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FLAGSHIP

THE INDEPENDENT MAGAZINE FOR GAMERS

General gaming news, views and reviews

*Turn-Based Games, Boardgames,
Roleplaying, Wargames, Online
games, Conventions and more!*



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Is NUCLEAR WAR unavoidable?

Is Nuclear Escalation inevitable? Is Nuclear Proliferation inescapable?

Are Weapons of Mass Destruction ever going to be found?

We don't know either, but we do know that the card game NUCLEAR WAR is the most fun you'll ever find in a box that size. Originally invented in 1965, this game makes fun of the very idea of trying to "win" a Nuclear War. And since 2005 is the 40th Anniversary of the invention of this hilarious game, we (the publishers) have come out with a limited-edition, signed and numbered set in a special metal tin. The tin contains the basic game, plus the deluxe population deck, a spinner, rules, and most of the special "Booster Pack" cards that are not in any of the other games.

Nuclear War has THREE expansion sets: Nuclear Escalation, Nuclear Proliferation, and Weapons of Mass Destruction, plus 47 different extra cards that are sold in random packs of "booster packs".

All these games should be available at your favorite local game store. If not, you can find them on our webpage at www.flyingbuffalo.com or you can mail us a check or money order (add \$3 postage if you are in the USA, \$8 postage for overseas surface mail, \$20 postage for overseas airmail.) We accept Visa, Mastercard, Discover, American Express, and Paypal.

Suggested US retail prices:

Nuclear War - \$29.95

Nuclear Escalation - \$29.95

Nuclear Proliferation - \$29.95

Weapons of Mass Destruction - \$19.95

40th Anniversary Limited Edition Tin - \$60

Deluxe population deck - \$10

Booster Pack (8 random cards) - \$2

Complete set of 47 Booster cards - \$35

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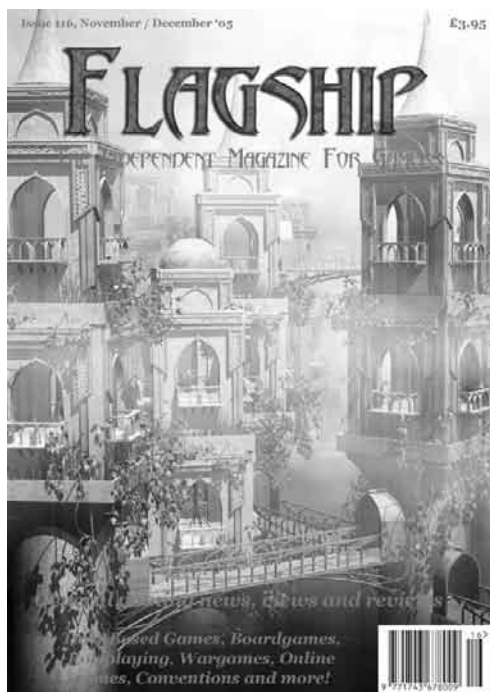
The Play-by-mail
game of star-
spanning
empires!

Have you ever played the Award-winning Starweb play-by-mail game? Have you ever wondered what it was like? This is a multi-player, hidden movement, strategic space game for 15 players from all over the world. Moves are done once every two weeks, and can be submitted by email, fax, phone, or postal mail. You can find the rules online at www.flyingbuffalo.com/swrules.htm

We have arranged to allow you to try the game out for FREE. Just write or email us and ask to be in a STARWEB TRIAL GAME. It will be a limited size map, with only 6 players, and only run for 12 turns. But there is no cost to you. And one of the players will be designated the "mentor" to offer help whenever you have a question.

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Report from the Bridge ...

OUR GREETINGS to you all come with this latest copy of *Flagship*, number #116. As ever, we've enjoyed putting it all together and we hope that you'll enjoy reading the whole issue.

We're pleased to include a wide assortment of games here, along with plenty of discussion. We've articles about turn-based games like *Serim Ral*, *WWII: Open Warfare* and *Hattrick*. We've reviews of boardgames, roleplaying games, card games, computer games and MMORPGs. We've articles that introduce wargaming, that discuss women and gaming, that consider the changing face of PBM, that warn about internet copyright and that describe roleplaying in MMORPGs. We've an interview with the originator of PBM, Rick Loomis, while our leading article describes the toils of designing a new RPG system, *Cursed Empire*. Our cover art this issue is taken from the forthcoming *Thargos Atlas* sourcebook for that game.

Remember, we're not afraid to print controversial opinions, so if there's anything here that you disagree with or would like to modify, by all means get in touch. One of the joys of editing a magazine about games is that players have such varied views about what they play!

We've also been aware that Christmas is approaching, so take a look at the articles where we describe games that seem worth considering for presents. Even if you've no-one suitable to give them to, you can always buy them for yourself.

Finally, let's invite you to buy a *Flagship* subscription as a Christmas present for a friend. We'll add an extra issue to your own subscription for doing this, and we'll include a card with your name on it in the first copy we send. So what better gift could there be for anyone who loves playing games?

Carol

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Editorial Comment

I'VE JUST returned home from the UK GenCon, which was held for four days at Bognor Regis in Sussex. I found the get-together great fun, because it's so inspiring to join men and women who take a keen, intelligent interest in playing games. The new venue seems an easy one for people to reach, and this year the hall didn't leak. From the floor of the hall, just behind me, resounded the happy cries of wizards, warriors, pirates and the friendly GenCon Dragon (pictured). Everywhere seemed busy!



But alas, the *Flagship* stand was bare to start with. Paying ParcelForce to deliver five boxes of copies on Wednesday afternoon, just before the convention started, seemed like a neat idea, but these copies didn't arrive until Friday lunchtime. My mobile phone was redhot with my anxious enquiries, grrr. Be warned, readers, don't rely on ParcelForce. Oh, and they also have extremely irritating 'hold' messages.

However, once the copies did eventually arrive, we ran a steady business for the remainder of the convention. It was good to meet many *Flagship* readers, and to gather more. It's fascinating just to talk to players and find out what interests them. It was encouraging, too, to see that so many families were attending GenConUK. Plenty of young players arrived, who were often interested in playing the various card games and who will no doubt continue as gamers for life. An old friend was doing well in one of the card game tournaments, with hopes of a handsome cash prize at the end. I wonder how the two optimistic Norwegians that I met in my lodgings got on? But winning or losing, everyone seemed to be having fun in the company of like-minded people. It's so good to get away from the tiresome restrictions of real life.

The next convention that we plan to attend will be the one-day Dragonmeet in London on December 3rd. Pretty soon, now! I'm really looking forward to this, and I hope that we'll see some of you there, at Kensington Town Hall.

Moving away from the topic of conventions, you'll notice right away that we're trying a different approach to presenting you with news in this issue. Since our columnists are pretty hot in describing the latest news about their own interests - roleplaying, boardgames, cardgames, computer games - and since most games firms run their own news on their own websites now, we've decided to put the latest PBM news together into a separate article rather than list all the news as usual.

This change is intended to be an experiment rather than a permanent feature: do let us know what you think! We'll be happy to change back if you object to this new approach.

With our best wishes that you'll have fun playing your favourite games, old and new, during the long winter evenings.

Carol

Gaming Afterlife?

Where do dead games go when they die? Are the classic games doomed to live on only in our memories?

I was set thinking by an announcement from Turbine (<http://ac2.turbine.com>) that their popular MMO, Asheron's Call 2, is to close at the end of this year. Not so popular, obviously - or maybe Turbine would rather promote their new game, Dungeons and Dragons Online. If I were an Asheron's Call player I'd be waiting for the email offering me a free trial of Turbine's new game. Obviously something like an MMO is probably doomed to an eternal graveyard once the plug is pulled. These games need a big server to run and lots of technical wizardry. But what of old play-by-mail games, boardgames and roleplaying books that are out of print? Not to mention all those classic computer games like space invaders.

Happily there is good news! Classic computer games are widely available and have something of a cult following at the moment. Of course *Flagship* has some games like Space Invaders on our website, but check out www.the-underdogs.org as well as some of the magazines in your local newsagent. Roleplaying games too have proved hard to kill, as Lisa Fordham shows in her reviews of games that are available on PDF. Do you have fond memories of the old AD&D world of Forgotten Realms? Then go to www.torrentreactor.to where you can download PDF versions for free. Boardgames have a habit of being recycled, for instance Junta is now being reprinted.

Dead PBMs are more problematic. Is there a market for these in the same way that 'Classic' (read 'Old') games from other genres seem to have acquired new life? Who has the rights to these games? Does the code still exist? *Flagship* would love to hear from any GM, past or present, who might like to dust off an old game and let it see the light of day again. If it works, for PC games, boardgames, roleplaying games - why not for PBM too?

Colin Forbes

Flagship Trophies

We've been experimenting with offering virtual trophies to firms for presenting to victorious players. *Harlequin Games* took up this suggestion, and we're pleased to report that game 83 of **Middle Earth PBM**, which was contested by two teams of players, has been won in a successful defence by Team Saruman on the 15th turn. Playing as the Free Peoples, Mike Sankey, Ken Weed, Kim Anderssen, Martin Dylewski, Ed Mills and Richard Devereux beat the team captained by Andy Wright.

Team Saruman plan to defend their virtual award, with John Seals joining them in place of Richard Devereux. This time, they'll be taking on a team led by Anders Stockmarr. www.middleearthgames.com

We also offered a real pewter tankard for the winner of the **Acquire** tournament at *Psychocon 2005*. Our congratulations to John Stratford for winning it!

Many readers will have heard of or even played *Acquire*: it's a well-known tile-game, where players invest in and develop hotels. *Games Magazine* rated it as one of their all time classic games, and we're happy to become associated with the tournament for such a successful game.



The convention was successful, and plans are already being made to run it in Harrogate again next year. www.psychozine.co.uk/psychocon

Note that we'll readily consider suggestions from other games firms and conventions for presenting a *Flagship* award. Just get in touch at the address on page 3.

Cursed Empire

The History of a Fantasy Roleplaying Game

CHRIS LOIZOU reveals what it's like to design and launch a new RPG ...

WHERE TO start? Well, the beginning is probably the best place! Over twenty years ago, I began with playing D&D, then AD&D, CoC, MERP etc. I probably followed a similar path to a whole crowd of you out there. Also like most of you, I started to develop a new type of game, using some elements from other games and adding my own house rules. The game then moved on in its own right, with a completely new set of rules and picking up a few d100 on the way. A whole load of my pals had the chance to test the game over a ten-year period. The general feedback was positive, as well as at the six or so game fairs I attended, where I had people going for their chequebooks, but no games to sell!

I spent four years typing the rules out and getting friends to assist with artwork, playtesting etc on a more structured basis. Then things went quiet for several years as I had studies to attend to and, above all, no time or money to get the game edited and printed: unhappy with royalty offers made to me, self-publication was the way forward. Then, having got a sales job with an IT firm, the idea reappeared to blow the dust off the original book and get it published: the 1st Edition was born through self-publication. A five-hundred copy print-run later and thirty books remaining, the 2nd Edition needed to see the light. After eighteen gaming conventions in the UK, France and the US, a great deal of feedback from the 1st Edition had been collected. 2nd Edition took nineteen out of twenty of the key comments made (the twentieth comment was something to do with ducks in flying saucers and was dropped eventually...). The fact is that the production qualities of 1st Edition were not going to be high enough when the game was placed on a shelf in a shop somewhere in the States, for example. 2nd Edition was there to remedy that and give the range a fighting chance. 1st Edition has four books out and a Master of Tales (MT) screen. 2nd Edition has six books out (including the Blood of Heroes Graphic Novel) and more on their way. Crimson Empire, as it was previously known, also had to go through a name change following contact with Lucasfilm. This was a major blow for the range as two years of branding and profile-building were almost thrown away; worse still, many gamers did not make the association and thought that everything had stopped.

So Crimson Empire became **Cursed Empire**, which is all about atmosphere. It is dark and exciting and has a realistic feel to it. The scenarios are usually very twisted and have subplots intertwined with subplots, all linked to the main storyline. Imagine a mist swirling about your feet, a dark sky streaked with red shards of light and a ruined city all around you, the ruined city of Metbetoch. You can still make out the imperial army as it makes its way over the crest of the hill to the north of where you are standing. Your knees are prepared to give way under the weight of your armour, the weight of your heart. This is your city that has been razed to the ground, here where the most prestigious academy of magic once stood. You swear revenge, which keeps you from faltering. You do away with your black-scale armour: what use is it to you now? You will never wear it again. Your world will be that of shadows, infiltration and subterfuge. You

swear an oath to the dark priests of Morg, an oath to hunt down knights of the Empire, for the glory of your faction.

I think that players and moderators will enjoy the game because its rules are simple, flexible and fun, and should not get in the way of the gaming experience. This game has not been developed with a different system for the sake of it, I find too many new games are marketed with a strong emphasis on the game system. Cursed Empire's strength is based upon its atmosphere, not the weight or the complexity of the rules. The Spartans Unleashed System is easy to pick up and can be adapted for different styles of play. The world of Thargos is a dangerous, hostile place of many extremes. Indeed, the Knight and Darkun factions that are at war with each other can be diametrically opposite with regard to their ideologies, or in fact a lot closer than it seems on the surface. The moderator and players alike will have great fun in interacting with the geopolitics of these complex entities, and designing their own ones. There are very complex levels of cohabitation and interaction between supposed allies, each with their own agenda. Darkuns are religious zealots and deadly opponents, as they have access to magic, poison and a host of deadly weapons, as well as having no fear or respect for life. Their life expectancy rarely goes beyond their mid twenties (for a human), but they're great fun to play, especially if they infiltrate a group of players. Magic is fun here, too, as the players and moderator alike can create a host of symbols and spells, and trade, sell, steal them. Flexible but adaptable rules are provided with main guidelines for the moderator to handle such activities, with a logical framework. I'm summarising a lot here in one paragraph, as there is much more to read in the book, but this gives the main flavour of the magic system. I nearly forgot: in some societies, sorcerers and mages are hunted down, as they are considered to be heretics. Moderators have a chance to personalise the game to their own style by making the use of spells more or less acceptable to suit their campaign. This can lead to some really fun situations, as I'll let you imagine.

Combat is both graphic and fun, and enables players to adapt their own fighting styles. Certain weapons are banned in the Empire (to simplify: the nice guys!) and their ownership or, even worse, their use is punishable by death. Players also get a chance to mix and match armour types and cobble together hybrid armour, compromising protection with encumbrance. The feedback from players has been that certain fights have an epic, almost cinematic feel to them. The combat is fun because it is dangerous and a lot of strange things can happen: every creature or individual can be brought down, every character is capable of heroics.

Creatures on Thargos are exciting and unique. Let's consider for example the Thargians (the oldest civilisation of Thargos), who ride their manta-like Targs over the desert and rule by fear. Once a proud civilized race, they are now reduced to primitive tribe-like survival. Or how about the howling Melok, who haunts graveyards hunting for a new body to live in, and can easily be confused with a ghost, but is so deadly in comparison? We could also consider the Trogre, a horrendous cross-breed between the Troll and the Ogre, with the combined strength of both: deadly! There are nearly ninety such creatures in the game, of which thirty or so are completely new: they all have detailed Creature Character Sheets (CCS) and loads of illustrations. Women are also present in abundance in the game, not the Pamela Andersen look-alikes (there are a few nevertheless!), but strong female characters like the Priestess on the front cover of the gamebook. It is about time that roleplaying games opened up to more female players!

A lot of effort has gone into developing the game and I'm hoping to share the fun of the adventures in the world of Thargos with as many people as possible. Please bear in mind that you have the chance to speak

Cursed Empire at a glance ...

A dark, medieval fantasy roleplaying system with undertones of the heroic age of Ancient Greece. In addition to the core rules (priced £32), several sourcebooks are available with a graphic novel recently released.

www.cursedempire.com

to me directly about your ideas and comments and, I hope, influence the future development of the game.

Playing Cursed Empire

The main aim of Cursed Empire is to go back to the basics of fantasy, ie to ensure that heroics are central and bring back the fear of losing a character and the thrill of designing your own spells. A great deal of this is enhanced thanks to the Points of Renown (PR) system, Magic and Combat.

Crimson Empire 2nd Edition develops the Points of Renown System and changes most conventional gaming preconceptions. Players can either progress an individual through the PR system or progress an Order or Faction, occasionally to the detriment of the individual character (Darkuns are a good example of this). The two gaming styles are perfectly compatible but allow for a very different gaming experience.

Knights, for example, through their individual actions will no doubt progress their order. However, the main aim for this type of character is to progress as an individual by gaining renown through heroic deeds and receiving support and 'sponsorship' from their Order. This can come in the form of a better warhorse, superior weaponry and armour through to retainers and money. Darkuns are characters who are expected to perish fast. Players who choose to create Darkuns know that they have chosen the 'time-bomb' option and that their character's days are numbered. What is the incentive for killing your character off? Well, by dying with glory for the Temple, the Darkun character progresses the status of the Faction. Fear is a powerful weapon against the Empire. This creates a new type of situation in the game as you have conventional characters all trying to progress and better themselves and a handful of demented individuals who really don't care who they take with them. It allows for some really heroic situations to arise, where players push the limits of their characters to new levels. Probability would normally dictate that they should not be throwing themselves up against twelve hardened Imperial Knights, but the outcome could potentially surprise everyone. If a player recreates a character from the same Order or Faction etc as their previous character, then this can start off with a 'head start' of PR. Basically, the Moderator rewards roleplaying and background efforts from players.

Creatures of Myth do exist, but most of them are so dangerous or terrifying that adventurers don't go there. They get their own back in Cursed Empire, which adds to the heroic fantasy dimension of the game: only fools or heroes would ever seek out such beings...

How to develop a new RPG system

Here are a few pointers from my own experience with Cursed Empire:

1 - *Game concept*: Outline the main game concept, including ambience, setting, system and the answers to the 'Why would I wish to play this?' question, which is critical and should summarise the reasons for 'buying into' the new game. Why take up yet another system? How does this differ from other games? What makes the game unique?

2 - *Ambience*: What atmosphere am I trying to create? What feel does the game have?

3 - *Setting*: What are the defining places, characters and situations that the players are going to encounter?

4 - *System*: Is the game system similar to anything else? Does it contribute to the above? Does the system add any new gaming dimension making it an integral part of the game itself?

I found with Cursed Empire that there were some similarities to older systems, like BRP for example, but at the same time the system has moved



on in its own right. The setting was a key aspect of the game. I have always been passionate about ancient history and wished to bring the heroic tales of Homer to the game table and have them clash with the mysticism of the Dark Ages in Europe. The system then becomes a story-telling means, not a hindrance.

5 - *Branding*: Another key aspect of game design is branding and product image. If you are not picking up a nice recognizable game licence, then you must stand out in your own right. I really tried to design a feel and image for the game through the art, fonts and overall design. The guys from *Contested Ground Studios* have also developed this for the A-State game.

Not long ago, *d20tm* was the only way to go to get a broad enough audience, now, however, every retailer and distributor I speak to think that this is definitely not the way to go. Games have to stand out for themselves, create a following and grow this following.

6 - *Conventions*: These are the key for independent publishers. We have attended nineteen in four different countries over the last three years. It is mainly through such gatherings that we can increase the fan base of the game and meet future contributors who keep the whole thing alive. They require a huge amount of work and the identification of key demo GMs. Demos are the best way to get the game known and they assist in refining its presentation. Feedback from gamers and improving the product are just some of the benefits. You also learn to ensure that your demo portrays the game in the right light and gives players enough of a feel for the game to buy into it.

7 - *Reward your following*: I have tried to thank those who've paid for my game with their hard earned-cash. You can do this through providing them with specials, discounts, freebies etc. When 2nd Edition was under development I thought that the owners of 1st edition should have something extra to thank them for buying the first version of the game. In that particular case the Creature Section was abridged in 2nd Edition and the 1st Edition book doubles up as a Monster Book. The complete list of creatures and their statistics will be released over a period of time, but 1st Ed Owners will have them in their older books from the beginning. Supporting your local shop with demos and specials is a nice way forward and running events over a weekend can really boost exposure.

8 - *Printing*: There are many considerations when deciding to go to printers. Are you going to self-finance the print run or are you going to go through another publisher? I preferred the first option, where I kept control of the product and higher earning potential. I will detail that scenario first.

Self-Publication: Proof-reading, editing etc are key points that take an

amateur publication to another level. I know that there is a fair amount to be done on that front for myself and have really understood this. I chose digital printing, which enables you to do a relatively small print run at a higher unit cost but nevertheless with enough margin for direct sales and a proportion of distribution. Please note that it is not uncommon for distributors to take a 60% margin off RRP (they also share this with a retailer). Getting product into shops is the hardest bit as you are an unknown quantity and the last thing they want is to have books collecting dust in the shop with their money tied-up.

Formatting and typesetting as well as the tortuous path of generating PDFs take some getting used to, although there are some excellent packages out there (Pagemaker, Quark Express and Indesign for typesetting and Jaws PDF for PDF generation). The quality of paper and cover design are key areas for consideration. The Cursed Empire 2nd Edition Corebook cost 30% more to print to have a spot UV (Shiny/Matt) cover, a red endpage inside and red and black stitching for the binding. However, the comments I have had about the finished product are worth the additional cost.

The whole printing and putting the books together is a tricky series of tasks and is best learnt through trial and error. Here, however, are a few key considerations to bear in mind:

- Format: US or A4? If planning to sell into the US, you must adhere to this format or few shops can display your product as their shelving will not be suited.
- Page Count: multiples of eight normally.
- Table of Contents *and* Index: very important for everyone I know.
- Clear and readable format.
- Quality paper, not recycled loo-paper!
- Get to see proofs first, also check art resolution and potential pixelisation due to the wrong graphic file formats and/or dpi (Dots Per Inch).
- Check Bold with certain fonts: they may not be supported and may be forced bolds, i.e. black bloody messes.
- Pay attention to the book spine, as when your game is no longer the new release it ends up with Xmm of shelf space: it must still sell itself.
- Think about warehousing and storage as well as shipping to distributors and retailers.

For more information or tips please email: chris@cursedempire.com

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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 sly 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.

Briny En



The year is 1791, and there's trouble afoot...! Not in England, where Good King George III of the House of Hanover-

Pumpnickel 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!

Gen Con UK 2005

Butlin's for gamers! LUCYA SZACHNOWSKI reports on the UK convention ...

THE UK's BEST-known games convention, Gen Con UK, has gone through a number of venues over the years.

Its first incarnation was at Camber Sands holiday camp in the early 1990s, where freezing chalets with coin-meter electricity earned it the nickname Cryogen. Then the convention moved to Loughborough University with a huge campus requiring Olympic running skills from gamers trying to get from one game to the next in buildings spread across the site and very little in the way of a central noticeboard. After that was Manchester University, where armed bodyguards would have been a useful addition if you wanted to venture to accommodation in the back streets of Manchester after dark. For me, London's Earl's Court was perhaps the worst venue, even though I live in south east England. Sky-high prices for everything, snooty bar staff and no affordable accommodation nearby meant it lost some of the attractions of chatting in the bar with mates when you weren't gaming or the possibility of late night parties in people's rooms. In 2004, Horsemen Events took over the running of the con from the RPGA and moved it to Butlins in Minehead where chalet parties could once more indulge in with relish, but the holiday camp's location was in the middle of nowhere and a long drive to get to unless you lived in the south west. This year Gen Con was at Butlins once more, but this time at Bognor Regis. It took place from 3rd-6th November over the Bonfire night weekend. A couple of hours' drive from London, on the West Sussex Coast, Butlins' Bognor Regis is certainly a much easier journey for many, myself included. Apart from the games convention, Butlins offers oodles of free attractions such as Splash Waterworld with a huge swimming pool and water slide, restaurants, a cinema, a funfair and the Skyline Pavilion with cafes, bars, an amusement arcade, staged entertainment and a massive play area for kids. Of course, if you are an avid game player you are unlikely to have much spare time to enjoy those other activities as well as Gen Con but it does mean you can bring along your non-gaming partner and children for the weekend without worrying about them being bored. The accommodation, in chalets or apartments sleeping up to six people, was great for impromptu games and, of course, late-night parties. I stayed in a what was termed a 'gold' apartment, meaning it was among the most luxurious on the site, and it was really quite warm and comfortable despite the brisk November weather. Apart from the bedrooms it had a lounge with two sofas, a coffee table and a wide-screen TV, a well-equipped kitchen area with a table and chairs ideal for playing games and a good shower room. Prices over the con weekend were from £54 for a standard chalet sleeping three people for three nights up to £129 per adult for three nights' half-board in a deluxe room. That is pretty reasonable for a weekend away, in my opinion, although that did not include entry to Gen Con itself, which was an extra £75 for a four-day pass.

Gen Con took over Butlins' Centre Stage venue - normally used as one of the site's entertainment complexes but well suited for a games convention and a big improvement on the leaky marquee used at Minehead. Centre Stage had plenty of space for tabletop roleplaying, LAN computer games, board games, miniatures wargaming, CCGs and other card games. Companies including Games Workshop, Wizards of the Coast, Wizkids, Mongoose, Upper Deck Entertainment, Privateer Press, Loony Labs and Hobby Games ran free demos all weekend in addition to sanctioned events, tournaments and tables for delegate organised games. The trade area seemed to be packed into a smaller space than in previous years although it was well placed at the back of the main gaming hall. There was a good variety of different things on sale, from new and used games to Larp equipment, clothing and, indeed, copies of Flagship. Chris Baylis ran a bring and buy table, as usual, with 15% of the cash taken going to the charity ECHO and



a good opportunity to get rid of unwanted games to make room for some new ones. There were some bargains to be found everywhere, including a stall selling fabulous corsets at such tempting prices that I could not resist adding to my already over-full costume collection. Colin Wheeler of Second Games Galore had slashed prices of his used stock to make way for new games for his Christmas stock. Yet they all seemed to be doing a roaring trade. Colin Wheeler said: 'We've more than covered our costs, which is the most important thing and better than we managed at Earls Court. The other main reason for coming to Gen Con is to chat with people and have a good time - which I have certainly done. There has been a really friendly atmosphere in the trade hall.'

Of course, that might have had something to do with the fact the traders were positioned right next to a bar which stayed open until 3am. The only parts of the con outside this space were the freeform and Larp games, which took over part of a restaurant and a conference suite. Both venues were adequate, if characterless, and not too far away from the main con. Nevertheless, walking to one game dressed in a St Trinians costume through crowds of bemused regular Butlins holidaymakers was somewhat embarrassing. Which leads me to the only drawback of running Gen Con at Butlins - unless the convention can grow to such a size that it takes over the entire site, we gamers are going to have to share it with the regular holidaymakers and put up with the inevitable strange looks from people who think we are all a little weird. Perhaps the thing to do is to spread the word so next year there are a lot more of us than this year's attendance figures of 1,957, to give us safety in numbers. Nevertheless, Horsemen Events was pleased with how Gen Con UK went overall and is planning on making the convention bigger and better next year. Long-standing games con organiser Ratty said: 'We are delighted that a huge number of people came to Gen Con UK and had a great time.'

For more information about Gen Con UK, visit the website www.genconuk.com

To send feedback to the organisers, email ratty@genconuk.com

Turn-based News

CAROL MULHOLLAND summarises the reports received at Flagship Headquarters ...

WE'RE TRYING a different approach to presenting you with news in this issue. Since our columnists are pretty hot in describing the latest news about their own interests - roleplaying, boardgames, cardgames, computer games - and since most games firms run their own news on their own websites now, we've decided to put the latest PBM news together into a separate article rather than list all the news as usual.

This change is intended to be an experiment rather than a permanent feature: do let us know what you think! We'll be happy to change back if you object to this new approach.

