

THE

ISSUE 91

FLAGSHIP

OF POSTAL GAMING

£4.00

In this Issue

Einstein's
Lot

Absolute
Heroes

Intrigue in
Sumer

Pop Tarts

Starfleet
Warlord

Tribe Net

WPBM: An
Overview

also introducing

The
Displacement
Engine

and much more!



Harlequin Games in association with Midnight Games presents,

Legends



The most popular Legends module ever is back! After 6 years in the module-wilderness, the North Island Campaign has been completely updated, the result of hundreds of emails and dozens of hours discussion between the six firms who run Legends and their players.

- This module has a separate plane designed to allow new players to mess about without getting squished by the experts for the first sixth months.
- We're also releasing a new 'How-Not-To-Drop-Legends-On-Your-First-Turn' Guide. Which does what it says on the tin.
- It still has loads of other stuff, too, but we decided not to list that in this advert. If you want to know more about the stuff of Legends, get in touch!
- Check out the LPE software on our website - a powerful database manager, map maker and turn creator for your PC.

"I would not hesitate to influence anyone to play this game due to its versatility and to those behind the scenes, Sam et al. Keep up the great work guys" - Scott Whyte

"Hi, Harlequin. I have to say that my GM was always here to help me as I am a french player, and when I was misunderstood, I could stand on Sam to flat the problem down (not sure it translates well, but now again Sam will resolve this :))" - Laurent Perlin

"Maybe Legends has a hollow centre full of highly-compressed matter particles" - Steve Tierney (Last Flagship)

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Report from the Bridge

Hopes for Summer ...

APOLOGIES if we're a few days later than usual getting this to you: on the day we'd usually be stuffing copies, we'll be celebrating our son Michael's wedding to beautiful Louise. This shouldn't much delay the mailing.

It's good to be able to praise the British post office: three cheers for the booklets of peel-off sticky stamps which they've recently produced.

There's a good chance that Paul Green's Highstreet Online will organise the next PBM convention, possibly in the spring of 2002. There should be a questionnaire about it in this issue, to return to him. Do return it, please. Even if you're not in the least interested in attending a PBM convention, Paul needs to know, while if you are it'll help if he can arrange things to suit everyone, as far as possible.

You'll see a few changes in this issue: improvements, we hope. There's an experimental game for readers, and a change which we hope will make Galactic View easier for you to consult. We're also introducing write-ups of conventions, mainly as a way of showing what a sociable hobby we can be: of course, continuing this new feature will depend on receiving enough material, so we'll be happy to hear from you when you've been to one. Meanwhile, too, a lot of work is taking place on our website, though this may not be finished by the time you read about it here. Oh, and we hope to have a credit card service restored before much longer. Do send us your opinions about all of this.

And what about the articles? A good range, this issue, I think. For once, many of the reviews cover games set in the present day (though, let's face it, maybe not the present day exactly as we know it). However, we've an ancients game, a tribal game and an sf one, too. There's an overview of wrestling games, which do sound lively to play. There's also plenty of discussion, advice from a legal adviser, more from Beelzebob, an interview, more from Steve Tierney, a continuing discussion about NPCs and some book reviewing.

I expect you've noticed that PBmers rarely agree with each other in the pages of Flagship, and a good thing too! But it's maybe worth pointing out that we welcome discussion on anything to do with PBM, without necessarily agreeing with everything that is said.

Hope you find this issue fun!

Carol

[Deadline for next issue: July 1st]

FLAGSHIP

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SCIENCE FICTION GAMES

We're starting a game diary for *Star Fleet Warlord* this issue, so now seems an opportune moment to announce that Pagoda Games' next regular game of *Star Fleet Warlord* is due to start towards the end of May. Pagoda anticipate a number of new American players joining this game, as the US moderators for *Star Fleet Warlord* are taking a 6-8 week break. GM Keith Burnham says 'we should see some very interesting tactics in this game, as the American players appear to have a very different way of approaching things in this game.'

Their second UK vs US team game (two sides of six players) is starting to draw to an end, but with the outcome still too close to call. A third game is starting to fill up already, and should be starting later this summer. And a new game using the *Die Hard* variant, which offers a much greater challenge and is for more experienced players, is expected to start at the end of June.

Several new features have been added across the board for *Star Fleet Warlord*, including a new range of advanced ships, while the new Omega scenario playtest is progressing well. Pagoda expect to release more details of this variant around September, with new games starting at the end of the year.

And they remind you that the five turn sample game is available free to anyone with a copy of the rules, which cost £5.



WORLD GAMES

David Hoare, GM of Eternam Games, reports that his *Aqua Eternam: The Rising Tide* is now recruiting players for several new tribal positions. Unfortunately the website is temporarily out of order, so

anybody interested is asked to contact the GM directly at Dhoare@aol.com



ROLEPLAYING GAMES

Hot news this issue is that Undying King Games are preparing to launch a new roleplaying and power game, **Conclave**. GM Mo Holkar describes this as 'a sort of successor to **Inferno** and **Mammon Inc**, a power role-playing game for about 60 players. It's about magic and politics in a high-fantasy world rushing towards apocalypse, and will last for two years.'

As with **Inferno** and **Mammon**, there'll be plenty of scope in **Conclave** for diplomacy and interaction, and the usual opportunities to save or destroy the world. If you found our coverage of the earlier games interesting, now's your chance to plunge into a similarly complex roleplaying experience.

Conclave is due to start on July 1st, and places are limited, so contact UKG as soon as possible if you're interested. The monthly turns will cost £4.50 each. More details from info@ukg.co.uk, and the website <http://www.ukg.co.uk>

Undying King's **Mammon Inc** has now finished (with the future of humanity just about assured), as has their **UNEXPLAINED** (the world, you will be pleased to know, has been saved, although, sadly, several brave agents died in the process). Undying King held a meet in Oxford last

month to wrap them up.

Interestingly, Undying King have worked out that **UNEXPLAINED**, which ran for over five years, managed to accumulate seven GMs, getting on for 2500 sets of orders, around 110 different player characters, and well over two million words of original text written. Wow! They report that 'two characters (Kris Macdowell and Grace Nodofir) have made it right the way through from Game 1 to the end, and five others (Iain Blayne, Matt Culver, Maddy Hook, Adam Twitchin and Greg Wentworth) managed to chalk up five whole games (and most of a sixth for Maddy, back in the days of the Flying Squad). But the more recent arrivals (including one brave player who joined the campaign in the very final set of games) have contributed just as ably as those who've been able to develop and deepen their characters over the years.' Our congratulations to all concerned.

Mammon Inc arrived at its successful conclusion after a run of almost two years, the world being saved from 'various menaces including aliens, strange viruses, megalomaniac computers and a genocidal madman who wanted to kill everyone and repopulate the earth with machines.'

While it's rather sad to see these games ending, each was deliberately designed to draw to a gripping conclusion. And the consolation is that



FIRMS

Several of Spellbinder's games have now been acquired by Barry Wright, who'll be running them as **The PBM Experience**.

He's starting off with just two of them at first: the wargame based in the London Underground, **LTWars**, and the wargame where you play a god competing with other gods, **Heavens Above**.

To get going, Barry is making a special offer for both games up until the end of July. The rulebook and the first eight turns will cost you just £5 if you mention Flagship's name on application. This is a good offer for two neat games. Full contact details for Barry are in Galactic View.

Keith Burnham of **Pagoda Games** has been working as a PBM moderator for the past five years, to high acclaim, but he has decided that it's no longer financially viable for him to continue to work full time in PBM. So he's currently re-training for a new career, and will be looking for a full time job.

Fortunately, however, Keith is determined to keep Pagoda Games going, albeit as a part-time operation in the evenings and at weekends. This will mean some changes, of course, but he's confident that it won't have a significant impact on Pagoda's players. He says that there will always be an answerphone on to take messages, and since most contact is via email these days

anyway, there will be no real change there. Processing will now take a little longer, and he'll be aiming for a 48-hour turnaround now instead of the usual same day schedule that he's been able to maintain pretty much without fail for the past five years. Reminders for late orders are unlikely to be sent out any more, and delaying a game for late orders will no longer be an option as it will have a much greater impact on Pagoda's processing schedule.

Keith is one of our most highly-respected commercial GMs, who has always put his players first. These restrictions seem easy enough for them to live with, and Keith is confident about Pagoda's future: 'The good news is that I fully intended to continue moderating our present range of games, and indeed we have new games starting over the coming months.'

Ross Lombardi of **Lombot Publishing** is closing his fantasy roleplaying game **Throne**. 'It wasn't getting much support,' he explains, 'and although I really hate to say it I do have to swallow my pride and admit there were design flaws. Having said that, the Idea for the game was good. I am quite happy to sell the notes and structure to the highest bidder (or someone that will offer the equivalent in free turns in one of their games).' We had two reviewers in the game, who reported that they found it difficult to work out how to keep their characters alive: maybe in fresh hands, a revamp would overcome this rather devastating



ROLEPLAYING GAMES cont...

there's now the chance of applying to play Conclave.

Richard Burd has been running his AD&D-style roleplaying game called **Terran III** as a free game since 1983. Not bad, eh? He's had some delays recently, caused by work commitments and a nasty dose of flu, but confirms that he's now continuing to process turns as quickly as his work allows. Richard calculates that he has some 53 players, of which 36 are very active, so there's plenty for him to do.

It's good to hear of this sort of continuing commitment in any PBM game, and especially for a free game. Long may Terran III continue!

Harlequin Games and their players are sad to say goodbye to their **Exile** GM Jim Botten, who ran the Exile area of **Saturnalia** for around three years to nothing but praise from his players. The last turn Jim wrote was a record-breaking 28 page epic, which sounds like a farewell and a half, and he will still be available for any questions that arise.

He has sent us such a pleasant statement about this that we'll quote him in full, as it does justice to Jim himself, to his players and to the game:

'It was with heavily mixed feelings that I

approached the ending of my tenure as the Exile GM. Not only did it mean withdrawing from the creative excitements of being at the hub of a fantasy role-play, but it also meant the giving-up of a large number of what had become very close personal (albeit postal) relationships. However, impending changes in my own life-style - plus a degree of inspirational "burn-out" after more than two years of full-time writing - urged me on; and I am now very glad that I went through with the transfer. Real-world events have shown that I could not have been giving the game anything like full attention, while the blossoming of Exile under Marcus Taylor's dedicated and enthusiastic direction has proved him the true heir of the tradition started by Sam and then continued by John Davis and myself. I feel proud and satisfied to have helped lay some of the foundations on which Marcus now builds, creating structures that were beyond the reach of my own self-contained imagination. And herein surely lies the strength of Exile and the Saturnalia genre, this sequential enrichment of the playing environment by successive GMs and their interaction with a band of dedicated and ingenious players. I will of course be keeping in touch with developments through my continuing friendships with Marcus and the good folks at Harlequin - who have been so supportive, helpful and understanding

throughout my tenure - and hope to be back one day as a player. In the meantime, may the deities bless all who voyage in Exile!

Congratulations to Jim on his PBM achievement, and we wish him all the best for the future.

And now let's warmly welcome Exile's new moderator, Marcus Taylor. Marcus has played both Exile and Amaranth, and has run his own hand-moderated game for many years - his 'exclusive, vampire/cowboy crossover game The Savage West' (ooh, er!). Marcus is the fourth GM to run Harlequin's Exile region and they're proud to have managed to keep the quality consistent throughout all eight years of the game.

Gary Lewis has closed **Gemini Games** and **Silver Screen**, in a clean fold after 31 turns. The main reason is that Gary didn't pick up enough players after relaunching the game to make its heavy workload worthwhile.

It's a shame to see the end of this game, which derived from the earlier Movie Mogul. It was certainly unusual: partly requiring economics, because you needed to work out the finances necessary to rise in the world of movies, partly requiring creative skill because you composed your own screen-plays, and partly requiring a good knowledge of current trends in the cinema.

Yes, it was a game for specialists, but a splendid chance for film fanatics to realise their grandest dreams. And we must all be able to think of films that should have been tried out in a game first, before hitting unwary cinema-goers (I nominate The Hollow Man, where the good guy's nasty stomach wound is miraculously cured by a few lengths of duct tape).

Gary is still running **Temporal Refraction Ent**, which offers free interactive fiction games based on Star Trek, Sliders and other TV shows.

Antony Dunks sends the interesting news that he's started a variation of his long-running roleplaying game Xott, which he's calling **Xott Grande**. It's designed to appeal to Xott's experienced players, and makes it possible to explore plot lines not previously available in the other formats. In the first game, players have the chance of solving a riddle that is at the heart of the Xott's contemporary history.

As a fair amount of game knowledge is required by players, Xott Grande is being run in-house with characters being drawn from Xott and Xott Solo, though future games will be open to all comers. Set for a minimum of 12 monthly turns, Xott Grande, episode I - 'A Minute past Midnight' will, however, run until a solution is achieved. There is no start-up fee, with turns being charged at £2.50 each, or £25.00 to cover the whole game.

We'll welcome any Rumours comments from players who are involved in this variant and look forward to announcing, in due course, further games which will be suitable for newcomers.

FIRMS cont...



problem?

However, Ross adds that Lombot's **Blood Sports of the Damned** is so popular that they now have a

new member of staff to run this, who is calling himself Minion. Training him to use the game system has caused some delays to both Blood Sports and Lombot's other game, **Battle Dirge**, but all will return to normal service soon.

Andy and Cara Simmonds of **Mindless Games** were hoping to get hold of a football manager game by now, but this seems to have fallen through. They are still very interested in running one, though, so invite anyone who would like to licence one to get in touch with them.

State of Mind's Rob Harper is still pretty busy with real-world concerns at the moment. However, his **Chevian Chronicles** is up and running again, and a new game of **Overlord** is expected pretty soon. Chevia can't accept new players because it's drawing to its conclusion, but it's worth getting in touch with Rob if you wish to join Overlord, a fantasy wargame that's received steady praise in our Rumours from the Front.

Please note that John Dee's **Jade Enterprises** has moved: the new postal address for **Absolute Power** and **Absolute Heroes** is in Galactic View.

There have been moves, too, for Nic Best of **Sevenstar Games**' Beyond Green Sun and **Michael Cruikshank** who runs the En Garde! variant **The Sun King**. Again, details are in GV.

And Ian Brumby of **Fenris Games** is about to move house. This won't affect Fenris's PO Box, but Ian warns that, 'Any new enquiries are welcome but we can't promise rapid response for the next month or two'.

Mindless Games are in the middle of a **Serim Ral** re-write onto PC to enable full e-mail play, and are holding up the launch of their new Serim Ral game until it's ready. They hope to have both the re-write and the new game, Serim Ral Dragon Isles - (Return to Serim Ral 23), ready to start in a couple of months.

Until then they're busy with additions and re-writes to the website and rulebooks, stuff like help/info sheets and a Hall of Fame, a new message board, etc.

LATE NEWS

Due to popular demand, **Timewyrm** are returning to their roots and offering games of **Diplomacy**. Start-up is in the form of a £10 deposit, refundable if you do not drop the game, thereafter there will be a turn fee of £1. Players should have a copy of the board game rules, as copyright reasons prevent Timewyrm from issuing these.

MEETS

LONDON PUBMEET: Reviving after a winter break! The first Friday of every month, from 6.30pm until closing time, upstairs at the *Jubilee* pub, which is just round the corner from Waterloo Station. Contact Hunky Monkey Games on 01392-681086 for details. All PBM players welcome.

GAMES GAMES GAMES DAYS: the second Saturday of each month, a day of games hosted by SFC Press at *The Barley Mow, Horseferry Road, London SW1* from 12.30 onwards. We've heard that admission, previously £3, is now free. Contact SFC Press Old Dover Road, London SE3 8SJ; email events@sfcpc.co.uk

EXETER MEET: A summer meet in Exeter is being planned by Timewyrm and Hunky Monkey - your editor hopes to be there, too. Contact these firms or Flagship if you're interested, so we can get some idea of numbers before fixing a date. If you're visiting the West Country this summer, just get in touch.

CONVENTIONS

Feel free to send us details of any conventions that you know about which PBMs are likely to enjoy. If you attend any of these, we'd welcome reports on how they go, too.

Sarbreennar Lives: 26th-27th May in Hinckley, Leics. This is the first 2-day Sarbreennar event. Visit the Sarbreennar site for more info: rpgauk.com/sarbreennar

Conclave: 26th-27th May in Ireland.

UK Games Fest 2001: Saturday, 7th July at the Sportcentre, Harlow, Essex. The organisers report that this is 'back bigger than ever with more role playing, more demo games, more CCG, more computer games and more traders'. For further details contact: Jan Eldridge on 01279 435372 or uk_games.fest@virgin.net.

DrakCon: July 14th-15th in Aberdeen. Contact: Sandy Douglas ...

sdouglas@portlethen.aberdeenshire.sch.uk

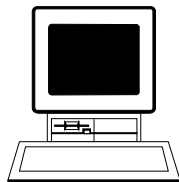
Gen Con UK 2001: Aug 29th-Sept 2nd at Olympia, London. Website: genconuk.com

Spiel 2001: from 18th-21st October at the Grugapark, Essen, Germany. This is the biggest game fair in the world.

CRIME GAMES

Anyone looking for a wargame with a difference should take a look at Pagoda Games' **Godfather**: it's challenging and it's distinctive. You play a gangster during the Prohibition era, aiming to become the head of all the other racketeers in Chicago. You can check out the rules on Pagoda's website: <http://www.pagodagames.co.uk>

Game 109 is just under a third full, and is expected start during the summer. Game 108, meanwhile, is well under way, with a flurry of diplomatic messages being distributed via the in-game *Chicago Tribune* newsletter. Sadly the planned 'Five Families' variant has been put on hold for a while, but Pagoda hope to have more news on this variant towards the end of the year.



EMAIL AND WEB-BASED GAMING

Please note these changes to Geoff Squibb's websites. We hope the change hasn't delayed anyone looking for Geoff's new **Star Empires 4**.

<http://www.gorlos.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk>

<http://www.starempires.dyns.cx>

Lombot publishing now have a website:

<http://pages.scifi.com/LOMBOT/LOMBOTindex.html>

Play by Electron Games is a US-based firm which has been running the fantasy / strategy wargame, **Eldritch III**, since 1997 and they have just completed a round of polishing and tuning. The changes included a few minor race tweaks, resolution of some combat issues, and the addition of a dozen new spells. Yes, we've listed Eldritch in Galactic View for a while now, but let's remind you that it's a tasty offering. The game can be played in two ways: either as an open-ended empire builder game or as a close-ended victory oriented game. The close-ended games typically last about fifty turns, though that varies depending on the design of the scenario. Games are possible with as few as ten or as many as several hundred players.

Play by Electron's GM, Mark Thomas, is willing to accept players from all over the world in this email game. Turns run weekly, with startups and two initial turns free. Good value for a complex fantasy wargame!

There are currently three games open to new players: G101, which is a free 12-turn trial game that started in April (late signups are still accepted for this, but be swift!); G201, a combat oriented scenario game that has a few open slots and which Mark describes as 'not for the faint of heart'; G400, an open-ended game of Eldritch that is always accepting signups.

And there's another game which we've not previously listed from Play By Electron Games: their **Monsters!**. This is a free, simple and short email game that makes a good introduction to the hobby for new players. There are only about a dozen game orders in **Monsters!**, and games usually last 12-20 turns. The contact information for **Monsters!** is the same as for Eldritch.

The contact information for Play by Electron Games is:

email: moderator@pbegames.com

website: <http://www.pbegames.com>

A free open-ended fantasy PBeM game is **Spoils of Empire**, which is run as a hobby by Rick Morneau. Because it's his hobby, Rick can only accept a limited number of players, but if you think you may be interested in playing, check the **Spoils of Empire** web page at:

<http://www.srv.net/~ram/soe.html>

To celebrate the nomination of their **Adventurers**

Guild for Best PBM Game at the big US gaming convention called Origins, Entertainment Plus More Inc, are offering free trial turns. This fantasy roleplaying game has been running smoothly for over ten years, which is a pretty good record. Though the base price for web players is about \$8.50 a turn, which sounds quite high, GM Hugh Bayer adds an assurance that discounts earned in-game can bring the charge down considerably: 'some folks get paid to play some turns'.

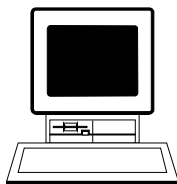
And Hugh is willing to make a special offer to all Flagship readers able to visit www.epmgames.com, and anyone who sends an email to ag@epmgames.com with the subject *Flagship* will be entered for a random drawing of \$30 US in game credits. The deadline for the drawing is June 10th, 2001. The winner will be selected and notified the day after the deadline.

New to our listings is the PBeM game **Blood & Water**, run by Mark Collins. The game is free and has a waiting list at present, though more places will become available if Mark licenses the game to a commercial moderator. (He's considering this, so if you're interested in a licence, get in touch with him.)

Blood & Water is designed for 15 to 20 players with a love for intrigue and diplomacy. You begin with a noble House of a duke, duchess and three children, your family's demesne and your family army. Over the generations, your noble children will continue to expand your own family's empire by intermarriage with the families of other players. An interesting touch is that each individual noble is unique; some are good at extended campaigns, while others are better suited to battle and a few sons will prove to be only a burden. While the sons extend your House, the daughters aren't simply ornamental and powerless; once married, a daughter can administer more efficient tax collections to support the armies of her new House, with her natural family protected from her husband by the marital alliance. Trade between the Houses is possible, and so too (heh, heh) is spying, fostering rebellion and attempting assassinations.

Blood & Water runs as an open-ended game, but once you've gained your House's full number of demesnes by direct conquest or from sworn vassals, your own House is no longer playable and is instead added to the Hall of Fame; new players are therefore able to play to the full extent of the game. Mark has found that this works well: 'because it is not necessary to control every demesne, and throughout the game Houses are at quite disparate strengths, dropouts are not the detriment they can be.'

Mark is also planning two further PBeM games. The first will be an En Garde! variant called **En Magica**. As the title indicates, the setting is a society of wizards, where you play either a wizard or a wizard's henchman. Each of these character types has its own set of values, but both have the same agenda: to rise through the rabble and become initiated into Arcadia - sooner or later.



EMAIL AND WEB-BASED GAMING

As in the standard En Garde! games, status and the means of rising high above the gutter are all-important. There will be some military activity, but Mark stresses that this En Garde! world will stress adventure rather than wars, and that role-playing will be important.

A third game that will require a small one-off fee is **Starboard** (nice name!). This is an economics game, in which players will head a board of directors wheeling and dealing in shares and assets while they direct their space-ships in trade and haulage. Each game of Starboard will have up to eight competing companies and will end when five of the competing companies have been taken over, or on the fiftieth turn; in either case the wealthiest company will be the winner. The cost for this game will be £10 or \$20 to play by e-mail only. Mark warns that 'rules will be issued before payment is expected, but there will be no refund as dropouts for this game are not desirable.' (Hmm, dropouts are almost impossible to prevent...)

It's an interesting range of games. Note that you'll need to join the relevant e-site at Yahoo's e-groups to play. More details from:

m.l.collins@ntlworld.com

Morten Larsen sends some news from Denmark, of interest to all pbem players. He has launched a new web site at www.pbem.dk where you can play his games by email and on the web, or download the latest rulebooks and other resources for the games. You'll need a credit card to pay for

your games but downloads are, of course, free.

As a special introductory offer for readers, he'll give a 10% discount on any game set-up purchased before June 30 if you enter "FLAGSHIP" in the comments field when ordering (the discount will be deducted from your credit card charge). The discount applies to the order total, so the more turns you purchase with your setup, the more money you save.

The two games on offer at present are **War of the Dark God** and **Conquest of Cofain**, which are also being run by Titan PBM in Britain (see above for a description of the latter game), but Morten also plans to revive a space conquest game which he used to run by post: we'll have more details later this year.

Morten is also working on an automatic on-line order checker for the players who play War of the Dark God with Titan in the UK. This useful facility will run as an independent sub-site on the pbem.dk server, though of course Titan will continue to accept orders submitted the usual way, 'and,' says Morten, 'provide their usual excellent service of translating plain English to valid orders for starting players who need this.'

As you can see, you can play War of the Dark God and Conquest of Cofain with either Morten or Wayne Morris of Titan PBM. The charges are around the same, so Morten points out that who you choose depends on which sort of service you prefer. Titan offer a human GM, the chance to receive results on paper and assistance to anyone who's new to the game system; Morton tries to automate the day-to-day running of the games, which provides a swifter service and ways to

make team coordination easier. So it's an interesting opportunity where 'You pays your money and you takes your choice.'

The GMs of the PBEM game **War of Wizards** offer free games for new players, as well as starting new commercial games.

In the latter category, game 165 (on the map of the Emerald Isles) is poised to start, while players are being collected for Shadowmoth II: The Return. This is set in a later age than the initial game and offers 51 positions in the biggest War of Wizards world so far. Details from:

www.wow.pbemgame.com/

Mindless Games have a new web address, though the older website address still works:

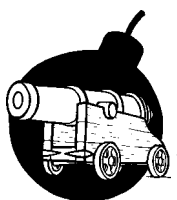
www.mindlessworld.net

They've had to close their Chat Room down, temporarily, but hope to re-open it at some point in the next couple of months.

Digital Mind Games have now launched **Corporation**, which can be found at:

<http://www.digitalmindgames.com>

It's a game of economic warfare in the cities of the future, which is basically the same as the Undying King version, only it's played entirely via the web, in one large gameworld. Player orders are processed live as entered, and the gameworld ticks over one turn per day. You get your first two weeks' play for free, after that it's a subscription at £6 per month, or £35 for lifetime membership.



NON-FANTASY WARGAMES

Hunky Monkey are extending their range of games! They have just obtained the UK & Ireland licence for a computer-moderated empire-building game, **Prometheus**, from its German designers. As the game extensively playtested in Germany, British players will have the advantage of playing in a game system that's already been fully tested.

In Prometheus, you start off with a capital city and the countryside around it, as the beginnings of your future empire. You have some settlers to found new towns, some workers to cultivate the land and some basic military groups to defend the country and explore further afield. The individual terrain maps in Prometheus are beautiful - detailed yet clear: you'll need to explore, to settle the new land, and to start gathering resources like food, wood and stone. To improve your technology, you can mine for metals and for oil. There's no particular bar on technological possibilities in the game: it's possible to acquire uranium eventually, with enough research.

There are three ways to win the game, though it won't be a quick and easy victory: planning is necessary for whichever route you choose. The

first two ways to victory are fairly obvious: you can win by crushing all the other empires, or by an alliance victory.

We've listed this as a wargame, but the third way to win is a peaceful one. It's possibly more difficult than the military options, and it's certainly unusual: you can win by discovering the Origin of Life, no less. Mind you, this third way to win looks as if it's likely to take a long time, as you'll need to do a lot of research. The rulebook mentions researching Astrophysics to succeed! It could turn out to be a frustrating project, but it does offer an interesting chance of winning against a superior military opponent.

