically free-for-all killing and 'griefers' were having a ball. A 'griefer' is basically someone playing the game in a way that they ruin other players' fun for their own satisfaction. Cyberspace bullies is a good description of them. Taunting players, cheating and using inappropriate language are some of the ways they accomplish this. You could barely leave a town before someone killed you at times and this made the game no fun for most people. Player killing was also a part of quite a few MUDs. Usually there were some game mechanics in place to limit the PvP'ing but some MUDs also used a free-for all system. As most players prefer no PvP or PvP with limitations, Origin had to make some changes to the system and created a bounty system, something also used on many MUDs.

Another problem Origin had not foreseen during their testing was corpse looting. If you killed a monster, someone else could run up and steal the loot if they were quick enough. On the MUDs I have played, they had different ways of handling this. Some had no rules for looting, and other let only the player who got the kill loot the corpses. In today's games, there are mostly strict rules for this and also game mechanics in place where you can change the rules to fit groups you might be playing with.

New generations

In 1999, *Sony* launched what would be one of the most addictive games of all times, **Everquest**. This was the first 3d massive multiplayer online role playing game with really good graphics, and it was a major leap up from Ultima Online. Everquest's game mechanics were closer to those of MUDs than UO's were. It had the typical classes, races and levels and PvP was restricted to special servers.

New games have followed since then with better graphics and new innovations, always pushing the envelope. One of the major differences between MUDs and MMORPGs if you don't take the graphics into account, is the new content and features being added on a much more regular basis in MMORPGs. Many MUDs are good at making new content and features, but not to the extent of graphical online worlds where many employees work every day doing this.

So are today's games better than some of the MUDs that have been around for over a decade? I honestly think most of them are. They have impressive graphics, they can host several thousand players on one server, they are packed with features and they have new content and features added frequently. I think MMORPGs will continue to evolve and push the envelope as years pass. What about the MUDs? People predicted MUDs would die out before we hit the year 2000 and here we are in 2005 with somewhere between 1500 and 2000 MUDs around. A lot of MUDs have probably lost some of their playerbase to the major online games, but I believe we will see MUDs around for at least another decade without a doubt.

Finally, I would recommend the following MUDs MMORPGs to Flagship readers.

MUDs

Armageddon
http://www.armageddon.org/
Players are required to maintain a high level of roleplay at all times.

Discworld
http://discworld.atuin.net/lpc/
The game retains the comical, fun feel of the books. I played this for a while a long time ago and found a lot of humour on that MUD, as in the books.

Aardwolf
http://www.aardmud.org/
This one is the top-ranked MUD on *www.topmudsites.com*

Ages of Despair
http://www.agesofdespair.net/
A fairly well-established medieval fantasy MUD, which interestingly enough, I'm hosting on the university network.

SW Mud
www.swmud.org

MMORPGS

Star Wars Galaxies
http://starwarsgalaxies.station.sony.com/
The next expansion is available for pre-order in early April. Star Wars Galaxies: Episode III Rage of the Wookiees! SWG was reviewed in Flagship #104.

World of Warcraft
www.worldofwarcraft.com
Set in the established world of the Warcraft computer game. Reviewed in Flagship #112.

Dark Age of Camelot
http://camelot-europe.com
Loosely set against a background of Arthurian and Norse mythology. Reviewed in Flagship #1Reviewed in Flagship #107.

Everquest 2
http://everquest2.station.sony.com/
The updated version of the most successful of all MMORPGs, set in the world of Norrath.

Anarchy Online
www.anarchy-online.com/
A science fiction themed game set in the world of Rubi-Ka.

THE MIGHTY PEN

Authenticity?

In the last issue, Rick McDowell wrote interestingly about the way that he designed 'Fall of Rome', and the sources that he consulted. Though the game is clearly enjoyed by many, I'm still not convinced that its attraction is 'historical authenticity'. After all, the game stars Celts, Visigoths, Vandals, Thuringians, Alamanni, Teutons, Lombards, Saxons, Franks and Huns - but not a solitary Roman. Rome doesn't even make it onto the map. Given that Romans were active in the West up till 480, and played an important part in the curbing of the Huns, that seems rather a big omission in a game called 'Fall of Rome'.

Even leaving that aside, there has been some pretty substantial editing of history. The head of the Thuringian position is given as Childeric, who in fact was the father of Clovis (head of the Frank position) - Childeric was in Thuringia as an exile because he could not keep his hands off the women of his Frankish subjects (as he went home to the Franks, he stole his host's wife, which argues he was a slow learner, too). The Vandals had acquired a lot of horse archers in the battle situation that Rick cited, but in real life they were defeated precisely because Belisarius (er, actually he was an East Roman) had horse archers and the vandals didn't. In the game, Vortigern stars as head of the Saxon position in Europe, but in real life he was a British ruler who employed Saxon federates until they decided to employ him as a figurehead. He was never active in Europe. Hengest, the real Saxon (well, Jute) leader, had been in Europe, though.

The modern equivalent would be to produce a game called 'Fall of Communism' with no Russians in it, where George Bush Snr leads the UK, George Bush Jnr leads the USA, Marshal Petain leads the Germans, and Iraq has tactical nuclear weapons. It might be a very good and entertaining game, but I don't think anyone would be praising its historical authenticity.

Rick's article also touched on the issue of variable victory conditions, and he is right to suggest that it adds a great deal to a game if players can choose their own victory conditions. After all, the objectives of an individual rules are his/her own business. The thing is that the individuals and peoples with whom he deals also have their own objectives - there have been articles in flagship on the boredom of NPC mages who are used as factories and the psychological scars of NPC generals! These objectives don't necessarily mesh in the slightest with the objectives of the rulers. Part of the reason for Rome's fall was that a great many Romans did not want to fight or pay tax, despite their rulers' wish that they should. The people of any tribe or state should have their own idea of what constitutes a victory built into the game, as part of the operating environment of the player. Persuading the Huns to establish a profitable embroidery industry isn't going to be the easiest of tasks for a player who has chosen success in Interior Decorating as his victory condition (I'm sure there is a Monty Python sketch, lurking in there) - but some players like a challenge.

Chris Morris *(Ulaidh Games)*

[My own historical knowledge largely comes from '1066 And All That'. But as a totally irrelevant point which amuses me, a chap in the 18th century wrote a play about Vortigern on old parchment, which he passed off as Shakespeare's. It actually got produced in 1796, though it wasn't a success and he later confessed. Gosh, though, if it had been genuine we'd know all about Vortigern himself, his wife Rowena and my favourite historical double-act, Hengest and Horsa.]

Readers' reactions

Well issue 112 is here, Flagship The Magazine for Gamers, it has had other names,The Postal and Email Gaming Magazine and Postal and Interactive Gaming but it was The Flagship of Postal Gaming. I have every issue from 1 to 112, but now as I read through it I find less and less to interest me. Flagship is now a general games mag and I can get most of the info you publish elsewhere. I know times change and PBM or even PBEM is not as it was. Flagship used to be special but not any longer. It seems to have become rather wishy washy, trying to appeal to too wide a market and I know that after 112 issues its present format no longer appeals to me. So with some regret (no, a lot of regret) I will not be renewing my subscription.

It may seem silly but after all these years of getting Flagship it was quite hard to type all this.

Ian T Parry MIScT

[Gloom, it's always sad to lose a long-time reader. As I say in my Editorial Comment, we still cover the whole play-by-mail hobby. As the editor, I can only do my best and I can't put the clock back ten years. We were faced with the tough choice of reducing Flagship's size and quality, or covering other forms of gaming, while maintaining our commitment to PBM and turn-based games. What I try to reflect in Flagship is players' reactions. I'm not sure that other sources do this to the same extent that we do.]

I recently bought your excellent magazine at my local games shop. I saw a copy a year or two back, but I must say that I'm really impressed with the way the magazine now looks. Oh and it reads well too.

It's a shame that you aren't in full colour throughout, as this would really make a big difference. A couple of people I know have been rather put off buying the magazine by this, which seems a bit silly to me since it's the content that matters most, surely?

I was very impressed by the sheer breadth of games that you cover. For the most part I play computer games, but I buy specialist magazines for news on that sort of game. However, I have more than a passing interest in roleplaying and boardgames, and have played some PBM (turn based games) in the past.

Nick Jones

[We thought readers would like to see these two opposing views. We appreciate letters of praise, but don't usually run them. We will this time however, for the sake of the contrast. Nick's letter is perfectly genuine.]

Peaceful gaming

I saw one person's entry in the Online Games bit of Rumours, in which they said they were looking for a peaceful game. I'd recommend either 'A Tale in the Desert', which features zero combat as participants face several Trials meant to create a perfect Ancient Egyptian society, or 'Dark Ages', in which it is possible to advance quite satisfactorily without killing things - one can get experience by going to (or delivering!) a Mass at one of the eight gods' temples.

Dave Panchyk

Comparative costs of gaming

The recent increase in the cost of Middle Earth PBMturns has made me think about the comparative expense of different forms of gaming. I now pay £9 a month for two turns of Middle Earth, but I can pay about £8.50 for an entire month of unlimited gaming in Everquest II. Moreover, in Everquest everyone pays the same, but with Middle Earth there seems to be a discount (only £8.43 for two turns) if you live in the USA. Maybe this is one reason for the decline of PBM (or turn-based gaming as Flagship now seems to call it).

Name supplied to editor

ME Games reply: *'It all depends on cost and fun. If you enjoy games like Everquest then that's fine but if you enjoy this game and you think it worth the price that's great. The UK price is linked to inflation, US turns would cost $8.42 if we charge the full price, but we realise that the US players are used to 'cheaper' life style than the UK/Europeans. If you compare the price of a turn to something like a pizza or pint of beer it's great value for money - it's all upto how much you enjoy it, how much you think it's worth and how much you enjoy the company of the players and the world you play in.'*

Feedback

CAROL MULHOLLAND looks through your comments on issue 112 ...