WARGAMES: You'll see that we've an article about *David Clay's WWII: Open Warfare* this issue, so the news that he now runs another, separate game based on WWI is of immediate interest. David describes this new game, **The Great War**, as 'much more detailed and based on historical set-up, down to divisional and brigade names where known... The game is based on only six to eight players, with each taking the head of the military in one of the key nations: the political component remains with the GM.'

www.wargaming.org.uk

KJC Games have just started game 43 of **Warlord**, which is a special game where every player has two empires but just pays for one. Suitable for experienced players rather than novices, there may still be a place for you, if you apply right away.

Counting a game about criminal gangs as a wargame, we'll add that **KJC** are starting game 51 of **It's Crime** exclusively for newcomers. The first two turns are free, and you can buy cheaper turns at the start of this game, at just £1.50 for a double order turn. (The normal price is £2.30.) If, as a newcomer, you don't know the game, the rules can be downloaded from:

www.kjcgames.com/crrules.htm

A US firm, **Struggle Games**, announce a PBeM they're presenting on Yahoo. Called **Global Struggle**, it's set in the 19th century and is based on 'the story of what if the world followed the example of the USA after 1776.' Hmm... The game is designed to appeal to players new to internet PbeM gaming as well as to experienced players and 'using Excel spreadsheets for the turn-based game, we can simulate all aspects of government operations from economic to military.' If you're interested, you can both view and play the game at

games.groups.yahoo.com/group/IFN

Check **Struggle Games** own site first, though, which provides detailed information about the game.

<http://strugglegames.com>

A reader asked us if we'd seen an internet game called **Hexwar**. 'Takes me back 30 years,' he reminisces, but of course this isn't a bad thing at all. We've now taken a look at it and it seems neatly presented. Those of you who enjoy straightforward wargaming should take a look, too: www.hexwar.com

FANTASY WARGAMES: *Harlequin Games* have announced a new look to an old module of **Legends**. *Adventures in Avalon* has become *Avalon Revisited* - with artwork by Disney's Wayne Vincenzi, a 24-page module, and some unusual game settings. It's the brainchild of an experienced **Legends** player, Andreas Bringedal, who wanted to create a game for hardcore factional players with an accelerated start and many game caps removed.

Harlequin expect this to be a fast and furious game of giant armies battling with hordes of Dragons, that's free from the constraints of the usual *Avalon* factional system. They are taking setups right now and the game, *Avalon Revisited* 23, starts in mid November. The module can be found at: www.harlequingames.com/hqdown/ar10.2b.pdf

Work is also proceeding on a parser which will improve the new player user interface, **LPE2**, which *Harlequin* released last spring. **LPE2** solved almost all the bugs of **LPE1**, ran on all modern computers and was also free. However, both **LPEs** suffered from only being able to show the data they were presented. The parser will help to collate the inferred information from the results sheet and allow its import into **LPE2**, so this will include barriers of nature, detected powerpoints and province movement modifiers. It'll be a great help, when completed!

www.harlequingames.com

Middle Earth Games report that their *Fourth Age* scenario of **Middle Earth PBM** continues to grow as they develop the nation set-up.

In the *1650 - Process When Ready* game (**PoWeR** format), they've reduced the turn cost to around 2/3rds the normal charge and will process turns as fast as the players can get them in. And yes, there are still a few positions available in the game if anyone is interested.

They've now completed updates to their turn order input software - it now automatically calculates the costs of your orders amongst many other snazzy new game-aids.

They also report good progress with their new scenario, *Kin Strife*, with new artwork, encounters and Special Nation Abilities. They hope to have the first player test game out soon.

Details of this and other forthcoming updates are available on their website or direct from them.

Speaking of the website, they have been updating this, to give it what they describe as 'a nice shiny new look.'

www.MiddleEarthGames.com

POWER GAMES: Still with a fantasy base, but this time an open-ended game, long-time readers will remember **Midgard**, which was run here in Britain by *Ventura Games*, until they closed some years ago. Stephen Weir owns the UK rights to this game and has been reprogramming it, with *Weird Hobbies* as the name of his games firm. He plans to relaunch **Midgard** initially in a free hand-moderated version, until the new programs are complete.

'Once the programs are complete,' he tells us, 'any clans running will be transferred directly into them. There will be no loss of clan, or a need to start from scratch. And any changes made to the terrain, Factions or cities during the hand moderation will also be edited into the game proper.'

Stephen plans to start off processing at a rate of one turn a month, to judge the level of interest and how long it takes him to process the turns: 'If it's feasible to reduce turnaround time, I will.' It's early days yet, so you've time to join the playtest if you're interested. Stephen will accept 'anybody who wants to play, new or old.' However, note that as Stephen's licence only covers the UK and Ireland, if you live outside these areas you will have to receive your turns by post. Of course, we asked about the charges. 'Orders are 0.10 each, up to a maximum of 30 per turn. Special Actions are 0.50 each, up to a maximum of three per turn. Combat Reports are £1 per participant. So you could have a turn as little as £0.10, or as much as £5.50. I'd imagine the average turn to be somewhere between £2-£3.'

Midgard was a popular game, with colourful background detail. If you want to take a look at it for free, you can download the rulebook from:

http://uk.groups.yahoo.com/group/midgard_uk_pbm/

If you're eager to join or rejoin **Midgard** in this hand-moderated version, contact Stephen, but note that he asks people not to send payment until they've spoken with him:

midgard@sweir.free-online.co.uk

We mention the Danish GM *Morten Larsen* below, but *Morten* also reminds us that his website and the other games he runs apart from his newly revived **Stellar Conflict** have been absent from our recent listings.

Oops, you'll find Morten's **War of the Dark God** and **Throne of Cofain** at:

www.pbem.dk

SCIENCE FICTION: *KJC Games* remind anyone interested in their space game **Phoenix** that signing up to play means that you can run your initial freighter for free. Indeed, you can run any number of ships, again all for free. 'There are players in the game that currently control more than eighty ships! Just make sure that you communicate with other players. Trust me, they want nothing more than good players working with them. In all cases they are just happy to have people that can run ships, they are genuinely not bothered whether you are a millionaire. You can even run ground forces, agents and operatives for free as well!'

Yes, you have to pay for more advanced positions like starbases and political positions, but taking these up is a matter of choice. This seems a pretty generous arrangement to us, especially since the charges for Phoenix's original version, *Beyond the Stellar Empire*, were if anything too high.

www.kjcgames.com

Incidentally, it's worth mentioning that *KJC's* **Space Troopers** is another science-fiction game from the same firm, simpler than Phoenix, which can be played at a very low cost, or even for free. The first turn you run on any given week is totally free, so if you only control one squad, you will never pay to play this game.

www.kjcgames.com/st.htm

We've also heard from *Morten Larsen* that he has just finished revamping **Stellar Conflict**, a 'classic formula' space wargame that he used to run play-by-mail some years ago. It'll now be possible to play this by email.

In *Stellar Conflict*, your race has just discovered star-flight but first you must choose what kind of race you want to play: is it's priority industrial, research-based, survival, combat, administration, slavery or...? Well, there are further types to choose from, but you get the idea. It's possible to combine a couple of characteristics if you'd rather do this than specialise.

Morten plans to run a few free playtest games before the game goes commercial again and is looking for play-testers. So you've a chance to try out the game for free, playing with a system that's already been operating, at:

www.pbem.dk/stellar

ADVENTURE GAMES: *Entertainment Plus More* report that another player-initiated adventure site has been added to their **Adventurers Guild**. Called the Bastion of Evil, 'its power grew, and the cities became more lawless every week. The future looked grim until good-hearted characters figured out how to curb its influence.'

They also announce that they're introducing free admission to the gladiatorial arena of *Adventurers Guild*, which runs as a spinoff game, **Deathsgate**. You can view past fights and look over the *Deathsgate* message board at:

www.epmgames.com/DGateIntro.html

Visitors are then invited to create a character and enjoy a turn of *Deathsgate* for free.

www.epmgames.com

KJC Games are making a *Special Offer* to coincide with the full launch of their new **Monster Island** Dream Quest moderation: in addition to the two free turns when you join, you also get the first ten turns for £15 instead of the usual £21. The offer only applies to brand new monsters, but can be used by existing players, who will qualify for it if they start a new monster:

www.kjcgames.com/mi/misetupf.htm

They have also introduced a new tournament to **Monster Island** as *Game 31: Terror Island*. An island in *Naralia* has been overrun by monsters, and it's necessary for one party from each alliance to take up the quest to get rid of them. Those volunteering should post their party name and number on the Quest 10 day list and *KJC* will arrange a date and time, for them to get on their way. There are rules and prizes for the tournament, which entrants will need to check out first.

It sounds a good idea for bringing fresh challenges into the game.

www.kjcgames.com/mi

SPORTS GAMES: Nathan Batchelor of the football game **In Off The Post** tells us that the game's websites are undergoing an update. Websites? Yes, the plural isn't a misprint, because *IOTP* run two sites:

www.iotp.net is for the traditional PBM & PBEM game, while

www.iotp-online.co.uk is the online version of the game.

INTERNET PLAY: Hugh Bayer of *Entertainment Plus More* informs us about **Vampires Rule**, a new internet game which invites anyone to 'join the vampires. It's a growing community, with competition for those wanting such fun. Bringing others under your wing is one of many ways to gain power.'

www.VampiresRule.com

Also on the Vampire theme, comes exciting news from Mica Goldstone of *KJC Games* that *KJC* are working steadily on an online Vampire game of their own. They're hoping to start a full play test of this in the new year. We won't say more about it at this stage, but we hope that Mica will write an article about its development for us closer to the time that it's launched.

www.kjcgames.com

KJC are also starting an online version of their long-running adventure game, *Quest*, as **Quest Online**. If you start with the Demo version of the game, you can play for free as far as turn twenty. Indeed, once transferred to the full world you can still play for free by playing within certain time zones, so as *KJC* say, 'you can carry on adventuring for years to come and all for free.' More information can be found at:

www.kjcgames.com/qonline.htm

NEWS ABOUT FIRMS: From November 1st, *KJC Games* have raised their turn fees slightly for all of their games except **Quest**. *Quest* players won't see their turn fees raised until the new magic system has been fully implemented.

We've updated our *Galactic View* listings and can say that the price rises are minimal, but we mention the changes here as well, because *KJC* explain that some players have expected to pay less because they play by email, whereas 'The answer to this is simple. We have very few postal players left. Postal players in most games only represent approximately 2% of the players. Almost all players now play by email. So the price you are paying really is how much it costs to run your email turns covering all associated costs. The gradual savings made over the years in postage, paper etc has meant that only small and infrequent price increases were necessary. In fact, before the rise in 2002, prices had been frozen for nearly six years, as increasing costs were absorbed by the change over from post to email.'

KJC also stress that there are plenty of free extras for players in all of their games. Oh, and that you'll gain 10% in game credits if you make a payment £50 or over.

www.kjcgames.com

News, too, from *Flying Buffalo Inc*, who sell a range of game products, including plenty for RPG games.

They've recently announced that their six-sided *Death Dice* can now be purchased in a range of different colours, that there's now a hardback book with traps from all seven of their original **Grimtooth** books with d20 stats included, and that a special 30th Anniversary 7th Edition of **Tunnels & Trolls** has just been produced. They also have plans to reprint the **Nuclear Escalation News** with new artwork and expect to be able to release it in December.

One gadget that sounds useful for all gamers is *FBI's* four-way rubber band, which will go around all four sides of a game box to hold it together. There are three sizes to choose from, and the price is a very reasonable \$5 for a set of six.

Details of all these goods can be found on the website;

www.flyingbuffalo.com

Banzai!

WWII Open Warfare

TAD WESLEY launches the Japanese offensive ...

HAVE YOU ever wondered what it would be like to be in charge of the day-to-day operations of a leader of a world power during World War II? Well, no one alive today will probably ever really know that feeling unless time travel becomes a reality. In the meantime, the closest you can probably get is to get into the game **WWII Open Warfare**, a play-by-email strategy game run by David Clay, hereafter known as 'DaveGM' (GM for Game Master).

The game strikes a good balance between the two, equally problematic, extremes of micromanagement on the one hand, and loss of realism on the other. You are given freedom to try anything in the game, giving you an essentially unrestricted imagination, as long as you keep in mind the realities of the time period, and the culture and nation you are playing. At the same time, however, you are assumed to have competent underlings under you, who can follow your orders, but simultaneously are able to react as new situations develop. To understand how, it's important to understand a little more about how the game works.

First of all, each major combatant nation is run by one or more real people. In my case, I am the Political Leader of the Empire of Japan, Prince Konoye Fumimako (I changed Fumimaro's name to Fumimako to represent the fact that I am not playing that person exactly as he was in history, but it is still close enough that the sense of connection is still there). I am responsible for the diplomacy, budget, and covert forces of Japan. I also have two teammates: a very able Army Commander, General Tojo, and a very good Naval Commander, Admiral Nagumo. These positions are abbreviated in game as JPPL, JPGC, JPNC. Other nations have more players, while some of the smaller nations have one player. Any nations not deemed important enough to support a player position, or that are simply vacant due to there being no active player, are administered by DaveGM.

Each turn, my teammates and I discuss general strategy and some specific coordination issues (more on that later), and then proceed to write up our orders for the turn. Each turn is due roughly monthly, and corresponds to exactly one month of game time. For example, the most recent turn we submitted was September, 1941.

The heart of the orders submission mechanism, and the true strength of the game, is known as the 'Free Floating Order' (FFO); each player gets up to ten per turn. An FFO is essentially exactly what it sounds like. Your character writes up an order to his subordinates, for them to carry out to the best of their ability. You really can write just about anything; the limiting factor is the ability of the subordinates to carry out the orders. The bottom of the FFO form is called 'Staff Officer Feedback'. That is where



DaveGM gives you the results of your order, how it was carried out, and its perceived effectiveness.

Beyond that, the turn consists of 'Strategic Planning Order' (SPO), as well. These are also very important. An FFO is an order you wish carried out immediately. However, the best orders, and the ones with the best chance of ultimate success, are the ones that you have been scrupulously planning for months. That's what the SPO is for. Here, you can outlay far-ranging plans and goals, so that your underlings can prepare for them appropriately.

The perfect example of this is a major offensive. Let's assume that as Japan, we wish to attack the US Naval Fleet at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, in December of 1941 as Japan did historically. We could simply have our Naval Commander write an FFO in December of 1941 assigning a naval task force orders to steam east to a given sea zone, launch all its aircraft at the base, and return. However, it would be much more successful if, as was historically the case, we had begun planning for this attack months ahead, designing shallower-water torpedoes, making practice runs with our carrier aircraft, preparing our ships for supply and logistics concerns, and so on. This is what the SPO is for. The Naval Commander would write an SPO, say, in May of 1941 asking our naval staff to plan for such an attack and report back on any issues they could foresee. One may be the shallow water in Pearl Harbor: would our torpedoes be effective? At that point, these potential problems could be detected, instead of simply 'flying by the seat of our pants' via FFO. The game very much rewards adequate planning. The best-laid plans are almost invariably the most successful.

The Naval Commander and Army Commander positions are also tasked with dealing with the Order of Battle (OOB). This is a spreadsheet containing literally every military unit under the control of the Japanese Empire. In it, the commanders can issue very simple orders to each individual unit under their command. Next to an air unit, for instance it could say 'rebase Singapore', telling that air unit to rebase its operations in Singapore.

Every three turns, the game includes another major orders feature, the quarterly budget. These are always my favorite months as the Political

WWII Open Warfare at a glance ...

A PBeM wargame with special actions, from David Clay. The charge is £20 for startup, which includes three turns, with subsequent turns at £5.50. A previous article, in #108, discusses the aspect of playing as a team.

www.wargaming.org.uk

Leader, and also by far my busiest. We are given an updated budget each month, and we can make changes each quarter. This is where I allocate money to each of our armed forces (although I generally leave the actual decision on what to build to the Naval Commander and Army Commander for their respective budgets), authorize and direct research projects, authorize railway projects, maintain our resource and transport flow via merchant marine and rail (a very challenging job for Japan particularly), organize the nation's industry, and so on.

I should touch on the resources as well. There are five primary resources tracked within the game. Coal is required for all industry; the nation's civilian factories also use ore, while the military factories use rubber. Petroleum is required for all motorized units, as well as for civilian consumption. The final resource is food, which is required to keep each city functioning. You may institute rationing of publicly used goods (food and oil). You may also raise the tax rate, which will increase the funds coming into the national treasury, but expect a loss of morale as a result, commensurate with the degree of the rationing or taxation. Suffer from enough morale loss, and you will see plenty of problems, including revolts and poor military performance.

As Political Leader of Japan, we have the historical problem of not having many resources in our home territories. So we have various trade agreements worked out, and of course we are also in control of Korea, Manchuria, and large portions of China, and we get the rest of our goods from there. The problem with this is that these resources then require shipment back to Japan where the factories wait to turn them into consumer goods, as well as the planes, tanks, and ships that keep the Empire growing.

That is handled through railways partially, and also by increasing our industrial presence on mainland Asia, but also of course through merchant shipping. Naturally, enemy forces can attempt to sink this shipping, interrupting our supply lines and creating headaches for our economy.

The other major part of the Japanese war effort under my control is the covert arm. The rules regarding the covert forces are pretty minimal,

because you really have a lot of freedom in what you want to try to do. I have radio intelligence units, spy cells in nations all over the world, counter-intelligence agents in my nation trying to catch other spies working here, signals security units charged with keeping other spies from reading our radio messages, field intel units tasked with finding out enemy troop positions and formations, and so on. You can attempt sabotage, coups, reconnaissance, stealing technology, planting false information, literally anything you can imagine and state in a Free Floating Order.

Finally, after every turn, each team is tasked with writing a national newspaper for the month. It is not required, but there are significant morale bonuses for doing so, and it is a great way for your country to give its opinion of the events of the month, quell (or start!) any rumors about your nation's intentions or interests, mislead your enemies, and so on. Great fun!

The game does have a cost, but it is pretty small. The per-turn cost is currently £5.50. That may sound substantial, but considering how much work goes into the game, and the unique nature of it, I think it's warranted. More importantly, I easily get that much enjoyment out of the game. The way I think of it is that it's a bit less than the cost of going out to the theater to see a new movie with my wife, without any snacks, drinks, etc. This game is easily as enjoyable as that. The payment is easy, even if, like me, you aren't British. Paypal allows currency conversion, and anybody can use Paypal.

I hope I have given a pretty thorough overview of how the game works, so by now I'm sure you're just itching to jump into the war. Just don't join a nation opposed to the will of the Emperor, and you will be spared. Bansai!

Austerlitz: The Rise of the Eagle

The premier Napoleonic wargame is now available for play with 21st century features: colour GUI, no setup fees, no battle fees, free practice battles, online updates, and the lowest Austerlitz turn fees offered anywhere. See what our players are saying about the game at <http://www.austerlitz.biz/forum/>.

Visit us at <http://www.austerlitz.biz> or email us at GM@austerlitz.biz to learn more about a game of diplomacy, commerce, and war.

Magical Energy?

Das Zepter von Zavandor

PAUL EVANS reviews a complex boardgame: can he master it?

GAMERS WHO'VE been around for a while will know of the legendary **Outpost**. This science fiction-based logistics game was published in 1991 by *TimJim Games* and has been out of print for nearly as long. You see dog-eared copies of the game still being played avidly at games conventions. And collectors will pay large sums for any secondhand copies that come up for sale. But now we have **Das Zepter von Zavandor (Zavandor's Sceptre)** from *Lookout Games* (a German publisher, despite the name). The credits explicitly thank Outpost designer Jim Hlavarti for permission to use the mechanisms from his game. From my hazy memories of Outpost (it's been a few years), *Das Zepter von Zavandor* is much the same game, albeit translated to a fantasy theme by designer Jens Drögemüller. More experienced Outpost players tell me that Zepter plays as a rather different game, while the rules remain broadly similar. Be that as it may, the result is a terrific game, which I find quite addictive.

The problem with writing a review is that it's quite a complex game. I have the usual reviewer's dilemma - of explaining enough of the game to get the flavour across without reproducing the rules - in spades. Still, let's give it a go. The story of the game is that the players are students of magic competing to win Zavandor's sceptre by having the most magical power and knowledge. For which read 'having the most victory points'. Points are scored for various things players build up through the game. The most valuable items are mainly the various 'sentinels', which provide large bonuses (like the 'large buildings' in Puerto Rico). They also end the game, since everything is wrapped up once five or more sentinels have been acquired. Like everything else in the game, sentinels must be paid for in magical energy. And they cost a lot of it. Thus the overall strategy of the game is to build up the amount of magical energy you generate to the point where you can afford a sentinel or two. (Three is just greedy!)

Players get their magical energy from gems, which must be 'enchanted' by spending magical energy. So each turn you get a bit more magical energy, which you invest in victory points and in getting more magical energy for next turn. The various magical artefacts do all sorts of things: allowing players to enchant better gems, improving their position in a field

of knowledge and more. In general, they boost the owner's position and, occasionally, damage others' positions. They are gained in auctions. One player puts an artefact up for auction and everybody can bid for it - in energy of course. If the player who started the auction doesn't get the artefact, s/he can auction another. One tactical note here is that the player who goes last in the turn can usually auction an artefact and get it at face value since everybody else will have spent their energy. The deck of artefact cards is carefully organised so that the cards gradually increase in cost (there's a minimum bid), power and victory point value. Another important part of the game is deciding which artefacts to buy and when. As there's only a limited number of each artefact, the bids can escalate rapidly if several players want the same thing.

This brings us to the six fields of magical knowledge. These are shown on a small board that is the central component of the game. Players place markers to show the level they've achieved in each field and get victory points for achieving 'mastery' - the top level. There's a large cost - in magical energy, of course - to starting a new field, while the cost of improving starts low and gets more expensive. Again, each field of knowledge gives players an advantage. For example, 'knowledge of gems' provides a discount on enchanting new gems. The better the knowledge, the bigger the discount.

Strategy (and tactics) in the game is mainly about the fields of knowledge and artefacts. Probably the most extreme example of this is the Ruby strategy. Rubies provide the most energy, so being able to enchant them is obviously a good idea. The only way to be able to do this is to achieve mastery of the 'Fire' field of knowledge. So first you have to go up the levels of this field, which takes turns and costs energy. Once you have the ability to enchant Rubies, you then need to spend energy to do so - and Rubies are expensive. So you need to be generating energy before you get any Rubies. Hence, your tactics need to be a balance between generating more energy in the short term and advancing your ultimate strategy. In practice, going for Rubies will produce a lot of energy towards the end of the game. But anyone following this strategy will have suffered in the early turns and will be significantly behind the other players. Whether they catch up depends on how quickly the game finishes. Phew!

Let me step back from the mechanics of the game and talk about how it plays. The main point is that you are always trying to expand. This means buying better gems, buying artefacts and improving knowledge. At the start of the game you don't have enough energy to do all of these, so there are decisions to be made. The balance is between immediate returns and development for the future. Later on, you have much more energy, but it's still a question of seeing what you can afford. With discounts and surcharges from knowledge, artefacts and players' positions in the turn order, this can mean doing a few sums. Other players may force the pace.



Das Zepter von Zavandor at a glance ...

A complex strategy game for 2-6 players aged 10+ that takes 21/2-3 hours to play (with four). Designed by Jens Drögemüller, it is published (in German) by Lookout Games. It should be available in specialist games shops in the UK at around £30.

Say you're building up your energy production to buy a particular artefact. Then someone else puts it up for auction. Either you're going to miss out (though there are at least two of each artefact) or you'll have to forego more energy production to get the artefact. When the end game arrives and players are buying sentinels, the same applies. The first player to put one up for auction can spark a stampede as everyone sees the end of the game in sight. An interesting tactical point that I keep forgetting is that players can dis-enchant their gems to produce energy. This can be a useful way of augmenting the energy on hand, but does mean they are trading victory points for energy.

I have to say that I have not mastered this game yet. I can usually stay in contention through the game, but then lose out on the final sprint. However, I find it a very enjoyable game. Most of the time, players work on their own, following their own strategy. The auctions provide the main way of interfering with others' plans. As always, though, the path to success seems to be doing something different from the other players.

The production of the game is good with nice, solid components. This is marred by a few typos, but a second printing is planned, which should iron those out. The game is only available in German, but the addition of a crib sheet for each player makes it eminently playable by non-German speakers. Highly recommended.



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A World of Football

DAVID BLAIR jumps into Hattrick with both feet, and a header ...

THE WEB-BASED football game **Hattrick** was last reviewed in *Flagship* around three years ago. As it's six months since my last article and this is a sports game that's free to play, I jumped in at the chance to play with both feet - and a header, too.

First, let me say one thing. This game is for fans who wish to start at the bottom and work up to real success: and I mean work! This is more than a game - it's a world of football. One statistic should convey the size of their player database: over 600,000 people are active in the game as I write. Bear in mind that players from all over the world have to sleep: probably most are still dreaming on the improvements they will make when they wake up.

I sent in my application for a team (calling it Aberdour Thistle after my local village) with green tops and shorts for a strip, and sat back. I could have chosen virtually anywhere in the world, but it seemed to make sense to stay in Scotland. Within three days I was in, and on entering my login details onto the main page I could see my team name, along with my players and their attributes. Now I have to inform you that nobody who joins Hattrick ever gets a cracking team to take over. The format seems to be that if someone pulls out from a top league their team is not given away but will play via the computer and be replaced by a promoted team. Fine, I hear you say, at least in one of the lower leagues you will take over from a departed player, along with that team's money, players etc. Not so - all my predecessor's players were wiped out and I got a brand new set of doughballs, er, players who come with a variety of gradings for their respective attributes. Nice touch here, as seven of my 18 lads have Mcs or Macs in their name: made me feel right at home, though this is not to say I don't have other nationalities in my squad.

There is a Premier division, then a set of leagues starting with I, II, III, IV etc. My division is V.69. Promotion means a move up to a higher set, so in my case five successive promotions should get me into the top bracket. In addition there is a system of playoffs where teams finishing fifth and sixth are involved in playing to stay in their division, which keeps everybody on their toes.

Can't think of that yet, too much to do sorting everything out. My players are graded for things like Stamina, Scoring, Passing, Defending and Set Pieces. There are 20 grades, with Divine at the top down to Disastrous at number 20. All my lads are graded between the 15th rank and the 20th, so lots of room for improvement, but it isn't a lost cause by any means. Players have a TSI (Total Skills Initiative) total that is a pretty good guide for quickly assessing their ability rating. I have players rated from 60 to 2,220 - most are around 300-700 - whilst teams in some of the best teams can run with TSIs many times higher than that. My lot have a little way to go and that, to me, is the beauty of the game. Success is not gained immediately, but it is there for all to strive to attain.

Regardless of the apparent poor quality of my merry men, every team in your current division won't be much different from yours so you can compete quite easily with them. An extremely important point this: the game is structured so you don't get a battering each week while you improve - you do actually win matches and can look to get better in time for a push

for promotion. Looking at the top divisions of many countries within Hattrick, while some players are rated pretty high in some attributes, there isn't a team that has an abundance of world class players, so the lifespan for running a team can stretch for many seasons. I haven't found a player with a 'Divine' attribute anywhere, despite the game being in its 14th season. You probably will never get to the AC Milan or Brazil superteam bracket but at all levels of attributes you will be able to compete in your division and, more importantly, in the higher divisions you aspire to reach.

In addition to the league matches, most teams get a shot at a Knockout Cup. Every country has its own Cup Competition - games are played midweek - and on average there are around ten rounds to be played to win one. As they work to a formula for Cup entries (64, 128, 256, up to 8192 for the English Cup), it's possible not to be entered in your first season if the numbers are above a suitable figure. At a league match per weekend (the actual day depends upon your country), the season doesn't take long to complete. This game will last for many more seasons (did I mention this is the 26th just finishing?) and I have come across people who have been there for all of them. It appears the game has that little something to keep its managers happy, even while they languish in the lower divisions harbouring dreams of reaching the Premier Division in their chosen country.

Now I would like to inform you of a few other goodies in this game, as the above only scratches the surface of the setup, believe me!