You need to use order codes to play, but these seem reasonably easy to handle. The 50-page A4 rulebook is both friendly and detailed, with lots of examples. Perhaps the text still needed a little work to Anglicise it fully in the draft version that we saw, but it was easy enough to understand.

In addition to the paper rules, there is also an HTML version, which looks good! The game is also available for play by email. We've had a quick look at this version of the turns, and can report that everything is in glorious technicolour and easy to navigate and understand.

Hunky Monkey are looking for up to twenty five players to start their first game, but player numbers for each game of Prometheus can vary easily from game to game, as the size of the world map can be adjusted.

This does look like an exciting and enjoyable new game to try: interactivity is encouraged, the materials are attractive, and there are plenty of different things to work on.

If you think you'll enjoy a game with exploration and research as well as warfare, take a look at Prometheus.

Hunky Monkey aim to start the first game as soon as there are enough players, though a game seems likely to start at the end of May, provided that there is a minimum of fifteen players.

Pagoda Games report that Game 105 of their highly-rated **World War IV** is just moving out of the early stages, with a very healthy 36 out of the starting 40 positions still under player control at the end of turn 5.


The next regular game is already starting to attract players, with a projected starting date of mid-June. Apply now if you want to play!

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Guide your people from the bronze age into the modern era and beyond!

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Hunky Monkey Games, 9 South View Terrace, Exeter, EX4 6JF or call: 01392 681086*

Prometheus is the new game from HUNKY MONKEY GAMES

Classified

[Any GM is entitled to a free 15-word announcement of game winners. Further words are 15p/word. Any FLAGSHIP subscriber is entitled to a free 15-word classified ad for any non-commercial PBM-related purpose. Further words (and all words for non-subscribers and commercial ads) are 15p/word, 20p bold or £10 per single column inch semi-display. Please send payment in advance to avoid invoicing for small amounts. Tips on play and rule oddities are welcome for Tricks of the Trade and Murphy's Moderators columns.]

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Any offers for the lot?

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If you are interested in advertising, please contact the Flagship office (details on page 3) and we will be happy to discuss your requirements.

What is Play By Mail?

THE PROCESS is simple. Players send their orders for each turn in the game to a central moderator (or GM), who works out the results and sends them back.

This simple process allows hundreds of players to enter game worlds of great depth, to contact each other between turns for discussion and negotiation and to play at a time that suits them.

In most games everybody's orders are processed together for each turn, simultaneously, but the results that are sent back are the individual ones for your own position. The other players won't know what you're planning unless you choose to tell them, which offers many possibilities for joint and covert action.

There are all sorts of games, with all sorts of settings: roleplaying, wargaming, adventuring, empire-building, sports games and plenty more! Some are simple, some are complex, but they will all take skill and planning to play them well.

If you've never tried Play By Mail, give it a go. It will be unlike any other kind of gaming that you've played.



FANTASY WARGAMES

Cutting Edge Games (Dean@day34.freemove.co.uk) report that the playtest of their **Wars of Magic and Legend** is

progressing very well. The playtest was up to turn 18 when we heard from them and apparently the various empires seem to have established their economies, so that military spending is now taking place and game politics are well under way. Most of the neutral provinces have been gobbled up and just recently there was a major rebellion in the empire of Cahir with three provinces declaring independence from the empire. 'Phoney wars are commonplace with espionage and magic being much used (and much denied!). But as we come to summer of year two, most empires are confident and strong and perhaps a little overconfident.'

The rules have been made clear and the programming side of the game is making good progress. Cutting Edge aren't accepting any further playtesters, as they already have a waiting list for the rest of the playtest. However, they're expecting to start the commercial game before the end of this year.

Titan PBM announce that their latest game has just gone into playtest. Unusually, it's a four player game, and it's called **War on Cofain**. The idea is that as well as being playable in its own right, the game can also serve as an introduction to the game system of **War of the Dark God**, for players to try out before moving on to this more complex game.

Once difference from WotDG is that there are no pre-set teams, so it's a case of everybody for themselves. The four nations are The Blue Knighthood, The Red Warlord, The Greenwood Elves and The Whitehill Gnomes. There's also another ten NPC nations. There are no special victory conditions: the game runs for just 12 turns and the winner is the player finishing with most victory points.

All the positions are smaller than in WotDG and are more rounded, with both magic and military power. The density of monster units and non-player units (and cities) is higher than in WotDG, to give the players something to do before attacking each other. It is intended that the game should still be playable when one or more of the opponents drop out, or even as a solo game for the beginning for those who wish to learn the system without the risk of being attacked by another player.

Titan's Wayne Morris hadn't worked out what the game charges will be when he told us about War on Cofain, but expects to have this sorted out by the time this issue reaches you. War on Cofain sounds worth trying for anyone who fancies a fantasy wargame that isn't a long-lasting commitment, whether or not you plan to move on to the more complex game. With only four players, you're not likely to have to wait long for a game to start, either. Indeed, why not try it with three

PBM friends? Wayne adds a note that Game 2 of War of the Dark God has now started with the first turn just being run, and 'I hope all the players are having fun.'

Harlequin Games are about to start a new game of **Legends, NIC24**. They already have the initial 50 setups, and expect another 50 players to join during the first few months.

New to this game is a concept borrowed from Middle Earth, where the GM has discretion to disallow the players from playing certain races if they are very popular. Normally in Legends, players can play any kind of setup they like, which can (by chance) lead to half the players picking a certain race. This happened in three of the seven games Harlequin have run and tends to lead to many of those players having a restricted game.

The change sounds like an improvement to us, and familiar in more fantasy wargames than just Middle Earth. Harlequin report that opinions on the concept are mixed, with broad acceptance from most players, but some unhappy grumbles from players who have been prevented from playing their favourite race. Harlequin promise to take a hard look at the idea a few months down the line and decide whether to use it again in the future. (Our advice is: stick with it - give 'em a first and second choice of position, and maybe even a third as well.)

Harlequin add that players' response to the new module itself has been very good. As they were the main designers, they're finding that it's quite nice to bask in a little praise...

There's news, too, about Harlequin's **Middle Earth PBM**. They report that the game continues to improve, with new games and new players joining all the time.

An exciting new development is a Last Alliance module, which one of the players has worked up. Set before the original scenario, this represents the last great alliance of Elves, Dwarves and Man against the hordes of Sauron. Sauron's death is one of the Free People's aims in this game, no easy task, along with the fall of Barad Dur. The Dark Servants can win a strategic victory in addition to both sides' forced concession.

Harlequin confirm that there's lots of player interest in this, and we're delighted to report this exciting new take on the Middle Earth PBM game.

Pagoda Games report that **Adventurer Kings** is proving the most successful of their games, receiving sign-ups from new or previous players at a healthy rate. They are starting new 8-10 player games every five or six weeks, and plan to start one of the larger SuperAK games towards the end of the summer.

They add the reminder that anyone can try the 3-turn sample game for free, so long as you have a copy of the rulebook (available as a free download from their website, or £5 for a printed copy).

Einstein's Lot

The Threat of the Unknown

MARTIN HELSDON ventures into a world where things aren't quite normal...

EINSTEIN'S LOT is a role-playing game set in what appears to be the real world in the present day, though a world where the paranormal is potentially a very real presence. It would appear that ancient forces are manifesting to varying degrees, apparently in response to, or to balance, our modern technological world.

The exact relationship between these powers, be they spirits, mysterious forces or whatever, with the threat of an impending ecological and technological catastrophe, is not something that was answered in the ten turns played for the review. No doubt any longer term experience in the game world might resolve this and other questions, or raise entirely new ones. The world of Einstein's Lot is complex and rich in detail, and it is unlikely that any revelations are complete or comprehensive. There are rumours of hauntings and even the Men in Black (men from the ministry - Government or Church?).

...and the element of uncertainty a constant ominous presence...

The meshing of strange and apparently supernatural events with the realities of this world is surprisingly effective and well managed. Aspects such as the fuel protests and foot & mouth outbreaks all slotted into the turns without being overly intrusive or forced. The writing was effective, the background solid and detailed, and the element of uncertainty a constant ominous presence.

As a game, Einstein's Lot is professional and articulate in presentation. Turns came back regularly and swiftly, usually within a week, rarely longer, and commonly consisted of two or three sides of text. The turn length offers good value for money. At the start of the game the reviewer was apparently the only player, but as the population of players grew, no apparent decline in service could be noted.

A lot more people ought to be playing this game.

Hints of possibilities...

The rulebook consists of fourteen pages. The presentation is fairly basic but adequate, complete with the warning 'THIS DOCUMENT NOT FOR QUOTATION OR RELEASE TO THE PRESS', giving it the feel of a government text that has accidentally fallen into your hands. Hopefully Flagship is exempt from this warning! The first page is presented in the format of a rejected newspaper article, setting the tone of paranoia and the mixture of ecological disaster with - something else. The footnote that the author of the article was subsequently found dead, with a hint that his suicide or overdose was more than the authorities assumed, also adds to the tone.

The article also refers to various writers, H P Lovecraft, M R James and Arthur Machen. As the game progressed I had reason to recall the latter two, and perhaps was more circumspect in my investigations than I should have

been. The atmosphere of my plot line certainly was reminiscent of an M R James ghost story, and recalling what usually occurs to the protagonists in his tales, I became increasingly cautious. To review this game fairly it might have been wise to play a more reckless character. The sense of implied menace was such that, in role-playing my character in what felt like a realistic way, I missed the 'opportunity' to come face to face with whatever was lurking out there.

As in the most effective horror stories, it is what you don't see but suspect, that proves the most disturbing. Einstein's Lot definitely hinted at supernatural activity, but it was elusive, and all the more effective for it.

Character creation

Following the introductory article there is a brief explanation of the game background, and the mechanics of gaining additional skills and abilities through experience. The system looks simple, and allows experience points to be spent on gaining Influence, useful not surprisingly in influencing people, increasing existing skills or purchasing new ones. In obtaining a new skill there has to be an in-game reason for obtaining it; the example cited suggests a week spent pony-trekking to improve fieldcraft.

In addition to writing actions, the player also has the opportunity to use a feature known as Recollection. This enables a character to recall something they know which might be relevant to the specified topic, and allows access to information the character knows, but the player doesn't. This nicely gets around the usual problem of a player being ignorant of something his or her character should know and take for granted. However, the ability has a few built-in limitations: what characters think they know, might in fact be partially or completely incorrect. In addition to hunting for clues, it also allows characters to 'discover' things about their colleagues, friends, family and location. The GM warns that if players relies purely on Recollection, they may get a lot of information back, but most of it may or may not be of practical use. I used the capability sparingly, and found it useful.

Character Design involves defining your character using appearance and body and mind characteristics, using a number of points. The character creation then leads into who and what your character is, offering roles varying from the aristocracy through to a farm labourer. Using this you can be anything from a priest to a newsagent. Most players seem to be creating academics, be they students or lecturers, as an obvious way of setting up a character with access to research and specialised knowledge. In hindsight it would have been interesting to test out another role, say in the underworld or armed forces. My character turned into a female Welsh archaeologist, and no doubt the scenario was tuned to the character.

Curiously, opting for a member of the police force is listed under the Armed Forces. This doesn't appear to offer the necessary forensic and investigative skills, though I'm certain that it could be arranged. Given that the game inevitably has a feel slightly similar to the X Files, in the British context a member of the police (a special unit perhaps to conduct unusual investigations - and did I cross paths with such an individual?) or Customs & Excise might be appropriate. Inevitably, at least initially, the game background appeared to be an updated 'Call of Cthulhu' but this proved not to be the case. It doubtful that such monstrous incursions into the 'real' world could be sustained without rapidly damaging the apparently normal setting.

The character creation then leads into pages of tables of skills, each having a different cost subject to the background of the character, the weighting looking realistic. Of all the generation process this is the most unwieldy stage, but not difficult to sort out on a piece of scrap paper. Skills

Einstein's Lot at a glance

A role-playing game of supernatural or paranormal investigation, set in the present day, from Ulaigh Games. Start-up is £4.50, including turn 0 and turn 1. Further turns £3.50 each. Orders can be sent by post or e-mail.

are also affected by the level of characteristics, these forming a realistic limit as to how good you can be in a particular field.

A copy of the game's newsletter, 'The Lone Dolmen' accompanied the start-up. This seems to be an irregular publication, with hints at game-world events though none of them appeared to intersect with my experiences. As the number of players increases, their activities should generate a few reports, though hopefully not in an obituary column.

So, character created, you enter the world of Einstein's Lot.

Mysteries gradually emerge...

I initially assumed that the level of weirdness was much greater than it apparently is (but perhaps I was just being overly premature), deciding to investigate a possible burial mound on or near the Wrekin. Two decent maps of the surrounding area were provided, though I also found a large-scale road map useful, the locality not being one with which I am familiar. A very blurred photocopy of the mound was provided, adding to the mystery, as it wasn't possible to resolve very much from it.

In full fantasy mode I rashly assumed all sorts of meanings for the mound, Cynddelan's Tump. Ideas that I was about to walk into a Sidhe mound were abruptly halted by the information that it appeared to be related to a Welsh prince named Cynddylan. This prompted some real-world research and the plucking of 'The Celtic Realms' off the bookshelf, to find an entire passage of the lament for Cynddylan. A further hunt on the web determined that Cynddylan is one of the possible sources of Arthur, as his clan symbol was the bear, and his war cry 'Yr Arth'.

As a result of this I launched into investigations in-game, including a search of the mound, and in return obtaining detailed description, right down to the soil, providing an indication that the side of the mound had been disturbed by... something. Something that seemed to have dug its way... out.

The mystery was further deepened by the fact that the supermarket that had bought the site also had security guards present, at least during the day. They disappeared at dusk, for reasons they were nervous about relaying. Further realistic questions resolved that it was a very odd site for a new development, the local towns already well served by commercial outlets, and the locality by no means a convenient place for out of town shopping. According to the map there is a firing range nearby, and lo, in the turns, occasional shooting could be heard.

My character proceeded to follow up a number of leads. These included the nearby council's records office (those in the nearest town has been removed, cut out in fact), talking with a helpful supermarket manager who was equally bemused by the decision of his employers to build on the site, and the local newspaper to gain information on the ignored public protest to the demolition of the Tump. It also became apparent that someone in a large BMW was following my character around, and pre-empting some of her investigations.

Sadly, a quick analysis of the site suggested that, unlike the hill-fort atop the Wrekin it was little more than a geological anomaly, probably dating back to the glacial deposits of the Ice Age. But, something was going on. There were references to local legends of a bear and wolf, and abruptly a switch from obscure Welsh princes to the Anglo-Saxon conquest of the area - which led me to an entry in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicles. A major clue had been planted in an earlier turn, relating to the location of the headquarters of the supermarket chain in Peterborough. This appears to link in with the Saxon kingdoms of the time, and a certain obscure Brorda of Mercia. To my shame, this failed to light any lamps until restated in a turn. A definite bear reference cropped up again, though I chose to have my character dismiss the references to Beowulf, until the evidence started to look overwhelming.

Acting and reacting...

I suspect that Einstein's Lot is a game that provides to some extent a reflection to what the player puts in. At no time could I fault the weight of detail and evidence in the game, and every lead I followed up in the real world was matched, and more, in the game world. However, I suspect that it is possible to play the game with less heed to archaeological, historical (and even geological) facts. As the GM writes in the Recollection section of the rules, he is entirely capable of matching what ever you throw at him. I had the

constant impression of a wealth of background and research, and the sensation that I had merely scraped off a few surface 'facts'.

This made for an intense role-playing experience. References to my overweight character were made here and there (I'd not paid much attention to the height and weight profile) and the continuing saga of the faulty GPS (wrecked apparently by students at an earlier dig) injected an element of humour into the turns. The general presentation was factual but with a growing sense of something going on, out there. In hindsight I missed a few opportunities to determine what was happening: something outside the window of the B&B, and not getting out of the four-wheel drive when sitting, observing the Tump at night.

There might have been something out there, but did I really want to face it?

...it is what you don't see but suspect, that proves the most disturbing...

The GM's hand...

'Meinir checked the locks again, and her mobile phone, then sat for a few moments. Then the thought occurred to her that maybe, in checking, she had inadvertently opened one of the locks. She shivered, and checked again. All was well. She sipped at the coffee, and wondered if it was wise to have all the doors locked? What if she had to get out in a hurry? She dithered, checked again, to be absolutely certain. At that point, she took a deep breath and stared in front of her. There was a name for this sort of thing, obsessive compulsion. When the urge came again, she clutched her cup and stared out at the wood.

Though her eyes had grown accustomed to the darkness, it seemed that it was swirling, down through the trees and off the hill towards the plain. Her heart raced. Darkness did not swirl. There was something moving out there. Something that took vague shapes which swelled up and dissolved away, bulky shapes of night that poured down the tump.'

Earlier on in the review sequence I'd been offered a different format, first or third person, and decided to stay with the original presentation.

About the only flaw I perceived with the game was how a few turns ended with information about to be provided by a non-player character. On the first occurrence I turned the sheet over and wondered if a page had gone missing. Chris quite reasonably answered my query, indicating that it heightened tension and provided choice for the player. I still feel that when an info-dump is imminent it is difficult for the player to guess what is about to be relayed, so making the response either a simple listen, a set of 'if - then - else' or their next logical steps based on the information already in hand. It's a minor point, but might be fixed by a rare 'turn and a half'.

Expecting the unexpected...

Einstein's Lot is an interesting and complex game, run by a competent and enthusiastic GM. The standard of writing is excellent, and the build up of tension is very effective - perhaps too much so! The gradual accumulation of legends, history and strangeness deterred me from going looking for trouble, as it is a natural desire not to be bumped off by things that go bump in the night. A more gung-ho approach might be rewarded with interesting, if not terminal results.

Memories of an M R James story, 'A Warning to the Curious', read a decade or more ago, where a character has moved one of the three hidden Saxon crowns from a mound, and the doom that befell him at the hands of the ghostly guardian thereafter, very much came to the forefront of my mind. Whilst it is unfair to identify Einstein's Lot with any one tradition of ghost stories or strange goings on, the scenario I found myself it was very redolent of the atmosphere of an M R James story.

I do wonder what might have happened if I'd instructed my character to wander the site of the mound at night. The actual level of supernatural events varies depending on where you go, and what you do, apparently.

For a rich role-playing experience in an almost real-world setting, Einstein's Lot cannot be bettered.

Roving Reporters

Convention reports

A new feature! Conventions are fun, right? We inviting anyone who's attended a recent convention to write it up for this spot in Flagship. Here, to set the ball rolling, are two reports.

The first is from Harlequin Games about the big wargaming convention they attended in Hammersmith on April 21st:

Salute 2001

'The thing you need to know about the M4 from Cardiff to London is that when you leave at 6am, you get the sun in your eyes all the way there, and when you return at 8pm, you get the sun in your eyes all the way home. Bit of a design flaw really: we'd like England moved to the West of Wales, please.

Salute is like the Flagship PBM con, except basically a lot bigger. There are around 150 stalls, with a great number of miniature vendors and demonstration wargames, plus re-enactment, lasertag, boardgames and a single PBM stall - manned by Sam, Clint and Stuart of Harlequin Games.

In contrast to our attempts to dominate the PBM conventions with outsized tents, we decided on just taking our banner, a selection of Middle Earth stuff and 40-50 Flagships.

'Ah! Harlequin Miniatures. Can you tell me where my order of 3mm Scottish Samurai has got to please?'

'We don't sell miniatures. We're Harlequin Games.'

'Ah! Middle Earth Roleplaying. Can you sell me the Sam Gamgee expansion pack please?'

'We don't sell Roleplaying. We're PBM.'

'A game you play by post? What a good idea. Where can I buy the miniatures?'

'Sigh.'

Seriously, we had a dozen setups bought and a similar number of enthusiasts who wanted to see the website first, and we introduced a lot of people to Flagship. Many of the visitors to the stall had PBMed before, remembered Flagship and were delighted to pick up a new copy.

We'll probably go next year, as these folk need converting to PBM. Thanks to all our players who came and bought us drinks.'

Madhouse mini-con

Wayne Morris of Titan PBM reports on the Madhouse mini-con, held in Hemel Hempstead over April 7th-8th:

'Being a new GM it seemed a good idea to put myself around a bit, so off I went to visit Madhouse at the Minicon they held.

For me it was a long drive, and I will say the M25 isn't much fun. Once at the pub I found that the minicon was being held in the rooms upstairs, so after a quick coke (I was driving) off up I went. A number of people were talking away about the games they play and I must say I did feel a bit out of place to start with. Bit it wasn't long before somebody (Justin from Madhouse) gave me some information about the mass game that will be played over the weekend.

The game looked like a large scale trading game, which could be fun to play. Each person had a part share in a number of items and a few gold tokens. The idea was to trade with the other people to get a full share of the items or a large amount of gold, which would then be given to you in the game of DungeonWorld. I had a one share in the Hand of Glory, Ontyles Magic Putty and the Robe of Dusk and 50 gold coins. I did see many players taking part in trading during the day and on the whole it did look a good idea and a lot of fun. Not playing DungeonWorld, I didn't take part but was asked my a few people if I would like to trade or if I had such and such.

Not long after I got there the boardgames came out and I was asked to take part in a game of Settlers which could last up to about half an hour. Never

playing before, I had to be given a crash lesson in the rules but soon had a basic idea of what was going on. I had my eye on a game of Risk next, which was on the next table and judging by the people around the table was proving a hit. A roleplaying game was under way in another room but I'm not sure on the details as I didn't take part. Anyway our quick game dragged on for about two and a half-hours and was great fun, but fair play to the winner - he had to work for it. Given that the game took so long I was unable to play any of the other games but did have a good chat with the owner of Madhouse, Steve, who seems a great guy. Being new to Play by Mail, I need all the help I can get and Steve seemed only too happy to give it all. After that chat I'm sorry to say it was time for me to start the long drive back, but I did have a good time while there.

The second day sounded as if it would be even better, as about four computers would be set up for people to play games on as well. I'm not sure, but they could well have been networked for even greater fun. Madhouse had taken a lot of time making the day fun for all the players who could make it and I must say it was time well spent. I would make time to get to another one and tell everybody to do the same, as they are well worth it.'

Forthcoming Attractions

MAY

Sarbreenar Lives: 26th-27th May in Hinckly, Leics. This is the first 2-day Sarbreenar event. Visit the Sarbreenar site for more info: rpgauk.com/sarbreenar

Conclave: 26th-27th May in Ireland.

JUNE

NSW Diplomacy Championships: 9-11 June 2001 at Sydney, Australia. Contact Craig Sedgwick craigsed@ozemail.com.au

World Boardgaming Championships: 26 June - 1 July 2001 at Hunt Valley Inn, Baltimore, MD USA. Over 100 tournaments and about 1000 players.

Superbia: 30 June - 1 July 2001 at Balliol College, Oxford. A freeform role-playing game for 36 players based on the Tudor Myth of History.

JULY

Central European Mind Sports Olympiad: 1-8 July 2001 in Prague. **Origins:** 5-8 July 2001 at Columbus, OH, USA. With almost 10,000 attendees, this is one of the largest game conventions in North America. It offers board games, trading card games, role-playing games, historical gaming and miniatures.

UK Games Fest 2001: Saturday, 7th July at the Sportcentre, Harlow, Essex. The organisers report that this is 'back bigger than ever with more role playing, more demo games, more CCG, more computer games and more traders'. For further details contact: Jan Eldridge on 01279 435372 or uk_games.fest@virgin.net.

DrakCon: July 14th-15th in Aberdeen. Contact: Sandy Douglas sdouglas@portlethen.aberdeenshire.sch.uk

Manorcon: 20-23 July 2001 at Birmingham University. Board games convention with strong links to the postal Diplomacy hobby.

World DipCon: 27-29 July 2001 at Paris, France. Contact thibault.constans@vnumail.com

Pop Tarts

Aiming for Fame

GINETTE BEAVIS has Deadly plans on the Top Twenty...

When will I be famous?

The scene is a TV studio. The camera pans along a series of girls and a lone youth. As it closes on a tight face shot of each, they announce their names. 'I'm Kira', 'I'm Katie', 'Hi, I'm Tim', 'Ruth', 'Jade', 'Scarlet', 'Sky', 'Adelle'. The camera pulls back out again and they all shout together 'And we're Deadly'. Massive applause and the crowd goes wild, cheering the most famous pop group in the world - or at least that's the ambition.

...and the crowd goes wild...

Pop Tarts is run by Received Wisdom and is, as you will have guessed by now, a game all about the music industry. You take your band - or solo artist - and see what you can achieve with it. Fame or obscurity, Millionaire's Row or the Budleigh Salterton Twilight Hotel for the Terminally Short of Cash, it's all down to you.

The rulebook is short, running to five and a half sides of A4, but it does the job in telling you how to set up your characters. You may control anywhere from one to six group members but can acquire many 'hangers on'. Having started with six girls in Deadly, I'm now up to eight members plus three dancers and a manager. The extra characters are totally under the GM's control. Each character has four stats: Charisma, Wit, Talent and Ego. While the first three are fairly straightforward, the Ego stat has me baffled. (I'm afraid since I had the girls my brain is weak and feeble - excuses, excuses.) While it is explained in the rulebook, I actually understood it very clearly but, quite frankly, it hasn't made any difference to how the game plays. After setting up the band, working out what money and cars they started out with and buying their equipment I never referred to the rulebook again until writing this review.

In addition to the four stats, each character may have a skill, for example they may excel at singing or choreography, they may write music, lyrics or play an instrument. The choice is up to you. The band can be any type - pop, dance, heavy metal - but the choice will affect your prospects. Pop is likely to be much more commercial than folk singing.

Pop Tarts at a glance

An email-only game about the music industry from Received Wisdom. The charge of £9.99 for a year's play covers participation in as many of Received Wisdom's games as you wish, though GM Stewart Leary reserves the right to limit the number of games available in order to maintain their quality.

Ginette Beavis at a glance

A little about myself. I'm married with two young children, nearly thirty and have been PBing for about 10 years. (Oh my god, is it really that long?) Most of my games are horse racing or En Garde!, but I am not averse to the occasional wargame.

One of the best parts (and most difficult) is coming up with songs. While the GM will accept just a title, he prefers a chorus or extract, and coming up with original songs is surprisingly hard. I have to admit that I ended up using choruses from some of my old records. If you do try this, don't use the Pet Shop Boys - the GM will recognise every one.

The turns are straightforward and extremely enjoyable. Each turn is equivalent to one month in game time and you may attempt to do anything.

That's right, anything. There are no order codes, no real rules, basically you see what's happened and send back your reply. The best part of the game is that GM Stewart Leary (aka Stu) allows you to go back over events in the last few months and expand on what happened. So if you get a gig, for example, which doesn't go very well, you could expand on who dropped a clanger (or a bad note), or what was wrong, or anything else you feel is worth expansion.