YOU RATED issue 112 at 7.87, with votes ranging from a straight 10 (*'I was very impressed with both the look and content of the magazine. It's attractive to the eye without being messy'* - **Nick Jones**) to a 4 (*'because there are less and less pbm articles in it'* - **Tom Hoefle**). Yes, that's a fair point because there were only four PBM articles in #112. We try to obtain a fair balance in the range of games that we cover, but we do sometimes have to mix and match at the last moment, when perhaps an article that we've been expecting hasn't come through in time.

The popular ...

Rumours from the Front remains your favourite item, with varied opinions about what else you enjoyed. Rick McDowell's design article on 'Fall of Rome' was mentioned by several readers, including **Bill Moore**, who thinks it's '*always interesting to see a designer's thoughts on what a game is attempting to do*.' Similarly, you enjoyed the account of Middle-Earth PBM; **Mike Grant** calls it '*a fine read, clearly showing how the game allows a comeback when things look their bleakest. Even though I don't consider myself a wargamer I'll probably try the Battle of Five Armies beginners scenario as soon as time allows (Not so much time to play, as time to digest the rulebook). Especially as I've been a fan of MiddleEarth and Tolkien ever since being read The Hobbit at school about 30 years ago when I was a very young lad.*' Mike also joins those who praise the Warhammer article, because it '*brought back fond memories of weekend Roleplaying sessions that often continued way into the small hours!*' **Nick Jones** '*enjoyed Globetrotter's piece on Computer Game Piracy. Most zines offer a wealth of reviews and very little opinion, presumably because they don't want to annoy potential advertisers. One of Flagship's strengths is the number of opinionated columnists within its pages. My favourite article in this issue though was Lisa Forham's "Fordham Files". I hope she writes regularly, because I want to read more!*' Nick, you'll be glad to see that Lisa is indeed a regular contributor. Several of you praise Eric Ridley's article on horror games: '*I've not tried one before - but I will now,*' says **David Morey**. **Mike Grant** helpfully mentions '*Chill: Black Morn Manor, as it was missing from the article. Got to play it at Beer and Pretzels in Burton upon Trent a few years back and had a great time.*' It's good to see our columnists singled out for praise: I think that their independence and enthusiasm combine to show what fun gaming can be.

... and the less popular

There was no universally unpopular article, though **Tom Hoefle** sighs that he can get non-PBM pieces '*from other mags as well'*. **Bill Moore** mentions that '*the LARP stuff didn't do a lot for me, but that's just because I've got terminal stage fright.*' Aw, I'll confess that while I'm not keen on anything to do with acting myself, I well remember sewing a white wizard's cloak out of sheeting and knitting a mithril coat from grey wool and lurex for members of my immediate family; the latter has been passed on to younger generations in a suitably Tolkienesque way. **Nick Jones** '*wasn't so interested in the review of the sports game, or in the How to Make Your Own Zine thing. Didn't fanzines go out with the ark? Don't tell me they are still going?*' Well, yes, they are, though maybe fan websites are the way for the future. Take a look at Mike Dean's article in this issue.

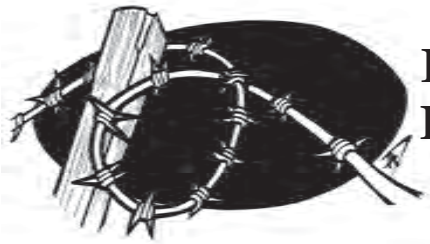
The website

Everyone who replied has taken a look at our website, which was the subject of question 4. You universally feel that it needs more content, though, like **Bill Moore**, who thinks that '*it's a bit sparse at the moment for regular visits. I'm sure I'll look at it more often when you get more stuff up there*.' '*With over one hundred issues, you've lots of material, surely*?' cries **Jim Davey**. We'll pay attention to your various suggestions, and yes we have plans to put up a lot more material, as soon as we have the time. Watch out for an article about the website in issue 114, and some questions accompanying this issue.

Galactic View

Question 5 asked whether we should list web-based games. Again, everyone agrees that we should include these somehow - how odd it is, to have readers agreeing with each other - but several of you raised the problem of fitting the information into our pages. '*I'd rather read articles than battle with pages of game listings*,' warns **Mark Preston**, 'it'd be really off-putting if there's lots of them.' As a new reader, **Nick Jones** has an interesting suggestion: '*If Galactic View is meant to be a list of turn based games (which seems to be the case) then you should list them all. But I don't understand the need to publish the list in the paper magazine. Why not just put it all on your website? It would give extra valuable content to the website and encourage visits, whilst freeing up two pages in the magazine which could be used for something much more interesting than the current dull and closely packed text.*' We have been thinking about doing this: should we print Galactic View as a supplement available on request? What do the rest of you think?

As always, we've found your votes and comments really thought-provoking. Many thanks to all of you who replied. As a change from listing Feedback questions here, we're enclosing a questionnaire with this issue for subscribers. If you buy your copy from a shop without the questionnaire, the questions will be up on our website. Feel free to email your answers: whether you're pleased with what we do or dissatisfied, do please get in touch!



RUMOURS FROM THE FRONT

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

Comments received after February 10th from:
Craig Brooks, Harry Devries, Hans Eck, Neil Edge, Colin Forbes, Joel Gabelman, Patrick Gleeson, Mike Grant, Patrik Jonsson, Nigel Monaghan, Bill Moore, Carol Mulholland, James Noakes, Robert Treadwell, Daniel Wawro, Alan White, John Woods, Wayne Yeadon.

TURN-BASED GAMES

Absolute Heroes *(Jade Enterprises)*

Robert Treadwell - 'The history of the cyber rats and the red coats has been published and now a battle at the wrestling hall has been set up over the matter of the honour of Thundress. Cyber rats leader who objects to have her dirty washing has been published. We are supervillians, so we have been raiding areas and hiring new members to help out our team.'

Aspects Of Might *(Silver Dreamer)*

Mike Grant - 'Flaming heck, what a close call! After managing to fend off the various wolves on the outskirts of the village, matters became steadily worse, with many monsters coming in for an attack or ten. Now I know why most choose to stay in the relative safety of the settlements! Had a Tree Ghoul slashing its unclean claws and a Forest Witch zapping away with poisonous thorns from her wand! Yep, you guessed it, I did indeed end up poisoned, making me both weak and slow. Not to mention how rapidly Health went down from a stalwart 51 to a feeble 5!

The race is on to get back to the Sisters of the Star and their gentle healing arts without being attacked in any way, shape or form!'

Destiny *(Madhouse)*

Robert Treadwell - 'The colonies have just come out and I've been one of the first to get them as I went to the minicon. I have a foot in the door, just need to see what I can find around our landing site - and are those sentient forests going to be friendly or not?

My pirates have upgraded our ship into a pirate destroyer and will go out looking for a fight soon...'

DungeonWorld *(Madhouse)*

Mike Grant - 'Grishnak Axehand, my Dwarven Warrior, is still single-handedly battling the Giant Ant invasion within Hell's Deep. Slightly less confident after one of the beasts managed to get through the full plate mail and other magical defences!

There's also a gang of Ogre Youths gathering to the south that I'm hoping will wander this way just to add some variety to the monster bashing! Still working on the stat training, though without success. Guess perseverance is the watchword for this luck-based action.'

Robert Treadwell - 'Things have gone mad at the moment, with the major plot line happening and a lord of the underworld being released, goblin armies invading a dungeon, and Steve (GM) ordering a house clean of the guilds, with those who have not been active getting turned unofficial, and those that have getting a big reward in upgrade. This caused the discussion list to pump out over 100 messages a day for over two weeks, and guilds publishing newsletters to show that they were active and doing things. On the plus side our guild the "silly" Way of the Five Paths (a guild for pink leggings and teddy bears) have been told that we are one of two who are definitely safe... just wait until they see what we want for our upgrade, hee hee. A must for every dungeon-exploring adventurer.

On my estates life goes on and new subcharacters offer their services to us. W have a undertaker offering his service to us, who can make graveyards on our estate and get gps for each turn for them, and can make a crypt. Something to look forward to. Just need that master brewer to turn up, then I will have a way to print money on our estate.'

DungeonWorld: BrokenLands *(Madhouse)*

Mike Grant - 'And finally the Elemental of The Halls of Stone was slain! This is the second of such formidable monsters for many of the members of the Slythian Fellowship including myself. We form a loosely knit adventuring company working towards a safer BrokenLand. Without this unity and co-operation there's no way we could take on such awesome creatures!

With the killing of this beast, I'm afraid we made the oft-fatal mistake of drifting our own ways and sadly this has lead to the demise of Salvestro the Enchanter at the hands of a Dark Dwarf Axemaster. Our once triumphant mood has been quickly stifled with sorrow at the loss...

I've contacted a Monk-only Guild within the DungeonWorld game known as the Brotherhood of the Silent Pond and am now waiting to see if they accept BrokenLand recruits.'

DungeonWorld: Frontier *(Madhouse)*

Mike Grant - 'At the moment I'm waiting to find out if my Ranger has survived an encounter with several Giant Leeches. Usually there are several adventurers staying closely together for safety but we seem to have drifted a little. Never a good thing in this game! This could be one of the grisliest deaths in PBM history!'

DungeonWorld: Kyr *(Madhouse)*

Mike Grant - 'The last message from my old friend, Al-Qatil, was a troubling one filled with plans of battle against someone or something named the Deathbringer, but I have not heard from him for many days now. Fear surrounds my heart, hinting of grief and death. Now that my arduous fighter training is at an end, I shall journey to Rasiaid with my trusty Aslani friend, Tigris, for I must know the truth of Al-Qatil's fate...Panthera the Dark Aslani Warrior.'

Einstein's Lot *(Ulaidh Games)*

Carol Mulholland - 'Alison had to face the problem of what to do about the three youths who appeared from a dark alley. To hang onto the ankh, get behind her vampire companion and then run like blazes seemed the most attractive options and yes, this plan succeeded. But argh, she's found that the wino who bumped into her in the chemist's has unobtrusively stolen the ank! Maria is furious. Annoying the cat goddess was *not* a good idea.'