In addition to league and cup ties, teams can play a weekly friendly against any other team in the world that accepts your challenge. These games are essential to bring on the training. You can specify to play at home or away, and the gate money is split. Worried about not knowing how to challenge? Not a problem: you can call up any country, select any region within that country and then pick any league, and give a challenge. Trust me, there is no problem getting challenges - I was between my third and fourth league games and received 83 challenges from teams world wide. I can check out as many as I want: don't just accept the first one and realise you have pitted your current dropouts against the equivalent of AC Milan at the San Siro! The bottom line is you want, nay need, to play a challenge game every week for training purposes, and searching out better opponents will bring on your lads that bit better.

The ideal setup for training is to have two keeper coaches and eight outfield coaches - they cost £1,000 per week each and you can hire as many as you want. Currencies change for every country you are in, so it'll be dollars in the States and yen in Japan, but there is a currency converter built in, so you can easily see the equivalent value in your currency for, say, a player you wish to purchase.

By reading the rules, you will see how long it takes a coach to better the statistics of a player (some take longer to train up than others: a bit like modern day football, I suppose). Initially with only a 200k budget things are tight, so the idea is to buy cheap, train up, and sell now and again to keep a positive balance. The best advice is to seek out 17-year-old players on the transfer market (not 16- nor 18-, only 17-year-olds) and push them into the friendly matches for experience, but play your best squad for the league games. Buy in as many as you can afford, as they will be the ones to either win promotion for you or be sold on for mega bucks in order to fund the next generation of stars. Bearing in mind the numbers in this game, it can be sometimes difficult to get the players you want for low amounts. The computer shows you all available and you bid for them. I have gained seven so far but must have bid for at least three times that number.

The most important purchase early on is a coach with a rating around Solid - he will bring on the training faster than the pudding I started with, but till I sell a couple of players I won't have the money to acquire one just yet.

Preparing for match day is simple: you pick your team from drop

Hattrick at a glance ...

Long-running web-based football management game that's free to play, with optional charges of £12 to join a community and £6.50 for your own web page.

<http://www.hattrick.org>

down menus for each position, and select simple enough tactics. Should you have a problem time-wise, the programme will automatically work out your best layout and the game gets played. Any time you log off the programme, this will automatically save what you have done. You can tick to have any match highlighted, and can watch the text game live as it happens. It works out at around real game time to play, and you can have the program inform you via SMS when your game is about to start. The in-match descriptions are actually pretty good, with clear detail on relevant incidents taking place throughout the game. A slight minus is the inability to alter a formation or use substitutions to change the course of a game. Believe me, it isn't a major blip - there's too much to do to see this being an obstacle.

Your login page gives you plenty of information on every player in every team that plays this game: the database is *huge*. All information is accessed by links: every player, team etc is just a keypress from giving up complete information! So over 600,000 players world-wide can access my team and its players and results if they wish, and I likewise.

Naturally with a game this big, there are forums - for everything! Each area has some, and they are well used. There are help subjects on every aspect of this game and one very important piece of advice is for every new player to obtain a mentor. I had one within four days. All I did was announce I was new and ask for advice, and I was approached with the information on the 17-year-olds, buying in the extra coaches, and playing friendlies from the word go. As this game goes like a blur, I was grateful for the advice. I've not seen a great improvement in player attributes but since I joined with all my disastrous, wretched inadequacies I have managed four wins and two losses in the league and lie third - the friendlies have been a disaster due to taking on teams a lot better than myself. However, they do serve their purpose in granting the playing time to my youth players. Now, with only three games to go, by the time this is read I will have either missed promotion and remain where I am, but better off in the training up of the team members, or will have moved up pyramid-fashion into a higher set.

In addition to the League and Cup, Hattrick also plays a World Cup and an U-20 competition. Teams are controlled by managers from their respective countries, voted into that position by the game players - my vote counts for something at last. 'Colinb' from Glasgow Athletic controls the Scottish U-20s squad, and with good skills and training there would be opportunities for players to be picked for the International setups - mine are a little way off that for the moment, but it is another goal to achieve.

The game is free, but there are some things you can pay for and they include credits for your mobile so you can keep up to date with what's happening in Hattrick. Too advanced for me, I'm afraid - I have just mastered joined up writing!

The two things I have paid for was firstly to join a community. This costs £12 for the year and allows me access to a massive base for advice, forums with players from my own area (Scotland), although I am allowed to join others for the money, the placing of shirt numbers and faces to each player in my squad, and it also speeds up movement from page to page. It tickertapes you with information on other bids on players you have already placed a bid on, allowing you to get back in to change yours. Believe it or not, but five minutes ago I was informed I had just purchased a Dutch 17-year old player called Joe Boensma who has a passable playmaking ability. My mentor told me to buy players not with good scoring or passing potential, but to look for a good playmaking attribute, as this seemed to be the catalyst for providing good skills given time for training. I do what I am told!



The other item I paid for is my own web page. Yes, every team in this game can, by firstly joining a community, and then by paying a small fee of £6.60 for a year, have a full web set up for their club. You are given a standard page complete with all your club's details and you can alter every facet of it to suit yourself. I have never had a web page so this was completely new for me, and I have been spending time altering it greatly. Easy to do, and again, as in all aspects of this game, there are nice people out there in the Hattrick community who have advice for website virgins like me.

Interesting people you can bring to your club include an Economist, a

Doctor for helping injured players to recuperate faster, a Physiotherapist to reduce the chances of an injury in the first place, a Spokesperson to improve the supporters' and sponsors' attitude towards the club, or even a Sports Psychologist to inject some extra confidence and team spirit. I haven't gone into detail on items like sponsors and supporters, team spirit and self confidence: all have ratings and all are affected by your dealings, team performances etc.

Today I won 1-0 to go second and played before my highest crowd of the season so far - 6586 hardy souls who watched the game. I expect them and more to turn up next week as I play against the top team. A win, and I go clear with only one game left - basically two wins in my last two games will guarantee promotion. Can I cope with all this early success? Probably not!

You may have got the feeling that I like this game. I will sum it up thus. I have played in over 40 football PBMs/PbeMs, and in my opinion this is up with the best of them for interaction with thousands of other players, giving a genuine feeling of achieving something as you see your team improving and you start to move through the lower leagues, with your own private webpage that will be updated on completing a game, thus ensuring a constantly fresh look, and the overall satisfaction that many others are playing, all with the same aims as you. With help offered from many sources, you need never feel you are playing alone. Hattrick seems to avoid the sameness many games have after a while. It has depth and you will take a while to explore just how much. Have a really good look at it - over half a million players and myself can't all be wrong!

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The Ridley Files

Hidden Conflict & Rezolution

ERIC RIDLEY embarks, Frodo-like, on a quest to explore two games ...



TWILIGHTCREATIONS often make brilliant games. The **Zombies!!!** Expansions and the **When Darkness Comes** line immediately spring to mind. They also make some real turkeys, and not the good kind we all like to rectally invade at Christmas time. Sadly, this game is one of the latter. **Hidden Conflict** is another tile-based game, (it is beginning to look like most of Twilight's creations are going to be square affairs); this one sees you take control of an army of warriors in an effort to take over the world. In my mind there are tons of things you could

do with an entire army: erect a really huge domino rally set, create a very long human chain or perhaps just have an enormous group hug. These things never seem to come up in games - their loss, I suppose.

Nonetheless, world domination is your bag; as such you must fight a number of other armies to succeed in your goal. Because the competition for domination of the globe is so stiff, conflict inevitably arises and leads to a number of deaths (see, if they had adopted the domino rally way of life a lot less bloodshed would be involved). The 'Hidden' part of the name is really where the meat of the game is stored, as opposed to in their trousers (ooh, blue).

At the start of the proceedings you must build your own army from a selection of tiles. These are comprised of items, events and warriors. The size of your army depends on the number of players, but it is typically between 20 and 25 tiles. While you may think that building your own force would be fun and strategic, it's not. The rules describe the process fairly badly, so it takes quite some time to sort yourself out. Most of the units you have to pick from are very similar, albeit with different abilities, which again detracts from the strategy. Eventually you just end up picking what you must to meet the required amount of warriors and get down to it. There really is not much excitement in crafting your own army, a shame really.

Once that ordeal is overcome you must then embark on the Frodo-like quest of deciphering the rules as presented on the instructions sheet. These are so badly written that almost none of the questions that will arise during the frustrating gameplay will be answered. It turns out that you pick a starting force of five from your initial army and then mix all the rest of the tiles up together and place them in a grid. Let's say a 4 x 5 grid. Each grid space has three tiles stacked on it face down. It is then your job to assign a place on the edge of the 'board' for your starting five characters to begin your assault. You turn over the amount of tiles you want to attack and see if you can destroy them in combat. Each tile has an attack and defence value and a special ability. The abilities are naff, and the attack and defence are usually so close that when you measure them against each other, both warriors end up dying. If you turn over one of your own tiles,

he joins your force. If you manage to have any warriors left after the attack you can move further into the board. The game plays a lot like a game of memory and crosses it with a very basic combat system. The ultimate goal is to kill each of your opponent's one-of-a-kind leaders. Once that is achieved you are the winner... and you have also wasted an hour of your time.

Look, the important thing about this game is not the rules - heaven knows the makers didn't seem to think so - but rather the fact that you should stay away from it. The game really is a waste of time and money. It is a shame. Twilight Creations has built a good name for itself in this small industry, and it has an excellent back catalogue. But with stinking steamers like this and the equally dreadful **Dante's Inferno** they risk alienating some new customers. Stay well away from this, overly expensive, badly realised, but very nicely produced, boxed Richard-the-Third!

Hidden Conflict: Published by Twilight Creations, priced £24.9. For 2-6 players taking about 1 hour to play (after you have decoded the rules)

There is not much in the world that can tear me away from the cosy warmth of the *Games Workshop* franchise. I have grown up with it and have painted so many miniatures that, if melted down, I could forge a mighty warhammer (appropriately enough) so it is a personal coup if another company can catch my eye.

Aberrant Games grabbed my interest with **Rezolution: A Dark Tomorrow**. It is a game of skirmish level miniatures combat set in a futuristic urban environment. It's a future where giant corporations are the new pseudo governments of the planet, where aliens have secretly lived among us for untold ages and ruthless gangs wage war in ruined streets. That all sounds a little derivative to me. There are a host of sci-fi games settings that can be described in the same manner. However, once you delve a little deeper into the background of *Rezolution* you discover that it is a well conceived setting with a wealth of potential and more than a little charm. The political system is described in just the right amount of detail, the history of each of the factions is described with panache and care and the reasons for all the conflict seem to make sense.

The problem with miniatures games is the length of time it takes to build an army, especially one that looks nice. I have been building armies for years, and I still haven't got one that is truly complete. So it was a mighty promise that *Aberrant Games* struck out with, in terms of having a game that was 'character based', the idea being that you can have a battle with only a handful of



miniatures but still have a tactical and meaningful game. In this respect the fledgling company have delivered... Sort of. In order to enjoy a full game of **Warhammer 40,000** you need about 30 - 40 figures per force, that's a lot of painting and organisation, especially for people who can find it hard to find time to spray deodorant on themselves. With *Rezolution* you can have a decent game with about 14 figures between both armies. It should be noted, however, that several scenarios in the rulebook require more... Lots more.

Let us look at the product itself. The game comes packaged in a brilliant way. Aberrant have released starters for each army, each containing between five and seven miniatures per box, a quick start instruction book, stat cards, a fantastic deviation die and a CD with all sorts of stuff on it, including printable buildings. With that, you have all you need to start playing for one person. The miniatures they give you are enough for a basic force and the quick start rules are so good you end up using them almost all the time, even when you have the core rulebook. Each starter, of which there are four, weighs in at £20. Pretty cheap if you ask me (or is it? - more on that later). The CD packaged with it is brilliant and is a bit of a brainwave in terms of miniatures gaming. In addition to the starters, there is also a core rulebook. It is a glossy 200+ page affair that is very well produced and a joy to read. It's bursting with all the information you will need. It includes the standard colour section and army overviews. It's jammed with artwork, background material and all the army lists you require. This will set you back £15, but it's well worth it. The rules themselves are joyously simple. They all make perfect sense on first reading and if you get stuck the index is so well thought out that all questions can be answered in seconds. The system is intuitive and easy to remember, there is no constant chart checking as in 40K. I really can find no fault in the combat system: it is there to help you have a fun/tactical time of it, and that is what all minis systems should be like.

A unique aspect of *Rezolution* is the 'Grid' concept. The grid is just the Internet in the year 2175. It's fancier and slicker, and presumably has a lot more pornography on it, but it's basically the same. Many missions require you to have a hacker with you. These people can connect to 'Hard Point' access terminals and download computer files for objectives and so on. What makes it special is the ability to fight while connected to the grid against other hackers. For instance, if you are in the middle of stealing secret plans for an enemy base, an opposing hacker (ghost) can log on elsewhere on the game board and try to stop you. It's all very futuristic and exciting. You can even hack into other army's vehicles and war bots and take control. Don't worry, though; again the mechanics are very simple.

There is no real point in explaining all the rules in this review, as it would take up too much space. Instead, let me cover some key features of the game. Each character has a certain number of wounds, no one ever has just one wound (that doesn't mean they can't die as the result of one bullet, however). Each miniature comes with a stat card: the card has all their weapons, abilities and skills listed on it along with their wounds and statistics. Each model in *Rezolution* is distinct in its abilities. Some are close combat specialists, others are heavy weapons lovers, and others again are grid jockeys and so on. You only ever use D6 in the game. Combat is based on opposing skills: roll your ranged combat ability and try and beat their 'size and agility' score to hit. Each starter comes with a large clear die: inside this die is a smaller arrow die, and the combination makes great deviation die. There are four factions in the game, The Dravani, Ronin, CSO and Apac. They all have a distinct background and history.

Because the game can be played on such a small level, faction backgrounds are important and relevant. The CSO are your standard Military Police in the future, they have a variety of hardware at their disposal. The Ronin are a group of mercenaries/street gangs that can be played on their own or hired out to join other factions. The best two factions however, are the Dravani and the Apac: they ooze classic design. The Dravani are an alien race who were forced to live on earth: they feed off human essence and proliferate quietly while taking on human form. The Apac are the enforcement arm of the Asia Pacific conglomeration: the miniatures are fantastically original and well worth looking at on the net.

War games often live or die by the quality of the miniatures that support it, and it's disappointing to say that *Rezolution's* are not great. Despite all it has going for it in terms of design and product quality, the miniatures

are the weak link. Don't get me wrong, the figures are not dreadful, but the pictures on the back of the starter boxes do nothing to make you splash your cash. The sculpts for the models are clean enough, but they are so thin as to be almost painful. There are a couple of exceptions, and to be honest the problem seems to have been sorted with the second wave of figures coming out, but for the initial launch it is a big shame. If you put the time in with the figs you can get good results: the picture here is of a Dravani starter crew I put together. The minis are easy enough to paint and have just the right amount of detail on them to make look real but not overly encumbered with pouches and seals and runes and all manner of other crap (ahem, Warhammer).

Take a long look at *Rezolution*; what you will find is a quality game with engaging mechanics and well-realised rules. All the artwork produced, especially the box covers, is of high quality and the concept is not lacking in ideas. Aberrant have crafted a game world that is exciting to play in, one that encompasses all the things you want in a sci-fi setting but avoids many of the associated pitfalls. Don't be put off by the seeming quality of the miniatures on the back of the starter boxes. I like this game, I like it so much I intend to buy into it and keep adding to my forces for a number of years to come. But, if you look at the prices you will quickly work out that for two forces and a rule book (what you require to play the full game) it will set you back £55. That's somewhat steeper than Games Workshop products in the same category, even more than the new **Starship Troopers** game from *Mongoose*, but those games don't have metal miniatures in the starters. It's a tough choice but I find *Rezolution* to be exactly what I am looking for. If you want more miniatures in your army, or slightly better value for money then I suppose you had best look elsewhere.



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Once Upon a Time

Happy ever after? COLIN FORBES tells the tale ...

'And, as he crouched down in the undergrowth, his evil green eyes casting a corrupt glow on the twisted vegetation, the Big Bad Wolf suddenly ... ' Interrupt! Wolf card!

'... the Wolf suddenly jumped up, saying "gwwwwa", and licked the face of the anxious Princess Buttercup, who had just been about to scream and hope her uncle the wizard was near ...

' Interrupt! Earlier in the story the uncle was a soldier, not a wizard. Inconsistency - my turn!

AND SO THE story continues, with new twists and turns until it reaches its traditional happy ending - or will it? As you may have guessed by now, **Once Upon a Time** (OUaT) is a storytelling card game for all ages. The game components consist of a four-page rule booklet, which is roughly 50% examples, and two decks of cards. One deck of cards is called the 'Happy Ever After' deck (36 cards), and the larger deck is the 'Once Upon a Time' deck (108 cards). The card artwork, while not spectacular, is pleasant and always clear about what is being represented. The card stock is sturdy and better than many cards found in board games.

The game plays quickly - I have often played half a dozen games in an evening - and consists of each player contributing to a single ongoing story that all of the players are telling. The catch is that each player is trying to get the story to have a different ending!

Characters, places and events

At the start of the game, everyone is dealt a single 'Happy Ever After' card, which is kept secret until the end of the game. This is the story ending that each player is trying to achieve. There are enough different cards that even if you play for a while, you'll never be quite sure to what ending your opponent is trying to drive the story. In fact, we found that the more we played and got to know the deck a bit, the harder it got to tell what ending the other player had in mind! This is because we would throw in red herrings to confuse the trail. I might toss in a riddle early, for example, to make my opponents think I have the card 'So the riddle was finally answered', whereas in that game, I really had 'But it had vanished as mysteriously as it had appeared'. I was going to have a magical something-or-other appear regardless of whether the riddle was solved or not, but the other players kept trying to keep the riddle unsolved so I wouldn't win, wasting all their energy!

After each player has his Happy Ever After card, he is dealt from six to ten OUaT cards, depending on the number of players. These cards are divided into two basic types - Storytelling cards and Interrupt cards - and five different groups within each type: Characters, Items, Places, Events, and Aspects (descriptive words, such as 'sleeping' or 'evil'). Each group is clearly marked with a symbol in the upper left corner, and the name down the left hand side, so the whole hand can be scanned quickly by card name and group type.

Who starts? Well the concise and friendly rules leaflet explains that 'Tradition dictates that this is the person with the longest beard...' Somewhat unfair, given this is a game which women really seem to enjoy, so I usually suggest longest beard or hair - given the hirsute nature of gamers this can apply to either sex equally.

Weaving the story

Once the game starts, things get moving quickly. As you say a sentence in the story, you lay down a card that represents something in that sentence. For example, if your goal is to have someone forgive his brother by the end of the story, you'd best introduce brothers while you have a chance. So if you have the character card 'Knight', you might lay it down and say, *'Once upon a time, there was a knight, ruler of all the lands around, who lived with his younger brother...'* You can only play one card per sentence, so you don't want to go on and on with each sentence: you can't play your Happy Ever After card until all of your OUaT cards are played. So if you also have the 'Witch' card, you might then play that as you say, *'One day, while riding in the forest, the knight met with an old woman in the wood - he didn't know it, but she was an evil witch.'*

At this point, if anyone has the Aspect card 'Evil', they can play it because you mentioned it. You lose your turn, draw one more OUaT card, and the same story is continued by the interrupter. Let's assume this happens. Let's say her Happy Ever After card reads, *'And she was reunited with her family.'* Obviously, she either has to introduce a female protagonist, or have the witch be reunited with her family. But since the witch has already been labelled as evil, she can't change that. Best to introduce a new character (though she could have the evil witch reunited with her family, mind you), so she says, playing the 'Castle' card, *'The witch told the knight about a castle deep in the woods, in which a beautiful princess was sleeping under an enchantment: only a brave knight could break the spell.'*

There are plenty of opportunities for others to interrupt here: since the Castle card is a place, if you had an 'Interrupt any Place' card, you could simply play that. The player mentioned the words 'sleeping', 'princess', 'enchantment', 'brave' - if you had a card with one of those words on it, you could interrupt. And so on, until someone manages to play their last card and bring the ending around to their secret objective. You can also pass your turn, which allows you to discard a card, if you think you just can't work a Blacksmith into the story, for example.

The game works a lot better than my rather lengthy description might suggest. I've played two-player and multi-player, and both were a heck of a lot of fun. It can get cut-throat, believe it or not - if someone has the 'Death' card, you can be sure some character you've been nursing along the whole storyline will be killed off by somebody else who thinks you may need him to achieve your ending. Fortunately, in the world of fairy tales, you can always introduce a magic staff to resurrect someone... It's also one of the few games that works well with three players: it's not really possible for two players to gang up on the third, the bane of most three-player games. The game also works very well with five or six players.

With children, this game is much less competitive. It can be a good tool to awaken creativity and even foster cooperation if done right. The adult in the game (parent or teacher or babysitter) can set the tone by only playing one or two cards then asking who else can continue the story, and making sure everyone contributes. Rules can be basically ignored in such a game, as the goal is different than it is with all adult players.

Happily ever after?

Once Upon a Time really is great fun. It's simple to learn and can be played competitively or casually. The interrupt system keeps the game and story going without being intrusive. Perhaps that's Once Upon a Time's most impressive accomplishment: the mechanics of the game are transparent enough not to derail the storytelling process (which, after all, is where the fun lies).

[Sadly a great many games shops do not seem to stock this game. The prices quoted to the left are from the Orcs Nest website.]

Once Upon a Time at a glance ...

Storytelling card game from *Atlas Games*, at £14.99. For two or more players, with games typically lasting from ten to thirty minutes. An expansion, *Dark Tales* (£6.99), is now available, along with sets of blank cards enabling you to introduce your own ideas to the game.

Star Wars: the MUD

HANS JØRGEN ECK reports on a galaxy that's almost far, far away ...

I HAVE PLAYED **SWmud** since 1994/95, sometimes with a few breaks in between, and I feel that I have an indepth knowledge of the mud and those who run it. Having played plenty of other muds, I feel that my opinions are based on solid experience. I would like to state up front that in some areas my feelings may be a bit biased, but then again, this would be true for anyone writing a review about something they love or hate.

SWmud, or Star Wars Mud if you like, is surprisingly enough a *Star Wars* Mud. Yes, I must admit this came as much as a shock to me as it probably did for you readers, but it is no less true. The mud has areas, non player characters, space ships and weapons from most eras of the Star Wars history. You are not put in a particular time in history and most of the ever-so-loveable characters are present, like Darth Vader, Boba Fett, Jabba and the rest.

It didn't take long before I got hooked, playing SWmud. The mud has many areas to explore, and most of them are well built, with good descriptions and many secrets to be discovered. There are around 40 planets and space stations to find and explore. You can choose from 21 races, each with a couple of unique skills. One of the races, the peace-loving Ithorians, encourages a non-hostile play style that will cater to those who find violence and combat a problem. It should be noted that if you want to truly play SWmud, it is very hard to avoid combat. There are ten guilds to choose from, where you can have one primary skill, two secondary and a fourth one, once you reach a certain level. This makes for a nice variety of guild combinations. All the guilds have many unique skills although some are definitely better than others. The player killing system is extensive, challenging and great fun.

This mud is fairly newbie friendly and if you are used to the mud library called *lpud*, it should be fairly easy to get into. There is a dedicated newbie channel where players can ask questions, but there is a strict rule against normal chatting on it. The help files are extensive, well made and cover every, and any, aspect of the mud you should need to know. You can go through a newbie school when you create a character. I haven't made a new character in years, so I haven't seen the school that was coded two-three years ago, but I'm sure it's all good and informative.

SWmud is a pure hack-and-slash mud. Some criticism arose because of this, as many would want to see it oriented more towards role-playing, but trust me when I say that this will never happen. Some muds cater to the roleplayers, some try to mix hack-and-slash with roleplaying, and some are just plain hack-and-slash. SWmud is almost entirely hack-and-slash. If you want to improve your character besides getting better at the skills you have already learned, you need to kill monsters/non-player characters to gain experience points, which in turn will let you gain levels and new skills.

One of the strong points on SWmud has always been the player killing, or pking for short. It's fun as hell and very challenging. There are many skills, items and tactics involved and it's very far from the old 'stand in a room to see who dies first' that you will see on too many muds. Pking on SWmud can be quite harsh, though, as many of the players are old-timers and can be considered quite ruthless. Many of the old-timers are bloodthirsty and after new blood, but in a good way. Many are very eager to teach those new to player killing how to get better and will often give advice on what

you should have done otherwise - after they have killed you. A final word on pking: You should play as a non-player killer for a while before you try player killing: learn the planets, the equipment and how the mud works in general. This will make the transition to player killing a lot easier.

When you create a character on SWmud you must join one of three teams: the Imperials, the Neutrals or the Rebels. The teams have their own team rooms with various benefits, although the Neutrals have less if I recall correctly. There are also player-made and player-run clans available for a price. All clan players must be player killers. Clan wars are not unheard of and some of the best and most entertaining fights have been big fights between the biggest clans. If you want to play in a group with others, you can form a party to share the experience points you earn. There are limitations to who can group with each other, and a big level difference will affect experience distribution.

As the years passed, guilds and planets have been added, wizards have come, and wizards have gone. There have been administration 'disagreements' a few times and this ended quite badly at least once, when several wizards/admins left. This is more or less inevitable on any long running mud, though, and may in some cases even have some good sides, as new and fresh blood might replace the people who leave.

Now for the problems with SWmud...

The mud has currently got very few active admins/wizards and you very seldom see anyone visible. There is hardly any work being done that is visible to the players. You will mostly see a small improvement or bug-fix here and there and no big features added. Now, you can't force admins/wizards to do anything as they work for free, but you will see that most well-organized muds do require wizards to show some activity or they get moved to a retired 'domain/position'. The administration votes on major issues and since some of the admins only login once every few months, things go slowly.

Another problem, in my opinion, is the lack of organization. In order to become a High Mortal on the mud, you need to attain a certain level and then do a quest. A High Mortal, or HM for short, is an elite player who has good knowledge of the mud and is given extra credit for that in form of new and better skills and access to better items. The problem is that this quest has not existed for four-five years. It was closed down due to cheating. There has been a new quest under development for years but due to the fact that this project was given to an admin with very little time to code, this project is still not finished, although it may be getting close to done now. Some of the guilds are also very unbalanced and lacking a few skills etc. This has also not been a priority. There is a thorough lack of good and efficient coders.

The lack of this High Mortal quest has driven a lot of players away from the mud and the player base has gone from 80-100 during peak hours to 40-50 over the last few years. I'm sure there are other factors in play here, like massive multiplayer online games becoming more and more popular and accessible.

Nevertheless, SWmud has a lot to offer. It is a very good mud in my opinion. As a new player, you have hundreds of hours of exploration ahead of you and many interesting people to meet and play together with. If the administrators manage to fix a few pressing issues, it should also ignite the motivation to play for the veterans of the mud and so I'm keeping my fingers crossed that they do.

If SWmud sounds like your kinda mud, login to swmud.org on port 6666.

[Copies of issue #114, containing Hans' introduction to MUDs, are available from the editor at £2 each (+ postage for overseas readers).]

SW MUD at a glance ...

A long-running MUD that is free to play. The website address of this Star Wars themed game is:

www.swmud.org

Roleplaying for Pocket Money

LISA FORDHAM downloads some bargain games ...

I TRY TO KEEP on top of the latest roleplaying developments and releases. I write about the subject as well as writing roleplaying supplements (albeit under a different name), so I'm lucky in that I have enough contacts to be sent a fair number of freebies. But I'll be honest, I don't actually look at some of these in great depth - there are just too many. Quite a few simply get passed onto a member of my gaming group who has an interest in the relevant game type. Consequently I'm saved the exorbitant prices that most RPG publishers charge for their products. I guess there are several reasons for the high costs: glossy production values, small print runs and (last but not least) sheer greed.