As an example, my girls (sorry, Tim) got an interview with a local DJ. It was fairly sketchily padded out but left lots of opportunity to go back and put in as much detail as I wanted to next turn.

There are always several leads to chase, including red herrings, and the turns are quite regular, generally returning about seven days after being sent. One minor niggle is that Stu doesn't acknowledge the email and so, being the technophobe I am, I always spend the week wondering if he got it.

The main drawback in the game is the isolation. If you like to diplomate, this game is not for you.

The game is single player, well written and engrossing. I find myself willing the girls to have a good gig, impress this person or manage to set up a meeting with that one. But if you want to know what others are doing, then find another game. It is also one of those games which, although you can bang off a turn in ten minutes, benefits greatly from a little cogitation. Having said that, because you can retrograde and add to the previous turn, if you want to bang off a turn and improve it later this is less of a problem if you're short of time.

...coming up with original songs is surprisingly hard...

This is a game where you can find earlier decisions coming back to haunt you fairly quickly. I myself have had a meeting with a man who seems to be fixating on Sky - he's tried to get at her at gigs and is starting to threaten her. Next time she is definitely demanding that bodyguard - very showbiz. Also, I decided Scarlet would take an instant dislike to an NPC who, as it turns out, has been instrumental in getting the band a one record contract. She doesn't like the NPC at all, but has to work with her and it's not really going well at the moment, but if she doesn't like it then out she goes!

The rules seem to be predisposed in favour of larger groups, simply because each person brings more money and more cars to the band to start with, and more money means more and better equipment. Or maybe I'm simply greedy. Greedy it is.

If you've ever fancied yourself as the new Elvis or Madonna then I'd say give it a shot. At £9.99 a year it's amazingly good value and you never know, maybe you'll be the next Hear'Say - or you may actually be halfway decent.

Absolute Heroes

Run a Team of Superheroes (or villains)

Armed only with a well-thumbed copy of 'The Watchmen', Reviewer-Man JEREMY WASDEN steps onto the crime-stained streets of Neon City

PBM GAMES with super heroes and villains have traditionally been few and far between, so when Jade Enterprises, moderators of Absolute Power, weighed in with a variant loosely based on the tried and tested 'Absolute' system, faster than you can say KAPOW I signed up for Absolute Heroes (AH).

The Absolute system, developed by Silver Dreamer, broadly consists of controlling up to eight characters, with an order each turn, five of which are simple 'short orders' like build something or train in a skill, while the three remaining orders are free form with lots of flexibility. Positions are built up both by developing characters and, in this game, their Super Base.

Each turn represents a week for your young Super team. For you, a turn consists of characters' results sheet, detailing just how successful those carefully crafted orders were, plus supporting printouts or spreadsheets for those playing electronically. Then there is the newsletter, Hero Watch (The Journal of the Super Human). The term 'newsletter' is a bit passive, implying that you can ignore its contents. The game operates on a city level for the most part, so what affects the city wholesale is likely to affect your team. Depending on what your team's orders were, there are accompanying special information sheets or battle reports to be had. Mind you, unexpected battle reports tend to be bad news.

...The star of Absolute Heroes is the city itself...

Team creation

Teams start the game with four members: more can be recruited later. Characters are generated individually, by firstly choosing the class of Super.

There are four Classes:

Powered: Either Energy Users, like those who can wield fireballs, or with 'natural' Powers like Spider-Man or Dare Devil.

Non-Powered: The detective type heroes, or those who wield a special weapon, like Iron Man's suit of armour.

Psionics: Powers of the mind.

Magic: The magicians and witches. You'll like this class...

Initially there are restrictions on just how powerful characters can be and what abilities can be taken. So no powerful armoured suits and, sorry Lois, no Superman. Points are spent on different powers, available to that class of character. For Fear, a powered, natural-powered Superhero and muscle for team Justify, I picked the Growth ability, Claws and Natural Armour.

As well as having powers to think about, Supers are rated in attributes, such as Fighting, Strength, Agility, Constitution, Intellect, Personality, PSI and Magic. Points can be spent enhancing these as well. Fear picked up an increase in effectiveness in Strength and Constitution. This would mean the character is naturally gifted in these two areas, so Fear is more effective than another Super with the same rating as her in that skill and she would train

From 'A Visitors Guide to Neon City'

'Welcome to "The City of Tomorrow", Neon City. Situated on the Pacific northwest coast of the United States of America, Neon City can be found nestling between Seattle and Portland. Conceived as a model city of the future, construction on the planned city began in 1924; construction which has led to one of the most famous cities in the United States. Neon City is an exciting and vibrant place, famed for its museums, night clubs and restaurants; but far more for its proliferation of Super Humans! Yes, Neon City has for most of its history been home to the largest super human population in the world. Many studies have been written by eminent sociologists as to why so many super humans should arise here in Neon City, but agreement has rarely been reached by these scholars. All agree though that the presence of these super humans have helped make Neon City the most exciting city in the world.'

faster.

The system needed a couple of reads through but it was flexible enough to create the types of character that I wanted. Not all character types are possible at set-up; you can't start out with a cybernetically enhanced character, for example, but the characters are not static beings, a cybernetic character or other type of character could be created during the game.

Added extras

To help the teams find their feet, they start off with a choice of a few extra goodies, like being famous or infamous, a hidden base, secret identification, a vehicle to run around in, a butler, a sidekick, generally happy or especially wealthy. Justify opted for a secret base, fame and wealth. The secret base is a must for villains, but Justify wanted a little protection if they were going to be one of the most famous teams in Neon City. And the cash is always good for a rainy day.

Supers and their employees all have a morale rating: if that plummets then expect staff turnover to increase. Morale declines if the team get beaten up or suffer setbacks, and as you would expect rises when they party or win. Justify's morale has been pretty high (until now that is) the only thing which set morale back was some adverse weather earlier in the year (caused by a super villain's defective climate control suit).

...Mind you, unexpected battle reports tend to be bad news...

For your Superheroes (and let's face it, no Flagship reader would play a villain, would they?) to get more powerful, they need good facilities to operate from. Auntie Perkins' allotment shed just won't do in Neon City. The team base consists of four floors of ten rooms. That's an awful lot of space to rattle around in, but floors soon fill up. The Supers each have a room to live in, and share a meeting area and a kitchen. So how would a Super team turn a Jamie Oliver arrangement into a thriving high security, hi-tech communications fort? Pop up to the lab...

Absolute Heroes at a glance

A super-hero game from Jade Enterprises. Charges are £15.00 to start + 2 turns; then 4.50 per turn, but more for battle reports. There's a waiting list, but new players are being introduced regularly.

Feasibility studies

In the labs, characters' dreams are made Neon City reality. Supers, being imaginative sorts, can think of new ideas to 'improve' the team. These are of infinite variety and include training facilities, labs to further research strange new powers, types of power for the base, vehicles, weapons systems, new types of employees, special skills and tactics or new spells for magicians and new headaches for psychics. The idea is written as a Feasibility Study (FS) order and if accepted, results in a FS Sheet for that idea. The FS orders tend to fail if you go too far, too quickly: no anti-gravity robots until you have developed robots and anti-gravity technology first.

Being just that imaginative sort, Justify have thought up the idea of a Weights Room to train their muscles. The FS sheet for the humble Weights Room indicates that if the team wants to build it, they will have to carry out lab research. The order to implement this research will cost 250 'Skill' points and 50 'Technical' points; these are types of points generated by the different labs and the employees there. Points are generated in the labs each turn, depending on how happy the researchers are and how good their facilities are. Once implemented, the team can then build the Weights Room. This just costs cash and another order.

Inventions can be patented, which makes the study public record, but does bring in a good stream of income. You also have to be first to the patent office with the idea, though.

Sponsors

A word from ours. This base and all these labs must cost a fair packet. So where does all the money come from? Yes, even the good guys have sold out early. Teams are sponsored by an organisation. These organisations are the Super teams first introduction to Neon City. They include organisations such as the city's Police Department, FB(S)I, and companies from power, media, construction, security, IT sectors and plenty more. These links are secret at first: after all, the teams are unproven and who wants their company to be linked with a failed bunch of renegades or worse? So far Justify, have had no contact with their sponsors, but let's just say they don't look forward to having to turn down a costume change to incorporate advertisements for 'Wizzo Washing Powder'.

Mega Bucks

Forget your pounds, dollars, euros etc, being Superheroes they think big: they think Mega Bucks. The going rate for one of these is \$1000. Cash is eaten away by wages, and implementing research, such as paying 10 MB for a weights room (cheap rate for all Supers). For good guys it's brought back in again by going to work, either getting a reward from a wealthy backer for a good deed done or by simply patrolling areas of the city.

The more affluent an area, the more they reward teams for patrolling there. The good guys tend to patrol wealthy areas frequently, concerned for the freedom of the very rich to go unmolested. Villains' cries of righteous indignation fall on deaf ears.

Neon City

The star of Absolute Heroes is the city itself. Divided into one hundred distinct wards, Neon City figures large in the game. Characters can search out an individual ward, which will bring in a special sheet describing the ward and its key buildings, inhabitants, features and rumours. These are a great way to plunge into stories, crimes and investigations. Neon City is a living city, with more plot lines than a can of spaghetti.

It is as you are going about your Super life that you get the feel for the city: it's just there in the background, like another character. It's the way the trees get knocked down in Caledonia Park North, the feeling of dark depression that weighs down on Trash Town Central, a meeting with a girl in a teashop in the Warrens in China Town. That's not to say that Neon City is the only place for heroes and villains. Some are getting involved overseas, there are also major new cities planned for the game.

What have Justify been up to?

Well, in the twenty weeks Justify have operated they have been tracking down menaces to society and recruiting them! We will have you know that the Walrus and the Egg Man are actually fine upstanding individuals, a danger to criminals and donuts everywhere. As well as recruiting and building up the base, their skills and powers, the team have knocked out the evil Lizard Man, sending him for treatment.

At the moment Justify are trying to befriend a madman by finding his floppy hat, which he lost when people who came from the sky assaulted him. This very powerful madman sent those members of Justify who were looking for his hat into this 'sky' place. So half the team are presently trying to work out where the other half of the team is, who are wondering where they are themselves. It all seemed like such a good idea at the time.

The End?

Absolute Heroes has an experienced GM, with an excellent imagination. The game is based on an established game planned, vibrant system set in well-city. It's tempting fate, but where can it fail?

If I had to categorise the game I think that I would mumble, stutter and finally fluff the question. It seems to have all the elements of power game, but with ample scope to roleplay your team and characters: but then isn't that the hallmark of a good power game? Certainly individual characters are going to be around a lot longer than in other 'Absolute' games, where for the characters a turn length is a year rather than a week, so there's a lot longer to get attached to them.

What are the weaknesses? Well, for anyone starting the game there would be some deficit to make up against those who have played from the start. But then, in this game I have not fought other players. That may change later on (especially if the villains don't stop moaning about where Heroes patrol). If it is decided to open up a fresh game area for new players, as has been considered, life would be easier for them. But we are less than thirty turns in; it's early days. The other good news is that you do not need to be a comic book buff to play the game; in fact you don't even have to go into a comic book shop. Reason enough to play, in my book!

An Absolute Heroes Battle Report

Justify vs Lizard Man

Seated atop a mansion opposite a back alley, the four members of Justify sit, staking out the alleyway below. Vigilant is rather pleased with her timing; now that the blizzard has ended there is a chance that their quarry might decide to venture forth. The four of them sit back on the rooftop and wait. Long hours pass and as evening falls, he Shrink nudges everybody else and points down below. A secret door has slid open in the wall of the mansion and a figure heavily wrapped in a thick coat and a baseball cap has stepped out. Vigilant gestures to everybody to look lively and watch

where this figure goes. He walks purposefully down the alley and hangs a left, walking past the side of the building atop which the heroes perch towards the next street. Vigilant whispers to her team to follow her over the prow of the rooftop and to hit this man as soon as he steps out into the street. They don't want to run the risk of loosing him and if they hit hard and fast they should be able to take him down and get out of there before any help can arrive for him.

The team look down from the roof as the man, assumedly Lizard Man, steps out into the street below. There aren't that many people about on this street and their quarry stops beneath a street light directly below to light a cigarette. Vigilant gives the signal for the team to move. Fear leaps off the building, dropping the three stories to the street below, growing in size as she goes. The figure below looks up in surprise as two massive feet crash into him as Fear lands on him, smashing him to the floor and cracking the pavement. Vigilant leaps off the roof, aiming for a convenient flagpole a floor below to swing off it to land smoothly on the floor. Fire Flash takes to the skies with the intention of using her flame powers from the air whilst The Shrink remains on the roof where he can use his metal powers in safety. Fear stands there with one massive foot on the body of the man and laughs, saying "That was too easy". Suddenly the man beneath his feet begins to grow! Fear goes flying sideways as where once laid their quarry now stands a full size and highly irate Tyrannosaurus Rex! "Whoops" says Fear as the T-Rex lunges forward at her, snapping with it's massive jaws. Fear grabs the beast, which is half again as tall as her, and tries to grapple with it.

They stumble backwards and Vigilant dives to one side, break rolling out of the way and coming up firing with her Vigilant pistol, the explosive rounds bouncing off the thick hide of the T-Rex. Fire Flash flies in close and lets rip with her most powerful flame blast into the back of Lizard Man, causing him to howl with pain. Lizard Man smashes Fear back away from him, causing her to land on a car and completely crush it, and turns to snap at Fire Flash who swoops up fast into the sky to avoid the crushing jaws of the T-Rex. Meanwhile, up on the roof, The Shrink tries to administer a psychic headache to the beast but is having a few problems. He can tell that in this form Lizard Man's brain seems far more reptile and alien to him

and The Shrink realises that it is going to take a moment for him to adjust to this reptile mindset enough for him to be able to do anything. He just hopes that the rest of the team can last out long enough.

Down on the street Vigilant shouts out orders to her two team mates. She can see the Shrink concentrating up above and hopes that he can come up with the good soon otherwise they might be lizard chow very quickly. Vigilant jumps up onto the roof of the car and unloads another couple of explosive rounds into Lizard man's hide. This seems only to have the effect of making him very angry and drawing his attention, which is rather what she hoped for. The T-Rex snaps down at Vigilant as she back flips off the car and out of harm's way, though the car gets completely totalled. And then Fire Flash does another quick fly by to flame blast Lizard Man and fly out of range before he can eat her. The T-Rex bellows with anger and a little confusion, but the plan seems to have worked; Vigilant and Fire Flash have bought their heavy hitter a precious moment to recover herself. Fear gets to her feet and, with immense effort, just about manages to pick up that car she had wrecked when she fell into it and, with a mighty heave, she smashes the car into Lizard Man's back, staggering the giant beast.

She then drops the smashed vehicle and leaps onto the lizard's back, raking at it with her giant claws, Lizard Man bellows with agony and staggers backwards, smashing Fear into a lamp post, knocking the lamp post down and shrugging Fear off his back. Lizard Man turns quickly towards the momentarily dazed Fear and opens his mighty jaws to bite her head off...

"Got it!" Shouts The Shrink with satisfaction. He thinks that he is on Lizard Man's wave length now and reaches out with his mind. He grabs the T-Rex's mind in an iron vice and freezes him in place. The Shrink feels that he will not be able to hold Lizard Man for long, but he buys time for Fear to roll out of the way of those might jaws. The Shrink then releases his mind control of Lizard Man, who snaps angrily at empty air where Fear's head was a moment ago, and then The Shrink unlimbers his mental blast.

Lizard Man staggers backwards and bellows in intense agony. The air around the villain shimmers and suddenly Lizard Man turns into a normal man again, holding his head in pain. Obviously he couldn't maintain his T-Rex form under a direct mental assault. "Down boy" Says Fear as she administers the coup de grace and pummels Lizard Man into the pavement and deep unconsciousness.

"Well, that was fun" Says Vigilant sarcastically as Fire Flash handcuffs the villain. The Shrink, down from the roof, keeps a tight mental grip on Lizard Man in case he regains consciousness but he can tell that this villain has taken a pasting and will be out cold for quite a well. Which is probably just as well since the team's base doesn't have any facilities to hold a prisoner. "Good work, team" Says Vigilant as Fear totes the unconscious Lizard Man over her giant shoulder "Another fine day at the office".



News from America

Pornography by Mail?

Bob McLain casts his eye over events in the US and Cyberspace ...

In 1981, Nicky Palmer (now known as Nick Palmer, and who may eventually shorten his name to just ick) tried to pull a fast one on me. Nicky was planning the release of the first issue of Flagship; I was planning the release of the first issue of PBM Universal. We were titans.

I must have made Nicky nervous because Bob Cook of Adventures by Mail warned me that Nicky was asking many questions about PBM Universal. Bob sent me copies of Nicky's correspondence. Not long afterward, I received new correspondence, this time from Nicky himself, offering to help me gather information about European play-by-mail games, and asking lots of questions about how I intended to run my magazine.

Nicky didn't mention Flagship. He must have hoped I would divulge all of my business secrets (worth about 25 cents at the time) to a complete stranger. I had to admire him. And I had to get even.

I wrote to Nicky and invited him to join my staff as the International Editor at a salary of \$2500 per issue. I told him not to worry about Flagship, if he had even heard of it, because I knew of a petition circulating among the U.S. moderators to boycott Flagship and discourage their customers from subscribing to it. I said that I owned a casino in Atlantic City, that play-by-gaming was my only hobby, and that I had a fortune to spend on PBM Universal.

Two days later, I wrote to Nicky again. In this letter, I confided that I had known about Nicky and his involvement with Flagship from the beginning, and that everything in the original letter was a joke.

Fortunately, Nicky got the joke, admitted he had tried to hornswoggle me, and suggested that we form a 'PBM Partnership' between our magazines, which we did. When Dave Webber heard about it, he started his own magazine, Paper Mayhem, vowing to publish nothing but articles about American games by American authors.

And now look at us. Dave Webber is dead, Nicky (Nick!) Palmer is championing legislation in Parliament to outlaw fox hunts, and I'm the only person still writing about American play-by-mail. Who would you rather be? (Who just yelled Dave Webber!?)

As long as we're on the topic of Paper Mayhem, let me put the final nail in its coffin. I asked Elaine Webber, Dave's widow, what she planned to do with the magazine, and here is her reply: "[U]nfortunately, it is finished. I have tried once to keep it going and got burned and am very leery of doing business with anyone else."

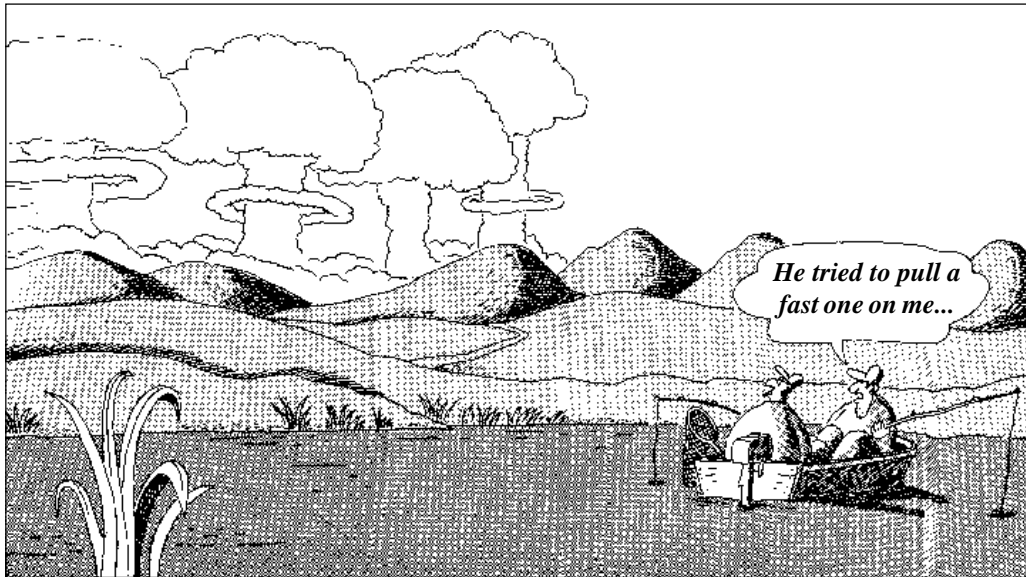
Paper Mayhem is not finished on eBay, the auction site, where I recently won 40 issues (a full run from May 1986 through April 1991) for \$14.50, or about 36 cents per issue, less than the postage it originally cost to mail them.

Kerry Harrison, who last year had announced his purchase of Paper Mayhem, is still listed in the Internic database as the owner of papermayhem.com, but the domain expired on March 13, 2001, and Kerry has not paid to renew it. I haven't heard from Kerry in months, but when I looked for him in the newsgroups, I found a couple of posts in alt.support.depression.manic. I'm sure those were about a different Kerry Harrison...

The real Kerry Harrison did post a message to a thread entitled 'Morally Ambiguous Works' on February 13.

Hey, bud. Want to have some fun? Visit <http://www.play-by-mail.com>, where you will have the opportunity to 'see the true Hollywood whores' and

pay a mere \$39.95 for penis enlargement ('no pumps or pills'). This site used to promote the U.S. version of Dungeon World. When Kerry Harrison (him again!) transferred the U.S. rights to Rolling Thunder, I guess he forgot about the Web site. If you want to buy play-by-mail.com, contact its proud new owner at prozz@onebox.com, and proposition him. Maybe he'll throw in a free penis



enlargement.

Pornography in play-by-mail is nothing new. Midnight Games used to distribute a card game of 'bad puns and naked buns' called Nina Hartley's Scandal. But success in the porn industry can at times be as slippery as a tube of Ms Hartley's anal lube. On January 1, Midnight Games became 'a division of Ray Technologies', the new owner of Legends, and the card game is no longer advertised on the site.

I regret to announce the forthcoming humiliation of Carol Mulholland right here in the pages of her own magazine. Carol has agreed to oppose me in a two-player game of Godfather. Many of you may remember the popular You Rule! Diary that ran in these pages several years ago, and that chronicled my sweet victory over Nicky Palmer in a two-player variant of that game. Carol plans to run a similar Diary about our game of Godfather. Ever the diplomat, Nicky wrote me to say that 'I'm sure Carol will knock the stuffing out of you...'. Sending a woman to do a man's job, are you, Nicky? I'm sure Carol can do no worse...

My birthday is in May. I can't help but realize that I have more past to think about, and less future. One thing I don't have to think about is sending thank-you notes to all my friends in play-by-mail who sent me birthday cards, because I didn't get any. I did get a few coupons redeemable for \$39.95 at the play-by-mail.com Web site. Thanks!

Hey, wait a minute...

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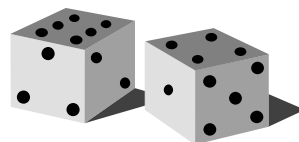
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Behind the Throne, Master and Commander, Northern Lights

CAROL MULHOLLAND gets behind the covers ...

I LOVE reading novels. I like a strong story-line that isn't predictable, believable characters and dialogue that sounds like real speech. As we all do, right? Of course, not everything which I enjoy will appeal to you, but here are some titles that just might interest you. The first, at least, has a clear PBM connection...



I ordered Martin Dougherty's *Behind the Throne* because I knew Martin's name as a PBMer, and had heard that he's also written RPG game supplements. This is his first novel, though others have followed since. *Behind the Throne* is set in an imaginary world; it isn't entirely a fantasy novel, however, because there's no magic or strange creatures in it. The world is a medieval one, where loyalty and personal honour are the watch-words but casual brutality is common enough. The main character is Duke Alvin Riall, decent and brave, who has the misfortune to arouse his king's jealousy by his skill as a military leader and from having been the queen's childhood friend. The king is well-meaning but indecisive, so easily influenced. Fostering trouble between Riall and his king is the devious Baron Terrik, who plans to seize both the crown and the queen when the time is ripe (cue for a villainous cackle). The novel doesn't have a lot of depth, but what it does have is a fine set of descriptions of combat, from the duel which gets the book off to an exciting start to Terrik's attempted coup at its end, and with plenty of battles in between. It's not a blood-thirsty book, however: peace is seen as the desirable condition for a nation, and it's what all the characters except Terrik desire, even though the story has to run its course before peace can be achieved. Martin Dougherty coaches a university fencing team, and his understanding of sword-fighting gives an impressive authority to the combat he describes. *Behind the Throne* doesn't altogether fit my own taste, but may well match yours. And I'm interested in going on to see how Martin handles a Napoleonic background for his later novels: I think I'll prefer a familiar historical setting.

Speaking of Napoleonic backgrounds, I first came across Patrick O'Brian's naval series when this was recommended by a long-standing PBM friend (thanks, Andrew). I've just finished the final one, but obviously it's best for a new reader to start with the first, *Master and Commander*. This is where the series' two main characters meet, in 1800, when Jack Aubrey is waiting in Minorca for fresh orders from the Admiralty, and Stephen Maturin is a

penniless doctor who's got himself stranded there. Their first encounter is unfriendly, but Jack is given his longed-for promotion and offers Stephen the post of ship's surgeon. Much of the interest of the series lies in the contrast between these two men, as they voyage together. But oops, I mustn't risk sounding girly by talking about the books' characters. There's plenty of action, too. The description of naval battles in the whole series seems excellent to me because I can follow what's happening - well, almost - in all the dangerous complexity of naval warfare in the days of sail. As a picture of life in the navy during the Napoleonic wars, the novels all seem well researched, with much of the detail drawn from diaries and letters of that period. And O'Brian is the only historical novelist I know who is able to capture the authentic speech of a period. The stories don't just describe warfare: there are voyages to distant lands, Stephen's interest in natural history, his work as a spy and Jack's tendency to plunge into difficulties while at home. All this with a sharp dash of humour, too. If you enjoy *Master and Commander*, you're a lucky reader, as you have the whole series ahead of you.

But maybe this doesn't sound your sort of book? Here's something different again, a fantasy recommendation. I know it's risky of me to recommend a book which appears in the Older Children section of my local bookshop, but I promise it's good adult reading too. Philip Pullman's *Northern Lights* begins in the Oxford of an alternative universe, where the Church holds sway, but where everyone (except for a few unfortunates) has a companion which is like a daemon or an external soul, and which settles permanently into the form of an appropriate animal as people reach adulthood. The main character, Lyra, is known by the adults around her to have a special destiny ahead, but she's only a child when the story starts and she has to discover this destiny for herself, painfully. No, honest, this isn't a little-girl+cuddly-pet novel: there are serious horrors ahead for Lyra, which include murder, sacrifice, a ruthless father and an appalling mother. The story moves at a rapid pace, and the background setting of a life which resembles our own but which still differs greatly from it is much more plausible than most fantasy fare. Not all of the novel's mysteries are solved at its scary end. Yes, this is partly because there are two more books following on, but it's also because some of the questions Pullman raises don't have easy answers. I've enjoyed the second volume (though not quite as much as the first) and will buy the third to read as soon as it comes out in paperback, but basically I'm happy to value *Northern Lights* just as itself. After all, mysteries are at their most enthralling while they're mysterious.