En Garde! Dangerous Liaisons *(Jerry Spencer)*

Nigel Monaghan - 'Dangerous Liaisons is an En Garde! PBM set in a France torn apart by religious strife and constant war. It's still a lot of fun, though! Jerry Spencer's regularly turned out zine has quite a few bolt-ons, notably political factions and a Parlement, brawling, expeditionary companies and horse racing. Jerry is considering a move from a snailmail to an email-based game.

In most EG! games you have regimental enemies who are a social nuisance. In Dangerous Liaisons, characters inevitably become associated with one or other faction. While you can rise within them, getting to play the "great game" of politics, you also have many more "enemies" than usual. As a result, although there are only about 20 players there is plenty of interaction, often through plots, surprise attacks and ambush. I like EG! games with interaction so for me the game would benefit from a few more players. Any takers?'

Fall of Rome *(Enlightened Age Entertainment)*

John Woods - 'Having been inspired to sign up for Fall of Rome from the *Flagship* write up and advertisement, I am extremely pleased to have done so! The last PBM I played must have been over ten years ago, and since then my gaming has been limited to playing Red Alert online, and similar games. Having found the
Flagship website, and signing up for a subscription (and in due course signing up for FoR) it is great to see how far advanced PBM has become.

I guess Fall of Rome is more Play-by-Website than Play-by-Mail, but it operates in exactly the same way, but using all the advantages of today's technology. The rules are quite extensive, and slightly intimidating when you first print them out. However, once you actually start to plan your turn and begin playing, the user interface means you can very quickly get to know the system. If you make an error, more often than not the system will warn you about your mistake! Great - never used to get that when you had to hand write your orders and post them off!

The colour mapping, with "fog of war" (and of course you can lift the "fog" in a multitude of ways) works really well. What really makes the game for me is the diplomacy element. The game has a full messaging system, and players can pick up and send their messages every time they log onto the website (so much better than the old scraps of paper that would take a full turn to get delivered to the other players!). Diplomacy in our game has been quite active, and I typically send and receive about half a dozen messages every turn.

The game successfully combines political intrigue, military planning, economic build-up and espionage. Turns are every three days, and are limited to a maximum 24 turns. To win you need to select a "mission" and achieve it - reminded me a bit of the mission cards in Risk! This can mean you are trying to build particular structures just to hit a mission rather than for their defence/economic benefits.

To summarise, I am really enjoying the game, and would recommend it to anyone who enjoys strategy games. Once I finish this game I'll definitely be signing up again. perhaps see you out there!'

[Welcome back, John! Long-time readers will remember you as the editor of PBM Scroll.]

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

Harry Devries - 'This is one of the best pbm games I have ever played. I played for several years in the 90s as the Holy Roman Emperor and loved it. I only dropped when I went overseas but now I am back and in two games. This has to be the most absorbing game I play and I can honestly say I cannot wait for the turn to hit the mat. It's not cheap but the interaction with other players is great and the anonymity is one of my favourite parts. I play England and it has just taken me over a year to get Scotland to unify with me. In that time I have had to put down Jacobite rebellions with spies, fight a cold war and eventually negotiate a treaty with France, build up trade throughout the world and raise my honour (great system). I love it. The game is postal only and the GM does not encourage out-of-game communications. There are about 30 people playing in each game and they run from 1700 - 1750 with one turn being one month. The game is pretty much free form, with you doing your orders free hand except the army movement. Try it.'

[The Glory of Kings is the newer name for La Gloire du Roi.]

Hattrick *(www.hattrick.org)*

Robert Treadwell - 'Treaders Utd looks to be midtable half way through this season and we have high hopes of getting that super youth from our youth team who will help us with that push up the table...'

Kosumi *(Kosumi)*

Colin Forbes - 'I have just started playing in a free trail game and ... so far so good, I think. There are some useful strategy guides of the sort which are of inestimable value to a newcomer. nonetheless I will almost certainly have made some hwoling mistakes. But we live and learn!

The game itself took me a short while to get to grips with, mostly because of problems with the on screen interface. Once you have worked it out, this is easy enough to use, but I still hanker for pen and paper. There's not been much action yet, though the last turn was pretty spectacular for me, capturing a large city and several smaller towns and villages. My economy has gone through the roof, but the area I have to defend is correspondingly larger. It's almost inevitable that I will have made some enemies by now, and of course my territorial expansion has outpaced by army recruitment.

The game interface is attractive and innovative. I was originally concerned that details might be lost as the map became more crowded, but then I found the option to increase the m,ap size (several size options are available). So no problems there then! My only disappointment really has been the total lack of player interaction. I've written a number of diplomatic messages, but alas have yet to receive any replies.'

Wayne Yeadon - 'I have just started playing in one of the free games being offered, after a shaky start. I was hoping to play a particular clan that appealed to me, but due to a lack of player activity, I was relocated to a more active game, controlling a different clan. Having played three turns thus far, it appears that the early stages are a case of grabbing as many settlements as you can, to form a good base to work from. Other clans may have experienced more conflict, but I'm quite happy to have only just begun to encounter enemy clans. Finding out what to do initially was quite tricky, so I think most players are likely to follow the advice given in the clan help files. Once you have played a few games, though, you can develop your own recipes for success, I guess. The client the game uses to play with is fine, although I find the graphics a little on the small side, making it tricky to see where things are. Once the map fills up, it may be harder to figure out what is going on, so I will have to wait and see really. So far so good, and I'm enjoying myself playing blind, but it looks like I'm going to see some action over the next few turns. I just hope I can survive!'

Middle Earth pbm *(ME Games / Harlequin)*

Colin Forbes - 'Alterations in the set-up procedure for the Fourth Age scenario seem to be proving popular, and a number of other small changes which ME Games are bringing in as a result of aquiring the code and rights to the game, are also good. The recently announced price rise has of course provoked discussion in the MEPBM community, though for myself I am more worried by why American players pay less than Europeans.'

Quest *(KJC Games)*

Mike Grant - 'After much discussion between the players and KJC, one of the restrictions upon the Knight sub-class has been amended. Before. you could not recruit them into your group if you already had any kind of Rogue. Now you are allowed to have a Scout and still accept Knights. All other restrictions upon this honourable and warlike class remain unchanged. But at least this will open up some more group setup possibilities. Is hard to imagine an adventuring company without some kind of Rogue in it!'

Wayne Yeadon - '*G31, Naralia*: All hell has broken loose, resulting in the takeover of two of our settlements by a combined force of alliances, resulting in a number of deaths among our alliance members. My alliance is in the process of attempting to avoid a full scale war by using diplomacy and negotiation to gain our settlements back. The attackers came up with a clever ploy though in the first place, by making claims of corruption within our city state, so I congratulate them for that. We are now having to disprove such claims, whilst not giving in to what we consider to be terrorist actions. This state of affairs is likely to keep us busy for a while at least.'

Mike Grant - *'Game 31 (Naralia)*: 'The proper 1st round of the Naralias Tournament has just started! 64 of the finest groups will battle it out in the many months ahead. Time constraints have made it really difficult to run the GITS alliance single-handedly and so in an effort to ease things quite a few changes have been implemented. The HQ Managers Leadership position has been passed to another member, an extremely experienced Quest friend has been drafted in to help with game related questions on our private Yahoo Group, our website is about to be updated and another ex-affiliate is being welcomed back home. All of this has definitely taken the pressure off and allowed me to get more involved in other aspects of the game like moderation, alliance wars, etc.'

Wayne Yeadon - '*G32, Twilight Isles*: The games tournament kicked off

just recently and I've been eliminated already by one of my own alliance members! I'm not too disappointed really, as I knew they were much better to begin with and my alliance overall is likely to do quite well in the competition. My alliance is implementing measures that should bear fruit in the distant future, allowing us to be able to call upon a few favours when we require them. It's early days yet for our revamped alliance, but we are looking forward to rapid expansion and ultimately domination of the Twilight Isles.'

Serim Ral SR26 Ancient Empires *(Incubus)*

Bill Moore - 'Has finally started now (late February). There was a delay from Christmas as apparently the GM hadn't finalised the rules amendments. He'd thought the game would take a while to fill up, but it was unexpectedly popular and nearly full after three days! Anyway, we're off now and, barring a couple of details, it does seem to running well.

Classic newbie mistake from yours truly lead to starvation at one of my cities and the garrison ate all of their horses... and 27 heavy cavalryman (what, armour and all?). Still, judging by the message boards a lot of other people, including experienced players, have made similar mistakes so perhaps AE might be interesting for someone new to Serim Ral to start off in? There have been a few dropouts in SR26 and Incubus are starting a new Ancient Empires game (SR27) on a weekly turnaround to cope with the demand.'

CONVENTION REPORTS

The Madhouse Minicon

Robert Treadwell - 'The minicon was one of the best that I have attended for a long time, with a trade game going on all over the weekend. Everyone was given an envelope at the start of the weekend, and you won them for winning games and suchlike. These envelopes contained part of an item and some gold, and you needed to find the rest of the items and trade/sell/steal/beg the other parts off others over the weekend to get all the parts to gain the item. Some were new items and some were common items. At the end of the weekend the gold left over was used in a bidding war to get special characters - such as flying men, giants, dragons, an albatross. (Yes, a giant sea bird. That was what I managed to win, going to go to one of my major characters.) Also we have the Crownheart players put on a play by the comic genius Mr Andy London, with the summercon offering being a superhero version of Sir Roger...

The highlights of the weekend had to be a game of zombies lasting three hours. It was on the losers' table, with a roll of six for any zombies and one for anyone else. And two copies of Viking Fury been brought, and shouts of "Do it in the correct tone, and that's not Viking enough..." could be heard around the pub. But who's the most hairy gets to start. And the tabletop with Ed's giant talking chickens and Bert and Ernie the forest giants who were the most intelligent ones on the diplomatic mission, 'cause the little people's brains were too near to ground...'