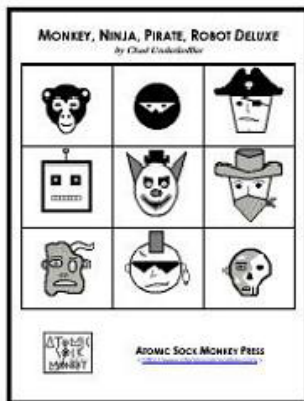
To counter this, I want highlight some of the games and supplements which are available for download in PDF format via the internet - usually cheaply and sometimes for free. They may not be superlative, but they're damn good, and worth buying. So here are several such games, in a slightly abbreviated review format.

Monkey Ninja, Pirate, Robot: the Roleplaying Game

Length: 64 pages

Price: \$8.00 (PDF)

Publisher: *Atomic Sock Monkey* www.atomicsockmonkey.com



You play a monkey, ninja, robot or pirate, duelling against each other and the invading aliens, while seeking sweet, sweet uranium. There are rivalries between the different factions (monkeys, ninjas, robots and pirates), but everyone hates the aliens, which can serve as a unifying element for a mixed group.

While the basic idea of the game is funny in a sort of surreal way, the mechanics themselves, being largely generic, don't exactly support or encourage comedy to any real degree. That said, the mechanics are the excellent PDQ System, first seen in

Dead Inside. Added to the core is an excellent 'mojo' system, which amounts to a very interesting reward system. Mojo comes in 'flavours' - defeat a pirate, and you might get some pirate mojo. While mojo can be used for a variety of things, including increasing attributes, only mojo of a particular 'type' can be used to increase your character's Type (monkey, ninja, robot, pirate or alien), so if you collect enough pirate mojo, you can become a pirate even if you weren't one previously. So it's possible, by defeating enough opponents, to become a combination robotic ninja pirate monkey with alien DNA. (Using alien mojo has additional side effects, connected to the alien agenda.) Flavored mojo is mostly gained through duels, or 'challenges', which game-mechanically are just a formalized extension of the standard PDQ conflict rules. Another way to get mojo is, of course, to acquire sweet, sweet uranium. Oh, and the art has a stick-figure nature that fans of **Kingdom of Loathing** will love. *White Wolf*, this is not.

After an introduction, Chapter 1 covers 'the Basics' - what you can play, and how challenges work. Chapter 2 is straightforward - pick a Type, a goal, some Qualities, roll some random starting mojo, and go. This is pretty standard PDQ stuff, as is Chapter 3, which really just goes over

the lion's share of the PDQ system, including the expanded mojo rules. Chapter 4 covers the mysterious aliens, and Chapter 5 is an excellent GM advice chapter. Chapter 6 rounds out the game with a sample adventure involving alien-influenced ninjas. Short, sweet and to the point.

Motocaust

Length: 50 pages

Price: \$10.00 (PDF)

Publisher: *Ronin Arts* www.roninarts.com

So, did you think that **Car Wars** was a little too complicated, or didn't



have enough zombies? Then this game is for you. An asteroid hits Earth, sort of ending the world, and releasing an alien virus that creates 'necros' (read: zombies). The world becomes more Wild West and anarchic, but not too much so - very **Car Wars**, actually. (Any world where cell phones still work isn't exactly 100% anarchy in my opinion.)

In some ways, it's a little too simple. And what is there is very 'standard' - roll under Attribute + Skill on 2d10. Yawn. Health is represented by hit points, for heaven's sake! There's a very sparse class system that reminded me somewhat of **Cyberpunk 2020**,

but overall the whole thing reminded me of **Car Wars**, and sometimes not in a good way.

Also, and this is just a personal thing with me, but I am utterly fed up of yet more Zombies. Enough already guys - Zombies are *so* last decade. Really, people, find a different form of cliched undead. On a more substantive note, I spent a good portion of the game thinking 'solid, but unimpressive' and then I hit the section on car creation. This reminded me of **Car Wars**, but in a good way, and it was a lot easier to deal with than **Car Wars**. Plus we're talking fast, gasoline engines here, no electric fuel cells. But most importantly, aside from determining the speed, maneuverability, and firepower of the car, there is also a statistic for 'Flash' - that is, how good the car looks. A lot of the game revolves around running cargo, and those with cool-looking cars get the best jobs, actual firepower or no. A very nice touch to the game and it acknowledges an element of the genre that's important. However, I became really impressed when I hit the last section of the game, on vehicular combat. Rather than the wargame approach of **Car Wars**, the game uses a very clever narrative system using ordinary playing cards, designed to produce sudden reversals, dangerous escapes, and cool stunts. This section, alone, makes the game worth the money, in my opinion.

The game's organization is very bare-bones - a lot of knowledge (say, of zombie cliches and RPGs in general) is assumed. Despite being very lite, this isn't a game for beginners for that reason. On the other hand, this

means it's very 'compressed' - everything you need: no more, no less. There's an introduction, some opening fiction (which is very fond of the f-word, if you care about that sort of thing) and then a quickie introduction to the world. This is followed by chargen, the vehicle-creation system I mentioned earlier, and then the system proper - task resolution, combat, and the aforementioned vehicular combat system. That's all there is - very streamlined. But it's all very focused, and they seem to have the attitude 100% down pat. Good stuff. Oh and the art for this game is amazing, if only it wasn't all zombies ...

On the Hoof: d20 Riding Beasts

Length: 12 pages

Price: \$2.50 (PDF)

Publisher: *Cognizant Chance* www.cognizantchance.com

Exactly what it says on the tin, as it were. This is a collection of unusual riding animals written for the d20 system. Yes, yes, I know - but really, you can adapt them to any 'real' system of your choosing. If you were expecting something more than a bare-bones listing of creatures, then you're going to be disappointed. That's all there is here. Some of the entries are a bit overshoot, in part I suspect because the author seems to be limiting himself to one page per creature. Sometimes the author stumbles a little on syntax, though never enough to make an entry unclear. While a lot of people might be turned off by it, I really liked the simple look and feel of this product. The art is all public domain, but nice looking and well-chosen. In general, the look and feel reminded me very much of the **1st Edition AD&D Monster Manual** - *Necromancer Games* should take note.

Although many of the creatures are variants on real-world beasts, they're clever variants, and there are some real gems, like the Autumn Mound (a rideable ooze), the Hellbender (a salamander with Dimension Door), and Wizzeltop's Demiphant (the result of Gnomish experimentation, 'nuff said). Also, it needs to be said: Cheap. I mean, what you can get in gaming for \$2.50 anymore? You get 11 creatures. That's 22 cents per monster: look down the back of the sofa and buy this.

vs. Monsters Deluxe Edition

Length: 82 pages (half size)

Price: \$7.00 (as a PDF)

Publisher: *Ronin Arts* www.roninarts.com

It's a twisted, Tim Burton kind of world, with a Town and a Village with no real names. You're a monster hunter. You hunt monsters. Need I elaborate? This is pretty standard stuff - no serious innovation here. It even tells you (albeit with perhaps a dab of sarcasm) that if you need to understand how to play RPGs, you need to play D&D first. As far as innovation goes, it does use a deck of cards instead of dice - draw a number of cards equal to your Attribute, and compare the highest against a target number - but it's not much different than (in essence) re-rolling a bunch of d13s (if such a thing existed). Nothing to write home about, although the cards do give it a nice atmosphere.

Fortunately, flavour is something this game has in spades. It's an excellent example of what you can do with public domain art, excellent layout skills, and an attitude. While I didn't find the game innovative in terms of mechanics, I found myself drawn in despite myself. It has a... light touch. It conveys a certain attitude that makes me want to play this game. It's very tough to describe, but it's worth the \$7 in order to experience it. I hate to put it this way, but trust me on this. This game is charming.

The Breakdown: The author's charming attitude starts on page one, even in the credits, and in the foreword and introduction. The game then plunges right into the 'world' of the game, which amounts to a Town, a

Road, a Village, a Forest and some Mountains that separates the character's little world from the Unknown. After this is character generation, which is very streamlined but filled with cute little digressions, which fits the game quite well. After that is a peppy section on equipment, followed by the mechanics. After that is a charming (I must stop using that word) section entitled 'Unnecessary Complexities' which covers all those things that you see in a lot of RPGs like called shots that people expect but are hardly needed. After that is a gamemaster section, and a very interesting listing of monsters. That's it. That's all the game needs, really. It's worth the \$7 for the description of 'the Misters' (a particularly nasty form of monster that blends into society surprisingly well) alone...

[A slimmed down, but free, version of this game can be downloaded in PDF format from: <http://www.1km1kt.net/rpg/vsmonsterslow.pdf>]

Who Loves Octavia Praddishaw?

Length: 23 pages

Price: \$1.00 (PDF)

Publisher: *Factions*

The Skinny: This very minimalist supplement that details the Praddishaws: people escaped into the real world (or, at least, the game world the PCs are in) from a very bad comic novel. The transfer has made them delusional, homicidal, and mysteriously difficult to catch when it comes to crimes.

Minus: This supplement is very no frills. No art, no cover, nothing. Hell, it doesn't even have credits - I'm not sure who wrote it. Which is a shame, because... it's a wonderful supplement. Many modern-day RPGs, like **Over the Edge** and **Unknown Armies** (and to a lesser extent, games like **Mage: the Ascension** or **In Nomine**) rely on the surreal. But it's tough for a GM to come up with all that color on demand, and it's nice to have an outside source of ideas. The Praddishaws are a well-written plot seed with a variety of uses and potential origins. I honestly wish I knew who wrote this so I could encourage them to write more. And for only \$1, you honestly can't go wrong here. Even if you don't use it, it's worth \$1 for the read. I think the anonymous author has really undersold himself (herself?) here. There's an element of black humor to everything, while somehow remaining deadly serious. Very deftly done. Man, I really want to know who wrote this...

vs. Monsters

a twentyfour hour game



by Philip Reed
www.philipjreed.com

artwork by the great
edmund dulac

Lasers & Lucre

Eve Online: First Impressions

STEPH KRUGER grapples with a steep learning curve ...

'I must go down to the sea again, to the lonely sea and the sky. And all I ask is a tall ship and a star to steer her by' - John Masefield, Sea Fever



FROM A SPACE station circling a moon of the third planet in a nondescript system, a mining frigate emerges. It clears the structure, makes a slight bank turn, then accelerates rapidly, its warp engines propelling it toward a gate - one that leads to an unprotected system. The frigate makes the jump and immediately engages shield boosters upon entering the system. Another warp to an asteroid field rich in ore, and rife with danger. The frigate targets a small rock and launches several mining drones. The drones attack the rock with lasers, extracting

valuable ore.

Back aboard the frigate, the pilot starts calculating the value of his haul. He is pleased with the profit he stands to make from this excursion, but before he can gloat his sensors jump to life. Several hostile ships are detected from behind! Quickly he targets them while sending word to his drones to return to the ship. Two... three... four bandits approaching rapidly. He targets one and launches missiles from each of his two turrets. Quickly he scoops the drones back to the bay. Another missile salvo at the second pirate. Pirate one explodes in a splash of fire. The other two are getting too close for missiles, so he targets one and aims his lasers. *Bang!* Several strikes weaken his shields. The second pirate ship explodes as the last of the missiles strikes true. Only two attackers left, but the lasers are not enough of a defence to gamble the ship. He engages warp engines and streaks away as several more shots destroy his shields. A close call and only a fraction of the ore he was hoping to cull make this a disappointing run. Jumping back to a safer system, the pilot decides to upgrade his weapons for his next journey.

Thus is the universe of **Eve Online**, a massively multiplayer space simulation that combines aspects of roleplaying, space combat, economics and empire building into a huge, highly complex game. I've not played the game for long, but this short review contains my first impressions.

Eve Online at a glance ...

Space MOG featuring trading, pirate killing and lots of player vs player combat. The initial game cost is €19.95, which includes downloading the basic software and 30 days of play. Thereafter there is a monthly charge of €14.99.

www.eve-online.com

Beginning the game

Each step in the character creation phase includes a good description of what each choice means to the character. If a player chooses the State War Academy, for example, he will start with a set of skills more suited to combat than would a player who might select the School of Applied Knowledge. Once the creation phase is done and a brief, yet informative tutorial is complete, the game begins.

Possibly the most difficult choice a player must make at the outset is what exactly he will do. Every player starts with a ship equipped with a mining laser, a pulse laser and a small cargo hold. Most players start by heading to the nearest asteroid field and mining, which is an easy way to make a little money. Others study the market and try to identify lucrative trade routes where they may haul goods between stations for profit. Your ship is the key to success in this game. A beginning frigate will have only two high power slots where a battleship may have eight. Some ships can carry more cargo than others, perhaps at the expense of firepower. If one wants to mine for a living and wants to carry as much ore as he can on each trip, his ship may not be the best in a dogfight. In this case, a player needs friends.

Corporate benefits

Corporations are the player organizations in the world of Eve. A corporation functions much like a guild, but there is more structure than in a typical MMORPG. There are a number of NPC corporations which players may join, but the real power is in player-run corps. This is where the political side of Eve manifests itself. Corporations form alliances and fight for control of unregulated space. Massive battles have occurred in remote systems with scores of player-controlled ships on either side participating in an all out melee for control of lucrative mining rights. Venturing into an unsecured galaxy means certain death unless one has the right friends.

Fortunately, new players need not worry about that at first. Each system has a security rating from 1.0 (completely safe) to 0.0 (no protection). Players start in a safe region of space, with no immediate need to venture out into more dangerous territory. Before that time comes, it's probably necessary to join a Corporation. Happily, these always seem to be recruiting and becoming a member of a player-run 'Corp' will open the new player to benefits he will not see in a NPC corporation. Many corporations provide ships and money to young players in return for duties assigned to them. In short, players are hired by corporations and are expected to do their jobs.

Don't expect to see a newbie flying a capital ship at first, though. A player has to build skills to be able to accomplish advanced tasks in the game, such as pilot large craft or research advanced items. Skills are trained in real time and continue to train whether one is playing or not. For example, if a player has the skill Caldari Frigate rank 1, it may take 1 hour 30 minutes to train to level 2. He can start training and then do something: mine asteroids, hunt pirates, log off and take a nap. This may seem strange, but it makes it a lot easier for people who don't have the time to play a game obsessively.

It's the economy, stupid

Although I haven't totally got to grips with this side of the game yet, the economy of Eve seems complex but potentially very rewarding. It can also seem rather dull and lumbering at first glance. Without more experienced players on hand to give advice, I might easily have given the game up as



boring. Ore, minerals, goods, items, ships, skills: everything in Eve is for sale and when you realise that players with really big ships will buy your ore, the whole system makes a lot more sense. Running around trying to make profitable runs between NPCs is soul destroying. My advice would be to find a rich player patron instead.

Let's get ready to rumble

This is a space game, so of course there are lasers to be fired and hulls to be breached. Combat, however, is more of an exercise in computer-based warfare than simply aiming the crosshairs and dodging laser shots with your joystick. You need to balance your shields, damage being taken, how much energy you have remaining - and above all, be prepared to run from a fight! Sure, there are pirates, but the real combat challenge comes against other players. Eve is pure PvP. Anyone may be attacked by anyone just about anywhere. Systems with high security are patrolled by powerful police ships that come quickly when there's trouble, so players are in little danger there. But out in the unpatrolled systems, attacks come swiftly and with little warning. Battling another human being is never an easy task, but take heart - with good tactics and a following wind, a player in a smaller, faster ship may be able to take out a larger ship.

We're pretty, oh so pretty

Eve boasts some of the prettiest graphics in computer gaming. Ships and stations are highly detailed. Light and shadow show the texture of rotating asteroids. Nebulae paint wispy shrouds across systems as warping ships sail the solar winds. Even Eve's harshest critics must concede that the graphics are stunning. Zooming in and out on the ship is seamless and shows the scope of the interface.

Black holes

As a beginner I felt rather alone. Space is a big place after all, and while other players will chat, this is not a game I would like to have joined without a more experienced friend to take me under his wing. The social aspect of Eve is sorely lacking. Most MMORPGs have long since added things like emotes which animate your avatar. Eve's portraits are static and dead. It's all too easy to feel all alone in the vastness of space, and the game.

I must also take issue with the learning curve of the game. A new player will probably find the interface confusing and the goals unclear. The tutorial is good, giving an excellent introduction to the game, but beyond that the game becomes soon intimidating, if not overwhelming. Fortunately Eve has a very good network of player guides and there is a Rookie Help channel where veteran players will answer questions. However, Eve is not for the casual player. A person must really want to play Eve to stick with it. Once the learning curve is surmounted, the interface is really very intuitive and the good design becomes evident, but getting there is not the easiest chore.

To boldly go?

Eve seems to have carved out a niche for itself in the competitive MMORPG market, with a devoted and international fanbase. The community is surprisingly welcoming to newcomers, which is something not all MMORPGs can say. The game is not for everyone: it can seem painfully slow, combat isn't quite the edge-of-the-seat experience I had expected, and it's important to find a Corporation as soon as you can. My advice would be to forget any preconceptions, especially relating to other space games you may have played in the past.

Like space itself, Eve is unexpectedly complex, set against a vast backdrop of stars. Master the steep learning curve and you will soon find it hard not to log on to Eve ...

Or perhaps that's just the star in the next galaxy calling.

[More comment on this game in Rumours from the Front].



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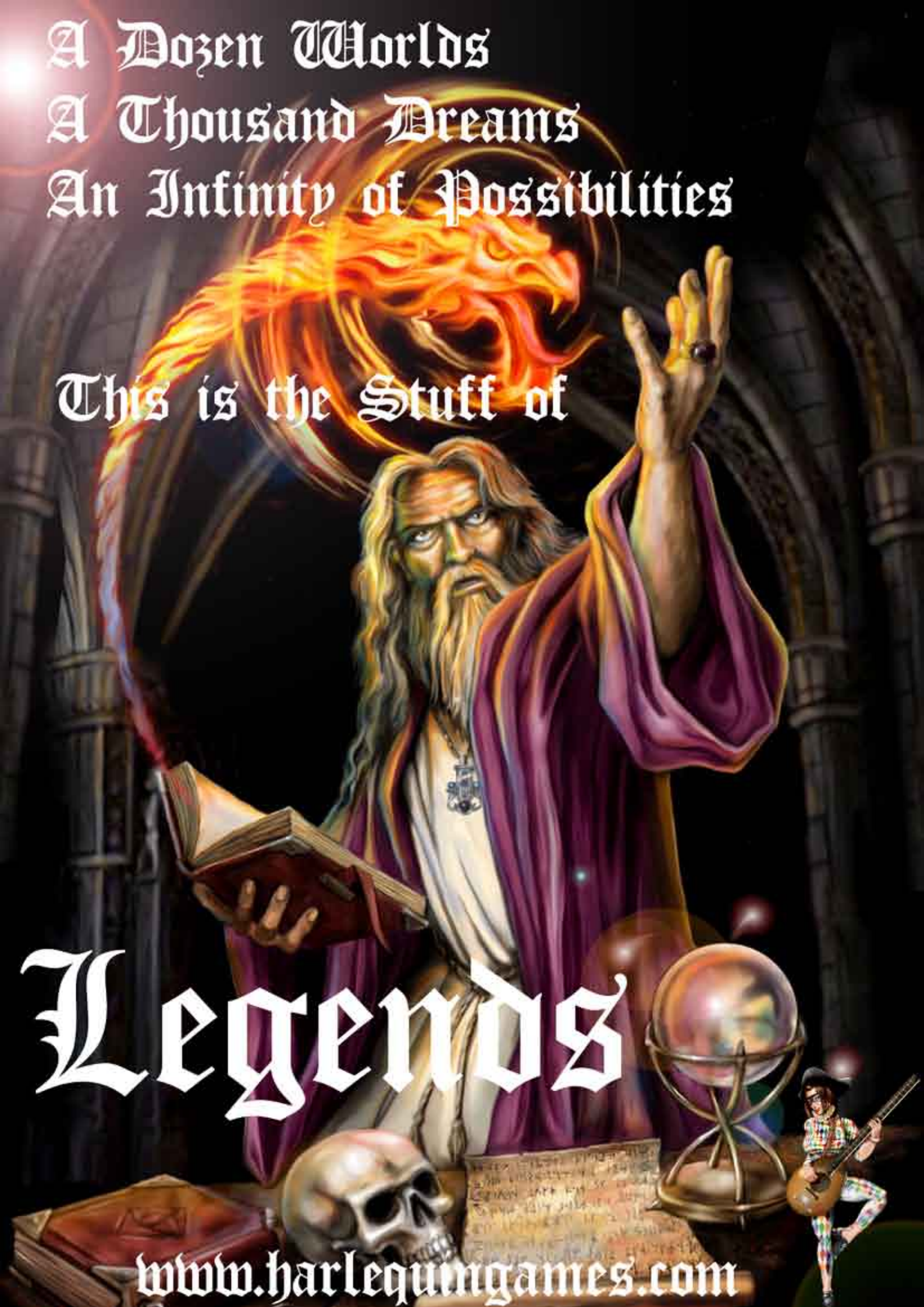
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The Fordham Folio

Getting A Picture For Your Character

Get the artist's permission first, warns LISA FORDHAM ...

THE INTERNET is a wonderful resource of free information, but we often forget that the information came from people who worked hard to learn it first before sharing it with the world out of the goodness of their hearts. For free.

So you are a roleplayer. Every roleplayer eventually wants a picture that shows in one glance, what their character is all about. And the Internet hosts thousands of artists with a few hundred thousand examples of their work. All ripe for the picking, right?

Wrong. When artists put their work up online (for instance on the Elfwood site at <http://elfwood.lysator.liu.se/elfwood/pike>), it is clear that they want to be seen. One of the most common defences put up by roleplayers I've talked to is, 'If they don't want us to use their art, they shouldn't have put it online!' A rather poor excuse - like a shoplifter saying, 'If the shops don't want their goods to be lifted, they shouldn't have displayed them.'

The issue of digitised images is often confusing. People may realize that stealing John Doe's framed oil painting from the gallery is a crime, but don't see anything wrong with right-clicking to save the same painting in its JPG format from the gallery's website and using it to decorate their own website or to post in newsgroups. This attitude is perhaps the bane to the new generation of artists, who work in nothing but digital art.

The first thing we need to understand is that artwork, whether in its traditional form of canvas and paint, or in the now popular digital form of JPGs and GIFs, is automatically copyrighted to its creator upon the moment of creation. Copyright gives the creator a number of rights, including distribution and profit from sales.

Controlled distribution, whether displaying in a personal gallery or submission to selected galleries, will give the artist some exposure and publicity. Unauthorized distribution might have a negative impact as this method usually disregards ownership and only dilutes the value of the artwork. In other words, whenever you see a website displaying numerous pieces of art without names attached to them, it is very likely that the artists are unaware of their work being there. Even famous names fall prey to this. There are image archives that blatantly display and distribute artwork by Michael Whelan, Boris Vallejo and many others, and it is highly unlikely that the artists know or approve of it.

'But it is free publicity!' perpetrators of the latter group protested. Wrong again. Whelan stated his views clearly in the FAQ of his website regarding the usage of his work: www.michaelwhelan.com/index.asp?vsPage=faq Vallejo does not distribute his work via dubious-sounding archives either. He expresses his views in his own FAQ: www.imaginstix.com/faq.cfm Never assume that taking it into your hands to give them 'free publicity' will compensate for that fact you did not bother asking them if you can use their work. It does not. You can be sued for it.

Where does that leave you then, if all artists have a major stick up the

nether regions when it comes to their precious artwork? I have talked to dozens of Elfwood artists on this topic and they all said the same thing. If you want to use it, ask first. Not only are most are more than willing to give permission, you never know, you might run into an exceptionally nice artist who would do more just because you are considerate enough to ask first. There was one roleplayer who told me that the artist he asked gave him permission to use not just the image he asked for, but any of her

artwork he might want in the future. Another artist discovered that the character of the roleplayer had a different colour of eyes from the image and adjusted a copy especially for her!

What happens if you do not ask and get busted later?

Very few of Elfwood artists I spoke to would show mercy. Another worthy note is that news travels fast on the artist network. If one artist gets screwed, the whole community will hear about it. Altering images without permission is also not looked upon kindly. People with a faint grasp of copyright lore have actually claimed that once they alter someone else's image, it now belongs to them. If it were that easy, we artists will be out of business. If you are planning to change the original image, you must have the artist's permission to do so.

Here comes the useful part... how to obtain a picture without getting into trouble later.

Some professional artists allow use of their work as long as they get a visible reciprocating link. Check the FAQ in their official website if you are not sure. On that note, always go for the official websites, rather than nameless archives. Artists are used to getting such requests, so they usually already have an answer ready. Don't bother them with emails unless you really have to.

Elfwood is a good source as well. The talent there varies from absurdly bad to amazing and, as stated earlier, most are happy to oblige if asked. They would usually ask for a reciprocating link in return. You may even find artists who take personal commissions for a small fee or for free. Elfwood also has a Picture Request (link) forum where anyone can post a request, and anyone can pick it up. Remember, it is always nice to ask first before you assume someone will take your request. I have posted a few pieces of art there and, from time to time, I receive character descriptions and am always annoyed at the guy's assumption that I'm available for commissions. Annoyed enough to say no.

If you wonder what all the copyright fuss is about, learn more about the rights you get as a creator at: www.whatiscopyright.org and know your rights when you create a character or game. The Ten Common Copyright Myths: www.copylaw.com/articles/copy_myths.html is also an enlightening read.

[Artwork on this page by **Rafal Hryniewicz**: www.McF-Asylum.com. Created as part of the Santharia project: www.santharia.com.]



Pevans's Perspective

PAUL EVANS considers games set in the Himalayas and in Germany ...

BY THE TIME you read this the *Spiel* games fair will have been and gone and lots of new games will be appearing. Rather than try to second-guess this, I'll leave it to next issue. However, there is another event at *Spiel*: *EuropeMasters*, the European Board Games Championships. This is fought out over four games by teams of four. My team scraped into the competition as the fifth British team and we've been practising the four games for some time. One of these is the excellent **Das Zepter von Zavandor**, which is reviewed elsewhere in this issue. Another is **Louis XIV**, which I reviewed in *Flagship* 114. So I thought I ought to talk about the other two.

Himalaya is the latest incarnation of a game that designer Régis Bonnessée has worked on over several years. This version, published by *Tilsit Editions* in France, transfers the setting to the Himalayas. The board shows twenty Himalayan villages of varying sizes connected by three types of road. Players are traders who move their caravan of yaks between villages along these paths. At some villages they can collect goods - wooden cubes of different colours. At others, they can deliver goods to complete a contract. This allows them to take two of three rewards. The first is to put up a stupa - a Buddhist shrine - in their colour. This is worth points according to the size of the village. The second reward is to place 'delegates' of their colour into the neighbouring regions(s). The third is to take a number of yaks - shown on the contract. These three are the key to winning the game. After twelve turns, players count up how many 'religious' points they have from their stupas. Whoever has the fewest is out of the game. Then they evaluate the delegations in each region: largest delegation wins the region. The player with the fewest regions is out. Of the remaining two players (I'm assuming a four-player game), the one with the most yaks wins the game. This gives players the interesting question of which rewards to take. Clearly there's a point to grabbing stupas first: to make sure you don't come last. But it's lots of yaks that win the game. Good stuff.

I haven't mentioned what players do in a turn. Everybody has six tiles that show a different action on each edge: a move along one type of path or a trade (collect goods or deliver a contract). The reverse shows a fifth action: do nothing. At the start of each turn, players secretly work out their six actions for the turn by placing their tiles in order. Then they are revealed and carried out one at a time. There is plenty of scope here for making a mess of things - choosing the wrong path, in particular. It also means players have to guess what their opponents are going to do: 'Can I get to that contract before Chris does?' This works rather nicely and mistakes add to the fun of the game.

