

ISSUE 93

# Flagship

THE POSTAL AND EMAIL GAMING MAGAZINE

## *in this issue*

En Garde!

Chevia  
Chronicles

Clovenshield

DungeonWorld

Kings of  
Karadon

Lands of Elvaria

Legends

PAFL

StarFleet  
Warlord

plus

Zine Scene

and much more!



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# AGEMA

# Report from the Bridge

## More Water With It

NOW THAT the evenings are darkening, it's good to be offering you a bumper issue of Flagship, full of articles, opinions and news.

As you'll see, we lead with a feature about En Garde!, which is one of the earliest historical roleplaying games and which is still going great guns in the hands of hard-working moderators old and new. My own favourite aspect of En Garde! is the weird and wonderful names that players choose for their characters: perhaps a fondness of puns doesn't prove my critical acumen, but the names do show the light-hearted yet absorbing nature of this game.

'Absorbing' is a good description for the other games we cover here, too. We've advice on success in the complex fantasy wargame Legends, more about how one of the less obviously attractive positions in DungeonWorld proved to be an exciting challenge, a report on the surprise conclusion of an early game of Kings of Karadon, the delayed but vastly readable end of the PAFL diary and, for once, a game diary from a player which describes getting spifflicated, in StarFleet Warlord. Last issue's roleplaying overview will resume next issue, not this, but we've lively reports on Lands of Elvaria, The Chevian Chronicles and Clovenshield to interest roleplayers. Don't worry, wargamers, your turn will come: meanwhile, check the news columns, wait for future articles and send in your Rumours comments for next issue. Oh, and we hope that the competition we're running will entertain you all and inspire moderators to take up this idea in the future.

People who don't know Flagship sometimes assume that we cover only commercial games, and favour commercial firms. Regular readers will know that this isn't the case: we aim to cover turn-based gaming as a whole, and will feature any games that seem to be good ones. If you know about games that we don't, then we're not ignoring them deliberately: just let us know. Heavens, there are enough people who think that game-playing is a suspect activity - let's convert them, before we bite each other.

Talking of which, I was tickled to see Michael Portillo recently quoted as saying, 'now my mind has room only for giants, gods, goblins, mermaids, and, oh yes, dragons, too.' Have we a new high-profile convert? I gasped. Alas, not yet: turns out that he was talking about Wagner rather than fantasy gaming, and I'm a Mahler girl myself. Still, it's good to see that even a celebrity ex-politician can occasionally get glimmerings of a splendid new idea.

*Carol*

# FLAGSHIP

Issue N° 93

September / October 2001

## IN THIS ISSUE ...

### FEATURES

#### Explorer's Findings (game reviews)

Kings of Karadon .....	21
Clovenshield .....	30

#### Test Flight (game diaries)

DungeonWorld .....	18
Lands of Elvaria .....	22
PAFL .....	28
Starfleet Warlord .....	32
The Chevian Chronicles .....	36

#### A Piece of the Action (beginners guides)

En Garde! An Overview .....	10
Legends .....	14

#### Flagpole (featured articles)

A Brief History of En Garde! .....	13
The Displacement Engine .....	23
Gameplayer: Computer Games .....	27
Sports News .....	34
Zine Scene .....	38
Bookstack .....	39
Tailpiece: Should GMs play in their own games? .....	50

### REGULAR DEPARTMENTS

Report from the Bridge (editorial) .....	3
The Spokesmen Speak / Competition (news) .....	4
Subscription Information .....	7
The Mighty Pen / Feedback (letters) .....	24
Rumours from the Front (gossip) .....	40
Hall of Fame / Advertisers' Index .....	45
Galactic View (game listings) .....	46
Ratings Survey / Discount Coupons .....	insert

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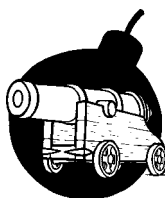
Produced by Westpoint Ltd.,  
113 Fazeley St, Digbeth, Birmingham, B5 5RX, U.K.

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Tim Lomas at [flagshipratings@antsnest.demon.co.uk](mailto:flagshipratings@antsnest.demon.co.uk)



HERE'S lots of news for the autumn. You'll be pleased to see how busy GMs have been over the summer! The holiday period seems to have inspired them with many ideas for their games. We at Flagship have also been busy with new ideas, artwork and an improved layout for *Galactic View*.



## NON-FANTASY WARGAMES

The GM of Kelem Games, Colin Leversuch-Roberts, reports that Kelem is alive and well: in fact, they have a new game of **First Crusade** which has just started. This is absolutely full, but there are a few dropout positions in **Agamemnon II** and in the earlier game of **First Crusade** if you want to try them.

We've received the rulebook and other game materials for Daredevil's **Insurrection**. They are most impressive, and wargamers will find the range mouth-watering.

**Insurrection** is set in modern Britain (the map is splendid), but our country has become divided into power-bases which are about to plunge into civil war. The towns and terrain are based on real places; there are 47 player-held positions with another 5 positions to cover off-shore islands like the Scillies and the Western Isles. Everyone starts off with a Parliamentary Democracy, though you can choose one of ten different ideologies for your own position if you wish; each ideology has its own strengths and weaknesses, but changing this again will require a revolution and a period of mob rule. There's a lot of detail in the game, with supplements on armour, artillery, aircraft, infantry and naval forces as well as the main rulebook.

The criteria for winning the game are interesting: your position needs to appear in the top three of the three tables showing Gross Domestic Product, Bloodshed and Territory. When it achieves this you can claim a victory, but you will only win if you can maintain these rankings after three more turns.

**Insurrection** is still in playtest at the moment, but it looks like being a humdinger when the playtest is over!

## PLAYTESTERS WANTED

We announced last issue that the fantasy roleplaying game **Barony of the Rivers** was returning: good news, as **Barony** was much loved in its time.