ONLINE GAMES / MMORPGs

Dark Age of Camelot : Catacombs *(Mythic / GOA)*

Alan White - 'The mobs in the new Single Instanced Dungeons seem to be a lot tougher than their normal counterparts. Meldayende my 48 hunter can kill a blue con svartalf before it reaches her 80+% of the time but I found that for the same con svartalf in an instance I could only take about 1/3 to 1/2 of their life before closing to melee. The mobs all conned blue or yellow to me in the Spindelhalla instanced dungeon (Arachnid Labyrinth). I entered the same instance with Littlebottom and Ugerdorf. The blue con mobs were a *lot* harder, some taking up to 10 hits at 160-220 damage before they went down. The mobs now also conned from blue to orange. Having said that, nothing in the Instance was a real threat and there was plenty to kill. One thing I did find is that the Aurulite (tokens you can use to buy cool stuff) drop rate was a lot better for Meldadayende my hunter than it was for my other characters.

There are two new ways of getting around in Catacombs, the Old World

DRAGONHELM

The struggle for power, glory and wealth goes on

Bledal is an unhappy realm, where the High king is a child and the Regent is an upstart. Evil forces are rising and demons walk abroad. those who can read the stars are filled with fear.

Take your place in a medieval style world or a modern occult mystery.

Start-up turns and one turn	**£4-50**
Subsequent turns	**£3-50**

EINSTEIN'S LOT

"Things are not only queerer than we imagine, they are queerer than we can imagine"

The past is the darkest influence on the present, even in modern day Britain

Ulaidh Games
62 Beechgrove Avenue, BELFAST, BT6 0NF

and to and from the new zones. Firstly there is a system of obelisks that allows you to transport between the Burial Grounds, Abandoned Mines and Kobold City. Note that you have to have reached an obelisk and activated it before it becomes a valid destination from the others. The second is the Mine Cart system in the Abandoned Mines. This allows you to get very quickly between the old world dungeons and some towns. As an example you can get from Varulvhamn to Vendo in about 30 seconds, a trip that used to take 15 mins by the old world horse routes. A new npc in Jordheim (in the main hall) will also teleport you to the Kobold Undercity obelisk (provided you have activated it) and also to other major areas.

Overall, the new graphics are amazing. At first you will notice the new character models which are a hell of a lot better than they used to be. All of the character armour has been given a lot nicer look and the cloaks have been reworked too. The Artifact cloaks look especially nice. Once you get into the burial ground the graphics don't look that impressive, it is after all a brown tunnel for the most part and then you get through the burial grounds and into the Kobold City and your jaw is going to drop. You'll see a large waterfall with realistic water flowing down it. You'll see a large statue of a Kobold Buddha. In fact you see lots of amazing new graphics.

Just when you think you've seen all there is to see you'll enter an old world dungeon. There are a lot of new mob models (monsters) and the textures on all of the surfaces in the dungeon have been redone. Also, after a while you start to notice fine details, like that cobweb on the roof that's moving in an invisible breeze … Overall the graphic detail is superb and in some areas is quite simply stunning.

The new sounds in Catacombs are also very good. As soon as you enter combat you will find that the new combat sounds are a lot better. But there are a lot of ambient sounds in the dungeons that are subtle, but when you pick up on them it all adds to the general feel of the game. Things like whispered voices on a breeze …'

James Noakes - 'I stand at just over 6 feet tall, well built and have a full head of white blonde hair. I carry a large double edge war axe and can take down an Elf in 2 hits. Yes this is me as one of my favourite on-line gaming characters; I play Sigmi a Skald in the MMPORG Dark Age of Camelot. I would like to think that this virtual persona represents me as I am in "real life", but alas at 5' 7, a little overweight and nearly as bald as the day I was born, it's not to be ! Even with this 'false' representation of me, I have made good friends (some I consider close friends) and although I sit on my own at my PC, I can spend an evening discussing any subject matter with more people than I could ever squeeze into my house, let alone my office.

So do I sit up till 3am? In the dark? Making axes and chopping things into little pieces with them? Yes, yes I do.'

Patrik Jonsson - 'Mythic's new expansion, Dark Age of Camelot: Catacombs has finally reached Europe, and provides a fresh breath of stale dungeon air. The graphics look gorgeous of course, the new classes are interesting and powerful - almost too powerful - and there are interesting underground areas for the dungeon crawler to explore. The introduction of dungeon tasks and mini quests provides a welcome and less longwinded alternative to regular monster-bashing. However, they quickly lose their charms even if they make the journey towards end-game PvP less painful. All things considered, Catacombs does feel like a good expansion that injects new life into the game.'

MULTI-USER DUNGEONS (MUDs)

Lusternia: Age of Ascension (*www.lusternia.com*)

Hans Eck - 'My journey into the world of Lusternia became a brief one as I realized that going AFK on the mud was 100% illegal. AFK means Away From Keyboard and Lusternia states that the player has to be at the keyboard at all times and actually play. Now, the little I got to see of the MUD before realizing this was not all bad. The website is good and informative. The character generation is straight forward and well made. You are presented with help files to get acquainted with the MUD. Personally, I would never play this MUD as it is possible to buy things in the game for real money. This can be skills, houses, pets etc. Many people might have no problem with this, but personally I frown upon it.'

CARD GAMES

Rage *(Amigo)*

Daniel Wawro - 'I have never had so much fun! We used to get together and play Hearts, every Tuesday night, but our group became too large. Rage was the answer. We even started a league. The scoring was 1 point for playing, 1 for topping 100 points, 10 for winning, 5 for second and -5 for last. We played from 10 cards down to one and then back up again. We made bidding counters (the yellow peg is the season leader) and the playing vernacular has become part of our daily conversation. We always played with two decks so one was being shuffled as the other was dealt. The best is a six-man game. This allows five to gang up on one, trysts to be made from hand to hand and throughout a longer season rivalries to flourish. In this game you can almost always take someone down if you want to and the leader is always the target. You have to play the rule that the bids can never equal the amount of tricks. Someone has to lose! For those that say the "special cards" are a hinderance, they must be the ones who play Checkers and never played Backgammon. If you need the comfort of things always being the same, you may as well play Tic Tac Toe. I'd like to think it is a little bit like life. You make your plan and then something happens to mess it up. You adjust and something happens again. Sometimes in your favor, sometimes not. This is certainly a game where in each hand, it is not over until the last card is played. We have just made a pact to start the league again and I can't wait!'

San Juan *(Rio Grande Games)*

Patrick Gleeson - 'This is an excellent card-game variant on the Puerto Rico board game; it has considerable replay value. I played a few hands last night (30-45 min each), and each time, I had to put a different thinking cap on to pick roles and build buildings that would be the most advantageous to the combination of cards that I was dealt. There are many, many different types of cards, and you never know what will end up in your hand at any given time, so one needs to be flexible about what cards to play. The game can be played with two players, but this is best for someone learning the game. The game is more interesting with three or four players.'

Bohnanza *(Rio Grande Games)*

Patrick Gleeson - 'After reading, and explaining the rules to our group, everyone was shocked by the idea of playing until the draw deck is exhausted for the third time. We wondered whether we would be playing until 2am. "We'll play until it gets late," was our determination. But once we played a few rounds, everyone at the table was hooked. This game is not only addictive, but different each time. You will find your strategies adapting each time you play. And we have found, amazingly, that people who have totally different taste in games all love Bohnanza. It seems silly, but even now I can't wait until the next time I get to say, "Please, trade me that Cocoa Bean for these two Blue Beans! I'll throw in a Wax Bean!"'

BOARD GAMES

Acquire *(Hasbro)*

Patrick Gleeson - 'Acquire has been one of my favourite games for years, and never gets old. Many of my friends and family who have played it, have now purchased it, or still beg me to play with them. It's is the right balance of luck and strategy, that makes it fun. The really old 3M version is good, and so is the newest version with plastic tiles. The one in between, with cardboard pieces, is poor, as they slide all over and don't at all look nice. I would recommend getting the new plastic version, though it's a shame the game doesn't have the same production values as many of the recent German-style games.'

Power Grid *(Rio Grande Games)*

Joel Gabelman - 'I waited close to six months to buy this game because it was on backorder. There were other games I was interested in, but I waited anyway. Guess what, the wait was worth it! I think this game ranks up there with Puerto Rico. There is resource allocation, a nice balancing

mechanism with turn order and purchasing of energy and there is *fun* in the game also! I've only played this once, but I will be playing this much more. If you have been waiting for a meaty game with lots of options and excellent balance, you don't have to wait any more. Get this game now! Power Grid is a solid strategy game with a comprehensive bidding component. Players have many choices throughout the game, each with advantages and disadvantages.'

Patrick Gleeson - 'The game is such that having an upperhand in one area (having the most cities, for example) will set you back in another area (buying resources to power those cities). Players must be aware of these trade-offs in order to have a winning strategy. There is little "down-time" in the game. Unless you have super-indecisive players, the auctioning and city placement goes quickly. The game works best with more rather than fewer players, but six can get a little claustrophobic. Five players is ideal.'

Take it Easy *(Burley Games)*

Patrick Gleeson - 'I bought this game a while ago, but dug it out a week or so back when my sister came to visit. We were all pleasantly surprised at how well it played with mixed ages (my nephew is eight). It is fun, easy to learn and can be probably be used as a teaching tool as well.'

Warcraft: The Boardgame *(Fantasy Flight Games)*

Craig Brooks - 'I played this recently after getting it as an Christmas gift and I thought it stayed very true to its computer game roots. Resources can be sacked by other players, workers must be at them to gather, they can potentially run dry if over-gathered, and units have a definite cost-to-power ratio and upgradability factor. I particularly liked that each faction is different in the number of times it can upgrade a unit type and with each civ's play deck being different. In the game I played, it was two on two and working together was *very* important. All that said, the game does have a large amount of luck in it, between rolling for resource gathering/depletion and battle and with the civ decks. In the game we played, very lucky drawing by the night elves led to my team taking a *huge* hit over three battles. We managed to come back some, but it was a rough time. Despite the loss, we all had a lot of fun playing the game and wanted to play it again. As mentioned in other reviews, there are some suggestions online for modification to remove some of the luck factor from the game, which may broaden the appeal for some. All-and-all, a fun game, so long as you don't mind a li'l luck involved in your games.'