The final element of the game is that there are some bonuses to be collected. After every four turns, players reveal how much of each good they hold. Whoever has the most of each gets the bonus - which means one player may get several bonuses. The bonuses are small, but can make a difference, especially at the end of the last turn. The other thing they do is give players an incentive to hoard goods, rather than using them to complete contracts. This means more decisions for the players.

Overall I rather like this game. You have to think a bit, but not too much. You have challenges and decisions. And it's fun. It's not a particularly

deep game and some will dislike the random element. As contracts and goods are placed on the board according to die roll, it's perfectly possible to have a contract appear at the village next to your pawn and be able to complete it immediately. The luck of the die also means that it's chance when and whether players have the opportunity to grab the highest value villages. This doesn't worry me and it certainly makes the game more 'family-friendly'.

The final game is my least favourite of the four. **Im Schatten des Kaisers** comes from *Hans im Glück* (**In the Shadow of the Emperor** is the English language edition from *Rio Grande*). At first sight, Ralf Burkert seems to have designed a terrific strategy game. The board shows seven German states in an abstracted form. Three are archdioceses, four are secular domains; each has spaces for a ruler, other nobles, Knights and cities. Nobles, knights and cities all give their owner a vote in choosing the next ruler of the state (and scoring victory points). Ruling a state gives the player a vote for the next Emperor (more victory points). Players also get victory points for building their cities and other things.

What you can do in a turn is governed by the actions available and the money you have (essentially, action points).

There is at least one card for each action. When you carry out the action, you take the card. This is then not available for other players, except where there are more cards for this action: for some actions there are several cards. Each action also costs money to carry out, so players can also run out of money. Clearly, the more

money you have, the better. And if you can spend your money slowly, you can be left to carry out several actions after everybody else has finished their turn. What you're doing with your actions is adding nobles, knights and cities to states; moving them around; marrying off nobles to give them more votes; killing off other people's nobles; grabbing extra votes and so on. Add in to this each state's special action - which the current ruler can use - and you have a complex web of interaction. Not just carrying out the actions, but depriving others of opportunities - or losing out on them yourself. There is more to this, too, such as the division of action cards into blue and pink cards. End the turn with a majority of blue cards and you gain a new, male noble at the start of the next turn. Otherwise, you get a girl, who can be married off for a victory point or sent to a convent for cash!

My problem with this game is that it's dry, dry, dry. You are not growing your family and politicking to get to be Holy Roman Emperor. No, you're manipulating bits of cardboard to score victory points. There's no story to the game, nothing to involve the player: it's purely an intellectual exercise. Now I don't know what makes *Himalaya*, for example, different. It is also pretty abstract, with little connection to the reality it portrays. Yet I always feel I am building stupas and chancing my arm on contracts, rather than moving bits of plastic around to score victory points. Okay, *In the Shadow of the Emperor* is not a bad game. Everything works and it has an intricate web of tactical options that depends on what other players do. It provides a tightly-fought contest that can be completed in 60-90 minutes. But I really don't care for it.



Attacking Cyprus

Serim Ral: Ancient Realms, part 2

MIKE NASH continues his account of playing as the Persians in game 26 ...

LAST ISSUE, I described the start-up process and first turn of Incubus Designs' new **Serim Ral** game variant: Ancient Realms - a clash of classical civilizations across Europe. Hammanu, my main leader, ruled a budding Persian empire from where he plotted world domination! Here's how he got on over the next few turns.

Top of the league

Turn 2 couldn't arrive quickly enough for me. But, finally, it did so - binging onto my desktop in the midst of a tedious day of work. Somehow, I got distracted...

First things first. I downloaded the Zip file and opened up the html turnsheet inside. Immediately, by habit, I scrolled down the list of Famous People - I wasn't on it, but my neighbour and new ally was. I must admit to having been slightly perturbed by this because, at this stage, I didn't know if this was a temporary alliance or not. My ally had two titles: Protector of the Tigris River and Protector of the Sakarya River. I had zero titles, other than having recognised myself as Head Priest of Zurvan (the Persian deity). Oh well. Ploughing on down to the bottom of the turnsheet, I found solace in the fact that I was fifth in the list of Top 10 Mighty Empires! Not quite top of the league, but up there. The fact that everybody was equal and I had done nothing to deserve the computer's random gift did not prevent a little flutter of joy. It wasn't likely to last that long, so I might as well be pleased while it lasted! With the macro situation examined, I scanned my turnsheet properly. It didn't look like I'd made any errors - there's always a first time.

Hammanu and Dagon were halfway to their destination, Alalakh, but I was acutely aware (and slightly jealous) that some more fortunate souls would have started in locations where they would have been able to reach independent cities with one turn's marching. In other words, while I was going to spend this turn on the move, some lucky blighters were going to get some combat and a chance to capture a city! At least Dagon had successfully recruited the new Fighter, Moloch, so that when I arrived at Alalakh he would be able to join in the fight. I transferred 1,000 troops from Dagon to Moloch and then marched both of them north to Alalakh. I did the same with Hammanu, who had reached the very top of 2nd level - he would be 3rd level (giving an extra 5% combat bonus) by the time he arrived for battle. At 3rd level, he would also be able to command 500 extra troops (Fighters can command 500 per level), but I didn't have another 500 to give him! Having recognised himself as Head Priest, Hammanu asked his god to summon down some Bows upon the city of Ugarit, so that they could be handed out to new recruits. Then he toddled off towards Alalakh, singing the Macarena for no apparent reason.

While the boss went slightly bonkers, Astaroth, my other new Fighter, sat in the city of Byblos, training alongside the garrison. Renowned professionals, Fighters can be used to improve the discipline and fighting effectiveness of troops. When my new fleet of Triremes was built, Astaroth

would be the man to lead the invasion of Cyprus. Until then, he couldn't really do much. My Ranger, Lamia, did even less. She went out for a morning stroll, mapped the local terrain and spent the rest of the week in the pub. It seems that I did forget some orders, after all.

My two Priests cast a couple of spells summoning Bows on Ugarit, while my Wizard, Shedim, sat in the library at Byblos and studied very hard. As I wanted my Ranger to be able to move around the countryside with ease, I had Shedim summon a pair of Winged Boots onto Lamia. I hoped she would be chuffed. My Thief, Berith, stayed in the tavern and robbed people. After that, it was simply a case of ordering the construction of more buildings - I made sure that training centres (to train garrisons) and an extra tavern (generates more income) went up in each city. Then I put up farms, forges and timberyards as before.

Feeling brave, I also decided to disband the garrison at Ugarit. By doing so, the troops returned to life as normal Citizens, which meant that they would breed - and the more Citizens breeding, the faster numbers would increase. In the long run, that meant more troops that I would be able to recruit. I was also beginning to develop a concept for the make-up of my armies - rather than light infantry or skirmishers (two of the infantry types in my starting garrisons), I planned to use large numbers of slingers to back up my elite Immortals. Cheap to recruit, slingers also have better Health (unsurprisingly, the higher it is, the harder it is to kill them), comparable speed across most terrain, and a special Arrow attack (the generic term for missile-firing special attacks) that made them more damaging than the other options. It didn't really take a genius to work that out, I hear you cry! But slingers do have a weakness - they are highly susceptible to the Charge special attack possessed by a number of mounted troop types. If my slingers went into battle against large numbers of cavalry, they would resemble so much chopped meat. I was working on the assumption that the first wars I would end up fighting would be against Persians or Egyptians, neither of which was likely to be over-reliant on cavalry because their elite troop choices (Persian Immortals and Egyptian War Chariots, respectively) possessed no Charge attack. Furthermore, the Egyptians would want all their horses for use in their chariots. The real risk would be if the cannibalistic, skin-flaying Scythian nomads came riding south. Then I really would have to look to recruit troops more able to stand up to a charge! For now, I figured that any Scythian invaders would have to come through my northern neighbour first, so I would have adequate warning.

By way of explanation, in addition to their Health and Move ratings all troops have two types of Attack Strength - normal and special - which determines how much damage they inflict in each round of combat they fight. Normal attacks vary depending upon the terrain (mountains, hills, plains, forest or sea). Special attacks remain constant, but they are assessed after normal damage has been dealt; there are different types of special attacks - including Arrows (such as arrow or slingshot), Charge, Formation (from phalanxes and the like), Fear and then various magical attacks from mystical beasts. Each troop type inflicts one or more types of special attack, but is also susceptible to certain ones. For example, my elite troop choice of Persian Immortals is awful at fighting in Forest (there isn't much in Persia) with an attack of 27, but particularly good (attack strength 81) in Hills. By comparison, a Citizen has an attack of 10 on all terrain and no special attack, whereas Immortals cause both Arrow and Fear damage, but their usual 345 Health is reduced to 106 if faced with Formation attacks. That's why the Macedonians beat Darius!

Attack! Attack! Attack!

Turn 3 and I was gone from the Mighty Empires list. Ho hum. But at least

Serim Ral at a glance ...

This long-running, turn-based, fantasy wargame is run in different versions by three firms: this diary describes the game from Incubus Designs (also run by Harlequin Games and Mindless Games - details in Galactic View). Startup is free, with subsequent turns at £3.50.

www.incubusdesigns.com

Hammanu was at Alalakh. Which meant combat! Alalakh had 2,500 Citizens and around 300 troops, all of them sat behind fortifications that were described as 'strong' (I knew that, in effect, this meant 'weak', but there you go; that's propaganda for you). I had three leaders there with 2,500 trained troops, including all 124 elite Immortals that I could scrape together. The Immortals' Fear attack was a particularly useful trait against the Citizen levy. Normally, Citizens have a Health rating of 100, but against Fear, their Health is treated as 10! So the Immortals could kill them ten times as fast as most of my other troops. I wished I had more, but I didn't. However, Hammanu had reached 3rd level, while Moloch was now 2nd level and was thereby able to command the 1,000 troops I had given him. (If I had miscalculated, Moloch would have been forced to fight at a serious disadvantage for trying to lead twice as many troops as he could command.) Also, my ally had sent two leaders to join me, as he had promised. He had sent one Fighter and one Priest, with 3,100 troops between them! Together, our five leaders and 5,600 troops attacked all out, dividing the already outnumbered defenders against five assaults. Unfortunately, I'd have to wait until next turn to find out if it worked. I also faced a nervous wait, in case one of my ally's leaders captured the city instead of me.

While his comrades engaged in their rookie battle, Astaroth set out across the water to Cyprus. Loading the ships to the brink, nearly 500 troops went with him. I figured that I needed to get at least another couple of thousand over to join him. Belial also set sail with a small contingent from Ugarit.

The other leaders had an uneventful time. Berith stayed in the tavern. Lamia flew south on her not-so-swanky Winged Boots. At a Move rate of 30 hours per square, she could only move five squares per turn (each turn allowing 160 hours of activity) - I had been hoping the boots would make her faster than that. Had I known, I probably wouldn't have wasted the spellcasting. Disappointed, I ordered Shedim to summon Livestock instead. I figured food would be in short supply after 20-30 turns in this game, and I wanted to build up some herds in order to supplement normal production.

After that, I built some more farms and timberyards. At Ugarit, where I now had a good number of forges, I created some Mines to generate the iron ore that the forges were using at an alarming rate.

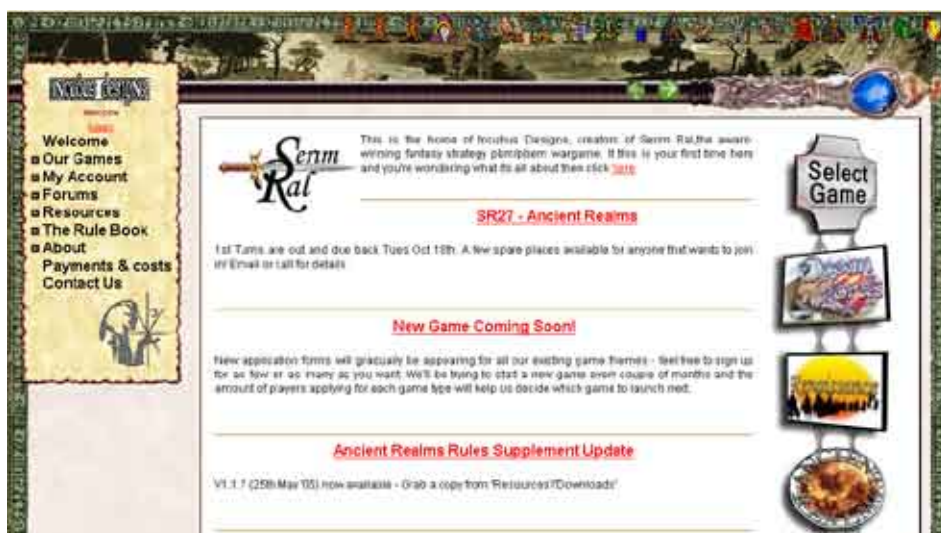
The campaign against Cyprus

Things were finally starting to hot up, and it was nothing to do with the forges or the Persian summer! I had captured the city of Alalakh and had taken fewer than 400 casualties doing so. Each of my three leaders involved in the battle had gained better than half a level's worth of experience (XP). Better still, 1,250 Citizens had returned to the city and accepted Hammanu as their overlord.

The capture of Alalakh also meant that I was in position to find another leader. With another battle coming, I opted to find a fourth Fighter. I know a lot of other players were looking to recruit more spellcasters (either Priests or Wizards) and in retrospect I should have done so as well - too many of the next several turns would be spent with one or more Fighters doing nothing more constructive than training. This wasn't pointless, but nor was it the most efficient use of a leader's time. Oh well, another lesson learned for future games (and later in this one).

What I really wanted to do now was get Hammanu down to the coast so that he could sail to Cyprus and lead the attack on Paphos. Unfortunately, I had already committed myself to assisting my ally like he had helped me. But, just as I was racking my brains for ways around this problem, my ally announced that he would arrive at the other target city this very turn and attack without me. Suddenly, unexpectedly, Hammanu was free to head southwest to Cyprus. So away he went.

I detailed my cities to make more ships, which limited the amount of wood going spare for bows. As soon as the fleet was built I would have to



switch production to restock with the bows vital for equipping Immortals and other missile troops. But for now, with stockpiles still limited this early in the game, it was a matter of priorities. Ships it was. To improve my cities further, I set about building quarries, mines, timberyards and farms. Each of these provided extra stone, iron, wood or food per turn, all vital for further building work, manufacture or feeding troops. At the moment, I wasn't too worried about being attacked, so I neglected building guard posts or barracks or fortifying walls. I only had four cities, but my empire covered lots of squares and with the capture of Alalakh I was confident that I would have time to build up defences as necessary should an invading army appear on my borders.

My Wizard continued to summon Livestock, while my Priests summoned Elephants (thus avoiding using Food to breed them). In the meantime, I spent a couple of turns manoeuvring Hammanu towards the coast with his army, sent Moloch alone on the back of a Laminak (a fast-moving elemental spirit) to my capital city, Ugarit, to fetch a fleet of spanking new Triremes, and moved Astaroth and his small advance force to Paphos, where he immediately set up a siege. Berith the Thief arrived to sabotage the city's guard post and walls. Belial handed his troops to Astaroth and sailed all the ships back towards Hammanu. Both he and Moloch rendezvoused with Hammanu and then let the boss take over the armada. My latest Fighter, Razael, trained patiently in my other coastal city, Byblos, awaiting the construction of another fleet with which to sail to Cyprus. Razael arrived on time, but unfortunately I screwed up with the calculations for Hammanu - trying to stick one too many barrels of finest wine in the hold - and the fleet was weighed down so that it moved more slowly than expected. In this way, I was forced to delay my attack on Paphos by a turn: this cost me a turn's worth of Citizens breeding under my command, and meant that I had a turn earning very little XP.

Nonetheless, finally I arrived in force at Paphos and attacked on Turn 8. I had three Fighters and 3,100 troops against a garrison of 2,500 Citizens and 300 troops. The numbers weren't that different, but I had by now recruited more than 1,000 Persian Immortals, 550 of whom were at the gates of Paphos. The Fear attack of these elites worked wonders and the city fell, while my armies suffered just 700 casualties. The capture of Paphos did not catapult me back into the top 10 Mighty Empires, but it did earn me a new title - Custodian of Cyprus. Together with my position as Head Priest of Zurvan (admittedly only one of several such head priests!) and the very cool title Goliath Bane (indicating the player with the most slingers), it was enough to get me on the Famous People of Note list. That list is often a better guide as to who is doing well than the Mighty Empires table, so I was quietly pleased. Furthermore, I was rated as holding 1.22% world power, only a little below the 1.28% for the tenth-ranked leader on the Mighty Empires list. I wasn't top dog, but I was feeling quite chuffed at where I was, given the geographical difficulties of getting to the independent cities near me.

On Screen

Girls can be Gamers too!

GLOBETROTTER advises against stereotypes ...

A LONG TIME ago, in a galaxy far, far away, my best friend and I made regular work of saving the universe. His girlfriend would stand back admiringly as we fought off alien hordes and earned our place among the galaxy's elite pilots. Video gaming was, quite simply, a boy's world. Girls would peek through the door of our clubhouse, but didn't seem to care much about stepping through the door. How times have changed. The setting is no longer the neon spectacle of video arcades, but homes that double as shrines to the digital age in which we live. And instead of looking over my shoulder as my fingers dart across a gamepad, my friend's wife now beats me resoundingly in **Toca Race Driver 2** and snorts derisively as I send the Prince of Persia plummeting to another untimely death. 'No, that's not what happened,' she'll say mockingly, echoing the Prince's words.

So what did happen? When did the clubhouse become co-ed? The simple, albeit wrong, answer is that game makers succeeded in deliberately tapping into the female demographic. A few years ago, around the time Lara Croft changed the face of interactive entertainment forever, you could hear the buzz emanating from big publishing houses: We need to get more women playing games. But how?

That wasn't an easy question to answer, because at the time, the industry was predominantly made up of males. (It still is, though to a lesser degree.) What's more, the market for female consumers was unproven territory. Like Lara Croft tiptoeing across a rickety branch suspended over lava, companies faced the daunting prospects of creating games that appealed to women and then coming up with the marketing techniques needed to get the registers ringing.

Rather than go out on a limb, however, publishers and developers played it safe, relying on broad generalizations regarding the differences between men and women rather than probing deeper. Women, for example, were thought to prefer the relaxed pace of puzzle solving to the frenzied aesthetic of virtual combat. Moreover, companies initially thought the

inclusion of more female avatars in games would do the trick, although in this case, they were afraid of alienating their proven audience, so retail boxes and the entertainment within began sporting a lot of girls in leather bikinis. Finally, drawing on the commonly perceived interests of women in general, games began featuring elements of interpersonal relations and romance. After all, what's truer about the world in which we live than the notion that men love guns and women love flowers?

However, as researchers probed deeper, they found a lot of individual differences that questioned reliance on these categories. For instance, Dr Mia Consalvo, of Ohio University's School of Telecommunications found in her studies that women who play games frequently like a broad range of genres and actually enjoy competition and fast-paced action. In addition, women who play games for longer periods of time and increase their skills become interested in exploring different genres, including multiplayer titles, which offer both competition and collaboration.

Consalvo says the selection of female characters points to another miscalculation by game makers: while women certainly like avatars that are sexy and intelligent, they're tired of having over-sexualized characters as their primary option. The biggest indicator that the games industry is trying too hard to attract females, however, is the relationship sim, **Singles: Flirt Up Your Life**. One screenshot shows a woman wrapped in the arms of a man, her face aglow at the prospect of romance. You'd almost expect a quiz, not unlike those found in countless women's magazines, to pop up during the course of game asking how compatible the player and his or her mate are.

So if game makers should scrap the ideas that women dislike complex controls and prefer puzzle solving to destruction, and accept that adding female avatars and romance to their titles won't necessarily attract women, what's left? Simply what the industry has been doing all along to attract more girls.

Almost without meaning to, publishers produced the female market



Globetrotter's Game of the Month: Dungeon Siege II

The story behind **Dungeon Siege 2** is completely separate from that of the first one, and, while sometimes exceedingly clichéd, is generally a gripping experience. The multitude of side quests enrich the plot of the game greatly. If one were to skip all except the primary objectives, completion could be achieved in less than 30 hours. But, to do everything possible takes this span easily into the 80+ hour bracket - surely good value for money! With all its beautiful scenery, spectacular battles, and pleasant (if sometimes tedious) gameplay, it is easy to make this my game of the month.

Essentially, **Dungeon Siege 2** possesses the single most important quality for a game: it's fun. Controlling my party of characters to victory over the hordes of enemies that would flood the screen was a blast. Yes, there was a large amount of repetition, but I found myself faithfully returning to the game to move to the next area, or to achieve the next goal.

One thing I especially enjoyed was the equipment system. **Dungeon Siege 2** is incredibly item-centric. The equipment a character wears can have as much, if not more, impact on his effectiveness as the skills he chooses. And making that equipment match so that it didn't make my character appear to be a peacock was entertaining as well. While I am not certain whether there is a **Dungeon Siege 3** in our future, I definitely hope there is after playing this one.

You can try the game for free, with a 1.5 GB download:
games/dungeonsiege2/downloads.asp

www.microsoft.com/

Developed by *Gas Powered Games*

Publisher: www.microsoft.com/games/

through the development of casual and online titles. Sites such as Yahoo! have attracted huge numbers of adult women by drawing on their experiences playing card and board games. Consalvo says the ease of learning these offerings, their inexpensive nature and the growth of the Internet all helped to stimulate this growth. It's proof that if women see content they like, they'll arrive in droves. It's important to remember, however, that this aspect of the industry is being framed as 'casual' rather than 'female'.

Anna Larke, a senior game designer at *Argonaut*, says the game industry doesn't need to address women specifically, as there are plenty of titles out there that appeal to both genders. **The Sims** wasn't created to lure females, even though it ultimately attracted a lot of girls, as well as guys, who hadn't played many releases. Instead, the popularity of *EA's* people sim boils down to it being a brilliant and accessible product. In other words, women will play anything, from **Far Cry** to **Vice City**, as long as it's good.

Larke also says 'pink games', as interactive entertainment for girls is called in some circles, might actually do more harm than good, as they reinforce the stereotype that women don't play games, and the ones that do need specially tailored offerings. The industry should simply recognize that people have different tastes, regardless of their gender, and move forward with the goal of making good products for everyone.

Publishers and developers also need to move toward greater inclusiveness. Perhaps the greatest division exists in the console market, which, if most gaming magazines are any indication, is still clinging to the boy's club ideal. Games don't have to become politically correct to appeal to women, just contain fewer stereotypes. Two things would help make this happen and expand the market at the same time: one, more advertisements in magazines for girls and women, and two, more female designers and executives working in the industry. The team that created *The Sims*, for example, included numerous women. As they bring their talents and insight to the industry, more players will follow.



- Serim Ral -



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The City Of Tictimum

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The City Of Tictimum is situated on hills in Persia at (). It has stockpiles of 30620 Food, 20775 Gold, 15445 Iron, 12420 Wood, 12420 Stone, 2000 Weapons, 2000 Armour and 2000 Bows. The City Of Tictimum is garrisoned with 700 Light Infantrymen, 5250 Citizens, 500 Heavy Infantrymen, 62 Persian Immortals, 400 Light Cavalrymen, 100 Heavy Cavalrymen and 700 Skirmishers. It has assorted equipment and mounts consisting of a Longship, a Liburnian Galley and a Trireme. The citizens are beginning to show some promise, have insignificant armour, are armed with improvised weapons, slings and The defenders are poorly trained in siege warfare. When attacking or defending the garrison have been ordered to fight until 100% of them have been slain. A surplus of 21908 food is held within the stockpiles. The City Of Tictimum is protected by some strong walls. Camped within the city is Hammanu The Persian Knight.



Production for this week was 9020 Food, 5775 Gold, 5445 Iron, 2420 Wood and 2420 Stone. The City Of Tictimum has 1 tavern, 1 stable, 1 shipyard, 1 forge, 1 library, 1 training centre, 1 farm, 1 quarry, 1 mine, 1 timber yard, 1 dungeon, 1 temple, 1 trading post, 1 barrack and 1 guard post. After a lifetime of auspicious encounters the legendary hero Amuffy Runeseeker has settled near here. His fame attracts a great many aspiring warriors to the area, doubling the output of barracks.

This week The City Of Tictimum can make the following items: 200 Weapons, 200 Armour, 300 Light Infantrymen, 285 Heavy Infantrymen, 200 Horses, a Trireme, a Ballistae, 300 Persian Immortals, 200 Bows, 300 Skirmishers, 300 Balearic Slingers, 250 Archers and 8 Elephants. These are the maximums based on the present stockpile levels. Note that barracks have a maximum output of 100 + 100 per extension, farms 1000 each, forges 200 items each and shipyards 1 item each.

Monster cards

CHIP ROCZNIAC offers help to novice and experienced players of the YuGiOh CCG ...

HELLO, FELLOW duelists. Have you been having fun in the world of CCGs, yet? I hope you have. Now for this issue's article. I had a bit of a problem deciding what to write about. I wavered between writing more about **YuGiOh** and picking another card game to write about. After much indecision, I decided to write another article about YuGiOh. But, what should I write? There are so many aspects of the game that I left unsaid: I could expand upon the previously mentioned Ban List and how it changed the game, or I could write about the various deck strategies and give tips on how to create and use them. Another possibility was to explain more about the different types of cards found in the game to help those unfamiliar with YuGiOh. I decided the last option made the most sense, because it allows those unfamiliar to YuGiOh to get to know an important aspect of the game, as well as giving those knowledgeable with the game a kind of refresher course.

In YuGiOh there are three different types of cards: monster cards, trap cards, and magic/spell cards. If only things were kept that simple. The three different main types are separated into subtypes. It is these subtypes which gives YuGiOh its variability and strategy, especially among the trap cards and spell cards.

Monster cards are the backbone of your deck. They should account for almost half of your deck. Of the four different kinds of monster cards available, the ones found in most decks are Normal monster cards and Effect monster cards. Normal monster cards have no special abilities and are primarily used as attackers, defenders, or as tribute fodder. Some examples of normal monsters are Blue Eyes White Dragon and Dark Magician. Effect monsters are where a lot of fun comes into YuGiOh: there are many different varieties of Effect monsters and each does something different (for the most part). Effect monsters must be played for their effect to activate, whether it be by normal tribute summon like Jinzo or by some special summon like Black Luster Soldier-Envoy of the Beginning. The card will specify whether the monster needs to be special summoned. Another type of Effect monster is called the Flip Effect monster. This Effect monster must first be set (played face down in defense position) before the card's effect can be activated. After the card has been set, its effect is activated when either you flip the card face up on your next turn or your opponent attacks the face down card during their attack phase. A good example of a Flip Effect monster is Man Eater Bug.

As I mentioned, there are four types of monsters in the game. I have described two of those kinds (Normal and Effect). The last two types have some things in common: they are both considered a special summon, and to be a special summon they both usually require specific spell cards and monster cards to be played. To summon Fusion monsters a player needs certain things either in their hand or on the field. The requirements are as follows: the spell card Polymerization, a Fusion monster from the player's Fusion deck (a pile of Fusion monster cards from which the player may choose) and the monster cards specified on the Fusion monster card (certain

Effect monsters can be used as replacement monsters to the fusions like Mystical Sheep #1). There is another way to bring Fusion monsters to the field besides using Polymerization: some Effect monsters such as Cyberstein and Magical Scientist can bring out Fusion monsters for a cost of various amounts of life points. Fusions monsters are often stronger than the monsters used to summon them, and some are Effect monsters. An example of a Fusion monster is B Skull Dragon (attack=3200), which is a fusion between Red Eyes B Dragon (attack=2400) and Summoned Skull (attack=2500). To be summoned, Ritual Monsters need only the Ritual monster in hand, the required Ritual spell card and enough monsters to meet the required level amount that is stated on the spell card. Ritual monsters are not played very often as the odds of having the entire needed material are slim. Relinquished is an example of a Ritual monster.