All the books are convincing in their different ways. *Behind the Throne* is strong on the details of combat without gloating over blood-shed; *Master and Commander* combines convincing characterisation and historical detail; *Northern Lights* has a vivid fantasy background.

Of course, reading a novel is totally different from playing a game, so I won't try to argue that *Behind the Throne* seems closest to an empire-building wargame, or that the O'Brian series is like a continuing range of finite wargames, or that *Northern Lights* resembles an RPG where a background plot is unfolding and players need to intervene in this. The two mediums are very different. I just hope you'll enjoy your reading.

[If you'd like to contribute a non-PBM review for this series - about books, boardgames, computer games, films, whatever - do get in touch!]

Behind the Throne by Martin Dougherty, Highbridge Press, New York ISBN 0-9678832-0-2 at £15.95 (you'll need to order this one. A search of www.books.co.uk reveals the best buy to be from WHSmith.co.uk at £17.10 inc.p&p.).

Master and Commander by Patrick O'Brian, published by Harper Collins, ISBN 0-00-616626-1 at £7.99.

Northern Lights by Philip Pullman, published by Scholastic Ltd at 5.99 ISBN 0-59066054-3 at £4.99. This may still be available on a two-for-£10 deal, where you can get the second in the series (*The Subtle Knife*) as well, or try the first of Pullman's Sally Lockhart thrillers, *The Ruby in the Smoke*.

StarFleet Warlord

The Death of a Warlord

PAUL WEST leads his PSI Corporation onwards, upwards, and...

THE YEAR was Y175. I had just been awarded Sector #29 in the D11 quadrant of the Greater Magellanic Cloud. There were many celebrations at our Home Office as the PSI Corporation began its quest to achieve domination of this quadrant. It was a goal shared by at least thirty other Corporations, so our work was definitely cut out for us.

Our first year was hectic. We built four Branch Offices (Warp Gates) and purchased several small ships for early exploration and scouting efforts. These were provided from old stockpiles of ships from the Galactic Powers, and included a Federation Express, Orion Free Traitor, Federation Police Cutter, Hydran Scout and several others. Though these ancient vessels are of little use in today's galaxy, they were quite helpful to our young Corporation, and we're sure the Powers were happy to be rid of them.

... Our first year was hectic ...

In our initial buys, we used up all our wealth except for 99 economic points (EPs), but knew we would receive our first income checks before we would need more ships. The Council also kindly provided us with a base station on our new Home Office, which took care of scanning our initial sector for us. As we mapped out the location of key sites, we also found that a foreign entity was roaming our sector. Considering the known distance to other Corporations, we assumed this would be a space monster. The Galactic Council warned us that there would be no prospecting allowed in the D11 quadrant, but that each site produced double the expected income. This forced us to adjust some of our initial strategies, and we decided to focus on scanning adjacent sectors as quickly as possible. With that in mind, we would outfit our ships and send them to our sector and start accumulating sites that would add to our income. We were young, dumb and full of gum, and we were looking forward to our foray into the great unknown.

As we prepared, we sent messages to our neighbors with offers to negotiate borders and treaties. We hoped that we would get responses soon, as we have learned that early communication has been helpful in other Quadrants. To further aid these efforts, we subscribed to the relatively new Galactic Bulletin magazine, and found out that this Quadrant was already gearing up for a tremendous war: two Corporations (Confederate Navy and Vengeance Inc) held a grudge against each other and were going to use Quadrant D11 to resolve their differences. Everyone was warned that we could be engulfed in this conflict, and that sides were being chosen early.

Among my staff I employed several officers who had worked previously on successful paramilitary contracts with Confederate Navy. Our relationship with this Corporation was therefore excellent, while we knew little of Vengeance Incorporated. Confederate Navy is also generally recognized as the most successful Corporation in the Greater Magellanic Cloud, owning at least five Quadrants that we know of. Our path seemed clear, but for now we kept our options open.

Year 176 - Diplomatic ventures and a helpful alien

StarFleet Warlord at a glance

A science fiction wargame from Pagoda Games. Startup is £5, with further turns at £3 each.

We had a good year. We captured two sites early on, two more several months later, and a fifth even as we were closing our fiscal books. Next year's income statement put us well in the black.

In diplomatic circles, we were warned that the Vengeance Inc Corporation was adjacent to us and that they considered PSI an enemy, so we could expect conflict almost immediately. Armed with this information, we decided to list our primary ship races with the Galactic Council as LDR, Orion and Lyran, which would give us the ability to produce ships optimized for offense (Orion) or defense (Lyran/LDR) as needed. We then changed our combat training tactic for all ships in our Corporation to Overrun for offense and defense. This would allow us to make the best use of the gating phasers and ESGs that would be aboard most of our ships.

At the start of the year we had only our leftover funds from the initial outlay and what the Home Office produced, so we didn't have a lot of EPs to spend. We used this paltry sum to acquire four small Orion ships. Orions can alter their option mounts to various configurations, which would permit us to use them for scouts early on and then switch to a combat-oriented mission later.

During the middle of the year, a strange alien approached our Home Office and offered to refit all of our ships for extra speed. This would cost 15% of each ship's value in EPs, which doesn't sound like much, but was a significant expense at this stage. After much debating, we agreed to this deal. The extra speed for our ships and warp gates would be well worth it later on. We only wished he would stick around permanently, but he advised us he would only be available this year, after which he would move on to other customers.

We also accessed the Galactic Council and found out that Warp Gates were the most purchased ship - 30 in all! That meant WG prices in the future would be insane. We'd probably be stuck with only the four we had at present, which would have to be enough.

...It was an Energy Monster!..

Our Corporation received a message from the BGWG Corp in sector 09 (we were in 29, so they were two sectors to our west) that they would like to talk alliance! Things were starting at a good pace. We also received a message from Confederate Navy stating that Vengeance was two sectors to our east (sector 49) and that he considered our sector as a battleground. We resolved to learn the truth of this before throwing our weight behind either of the two warring Corps.

We didn't have to wait long. Almost as we disconnected the vidcom with CN, we received a call from the supreme commander of Vengeance Inc stating Confederate Navy was in charge of not one but three corporations! Vengeance also warned us that Confederate Navy is not above backstabbing their allies. Frankly, this worried us. It is generally not good business practice to begin the negotiations by venting against someone else. Vengeance Inc seemed like a bad risk.

After some debate, we decided Confederate Navy would be the better choice as an ally. We responded in writing to this effect, and explained that PSI will not turn their back on their allies. Confederate Navy was a strong Corporation who had always helped out PSI in other interests. We also stated in the Galactic Bulletin that PSI was not accepting any more inquiries regarding turning on Confederate Navy.

Later we found out that our statement made us a lot of enemies.

Year 177 - A space monster and a dangerous neighbour

Thanks to our alien benefactor, we had our whole fleet refitted for extra speed, so we were hoping that this year we would take some new sites. Because of this expense, we could only purchase two small civilian vessels, but the greater speed was sure to pay dividends later.

During our movements early in the year, we tried to take a new site, but the alien entity in our sector was there. It was an Energy Monster! Our combat computers accessed the database on such creatures and learned its strength was far more than our two ships (the Federation Police Cutter and a couple of small freighters) could handle. Our captains wisely decided to retreat.

In the Galactic Bulletin, we were told that Vengeance Inc and Magellanic Research (who was two sectors to our south) were in league together. While this was cause for concern, we were also told that Planet Catchers (two sectors north of us) was no friend of Vengeance. Based on this information, our Strategic Command decided that it would be best to fortify to the south (to block Magellanic Research advances) and attack sector 39, which was between Vengeance Inc and ourselves. We would then carry the fight to Vengeance.

Upon further digging through Council records, we found out that Vengeance had conquered at least four Quadrants in the past and was a greatly feared Warlord. We knew that our chances for survival were not on the positive side. On top of that there was rumblings in the Cloud that Confederate Navy was going to give up the two extra sectors they were managing and that other Warlords were going to replace them. We had mixed feelings at first. Confederate Navy had told us that Vengeance was his to take out, but if his sector changed owners, we would be left on our own to defend our borders. Yet the thought of testing our mettle against a proven Warlord like Vengeance made us all very excited.

Year 178 - Some advances

We started the year by upgrading our base station to a battle station and

assigning a Legendary Science officer to the site. This would earn us our first special scanning order, which we could use for any of a number of information-gathering purposes.

Still lacking our sector bonus thanks to the Energy Monster, we were low on cash and bought only three ships. These were more Orions, which we preferred at this early stage for their mission variety. Our scouts made sector scans of sector 19 and sector 39, expanding our potential territory by 300%. We were successful in capturing three more sites, but the overzealous captain of our Light Raider decided to attack the Energy Monster that was terrorizing our sector. Though things looked good early in the battle, the monster proved too tough for his ship's small hull, which was destroyed with no survivors. On top of that, our base scanners broke down early in the year, so we had to do without tactical scans while waiting for spare parts.

It was a very quiet year on the diplomatic front. Reports were being put in that Confederate Navy had indeed dropped the two extra sectors and that Vengeance was aching to pick a fight. Again, subspace messages came in asking us to turn on Confederate Navy and get him out of the Quadrant. Our response was our most serious: We will not turn on our allies, and do not contact us about this any more!

We considered that maybe we should alter our tactics after the great Warlord hero, Braineater, and go in all directions. But this was voted down, as Vengeance would need our full concentration if we were to stand any chance of surviving in this quadrant.

The war of words heated up between Vengeance and Confederate Navy and sides were being drawn. This quadrant was like being in a Mob war - to survive you had to join one side or the other. Confederate Navy contacted me stating that my sector would be caught in the middle of the battle. All of Confederate Navy's allies and friends started to speak up for him, which made us satisfied with our decision. However, the war of words continued and it was starting to get very nasty. We continued monitoring the messages and hoping that we could see signs of either side backing down. But it just got worse...

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Sports News

CHRIS DICKSON takes his regular look at sports PBM ...

THE DICKSON family recently enjoyed a glorious day at the port of Whitby: not a cloud in the sky, a gentle breeze and pleasantly warm temperature. We concluded that that was this year's spring and so it's time for yet another damp, overcast English summer. Talking of damp, overcast summers, I haven't looked at the world of PBM cricket games for a couple of years, so here's a round-up of the state of the art.

Many of the most prominent sports games in the country come from the partnership of Danny McConnell's Ab Initio Games and Peter Calcraft's Software Simulations; Run Chase, Software Simulations' one-day cricket game, carries on strongly with a dozen games currently in progress. You act as coach of a squad of 24 players and pick a first eleven each week, aiming to select a style of play which uses your players' strengths and takes advantage of your opponents' weaknesses.

You also have the decision as to whether your players should bat in an aggressive or defensive fashion; aggressive play generates runs more quickly but, as ever, increases the risk of your players being given out. The standing orders you supply will be interpreted over by over in order to work out how your team should play. You may want to change your batting or bowling line-up if the situation requires it.

The squad management aspect of the game is detailed as well; there are a number of different sources from which you can look for fresh talent, or you can coach your squad so that their abilities improve, but you need to balance players' spiralling wage demands with your tight budget. At the end of the season, younger players who have shown good form may realise more of their potential, whereas older players may wane in the twilight of their careers.

The game's structure has three divisions each of six teams; you play each team in your division home and away for a ten-game season before promotion or relegation. As a bonus, the computer selects eleven of the players in your squad who haven't been selected for the first eleven match to play in a second eleven match each week as well.

Alternatively, if you've always criticised the England selectors for picking a poor side, an international format game exists where you pick from the cricketing wealth of an entire country in global competition; there are no transfers between teams (people don't often change nationality overnight!), nor are there second eleven matches.

Turns are scheduled for alternate weeks. Turn fees are three pounds, but a 10% discount is offered if you buy a block of ten, or a 20% discount if you buy a block of twenty. Players from outside the UK are made welcome, but special arrangements for sending and receiving orders raise the costs. You'll find GM Software Simulations' details in Galactic View.

Unfortunately, it seems that their 'fantasy cricket' game, Cricket Stats, is no longer available - a shame, as this means the only fantasy cricket games left are the newspaper ones.

Run Chase only simulates one of the two major forms of cricket, the one-day, limited-overs game. The next cricket game, Ultimate Test, restricts itself to the other version, the traditional five-day, four-inning international test match.

Mark Labbett gave a comprehensive review of the game in issue 88 of Flagship, so I will summarise. You act as manager and coach in a one-man game, guiding an England team of your choice against a rival Test match country such as New Zealand or the West Indies. The game is played in chunks of between ten and thirty overs; your orders are completely freeform and typically see you describing how you want your bowlers or batsmen to behave in the short-term future.

Mark's conclusions were that the game was intricately detailed, extremely well thought out and immaculately GM'd by Simon Williams, but that the lack of interaction between you and any other player (for each player takes part in their own little game universe) meant that this had limited appeal, being primarily restricted to deep thinkers who want to pit their wits in considerable depth against a cricket enthusiast GM. That isn't a bad thing, of course - if you fit the bill, you'll be on your way to GV already.

Spellbinder announced The Willow Game around a year and a half ago, which simulates the English inter-county competitions, both in one-day limited-over matches and the longer county championship games.

Paul Appleby gave favourable feedback in Rumours from the Front in issue 88, praising the game for the commitment and effort shown by the GM and enjoying the atmosphere built up by players who care about building up a league of entertainingly themed teams.

The rules stretch to just five and a half pages, but the turn fee is relatively low for a professionally run game at under £2 a turn. Paul didn't find that being new to sports games hindered his enjoyment, so this might be an ideal relatively-small

game to play. As ever, Galactic View will tell you costs and contact details. [We've recently heard from Paul that it's a while since he's had a turn in The Willow Game, so check the game is still running before trying to join it - C]

There are also a number of amateur postal cricket games run as 'zines, or sometimes as games within 'zines. I don't mean to dismiss them for I have enjoyed many 'zines over the years and find that a good 'zine editor can make even the simplest game a lot of fun to play, but barring further information, I can only give you a number of name checks and direct you to Galactic View. I haven't heard anything to suggest that any of George Foot's Long Leg, Mike Benyon's Over the Boundary or the Dave Carter's untitled cricket game aren't all still running.

However, probably bigger than all of these put together is Ultra Cricket, which can strictly only be played by e-mail; you can get all the details from the <http://www.ultra-sports.com/Cricket> web site. Currently the game universe consists of five parallel conferences, each containing eighteen divisions of twelve teams; moderator Tim Astley estimates that only around 200 of those 1080 teams are free for takeover, the others all being taken up by loyal players.



The game is based around players e-mailing programmed orders in a complicated quasi-English format. Orders include team selection, the circumstances in which the selected line-up will be re-ordered, batting tactics, declaration circumstances, fielding tactics and bowling tactics. Each week, your side typically takes part in one test match and two one-day international matches; you also have the opportunity to train players and draft three newcomers at the end of each season.

Players are rated for batting skill, batting aggression, bowling skill, bowling economy, fielding skill, ability to bowl each of the three fundamental types of delivery (fast, swing and seam), particular batting ability when facing each of those three types of delivery, age, health and form. On top of those, it's possible for players to have special characteristics such as captaincy, wicket-keeping and left-handedness.

The array of competitions in which you participate is as bewildering as the detail in which players are described; each conference has a super league, four parallel sets of four-division leagues and a league dedicated to new players. Your season consists of eleven matches, one against the other five teams in your division, plus a five-match promotion and relegation mini-season which determines whether you are promoted or relegated, possibly by two divisions. The way this is calculated looks both impressive and fearsome.

On top of that, there is a 'knockabout' cup run by the 'Swiss system tournament' principles most commonly seen in chess tournaments; think of it as a knockout cup where, if you lose, you aren't eliminated, but you carry on in the competition, disqualified from the overall championship but continuing to face opposition with similar success records to yourself in order to find out in which position you finish.

A truly impressive play-by-e-mail game, similar in complexity to the Electronic Football League EFL games that are mentioned here from time to

time. I recognise some of the names who play as experienced PBM old hands, which gives a good impression; however, I also recognise them as computer programmers, which is probably an accurate assessment of the mentality required in order to be fully able to cope with the artificial nature of the order input system.

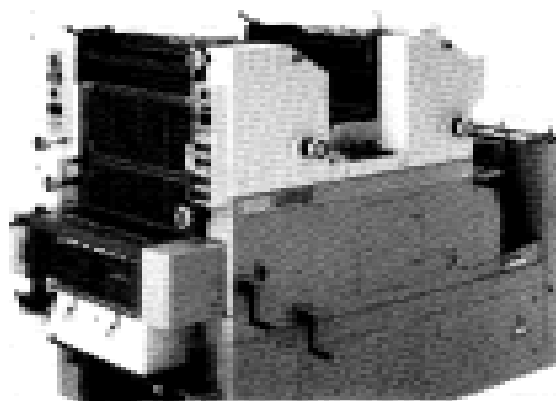
Play is free, but you can join entirely optional clubs about the game at a real-world cost - these clubs permit you to run more than one team in the game, to receive discounts on accompanying software packages, to participate in additional dedicated inter-conference competitions and to receive certain statistical information through your e-mail rather than having to look it up on the web site. The costs involved here are modest, in the low tens of Australian dollars per year. I get the impression that most of the payment is made to thank Tim for developing such an intricate piece of software and keeping the game running. High praise indeed!

So those are the options available in the cricket world at the moment. We also have some postal football game news: Pete Burrows reports that his two United-based games, Top of the League and Puma, are still going very strong, beginning their fifteenth and fourteenth seasons respectively. Few games will be older than that.

One of them may be Soccer Star, whose history can be traced back as far as 1986 - a proud boast indeed. Jonathan Housden advertises this special offer: startup and two turns in the popular postal football management game are free; also, Flagship readers mentioning this column will have any money they send in for game credit doubled. This offer is limited to a doubling of £2.50 to £5, sufficient to pay for an entire season at once, and I imagine that Jonathan wouldn't be too impressed if you try to take advantage of it after the end of summer. Thanks, Jonathan - sounds like an offer worth trying to me!

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The Displacement Engine

A trial game ...

WE'RE STARTING The Displacement Engine as an experiment. Occasionally, readers suggest that we should run games in *Flagship*, but with such a huge range of games it's hard to decide what would be best for this purpose. What we're looking for are games that anyone can join in at any time, and which will be interesting to read about each turn even for people who aren't playing. Not so easy, eh?

The Displacement Engine is a narrative game of time-travel, and the cunning plan is to run it as a trial for 3-5 issues. It'll take up around a page each time. You can all take part in it, or we'll discontinue it if you dislike it.

The GM's decisions will be based on the majority of your choices, reserving the right to nip and tuck as appropriate. Other moderators are invited to have a go at running a game of their own design when The Displacement Engine has finished.

The Background

The year is 1850. On the edge of Hampstead Heath, behind a high stone wall, the stout yellow bricks of a large new house gleam fitfully in the London fog.

Inside, a small group of people has gathered. Although they don't all know each other, all are concerned about the owner of the house, Sir Rawley Withycombe. Some have been summoned by brief letters from Withycombe himself, some have arrived on official business, some are present on flimsy excuses out of plain curiosity.

Yesterday, 24th March, Sir Rawley should have delivered a paper entitled 'A Significant Advance in the Practicalities of the Withycombe Displacement Theory' to the Royal Theoretical Society. This was expected to be controversial, since few of the Society's members have accepted the Withycombe Displacement Theory itself.

But he never appeared at the meeting. Indeed, he seems to have vanished altogether.

Following a trail of scuff-marks and sawdust, the group wanders through the paper-strewn library and then out again into what in any other large house would be a yard with the carriage block and stables. Here, however, the stables have padlocked doors with grills, through which can be glimpsed sealed casks, coal, sheets of glass, sacks and piping.

On, to the carriage block. The servant, Tennant, confirms that this is Sir Rawley's private laboratory. Opening the door easily, they call out and glance anxiously around inside for Withycombe himself, perhaps fallen to the floor or collapsed in a corner. No, no sign of him behind the long central table, or near the stove, or beside the packing cases heaped at one end of the room, or among various bundles clustered at the other. Then a hush falls as they take in their surroundings.

The large stone-flagged room seems to have a busy, independent life of its own. It contains arrays of glass vials, banks of charts and complicated but mysterious machinery with brass dials and levers mounted on interconnected metal pipes. Some parts steam, bubble and hum. A faintly acidic smell lingers in the air. Nearby, there's a ring-shaped metal groove set into the floor. Close to this, there's a strange metal carriage with many small wheels, standing in a similar groove. The carriage is strongly constructed, out

of grey steel, and inside it brass dials, levers and a large clock face are mounted on interconnected metal pipes. They press forward, wondering what this carriage is for, except for Joseph Rouncewell and Silas Trimmer, who cry out, 'That's it! That's the Displacement Engine! Made of brass and steel layered together, gentlemen - a revolutionary process of untold benefit! Withycombe calls it electro-plating...' 'Yes, that's it! The wondrous Displacement Engine!' Rouncewell and Trimmer scramble eagerly into the carriage, with the others.

Alas, whether by accident or design, someone asks, 'What's this?' and pulls a tempting lever.

The carriage spins and judders. A flickering grey mist takes its place. The carriage has vanished.

...The air buzzes and hums in the suddenly empty room... Shadows form... Become strangely human... A sharp, twanging voice rings out, 'Grit! We mused 'um - let's sort backfurther...' ... and the Shadows fade... ...And is that Something Else taking shape? Glittering eyes, sharp white teeth... No, surely, it was just a trick of the light... Anyway, if it was really here, it's gone now...

The Characters

Sir Rawley's nephew and heir,
Adolphus Withycombe,
aged 22.

Sir Rawley's niece and Adolphus's cousin,
Patience Withycombe, aged 19.

The local vicar, the Reverend Horatio Percy, aged 41.

Joseph Rouncewell, a fellow-scientist and admirer of Sir Rawley, aged 50.

Silas Trimmer, a student of mathematics, aged 23.

Charles Tennant, Sir Rawley's man-servant, aged 29.

Benjamin Garland, a police constable, aged 37.

What to do...

Choose one of these characters (or more, if you wish), and:

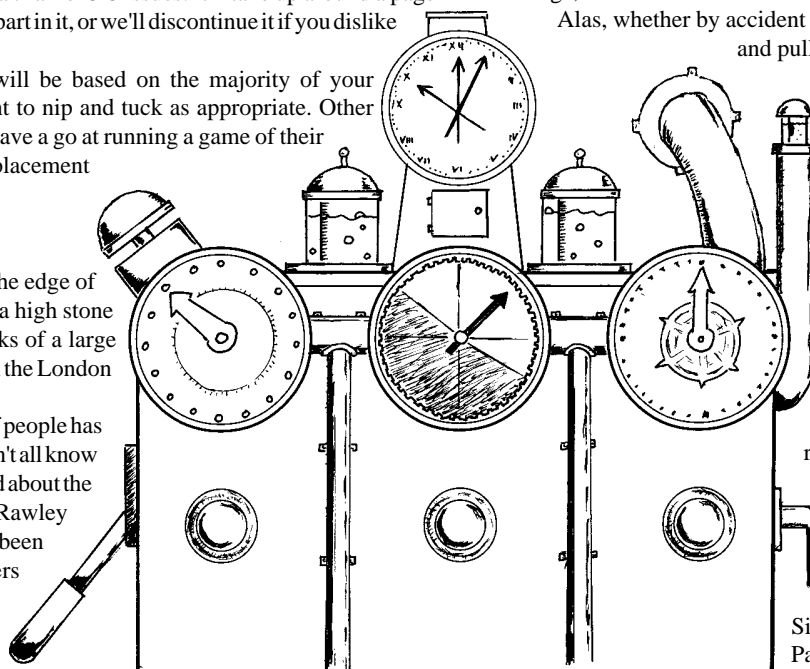
- 1 Provide brief details of his or her appearance,
- 2 His/her explanation for being at Withycombe Villa,
- 3 Any hidden agenda the character may have (optional),
- 4 One talent and one disadvantage the character may have (optional).

Now, let's get the story moving:

- 5 Specify one useful or mysterious item to be carried by one character (keep this appropriate for the period).
- 6 Which of these characters is most likely to lead the others?
- 7 Who is most likely to perish, and why?
- 8 To which of the following time periods should the Engine head?
(i) 50BC, (ii) 150AD, (iii) 1450, (iv) 1650, (v) 1750, (vi) 1950, (vii) 2050
- 9 Referring to the illustration, one character may suggest how to use the control panel: the GM will take any plausible suggestion on board - feel free!
- 10 Would you prefer this trial game to end next issue?
(i) Yes, (ii) No.

Replies to *Flagship*, by June 15th please!

[This game is very loosely adapted from one previously run by Time Patterns.]



THE MIGHTY PEN



Assyrian Protest

Sleeping wolves should be left asleep. But I have been woken up by the Assyria's End scribe in issue 90. Assyria's End encouraged players to be brutal via the Ferocity/Reputation list. You were encouraged to read about the Assyrians. This I did, and chose to follow the God of Destruction and Death (no shock to anyone who knows me!). If I caught the savage, bragging nature of the Assyrians, then I am pleased. As Rab Shaqe, the leading general rather than the king and princes, I had to maintain my reputation. So when a city defied me it was shown the darker, bloody side of my character.

The account was written up in the newsletter. This was taken directly from my turns. I did not ask for it to be published and I did not object to it being published. The first I knew of any 'distaste/disquiet' from other players was when I read it in later newsletters. The GM/Editor takes full responsibility for the newsletter content. I for one did not need an audience as was hinted. In fact, because I roleplay my characters, I told the GM at my startup that if he thought I was too violent I would tone it down. No such request was ever made.

I am sorry I cannot be a fluffy white bunny. This was because the Assyrians were wolves amongst the sheep. Do I look over my shoulder in future games? When I slaughter cattle for supplies, should I ask the GM if there are any vegans playing who might find that distressing?

Roleplaying real people of different races and religions allows you greater insights into present day problems. For example, some might object to my playing a slaver because slavery was wrong - 'was', it still exists today in countries around the globe.

I have never apologised for my characters in-game actions, and never will. My advice for the easily upset is to avoid games that might offend your delicate natures.

Name Supplied to Editor

[I've decided not to publish the writer's name, because of the restrictions within the game, but he's a respected PBMer. The question of in-game behaviour is an interesting topic for PBM play in general, and we'll welcome further comments on this - C]

Better betting?

I'm still a bit worried about the cash prizes offered by Reality Racing. The paragraphs quoted by Chris Dickson contain no reference to cash prizes: is everything above board?

A Bold

Leaving a firm, part 3

I had my falling-out with Spellbinder a long time ago.

I was playing in their first game of Spiral Arm, and was some way in the lead. That meant I had a longer printout than anyone else, and this was causing two problems - the turn weighed more than the limit for a basic stamp, and the envelopes they were using were bursting in transit. I was getting my turns late and with requests for postage due, and I could never be sure whether enclosed diplos were getting lost.