Neil Edge - 'Nothing sets me off more than to pay good money for a bad game. I guess I went into this game thinking that is really could be a fun game. I played it and then played it again trying to make it fun. Nothing worked. The game is so far removed from the Warcraft computer game it's not funny. The mechanics are what I consider to be flawed (ie A flying creature can attack any other creature but some creatures can not attack a flying creature at all. How can a giant flying creature swoop down and attack me but I can't attack back?) The game bogs down as you are left to doing tasks that you let the computer handle usually and the whole strategy of where and how to build your town is...well gone. Steer clear of this gaming atrocity at all costs.'

Games Shops

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

Cardiff Games, Duke Street Arcade, Cardiff, CV1
029 2034 3818

Funagain Games
www.funagain.com

Gamers, 34 St. Mary's Street, Eynesbury St. Neots, PE19 2TA
01480 217443

Gamezone Models, 32 Rolle Street, Exmouth, Devon
01395-267733

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

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

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

White Knight Games, 8 Cheapside, Reading, RG1 7AG
0118 950 7337

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

Bookstop, Mail-Order Secondhand Games & RPGs, 11A Mayfield Grove, Harrogate, North Yorkshire, HG1 5HD.
bookstopuk@aol.com

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Wayland's Forge, Unit 2 Fletchers Walk 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

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! The website also contains details of many regular games meetings around the country. As a rule we do not cover North American conventions in the magazine, but we will list them on the website.

www.flagshipmagazine.com

APRIL

SALUTE ZERO FIVE: 23rd April at *Olympia 2, London*. A family show for miniatures gamers, with many model manufacturers present. Run by the South London Warlords, who plan to have over 90 displays for the audience to play in or watch, including games and historical re-enactment societies in colourful costumes: the theme this year is St George. Admission to the show costs £8, and advance entry tickets may be purchased from the website.

www.salute.co.uk

MAYCON: 29th April-2nd May, at the R*utland Square Hotel, St. James Street, Nottingham.* Running from 18:00 Friday night to 14:00 Monday, this is a general games convention with a focus on boardgames and the like, but the flyers do mention RPGs. Membership costs £10/day or £30 for the weekend up to March 30th, £12/day or £35 for the weekend if booked in advance after that, or £15/day on the door: hotel rooms are £35 per night (B&B) for two sharing, or £45/night for single occupancy.

www.maycon.org,
maycon2005@gmail.com.

JUNE

VATICON XI: 11th-12th June at the *Leinster - Belfield, UCD Student Centre, Dublin*. UCD's Annual Gaming Convention, offering a variety of card games, board games, RPGs, LARPS, and other events. Contact Dave O'Brien by post at Box 22, Games Society, Student Centre, UCD, Belfield, Dublin 4, or at:

vaticon@gmail.com

Q-CON XII: 24th-26th June, at *Queen's University Belfast's Whitla Hall*. Anime screen, board games, card games, console games, roleplay games, wargames and more... Full weekend ticket £8, accommodation £11.20 student/£13.80 non-student per night.

www.q-con.co.uk

ORIGINS: June 30th to July 3rd, at the *Greater Columbus Convention Center, in Columbus, Ohio, USA*. The premier game-playing consumer convention in North America, which includes the annual Origins Awards (PBM amongst them).

www.originsgames.com

JULY

MANORCON XXIII: Friday 15th - Monday 18th July, at *Shackleton Hall, Birmingham University*. ManorCon is a large board games convention that has been running since 1983. The 200-250 attendees each year stay and play in a large, modern University Hall of Residence with bar and canteen facilities and ample room for both tournament and open gaming. There is free car parking available and the site is also within easy reach of public transport and the city centre of Birmingham with its pubs, restaurants and nightlife.

SUMMER STABCON: 8th-10th July , at the *University of Manchester's Woolton Hall, on the Fallowfield Campus*. Another in a very long-running series of friendly, small-scale general games conventions, always featuring a good number of RPGs. Membership is £12.50 for the weekend at the time of writing; this will increase a bit later, and one-day rates will also be available. As games will be played in the bar and adjoining areas, the con has a minimum age limit of 18.

Accommodation will be provided in single study bedrooms at the Hall, costing £19 a night, or £25 a night including a full English breakfast. (A limited number of twin rooms can also be arranged for couples wishing to share.) Questions can be addressed to, STABCON, 17 Davenport Park Road, Stockport, Cheshire, SK2 6JU, or 0161 483 9131.

bookings@stabcon.org.uk

AUGUST

MADHOUSE SUMMER MINICON: 13th-14th August, *Black Barn House B&B, Wisbech*. There'll be a Medieval Madhouse Banquet on the Saturday night, all in-character as if it were taking place in the DungeonWorld land of Bereny, so 'action, excitement, murder and mystery' are guaranteed. Saturday and Sunday are the main days, but it's possible to stay for four nights, Thursday to Sunday, if preferred. Madhouse recommend booking the accommodation in plenty of time.

www.madcentral.com

CONSTERNATION: 12th-14th August, at *New Hall, Cambridge*. The latest in the long-running series of 'British Roleplaying Society' conventions. Guest of Honour: Allen Varney. UK Guest: Marcus L. Rowland. A convention focussed purely on RPGs, with tabletop and LARP events, panels, an auction, and more. Membership is £24 until Easter 2005, when it will increase to £27. (The price on the door will be increased again.) A range of accommodation will be available in the college. For more details, including a PDF copy of the flyer, with membership form, and information as to how to join, see the web site.

www.consternation.org.uk

SEPTEMBER

CASTLECON: 23rd-30th September and 30th September-7th October. at *Roch Castle, Roch, Pembrokeshire*. Castlecon is 'a self-catering gaming holiday for up to 16 games-players per week. There will be plenty of chances to play your favourite games, and there will also be opportunities to get out and see the surrounding countryside in a very pleasant part of Wales. The approximate cost per person per week will be in the region of £130.' For more information, contact Steve Jones at 59 Sudeley Walk, Putnoe, Bedford, MK41 8JH, or on 01234-405878.

OCTOBER

AGSCON: 1st October , at the *University of Kent campus, Canterbury, Kent*. A one-day convention of Roleplaying, Wargames & Collectible Card Games. Doors open 9:30, games start 10 am, closes 7 pm. Entry £2 in advance, £3 on the door - free to AGS members. For more details, go to *www.canterburygamersnews.tk* and follow the link on the top right to AGSCON, or e-mail *agscon@aol.com* for more info, maps, and to book your place.

PSYCHOCON 2005: Friday 7th October from 10:00am until Sunday 9th October 6pm in *Leeds*, with the actual venue TBA. There will be a pre-con Dinner at a local restaurant on Thursday 6th for those who decide to travel up the night before.

www.psychozine.co.uk

Galactic View

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

UK, EUROPEAN & WEB-BASED GMs

Ab Initio Games, PO Box 605, Bromley, Kent BR2 0YQ McC
WEB: www.pbmsports.com
EM: danny.mcconnell@virgin.net
TEL: 020 8325 2448

Adams, David ADA
WEB: www..throneworld.com/lords/lote04/index.html
WEB: www..throneworld.com/lords/lote10/index.html
EM: davester@oz.net

Advanced Gaming Enterprises, POB 214949, Sacramento, CA 95821, USA AGE
WEB: www.ageforfun.com
EM: customerservice@ageforfun.com

Agema Publications, 120 Carmel Gardens, Arnold, Nottingham, NG5 6LZ AGM
WEB: go.to/agema
EM: agema2@tiscali.co.uk

Ancient Guardian Enterprises, AGG
WEB: www.agegames.com
EM: gm@agegames.com

Andrews, Colin, 26 Brown Edge Road, Holts, Oldham, OL4 5QG AND

Arnott, Steven, ARN
WEB: www.sjasystems.co.uk/
EM: gi3@notreally.co.uk

Austerlitz PBeM AUS
WEB: www.austerlitz.biz
EM: gm@austerlitz.biz

Baird, Phil, 930 NE 63rd Ave, Portland, OR 97213, USA BAI
WEB: www.throneworld.com/lords/lote11/index.html
EM: phillipbaird@sprintmail.com

Briny En Garde! (Terry Crook), 11Laurel Close, Burniston, Scarborough. N.Yorks, YO13 0JQ BRI
WEB: *www.brinyengarde.co.uk*
EM: horseguards@brinyengarde.co.uk

Burrows, Pete, **Buzzwack PBM**, 8 Magnolia Court, Beeston, Nottingham, NG9 3LG BUR
WEB: www.buzzwackpbm.freeserve.co.uk
EM: pete@buzzwackpbm.freeserve.co.uk
TEL/FAX: 0115 9224901 (pre 10pm)

Chaos Trail, 8 Osier Close, Ely, Cambs., CB7 4AY WIL
WEB: www.chaostrail.com
EM: (Simon Williams) ct@chaostrail.com

Clay, David, 20 Malden Close, Cramlington, Northumberland, NE23 6AY CLA
WEB: www.wwiiopenwar.co.uk
EM: dave@wwiiopenwar.co.uk

Crasiworld, 4 Barleyfield, Clayton-le-Woods, Preston, Lancs., PR5 8JQ CRA
WEB: www.crasiworld.com
EM: andy@crasiworld.com
TEL: (Andy Smith) 01772 334878

CSPP, Alfred-Buchererstr. 63, 53115 Bonn, Germany CSP
WEB: www.the-ashes-of-empire.de (German)
WEB: http://home.t-online.de/home/ashes_of_empire/ashes2.htm (English)
EM: h.topf@cspp.com