When building your own deck, the key is deciding what kind of monsters to include. Ritual monsters generally should not be included, as the only useful ones released so far are the aforementioned

Relinquished and Shinato, King of a Higher Plane. There are many more Ritual monsters but in my opinion those two have the most promise. Relinquished is a low level summon and has a crazy effect that takes over an opponent's monsters, while Shinato deals damage to your opponent's life points with every monster it destroys. If you do want to use them, I suggest putting in multiple copies of both the Ritual monster

spell card (the legal limit of any card not restricted or on the ban list is three), this way you can give yourself the greatest chance of drawing the cards you need. Fusion monsters have found their way into many decks, though the spell card Polymerization has not. The spell card Metamorphosis allows a player to use a Fusion monster in exchange for a monster already on the field. That card allows a player to use Fusion monsters without having to include Polymerization or the monsters the fusion usually requires. Metamorphosis allows players to use the card Thousand-Eyes Restrict without all the hassle of having to get the required cards in hand (in case some of you were wondering, the required cards would be Relinquished, Polymerization, Thousand-Eyes Idol and possibly the Ritual spell card Black Illusion Ritual).

Chip's quick tip: If you can get the same value using fewer cards, do it. Never give card advantage to your opponent

I do not want to overload you with too much information, so I will stop here for now. Next time, I will explain the varieties of Spell cards and Trap cards and maybe start to explain the various types of decks available.

If anybody has any questions or would like to make a suggestion about any card game they would like me to discuss, my email is RoczniakC@aol.com

Till next time, happy shuffling.



The Flagship Inter-

Long-term readers of Flagship will know that Rick Loomis has been a very influential figure in the development of PBM gaming. Rick was the first person to set up a firm, Flying Buffalo Incorporated, in 1972 to run computer-moderated games, starting with one called Nuclear Destruction. His award-winning PBM game Starweb is famous for its elegant design, offering different paths to victory according to which type of six positions you play: Empire-Builder, Pirate, Artifact-Collector, Merchant, Berserker or Apostle; it's also important to contact the other players between turns. Flying Buffalo has also worked to develop other types of game, including the early roleplaying game Tunnels and Trolls.

What sort of games did you enjoy as a youngster?

I played everything - chess, monopoly, risk, stratego, battleships, clue, anything I could talk my sisters and cousins into playing with me. I especially liked the Avalon Hill wargames. My first (and favorite) was Gettysburg.

Were there any other influences which inspired you, and is there a game of any genre that you wish you'd thought of yourself?

I read hundreds and hundreds of science fiction and fantasy novels and short stories, and I also read a lot of history, especially military history. Well, I've often wished I had invented 'Nuclear War'. It really is a perfect game - quick, simple, easy to play, and lots of fun. I've developed all the expansion sets, but they are just building upon what Doug first invented.

You were the first to think of running turn-based computer-moderated games by mail. How did you come to think of this method?

I invented games of my own in high school. One of my favorites started out as a variant of 'Battleships', only a lot more complicated. Soon it had seven or eight players with dozens of different kinds of combat units with thousands of pieces on the map simultaneously. It had hidden movement, too - you had to have a referee to tell you what you were allowed to see. 'The Game' was a lot of fun, but it was a lot of work to be the referee. It took forever to calculate the results of one turn, and I couldn't play it because no one else was willing to do all that work. The first time I saw a computer, I just knew I had to figure out a way to let this machine be the referee of my game. (Note: this was back in 1964. My high school class took a *field trip* to go *see* a computer. It was in a huge room at the local electric utility and we had to look through glass to see it.)

My game also had a problem in that there were 11 countries in the game, but seldom did we ever actually have that many players. So I needed a way to figure out what to do with the 'unplayed' country's forces. When I was in the army in 1969 I figured out a way to run the unplayed countries that I thought might work: I came up with the idea of a 'popularity index' - each player would have a popularity index (that could be manipulated in various ways) in each unplayed country. As long as your index is the highest, you could make moves for that country. This was such a breakthrough (in my mind) that I had to test it. But I was overseas (in Hawaii), away from all my gaming friends. So I started writing to gamers who advertised for opponents in the back of a popular gaming magazine, offering to let them playtest my new game idea if they would send me a postage stamp with each turn. Then by the time I got home from the service, I had 200 players. I figured this was getting so popular perhaps I could afford to buy a computer and make a business out of it.

Starweb is your best known design. Did you achieve it by a sudden flash of inspiration?

Not really. By that time I had several wargames, and I took a survey of my customers to see what they wanted. Most of them wanted a strategic space game. But many of the concepts of Starweb were created because of

limitations on our computer. We could only afford 4K of memory, which even then wasn't much. We couldn't afford to reserve room in memory to keep track of unlimited numbers of fleets. So I came up with the idea of 'keys'. In order to have a fleet of ships, you have to attach your ships to a 'key' and we could limit the number of keys to 255. Likewise, I didn't want to have an unlimited number of 'positions' where ships/fleets could be located, so I invented the idea of a 'web' of star portals. Thus you had 255 places you could 'be' and there was no way to be 'on the way' to a place. You were either in one, or you were instantly in another.

You're involved with many types of games: do you have a favourite?

I like all kinds of games. However I have a particular fondness for historical war boardgames, especially those of the American Civil War. (Which was why I pounced upon the Avalon Hill Gettysburg game when I first saw it in a toy store.) I also enjoy railroad games, especially the Mayfair Games 'crayon' railgames.

To what qualities do you attribute FBI's survival in a competitive market?

Well, mostly I've kept expenses as low as possible. I've made lots of mistakes, but mostly they've been affordable ones, thank goodness. Mostly I think it's persistence - keeping on slogging even through the slim times, which has led to longevity. At this point I often get customers coming back who say they played my games ten or fifteen years ago. Now I've got the nostalgia factor working in my favor. Or perhaps the most important factor is that I started out running games for my friends, and I have continued treating my customers as if they were my friends. I think they can sense that. If a customer has a problem, I sincerely want to make them happy, not because I don't want to lose their future turn fees, but because I don't want to disappoint a friend.

Do you think that PBM itself will survive?

Of course. PBM (and PBEM) isn't just a business. It has changed a lot with the advent of the internet and cheap computers, but there will always be people who like to play turn-based games with lots of opponents, hidden movement, and plenty of time between moves. It may never again be as big as it was for a while, but some of us never get tired of that kind of game.

Do you have a favorite memory of your time with FBI?

Wow, that's a hard one. There are so many. Such as the time one of my female players told me to change her last name in our records because she was marrying a fellow she met in one of our games. Or the time Fred Saberhagen asked me if it was ok to write a book about me and my company. Or the day I was first asked for my autograph. Or the first time one of Flying Buffalo's games (Citybook I) won an Origins Award. I think probably it was the day I was inducted into the GAMA/Origins Hall of Fame.

What plans do you have for the future?

Oh, I have a lot of ideas, and will probably never be able to get them all done. I'd like to do more web-based stuff, perhaps some kind of variant of the massively multi-player online games. I'm also still hoping to be able to program and operate 'The Game'. This is the one that I invented back in high school (of course it would be better now). It would be a massively complicated wargame with dozens of players with an infinite number of different units that would interact in endless ways. Oh yes ...

www.flyingbuffalo.com/

The Changing Face of Play-by-Mail

KJC's MICA GOLDSTONE asks: How do you make a large pile of cash in the PBM industry?

I WAS ASKED to write an article on the changing face of Play-by-Mail. This was a tough one as I could only write from my perspective, which I know full well to be only a part of the big picture and not necessarily an accurate one at that. So my gut reaction was to decline. A few beers later and some mulling, and I came to the conclusion - yeah, what the hell, who cares whether I offer up a well documented and carefully ordered dissertation on the changing face of PBM: wouldn't they rather read the ranting of a madman?

So, why did the industry collapse, and trust me on this, the industry is not what it was. For my money, I would put this down to three primary factors. First of all and most importantly, it was competition from computers, console and more recently on-line games and the underlying nature of PBM. These offer much better (faster, less frustrating) learning curves, resulting in a quicker fix. Essentially they pander to the majority who are less intellectually gifted and more slothful and idle. Hell, when I'm at a loose end, full of beer and can't be bothered thinking, I grab the xbox to nuke some aliens and generally press buttons with all the forethought of a child making itself sick on chocolate. Second is the 'local pub' mentality of most players. Players tend to find a game or a few games and stick with it/them to the exclusion of all others. It is a bit like your local pub. You always go there. Sure, you may visit another one from time to time and there will be always those few that flit round all the pubs - generally getting on peoples' tits before bugging off to a new, shinier pub, but most people like their local pub. They know most people, have developed a rapport with the regulars and have some kudos or at least a reputation of sorts. While people talk about PBM as a hobby in general, in truth it is closer to many individual hobbies, each being a game. Nobody (of consequence) says that their hobby is sports; that would be stupid, instead they say that their hobby is fencing, running, rugby, football. Same thing here; even when there was a convention for all the games, you found that the players visiting tended to hang around the stalls of the games they played, though they may have had a little nosy at some others with the same vague interest that a fencer looks at kendo. Within a short period of time, though, the players from the same game ended up together in the beer tent swapping in-game stories and getting hammered. This level of introversion has meant that once players are committed to the game they get a little cagey about talking about it. You don't sing your local's praises: it is something that is special to you. You will be happy to talk to a new customer if they happen to be standing next to you at the bar, but they are not a regular and there is definitely no immediate invitation to share your table - unless they tip you on the pub-quiz and you happen to be hammered at the time and she has huge jugs... but that's another story and the analogy breaks down there. To cut a long story short, the players involved in a game tend not to rant about the game to outsiders irrespective of how much they are enjoying it. This means that the player base tends not to grow through word of mouth.

The extended learning curve means that advertising is problematic. It is difficult to capture somebody's interest with an accurate advert and a longer advert is not normally viable. This means that generally only those who know about the hobby read the adverts and these people are often already playing in another game.

Finally, internal sabotage has played a part in pulling it down. This is not the sweeping axe of inter-company all-out war, but rather the death by a thousand cuts, or the one too many fleas that killed the dog. Many players have looked at the results they have got from the game they are

playing and thought that it must be easy money to run a game. A couple of quid for couple of sheets of paper or more recently nothing more than an email - piece of cake. So they have hammered together a half-assed game that runs only though constant supervision and pan-handled this to other players in the games they are playing in. Players have not left in droves, but some have, due to promises of more personal service, better returns for their money etc. The bloke in his bedroom - not paying tax, overheads, advertising or other running costs discovers that the time and effort is actually quite a bloody lot and after a few months of hard work, frustrations and run-ins with disgruntled customers decides to sack it off. Unfortunately, this has been sufficient to alienate the players and cause them to venture into other forms of entertainment as they cannot hope for the same level of commitment from a larger company than they got from bloke-in-bedroom, even though bloke-in-bedroom burnt out as a result. Sure, some will come back, but not all. The damage to the industry has been done over the years. As I said, it has been the death of thousand cuts and fleas sucking the dogs dry.

So what are we left with?

A division in the industry, split between dedicated-blokes-in-bedrooms delivering personal services to a small audience and the larger companies that have built up the sophistication of their code over many years and can beat off the fleas with big sticks. While there is considerable mutual respect between the big three (Harlequin, Madhouse and us, KJC), we do not really talk. There is nothing much to say really. We are still here while many rivals are now stacking shelves at Tesco or teaching. We are in competition with each other, but we are more in competition with the changing mentality of the modern gamer.

The modern gamer

Once upon a time the gamer accepted his fate. He learnt the rules to try and avoid his fate, but at the end of the day, he knew that when it was over, it was over and would be prepared to start again. Then came the reload option and next the save game button and finally, auto-re-spawn. It doesn't matter if you act a prick, nothing is permanent and it can all be re-set. The disposable society finally hit gaming in a big bad way. We find that most PBM gamers are those who were born before this mentality of 'here I am, give me what I want' set in. Our average gamer is more understanding of the principles of 'implications, ramifications and cause and effect'. They understand that it can take years to build up and mistakes can well be permanent - 'yeah, fuck-it' will not be issued from our gamers' lips prior to breaking a treaty and committing to a war that could end in their own annihilation.

Industry failings

What we don't offer is a well established general forum or notice board where potential players intrigued by this style of gaming can see what they can get from reliable, established companies. Instead we have sites scattered across the web with pages of listings, some with nice wrappings, but unfortunately wrappings around rubbish. They are often littered with dead links, a 2p bloke-in-bedroom affair or just a downright load of crap. I note *Flagship's* new forum and hope this will gain popularity and create some common ground. We (the industry) don't offer a quick fix. One of the major aspects of a PBM game is the community. How can a couple of

turns reveal this? A reviewer of a game cannot possibly hope to give a fair account of a game. It would be as fair to review a restaurant by looking at the menu or a holiday from the brochure.

This, however, was exactly how the industry issued the awards for PBM in the past. We have loads of awards dating to the times when KJC were buddies with the various people responsible for handing out the awards. Have we been approached by award givers in the last ten years? Like buggery we have, so how can anybody take seriously an award that does not even take into consideration some of the most popular games on the market? We generally find the whole thing a bit of a joke. We are still here and paying the bills, this we think is what makes a good PBM game and company - the very fact that we are still around and players still play our games.

What is needed is an independent site where games can be listed. This site should be updated regularly and details about the game should be present. These should include how many years the game has run for and probably some reviews by the players themselves along with costs etc. Reviewers should state exactly how long they have played the game and state how much they got involved in the game.

Personally speaking, I am glad that most of pissant little companies have gone the way of the dodo. Those that remain actually do give a damn about their customers. They do offer reliability and are committed to putting back into the company the money they earn. The only real shame is that the professional companies are still outnumbered by pan-handlers by hundreds to one.

So where do I see the industry going?

We are down but we are not out. That is my prediction. We will never be the glory boys, but we offer something that others cannot compete with, this being long-term satisfaction. We will find that the average age of our players will increase until the majority are in their mid twenties to late thirties and as a result of other commitments always a minority, but the industry will remain. We offer games that can be played during work hours, we offer communities and we offer the smug satisfaction that intellect will often win out over hammering buttons really fast.

I am also noticing that we are recruiting players who have become disillusioned with the alternative gaming experiences. The other games do

not have the longevity of our games and tend to be more about jumping through hoops than real strategy and tactics. They are the quick fix and are the chocolate bars of gaming. They have no real meat to them. This is clear by the vast amount of players who jump ship as soon as the next big thing hits the shops/net. I believe that we were there at the beginning, twenty-something years ago and popular simply because there were few alternatives. As the gaming community matures, I anticipate that we will find that some players will gravitate to our generally more mature style of games, providing that they have even heard of this type of gaming!

I also suspect that the hybrid game will become the standard. As PBM has moved towards PBeM, the general progression will be towards PBeM/Web games. There will be different levels of hybridisation. Many games already allow turn input via the web, and some of the more sophisticated ones even upload data to the web. I suspect that Forum/PBeM will become popular - at least that's where I am pushing development in my company.

I note *Flagship's* improved website, especially the forum and applaud it as a progressive move and will applaud even louder if it increases interest in the hobby in general and our games in particular. I also believe that their move towards main-stream gaming is in the right direction. This appeal to a more general gamer will hopefully mean that PBM will be introduced to gamers who have simply not experienced this type of gaming - poor ignorant bastards - may they see the light.

Progress?

Next time I may give some ideas about what we have done to survive, beyond the obvious answer of work, sweat and work. In particular the work we have done to create Phoenix and how it opened our eyes to what can be achieved. This article may well interest game designers and hopefully encourage the potential bloke-in-bedroom to work with an established company in preference to being another straw on the camel's back.

Finally, to come back to the title: How do you make a large pile of cash in the PBM industry? My answer would be to start with a huge pile of cash!

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Introducing ...

War Gaming

STUART ASQUITH advises on this absorbing form of gaming ...

JUST WHAT is 'war gaming'? - a question frequently asked by non-war gamers. The answer can either be complex; war gaming can be seen as re-creating battles in miniature, governed by a set of rules, using model soldiers on a conveniently sized playing surface in a chosen period - historical or fictitious - involving the study of army organisation, the uniforms worn, the weapons used and the tactics employed, as well as the leading commanders, the reasons behind the conflict, the historical outcome and so forth - or the answer can be simple: war gaming is playing with toy soldiers.

It is impossible to truly re-create actual warfare in miniature; it must always be borne in mind that it is a war *game*. It is not the real thing and doesn't attempt to be. There is sometimes the school of thought that feels that war should not be glorified or portrayed as a game. This is a valid point, but it is always expounded by non-war gamers. To the hobbyist, war gaming is the study of strategy and tactics, coupled with research into uniforms, weapons and so forth. To read about a battle is interesting in itself, but then to go on and re-create that battle in miniature is a fascinating experience. Can you reverse the outcome of Waterloo? Can King Charles I win the English Civil War?

All things are possible. Now let's look at some aspects of war gaming in a little more detail.

The rules

Unlike most other tabletop games, there is no one definitive set of rules for the conduct of a war game. Many commercial sets are available, some covering historical eras such as the period 1700-1900, usually referred to in war gaming terms as the 'Horse and Musket' period, in that the cavalry still rode horses on the battlefield and the infantry were armed with increasingly effective muskets or rifles.

There are also sets for a specific historical period such as the Napoleonic Wars (1793-1815) or World War 2 (1939-1945), while there are still others for sub-periods such as the battle of Waterloo (1815) or the battle of Kursk (1943). Equally, war gamers can write their own rules, based on their understanding of the actual capabilities of the troops and weapons of the required period. There is, however, always a trade off between historical accuracy and playability.

What period?

War games can be set in any period. Perhaps at school you studied the war in Greece between the various independent city states, the Norman Conquest, the English Civil Wars, the American Civil War and the First World War etc. Any or all of these are interesting subjects to re-create as war game ideas. Alternatively, there are 'what if?' scenarios, such as Great Britain coming in on the side of the Confederate Southern States in the American Civil War, or the Germans invading the UK in 1940. Futuristic conflicts, where perhaps civilisation is breaking down in the wake of a devastating nuclear war, or spacemen land on another planet to be assailed by aliens. Or how about Viking raids, medieval knights in tournament or Wild West gunfights? - the list goes on. Equally the whole concept for war games can be fictional; for example, a mid 18th century European conflict, where the forces of the 'emperor' and the 'elector' are locked in an armed struggle.

If a particular period interests you, it can probably be war gamed.

How many players?

As many as you like, given the available space around the war game table and the room in which it is situated. Two players is a good and convenient number, although it is possible to play war games on one's own. War

gaming is a sociable hobby and there are many war game clubs around the world, so there is probably one fairly near to where you live. Some clubs advertise their presence in the windows of local shops or libraries, or these days often have their own website. Any club worth its salt will take new members on board and show them just how war gaming works and how its members play.

The soldiers

War game figures are commercially available in a number of sizes, from 2mm to 54mm, the size being measured from the figure's eyes to the soles of the feet. Such figures are cast in metal, usually lead with a varying tin content, or pewter. Many war gamers have several armies in different sizes in different periods, but each figure size has its devotees - 6mm figures are ideal for those war gamers without much playing or storage area, while 15, 20, 25 and 28mm are generally the most popular sizes, although a growing number of war gamers enjoy using the traditional 54mm toy soldiers in their games. There are numerous companies in the UK producing metal figures and many more worldwide, notably in Australia, Italy, Spain and the USA. Few shops sell war game figures, but most companies offer a mail order service. The figures are supplied as unpainted, bare metal castings that the purchaser cleans up, undercoats and paints in appropriate uniforms, but we are starting to get ahead of ourselves. To provide some idea of prices, a 28mm metal infantryman currently (late 2005) costs about 90p-£1, a mounted cavalryman £2-£2.50p, an artillery piece £2.75-£5. The smaller size figures cost less, while the larger 54mm traditional toy soldiers are much more expensive.

Plastic or polythene figures are also available, but usually only in 20mm or 54mm sizes. These are supplied in boxes of around 40 of the smaller size or eight 54mm figures. *Games Workshop* have outlets in most high streets these days and sell only their own ranges of fantasy (ie non-historical) figures in 28mm, both in hard plastic and metal, as well as 10mm metal figures by post.

Nowadays, there surely cannot be a period of history that is not represented in some size by one or more manufacturers. Add to this fantasy and science fiction and you can begin to appreciate the sheer scale of the hobby's potential. The main focus of this introductory piece is on 'land' battles, but naval war gaming or air games should not be overlooked.

The playing area

The available playing area often governs the size of the figures used. Typically, the average (well protected) dining room table provides an adequate playing area for most size figures, the kitchen table less so and the limited area offered by a card table is really only suitable for 2mm or 6mm figures. Two areas which might look useful, the floor and the bed, are in fact useless for war games. The former cripples knees after a few moments, with domestic pets becoming a real threat; the latter will see figures fall over with the slightest movement. Equally, the garden is a non starter, not only from the 'knees and pets' aspect, but because figures will not stand on grass and soon become dirty amongst the flower beds. Back indoors we trudge.

A table tennis table provides an ideal playing surface and lucky indeed is the war gamer who has the facilities to leave such a table in situ between games. Similar sized areas can be constructed from scratch by those who are good at such things, but again may have to be put away between games. Rare indeed is the war gamer that has a room dedicated to the hobby, the centre piece of which is a magnificent war games table. Typically, such a

table might be eight or twelve feet long and perhaps five feet wide (any wider, and players with average length arms will not be able to reach the middle of the playing area - a point to bear in mind).

The scenery

A war game played out on a bare surface will be rather dull and visually unappealing, so some items of scenery are needed to add to the look of the thing. First, a green(-ish) coloured cloth laid over the playing area converts the dining room table into a verdant pasture or whatever. The cloth can be an old sheet dyed a suitable colour, or a commercially available thin felt mat, available in sand (desert), green (arable), light grey (for futuristic games) or blue (for naval games). One way of producing hills is to place books under such a cloth to produce visually interesting arrangements. This looks good, but cloth areas stretching down from the top of the 'hill' to the table top will sag if the larger size metal figures are placed on them. Making hills from Plaster of Paris, once hugely popular, has largely fallen into disuse as the production involves a lengthy and messy process and the finished product is both heavy and fragile. Stepped hills are generally used nowadays, with one contour being placed on top of another to produce the required height and size of hill. This 'stepped' method means that figures will easily stand anywhere on the hill, but the players are required to visualise the slopes. Such items are readily available commercially, but are fairly easy to make from polystyrene tiles, thin wood, or, for 2mm figures, carpet tiles. Trees add to the appearance of a war game table. Again, these are commercially available, either from terrain manufacturers, or model railway shops, in a variety of scales. There are many ways of making one's own model trees, but given the relative cheapness and fine appearance of the commercial product, it really isn't worth the effort. The same arguments could equally be applied to hedgerows, fencing and 'stone' walls.

Roads and rivers are again commercially available, painted or unpainted, in sections of varying shapes, lengths and widths. Brown (roads) or blue (rivers) sticky tape can be used and has the advantage of being easily (?) removable, but it does look just like tape...

Any buildings placed on the war game table must be of the same scale as the figures: obvious perhaps, but a point to bear in mind. There are many sources of suitable buildings from commercially made and painted splendid edifices usually modelled in resin, through self assembly kits in resin or plastic - it's well worth looking in your local model railway stockist - via 'build your own' card models, often available from museum or tourist shops, to totally scratch-built items produced by the war gamer. Such buildings can be as complex or simple as required within the builder's skill and budget, but all the buildings have to be fairly robust, for unlike the model railway enthusiast, the war gamer nearly always has to clear away and store scenic items between games, so everything has to withstand a fair amount of handling.

It is important not to have too much scenery: after all, the figures are the focal point of the war game and they need space in which to fight and manoeuvre. Large items such as castles or walled towns look great, but are simply too big for the average table, unless the war gamer is re-enacting a siege or whatever - here the 6mm aficionados will point out the benefits of their diminutive figure size which does make the use of larger pieces a viable proposition.

Painting the figures

Having briefly touched on the scenery, let's return to the figures that are going to march and fight across our open pasture land/built up area or whatever.

As noted earlier, the figures are supplied unpainted. Now, there are specialist painters who will either paint your own figures for you, or who will sell ready painted units or even armies. Given the labour-intensive nature of such work, such a service costs money, usually a lot of money. If you really feel that you can't paint figures very well, you are wealthy or you haven't the time to paint, then to unpack a box full of painted figures ready for instant action is a thrilling if expensive experience.

The figures need to be cleaned up and any stray points etc as a result of the moulding/casting process removed. They benefit from a good wash in soapy water, as per washing up, to remove any traces of grease which will repel paint.

The figures are then attached to a temporary base such as a 12" ruler using Blu-Tac or similar, so that they are held firmly in place, but can be easily removed after painting. Now the figures are undercoated using either a black, white or grey spray, such as might be used for car bodywork paint (it is important to both wear a mask when spraying, and to work in a well ventilated area). Equally the undercoat can be brushed on, but obviously this process is more time-consuming.

Once the undercoat is dry - this depends on the spray used - the painting proper can begin. The main types are acrylic, enamel and oil paints. Acrylic (matt) paints are probably the most popular as they are relatively cheap - about £1.50 for a 12ml jar - and are available in a huge range of colours. The paint stays wet sufficiently long enough for colours to be mixed if required, but dries fairly quickly to a tough finish. Enamel paints (matt or gloss) were all the rage some years ago, but have fallen behind of late. The range of colours is good, but the paints take longer to dry than acrylics and slow the process down. Prices are about on a par with acrylics. Oil paints are expensive, but readily permit mixing, shading etc, although taking ages to dry. As in most things, individuals will have their own preference, both in type of paint and manufacturer.

Paint brushes are expensive, as only the best will do. The brush-point is essential for fine work such as faces; as brushes become older they can be used for larger areas, such as coats, or horses. Older still and they can be used for undercoating - get value from your brush! Brushes can be purchased from art shops, model shops and some stationers but seek advice and try to buy the best you can afford. Once painted, the figures can be left as they are or painted with either matt or gloss clear varnish to further preserve the paint and colours.

Finally, the figures are mounted in groups on bases made from thickish card (eg beer mats) or balsa wood. Just how many figures and in what arrangement will depend on the size of the figures and the rules that are to be used. Most rules suggest bases and how many figures of which type to set on each base. The bases can be painted green and left - and there's nothing wrong with that - but equally they can be enhanced, for example by having white woodwork adhesive carefully applied to the base around (not on!) the figures and then being sprinkled with cage bird sand. Once set, the glue is transparent and the sand can be painted (use a very old or cheap brush for this) a suitable colour, producing a very pleasing effect.

Uniforms

Just what colour to paint the figures is based on reference to uniform books of one's chosen period, from the bare flesh and golden armour of the ancient period, through the very varied and colourful uniforms of the Napoleonic period to the functional khaki and field grey of the Second World War. Books on uniform proliferate; any local library will have some on their shelves and can obtain more for you through the library system.

Equally, if you wish to paint up a completely fictitious army, then any colour of your choice can be used: it's entirely up to you.

Further reading

We have seen that amongst other subjects, war gaming can embrace the study of military history, strategy, tactics, weapon capabilities and uniforms. The local library will have some useful titles, including books on war gaming itself, the internet will produce results, and there are specialist military book dealers who provide a mail order service. There are also a couple of monthly hobby magazines, *Wargames Illustrated* and *Miniature Wargames*, that provide colourful and interesting articles, as well as carrying advertisements from hobby related companies. These are both available from most newsagents, particularly the larger outlets, or by subscription.

In a short piece such as this, I can't hope to do any more than scratch the surface of this fascinating hobby, but I hope that sufficient information has been included either to answer some of the questions or to inspire you to find out more.

Online Role-playing Communities

JIM KEMENY and JANET SAVAGE discuss the collaborative element in MMORPGs ...