Despite repeated requests Spellbinder refused to acknowledge either

problem. Seems to me that posting the turns to you properly is a fairly fundamental requirement for a PBM firm ...

Andrew Barton

[Yes, though if this happened a long time ago, it may have got sorted since...]

I am writing to further add to the Spellbinder Debate that is raging at the moment.

Whilst I agree with a lot of what is said I have some problems with some of the writers from last issue, particularly Mr Hann. He accuses Spellbinder of being petulant and childish and then proceeds to display exactly the same attitude towards them. Boycotting a company or trying to organize one would not only be petulant, it would be potentially legally dangerous for Flagship, and could split what is already a small hobby down the middle.

I am well aware of the problems with Spellbinder, having in the past played two of their games. They are not mediocre at all, and are in fact some of the best games you will find in their respective areas. Credit where credit is due surely Mr Hann?

However the problem at Spellbinder is GM Chris Dempsey's attitude, which is generally one of 'The customer is always wrong'. Quite simply he is too irritable to be in a customer service like PBM. That said, he isn't a bad bloke at all. He's amusing and does have an excellent sense of humour. But dealings with the public is not a strong point. The issue of return of money is obviously one which deserves some legal challenge, so we know where we all stand. After all, in a flimsy hobby like PBM, how often have we all been in games that have disappeared or gradually gone under. More to the point, most of the PBM companies regularly break the law by providing addresses of players to other players, and even sales companies! Let him without sin cast the first stone, as they say.

So to sum up, let's take things a little calmer here. Yes there are issues raised of importance here, but don't let this cloud other things. A good PBM game is a good PBM game. You just have to decide what you are prepared to put up with and how much money you will pay in advance to play it.

Stephen Taylor

I've done a brief check on the internet to see if the 'no refunds' policy is legal, as I'm no lawyer. I haven't been able to find anything definite, as there aren't many things that you pay for before you receive the goods. Mail order is probably closest, but you only send money to cover the cost of the goods, and there's guarantees for quality etc, so you can return faulty products for a refund. I don't think game turns could be declared faulty though, as the player has input too, and mistakes can arise from orders written badly, although some games can identify a 'bad' order at input, which can be corrected either by player or GM before results are printed.

In this case, I think Spellbinder are going to cause problems for themselves in that players who decide to stay with the company are going to be unlikely to send in large sums of money in case they can't reclaim it, which surely will lead to more admin. work at the expense of time spent inputting and running games. I don't think this tale is going to have a happy ending, somehow.

As an additional point, we have all heard of the mail order companies who try to get you signed up by sending stuff and you've got to send it back if you don't want it. Well, I was wondering if a player is in credit is the GM justified in continuing to send turns out until credit is used up? I know some GMs allow players to go into negative credit occasionally too, on the grounds that a cheque's on the way later, but if a game is interactive (the player sends orders) then surely when the player stops playing, credit should be refunded or the outstanding deficit settled? I think the problem legally, is that there is no contract signed by GM and player at gamestart, so GMs occasionally fold, and players frequently drop games depending on personal circumstances. Besides, you couldn't expect a player to agree to play an open-ended game forever, (DungeonWorld or Monster Island are examples) but those games are designed for players to come and go as they wish. I still can't see any easy answer, especially for Jim, unless someone in the UK could take up the matter on his behalf.

Of course, this could cost more than the claim is worth, so it's down to a matter of ethics, right?

Bruce Edwards

In issue 90's Mighty Pen you asked if refusal to refund credit was legal. I checked with a lawyer friend and her answer was: It depends. If it was clearly spelled out in the initial terms and conditions when the player signed up, then although it might be reprehensible, it would be legal, but not good business. If, however, there was no such provision then the funds are considered a payment on account for future services to be rendered. In that case, failure to retribute all the unused funds upon failure to provide satisfactory service would be actionable. (When done for sufficiently large sums, the Fraud Squad becomes involved. I suspect that doesn't apply to PBM...) Again, if there is no clause up front the company cannot deduct anything for 'expenses' when making a refund.

Sometimes PBM companies forget that they are subject to the law just like any other company: they assume that just because this is a hobby, they're allowed to change or ignore the rules.

They're not.

Gavin Wynford-Jones

Silent GMs

[Patrick Gleeson's letter last issue reported that two of the GMs he had asked for information about their games hadn't replied to him.]

When GMs attack me with their famous silence, or continuously broken promises ('you'll hear very soon...'), I mail them two normal letters. If there's still no reaction, then I change to registered letters: polite requests for info, with copies of the previous letters, including an SAE and an optional priority sticker. Most GMs do react promptly after the first registered letter, with the usual 'your first letter went missing in the mail, blah, blah, blah.' But the more aggressive ones do carry on with their silence.

Registered letters are more expensive, but it seems that there's a pot of gold at the other end of the rainbow, too. Mailing a registered letter here in Belgium costs me about £3 or £4 in stamps. When a GM plays dead, I ask the post office to track my missing letter(s) down. Every time the UK side doesn't react to my enquiries, forwarded to their mail service, I receive a standard compensation of about 1000 Belgian francs (£14) for each missing one from the Belgian Mail.

And the pot of gold is not the only thing - it has a lovely glow, too. I see this method as a sort of healthy self-defence: no feelings of powerlessness against that aggressive sabotage of my hobby life, or the misdirection of my spare time and money.

It's taken me a very long time before I had the courage to defend myself against aggressive GMs, but now I won't allow such intrusions to take place. I throw them out through my door 'with soft soap on their bellies' (so much the faster and so much the further they slide). I don't need that rubbish inside my private life!

Willy Deconinck

How to improve Flagship

I know Flagship revolves around PBM, which is great, but why not introduce a few regular features to catch your readers' other interests?

Other magazines put a lot of effort into covering fashion, cookery, gardening and royalty.

How's about an article, for instance, on which T-shirts are most likely to pull the birds? And has the anorak been ousted by the kagoul? We need to know!

Or a consumer test to find a Flagship-recommended frozen pizza?

Or a push to market something more fantasy-oriented for gardeners than the standard gnome? (The window-box brigade shouldn't be ignored.)

No problem, surely, re royal news: there's plenty of kings and emperors in PBM.

I'm sure you'll find that these suggestions of mine strike an enthusiastic chord with Flagship readers!

M J Sharp

[Gosh, thanks, it takes a genius to spot the obvious! We'll certainly consider your suggestions, but meanwhile can helpfully reply: black; only in the summer; avoid all frozen pizzas, though switching to salads is a bit extreme. I rather fancy a recumbent marble orc for the middle of the lawn, myself, as a classy way to reduce the amount of mowing, while window-box gardeners

who specialise in ornamental toadstools will impress all; plastic is fine as long as they're well-secured. Our reviews can be guaranteed to include news of royalty, wherever possible...]

PBM Porridge

I'm playing in a game at present where a stand-by position has been taken up by someone residing at Her Majesty's Pleasure. This doesn't bother me in the least, but I know of one player who is seriously considering dropping because he doesn't like the idea of his name and address being available to someone who is in prison for an unspecified crime. "What if I annoy him in game?" is apparently the worry.

Personally I think this attitude is appalling, but do GMs actually have any responsibilities in a situation like this? I'd be interested in hearing if anyone has had similar experiences.

Name Supplied to Editor

Credit Refunds

Advice for Moderators and Players

We've received this from a Legal Advisor on Credit Refunds...

"There is no simple solution to the problem of credits and credit refunds. If you are already playing a game, it may be an idea for you to check the literature you received before you paid for your start-up; a moderator may well be acting unlawfully if they provide the details of their refund policy after the initial payment has been paid. This could be seen to be altering a contract after the terms have been agreed. The argument being that once you have paid for the start-up, you have entered into a contract with the moderator for them to provide you with your turns, at the agreed amount stipulated in their literature or their adverts.

If there is no mention of a refund policy at all, then there is a good argument for a full refund to be provided to the player and that the demand for a full refund can be enforced by an action, most likely in the small claims court.

On the other hand, the moderator will argue that the contract between player and moderator was that the turns will be provided until the end of the game, or if it is an open ended game, ad infinitum! Therefore the player, if he wishes to terminate the agreement, has to give reasonable notice. Exactly what would be regarded as 'reasonable' is a matter for the courts, or again should be stipulated by the moderator in his literature.

To make matters more complicated, if a moderator gives full details of their refunds policy in his literature, if that in itself is unreasonable, it may well fall foul of the law governing unfair contract terms. Again, this would have to be decided by a court on the merits of an individual case.

As you can see, there is no definitive answer, as each case will be viewed on its own merits, and each moderator will have different literature and each player will act differently. Bear in mind...

- * Players should ensure that they are aware of the refund policy before they start to play the game.
- * If you are thinking of dropping out, let the moderator know this; not only will you be giving them reasonable notice, moderators would more than likely want to know why you are dropping out.
- * Be sensible, only have huge amounts of credit if you have either no intention of dropping out, or if the payment is part an offer or deal.
- * Moderators should make it clear what the policy is; the best place to do that would be on the initial start-up sheets, web page or similar.
- * If a moderator charged a small fee for refunding credit, it is unlikely that it would be viewed as being unreasonable.

If you have a problem with either a moderator or a player (just ask how many moderators have players in minus credit!) the legal option is always there, the problem being, most people would hate to have to resort to that in what is, essentially, an amiable pastime."

Feedback on issue #90

LAST ISSUE was rated at 8.2, with no really low votes. 'Much better than last issue!' thinks **Wayne Yeadon**. Several of you praised the re-arrangement of the news columns, and Larry Deyell's icons. 'Sports games should perhaps have their own column. Chris Dickson writes well, and could surely fill a page or so every issue?' suggests **Patrick Gleeson**, and **Duncan Chisholm** wonders whether 'the new icons used in Spokesmen Speak... could be used throughout the magazine to indicate the genre of articles, reviews etc?' We've implemented one suggestion, and will bear the other in mind.

Your votes spread out fairly evenly among the articles and features, which is always a good sign. We welcome your comments, favourable or unfavourable. It was Bob McLain's column that topped the list of favourites at 48.8% ('like him or loathe him, he's always a good read' - **Patrick Gleeson**). Spokesmen Speak and Rumours followed; then the Lizards! review; then the Wrestling article and Assyria's End; then Intrigue in Sumer tying with Legends; then the Diplomacy article, with several of you asking for more amateur coverage and to have Diplomacy included in Galactic View. Votes came in for the boardgame review and Mighty Pen, too ('I do enjoy it when Flagship gets controversial' - **Paul Appleby**).

65% found nothing boring. There was an anti-sports vote against the Wrestling article, a couple of protests against a fluffy Tailpiece ('Surely you can fill the mag with something better than that?' - **Wayne Yeadon**) and single objections to the History of PBM, Intrigue in Summer ('hard to read' - **Colin Danks**) and Takamo.

Question 4 asked whether we should we boycott PBM firms for misbehaviour. 8.5% voted for (a), Yes; 91.5% for (b) No. No-one thought option (c), that a players' association is needed to handle these matters, is practicable. There was a lot of interesting discussion, mainly about how hard this would be to implement as a general policy. **Chris Morris** points out that future complainers may be 'a small group who have captured your ear'; **Bruce Edwards** that 'a firm must have the right to reply to complaints made'; 'By all means tell us when a GM has misbehaved, but still keep telling us about their games. The decision is then up to players rather than any Flagship editorial policy,' argues **Duncan Chisholm**. 'I would prefer to know about dodgy firms rather than not have them mentioned at all,' says **Wayne Yeadon**. 'You should report the good and bad,' thinks **Colin Danks**. And **Paul Appleby** doesn't think he was badly treated, 'I won't join the feeding frenzy.'

Question 5 asked what else you would you like to see in Flagship, and the general answer seems to be: more of everything! Comparative articles (a) were marginally the favourite at 27.3%; 'I like to know about games before I try them. PBM companies don't have a large profit margin and I don't like joining games when they have to send out large amounts of info, just to see me quit after a turn or so,' says **Colin Danks**. 'I do quite like these,' adds **Bruce Edwards**, 'but often find I'd really like to play... the best points of both... combined!' Option (b), more on the less well-known games, followed at 26.5%, though with warnings like **E Arnold's** that 'it's no good pushing games that don't actually want players.' Option (c), more two-viewpoint articles, got 23.2%, and (d), more on email games, was reasonably high at 22.9%. 'Normally I'd rule out the email games, but I'm seriously considering going on-line this year, finally. I actually am a sad git in an anorak, so I might as well enjoy the lifestyle to the full,' says **Paul Appleby**. Several of you advised polling readers before running too many PBeM articles.

Finally, Question 6 asked about your other leisure activities. No-one's much interested in live roleplaying, but a couple of you asked whether I meant face-to-face roleplaying: oops, blush, maybe I did. All of you enjoy reading, with 28% putting this as your main leisure activity. Almost all of you play computer games, with 56% putting this as your main activity. Two thirds of you play board-games, with 16% saying it's your main activity. Half of you play wargames, a quarter play card-games and an eighth of you play in quizzes. Busy, busy, busy.

Many thanks to all who wrote in!

Feedback questions for #91

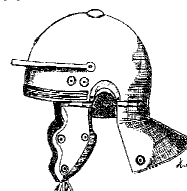
[Choose more than one answer if you wish, and feel free to comment.]

- Please rate this issue from 1 (odious) to 10 (on the ball).
- Which articles/sections did you most enjoy, and why?
- Which bored you, and why?
- So, who is on email now?
 - I've no intention of playing games in this way,
 - I'm thinking of getting email, one day,
 - I send in orders by email, but prefer to receive turns by post,
 - PBeM is the future, and I'm becoming an adept.
- How enthusiastically should we play blood-thirsty characters?
 - I tend to avoid games with blood-thirsty roles in them,
 - I'll play them, but as a good character,
 - I tend to choose evil roles because they're fun to play,
 - Games should allow you to roleplay in character,
 - GMs should censor extreme messages,
 - Players should be allowed to say what they like if it's in character.
- I've noticed that players seem to divide into two groups: those who like to amass lots of detail and those who prefer a broad overall picture:
 - Yes, I love games which provide stacks of information - maps, stats, info blurbs - the more the merrier,
 - I like accurate but limited information, that I can exchange with fellow players,
 - I like games where there's lots to be discovered, but I have to find it out gradually,
 - Atmosphere rather than facts for me, every time.
- Here's an idea, that's intended as a service to GMs (*not* for publication!) Please rate the ads in this issue on a scale of 1-10. Bear in mind effectiveness, information and how attractive the ad is (or isn't).

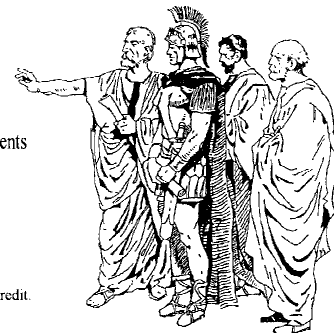
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Intrigue in Sumer

More Deaths and a Vision

JASON BROWN *escapes being poisoned, but has the danger passed?...*

As the plot thickens in Sumer, we rejoin the noble Lord Sankuru of N'Gali who is just waking from his rest. (*Passages in italics are quotations from the excellently written turns.*)

THE SHADOWS are lengthening in the corridors of the Royal Palace in Sumer, for even though the pale light of dawn is even now filtering through the windows, there is a darkness hanging over all the gathered ambassadors and members of the Sumerian Court. Today is the day sacred to Marduk, most noble of the Sumerian pantheon, yet what of the murders that have been taking place? What of the obscure words of prophecy spoken at the banquet last night?

I am awoken by one of my servants, who brings news of another death, this time in the apartments of Bessos of Mardin - the Satrap of defence and one of the most powerful men in the Empire. Apparently one of Bessos' servants sampled some sweets delivered after the banquet last night. The Ancestors preserve me - a similar tray was delivered to my own quarters last night, though fortunately none have sampled its delights. Someone is using poison, someone who wants to kill as many of the assembled guests as they can.

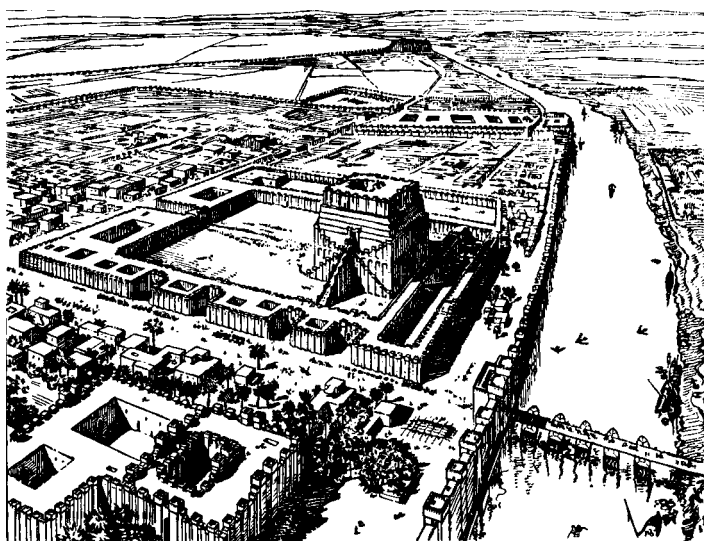
Meanwhile there is a bustle in the Palace, for tomorrow is the last day before the Coronation - assuming the Royal Regalia are found in time. I rise and read through a number of papers which my scribe, Juandi, has prepared, updating me on various matters requiring my attention. Just then Juandi enters in a state of some distress. It seems he brings word of another death, this time a suicide. An Anuban scribe with whom I talked only last night has been found hanging by his belt in his quarters. A partially smashed clay tablet found nearby held details of myths relating to the Eye of Ad, a device which I am convinced holds some meaning to the events of the past few days.

A little while later a servant summons me to the Gate of All Lands, where there is something of a commotion.

"A party of some fifty strange slant-eyed black-haired men have arrived, their skins bronze-coloured, not entirely unlike the barbarous Rimush in appearance save that they are obviously highly civilised. A venerable man with a long black moustache dressed in fabulous patterned silks of purple and yellow and wearing jewelry of jade is apparently Duke P'ing, an ambassador from the near mythical realm of the Chin. His belt is heavy with jewelled ornaments; the interpreter and servants wear similar but less ornamented belts, suggesting that these might indicate the status of the wearer."

Accompanying this outlandish crowd are several dozen soldiers, whose presence causes something of a stir. Naturally the Grand Vizier is soon on the scene, exuding his usual unflappability, and he makes a positively oily speech of welcome. From his more than usually flowery speech and fawning nature, it's pretty plain that he has no idea what Duke P'ing is doing here, nor indeed how he got here. Duke P'ing meanwhile is looking inscrutable, as if all the wealth and power of the Empire on display is beneath his notice.

The commotion dies down as the new delegation are shown to hastily prepared quarters and I make a mental note to send a message along enquiring as to the possibility of trade or other potentially beneficial contacts with the Chin. A ruler of men must always be thinking of such things! A while later (after news of yet another murder by poison, this time one of Queen Nabazia's favourite eunuchs) I embark on a grand tour of the Palace precinct, led by the chamberlain Arad Ninlil.



From the wall, the view is astounding. Off to the east lies the Tigranes river, and beyond its silvery extent the mass of the Great Gardens, the two tiers still partially hidden by morning mists. Shamash the sun has yet to dispel. Walking along past the river wall, the walls border the city of Sumer, permitting the viewer to gaze across the great city towards the bulk of the twin ziggurats of Marduk and Nebo at the very centre of the city. Spirals of smoke rise from cooking fires from the flat roofs of tens of thousands of houses, giving an idea of the population and wealth of Sumer. In the distance the broad processional ways that divide the city into quarters can just be made out. At the next wall, the view is out across the flat irrigated plains, farm after farm dwindling into the distance, with the line of a road flying as straight as a spear across the land. Beyond the irrigated land a haze lies over the grass covered plains still called the Edin by the Sumerians. At this time of year the grass is yellow, and a haze of dust lies over the land. Off to the south summer lightning lances down from dark clouds near the horizon. The lightning dances across the grassland but is so distant that the accompanying thunder cannot be heard.

But time is passing swiftly, and I have much to do before the morrow. We shall all be formally presenting gifts to Prince Cambyses, and I want to check on my rather large gift to ensure it has not been damaged. Returning to the palace, I am greeted with the news that the lord of Ur Sefid is dead, found amidst the bodies of his fallen soldiers. The fate of the lord of Resh is less clear, as his body has not yet been identified. The Mardinite commander has reported that the trail leads southwards. This news is some days old, for even the Royal Postriders take several days to relay messages riding the long roads of the Empire.

Word swiftly passes through the palace that a special meeting of the Council of Regents has been called by Prince Cambyses in the Surinam. Guards stand at the doors and permit no others entry. Eventually the Regents emerge, grim-faced, and offer no news as to what was discussed.

"Shortly after dawn the next morning, there is the sound of marching feet in the corridor outside and a pounding on the doors of a guest apartment several doors away from your own. When M'Takku looks outside he returns to report that a large number of the Royal Guard are massed outside the apartments of the king of Jazira. There is the sound of splintering wood and then the harsh ringing of sword against sword. Someone is screaming; others are shouting. Then everything goes quiet for a time."

"Looking out again M'Takku witnesses almost the entire Jaziran delegation being marched past, their hands bound behind their backs. The lady Charis glares about, declaring that everyone will suffer for her being mishandled like this. She has a nasty bruise on one side of her face that detracts from her famed beauty. One of the soldiers, who bears the marks of her nails on his face cuffs her into silence. Another soldier, his expression contorted with pain, presses his hand to a dagger wound in his side, snarls at her, "Quiet Jaziran bitch." Several of the Jaziran guards bear wounds; one is being carried along as a dead weight by two of the Royal Guard, his clothing soaked with blood."

...A partially smashed clay tablet found nearby...

I am beginning to have serious doubts about staying for the coronation, the Palace is beginning to stink of blood, and we're no closer to finding out who is behind it all. Perhaps this is what happens when so many politicians are forced to live in close proximity. I send a messenger off to the Grand Vizier to demand an explanation, as well as requesting that extra guards be assigned to the ambassadorial quarters. Needless to say I intend taking great care over what I eat from now on.

"Towards noon word circulates throughout the palace of extraordinary events in the harem earlier this morning. A contingent of guards, led by Tahu Ishtar, went within and ordered all doors to the rest of the palace secured. They then apprehended the chamberlain Daiaukka who has authority over the harem. Accounts then become confused, for it seems that as the soldiers seized the eunuch he attempted to escape, causing two men to burst into flames by some arcane means and was only prevented from unleashing more death by the presence of one of the Chaldeans. The unconscious eunuch was then carried away in chains. A little later it is said the royal regalia were recovered from a secret passage opening off from one of the corridors in the harem. Several bodies were carried away to the House of War, to be given a funeral in the evening. Prince Cambyes has ordered pyres of the most costly timbers to be built in honour of the brave men who have died this day in his service."

Now that is good news! with the recovery of the Royal Regalia, the Coronation can go ahead as planned, albeit without quite as many guests as had originally intended to attend. Many of the priests seem relieved and are putting it about that this augurs well for the coming reign of King Cambyes. His destiny, they say, must be very strong if the gods have intervened to foil the plots of his enemy. I may be what they call a barbarian around here, but I know propaganda when I hear it. Those priests no more read such a thing in the liver of an ox than I did: I wonder how much the Grand Vizier bribed them to spread that story?

...a special meeting of the Council of Regents has been called...

The next few hours are tedious beyond belief. The various gifts of the Satraps, lords of the Empire and foreign dignitaries have been arrayed for viewing in the great feast hall, or else in the Royal Zoo in the case of beasts wild or tame, or the stables for horses, or the barracks courtyard for slaves, according to the nature of the gift. This seems an excellent opportunity to look over the gathered treasures, both to ascertain the relative generosity of my own gift, and that of others. I feel I have nothing to be ashamed of! One of the most valuable gifts, although also one of the smallest, is from the Lord of Ahkron. His people, the Khor, are a highly advanced civilisation who live on an island way out into the Encircling Ocean, far beyond the Clashing Rocks. They give the Great King a single ring, but what a gift, for it is made of Triton, a precious metal said to be sacred to the Gods themselves! Though small, that single ring must outweigh the treasure rooms of half the rulers gathered here. Several lords look decidedly disgruntled, and are not reassured by my own gift of a solid ivory throne. It is obvious that many are impressed by this display of wealth, and as well they might!

Duke P'ing, whose arrival created such a disturbance yesterday, presents a massive jade dragon, longer than a man is tall, set upon a lacquered stand. The stone seems to me to be of excellent quality, beautifully fashioned by a master craftsman, almost glistening with an inner life and soapy to the touch, the mark of the most expensive of jade. The presentation continues for hour after hour, and it is no surprise that upon reaching my quarters in the early hours of dusk, I fall fast asleep and do not wake until the morning.

"That night you have a strange dream: A God bids you rise from your bed and walk through a pearly mist of dim figures. He sets you upon the back of a giant golden eagle. It soars high in the upper air, flying in across the Known World from the furthest west as the sun sinks in fire beyond the arc of Ocean. Behind you, you see the glitter of perhaps seven distant islands in the Outer Ocean and beyond them the haze of other lands or the edge of the world. To the north you spy the rugged outlines of the land of the Hyperboreans; to the south the great island of the Khor. The Clashing Rocks are covered in a cloud of mist and spray and you hear the dull booming of the tortured seas. To the north pass the peninsulas of the Truscans and beyond the mountains the dark green forests of the Keltas. The distant howling of wolves comes to your ears. To the south lies the smoking isle of the Cyclops and the coast dotted with the western cities of the Tyrians, and then the plains and jungles of the Theop lands. A dark shadow spreads across the most southerly lands."

...I may be what they call a barbarian around here, but I know propaganda when I hear it...

Across the impossibly blue waters of the Inner Sea you fly, across the lean fingers of the lands of the Achaeans and over the isle of the Taureans. Southwards the great river of Anubia shimmers in the moonlight as it flows through the desert on its long journey to the sea. Pyramids lost in the fastness of the desert cast long shadows. Swiftly you cross the coastal lands of the Tyrians and the Valley of the Dead, which is covered by a dark restless cloud, rent by lightning. Northwards ranges of mountains frame the plains and yet further north a ribbon of sea and the faint outline of the Centaur coast and the steppes of the Rimush. Something snakelike sparkles with a blue light in the furthest northeast though you cannot see it clearly. Away in the east there seem to be other lands about the curve of the world."

Now you see the lands of the Empire spread below you like the board of a great game, with pieces of ivory, lead, iron, copper, bronze, silver, gold, triton, jade and bone scattered across them. Some are armies, others smaller figures: kings, lords, priests and Magi. You see the great cities, impossibly small yet exact in a detail you forget on awakening. The eagle dips its wings and descends towards the city you recognise as Sumer, the ziggurats, the tiers of the Great Gardens, the palace and other buildings seemingly the miniatures made by a jeweller of unparalleled skill beside the silver stream of the river."