Dark Wolf Games, BCM Darkwolf, London, WC1N 3XX DWG
WEB: www.darkwolf.ie
EM: pbm@darkwolf.ie
TEL: (Kain): 070 2099 WORG (9674), FAX: 0870 052 7521

Dracs Games, 21 Chipperfield Drive, Kingswood, Bristol BS15 4DP DRC
WEB: www.dracsgames.co.uk
EM: derek@dracsgames.co.uk
TEL: (Derek Rainey): 0117 9607173 (9am-6pm Mon-Fri)

Dreamworld Games DRE
WEB: www.logicalsoccer.com / www.realityracing.com / www.dreamworldgames.co.uk
EM: administration@dreamworldgames.co.uk
TEL: 01380 811522

Dunks, Antony, Far Horizon, Sark, Guernsey, GY9 0SE DUN
WEB: www.sark.net/~xott
EM: xott@sark.net

EMG EMG
WEB: http://members.shaw.ca/emg.pbm/emg.htm
EM: emg.pbm@shaw.ca

Enlightened Age Entertainment, EAE
WEB: www.fallofromegame.com

Entertainment Plus More Games, PO Box 2578, Appleton, WI 54912, USA EPM
WEB: www.epmgames.com
EM: ag@epmgames.com

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

Extreme Web Games EXT
WEB: http://extremewebgames.com/
EM: ro@extremewebgames.com

Faraway Games, 3 Maslem Rd, St Albans, Herts AL4 OGS FAR
EM: jgibbons@faraway.co.uk
WEB: http://www.faraway.co.uk/

Flying Buffalo FBI
WEB: http://www.flyingbuffalo.com/
EM: rick@flyingbuffalo.com

Games by Mail, Bridge Street, Neston, S Wirral CH64 9UJ GBM
WEB: *GamesByMail.co.uk*
EM: colin@gamesbymail.co.uk
TEL: (Colin, Yvonne, Trog): 0151 3361412
FAX: 0151 3361009

Glover, Adrian, 4 Stevanne Court, Lessness Park, Belvedere, Kent, DA17 5BG GLO

Harlan, Thomas, 3210 East 23rd Street, Tuscon, AR 85713, USA HAR
WEB: www.throneworld.com/lords
EM: thomash@throneworld.com

Harlequin Games, 340 North Road, Cardiff CF14 3BP HAQ
WEB: www.harlequingames.com AND www.middleearthgames.com
EM: pbm@harlequingames.com
TEL: 029 2091 3359 (9-6.30 weekdays) - Middle Earth only
TEL: (Sam Roads): 029 2062 5665 (9-6.30 weekdays)
FAX:029 2062 5532 any time

Haynes, Nic, 33 Chatsworth Road, Chichester, West Sussex, PO19 7XD HAY
EM: oinkyfattypig@hotmail.com

Incubus Designs, POB 263, Loughborough LE11 1ZG INC
WEB: www.incubusdesigns.co.uk
EM: inqbus@globalnet.co.uk
TEL: 01509 217957
FAX: 01509 558788

Jade Enterprises, 127 Queen Adelaide Court, Penge, London, SE20 7EB JAD
EM: jade.ent@ntlworld.com
TEL: 020 83256507

KJC Games, FREEPOST, Thornton-Cleveleys, Lancs FY5 3UL KJC
WEB: www.kjcgames.com
EM: enquiry@kjcgames.com
TEL: 01253 866345

Lloyd, Rich, 79 Farmersville Road, Califon, NJ 07830, USA LLO
EM: lords4@throneworld.com
TEL: (908) 832-5176

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

Mindless Games, 5 Basford Road, Nottingham, NG6 0JP MIN
WEB: www.mindlessworld.net
EM: andy.mindless@ntlworld.com
TEL: (Andy Simmonds): 0115 979 0797 (9.30 -6.30 weekdays only)

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

Oates, Jason, 6 St Georges Rd, Dorchester, Dorset DT1 1PA OAT
WEB: http://uk.geocities.com/jasonpaul.oates@btinternet.com
EM: jasonpaul.oates@btinternet.com
TEL/FAX: 01305 251451

Olympia Games, 6 Sandy Lane, Bramcote, Nottingham, NG9 3GS OLY
WEB: www.olympiapbm.co.uk
EM: pbm.dexter@talk21.com
TEL/FAX: (Trevor Dexter) 0115 9436197

Pagoda Games, PO Box 5155, Tamworth, Staffs B77 4QQ PAG
WEB: www.pagodagames.co.uk
EM: orders@pagodagames.co.uk
TEL/FAX: (Keith Burnham): 01827 703251

Mark Palin, Clansmen, 5 Burford, Brookside, Telford, Shropshire, TF3 1LQ PAL
EM: mp004f8903@blueyonder.co.uk

Pinder, Mark, 139 Nelson Way, Laceby Acres, Grimsby, S.Humberside DN34 5UJ PIN
WEB: http://groups.msn.com/elvaria
EM: Markpinder@aol.com
TEL: 01472 753430

Play-by-Electron Games PEG
WEB: www.pbegames.com
EM: moderator@pbegames.com

Quirxel Games, Quirxel Games Gbr, Am Pannofen 7, 47608 Geldern, Germany QIR
WEB: www.quirxelgames.de
EM: quirxelgames@t-online.de

Rebus Games, 70 Greenfield Crescent, Brighton, BN1 8HJ REB
EM: dominicm@zoom.co.uk

Received Wisdom, 9 Oundle Road, Alwalton, Peterborough PE7 3UP RCW
WEB: www.receivedwisdom.org
EM: stu@receivedwisdom.org

Rolling Thunder Games Inc., PO Box 310, Eastlake, CO 80614-0310, USA ROL
WEB: www.rollingthunder.com
EM: russ@rollingthunder.com
FORUM: www.rollingthunderforums.com

Rzechorzek, Peter RZE
WEB: www.geocities.com/TimesSquare/Alley/2187/tribenet.htm
EM: tribenet@netspace.net.au

SSV Klapf-Bachler OEG Josefigasse 41, A-8020, Graz, Austria SSV
WEB: www.heldenwelt.com
EM: ssv-graz@aon.at

Scriven, David, 15 Alandale Grove, Garforth, Leeds, LS25, 1DJ SCR

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

Software Simulations, PO Box 2758, Yeovil, Somerset, BA20 2XH SOF
WEB: www.pbmsports.com
EM: peter@pbmsports.com

Spellbinder Games, 51 Athelstan Rd, Cliftonville, Margate, Kent CT9 2BE SPE
EM: Chris.spelbinder@btinternet.com
TEL: (Chris Dempsey): 01843 291558

Spencer, Jerry, 51 Elm Vale, Liverpool L6 8NY SPN
EM: italia@gryphon33.fsnet.co.uk

Sporting Dreams, PO Box 5423, Derby, DE21 2ZB SPO
WEB: www.sportingdreams.com
EM: info@sportingdreams.com
and *info@greyhoundtrainer.com*
TEL: 01332 726376

Supersonic Games, PO Box 1812, Galston, KA4 8WA SUP
WEB: www.austerlitzpbem.com
EM: supersonicgames@tiscali.co.uk
TEL: (Scott, Sam, Chris): 01563 821022; fax 01563 821006

Tempus Fugit PBM Productions 96 Bishopswood Road, Tadley, Hants RG26 4HG TFT
WEB: http://tempusfugitpbm.co.uk
EM: *enquiries@tempusfugitpbm.co.uk*

Terre de Jeux, 88 Avenue de Jussieu, 91600 Savigny sur Orge, France TDJ
EM: isasol@club-internet.fr

Total Conquest, TOT
WEB: www.total-conquest.com
EM: support@total-conquest.com

Ulaidh Games, 62 Beechgrove Avenue, Belfast BT6 0NF ULA
EM: chrisjan.morris@virgin.net

Undying King Games, 35 Kings Avenue, Ipswich, Suffolk, IP4 1NT UKG
Web: www.ukg.co.uk
EM: info@ukg.co.uk

White, Stephen, 14 Wiltshire Avenue, Burnley, Lancs., BB12 6AD WHS

WOW Games, WWG
WEB: www.wow.pbemgame.com
EM: chris@wow.pbemgame.com

Xanthis, Constantine, 7080 NW 75th Street, Pompano Beach, Florida 33067, USA XAN
EM: cjxren@yahoo.com

Zine Listings

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

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

Carnel Robert Rees, 10a Eldon Grove, London, NW3 5PT EM: carnel@talk21.com *(www.geocities.com/shudderfix/carnel)*

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

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

Flights of Fancy, Philip Honeybone, Email: phil@melly98.freeserve.co.uk

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

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

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-shelfolympus.net)

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

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

S.O.B. , Chris Hassler, 2000 S. Armour Ct., La Habra, CA90631 USA (Email: chassler@adelphia.net)

Serendipity, John Webley, Töpferreihe 4, 38259 Salzgitter, Germany (Email: jjwebley@aol.com)

Strangitude, Paul Sands, Flat 2, 432 Birmingham Rd, Wylde 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)