GLOBETROTTER'S article in Issue 115, *On Screen: the competitive element in MMORPGs*, is certainly correct to point out the one-sided emphasis on fighting skills in this genre and the intense competitiveness it involves. Most players play for the thrill of exploring dungeons, killing monsters and looting their possessions, or killing other players' characters in wars or gladiatorial contests. However, there is much more to these games than that. In this article we want to take a closer look at what else can be done in MMORPGs, and particularly a very different - and in many ways more traditional - understanding of what is meant by 'role-playing' that places a lot of reliance on collaboration between players rather than competition.

There are obvious alternative roles to fighting, such as merchant, priest, and craft workers. Craft workers in particular provide important services to fighters by making armour and weapons. But there are also ordinary peaceful citizens, poor and leading rather humdrum lives, like farmers, fishers, beggars, cooks, entertainers, bards, detectives, cartographers, scribes, monks and gardeners. And there are also some independent traditional craft workers (smiths, tailors and the like) that are the player's main character and not just an 'alt' - a secondary character to provide the fighter main character with war gear.

When the first author of this article wanted to join a MMORPG and was looking at the games on offer, **Ultima Online**

<http://www.uo.com>

appeared partly because it was based on a well-developed in-game history or story-line originating in pre-computer times. This was adapted to online gaming involving a gem of immortality that shattered, creating shards (servers) and facets, dark (Felucca) and light (Trammel), named after the two moons of the world. The latter in particular was of interest because it was intended for pvm and consensual pvp, in contrast to free-for-all player-killing on Felucca.

But most important, Trammel was the home of a number of substantial groups of role-players. Several shards in the USA - Pacific, Catskills, Great Lakes - and most heavily used of all, Europa - have a large number of collaborative role-players who devise carefully-balanced rules of engagement, discussed and decided based on consensual combat and interaction.

Collaborative role-players often have their own umbrella organisation or at least their own forums. So, for example, western North America (Pacific shard) has the Pacific Role-playing Community

www.theprc.com/vb/

Europe (Europa shard) has a group of guilds in CoRE (Community of Role-players, Europa): www.f4g.net/vb/forumdisplay.php?f=75

and an even larger number of independent guilds who nevertheless all



interact and communicate with each other and with CoRE. Many of the players running these role-playing guilds and groups are dedicated veterans, and it takes a lot of commitment in time and effort, as the second author of this article can testify.

The guilds cover almost every conceivable activity: knightly orders, armies and militia, city states, player-run towns and villages, trades associations and merchant guilds, undercover organisations for spies and assassins, nobles, crafters, serfs, mercenaries, rangers, bandits, thieves, pirates, elves, orcs, undead and many, many more.

What distinguishes this kind of role-playing from merely taking on the role of a fighter or mage? The fact is that a game that exclusively focuses on hack-and-slay quickly palls. There is a limit to how many balrogs and dragons you can slay before boredom sets in. The companies marketing this kind of game do 'up the ante' periodically, introducing new lands and dungeons and more dangerous monsters. But the problem of holding player interest in the long run remains.

What role-players do is to add a further layer of complexity and 'reality' (if that's the right word in this context) to hack-and-slay. They create a social, political and cultural world that the game otherwise lacks, based on the in-game cities and towns, which to most non-role-players are simply places to buy and sell. The main instrument for this is the guild system, which is extended from the original concept of a group of friends fighting together. Guilds are created to provide a player-designed political system, with a player-ruler and a hierarchy of political power, often including several classes - a military arm of course, but also clergy and a craft worker classes, and perhaps also a secret service. Players choose a path and work their way up the hierarchy.

In addition, there are numerous other routes into MMORPG role-playing. The loner who does not want to join a guild or guild members who want to do their own thing have a wide variety of options. They may buy a plot of land and build a tavern to attract adventurers to slake their thirst after a hard fight, and even employ entertainers to draw more players to the tavern. They may build up a library of books or a museum of rare items and artefacts, or start a farm. The possibilities are only limited by player imagination. But the viability of this approach depends on the existence of a community of collaborating role-players: characters to discuss the latest war or political intrigue.

Importantly, then, role-players have their characters talk to each other. An important principle in all role-play is to talk 'in character' and not use shorthand, like tbh (to be honest) or alpha-numeric expressions like n00b. Role-playing communities also avoid alpha-numeric character names or the names of the best known fiction heroes like Gandalf, going instead for names reflecting the world the characters inhabit or their profession.

For creating a character is not just a matter of selecting skills. Rather it is a way of bringing that character to life in a convincing and aesthetically-satisfying manner. Players usually think out a background for their character, often just a paragraph or so, but sometimes much more, perhaps including a simple genealogy and even a written background family history. And in everything they do or say they try to put themselves in their character's situation and act out their role.

Members of the role-playing community put on frequent 'events', often in the evenings or weekends when more players are online. These can take many different forms, apart of course from the ubiquitous guild 'hunts'. They may be a training session for the soldiers of a guild, a regular tavern night put on by the tavern-owner, fairs/markets where crafters sell their wares (including black markets!), a religious service, a wedding, a birthday party, a story-reading discussion-circle in a library, a play, a sports competition, a competition with judges for the best bard's tale with a large prize for the winner, or gladiatorial contests. There are also scenarios devised around a storyline and played out over several sessions, with an open-ended outcome to be decided by warfare or other conflict. With a lot of dedication and enthusiasm role-players use the basic on-line game, building on it to create a living world of characters and institutions.

These roleplaying communities within MMORPGs can include hundreds of players, and many get to know each other through on-line messaging, chat-rooms and out-of-game meets. It's probably fair to say that traditional monster-fighting still comprises a part of the interest of these roleplayers - for many, perhaps even a significant part. But they have the commitment to widen their gaming interests in collaborative projects and colonise what are relatively small corners of games that otherwise cater for much larger numbers of competitive and purely hack-and-slay players. The existence of a facet in Ultima Online designed to minimise player-killers helps a lot. That many choose a long-established game with depth and a wide variety of items, even though the graphics may be inferior to the latest MMORPGs, says much for player ingenuity and inventiveness.

There are things which make Ultima Online particularly suited for role-playing. The first, and perhaps most important, is that it's not a levelling game. A completely new character can go anywhere (although the depths of dungeons are perhaps not advisable!) and role-play anything they like. Of course, having some skill makes it easier - you can call yourself a wise old mage full of ancient wisdom, but then being unable even to cast a fifth circle spell reliably is a bit of a let down. But that's where acting comes into play, and UO allows all characters to interact, however skilled or experienced in game, which makes the role-playing very quick and easy to get into. It also means that veteran players are not forced to do boring repetitive low level events just to interact with new players and get them up to higher levels. It therefore encourages communities for all players at whatever level of skill, with very in-depth immersive roleplaying, and allows for a great deal of character continuity and development.

The second is the player housing. There have been times when houses were very expensive and difficult to come by on some servers. But times are changing a little, and the sheer fun of designing and decorating your own dwelling (a country house, or fairytale castle, or evil cultists' temple, or museum, or tavern, or old witch's hut, or library, or guardhouse, or orc fort, or tree house, or the only limit is imagination) is a big plus point

for many people. Furniture can be crafted and many decoration items are readily available, flowers and trees can be grown and placed to make gardens, and having in-game storage other than just a bank box is very useful!

The third is being able to put things down. This might sound silly, but we don't know of another online game where you can actually put out a table and chairs with food, drink and candlesticks for a romantic picnic in a forest clearing; or set up a marketplace with stalls selling all manner of goods, all of which can be displayed; or build a barricade with boxes; or make pictures with pieces of coloured cloth; or play a game like bagball ... it's a great part of UO and makes the environment far more flexible. Being able to have an element of influence over surroundings like that is a huge bonus for role-playing.

In short, role-playing in UO goes beyond designing a character with a particular set of skills by creating key elements of everyday life. Politics and power are dimensions of MMORPGs that are easy to overlook but add great depth as well as human and management skills to an otherwise often soul-less game. The fact that the graphics are average means that they don't distract from role-playing, and - importantly for many on low budgets - the game does not demand the latest in computer technology.

Top 5 rated current MMOs

Ratings courtesy of www.mmorpg.com

1: Eve Online

EVE takes place in a cluster of stars far from mankind's original habitat, planet Earth. How far away, and whether or not that cradle of civilization still exists, is a mystery. Humans arrived through a natural wormhole and, gazing up upon an alien sky they had never seen, were completely unable to determine where this new world was located. From the New Eden solar system, where the gate of EVE once led to the old world, humans expanded in all directions at a furious pace, exploring and colonizing rapidly.

2: Guild Wars

Meet new friends in towns or outposts, form a party, and then go tackle a quest together. Your party always has its own unique copy of the quest map, so camping, kill-stealing, and long lines to complete quests are all things of the past. Within a quest you have unprecedented freedom and power to manipulate the world around you: your magic can build bridges and open up new pathways, or it can burn down forests and tear the ground asunder.

3: City of Villains

The standalone sequel to critically acclaimed City of Heroes®. Using a large assortment of new powers, abilities, and customization options, players can now experience sinister game play from the other side of the mask. With diabolical craft and guile, players forge new super-powered villain characters in an attempt to dominate the world.

4: World of Warcraft

Four years have passed since the aftermath of Warcraft III: Reign of Chaos, and a great tension now smolders throughout the ravaged world of Azeroth.

5: City of Heroes

Take on the roles of super powered heroes, fight villains, and help create the story. Prequel to City of Villains (see above)

More details on all these and more, from www.mmorpg.com

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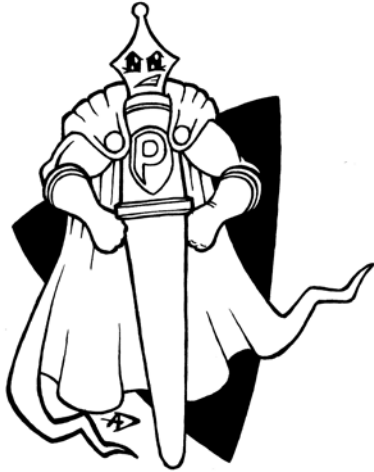
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THE

The Competitive Element in MMORPGs

I thought Globetrotter's view on MMORPGs was bizarre. Don't get me wrong, I've yet to play a MMORPG (looks fun but not really got the time). However, the thrust of the article appears to be that because skill isn't the only factor, the genre isn't worthwhile.

What a bizarre concept! Most games have elements of luck, and it's how you use this luck that helps determine how good a player you are. It seems to me that if in an RPG (and a MMORPG is probably the same) you meet a character much more powerful (been playing longer maybe, but skill will have determined how much the character has gained over that time) then you react accordingly - diplomacy, running away, that sort of thing!

In strategy games - like Fall of Rome - if you get a drop out position next to you, that can help. But use of clever diplomacy and good tactics will be needed to realise that advantage. A great player in FOR will not always win, although it's probably fair to say a very poor player will never win.

I love games for the diplomacy, strategy and challenge. but games would be a lot poorer without a certain element of luck.

John Woods

Feudal Lords: last issue's review

One thing I noticed reading over the article that I submitted, is that I incorrectly wrote that a non-player fief will give a player 'up to half' of their knights when I should have written 'half or more' knights. This is a really small error, and if you have already sent the article to the printer, it really doesn't matter much.

Michael Neal

[We're happy to publish your correction here in this issue. Thanks for letting us know.]

PC in games

So your editorial comment about black and white referred to Shadows Over Camelot? Hmm, I'm not sure. I would say that (at least in Malory) the Round Table includes Saracen (Muslim) knights, Sir Palomides and a couple more. And in real life everyone admired Saladin as a chivalrous enemy - presumably why Malory put them in. How's that for a much more PC Middle Ages than is normally recognised?

Hmm, perhaps I've seen the very pious 'Kingdom of Heaven' film once too often.

Paul Appleby

[Well, I'd rather not see black used to denote evil in games...]

Does anyone know?

Can anyone tell me what's happened to Geoff Squibb, who used to run Star Empires II?

Chris Dempsey, Spellbinder Games

Feedback on Issue 115

The rating for last issue was exceptionally high, at a ritzy 8.75. Favourite articles were the Serim Ral diary, the interview with Fall of Rome's Rick McDowell, Kosumi, Shadows over Camelot, Rumours from the Front, Eric Ridley's comments and Mighty Pen. Nobody singled out any article as boring, though not everyone agrees with Globetrotter's controversial comments about MMORPGs ('I love games for the diplomacy, strategy and challenge. but games would be a lot poorer without a certain element of luck' - **John Woods**; 'Surely if people with "no lives" choose to spend a lot of time on a game they should succeed?' - **Paul Appleby**). Nobody suggests any particular changes we should make. Well, not yet, anyway.

Question 5 asked how we should promote discussion of gaming issues. I was happy that nobody favoured option (c), that we should only print opinions that we agree with ourselves. 'That'd be dull,' says **Bill Moore**. Most of you thought (a), that we should try to include an opposite opinion in the same issue, seemed reasonable. Others felt that option (b), always pointing out when we disagree with a correspondent, would be 'rather too heavy - we can make our own minds up' - **Ed Chorley**. There's some support for option (d), concluding a discussion after three or four issues: 'Otherwise you're going to get those endless wrangles discussion boards are prone to and it's going to get pretty boring for anyone but the people involved' - **Bill Moore**.

Question 6 asked about our coverage: should we keep new games for Newsdesk (option (a)), only review them by an experienced gamer (option (b)), cover games mainly by game diaries (option (c)), cover older games by hints and tips (option (d))? Most of you expected to see new games mentioned first of all in Newsdesk, then reviewed soon afterwards. I was amused by **Paul Appleby**'s comment - 'I've got used to your "experienced" reviewers - unless something's really a totally new concept, s/he'll have seen something to compare it to.' **Phil Mason** feels that it's helpful for a reviewer 'to give us some idea of how experienced he is: I'm happy to read the views of a newcomer, as long as he says this is what he is.' Oh, and Bill Moore adds that 'newcomers to old games can be interesting too. And "hints and tips" articles that are too technical can get very boring. Any such writer should always bear in mind that most of the readership won't have played that specific game.'

This is all helpful stuff, guys. I sometimes need to advise our writers on what I think you'd like to read.

Question 7 asked which games we should cover in the Turning Digital series and we had an equal number of votes for the games we actually suggested.

Question 8 asked whether we should develop a ratings system for reviewers to use, but there's no great enthusiasm for this. I'm inclined to believe myself that it would distract attention from what I like to think of as well-balanced criticism.

Many thanks to all who've sent me your comments!

Have your say on this issue!

1 - Please rate this issue from 1 (soggy) to 10 (superlative).

2 - Which articles/sections did you most enjoy, and why?

3 - Which bored you, and why?

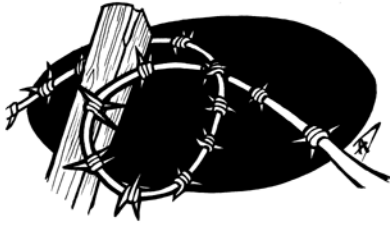
4 - What do you think of the new approach to PBM News and our proposed treatment of general gaming news? There's a discussion of this on the Editorial Comment page.

5 - With Christmas just round the corner, is gaming becoming more or less a form of entertainment enjoyed by your family?

6 - You may have noticed that we find it hard to be consistent in what we call MMORPGs, MMOGs, MMOs etc. Do you have any preferences, yourself?

7 - Is face-to-face contact becoming less important when playing games?

(a) I prefer playing games when I can see my fellow players in the same room, (b) I'm happy to play a game without ever meeting the other players, (c) I'm happy to play by email, or online, but I'm always glad of a chance to meet players socially, too.



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 September 15th from: Paul Appleby, Neil Edge, Patrick Gleeson, Michael Grant, Derek Hawthorne, Colin Forbes, Bill Moore, Carol Mulholland

TURN-BASED GAMES

Chaos Trail (Simon Williams)

Carol Mulholland - 'I'm finding the depth of Simon's game world and the skill of his writing impressive. It's a fast moving game, too, with plenty of possible decisions in it. My character has managed to escape the Watchers, phew, though this may be only a temporary respite. Her new friend, Seneth, has led her into the Hall of a Guild called the Guild of Portent and Divination: this doesn't sound too promising, but in its library Seneth introduces her to a beautiful woman - perhaps part-elvish - who seems both wise and truthful. My character is asked what she desires most, and she admits that it's to discover what the evil is that oppresses her people, and whether it can be effectively resisted. A dangerous desire to have, right?'

DungeonWorld (Madhouse)

Main Module

Mike Grant - 'At last my catacomb wanderings have led somewhere to truly test this old Dwarf's skill-at-arms! A den of murderous bandits filled to bursting with brigands, berserkers, archers, zombies and giant rats all rush to test my enchanted battle-axe. Let them seek their deaths at the hands of a true Dwarven berserker!

A suit of fine magical armour has caught my eye at a nearby traders, though there's still a long way to go for that kingly 3000 gold price mark! - Grishnak Axehand, the Male Dwarven Warrior'

Bill Moore - 'After much seemingly aimless pony-trekking, astonishingly my dryad, Tartrazine has finally reached her objective, the fabled "Dungeon in the Sky". Unfortunately everyone and his uncle seems to have got there before me - including what appears to be the entire diplomatic mission from the mysterious province of Derwent. I'm not sure what they're doing standing on top of a cloud in the middle of nowhere? Weren't they supposed to be on the way see the Regent for some reason or other? Anyway that's of little import to the hapless Tartrazine, who, having climbed to the top of the ladder, now seems likely to get eaten by a nearby Cumulous Dragon. Wah! Any chance he's a vegetarian?'

DungeonWorld: BrokenLands

Mike Grant - 'This waterlogged dungeon level suddenly came to life with hordes of braying Bufo Warriors and slimy Giant Snails! Fortunately there are many able adventurers within the loosely knit Slythian Fellowship else we may have been quickly overrun. With the boat-summoning conundrum finally solved, we have been able to call forth a fleet of flimsy rafts known to the more nautically minded as Schilla. How we've roared with laughter at the water antics of us landlubbers! I have meditated long and hard when things have gone wrong and now feel attuned with my boat. In fact, it glides with ease towards the north-eastern shore of the lake, where much plunder bobs up and down in the dark water - Able seaman Jai of the Dragon, the Male Human Monk.'

Dungeonworld: Kyr

Bill Moore - 'And the small contingent of minotaurs presses ever eastwards, still searching for their ancestral home, wherever that may be. After the sad loss of our brother Ki-Amorim to the combined attack of a Green Screamer and a Red Wasp Swarm on the outskirts, we have finally reached the City of Splendours, the magnificent capital of Kyr. There it appears some munificent person has set up a hall of training, the "Horn & Hoof", specifically for our kind, where we can learn exciting new skills like "Whole Lotta Bull". Or we could, if we had a gold coin between us which, of course, we don't... Pralix, Minotaur.'

DungeonWorld: Frontier

Mike Grant - 'Opening the large Sarcophagus unleashed a foul Vampyre into our midst! It injured many within our small band, yet we were finally able to lay it to eternal rest. The rose emblem it bore has raised questions amongst those of the White Tower as they also carry this ancient symbol and according to them no-one of their order has travelled here before now. There are many other sarcophagi and chests to be opened, so our work will be long, arduous and perilous indeed. Hellish voices of the damned warn of a mighty host within this unholy tomb, all howling for our blood! Our rag-tag company has made camp in a passageway for mutual protection and the sharing of vital water supplies. For many the thirst grows strong to the point where we may soon be forced to retreat back up the stairs and onwards to the only drinkable water source we have found within these ancient ruins. Despite all the troubles and concerns, morale is high, with old friends joining the camp each day - Anakine Oakhart (Nature Girl) the Female Human Ranger.'

DungeonWorld: Daemonrift

Mike Grant - 'The compassionate hands of Goddess Marial the Queen of Healing have guided me always. And now after many years of arduous training with my sister Crusaders, I am finally ready to journey forth alone. They have gifted me with armour and shield to defend both the weak and myself in times of need. And blessed me with the power to heal the diseased while never succumbing to such accursed afflictions. The daemon plains are in sore need of aid without stint as the local hordes are daemon-tainted and evil to their very core! My scimitar shall teach them the error of their ways as I travel towards unknown places and dangers. Goddess Marial, guide this your humble servant in her endeavours - Llandra Silverhelm, the Crusader of Marial (Queen of Healing)'

Einstein's Lot (Ulaidh Games)

Derek Hawthorne - 'My character, Charles "Church" Ryder, is an ageing hippy who leads the Seekers of Enlightenment, a new age commune. A request for help from a friend, Jimmy, in Edinburgh was how the game started. Jimmy has disappeared, last seen going to a ruined castle late at night with a shovel. Since then there has been a murder, visits to the police station, a women's group, and the ruined castle, all of it culminating with Church having tea with Anna, whose house is apparently dedicated to the Triple Goddess and in the company of Bridget, a rather attractive woman who claims to be an Elf. The turns are very well written and the lack of a deadline suits my erratic submission of turns.'

Carol Mulholland - 'Alison thinks that she can hear the voice of the Queen of Elfland summoning her, but manages to resist it. At least, to begin with: when she awakens early in the morning, she finds that she needs to go out to buy food at the nearby petrol station. She takes her precious, if mysterious, ank with her, but is going out on her own a dangerous mistake? Perhaps, because a woman who can only be the Queen accosts her and asks why Alison wants to meet her. Alison is too cautious to eat anything that the Queen offers, but has a strange vision of her life falling in ruins unless she asks the Queen for help...'

Glory of the King (Agema Publications)

Paul Appleby sends a comment reacting to last issue's diary - 'I'm still in Glory of the King, as it's now called, and I have run across Alex McLellan's character, so that was fascinating. However, I have to say (defensively) that yes, all Enlightenment Europe does admire Switzerland, but universal education is *unbelievably* expensive and my state (Liege-Cologne) doesn't even have financial problems. As Prince-Archbishop I'm not sure it doesn't violate the catholic concept of "subsidiarity", too.

Can I say what a superb GM we have - I missed a turn when I was on holiday and it was one I should have paid on, but he's fine about it.'

Kosumi (www.kosumi.com)

Colin Forbes - 'Just started my second game of this excellent Japanese-based fantasy strategy TBG. An exceptionally pretty interface (yes, this one is playable only with a computer) makes entering orders a joy, even when one

of your supposed allies has stitched you up. My previous game had next to no diplomacy, but the new one is quite the opposite, somewhat cut-throat in fact. I do not understand why this game has not been much more successful. Maybe it's a slow-burner - I hope so! A lot of thought and work has gone into Kosumi, including some excellent help files and strategy guides to get you through those first few turns which can be tricky in an unfamiliar game. GM James Acres is both efficient and friendly. Highly recommended.'

Lands of Adrohil (www.androhil.ws)

Mike Grant - 'I ask for princely armour and weapon and they give me flimsy leather hauberk and feeble hand axe! Where are the armaments of my ancient forefathers? Tools of war fit for a noble Dwarven hero? As there appear to be none within the poor village of Norbridge I will seek for them within the local Haunted City where undead roam without care. They shall soon be in for a harsh axe-lesson! - Thelor the Grim, the Dwarven Axeman'

Bill Moore - 'Decided to take the plunge and signed up for this PBEM as a stalwart dwarf. So far have survived an encounter with goblins (not too tough) and some nasty spiders, whose hide was too tough for my axe and whose bite caused temporary paralysis. Have finally emerged from the tunnel I was walking down only to be ambushed by four dire wolves. My sometime companion, the Elven Shaman Necros, has been badly wounded. Can I reach him in time before the wolf, Ginger (I wonder how I know that's his name?), finishes him off...

This is a fairly simple game, but does have three points that make it stand out from the rest - the snazzy colour graphics, the way the program automatically draws a map of your travels and the "near standard english" syntax you send orders in (the latter being especially noteworthy as it's not the GM's first language!). Not one that's going to take up a lot of your time, but certainly worth a look.'

Middle Earth PBM (*M.E. Games Ltd*)

Colin Forbes - 'Three cheers for Team Andraste! Our rag-tag bag of Greeks, an Englishman, a Yorkshireman, a Scot and a Dane have bounced back after two defeats to resume our earlier habit of winning games in double quick time, this time as Free Peoples in the 1650 scenario. The next game has already started and is going well. Games seem to be starting up regularly, and work on the Fourth Age scenario set-up appears to be paying dividends in terms of game starts. The service from ME Games remains superb.'

Quest (*KJC Games*)

Mike Grant - 'KJC are still working on their planned new Magic and Miracle system. Word is that it should be ready very soon. Players are certainly looking forward to testing the changes, which should see Mage and Priest heavy set-ups making a strong comeback against the currently dominating Fighter ones.'

Quest Game 31

The grand Nalarlia arena tournament is nearing the closing stages. Law of the Land of Bloody Honour, Whispered Dreams of the Scrolls and Dogs Dinner of the Royal Dragons Alliance are all through to the next round. Only the battle between Ruin of Angels and their fellow Haus Tepes members, Heaven Torn Asunder, remains to be fought. Heaven Torn Asunder were last year's champions so it should be a good carnage-filled battle.

The Cataclysm alliance of Thieves has just had a rogue's competition within their home city of Larochele. It has proven popular, so I'm sure another will be arranged next year. Deo Volente stole (S order) 11520 gold, earning prize money of 10,000 gold. Chaos Lords stole (SI order) the equivalent of +30 items, earning prize money of 10,000 gold. Thieves Guild successfully scouted (SP order) 22 other parties, earning prize money of 5,000 gold.

A few enterprising players have pulled together to begin production of an in-game newsletter called The Eagle Eye. It includes entertaining Nalarlia news from various sources; an Agony Witch section where readers get to ask Grinning Greystalker for help and advice with their love life and deeper, darker matters, of course. With the Greased Goblin Grappling season just underway you can expect full reports on the contest. Four Alliances are already represented and I'm sure more will enter shortly. And let us not forget the pearls of wisdom from various luminaries like the delusional Elven God Lord Glendor, Elkhart's only out Elf Lithe Lysander, the epic drunkard Hafgood and many other slightly unhinged characters. It is also a place for Alliances to show their wares to tempt as yet unaffiliated players and for equipment to be bought and sold via Vinnie's exchange and mart. Issues 1 and 2 are currently available to view or download in PDF format at: <http://newsletter.fambon.com/>

A monster mashing competition is due to begin in December. The idea is

to kill as many different classes of Monsters as possible within a set timescale. The entrance fee is 5000 gold with decent gold prizes on offer for the top three slayers. Depending on the quantity of entrants, extra prizes may be awarded for most kills in a turn, strongest monster killed, weakest monster killed, rarest monster killed, most kills by a particular character, etc. Should be an exciting contest indeed and repeated at least yearly.

A new event simply entitled Terror Island is being organised by the Union of Shadows alliance. It'll be a chance for alliance groups and a few independents to show their monster slaying capabilities against various creatures of the Elemental class on an out-of-the-way island to the northwest of Nalarlia. Some of the beasts of this type can prove very tough opponents even for experienced groups! There's a steep 50,000 gold entrance fee and an extremely limited number of places with the prizes on offer definitely making it worthwhile. If this event goes well then it may become annual, open to more parties and with different themed monster types.

The Royal Dragons Alliance (103) have a new website at:

<http://royaldragonrda.tripod.com/>

The nature-loving, Molwanh-worshipping Scrolls (111) have a website at:

http://www.geocities.com/gatherers31/The_Scrolls.html

Serim Ral (*Incubus Designs*)

Bill Moore - 'Serim Ral SR26 Ancient Realms: Am now (turn 23) still concentrating on picking up neutral cities as even at this stage active player-run and player dropout cities are too tough a target for most of my armies. I think I may have to consolidate my forces into one mega-army to tackle them, despite the obvious risks of putting all my eggs in one basket (ie that it's going to leave my empire relatively undefended, should some intrepid soul attack it from the rear). Either that or my thieves are going to have to do a lot of sabotage work on the city defences first.'