About the board you perceive the shadowy figures of the gods of Media: regal Marduk in his robes of kingship, beautiful Ishtar in her revealing red gown, bright Shamash clothed in light, pale Sin with his horned crown, Nergal in his war armour, proud laughing Ninurta, youthful Nebo with his scribal pen and all the others. They seem not to notice you and are intent on the game. Dice are rolled and pieces are moved. In the shadows wait three shadowy indistinct figures: a great lion with a golden mane; a gigantic coiling serpent with scales like jewels; a burning bird of fire."

And then you awaken, unsure as to whether this was a true vision or merely a dream. In the distance you hear the trumpets and drums: the ceremonies for the coronation are commencing. You must summon your servants and prepare for this last day of intrigue in Sumer."

[The diary concludes next issue. Although the excellent Intrigue in Sumer has ended, the author is enjoying the follow-up game, Heroes of Olynthus. This is also set in the Sumerian Empire, though on a smaller scale and with players controlling a single rather plebeian character. Note that the moderator quoted here, Martin Helsdon, isn't running Heroes of Olynthus; this is GMed by Timewyrm's Colin Forbes.]

Tribe Net

Playing the Conqueror

JOE McCARTHY continues the advice for beginners that he started last issue...

YOUR TRIBE is now safely established on a conifer hill with a coal deposit, and it is mining coal and refining iron with as much efficiency as you can manage. Your garrison or sub-tribe sits in its own palisade and mines your iron, sending elephant caravans constantly to your main tribe. Your herds are growing and your hunting returns are allowing you to concentrate solely on production for the entire winter. You have won the struggle to make your tribe viable and growing: your tribe is running like a well-oiled machine. The next question is 'Now what?' The question rises unbidden in your head 'What would Ghengis Khan do?'

Military might

You must have a number of things to make an army in **TribeNet**. A small amount of iron weaponry came with your tribe when it was brand new, and with your herds you have been able to make leather armor as a stopgap until you can get something better, but more needs to be made. Skill points had to be mastered to make your palisade (Engineering), to mine your ore (Mining), and to build your refineries (Engineering again), and to refine your ore (Refining). And you've already seen how skill level numbers not only affect the amount of people you can place on a job, but the level of competency you have to perform a job as well. Warfare is no different; it just requires a whole slew of new skills.

...it just requires a whole slew of new skills...

In order to excel at hunting, certain weapon skills were already required to make bows and spears, slings and traps. The bows and spears require basic weapons skills. The higher the skill level, the more advanced the weapon you can make. And the near target to shoot for is the ultimate Melee weapon, the sword. Now we'll have to throw some numbers out here. To make spears you needed only Weapons Level2. Easy and quick to get, and this let you make bows as well. But to make swords, and that all-important cavalry weapon the horse-bow, you need Level6. If you can reach that then you'll be OK for a while. Swords require enormous amounts of iron and coal so your miners are talking Union and your refineries are making your village smell like Gary Indiana. But that is of little importance. You're going to conquer the world, right? And did Ghengis Khan ever complain that his village stank?

Bows and horsebows are powerful weapons, but they need something to make them even more powerful, the Iron Tipped Arrow. This requires a new Skill, Fletching. And one bow can use five arrows in a single battle. So when you look at the 1,000 bows you have made, you see that 5,000 arrows will last you for one battle. Fletching skill limits how many people you can put on a task, so you need to work that one round the clock. And you are seeing the next element in building an army: logistics. You must prepare well in advance. Swords and arrows cover the basic material needs of offense. But keep in mind that there are degrees to everything. The saying 'Every Dog Has His Day' applies well to TribeNet. Even in weapons.

The lowly sling outperforms bows in the rain or during winter snows. Cavalry equipped with spears will do more damage charging into an enemy than cavalry equipped with swords.

Next you need the basic material of defense: armor. There are many levels of armor in TribeNet. The head can be covered by a Hood (leather), Haub (Bronze), or Helm(Iron). The body can be covered by a Jerkin (leather), Scalemail (Bronze scale on a jerkin), Ringmail (Iron rings on a jerkin) and Chainmail (Iron again). The Chainmail can be further covered by a Breastplate (Iron) or a Cuirass (Bronze Breastplate). You need a shield. There is the (Leather) Heater, the (Bronze) Scutum, and the (Iron) Shield. And, of course, Trews (Leather) for the legs.

Ideally the warrior should have a Helm, Chainmail, Breastplate, Shield, Sword, and Trews. Add a bow for missile troops and you can lighten up on the melee back-up weapon, but have to drop the shield. An archer without a Melee weapon is a Nervous Nellie in any combat. Not good. Nobody can sleep in your village for the sound of hammers on anvils. Your villagers now vacation in Gary Indiana. But your army is growing.

Advancing! But where?

Now it's time to use your armored warriors. But wait! What skills are needed to operate an army? The basic skills are Combat, Archery, Horsemanship, Tactics, and Leadership. The higher the better. And of these Leadership has the most effect because it modifies all the others across the board. Your cavalry use horsemanship and archery together for their horsebows, operating on the lowest of the two, so archery and horsemanship should always be the same level. Horse Archery is a powerful weapon. And as a rule of thumb, you should never go into battle if these skills are less than 5.

And there is also the tactical problems of finding an enemy, fixing an enemy and, if he is behind fortified walls, defeating an enemy. Open field battles depend upon Combat, Archery, Horsemanship, Tactics and Leadership. And these battles can be very bloody. But the finest army in the world can come upon a small, wooden palisade and be unable to take it even if it sweeps the enemy off the walls in an archery duel. It needs Siege Equipment. These are small portable things like Ladders and Assault Bridges (to get over Moats), Siege Towers to get men over intact walls, and Pavises to protect your archers surrounding the fort. And for those who prefer something to knock down a wall there are Catapults. And Heavy Weapons skill is needed to operate catapults. So to be able to deal with a walled village you need Siege Equipment and Heavy Weapons skills.

...Be careful when designing your own religion...

Finding an enemy is an even greater problem. You can find an enemy either by ending up in the same hex as he is (easy to do with a known fort), or by using your scouts to find him and leading your army from a distance over to where he is. Finding an enemy like that is called Locating, and it calls for a combination of Scouting Skill and Spying Skill. Preventing that being done to you is called Suppression and requires a combination of Scouting Skill and Security skill. And if you're going to stay around that village for any length of time you need Sanitation skills. An army once besieged another and lacked all sanitation skills. The resulting epidemic killed more people than the siege battles. You'll also need Healing skills to return wounded warriors to usefulness.

Tribe Net at a glance

A tribal PBEM from Peter Rzechorzek. Startup and 4 turns free, with further turns around £1.60 - an approximate price as the charges are in A\$. Contact tribenet@netspace.net.au

Step by step...

Being a conquering hero requires a great deal of preparation and is not a simple task. But the more you do it the better you get. When you fight, your tribe develops Terrain Proficiencies. This is accompanied by a morale bonus (if you win). It is obvious that this cannot be done all at once, and you cannot realistically go from step to step to step. You must begin building your army from the very start by bumping up the skills as you get opportunity to, not as you need them. You are guaranteed to need them. Often you will be bumping up skills on the way to the enemy. But it takes a great deal of planning, and the planning is very long term. Once you can feed your people you must prepare to fight.

...did Ghengis Khan ever complain that his village stank?

And the planning doesn't stop there. You still want to conquer the world? Even Ghengis Khan had to create a coalition to get the Mongol Hordes started. And you must create that coalition by careful diplomacy. You must establish a relationship with your neighbors, finding out who is gregarious and who is not, and through them establish a network of friends among the other tribes. TribeNet is the ultimate limited intelligence game, and you will know little unless you begin talking to players. You will find many players willing to talk to you too because they suffer from the same lack of solid intelligence information that you do. This single act is the most important and largest step taken on the road of success in TribeNet. Thus you can find out who can be your friends and who are likely to be your enemies.

Your first goal is to establish a solid working relationship with at least one other tribe. For both offense and defense tribes do better with company. This can mean pulling up

stakes and moving to another location to be with a second tribe, or inviting another tribe to move over to where you are. The more the merrier.

The thing that will solidify a collection of tribes like no other is religion. Nothing can overstate the importance of religion in TribeNet. Although game rules don't impel a tribe toward a religion, the advantages of tribes operating with a religion are strong and obvious enough to be powerfully persuasive. As in ancient times, a tribe's affiliation is more intertwined with their religion than any nationalist feelings. This is truly a pre-nationalist environment.

If you are fighting in conjunction with an alliance, either co-religionists or like-minded tribes, then your success on the battlefield can lead to bigger and better things. But if you are all by yourself then your success on the battlefield can ultimately lead to a large coalition against you. This very thing happened to a tribe called the Sbaras, who grew very powerful and fearless in their power. However, when they tried to exact tribute from a pair of weaker tribes in their territory they soon found themselves beset

by both those tribes and a third. In a very short time they were running for their very lives and had to settle their remnants far away from the original land they claimed. They survived, but were cruelly crippled.

The Gods of War

Religion in TribeNet is very powerful. Religion effects are determined by the degree of hardship imposed by the religion, the number of other tribes in the religion, and the level of Religion skill possessed by the player in question. Religion skill is a factor in battle, and can effect every facet of life within the tribe. It is a major contributor to morale as well. An example of religion is the Ushko religion on Mangalia. It is the largest religion on the continent with 17 tribes, and can place some very stringent demands upon a tribe. All religions must set aside one turn a year for religious observance (celebration). Ushko sets aside two, so production can only be done for 10 of the 12 months during the year. The celebrations can be very demanding in themselves. And tribes in Ushko cannot own, use, or even tolerate slaves. Thus they are limited in using only their free population for all tasks. But if you are an Ushko tribe you get points every year to boost up your skills, and an Ushko tribe can achieve advancement in skill levels at a speed other tribes can only dream about.

Be careful when designing your own religion. If you are the only member, or have only one other, you will get pathetically small benefits despite the hardship. And the gamemaster will allow you to design your religion very badly too. He is mainly interested in whether it breaks game rules. If it screws you up one side and down the other? Well, that is not his primary concern. It is best to find a good religion and join it. The fit may not be perfect, but the rewards will be far greater both in the short term and in the long term.

Stay awake!

TribeNet is not for the casual gamer or the gamer who wants to be spoon fed. TribeNet does not run itself. If you won't color in your tribe then it will remain a black-and-white outline and nothing more. If you do not plan then you will find yourself left

in the dust, growing weaker and more isolated until some stronger group eats you up and takes your goods. If you go it alone then your planning must be immaculate and your position on the continent one where you need not fear surprises or visitors until you are ready to receive them. If you are part of a group then you must make sure you are in a good group.

...you will know little unless you begin talking to players...

Whichever road you take you must operate with the same constant alertness you must exercise when you drive. The world in TribeNet can rise up and bite you on the nose, as can any of the 40 some tribes out there. But in TribeNet you have the opportunity of actually making a silk purse out of sow's ear, and if your plan it right you can make several. TribeNet is not the dream of tacticians; it is the dream of grand strategists and logisticians. And a greater challenge you are unlikely to find.



WPBM: An Overview

GREG A LAMB describes the contenders ...

AS PROMISED last issue, here is the second part of my overview of the world of play-by-mail wrestling. This time, I'll be looking in detail at the various WPBM games currently active in the UK. Note that in the 'vital stats' sections all numbers, whether involving turnaround, turn length or player base, are approximate. The world of hand-moderated PBM is not a precise one.

British Wrestling Association (BWA)

Where better to start than with the venerable BWA? By the time you read this, the game will have celebrated its tenth anniversary. Other games have risen, fallen, merged, split, and changed their names, their attitudes and their GMs, but the BWA thunders on implacably. Possibly the most respected game running, success in the BWA buys you bragging rights throughout the WPBM world.

The big drawback of the game is the turnaround, which is slow even by WPBM standards. GM Dan counters this by releasing newsletters, rankings, interviews and updates in between major events. These bonus releases are produced at no charge and are entertaining to read even if your wrestler isn't involved. The game boasts a solid tag team division and a host of belts, including the new Young Gunz Title for the lower ranked wrestlers. The game is a solid and dependable performer - it's been around a long time and it will stay around for a lot longer.

Federation X

If the BWA is the grizzled veteran of the WPBM circuit, Fed X is the brash newcomer with youth and flair on its side. That isn't to imply a lack of experience on the part of GM Chris Bury, as Fed X is simply the latest of a long lineage of popular WPBM games from this prodigious writer, from the BWA-contemporary FWA to the FWF to the WWA to the WFW and then to its present form. Existing exclusively in the fast-paced world of the Internet, the game's main selling point is its incredible turnaround, which is unique among current games in being measured in terms of week rather than months.

It should be noted that despite the medium, this is a genuine WPBM game rather than one of the countless interchangeable E-feds that populate the Web. The player base, while small, includes the cream of the WPBM world, including the GMs of WOW, JWA and ABPW.

Note that its rapid turnaround allows feuds and angles (plotlines) to evolve and develop more easily than in other games, and the existence of a dedicated message board encourages extensive roleplaying as characters interact via interviews and promos. Challenges, threats, boasts and betrayals are all part of everyday life in Fed X - just as they are in 'real' professional wrestling.

Vital Statistics

British Wrestling Association - BWA

GM: Dan Turner

Address: 8 Lonsdale Terrace, Millom, Cumbria LA18 4AT

E-mail: Jdodgers@aol.com

Price: £10 per wrestler for a six-match contract.

Turnaround: To quote Dan, 'when it's done'. As an example, my first wrestler has been in the BWA for a little over two years, and is currently awaiting his third match. The BWA has actually produced nearly a dozen cards (turns) of various kinds over this period.

Match length: Two A4 pages.

Turn length: Five A4 pages. All matches except your own are summarised.

Player base: Twenty-five players controlling some eighty wrestlers.

Federation X - Fed X

GM: Chris Bury

E-mail: chris_bury@hotmail.com

Price: Free.

Turnaround: Two to three weeks.

Match length: Varies widely, averaging around two pages.

Turn length: Around twenty pages. All matches are shown in full.

Player base: Ten players with twenty wrestlers. Chris is currently recruiting new players on a limited basis - in order to keep the turnaround up only about half a dozen new players can be accepted. You must have email and Web access in order to join in the game.

All Britain Postal Wrestling - ABPW

GM: Alex Boothroyd

Address: 30 Sawyer Drive, Biddulph, Staffordshire ST8 6SU

E-mail: ABPW@wrestlingmail.co.uk

Price: £1 per wrestler per match. Second and subsequent wrestlers in tag matches are charged at half the standard rate, so playing a team of three wrestlers in a tag match would cost only £2.

Turnaround: Bimonthly.

Match length: Three or four pages, longer for larger or more important matches. One main event reached twelve pages.

Turn length: Easily sixty pages. All matches are shown in their entirety. Player base: Ten players with twenty wrestlers.

Special rules: All main events and title matches are won on best two out of three falls. All tag matches are fought under elimination rules. All six-man or bigger tag matches are conducted under Captains' Falls rules.

World Organisation of Wrestling - WOW

GM: Russell Smith

Address: Middleton Cottage, 7 Fennels Road, High Wycombe, Bucks HP11 1SL

E-mail: raw hotline@hotmail.com

Price: £3.50 per turn for one wrestler. Prices lower greatly for players running multiple characters - £5 for two to five wrestlers, £8 for five to eight wrestlers, £10 for nine or more wrestlers. Free by email.

Turnaround: Bimonthly.

Match length: Two to three pages.

Turn length: Twenty pages. Your own matches and main events are written in full, all others are summarised. PPVs (special events) show all matches.

Player base: Twelve players with forty wrestlers.

Juniorweight Wrestling Association - JWA

GM: Richard Fryer

Address: 6 Flamingo Close, Woosehill, Wokingham, Berks RG41 3SJ

E-mail: jwahotline@hotmail.com

Price: £1.50 per turn per wrestler. Free by email.

Turnaround: Six weeks.

Match length: Averages five pages.

Turn length: Thirty pages, recently whittled down from twice that size. All matches are shown.

Player base: Ten players with thirty wrestlers.

All Britain Postal Wrestling (ABPW)

I must admit, I don't play in the ABPW personally. However, I have seen a turn sample and spoken to both the GM and several players, and a few things are indisputable about the game. First, GM Alex Boothroyd is quite possibly the greatest authority on wrestling in the PBM world. While the ABPW is a relatively young promotion, Alex is a lifelong fan of wrestling, with knowledge drawn not only from the big name federations but also the independent circuits, the Japanese leagues and the Mexican art of Lucha Libre.

Second, Alex has little sympathy for the current trend towards 'sports entertainment' in professional wrestling. The ABPW is about wrestling, not angles. Sport above spectacle. That's not to say there aren't a few off-the-wall characters in the game - Wayne Yeadon is one of ABPW's biggest supporters - but if you don't know and enjoy wrestling as a legitimate athletic contest this may not be the game for you. Alex has a unique set of rules under which the ABPW operates - most notably, a wrestler in the ABPW may not be contracted to any other federation. Other rules, which will mean little to those not already familiar with wrestling, are noted below.

World Organisation of Wrestling (WOW)

The opposite number to the ABPW, WOW is the consummate entertainer. Plots and feuds dominate WOW, to the extent that the actual wrestling is secondary. Not that wrestling knowledge and tactics are unimportant in WOW, but personalities and storylines are brought to the fore in true sports entertainment style. WOW has been running in various forms for over eight years, originally as an amateur affair and then opening to the public around five years ago. Since then it has become a popular game and a staple of the WPBM world. Recently it survived a short-lived merger with a rival federation. Has a huge array of titles to aim for, and the biggest characters are a mix of styles, from angle machines to legitimate wrestlers. Something for everyone, then.

Juniorweight Wrestling Association (JWA)

Another relatively new game, started several years ago as a collaboration but now run solo. The JWA's defining feature is its weight limit - all wrestlers signed to the federation must weigh less than 250 pounds. While this is distinctly chunky on a normal scale, in wrestling terms these are the lightweights - the high-flyers, the streetfighters and the martial artists. This means JWA matches have a style of their own, with the writing fast-paced and informal. The focus of the JWA is balanced between the sports and entertainment aspects of wrestling, leaning a little towards the former. Healthy hardcore and tag divisions add variety.

Planetary Wrestling Syndicate (PWS)

This game deserves a mention here as another veteran of the hobby, although as I've had no personal experience of the game I'll keep it necessarily brief. GM Tom Lancaster is a well-known figure on the WPBM circuit, and has a devoted group of players who've stuck with him despite recent turnaround problems. As a result of dwindling spare time, Tom is no longer accepting new players into the game.

Which way will he go?

So, to which game would I direct a new player? Well, for starters, if you have Net access and can keep up the pace I heartily recommend you try Fed X. Not only is Chris noticeably newbie-friendly, the swift turnaround makes it an ideal game in which to quickly learn the basics of WPBM. Outside this, WOW and JWA are good places to learn the trade, catering to a variety of styles of play. BWA is an excellent game best suited to those with patience or busy schedules. ABPW is something of an expert's game, although wrestling fanatics may find it more to their taste than its less serious competitors. To all those interested in WPBM in general, I won't hesitate to point you again to <http://cgi.steward.force9.co.uk/cgi-bin/ubb/Ultimate.cgi> where the lively Internet discussion boards for these games are located, allowing the Web-oriented access to most of the major players in the WPBM community.

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Retroscope

STEVE TIERNEY looks back at The Great Mail Rampage ...

I want to tell you a scary story. It's a story based on a bunch of stuff that really did happen. Some of you were there, so you know. If you weren't, then you'll be amazed. Because my story #might# just be about the greatest scam ever pulled in PBM. Or maybe it's just about life. It all depends on your point of view. I can't say for sure either way, so I'm going to present the facts and let you decide. The background of this story is taken from Flagship. The truth will, perhaps, never be known. The chief players have long since left the hobby. But if this were a horror movie... you'd have to wonder... would they ever be back?

Something Wicked This Way Comes

In summer 1986, with little fanfare or spectacle, issue 11 of Flagship was graced with a single half-page ad. It was typed, as most ads were in those days. Its sole artwork was a badly-drawn dragon in the top right corner. It did little to call attention to itself. It's safe to say that the readers of Flagship back then in the dawn of time had no idea what lurked beneath that bland façade. They had no inkling of the beast that stirred beneath that placid surface.

The three games which were presented were **From the Mouth of Hell**, **Beyond The Horizon** and **St Valentine's Day Massacre**. The games offered must have been interesting for the players of the day. After all, it was a big thing back then when a new PBM game arrived, so for one company to appear on the scene with *three* new games was quite astounding. We will probably never know how many people, if any, signed up from that initial advert, but the following issue it did not reappear and all was quiet once more.

The Darkness Arrives

Issue 14 of Flagship featured another half-page ad. The same new company, but this time their ad design was rather more striking. **Rampage!** it proclaimed. It trumpeted a proud fanfare for **St Valentine's Day Massacre** without mentioning the other two games. It's easy to forget that each issue represents three months of real time, so by the time Flagship 15 arrived it had been a full year since Rampage's first appearance. Already, Beyond the Horizon seemed to have almost disappeared, while From The Mouth Of Hell was plagued by rumours of 'slow turnaround' and 'poor service'. This wasn't uncommon in those days of a plethora of hand-moderation and swelling player numbers, but it was the start of a pattern which would become horribly familiar to players for over a decade of PBM history.

By Flagship 16, Rampage had become a well-known name in the hobby. Their press releases talked of 'trained GMs' leaving under the 'pressures' of running From the Mouth of Hell, while they explained that because of the work the vanishing GM had left them their St Valentines Day Massacre game (hereafter called simply St Vals) was also suffering. Notice the way the releases are worded? You almost feel sorry for them, don't you? The victims of unreliable staff and heavy workloads. Hang on, though... weren't people **paying** for this service? And shouldn't they have planned their releases in such a way that it was possible to run them reliably? Never mind... surely they learnt from all this and avoided these mistakes in the future, right?

Every Cloud Has A Silver Lining

The really difficult thing to fully grasp if you weren't actually *there*, is that the Rampage games were *good*. In fact, they were more than good. They kicked butt. It's true to say that like Marmite, you either loved them or you hated them. The thing is, so *many* people loved them. They knew how to tantalise with a setting, how to bait a trap with exciting promises, prime it with eye-catching advertising and spring it with original ideas. These guys were *talented*. Which is what makes it all such a shame.

St Vals ran into deeper and deeper trouble. Then, in issue 20 it relaunched with an increased amount of computer moderation, and a higher-cost mixed

moderation. Once again, the praise was loud while the grumblers were forced to eat their words and bide their time. **It's Back And It's Better Than Ever!** Rampage proclaimed. In those days, PBmers were given to mercy and forgave Rampage their previous sins. The general opinion was, 'great, this cool game is going to run perfectly now!' Hardly anybody really noticed that this was the only game Rampage were still running. Didn't they start out with three? Just a learning curve, it seemed. Surely that's all it was.

St Vals became **St Vals II**. Having found the game they could sell, Rampage pushed out another version with expanded rules and setting. Hot on the heels came **St Vals III 'The Omerta'**. Half page ads became full page ads, then a full page back-cover ad. Rampage certainly seemed to be growing fast, and as their player base grew... so did their ambitions. By issue 25 of Flagship the rumours about Rampage were glowing, their fans were numerous and their critics could do nothing but sit, brood... and wait. This was their time in the sun.

The Shadow Falls

Lots of companies were learning about promotion in the first decade of commercial PBM. **Standard Games**, **KJC**, **Rhann**, **Ark Royal**, all were producing exciting adverts full of dashing prose, stirring adjectives and wonderful art. While Rampage hadn't got the design element down in quite the same way as their rivals, they had mastered a far more subtle advertising art. *Psychology*. Special offers, intuitive wording, re-releases, capitalising on certain points, using colour to its best potential, these were all secrets that Rampage had discovered gave them an advantage.

St Vals I disappeared, St Vals III didn't show up after all, so St Vals II was Rampage's only game. However, Rampage had surely been regarding their rivals with envious eyes. Everywhere you looked, computer-moderated games had begun to dominate. While St Vals was supposedly computer moderated with mixed-mod options, it was clear that a degree of full-automation was what they yearned for. It seemed everybody was making the big bucks and they wanted a piece of the pie. Fair play, perhaps? They had earned it. St Vals was still regarded as the best PBM Crime Game. They had been taking the back page of Flagship, plus other magazines (this was in the days when there were other magazines!) for many issues. They were ready to bring out the big guns. In Flagship 29, Christmas of 1990, four and a half years after their arrival, they did just that! **The Keys Of Medokh** was about to turn the world of PBM on its ear. In more ways than one.

The Behemoth Has Arrived

A preview of **Keys Of Medokh** in issue 29 was followed by an *eight page* pull-out advert in issue 31. 'Imagine a World of Epic Proportions...' it began, and continued to lay out a fascinating and exciting background to a massive fantasy game of enormous proportions. Here was a world of scope! A game of the sort we had waited for for *so long*. And it came with some amazing promises! In celebration of the launch Rampage were giving away **2,500 Free Startups!** (Yes, you heard me, 2,500! Psychology at work.) You would receive all sorts of goodies upon signing up! You would be placed in a game *fast!* You would be given a bunch of free turn credit! And *if your turn was not processed within 24 hours it would be entirely free of charge!*

This was just too good to be true! The players saw, read and signed up. In Droves! The trouble was, it really was too good to be true. But it was way too early to see what was coming. Perhaps some old-timers suspected. Certainly they would have you *believe* they did. But for now, Rampage were kings. Keys Of Medokh was the emperor. Flagship loved them. The public loved them. Everybody loved them. The trouble with being up in the clouds is that it's a long, long way to fall.

More next time...

Greg Lindahl

FLAGSHIP interviews GREG LINDAHL, who maintains the internet list of PBM/PBeM games...

1 - No harm in starting off with the obvious questions: how and when did you get into PBM?

It's been long enough ago that it's hard to remember... let's see, I think I was 16 and it was 1981, and the game was Flying Buffalo's Nuclear Destruction. I played one game, and then wrote a multi-player version for the Apple II+, which Flying Buffalo and Avalon Hill declined to publish ending my early shot at a lucrative career as a software author.

2 - What is PBM's appeal for you?

In high school I used to play face-to-face games with lots of players: fantasy and Napoleonic miniatures, and games like Cosmic Encounters, Junta, and role-playing games like GURPS and Twilight 2000. I like games with lots of players. By the time I went to college, it was impossible to find people I could meet with on a regular basis. PBM filled that gap, and I could play games with many more players than before. Since high school, I think I've played a grand total of one face-to-face game (a grand campaign of Empires in Arms, a 7-player Napoleonic game that took us 18 months of playing to finish), and a zillion play-by-mail and play-by-email games.

3 - What made you decide to compile the pbm_list?