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 SSAE or at least pay for the GM's postage.
Other Fees - the following footnotes apply:(**a**) more for larger positions or later turns in the game, (**b**) more for battle reports, (**c**) more for extended orders/longer reports, (**d**) more for several possible extras, (**e**) lower cost if you join the club **$** indicates no credit refunds available. (**f**) higher start-up fee for paper rules, (**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	GM	Medium	Start-up	Free Turns	Turn Fee	Xtra £	Flagref.
Absolute Fantasy	M-O	Power: Fantasy	SIL	p	£15.00	2	£4.00	-	-
Absolute Heroes	M-O	RPG: Superhero	JAD	p	£15.00	2	£4.50	(b)	91
Absolute Power 2	M-O	Power: Fantasy	SIL	p	£20.00	2	£5.00	-	98
Adventurer Kings	C-F	Wargame: Fantasy	PAG	p	£5.00	0	£2.50	-	35, 72-74, 88
Adventurers Guild	C-O	Adventure	EPM	e	Free	1	$10	-	103
Alamaze	C-F	Wargame: Fantasy	PAG	p	£15.00	1	£3.50	-	71, 80
Ancient Battles	M-F	Wargame: Historical	AGM	p	£6.00	0	£3.50	-	-
Ancient Empires	M-F	Power: Historical	OAT	e, p	£4.00	2	£3.25	£1 month	58
Ashes of Empire	C-F	Sci-Fi	CSP	e, p	Free	•1.53	-	-	-
Aspects of Might	M-O	Adventure	SIL	e	£2.50	0	£2.50	(c)	-
Assyria's End II	M-O	Power: Historical	AGM	p	£5.00	0	£6.00	(d)	90
Austerlitz	C-F	Wargame: Historical	QIR	G only	?	?	?	?	(96)
Austerlitz	C-F	Wargame: Historical	SUP	e, p	£10.00*	0	£3.75	(a)	96, 103-105
Austerlitz	C-F	Wargame: Historical	SSV	e, p, G	?	?	c6 Euro	?	(96)
Austerlitz	C-F	Wargame: Historical	AUS	e	Free	0	$4.00	(b)	(96)
Australian Empires	C-F	Wargame: Futuristic	SOF	e, p	£5.00	3	£2.00	-	-
Barbarians at the Gate	C-F	Wargame: Historical	SOF	e, p	£5.00	3	£2.50	-	
Battle Plan	C-O	Wargame	FBI	e	$5	0	£3.50	(a)	19
Beyond	M-O	Adventure	CRA	e, p	£25.00	5	£5.95	(a)	86
Bledian Diary, A	M-O	Tribal	SPE	e, p	£7.50	2	£2.25 - £3.25	$	80a, 81-84d
Championship League	C-O	Sport: Soccer	SUP	p	Free	0	£1.95	-	-
Chaos Trail	H-O	RPG: Fantasy	WIL	e, p	£1.75 S	0	£1.75 S	-	86
Chicken Run	H-O	Sport: Motor Racing	RCW	e, p	£0.50	0	£0.50	-	-
Clansman	M-O	Tribal	PAL	e	£10.00	2	£5.00	-	104
Company Commander	M-F	Wargame	OAT	e, p	£12.00	2	£3.50 + £1.50/month		96, 97
Covert Operations	C-F	Economic	FBI	e	$25 per game	0	n/a	-	-
Crack of Doom II	M-O	Tribal	AGE	e	$20	0	$10/month	-	96
CTF2187	M-F	Arena	AGE	e	$20	0	?	-	-
Crusades, The	M-F	Wargame: Historical	AGE	p, e	£5.00	0	£6.00		-
Dark Age II	C-F	Power: Historical	SOF	p	£5.00	3	£9.00 for 3	-	51
Dark Lands	M-O	Adventure	CRA	e, p	£25.00	5	£5.95	-	-
Day at the Races	M-O	Sport: Horse Racing	DRC	e, p	Free	0	£2.50	(a)	51
Deathsgate Arena	C-O	Adventure: Arena	EPM	e	Free	1	$6.00	-	-
Destiny	C-O	Sci Fi	MAD	e, p	£10.00	4	£3.50	(a)	100, 101
Diplomacy									see zine listings
Dragonhelm	M-O	RPG: Fantasy	ULA	e, p	£4.50	1	£3.50	-	79
Dragontech	M-O	RPG: Sci-Fi	CRA	e, p	£25.00	5	£5.95	-	-
Dragonlords	C-F	Wargame: Fantasy	AGG	e	Free	-	Free	(d)	-
Dragonwars	C-F	Adventure: Fantasy	EXT	w	Free	-	Free	-	-
DungeonWorld	C-O	Adventure	MAD	e, p	£5.00	2	£2.00	(d)	92-94, 100
EG!: Briny	H-O	RPG: Historical (EG!)	BRI	e	Free	-	Free	-	-
EG!: Dangerous Liaisons	M-O	RPG: Historical (EG!)	SPN	p	£3.00	5	£0.80	-	93
EG!: LPBS	M-O	RPG: Historical (EG!)	EVA	e, p	Free	0	£0.50	-	34, 93
Einstein's Lot	H-O	RPG: Modern	ULA	p	£4.50	1	£3.50	-	91, 107
Eldritch	C-O	Wargame: Fantasy	PEG	e	Free	2	$2	-	74s, 91s
Election Year	C-F	Misc: Political	FBI	e	$25 per game	0	-	-	-
Empires	C-O	Wargame: Historical	SOF	e, p	£5.00	?	£2.00	-	
Empires of the Middle Sea	C-F	Wargame: Historical	EMG	e	Free	0	Free	(g)	-
Epoch of Might	H-O	RPG: Fantasy	DWG	e, p	£10.00	2	£3.00	-	63
European Empires	C-F	War: Historical	SOF	e, p	£5.00	3	£2.00	-	-
Extra Time-Chairman	C-O	Sport: Soccer	KJC	p	Free	1	£2.25	-	53
Extra Time-original	C-O	Sport: Soccer	KJC/CRA	e, p	Free	1	£2.00	-	53
Fall of Rome	C-F	War: Historical	EAE	e	$6.47	-	?	-	110a, 111a
Fall of the Roman Empire	M-F	Wargame: Historical	OAT	e, p	£3.00	0	£1.50 + 50p/month		-
Fallen at the First	M-O	Sport: Horse Racing	DRC	e, p	Free	0	£2.50	(a)	-
Fantasy Soccer	C-O	Sport: Soccer	KJC	p	Free	0	£1.50	-	53
Fellowship	M-O	RPG: Fantasy	CRA	e, p	£25.00	5	£5.95	-	-
Feudal Lords	C-F	Wargame: Historical	FBI	e	$5	0	$3.50	-	3
Feudal Lords: Right of Kings	C-F	Wargame: Historical	LWG	e	$5	0	$1	-	108
Fussball-Liga	C-O	Sport: Soccer	SSV	G only	?	?	0.75 Euro	-	-
Galactic Conflict	C-F	Sci-Fi	FBI	e	$5	0	$3.50	-	-
Galactic Invasion 3	C-F	Sci Fi	ARN	e	Free	-	Free	-	-
Galaxy	C-F	Sci-Fi	REB	e, p	Free	6	£1.50	-	94s
Gameplan	C-O	Sport: American Football	SOF/McC	p	£5.00	0	£11.00 for 4	-	20
Gameplan Baseball	C-O	Sport: Baseball	McC	p	£5.00	0	£3.00	-	-
Gameplan Boxing	C-O	Sport: Boxing	McC	p	£5.00	5	£9.00 for 4	-	-
Gameplan: Advanced	C-O	Sport: American Football	SOF/McC	p	£5.00	0	£13.00 for 4	-	-
Godfather	C-F	Misc: Crime	PAG	p	£10.00	2	£2.50	(a)	73, 83, 100, 101
Gods Decide, The	C-O	Power	UKG	w	Free	-	Free	-	-
Great White Hunter	C-F	Misc	ARN	e	Free	-	Free	-	-
Greyhound Trainer	C-O	Sport	SPO	w	-	-	£1.00	-	-
Gridiron Stats	C-O	Sport: American Football	McC	p	£5.00	5	£8.00 for 4	-	-
Ground 8	M-O	War: Sci-Fi	AGM	e, p	£5.00	-	£6.00	(d)	-
Gunboat	M-O	Power: Historical	AGM	e, p	£5.00	0	£6.00	(d)	-
Haunted Manor	C-F	Adventure	MAD	w	Free	0	Free	-	97
Heldenwelt	C-O	Adventure	SSV	G only	?	?	6.9 Euro/month	-	103
Heroic Fantasy	C-O	Adventure	FBI	e	$5	0	$3	-	40
High Seas	M-O	RPG: Pirate	CRA	e, p	£25.00	5	£5.95	-	-
Hoopplan	C-O	Sport:Basketball	McM	p	£5.00	2	£3.25	-	-
Horses4Courses: Epsom	M-O	Sport: Horse-Racing	SCR	p	£10.00	4	£3.00	-	98
Imperial Expansion	C-F	SciFi	EMG	e	Free	0	Free	(g)	106
Imperium	C-F	SciFi	e	Free	0	Free	(g)		-
Iron Kings	C-O	Wargame: Fantasy	PEG	e	Free	2	$2	-	-
It's a Crime!	C-F	Misc: Crime	KJC	p	Free	2	£1.85	-	-
Kickabout	C-O	Sport: Soccer	SPE	e, p	£7.50	2	£2.25	-	18a, 34a, 89a
Kings of Steel	H-F	Wargame: Fantasy	WHS	p	£5.00	1	£2.50	-	13, 77
La Gloire du Roi	M-O	Power: Historical	AGM	e, p	£5.00	0	£6.00	(d)	76, 86-89
Lands of Elvaria	H-F	RPG: Fantasy	PIN	e, p	£10.00	3	£4.50	(c)	59, 93, 101
Legends	C-F	Wargame: Fantasy	HAQ	e,	£20.00	1	£3.70	(c)	,96, 100, 103
Legends	C-F	Wargame: Fantasy	SSV	e, p, G	?	?	5 Euro+	(a)	90,93,96
Logical Soccer	M-O	Sport: Football	DRE	p	Free	0	£1.75	-	-
LotE: 1	M-O	Power: Historical	HAR	e	?	?	?	?	97, 105, 106
LotE: 4	M-O	Power: Historical	LLO	e	?	?	?	?	(84)
LotE: 10	M-O	Power: Historical	ADA	e	?	£5	0	-	(84)
LotE: 11	M-O	Power: Historical	BAI	e	?	£5	0	-	(84)
Mediaeval Empires	C-F	War: Historical	SOF	e, p	£5	3	£2.00	-	-
Medieval Warlords	C-F	Wargame: Historical	AGG	e	Free	-	Free	(a)	107
Middle Earth PBM	C-F	Wargame: Fantasy	HAQ	e, p	£10.00	2	£4.50	-	,94,96, 99, 105
Middle Earth PBM	C-F	Wargame: Fantasy	CEN	e, p	?	?	?	-	80,88,94,96
Mighty Heroes	H-O	RPG: Superhero	RCW	e, p	£9.90 a year	0	n/a	-	-
Mighty Oaks	C-O	Nature?	UKG	w	Free	-	Free	-	-
Mobius I	C-F	Sci-Fi	FBI	e	$8	0	$8	(a)	47
Monster Island	C-O	Adventure	KJC	p	Free	0	£2.10	-	-
Monsters!	C-F	Wargame: Fantasy	PBE	e	Free	0	Free	-	-
Moonbiter	M-O	Tribal	HAY	e, p	£10	2	£3.00	(d)	-
Mortis Maximus	C-O	Sport: Fictional	MAD	p	£10.00	2	£2.50	-	-
Napoleonic Battles	M-F	Power: Historical	AGM	p	£6.00	0	£3.50	-	71-73
Nightfall	M-O	RPG: Horror	CRA	e, p	£25.00	5	£5.95	-	-
Neutral Zone	C-O	Sport: American Football	NEU	e, w	£3.50	0	£1.40	-	92, 105
Nuclear Destruction	C-F	Wargame	FBI	e	$5	0	$2.50	-	-
Panzergruppe II	M-F	Wargame	AGM	p	£5.00	0	£3.50	-	-
Peldere	M-O	RPG: Fantasy	CRA	e, p	£25.00	5	£5.95	-	-
Phantasmech	C-O	Adventure	CRA	e, p	£29.95	10	£2.95	-	30
Phoenix	C-O	Sci-Fi	KJC	e, p	Free	-	-	(d)	102, 105
Play On	C-O	Sport: Aussie Rules	McC	e, p	AUS$10	?	AUS$5.50	-	
Pop Tarts	H-F	Economic: Pop Music	RCW	e, p	Free	0	£9.99 per year	-	91
Pro-Soccer	C-F	Sport: Soccer	OLY	p	Free	3	£1.70	(c)	-
Puma	C-O	Sport: Soccer	BUR	e, p	£4.00	5	£1.00	-	-
Quest	C-O	Adventure	KJC	p	Free	0	£2.20	-	36, 47, 94
Quest Online	C-O	Adventure	KJC	w	Free	0	£2 for 10	-	36, 47
Raceplan Grand Prix	C-O	Sport: Motor Racing	McC	p	£5.00	1	£3.00	-	60, 99
Reality Racing	M-O	Sport: Horse Racing	DRE	p	Free	0	£1.75	-	-
Renaissance	M-O	Power: Historical	XAN	e	$5	0	$2.90	(d)	101
Riddle of the Sands	M-O	Power: Fantasy	SIL	p	£20.00	10	£2.50	(a)	89
Riftlords	C-O	Sci-Fi	FBI	e	No	3	$4	(a)	-
Rugby League Breakout	C-O	Sport: Rugby	McC	e, p	£5.00	3	£5.00 for 4	-	-
Rugby League Stats	C-O	Sport: Rugby	McC	e, p	£5.00	5	£8.00 for 4	-	-
Rugby Union Stats	C-O	Sport: Rugby	McC	e, p	£5.00	5	£8.00 for 4	-	51, 85
Run Chase	C-O	Sport: Cricket	SOF	p	£5.00	5	£11.00 for 4	-	-
S/F	H-O	Sci Fi	RCW	e, p	Free	0	£9.99 per year	-	-
S-League, The	C-O	Sport: Motor Racing	SPO	p	£5.00	0	£4.45	(c)	-
Saturnalia: Exile	H-O	RPG: Fantasy	HAQ	e, p	£10.00	2	£4.00	-	53
Saturnalia: NE	H-O	RPG: Fantasy	DWG	e, p	£5.00	2	£4.00	-	-
Saturnalia: S	H-O	RPG: Fantasy	TFT	p	Free	0	Free	-	-
Sengoku	C-F	Wargame: Historical	e	Free	0	Free	(g)		-
Serim Ral	C-F	Wargame: Fantasy	HAR	p	£10.00	1	£4.50	-	50, 92, 96
Serim Ral	C-F	Wargame: Fantasy	INC	p	Free	0	£3.50	-	50
Serim Ral	C-F	Wargame: Fantasy	MIN	p	£5.00	3	£2.00	(c)	50, 78
Slamdunk	C-O	Sport:Basketball	McC	p	£5.00	5	£8.00 for 4	-	-
Slapshot	C-O	Sport: Ice Hockey	McC	p	£5.00	5	£8.00 for 4	-	-
Smuggler's Run	C-F	Sci-Fi	ABM	e	Free	0	$0.50	-	-
Snail Racing	C-O	Sport: Snails	DRE	w	Free	0	£1.00	(d)	-
Soccer Stats	C-O	Sport: Soccer	OAT	e, p	£5.00	2	£2.00	-	51, 85
Soccer Strategy	C-O	Sport: Soccer	SOF	p	£5.00	5	£8.00 for 4	-	-
Space Troopers	C-F	Sci Fi	KJC	e	Free	-	Free	-	-
Spaceplan II	C-F	Sci Fi	SOF	p	£5.00	3	£9.00 for 4	-	57
Speculate II	C-F	Economic	SOF	p	£5.00	3	£2.00	-	-
Star Chase	C-F	Sci-Fi	SOF	e, p	£5.00	3	£2.50	-	-
StarFleet Warlord	C-F	Sci Fi	PAG	p	£5.00	0	£3.00	-	72, 78, 91-93
Starweb	C-F	Sci-Fi	FBI	e	$7	0	$4.50	(a)	9, 32-37
SuperNova III	C-O	Sci-Fi	ROL	e	$10	0	$6	(c)	104, 106
Tartarus	C-O	Misc: Robots	FAR	e	Free	0	Free	(a)	-
Tatanka	?	?	TDJ	F only	?	?	?	?	-
Total Conquest	C-F	Wargame: Fantasy	TOT	e	1 Euro	-	1 Euro	-	99, 102, 107
TOTL	C-O	Sport: Soccer	BUR	e, p	£4.00	5	£1.00	-	-
Tough At The Top	C-O	Sport: Soccer	GBM	e, p	Free	0	£2.50	-	96
Tribe Net	H-O	Tribal	RZE	e	Free	6	$3.00	-	86, 90
Victory!	C-F	Wargame	ROL	e, p	$5.00	0	$6.00	(c)	-
Vitriol	H-O	RPG: Fantasy	RCW	e, p	Free	0	£0.70	-	-
War of Wizards	C-F	Wargame: Fantasy	WWG	e	Free	0	Free	-	-
War of Wizards	C-F	Wargame: Fantasy	WWG	e	$7	5	$1.40	-	-
Warlord	C-F	Wargame	KJC	p	£3.00	3	£2.20	-	61-62
Wild World Web	H-O	Misc	RCW	e, p	n/a	0	£9.99 per year	-	-
Winning Post	M-O	Sport: Horse Racing	GLO	p	£30.00	12	-	-	58
World at War	C-F	Wargame	e	Free	0	Free	(g)		-
World Conquest	C-F	Wargame	SSV	G only	?	?	4.50 Euro	-	-
World Empires	C-F	War: C20th	SOF	e, p	£5.00	3	£2.00	-	-
World War I Battles	M-F	Power: Historical	AGM	p	£5.00	0	£3.50	-	-
World War IV	C-F	Wargame	PAG	e, p	£10.00	3	£3.00	-	56, 59-61, 76
Worlds Apart	H-O	RPG: Fantasy	AND	p	£4.00	4	£4.00	-	99-102
WWII Open Warfare	C-F	Wargame	CLA	e	£4.50	0	£4.50	-	108
WW IV Blitz	C-F	Wargame	PAG	p	£10.00	5	£2.00	-	-
WW IV H2H	C-F	Wargame	PAG	p	£5.00	3	£1.50	-	-
Xott	H-O	RPG: Fantasy	DUN	e, p	£10.00	2	£2.50	-	33, 107
Xott Solo	H-O	RPG: Fantasy	DUN	e, p	£10.00	2	£2.50	-	-