MEGAGAMES

Paul Appleby - I'm on a coach going to the biggest Megagame Ever (ever, ever). Well, perhaps not, but 151 players - not bad for a face to face game, eh? Once again I've been overlooked for a household name position - it looks probable I'll be Chinese Communist General Chu Te, though if Mao doesn't show... They never finally assign roles till they know who's coming. This game's so high-level a representation of World War 2 (or "current affairs" as my mum would call it!) that generals are on the bottom rung.' (www.megagame-makers.org.uk)
[Paul described Megagames in his article in issue 111.]

MMOs

EVE Online (*CCP Games*)

[Also reviewed in this issue]

Wayne - 'I've been playing *Eve Online* for nigh on two years and to be frank, it is the worst online game I have ever played. Why?

Well, first of all is the training system. It is real time: ie if your character takes ten days to learn an increment in a skill, then it takes ten real days to do so. So while you are sleeping eating and generally not playing the game your character's skills are 'progressing'. It doesn't take any in-game commitment to develop your character: just start training and let the clock start ticking.

Speaking of the training system, it is clumsy and uninformative. For example, to fly a certain ship you have to have about six different skill sets trained - which can take anything up to 40+ days in real life, and once you can fly the ship you find that to actually fly it with any gusto, you need to train another skill up which will take you anything up to another 30+ days!

Speaking of flying, there isn't any real flying. You point and move your ship in that general direction and that's it. No joystick needed - that would involve real-time physical skills, which a majority of these players despise. You warp in, warp out, then point your ship in a certain direction and get it to move near it or orbit it. Woot - not!

People compare this game favourable with *Elite* - well, apart from the complete inability to fly your ship. This game is nothing like *Elite* if the truth be told. Take trading, for example - In *Elite*, you could fly round the universe trading with loads of NPC traders. You could do this in *Eve*, but when they patched, things changed. Before the patch I could find stuff at disparate prices

in the same system and make a small killing. Post patch you need decent skills to trade stuff properly - remember skills take time - and the small killings I made are gone.

To get money you mainly have to mine. Now, Eve players will tell you there is no 'grinding' in Eve - ie relentlessly a-killing load of monsters to gain experience - and that's true. But what they don't tell you is that you have to grind for cash. Mining in Eve is the most soul-destroying thing I have ever come across. Basically, you sit there in a ship fitted with mining lasers - which go buzz buzz buzz - and point them at an asteroid. In a few minutes ore will be placed in your cargo hold. But your hold in a mining ship is so small that it can only contain a minimal amount of ore! So you have to jettison a container - 'a can' in game speak - and transfer your ore to that. Then your can is full, you leave your can there, nip back to your home planet, pick up your 'indy ship' - a hauler that is really slow - and then pick up your ore and take it to a planet with a market, preferably a market that won't rip you off for processing and selling it. Oh yeah, and at random intervals 'npc rats' - game speak for Pirates - attack you - yawn.

Eve players will mainly tell you how complicated this game is. Poppyclock: it's not complicated, it's confusing. Take ship construction. A ship has three types of slots: high medium and low - and depending on the ship you buy, it can be configured in different ways for combat, mining or exploration. Your skills also affect how you fly the ship and equip it. A lot of the items your ship can use have the same icon as something else or otherwise do something slightly different. Basically, if you like to tinker around with energy requirements, computer capacity, and 'cap' - the total amount of stuff you can have running at one time before your ship shuts down: very nice in combat situations - and balance them up and fine tune them to the max, this game is for you - but as old gamers will know, Elite was never like this.

One final gripe. Space has various safety rankings. 10 to 5 is safe - no player character can attack you. 3 to 0 is dangerous - any player can attack you. Fine, I hear you say, I'll keep out of dangerous space. Unfortunately, it's not possible. If you want precious metals, to try your hand against the top rats and generally progress in the game you have to go to these places. Oh and player groups - Corps - claim these areas as their own, and there is no in-game warning about this. So fly into the wrong zone and zap - you are no more.

Eve players will tell you how combat in Eve is the most egalitarian system in the MMOLRPG multiverse - how a newbie player with the right ship configuration can bring down an experienced player will ease - and I say that while it is possible, it is nigh on impossible. Fancy starting up and meeting a character in space who has 100,000 times your cash, much better ships and two real years player training? No I thought not. Eve players big the combat system up but they obviously haven't ever played Elite. Those that have remember those long, joystick twisting, dexterity challenging fights with NPCs that lasted for 20 mins plus. In Eve, it's mainly a case of warp in with a load of mates, unload a load of weapons on one common target - most serious Eve'rs use Teamspeak btw - and warp out again. A top player I met told me that the best example of combat he saw was in this Eve video The FOE Contract: http://mc.stylii.com/main/videos/index_thn.asp?c=1

Take a look - this is what they describe as the 'most epic and entertaining ever'. To me, it looks like a bunch of guys warping in, 'ganking' (ie all picking on one target) one or two ships and then warping out again - Elite not!

Sure the graphics are ok, there are missions to be done and being in a Corps can be fun, but overall this game is dull as dishwater. So why am I still playing? Well, it's worth the monthly fee to experience how a truly bad game can be, plus the fact that if I don't log on for a week or two, I know my character is still there, training away his latest skills!

[What do YOU think? We'd welcome further comments, from both newcomers and experienced players ...]

BOARD & CARD GAMES

Settlers of Catan (*Mayfair Games*)

Neil Edge - 'This is probably my family's favourite game. It is easy to learn and appeals to kids as well as adults. I enjoy every game and it always ends with me wishing I could have just a few more turns (unless I won.) Perfect for anyone who enjoys strategy and competition.'

Colin Forbes - 'Having played this one to death several years ago, we

brought Settlers out of mothballs the other day to teach it to a friend who had (surprisingly) never played the game, or any of the many expansions and variants. It was a great success, if you ignore the fact that the friend won both games we played! Settlers plays better as a four player game than with three players, though randomising the map tiles leads, in my opinion, to a better and more challenging game for smaller numbers of players.'

Once Upon a Time (*Atlas Games*)

[Also reviewed in this issue]

Patrick Gleeson - 'I am a fan of storytelling. I love stories because of the story, the quiet listening, the narrative, the thought, the suspense, the insights ... all sorts of reasons. I am also a gamer, running a weekly gaming group with about ten regulars, and I've been playing for some 20 odd years. This is one of the few designer games I give a huge 0 to. It is not fun *at all* as a game. It might be nice to buy it and bring it to a fifth grade classroom, hand out cards and start doing creative exercises. As a game however, the object is to race through the quickest, most cliched elements in your cards and play your last card. Other people have to listen only enough to yell out there own cards. That is neither storytelling nor gaming; even the items on the cards are boring (prince, queen, castle, etc...). If you want fun, there are many other games available, and if you want stories, there are endless stories and storytelling exercises you could use. Avoid.'

Neil Edge - 'I couldn't disagree more with Patrick's comments (we are in the same gaming group). Once Upon a Time is sheer simplicity to play, allowing gamers and non-gamers, old and young alike to join in the fun. And yes, it's an excellent family game. The games goal is create fairy tales using archetypes present in almost of these stories. You receive cards with simple story elements such as sword, princess, or door. By weaving these words into your personal tale, you place the used terms face-up in front of you, but beware if you should mention a key element present in another player's collection of cards...they can then steal the story from you. Each player at the beginning draws a random Ending card that they are trying to develop their story to, but it is no clear course as the story will be stolen again and again sending it off in unexpected directions. However the rules dictate that internal logic and continuity must be maintained. Of all the games I have on my shelf (and that is a lot) this one is consistently enjoyed and most repeatedly asked for, both in some sections of our games group, as well as being a family favourite. An amazing idea: simple execution, endlessly re-playable, and all for a bargain price. A real must have! Here's to you having a happy ever after with this game!'

Rat-a-tat Cat (*Gamewright*)

Patrick Gleeson - 'OK, so this is unashamedly a game for kids. But at this time of year, my mind turns to anything that can keep the little darlings occupied during the deathly days between Christmas and New Year. Rat-a-Tat Cat is a fun card game that requires quick counting skills and keen timing. It teaches maths concepts, like greater than and less than. As they learn the strategy for the game, kids will also begin to develop an intuitive sense of probability. Basically, rats are high, cats are low... low-down and cool, that is! Put on your poker face, then draw, swap, and sneak a peek to get rid of rats and make way for the cats. The player with the lowest score wins. Each player is drawn four face-down cards. At the beginning of each round the players get to see two of those four cards (*once*, and never again during the round). The aim of the game is to have the lowest sum possible in that four cards, thus Zero is a very good card and Nine an extremely bad one. Then each player in turn draws a card from the deck and decides whether to exchange it with one of his card or to discard it. When a player thinks his 'hand' is good enough, he can knock on the table to indicate that the round is going to end. Then each player (except the knocking one) takes another turn and then scores are revealed. You get to play a number of rounds equal to the number of players, or, if you want, a multiple of the number of players. Not knowing when the round is going to end is going to keep you on your toes!'

Galactic View

GV is a list of firms known by FLAGSHIP to be running turn-based games 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

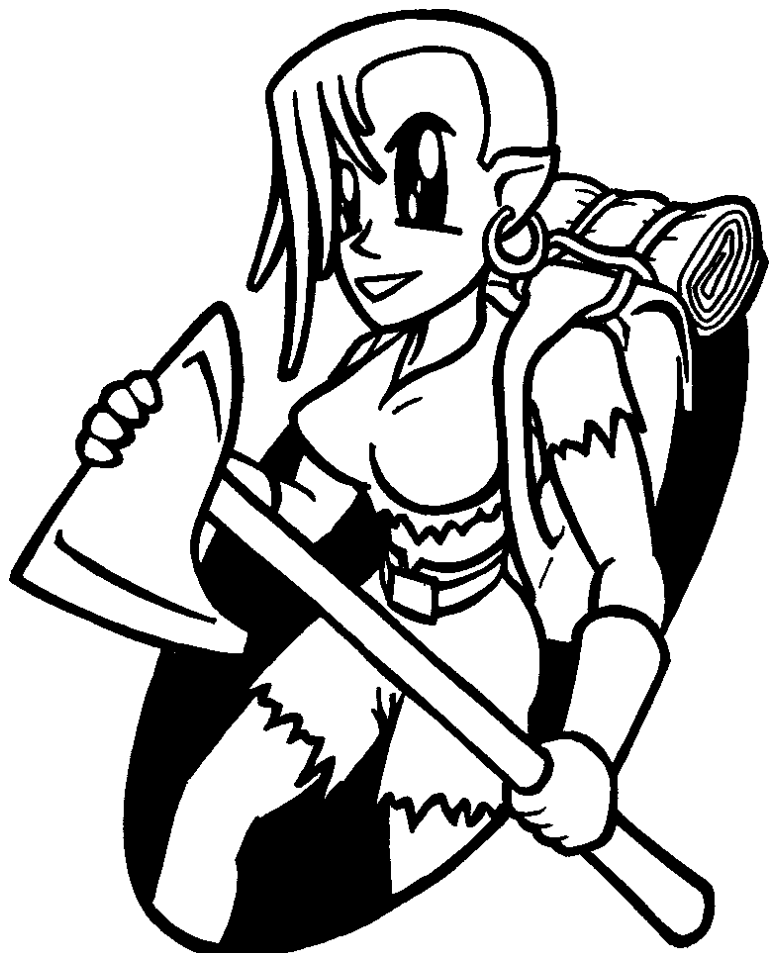
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|---|-----|
| Ab Initio Games , PO Box 605, Bromley, Kent BR2 0YQ WEB: www.pbmsports.com | McC |
| Advanced Gaming Enterprises , POB 214949, Sacramento, CA 95821, USA WEB: www.ageforfun.com | AGE |
| Agema Publications , 120 Carmel Gardens, Arnold, Nottingham, NG5 6LZ EM: agema2@tiscali.co.uk | AGM |
| Ancient Guardian Enterprises , WEB: www.agegames.com | AGG |
| Andrews, Colin , 26 Brown Edge Road, Holts, Oldham, OL4 5QG | AND |
| Arnott, Steven , WEB: www.sjasystems.co.uk/ | ARN |
| Austerlitz PBeM WEB: www.austerlitz.biz | AUS |
| Baird, Phil , 930 NE 63rd Ave, Portland, OR 97213, USA WEB: www.throneworld.com/lords/lotel1/index.html | BAI |
| Briny En Gardel (Terry Crook) , 11 Laurel Close, Burniston, Scarborough YO13 0JQ WEB: www.brinyengarde.co.uk | BRI |
| Burrows, Pete, Buzzwack PBM , 8 Magnolia Court, Beeston, Nottingham, NG9 3LG WEB: www.buzzwackpbm.freemove.co.uk | BUR |
| Chaos Trail , 22 Christopher Tye Close, Ely, Cambs., CB6 3DB WEB: www.chaostail.com | CHA |
| Clay, David , 20 Malden Close, Cramlington, Northumberland, NE23 6AY WEB: www.wilopenwar.co.uk | CLA |
| CraSiWorld , 4 Barleyfield, Clayton-le-Woods, Preston, Lancs., PR5 8JQ WEB: www.craseworld.com | CRA |
| CSPP , Alfred-Bucherstr. 63, 53115 Bonn, Germany WEB: www.the-ashes-of-empire.de (German) WEB: http://home.t-online.de/home/ashes_of_empire/ashes2.htm (English) | CSP |
| Dark Wolf Games , BCM Darkwolf, London, WC1N 3XX WEB: www.darkwolf.ie | DWG |
| Dracs Games , 21 Chipperfield Drive, Kingswood, Bristol BS15 4DP WEB: www.dracsgames.co.uk | DRC |
| Dreamworld Games WEB: www.dreamworldgames.co.uk | DRE |
| Dunks, Antony , Far Horizon, Sark, Guernsey, GY9 0SE WEB: www.sark.net/~xott | DUN |
| EMG WEB: http://members.shaw.ca/emg.pbm/emg.htm | EMG |
| Enlightened Age Entertainment , WEB: www.fallofthefame.com | EAE |
| Entertainment Plus More Games , PO Box 2578, Appleton, WI 54912, USA WEB: www.epmgames.com | EPM |
| Evans, Paul , 180 Aylsham Drive, Uxbridge UB10 8UF WEB: www.pevans.co.uk | EVA |
| Extreme Web Games WEB: http://extremewebgames.com/ | EXT |
| Faraway Games , 3 Maslem Rd, St Albans, Herts AL4 0GS WEB: www.faraway.co.uk/ | FAR |
| Flying Buffalo WEB: www.flyingbuffalo.com/ | FBI |
| Games by Mail , Bridge Street, Neston, S Wirral CH64 9UJ WEB: GamesByMail.co.uk | GBM |
| Glover, Adrian , 4 Stevanne Court, Lessness Park, Belvedere, Kent, DA17 5BG | GLO |
| Harlan, Thomas , 3210 East 23rd Street, Tucson, AR 85713, USA WEB: www.throneworld.com/lords | HAR |
| Harlequin Games , 340 North Road, Cardiff CF14 3BP WEB: www.harlequingames.com AND www.middleearthgames.com | HAQ |
| Haynes, Nic , 33 Chatsworth Road, Chichester, West Sussex, PO19 7XD EM: oinkyfattytip@hotmail.com | HAY |
| Incubus Designs , POB 263, Loughborough LE11 1ZG WEB: www.incubusdesigns.co.uk | INC |
| Jade Enterprises , 127 Queen Adelaide Court, Penge, London, SE20 7EB EM: jade.ent@ntlworld.com | JAD |
| KJC Games , FREEPOST, Thornton-Cleveleys, Lancs FY5 3UL WEB: www.kjcgames.com | KJC |
| Kosumi WEB: www.kosumi.com | KOS |
| Lloyd, Rich , 79 Farmersville Road, Califon, NJ 07830, USA EM: lords4@throneworld.com | LLO |
| Madhouse , 6 Alexandra Road, Wisbech, PE13 1HQ WEB: www.madcentral.com | MAD |
| Mindless Games , 5 Basford Road, Nottingham, NG6 0JP WEB: www.mindlessworld.net | MIN |
| Neutral Zone , 33 Rockall Close, Haverhill, Suffolk, CB9 0LU WEB: www.neutral-zone-footbal-pbm.co.uk | NEU |
| Oates, Jason , 6 St Georges Rd, Dorchester, Dorset DT1 1PA WEB: http://uk.geocities.com/jasonpaul.oates@btinternet.com | OAT |
| Olympia Games , 6 Sandy Lane, Bramcote, Nottingham, NG9 3GS WEB: www.olympiapbm.co.uk | OLY |
| Pagoda Games , PO Box 5155, Tamworth, Staffs B77 4QQ WEB: www.pagodagames.co.uk | PAG |
| Mark Palin , Clansmen, 5 Burford, Brookside, Telford, Shropshire, TF3 1LQ EM: mp004f8903@blueyonder.co.uk | PAL |
| Pinder, Mark , 139 Nelson Way, Lacey Acres, Grimsby, S.Humberside DN34 5UJ WEB: http://groups.msn.com/elvaria | PIN |
| Play-by-Electron Games WEB: www.pbegames.com | PEG |
| Quirxel Games , Quirxel Games Gbr, Am Pannofen 7, 47608 Geldern, Germany WEB: www.quirxelgames.de | QIR |
| Rebus Games , 70 Greenfield Crescent, Brighton, BN1 8HJ EM: dominicm@zoom.co.uk | REB |
| Received Wisdom , 9 Oundle Road, Alwalton, Peterborough PE7 3UP WEB: www.receivedwisdom.org | RCW |
| Rolling Thunder Games Inc. , PO Box 310, Eastlake, CO 80614-0310, USA WEB: www.rollingthunder.com | ROL |
| Rzechorzek, Peter WEB: www.geocities.com/TimesSquare/Alley/2187/tribenet.htm | RZE |
| SSV Klapp-Bachler OEG Josefigasse 41, A-8020, Graz, Austria WEB: www.heldenwelt.com | SSV |
| Scriven, David , 15 Alandale Grove, Garforth, Leeds, LS25, 1DJ | SCR |
| Silver Dreamer , 174 Charles St, Greenhithe, Dartford, Kent DA9 9AJ WEB: www.silverdreamer.com | SIL |
| Software Simulations , PO Box 2758, Yeovil, Somerset, BA20 2XH WEB: www.pbmsports.com | SOF |
| Spellbinder Games , 51 Athelstan Rd, Cliftonville, Margate, Kent CT9 2BE EM: Chris.spellbinder@btinternet.com | SPE |
| Spencer, Jerry , 51 Elm Vale, Liverpool L6 8NY EM: italia@gryphon33.fsnet.co.uk | SPN |

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|--|-----|
| Sporting Dreams , PO Box 5423, Derby, DE21 2ZB WEB: www.sportingdreams.com | SPO |
| Supersonic Games , PO Box 1812, Galston, KA4 8WA WEB: www.austerlitzpbem.com | SUP |
| Tempus Fugit PBM Productions 96 Bishopwood Road, Tadley, Hants RG26 4HG WEB: http://tempusfugitpbm.co.uk | TFT |
| Terre de Jeux , 2 rue Pierre Valençon, 18520 Avord, France EM: isasol@club-internet.fr | TDJ |
| Total Conquest , WEB: www.total-conquest.com | TOT |
| Ulaiddh Games , 62 Beechgrove Avenue, Belfast BT6 0NF EM: chrisjan.morris@virgin.net | ULA |
| Undying King Games , 35 Kings Avenue, Ipswich, Suffolk, IP4 1NT WEB: www.ukg.co.uk | UKG |
| White, Stephen , 67 Milton Street, Padiham, Burnley, Lancs., BB12 8RJ | WHS |
| WOW Games , WEB: www.pbemgame.com | WWG |
| Xanthos, Constantine , 7080 NW 75th Street, Pompano Beach, Florida 33067, USA EM: cjxren@yahoo.com | XAN |

Zine Listings

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

| | |
|---|--|
| Abyssinian Prince , Jim Burgess, 664 Smith Street, Providence, RI 02908-4327, USA (Email: burgess@world.std.com) | |
| 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.freemove.co.uk | |
| For Whom The Die Rolls , 14 Stepnells, Marsworth, Nr Tring, Herts., HP23 4NQ (Email: Keith@Thomasson.com) | |
| Mission From God , John Harrington, 1 Churchbury Close, Enfield, Middlesex, EN1 3UW (www.fbgames.co.uk 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-shelf@olympus.net) | |
| Psychopath , www.psychozine.co.uk (Web publication only.) | |
| Rhein-Neckar-Zine , (German language), Lukas Kautzsch, An der Rosswald 18a, 76229 Karlsruhe, Germany, (Email: lukas@oberfoul.de) | |
| S.O.B. , Chris Hassler, 2000 S. Armour Ct., La Habra, CA90631 USA (Email: chassler@adelphia.net) | |
| Strandipity , John Webley, Töpferreihe 4, 38259 Salzgitter, Germany (Email: jjwebley@aol.com) | |
| Strangitude , Paul Sands, Flat 2, 432 Birmingham Rd, Wyld Green, Sutton Coldfield, B72 1YJ (Email: strangitude@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@) | |



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. **Free 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. **C** 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 | £ | Flag | ref. | | |
| 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 | - | | | Adventure | SIL e | - |
| Aspects of Might | M-O | | | | | £2.50 |
| £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 | | QIRG only? | | ? |
| ? | ? | | | | | (96) |
| Austerlitz | C-F | Wargame: Historical | | SUP | e, p | |
| £10.00* | 0 | £3.75 | (a) | | | 96, 103-113 |

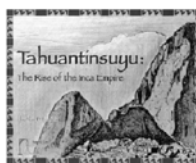
| | | | | |
|------------------------|--------|---------------------|----------|------------------|
| Austerlitz | C-F | Wargame: Historical | SSV | e, p, ? |
| ? | c6 | Euro | ? | (96) |
| Austerlitz | C-F | Wargame: Historical | AUS | e Free |
| 0 | \$4.00 | (b) | | (96) |
| Australian Empires | C-F | Wargame: Futuristic | SOFe, p | |
| £5.00 | 3 | £2.00 | - | |
| Barbarians at the Gate | C-F | Wargame: Historical | SOFe, p | |
| £5.00 | 3 | £2.50 | - | |
| Battle Plan | C-O | Wargame | FBI e | \$5 0 £3.50(a) |
| Beyond | M-O | Adventure | CRA e, p | £25.00 5£5.95 |
| (a) | | | | |
| Bledian Diary, A | M-O | Tribal | SPE e, p | £7.502 |
| £2.25 - £3.25\$ | | | | 80a, 81-84d |
| Championship League | C-O | Sport: Soccer | SUP | p Free |
| 0 | | | | |
| Chaos Trail | H-O | RPG: Fantasy | CHAE, p | £1.75 S 0£1.75 S |

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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 may list them on the website.

www.flagshipmagazine.com

DECEMBER

DRAGONMEET: 3rd December at *Kensington Town Hall, London*. Dragonmeet covers all aspects of hobby-gaming, from boardgames and collectible card-games to roleplaying, miniatures, play-by-mail games and live-action. Dragonmeet is fun for new players and serious gamers alike. There'll be hundreds of games to play, two trade-halls, guests, signings, seminars and special events all day

www.dragonmeet.com

JANUARY 2006

STABCON: 6th - 8th January at the *Britannia Hotel, Stockport*. Another in a very long-running series of friendly, small-scale general games conventions, always featuring a good number of RPGs. Membership was £12.50 for the weekend at one point, but may have since increased; check with the organisers. One-day rates will also doubtless be available. The con has a minimum age limit of 18 in general, but enquire about babes-in-arms, accompanied 16-year-olds, etc. Accommodation is of course available in the hotel, at £30 a night for a single room, or £39 a night for a twin/double. Breakfast is £5 if pre-booked, £9.95 otherwise. Questions can be addressed to bookings@stabcon.org.uk, STABCON, 17 Davenport Park Road, Stockport, Cheshire, SK2 6JU, or 0161 483 9131.

WARPCON XVI: 27th-29th January 2006, at *University College Cork, Ireland*. Roleplaying, wargames, cardgaming and LARPs plus lots of social events: quizzes, drinking games etc. More information from an informative website:

www.warpcn.com

FEBRUARY

CONCEPTION: 1st-5th February, at *Naish Holiday Village in Highcliffe, Christchurch, near Bournemouth*. The latest in this well-liked series of holiday camp-based conventions. Roleplaying and some boardgames. Living Environment rpgs and a full weekend of Cursed Empire (featured in Flagship 116). For further information, see website:

<http://conception.modus-operandi.co.uk>

LEPRECON 27: 24th-26th February, at *Trinity College Dublin, Ireland*. Not much information on this at present:

www.leprecon.ie

MARCH

K2 2006: 3rd-6th March, at *Killarney Country Club, Killarney, Ireland*. Contact lr@lspace.org for more information.

ITZACON II: 10th-12th March, at *NUI Galway, Galway, Ireland*. Galway's

foremost, and possibly only, gaming convention! SciFi features in a big way, along with fantasy games. Roleplaying, CCGs, Wargames, LAPRs and Boardgames.

www.itzaconeire.com.

CONPULSION: 25th-26th March, at *Teviot Student Union, Edinburgh University, Scotland*. The latest instance of another long-running series of conventions at this venue. Last year the 450 attendees raised £3500 for charity.

www.conpulsion.org.

SILICON 8: 31st March-2nd April, at the *HUB, Dublin City University, Ireland*.

<http://silicon.redbrick.dcu.ie>.

APRIL

BAYCON: from 1.00pm Thursday 20th April to 3.00pm Sunday 23rd April 2005, at the *Exeter Court Hotel, Kennford, near Exeter, UK*. The convention stutters into life around midday on the Thursday, when early arrivals can usually be found in the hotel bar. Games ensue from then onwards. The main event of the weekend is the Victor Ludorum tournament to find the UK National Board Games Champion. An account is kept of all games played throughout the convention and the player with the best overall score receives the Victor Ludorum Trophy. See website for details of costs etc.

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

BATTELMASTERS: 21st-23rd April, at ????. The latest in another well-known series, run, as previously, by Eurolog. I don't have much more information on this as yet, but doubtless it'll come; a Google search might find something.

SALUTE ZEROSIX: 22nd April, at *ExCel, London*. A big, well-established wargaming event (newly moved to this larger venue), and potentially worth a look for other genres of games - there's usually some stands and maybe a game or two of definite RPG interest. See <http://www.salute.co.uk/> for more details.

EXCALIBUR: 28th - 30th April, at *Honicombe Manor Holiday Village St Annes Chapel, Callington near Plymouth, UK*. Roleplaying event, which last year also included Cthonicon (don't mention Cthulhu!).

www.horsemenevents.com/excal06-info.php

MAY

BEER & PRETZELS XVII: 13th-14th May, at *Burton Town Hall, Burton on Trent, Staffordshire, UK*. For more information:

www.spiritgames.com/bnpdetails.php.

UK SPIELCHAMPS (& MAYCON): Sunday 28th May, at the *Ramada Hotel, Bath Road, Heathrow*. UK SpielChamps is the UK Heats for the EuropeMasters European Board and Card Games Championships (formerly known as Intergame) at Essen Spiel in October 2006. The tournament takes place during MayCon - details of this as soon as we have them.

www.maycon.org



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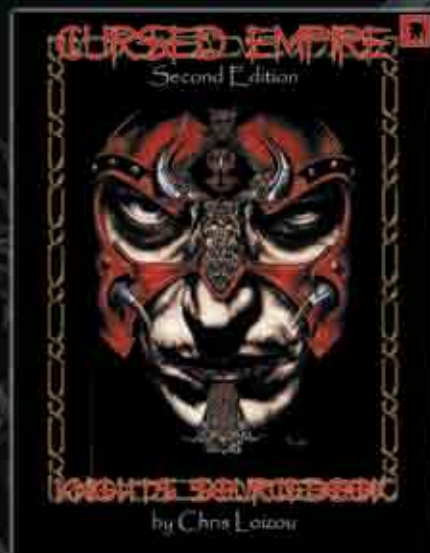
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