In the Good Old Days of the Internet, lots of newsgroups had volunteers who maintained lists of information and answers to frequently asked questions (FAQs). The newsgroup rec.games.pbm had a list of games compiled by a gamer named Bryan McDonald. When he stopped being interested, I took it over. I don't remember how long ago, perhaps 1990. The list started as a big file listing all the games. As time passed, it grew a web interface, which allows people to zero in on the types of games they're interested in, and now it sports forms to submit new games, and has some web stuff that helps me quickly approve new games.

4 - Have you encountered any problems in doing this?

Since the PBM List isn't an advertising-supported magazine, some commercial moderators are a bit confused by it: I'm a lot more interested in serving players than balancing that with getting enough advertising revenue.

5 - Is there much maintenance involved, or does pbm_list run itself automatically now?

Over time I've automated things, but I do have a bit of a maintenance problem in that game moderators, even commercial ones, are unlikely to remember to let me know when they move their webpages or change their other details. And I can't just delete any game whose webpage disappears; it's probably moved, and the game isn't dead.

6 - How should newcomers use pbm_list to find a good game?

The list is organized by different types of games, so it helps if you have an idea of what kinds of games you like. For example, if you like fantasy games, and you think you want a commercial game, clicking on those two keywords

gets the list narrowed to 70 games. That's still a lot of games, so you can click on more keywords to further narrow the list, or look over all 70 games. Since different people have very different ideas about what's a 'good' game, it isn't an easy process.

7 - What type of game do you enjoy playing? Any favourites?

I would love to find a computer-moderated, thousand-player space opera game that actually worked well. Until that day, I'll have to survive by playing Olympia, which is a large computer-moderated fantasy game.

8 - What's your best PBM moment? What's your worst?

I was really embarrassed in Beyond the Stellar Empire, quite a few years ago, when some pirates tricked me into letting them capture a ship of mine. My best moment was when my allies and I defeated the Lords of the Crown invasion of my home territory in Game 2 of Olympia; they marched up to my main castle, and then were wiped out by my forces, because I was able to build new troops much faster than they could.

9 - What's your real-world job?

My day job is building supercomputers. My biggest customer so far is a facility that develops weather codes, including the code used to predict the weather for US aviation. One neat thing about PBM is that you meet people from all walks of life. One of my big game enemies used to work for a US government classified agency. Now he works for a 'dot com' company, and his ex-employer bought a large machine from my business. We still trade supercomputing tips.

10 - Wow, will weather-forecasting ever achieve 100% success? And will we ever be able to control our weather, please?

Ha! No, weather forecasting is doomed to always be inaccurate, although it has gotten a lot better in recent years. It's also a field in which Europe currently leads the US - it's a friendly race, but hopefully we'll catch you soon. The world loses billions of dollars a year - and thousands of lives - because of bad weather that isn't successfully predicted.

11 - Do you have any PBM plans of your own for the future? How do you see the hobby developing?

Actually, I currently run one rather simple free game, named Food Chain, which was developed by Steve Andrewartha and Martin Gregory. I've had dreams for a long time of developing a many-player space-opera game, which I have dubbed GLUG - Greg Lindahl's Ultimate Game. Unfortunately it's never gotten to the stage that it's playable, and I don't see PBM being a very profitable enterprise. As for the overall hobby, I see it growing in some non-traditional directions. VGA Planets is a PC program with a play-by-email mode that was very popular, and websites are offering turn-based fantasy sports games that I consider to be play-by-mail games. These games are much bigger than the entire traditional hobby combined.

12 - Do you think commercial PBM/PBeM games will survive?

I'm sure there's a market, but it may not look much like today's market. The boardgame and collectible card game markets have changed dramatically in the last 20 years, and PBM is under a lot of the same influences.

13 - You've got a reputation for sharp answers on the rec.games discussion forum - is this deserved or are you really a pussy-cat at heart?

My co-workers say that talking to me at work is like 'drinking from a firehose'. I'd hate to be thought of as a pussy-cat!

Greg Lindahl at a glance

Greg Lindahl is a 36-year old supercomputer designer who theoretically lives in Charlottesville, Virginia, USA, although he spends most of his time traveling for business. He is currently the founder and Chief Technology Officer of Conservative Computer, Inc. His hobbies range from Renaissance-era music and dance to whitewater kayaking. His list of PBM/PBeM games is at: www.pbm.com/~lindahl/pbm_list/



[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 from March 10th

Paul Appleby, Duncan Chisholm, Colin Danks, Antony Dunks, Belinda Dunks, Bruce Edwards, Stuart Filmer, Colin Forbes, Tom Fyfe, Patrick Gleeson, Joe McCarthy, Roland McGinty, Carol Mulholland, Paul K Paton, Stuart Rose, Denise Sweeny, Den Tempesta, Gavin Wynford Jones, Wayne Yeadon

[Deadline for next issue: July 1st]

GAMES FEATURED THIS ISSUE

British Wrestling Association BWA

Wayne Yeadon - 'A follow-up to comments I made last issue. The event I spoke of has had to be postponed due to the Foot and Mouth crisis. Hopefully it can be rearranged for later in the year. We may even get a turn in between all this waiting!'

Einstein's Lot

Carol Mulholland - 'I had thought things were moving rather slowly for my character, until the last turn arrived. She'd been brought to a ruined chapel by a saturnine lecturer, where the point of interest was a rather scary painting up on the ceiling: so I'd half-expected that something nasty would appear from the shadows to gobble her up. I had her mention casually that her friends know where she is, and then take a much closer look around. Now, this turn, there's a mysterious hidden inscription to ponder and (hooray!) she gets safely away for a trip to a weekend cottage. What the painting means, or the inscription, needs further thought. But my advice for players is: find a logical reason to look a little further into what's apparently in front of you. Oh, and be sure to keep mentioning your circle of friends.'

Chris Morris's turns are very well written and I'm impressed to see that he never seems fazed by my character's rather obsessional knowledge. I've made her a student, so should mention that her experiences differ convincingly from those described in this issue's review.'

Tribe Net

Joe McCarthy - 'The Western lands are quiet again. The Bushido tribes have not pressed their Southward movement and based on scattered reports may even have reversed their course to move up North to help the Staffords. They are a long ways away, with a mountain range between them and the Staffords lands.'

The Ushko Tribes of Itama pounced upon the Sasakawa, but the Sasakawa scattered before their armies, leaving scorched Earth in their wake.

The Tribes of Itama then turned away from the empty lands and resumed their trek, only be shadowed by a large mounted force from the Staffords. The Staffords lost a steady stream of scouts to the screen around the moving tribes.

A unit of the powerful and warlike Yongoe Gitters fell to tribesmen of a little known and primitive race in the hilly lands below Brittany. It was a rich unit with elephants, warriors, slaves, and goods. Rumors were that the slaves were freed and some joined the mysterious tribe, but the truth of that is not known.

Tribe Phoenix won the Mangalian Triball eliminations at Smurfdale after a hard fight and near loss to the powerful Lemming team. It is rumored that the mighty Clan Savo will join in the next tournament.

The Longships of Clan Savo ply the Eastern Sea with impunity now, and no ships have shown up to contest their mastery of it. It is rumored that certain longships carry a catapult that lobs Greek Fire at their enemies, but there is to date no surviving witness.'

ROLEPLAYING GAMES

The Chevian Chronicles

Colin Forbes - 'Things are back up and running again now, and what a good turn it was! Poor Pryderi (and I mean poor in every sense of the word) has been abandoned by his erstwhile travelling companions. Anyway, Pryderi and friends fought some Dwarven undead in an abandoned Goblin mine, and lost one of the party to a nasty fall down a bottomless shaft. True there is a treasure chest, but it's locked and the only member of the party with the skill to open it safely is imitating strawberry jam some few hundred feet below.'

Sarah Callaghan - 'Well, Chevia's back up and running again, after a bit of a protracted break. Good thing too, as the situation's getting dire. What with goblin attacks, cities being burned to the ground and those nasty flying heads, how's a poor adventurer supposed to get any adventuring done?'

Dragonhelm

Paul Appleby - 'Dragonhelm is proceeding slowly - thanks to me, not the GM, who is very keen. As intimated in the review, things happen quite slowly within the game anyway and I've spent about a real month in the same pub, or rather my character has, the big lump. Probably about three hours in the game! Chiefly putting up with local xenophobia - Bledal is probably not the biggest barrel of laughs in the multiverse (wonder if being run from Ulster has an effect?), as you get the distinct feeling that Bad Times Are Just Around The Corner (copyright Noel Coward). That's not a complaint. I'm enjoying the doom-laden atmosphere. Possibly my character isn't! I devised him as being pretty thick, hoping it would simplify things, but even now there's a lot for him to figure out - everyone's got an angle, it seems, except himself, who's desperately trying to stay naive and optimistic. Imagine someone a bit like Obelix the Gaul (only more phlegmatic) trying to survive in the world of Raymond Chandler...'

Saturnalia

Stuart Rose - 'Serpent Isles: Ashley continues with a good style of writing and interesting turns. I, in association with another player, have just survived our first hostile encounter with goblins; only three, but a major achievement for Arcus and Amber as neither was intended for combat.' [Note that Exile, below, can be classed as a version of Saturnalia...]

Exile

Stuart Rose - 'Just started with new referee Marcus Taylor: first turn contains plenty of atmosphere and looks promising.'

Belinda Dunks - 'This game is living up to initial expectations and anticipation remains high. The turn charges are a little on the steep side, but still worth it given their quality.'

DUNGEONWORLD

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Human Assassin _____
Human Necromancer _____
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Dwarven Warrior _____

(3) Male or Female? (Check One)

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Female _____

CHARACTER TWO

(1) Choose a Name

(2) Choose a Character Type
by ticking an option!

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Human Rogue _____
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Unexplained

Antony Dunks - 'Game 29: Having come to Unexplained only recently, I have only been involved for the past year and I regret now not joining back at the start. Though Graham (my character) has only known his travelling companions for eight days or so, he is going to have a very hard time forgetting them, while there are some he wishes he could have gotten to know better. The turns have been extremely interesting, humorous at times, especially as Francis (the GM) went along with some of the more outlandish schemes put about by the group - often at the expense of other members of the group. All around big Hurrah! yet tinged with sadness as it is all over. Finally, would Judith get in touch, Graham would like to exchange Christmas cards, but does not have your address.'

HISTORICAL ROLEPLAYING

Heroes of Olynthus

Patrick Gleeson - 'At first glance - this is only the second proper turn in the game - Heroes is a remarkably simple game to play, yet it seems to have amazing depth. Essentially a roleplaying game set in a fantasy version of ancient Babylonia, each turn is split up into five weekly actions - similar to a game of En Garde! in many respects. I'm playing an Achaean (Greek) philosopher of sorts, who has come to the city of Sumer to study at the famous College of Chaldeans. Trouble is, the illustrious Chaldeans (some or all of whom wield powerful magics) don't seem too keen on me getting a look at their library. Still, there's time for that as there's just so much to do in the game!

Each turn consists of a well-presented cover sheet with atmospheric artwork, a page describing your character's actions during the last month and a page listing your character stats, equipment and GM notes. In addition you get a page detailing the city or town you are in (not sure what happens when you're off in the wilderness) and a two or three page newsletter full of rumour, gossip and even a few hard facts about the game world in general. The friendly GM, Colin Forbes of Timewyrm, writes well and has always responded to all my orders - an important matter with free-form orders!. Although there are only limited places available in the game at the moment, I'd heartily recommend it to anyone who wants a roleplaying game that doesn't demand advanced writing skills simply to play!

Roland McGinty - 'Great game. Colin is doing a good job, given his condition. Turns comprise a side of A4 written specifically for your character. A sheet of stats, a newsletter (three sides this turn!), the player list, and if you are in a city you get a city sheet. Oh, and the obligatory order sheet. The atmosphere in the writing is fantastic, I don't know where he gets his inspirations from, but wherever it is can I have some? I've left the main city of Sumer now and am heading south into an area of the Empire that has recently been invaded. I'm hoping to find out more information about the strange invaders, and you never know, it might be useful to sell that information on to the highest bidder.'

ADVENTURE GAMES

Dungeonworld

Stuart Rose - 'My main adventuring position is trotting along happily, with me helping to form a new guild, (not yet official, though) and one of my characters getting a position on its council; other characters are on a mission with about 20 others which is very hush, hush, so no more to say.

My monster position is coming along nicely and shows promise provided I can avoid arguments with other monsters and the goody, goody adventurers don't find the entrance to our dungeon too soon.

The estate positions are different and whilst not offering as much instant action as an adventurer position seem to be less samey every turn than trader positions.

A note for any people with email: it's worth joining the dungeonworld estate mailing list just for the opportunity of seeing people worry about rabbits, rabbit hutches and goats.'

Monster Island

Bruce Edwards - 'The trouble with e-mail is that you go looking for discussion groups about the game, and suddenly find yourself on the US Island, playing by e-mail! I've adopted two monsters, been part of the formation of a new group, and built a Temple already! The other players are fairly chatty, and I've even learned a thing or two myself. I believe the UK game is up to date on developments, so if you want to know (almost) anything about MI then look up the Fire Rider web site -

<http://home.nycap.rr.com/nyoumans/>

Also I'm still running two of my monsters on the UK Island, but things are rather quiet as the player-run newsletter, Message In A Bottle, seems to have disappeared due to a lack of an editor.'

Quest GME (Games Master Edition)

Wayne Yeadon - 'Players have been causing problems for themselves by not reading the new rulebook properly! Bat must be getting a little fed up of this now, but he is quite forgiving re our mistakes. The special actions have caused the most problems I think, mainly from players asking to do things that are beyond their current rank or status. It is still early days for this new version of Quest and players will eventually get the hang of it.

Most alliances that have got going in the game, have had their first quests and some have even completed them, gaining themselves a cash reward and status for the alliance.

The history to each of the new games, contains plot outlines that will become important as the game evolves. Links between cities have already become evident, especially where this affects the relationship between two alliances. In turn, the actions of some alliances have caused problems with players and alliances being banned from certain cities. If you are allied to one such alliance, you also become affected by the ban. If you have an alliance that hates another alliance and their base cities are actually on good terms with each other, then this is bad news for the alliances concerned!

There is a great deal of information to be aware of now, that was previously overlooked. If you do not pay careful attention to what you are being told from certain sources, you will make mistakes or miss out on things that may become important later on.

Players still need time to adjust to this new way of playing and when they do, it should be a much better game for all concerned. Here's to a happy future in Quest.'

FANTASY WARGAMES

Hand of the Demon

Bruce Edwards - 'The game is slowly working towards a finish, and Lager Troopers still lead. He's obviously decided to try for a solo win, but the rest of us are harrying him and preventing him from getting the final decisive score. I feel we are only delaying the inevitable, but you've got to keep trying, haven't you?'

Stuart Filmer - 'Game 10: Draums Revenge: Now on turn 3 of this special edition of HOTD. The premise of the new game is that Draum was defeated, and, like a big girl's blouse, ran away. As Demons aren't too fond of defeat, Draum has recruited a new army. He learned from past mistakes, and his new recruits are just that little bit harder. Not only that, the little blighter has taken nearly all the magical centres. So generally, he is one tough cookie to crack.

Probably due to earthquakes, the Land of Angmere has changed, to give this a game a different feel, and also some of the races have changed. Orcs and Hobbits went off to search for happy times, to be replaced by Trolls and Demon Magelords - presumably a break-away sect, like the SDP. The ally order has also been modified. In the normal HOTD, you can ally with any race. Now each race can only ally with their own kind, and one other designated race. So searching out one of your allies is a must.

The first couple of turns haven't been too exciting, just building up the home city, capturing some local settlements etc.. On Turn 3, I'm just meeting all my neighbours, and as I cannot ally with them, the fun may be just around the corner.'

Kings of Karadon

Duncan Chisholm - 'Plaudits to Hunky Monkey and GM Tom Fyfe for getting the games running again, despite his new job. As I understand it the existing four games will continue to run to monthly deadlines, with new games starting as old ones come to an end. A monthly turnaround may seem slow to some, but veteran Karadon players will appreciate that the game can take a lot of time, what with hectic diplomacy and the vast number of orders it is possible (though not necessary) to write. Both games I'm in have places available, so grab one now before they all go! I promise you won't regret it.'

Game 1 - The Great Winter: This is the longest-running Karadon game, and is one of the two open-ended games. Unlike the closed-ended versions of the game, this scenario features a free-form Special Action each turn, which adds enormously to the depth and flexibility of the game. Recent events have seen the continuing advance of the Great Winter, religious turmoil with the dissolution and then reformation of one of the major Conclaves, the assassination of the Queen of Miradon (the most powerful NPC state) and now an outbreak of civil war amongst the Centaurs and a Jihad being declared by the Orcs of Ugbat! I count myself lucky that my own nation is based around a series of island chains some distance from the main action. That said, please don't think I feel safe or am complaining of being bored! Oh no, I wouldn't dare give the GM that impression - it might give him ideas!

Game 2 - The Return of the Ancients: With the slow-down in turnaround, I have bitten the bullet and joined game 2, another open-ended game. This one has a totally different scenario from game 1, being more religiously orientated and based around the release and return of evil gods known as the Ancients. I've picked up a veritable power-house of a nation, though alas the realm of Reichmar seems to have fallen into some disrepair since the height of its power under my predecessor. Whilst the GM takes an active role in making sure that non-player nations are more or less active, rather than passive punch-bags, I think Reichmar has been deliberately reduced in power through strategic neglect. Still, it gives me a challenge and means the game isn't unbalanced - good GMing!

Patrick Gleeson - 'Turnaround is still slow, owing to the GM acquiring a real-world job. That said players are being kept fully informed, and there is no diminution in game quality. In fact, if anything Game 1 *"The Great Winter"* is getting better! This is probably as a result of the GM feeling less pressure to get the games out to the previous two day turnaround. The quests are longer, and there are some very interesting things going on in my nation, which I'm sure have the foul hand of the GM behind them. More and more I'm coming to think of Karadon as an open-ended game, and suspect that I wouldn't really enjoy one of the closed ended games, it would seem so artificial! Apart from anything else, I rely on the Special Action you get each turn in the open-ended games to keep my nation from falling off the rails. There is so much that can be done, the prospect of just having the basic order codes doesn't bear thinking about any more.'

Legends

Stuart Rose - 'NIC Champions game: This game is about to start with all factions pre-determined and led by experienced players who have one multiple game. Two of the factions are led by Brits, but just to be awkward I have joined a faction led a scandinavian, this should be a really fast paced game.'

NIC 24: Already Sam from Harlequin has declared that trolls and several other races have reached the limit set in module, and even the maratens have been declared full even though there is no limit set in the module. Looks interesting and should be starting soon.'

Middle Earth PBM

Colin Danks - 'Finally joined Middle Earth; seems the players are a very organized bunch. Not too sure how long I am going to last as the Dark players sound very experience and we are not! Some of the rules don't seem true to life (it seems easy to destroy a very large army just by killing a general).'

Colin Forbes - 'The World Championship game (59) is continuing apace, with both sides having things to be pleased about. But never fear, we shall win the game and square the series against the Americans! Meanwhile Harlequin's service is continuing to get better, proving that impossibility is no bar to these guys. Work on the "front" account sheet is under way, which will make keeping track of your games and account a lot easier for everyone.'

Tom Fyfe - 'Well, the world championship game is going quite well. It looks like we may be giving the Americans a proper run for their money, as opposed to the pathetic fight we put up last time! The game's going well, even though the teamwork at times seems a little patchy; I'm just a guilty as any other, though. But the game is enjoyable and I'm looking forward to guaranteeing that the Yanks get a damn good kicking!'

Realms of Israa

Colin Forbes - 'Turnaround continues to improve and several players who have been thinking about dropping now seem to have changed their minds - and a good thing too!'

War of the Dark God

Colin Danks - 'Game 2 has just started. Now that I know the rules better I should make less mistakes! Can't get over how good the maps are every turn. You can tell that GM Wayne is very keen in this game, he sets up all the players on a group site making correspondence easy (plus he adds his own comment now and again).'

NON-FANTASY WARGAMES

Company Commander

Den Tempesta - 'A deep and involving modern wargame, that requires some thought and planning, but is very rewarding. You need to work out your supply, so that the men have arms, fuel etc. The lorries have a load limit, so you need to have enough of them. A special action each turn adds a lot to the game, too. From the UN offering aid to help your industry, to discovering an abandoned fire-base containing useful munitions.'

No problems with Jason's GMing. All questions answered, turns sent back regularly.'

Crisis!

Colin Forbes - 'Just started up in a game, and I'm enjoying it thus far. Seems a bit like a glorified version of Diplomacy with nuclear missiles - and I mean that as a compliment! The rules are easy to grasp for a new player, and if in doubt the GM is friendly. Player interaction has so far been high, which in a game like this is critical. Looking forward to future turns.'

LT Wars

Bruce Edwards - 'For those of you who still remember the article a few issues ago, you may be interested to know that I'm still holding the lead with 14 turns left to play. I've got a few tips and tricks up my sleeve yet, and I may divulge these later on - if the game is still being mentioned in these august pages.'

I'd spill now, but I don't want to give anything away until the game is settled, just in case someone gets any ideas.'

WWIV

Colin Danks - 'Just put my name down for another WWIV game. Keith has so many different versions that it has kept me interested in this game. Just about finished a blitz game and am trying to see how many capitals I can take on the last turn.'

WWIV is a great game to be playing. Pagoda Games are always helpful and reply quickly to any questions I may have. I don't think this game is expensive, my superpower turns are less than five pounds and you get a wealth of information.'

SPORTS GAMES

Raceplan

Den Tempesta - 'Advanced: I've been playing Raceplan for about six months now, and recommend it to anyone interested in motor-racing. Well-presented, easy to get into, but deep and involving enough to make you spend some time thinking about it. All options are covered, from brakes and tyres to aerodynamics, that you can improve. You tell your driver exactly how to race, so if your driver crashes or wins it's down to you.'

No problems with Danny's GMing either, the game's returned with first post the day after the deadline.'

Tough at the Top

Stuart Filmer - 'Still going from strength to strength. Bookings & injuries are now in place, and the game is all the better for it. The designer has now committed to the game full-time, so the updates to the game should now be significantly quicker. The "Fantasy" game is currently the hardest and the best, due to an impressive amount of managers in the league. GBM are still providing an excellent service.'

CRIME GAMES

Godfather

Gavin Wynford Jones - 'I'm now in my second game of Godfather. My first game resulted in an ignominious end at the hands of a sniper for failing to pay off the Bosses at Murder Inc. I signed up for my current game immediately. It's been a long time since any game has produced the high level of anticipation that Godfather invokes: two weeks between turns seems a very long time indeed!'

The game itself has some very nice touches which add to the atmosphere. For example, in my first game I forgot to give a newly hired enforcer the required car. In most games, that would have simply resulted in his orders failing for that turn. Not in Godfather. The turn report included the comment, "Smiley, grumbling about his poor treatment, takes the keys of a sedan and collects it from the gang stores." Love it!

GM Keith runs the game very well, with turn reports coming out on time like clockwork. He's answered all my questions quickly and even updated some of the racket sheets to make them clearer as a result of my questions! How's that for service and commitment!

I'm looking forward to the Five Families variant and a one week turnaround game (if I can persuade him to run one).'

Carol Mulholland - 'Eek, I've just let Bob McLain talk me into playing the head-to-head variant with him - and for publication, whimper, whimper. As they say, it seemed a good idea at the time, but my morale hasn't been boosted by seeing "from an original draft by John Merrells & Bob McLain" on the title page of the rulebook. Ooh, scary...'

NEW GAMES

Blood and Water

Patrick Gleeson - 'I've only just signed up for this medieval simulation, and have to say I'm extremely impressed! Set in a mythical world known as Mhurvana, Blood and Water is a fifteen to twenty player game based upon a quasi-feudal system. There's a strong emphasis on dynastic scheming, and an excellent circular called the Courtly Gossip which is a focus for public-knowledge events as well as stories written by the players. Worth checking to see if there are any places going in the one game running. I would be surprised if any more started up any time soon, as Blood and Water is free!'

It's not listed in Flagship, so here are the contact details:

<http://www.egroups.co.uk/group/knightchampions>

email: m.l.collins@ntlworld.com

King's Pirate

Denise Sweeny - 'King's Pirate is an excellent game. Already I've had the opportunity to purchase plantations and a tavern, seduce Naval officers, assassinate the Governor's Naval Aide, and press gang the local drunks to a life less ordinary. Even during the slow bits when Governors aren't being kidnapped or colonies burnt to the ground, the player interaction is awesome, trade is easy and there's always something interesting on the email group. Bon chance.'

FIRMS

Dracs Games

Paul K Paton - 'Thanks to you I joined Dracs Games. I can honestly say that Derek is the best GM I've come across.'

Harlequin Games

Colin Forbes - 'A shining example of what a PBM company ought to be. What I particularly like about Harlequin is they listen - you really feel they're there for you and taking an active part in continuing game development - even where they don't own the programming rights. And of course they continue to promote PBM, taking a stand at the recent Salute wargames convention. Not only did they promote their own games, but also distributed fliers and sample copies of Flagship. Not something you'd catch some other big companies doing!'

[Please get contributions for Rumours, issue #91 to the Flagship office by July 1st]



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UK	£15.00	£21.00	£40.00
Elsewhere	£17.50	£25.00	£45.00

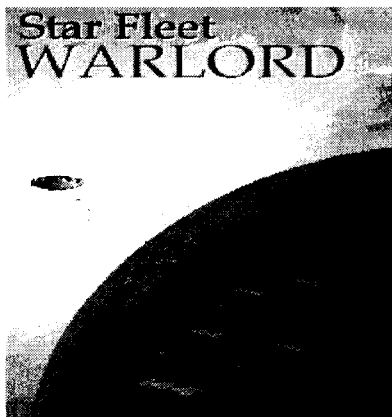
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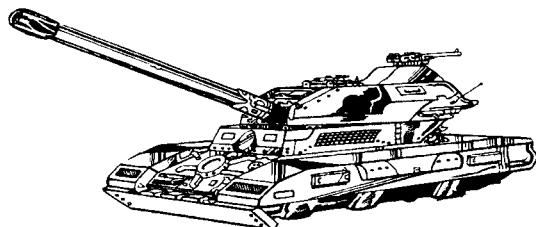
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Based on the
Star Fleet
Battles range
of games,
this is the only
official play
by mail game
set in the
Star Fleet
Universe.



World War IV

*"This is your chance to try Global
Thermonuclear War"*



The best play by mail wargame just got better. Dozens of new units have been added offering a whole new challenge for beginners and regular players alike.

ALAMAZE



This highly detailed and in-depth fantasy wargame offers you the chance to enter the world of Alamaze, where 15 unique Kingdoms battle for control.

As King you will order your troops to take control of towns and cities through diplomacy, sieges, or simple brute force!

Dozens of orders are available each turn, with hundreds of spells at your disposal.