Independent Roleplaying Magazine

Packed full of Scenarios, Official Material, Columns and Art

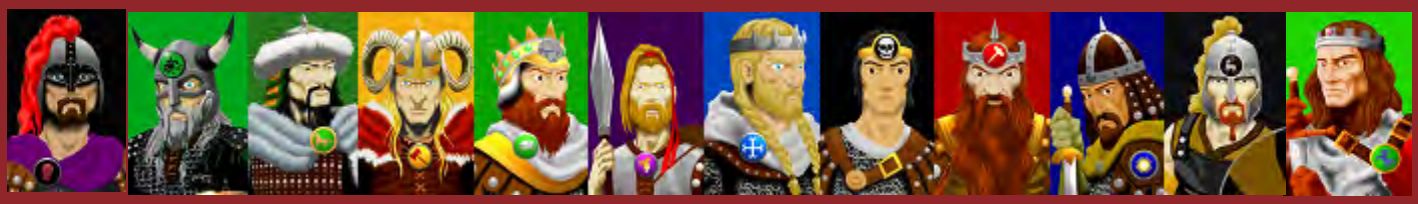
For more details or to subscribe contact StealthBrothers.com

StealthBrothers.com

The World's Greatest Multi-Player Strategy Game is here...

NOW!

LEAD YOUR KINGDOM TO DOMINANCE AGAINST ELEVEN RIVALS INCLUDING KING ARTHUR AND ATILLA THE HUN!



Experience breakthrough turn based strategy set at the dawn of the Dark Ages. Enjoy the intuitive graphic user interface and in-game messaging system. Exciting game play includes all these elements:

*** Role playing * Intrigue * Diplomacy**
***Military * Political * Economic ***
*** Covert Tactics * Epic setting ***
***Adventure *Thorough Battle Reports**

FREE
30 day trial!

Learn more and join at:

FALLOFROMEGAME.COM