Pagoda Games

PO BOX 5155 Tamworth Staffordshire B77 4QQ

Email: mail@pagoda-games.demon.co.uk

Web: www.pagoda-games.demon.co.uk

Adventurer Kings

One of the greatest fantasy wargames has found a new home. Adventurer Kings offers an unparalleled gaming experience, with remarkable depth yet is easy to play. Exciting game reports and a colour map updated each turn ensures you are gripped from start to finish. Simply the best.



THE TIME IS THE ROARING 20'S.

THE PLACE IS CHICAGO.

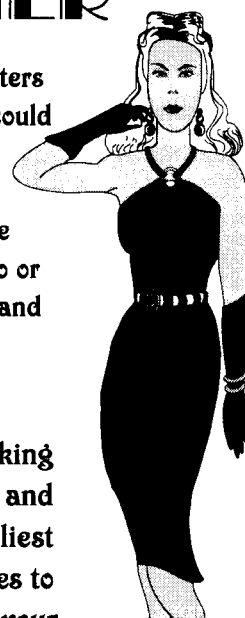
AND THE GAME, IS

GODFATHER

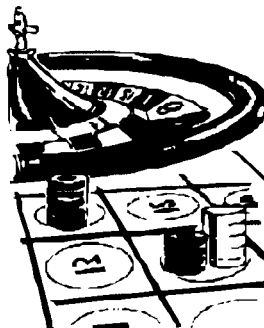


Step back in time to an era where gangsters ran free, alcohol was illegal and gunfire could be heard on the streets every night.

Take on the role of Al Capone, George "Bugs" Moran, Charles "Lucky" Luciano or one of the many other real-life mobsters and try to become Capo of Chicago, the Boss of all Bosses.



Set up casinos and brothels, loansharking and protection rackets. Hire hoods and bribe the police. Buy the deadliest weapons, invest in legitimate businesses to avoid the IRS, but most of all, *kill your rivals before they kill you*. Rising from the ashes of St Vals 2, and featuring a completely new combat system, Godfather is back, and it's bigger and better than ever!



The set-up fee for each game is just £10, which includes the rulebook and a number of turns.



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

We ask GMs and our readers to check the listings here and verify their accuracy; please notify the editor if you find an error or omission. Readers are advised to send an SAE rather than money to GMs who aren't obviously operating (by advertising, or a mention in *Spokesmen* or players' comments in *Rumours*).

We also include GM phone numbers, where the GMs have given permission or they've announced the number as a service to players. However, please play fair; *only* call at reasonable times (or the specified times if they're given) and try not to pin the GM to the phone for hours!

UK

NEW: Barry Wright (The PBM Experience)

DELETED: Gary Lewis (Gemini Games)

Total: 122 active UK GMs

A&D Entertainment, PO Box 108, Becton, Stowmarket IP14 4RX

Webmaster: fabbase2.demon.co.uk

website: www.fabbase2.demon.co.uk

fax: 01449 781916

Abbsolom, Mike, 96 Bishopswood Road, Tadley, Hants RG26 4HG

MAbsolom@aol.com

website: <http://members.aol.com/SatSouthGM>

Arena Publications, 3 Workshop Rd, Off Carlton Rd, Sneinton, Nottingham NG3 2BA

website: go.ta/arena

Apex Games, POB 56, Gravesend, Kent DA11 9LT

eg_sage@staysystems.co.uk

website: http://www.staysystems.co.uk/sage_engarde/

Bagley, Adrian, 28 The Oasis, Lindsay Road, Branksome Park, Poole, Dorset BH13 6AP

tel: 01202 767243 (after 6pm)

Baylis, Chris, 67 Mychens, Lee Chapel North, Basildon, Essex SS15 5EG

Boyton, Mike, 7 Rochford Green, Loughton, Essex IG10 2BT

Boothroyd, Alex, 30 Sawyer Drive, Biddulph, Staffordshire, ST8 6SU

alex.boothroyd@virgin.net

Brunt, Steve, 20 Ringrose Close, Newark, Notts NG24 2JL

Burd, Richard, 83 Sandcroft, Sutton Hill, Telford, Shropshire TF7 4AD

1005532107@compuserve.com

tel: 01952 413655

Burrroughs, Martin, 15 New Earth St, Oldham OL4 5ES

tel: 0161 6261580

Burrows, Pete, Buzzwack PBM, 8 Magnolia Court, Beeston, Nottingham, NG9 3LG

pete@buzzwackpbm.freeserve.co.uk

www.buzzwackpbm.freeserve.co.uk

tel/fax: 0115 9224901 (pre 10pm)

Burrows, Martin, 47 Greenfield Terrace, Newbridge, Gwent NP1 4QY

Bury, Chris, World Fictional Wrestling, 1A Chapel Terrace, Southend, Essex SS1 1EX

Calver, Dave, 45 Dixon Street, Swindon SN1 3PL

Camelot Games, 61lys-Y-Feol, Caernarvon, Gwynedd LL55 2LU

Campbell, Alex, Families Centre, 1 BN REME, BFPO 36

Carter, Dave, Scorpions Games, 13 Liverpool Rd South, Burscough, Lancs L40 7SU

dic@clara.net or info@scorpions.co.uk

website: <http://www.scorpionsgames.co.uk>

Casey, Ashley, 16 Willow Grove, Harrogate, North Yorkshire, HG1 4HP

serpent@ashcasey.co.uk

www.ashcasey.co.uk

Championship League, PO Box 1966, Kilmarnock KA1 1BF

tel (Brian Ian, Yvonne): 01563 536515; fax 01563 536565

Cleopatra Computer Games, 82 Farningdon Avenue, Bromley, Kent BR2 8BU

Coshaw, Mark, 10 Ellis Close, Glenfield, Leicester LE3 8DW

Cooksey, Dave, 2 Penerton Rd, Basingstoke, Hants RG21 5LW

dmcgames@aol.com

Cozens, Richard, 16 Fox Close, Boston, Lines PE21 8EE

r.cozens@tutanonline.co.uk

Crashworld, 4 Bartleyfield, Clayton-Le-Woods, Preston, Lancs PR5 8JQ

website: <http://web.ukonline.co.uk/r.cozens>

andy@crashworld.com

website: www.crashworld.com

tel (Andy Smith): 01722 334878 (credit card hotline)

Cruikshank, Michael, 52/4 Bryson Road, Edinburgh

mcruikshank@ntlworld.com

Cyclops PBM, 18 Knighton Road, Romford, Essex RM7 9BS

Daredevil, 178 Hall Lane, Urmister, Essex RM14 1AT

polaris@daredevil.jp.co.uk

Darker Times, The, 176 College Street, Long Eaton, Nottingham NG10 4GX

live2game@hotmail.com

Draes Games, 21 Chipperfield Drive, Kingswood, Bristol BS15 4DP

derek@draesgames.co.uk

website: www.draesgames.co.uk

tel (Derek Ratney): 0117 9607173 (9am-6pm Mon-Fri)

Dundelin Games, 65 Boswall Drive, Edinburgh EH5 2BE

dundelin@crumbie68.freeserve.co.uk

Dunks, Antony, Far Horizon, Sark, Guernsey GY9 0SE

xar@xart.net

website: <http://www.xart.net>

tel/fax: 01481 832926

Evans, Paul, 180 Aylsham Drive, Uxbridge UB10 8UF

paul@prevans.co.uk

Faraway Games, 3 Mastlen Rd, St Albans, Herts AL4 0GS

jeithbons@faraway.co.uk

website: <http://www.faraway.co.uk/>

Fenris Games, PO Box 46, Rochester, Kent ME1 1JQ

FenrisGames@compuserve.com

Foot, George, Coombe House, Brithem Bottom, Cullumpton, Devon EX15 1ND

Foster, J. Ten to Three, 75 Freshman Road, Southsea, Hants PO4 8AE

Galactic Society Four, 1 Peter Coats, 31 Calside, Paisley, Scotland, PA2 6DB

galatun@gsgames.co.uk

Games by Mail, Bridge Street, Neston, 3 Wirral CH64 9UJ

colin@gamesbymail.co.uk

website: [GamesByMail.co.uk](http://www.gamesbymail.co.uk)

tel (Colin, Yvonne, Trigg): 0151 3361412, fax: 0151 3361009

Glover, Adrian, 10 Landseer House, Francis Chichester Way, London SW11 5HY

tel: 020 7720 4117

Paul Green, 11 Belgravia Mews, Shaw, Oldham OL2 7TB

Paul@highstreet-online.com

tel (Paul Green): 01706 881344

Harbinger Enterprises, 3 Nelson Square, Norton Green, Stockton/Tees, Cleveland TS20 1EH

Harlequin Games, 340 North Road, Cardiff CF14 3BP

pbm@harlequin.com

website: www.harlequin.com

fax: 029 2062 5532 any time

Hensoft Computer Consultants, 7 Eastgate House, The Hornet, Chichester, W Ssx PO19 4JR

Hynes, Nic, Cakery Pig Prods, 54 Cresswell Fields, Stibbans, nr Truro TR3 7RE

tel (Paul Hennesing): 01209 860116

Hoare, David, Eternam Games, Swaledale, Castle Hill, Ilfracombe, N. Devon, EX34 9HX

website: www.aquaticeternam.biz/land.com

Hollandale, Adam, 113 Coramtion Road, Brimington, Chesterfield, Derby S43 1EY

psychic-er@naticity.com

Housden, Jonathan, 23 Annesley Road, Hucknall, Notts NG15 7AD

jonathan.housden@ntlworld.com

website: <http://www.soccerstadoi.com>

Hunky Monkey Games, 9 Southview Terrace, Exeter, Devon EX4 6JF

monkey@karadom.freeserve.co.uk

tel (Tom Fyfe): 01392 681086

IB Postal Games, 90 Queen Elizabeth Way, Kirk Hallam, Ilkeston, Derbys DE7 4NT

In Off the Post, PO Box 302, Halstead, Essex CO9 2LA

Incubus Designs, POB 263, Loughborough LE11 1ZG

inghus@glaholnet.co.uk

website: <http://www.incubusdesigns.co.uk>

Interesting Times, 37 Whitehouse Way, Southgate, London, N14 7LX

tel: 07050 658383

fax: 07050 658384

startup@interesting-times.co.uk

website: www.interesting-times.co.uk

Jade Enterprises, 127 Queen Adelaide Court, Penge, London, SE20 7EB

jade@jdee.co.uk

tel: 020 83256507

Kelen Games, 7 Claverdon, Hanworth, Bracknell RG12 7YN

gpt@kelen-games.com & kelen_games@hotmail.com

website: www.kelen-games.com

KJC Games, FREEPOST, Thornton-Cleveleys, Lancs FY5 3UL

enquiry@kjcgames.com

website: <http://www.kjcgames.com>

tel: 01253 866345

Lancaster, Thomas, 19 Ferry Road West, Scunthorpe, North Lines DN15 8EA

Loughing Dog, 31 Leopold Road, Felixstowe, Suffolk IP11 7NP

tel (Sam Bemett): 01594 274452 (7-10pm weekdays)

Lombot Publishing, PO Box 60, Skelton, TS12 2GP

ross.lombard@ntlworld.com

Madhouse, 13 Marchmont Green, Hemel Hempstead, Herts HP2 5BB

http://pages.scifi.com/LOMBOT/LOMBOTIndex.html

madhouse-uk@play-by-mail.com

Global Web site: <http://www.play-by-mail.com>

tel: 01442 252950 (answerphone)

quester/helpline: 01442 402763 (8pm-10pm Mon-Thurs, all day Sunday)

Maestro Games, PO Box 216, Fumham, Surrey GU9 8XA

McConnell, D. Ab Initio Games, PO Box 150, Beckenham, Kent BR3 5ZD

danny.mcconnell@virgin.net

McGiffen, Pete, Flat 5, 1 Tyrrwit Rd, London SE4 1QD

peter.mcgiffen@meimail.com

tel: 0181 694 9369

Miles, Richard, 5 St Nicholas Road, Barry, Glamorgan CF62 6QW

richard.miles@hotmail.com

tel/fax (Richard Miles): 01446 413667

Mindless Games, 217a Ilkeston Road, Nottingham NG7 3FX

andy.mindless@virgin.net

website: www.mindlessworld.net

tel (Andy Simmonds): 0115 979 0797 (9.30-18.30 weekdays only)

Necrom Games, 19 Mostyn Road, Hazel Grove, Stockport SK7 5HL

tel (Neil): 0161 4831500

Ninth Legion, The, 40 Hykeham Road, Lincoln LN6 8AB

ghenpsal@hotmail.com

Nova Games, Bill Heron, 39 Thomson, Currie, Midlothian, EH14 5EX

tel: 077 9047 9575 (between 6-9pm weekdays, 9am-8pm weekends)

enquiries@novagames.u-net.com

website: <http://www.novagames.u-net.com/>

Oates, Jason, 6 St Georges Rd, Dorchester, Dorset DT1 1PA

jaono.oates@virgin.net

website: <http://freespace.virgin.net/jason.oates>

tel/fax: 01305 251451

Olympic Games, 6 Sandy Ln, Bramcote, Nottingham NG9 3GS

l.dexter@tda21.com

tel/fax (Trevor Dexter): 0115 9436197

Pagoda Games, PO Box 5155, Tunworth, Staffs B77 4QQ

order@pagodagames.co.uk

website: www.pagodagames.co.uk

tel/fax (Keith Burnham): 01827 703251

Parr, Alan, 6 Longfield Gdns, Tring, Herts HP23 4DN

Pemberton, Mark, Karakorom Games, 23 Kingsthorpe Cres, Skegness, Lincs PE25 3PW

Phinder, Mark, 139 Nelson Way, Lacey Acres, Grimsby, S Humberside DN34 5UJ

Markphinder@aol.com

tel: 01472 753430

Pure Fantasy Games, Portland House, Boksorv Buisness Park, Chesterfield, Derbyshire, S44 6BH

Reality Racing, PO Box 100, Devizes, Wiltshire, SN10

tel: 01380 81819

help@realityracing.com

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), **e** shows whether it's also available by email, though note that the charge may differ from that shown for postal play. **GM** is the GM's code shown in our listing of UK firms. **Ref** shows the issue of FLAGSHIP where you can find the best description so far: a=article, s=Spokesmen Speak, d=diary. Thus, 4s means 'Spokesmen Speak issue #4'. For the **Other Fees** column, 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, * next to **Rules & startup** indicates deposit returnable if you play to the end of the game, or prepayment discounts available (see moderator for details). Next to turnfee it means that return postage is paid by the GM each turn. S, by contrast, means you need to send an SSAE or at least pay for the GM's postage. \$ indicates no credit refunds available. # next to Ref indicates a 'Euro-friendly' game: deadlines at least two weeks apart and prices for Continental players not more than 30% above those listed here. ! indicates a game included in the Supercoupon. 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.

New entries: Adventurers Guild, Blood & Water, Conclave, Diplomacy, Heavens Above, Monsters!, Prometheus, Spoils of Empire, War on Cofain.

Deletions: Mammon Inc (concluded), Silver Screen, Throne

AFTER 9 additions and 3 deletions, the list shows 211 games. Note that prices are for the UK: non-UK European rates are usually about 25% higher, and overseas rates can be up to double.

Game	ADVENTURE	Process	GM	Medium	Startup & Turns	Turn Fee	Other Fees	RefS/c
Casinoff's Quest World	C-O	e	CRA		Free(3)	1.95	-	43s
DungeonWorld	C-O		MAD		5.00(2)	2.5	(d)	74a, 77-80a!
Heroic Fantasy	C-O		SLO		Free(0)	1.5	(a)	40a
Legends of Israa	C-O		VIK		Free(0)	1	-	85a
Monster Island	C-O		KJC		Free(0)	2	-	28a,36a!
Quest	C-O		KJC		Free(0)	2	-	36a,47a,80a!
Virriol	H-O		RCW	e	Free(0)	70p	-	62s,#
CRIME								
Godfather	C-F		PAG		10.00(2)	2.5	(a)	70a,83d
It'saCrim!	C-F		KJC		Free(2)	1-2.00	-	11a!
ECONOMIC								
Speculate	C-F		SOF		5.00(3)	2.25	-	72s!
Games Guru	M-F		GUR		5.00(3)	1.75	-	76d-81d
FANTASY								
Empire								
Kings of Karadon	C-F		HKM	e	5.00(0)	4	-	62s
Prometheus	C-F		HKM	e	10.00(0)	2.5	-	
Power								
Absolute Fantasy	M-O		SIL		15.00(2)	4	-	63s
Conclave	M-F		UKG		10.00(2)	4.50	-	91s
Riddle of the Sands	M-O		MAD		20.00(10)	2.5	(a)	65s, 89a
War								
Absolute Dominion	M-O		TTN		To be announced	-	-	77a
Adventurer Kings	C-F		PAG		5.00(0)	2.50-3.00	-	87s
Azaranmon II	M-F		KEL		12.00(5)	2	-	88a
Alumaze	C-F		PAG		15(1)	3.5	-	76a
Ancient Fantasy Empires	M-F		OAT	e	8.00(0)	3.25	£1mnth	71a,80a
Buttle Dirge	M-O		LOM		2.00(3)	2	(d)	58s#!
Bloodsports of the Damned	M-O		LOM		6.00(5)	2	-	85s, 88a
Draum's Revenge\$	C-F		SPE	e	Free(2)	2.1	-	86s, 89a
Hand of the Demons\$	C-F		SPE	e	Free(2)	2.1	-	86s
Heavens Above	C-F		WRT		10.00(8)	2.1	-	48a,61a
Kings and Things	C-F		SLO		Free(0)	2.25	(a)	69a, 88a
Kings of Steel	H-F		WHS		5.00(1)	2.5	-	20a
Legends	C-F		HAQ	e	20.00(1)	3.5	(a)	13a,77a
Lizards	C-F		TNL		5.00(2)	2.5	-	30a,81a,84a!, 90a
Middle Earth PBM	C-F		HAQ	e	10.00(2)	3.9	-	54a, 90a
Necromancer	C-F		MAD		Free(2)	2	-	54a,76a, 80a!, 88a
Overlord	C-F		STM		10.00(4)	2.5	-	63a,70-71d
Serim Rel	C-F		MIN		5.00(3)	2	(c)	57a
War of the Dark God	C-F		TTN	e	6.00(2)	3	-	56a,59-61d,76a
War on Cofain	C-F		TTN	e	TBA	-	-	91s
Tribal								
Crack of Doom II	M-O		HAQ		10.00(1)	4.5	(d)	77a
Bleidan Diary, A\$	M-O		SPE	e	7.50(2)	2.25-3.25	-	46a
Aqua Eternam	M-O		HOA	e	10.00(2)	4	(b)	80a,81-84d
Tribes of Crane	M-O		ZEN		12.00(1)	4.4	(c)	74a
Clans II	C-O		GRE		10.00(2)	2	-	37a,79a#
Casinoff's World	M-O		CRA		9.95(2)	2.5	-	38a,84a
HISTORICAL								
En Garde!								
Dangerous Liaisons	M-O		SPN		5.00(5)	80p	-	53a,75d,84a,85a
Sage	M-O		ARN	e	6.00(2)	1.5	-	84s
The Sun King	H-O		GRU		8.00(2)	2.5	-	70s#
LPBS	M-O		EVA		10.00(4)	2	-	67a
Power								
Assyria's End	M-O		AGM		5.00(0)	5	-	84a
La Gloire du Roi	M-O		AGM		5.00(0)	5	(d)	81s, 90a
Lords of the Earth	M-O		BRU	e	7.50(0)	2	-	47a,76a, 89a
Primvs Inter Pares	M-Oe		INT	e	10(1)	6.00/month	-	84a

Wargame

Am/Civ/War Battles	M-F	AGE	6.40(0)	2.8	-	34a
Am/W/Ind Battles	M-F	AGE	6.40(0)	2.8	-	60s
Ancient Empires	e	OAT	4.00(2)	3.25	£1 mnth	78s
Austerlitz	C-Fe	TBA	10.00(0)*	3	(a)	58s#!
Dark Age II	C-F	SOF	5.00(3)	49/4 turns	-	34s#
Diadochi	C-F	CYC	5.00(2)	2.5	-	51a!
Eagle	H-F	SAB	10.00(1)	10.00 for 3	-	78a,79d,81d!
Eng/Civ/Wr. Battles	M-F	AGE	6.40(0)	2.8	-	78s
Falcon	H-F	SAB	10.00(1)	10.00 for 3	-	
Fall/Roman/Empire	M-Fe	OAT	3.00(0)	1.5	50p / month	
Feudal Lords	C-F	MAD	10.00(2)	2.5	-	78s
First Crusade	C-F	KEL	10.00(5)	2	-	3a!
Fr God.King&Country	H-F	AGM	80p(0)	5	-	38s#!
Gryphon	H-F	SAB	10.00(1)	10.00 for 3	-	46s
Knights/Christendom	H-F	SAB	10.00(1)	10.00 for 2	-	
La Ultima Cruzada	H-F	SAB	10.00(2)	10.00 for 3	-	
Mundis	H-F	SAB	10.00(1)	10.00 for 3	-	
Napoleonic Battles	M-F	AGM	6.00(0)	2.8	-	
Royal Alliances	M-F	HAQ	15.00(4)	3.4	-	71-73d
War 1940	H-F	CMB	10.00(0)	3	(c)	71a!
World War I Battles	M-F	AGM	5(0)	3	-	62s
MISCELLANEOUS						
Politics						
In The House Today	H-F	SAB	Free	10.00 for 2	-	30a
FUTURISTIC						
Robot						
Phantasmtech	C-Oe	CRA	9.95(3)	1.95	-	68s
CTF 2187	C-F	HAQ	10.00(5)	2	(c)	30a!
ROLEPLAYING						
Fantasy						
Borderlands	H-O	M&G	15.00(2)	2	(c)	
Chaos Trail	H-O	WIL	Free(0)	1.25S	(d)	61a
Empty Halls	H-O	WRG	Free(0)	3	-	47a,86a
Epoch of Might	H-Oe	WRG	10.00(2)	3	-	82s
Exile	H-Oe	HAQ	10.00(2)	4	-	63a!
Guardian	H-Oe	RIC	10.00(2)	2	(c)	53a!
Heroes of Olynthus	H-Oe	TIW	10	4	-	53s
Lands of Elvira	H-Fe	PNL	10.00(3)	3	(c)	88s
Portals & Palaces	H-Oe	HOL	5.00(1)	1.3	(c)	59a!
Saturnalia	H-O	WLL	5.00(2)	4	-	59a,65a,83a
		CAS	4.00(2)	4	-	59a,65a,83a
		ABS	Free(2)	3.50	-	59a,65a,83a
	H-O	WAY	5.00(1)	3	-	72s
	H-O	BRD	FreeS	FreeS	(c)	57a
	H-O	Tyvanah	10.00(2)	2.5	(c)	32a#
	H-O	Wyrdworld	5.00(1)	2	(c)	33a#!
	H-O	Xott Solo	5.00(2)	1.5	-	33s#!
	H-O	Xott	10.00(2)	2.5	-	79a
	M-Oe	Dragonhelm	4.50(1)	3.5	-	
	M-O	Mandragora	10.00(2)	3	-	
Futuristic						
MNCII	H-O	FEN	15.00(2)	2	(c)	81s#!
New Earth	H-O	PEM	20.00(3)	FreeS	-	64a
Psyche	H-O	COO	20.00(1)	3.5	-	67a
Modern						
Einstein's Lot	H-O	ULA	4.50(1)	3.5	-	90s
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GMs Playing in Games

The case for and against

PATRICK GLEESON on the NPC's he's encountered ...

In writing this article, I in no way intend to imply that any GMs are anything but objective as moderators. What would say though, is that whenever a GM plays in one of their company's games, that GM is inevitably going to take some risk, however slight, that some player may sometime, somehow, perceive the GM's position as being compromised.

Do the moderators play for free? If not, are they not simply paying themselves in a roundabout way, which in principle is the same as playing for free? This raises the same problem faced by any player who for whatever reason is not paying for a game. Surely there must be times when a player who is not concerned about the financial implications, might engage in outrageous or risky strategies, knowing that if their nation suffers disaster they can simply start another game at no cost to themselves?

Let's assume, for the sake of argument, that moderators, as licensees, have access to the software, even if the licensing agreement prohibits making changes in the program code. Will the fact that they know secrets of the software influence their play? Even if they profess that the answer to the previous question is no, is it not possible they may subconsciously take advantage of software secrets not known to the customer players, without their even being aware of it? Where the moderator is the actual programmer or game designer, the problem becomes even worse. It's almost inevitable that they will have knowledge of things which might not be immediately apparent to another player.

In principle this situation is no different than one in which a government employee is forbidden to own stock in a corporation over which he has some regulatory role, or a judge being expected to recuse himself from any case in which he could be perceived as having some personal interest. In the case of the vast majority of PBM games, the monetary implications are very small, but nevertheless the principle remains the same. The highest ethical standard is to avoid any possibility of a perceived conflict of interest.

GMs are bound to maintain a strictly neutrality and avoid any shadow of favoritism. As a player one is free to act as one pleases. However, if one is also a GM, a problem arises because other players may not be able, or may not wish to, keep your two roles completely separate. This is a classic case of perceived conflict of interest. Any other position that a GM-run position attacks, has a player behind it. That player may feel that he has been picked on by an employee of the company, and therefore could conceivably decide to take his business elsewhere because of this, so the mere fact of the GM playing could have a negative impact on the company's income.

The most common, and indeed persuasive argument, used by moderators who play in their own games, is that they need to engage in play to become better moderators. Is this true? It is surely possible for the employees to run

a playtest game amongst themselves, not for competition, but to try out different things for the purpose of gaining experience with various situations which may occur in the game. As an alternative, a moderator might "look over the shoulder" of one or more players, following closely the progress of one or more position without actually participating in the game or the players even being aware that their game was being "watched". In that case, however, it would have to be conceded that the moderator would in all likelihood not be aware of all the private inter-player communications that regularly occur.

Having said all that, there is a case to be made for allowing GMs to play in their own games, under certain circumstances. The important thing is to be open about everything. Under no circumstances should a GM ever play in a game without informing the players first. I would suggest that some games be open for moderators to play in, and some closed, and that when GMs announce that they are accepting setups for a new game, they should state whether or not that game is open to moderators. Anyone who plays in a game open to moderators then accepts that situation up front, instead of finding out after x turns, that one of the opponents happens to be a moderator.

Having spoken with various GM's I would agree that playing in a game is substantially different to running a simulation. Running a simulation will only teach the GM how to run simulations well. Actually playing a game gives a GM hands-on experience, teaching the GM how the game works from a player perspective, what thoughts go through players minds when something occurs, random elements and their impact, the list is endless. This enables the GM to have a much better grasp of a game, which in turn helps out the players. When a problem comes up the GM is then able to draw on their experience to decide what the appropriate action to take may be.

The only way to totally avoid perceptions of conflict of interest is to not play in games in which you act as a GM, even if you keep totally hands off the particular game in which you would be playing, because you have to avoid not only real conflict of interest but perceived conflict of interest..

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