Adam Hill, **Barony**'s original creator, is reviving the game in beta test mode at the moment. There's still room for five players in this test; 15 playtesters have already signed up and the first batch of *Players' Guides* has now been emailed out. Since Adam already knows the game very well, he is charging for the test, but at the pretty low rate of £10 for the startup and three turns, then £2.50 a turn.

He's expecting to launch the full revival early in 2002. If you'd like to join the playtest, contact Adam at the address in *Galactic View*.

A new roleplaying game with a free playtest is **College Crusaders** from Matthew Saunders. Matthew is looking for six playtesters for this, so you'll need to contact him promptly to be sure of a place.

You play a teenage superhero at a college somewhere in California, and should be prepared to deal with sinister big businesses, hostile other-worlders and dark supernatural incursions as well as the more familiar problems of teenage angst to do with spots, dating and studying. Your character

can be an out-and-out goodie or a darker superhero, but the game's evil forces are NPCs: go elsewhere if you want to play a super-villain.

Your character starts as a first year student at the college, Garden UNC, which is maybe not a million miles from Buffy Summers' Sunnydale. There are four halls of residence to choose between, and lots of useful on-site facilities like a massive library, a 24-hours supermarket, a bar, a night-club and plenty of computer terminals. Better than most British colleges? Perhaps, but there's a possible snag: this college has been built on ancient holy ground...

You create your character by using 50 character points to choose skills, advantages, disadvantages and, yes, basic super powers. There are up to ten skills, which don't have to be the subjects your character is studying, and up to eight advantages or disadvantages. But it's the powers of a superhero that you're really interested in, right? You have an appropriate special power to fit your individual superhero character, of course, while the basic powers include useful things like Flight, Telepathy, Paranormal Sight among others.

Interested? If you want to join the playtest, contact Matthew Saunders, 15 Conningsby Drive, Cassiobury, Watford, Hertfordshire WD17 3BD.



## FIRMS

We've had some sad news from Ross Lombardi of **Lombot Publishing**.

He's closing his games, **Battle Dirge** and **Blood Sports of the Damned**, because of ill-health which will require quite heavy medication for some time. He had been expecting someone else to carry on moderating the games until he was well enough to resume them himself, but this arrangement didn't work, so he's decided that he'll have to close them down.

Ross is worried that **Lombot Publishing** doesn't have enough money to refund outstanding credit. The good news is that **Madhouse** have agreed to take this debt on, for any players who are unable to get a refund from **Lombot**. **Madhouse** will offer full credit for any player for any amount as long as they aren't already a **Madhouse** player. Existing **Madhouse** players aren't left out, though: **Madhouse** offer them 50% of turn credit up to a max of £25.00. In both cases they'd need a turnsheet as evidence, of course.

We've not heard back from Ross about this offer: perhaps he's too ill to cope with the detail. So if you're one of his players, could you contact **Madhouse** directly? Perhaps you can pass the news on if you've friends in **Lombot**'s games who don't take **Flagship**?

We've no definite news about anyone taking over the games, though this may happen when Ross is well enough to pass on the game data. He put a lot of loving care into his games, so we're sorry to report this news. We wish him a smooth recovery.

**Titan PBM** have closed their mixed-mod fantasy wargame **Absolute Dominion**, as they've found it difficult to gather enough players to make the game worth running in its current form. GM Wayne Morris thanks all the players who did try it, and does hope to relaunch an improved version: he says that there could be a bit of a wait, however, while he puts some work in on it. We liked the look of this game from its rulebook, so are glad to hear that it's likely to return eventually.

Happier news from **Titan** is that their range of games is about to grow again. They have the rights to **Spellbinder**'s futuristic game of war on the London underground, **LT Wars**, and look forward to launching it soon. Drop them a line for more information.

Games from **Hunky Monkey** and **Timewyrm** are delayed at present, following a family bereavement. They've informed their players, and expect game turns to resume at the end of this month, September. If you apply to join **Kings of Karadon**, **Prometheus** or **Heroes of Olynthus**, don't be alarmed by the delay. We send our commiserations.

## ADVENTURE GAMES

Madhouse report that **DungeonWorld**, 'the world's largest fantasy adventure PBM', continues to grow. After an advertising campaign in various commercial magazines (impressive ads, we've seen a couple of them) and their free online game of Brokenlands, they've attracted enough new players to open several new dungeons and player areas. Madhouse's Steve Tierney stresses that every player in the world of Bereny is in the same game, 'which means massive interaction and complex roleplay!' New magic items (over 20,000, wow!) have recently been added to the game, as well as 2000 new monsters (eek!).

It's worth mentioning that **DungeonWorld** can now be played in several popular ways. We're running Andy London's diary about his Estate position, which was recommended for experienced players, but there's still the original Adventurer position and also the Trader position, or you can go for something completely different as a Monster Tribe.

On top of this, the two faster 7-day **DungeonWorld** spinoff modules are still flourishing:

<http://www.madcentral.com/Pages/dungeonworld/dungeonworld.htm>

There's also the first open-ended **DungeonWorld**

spinoff, **Frontier**, which has a vividly contrasting background in the steamy, dinosaur-infested jungles far East of Bereny. **Frontier** is a game of exploration, survival and prosperity in an area that's dangerous, mysterious and exotic.

As well as a standard position in this game, there's also a martial arts plotline called 'Cat In The Serpents Lair' which you can apply to join. This features an oriental-style clan war between a leonine humanoid race called the Aslani, and an evil serpentine race, masters of the dark martial arts. Ask for a position in this if you're a fan of the old Chinese martial arts movies:

<http://www.madcentral.com/Pages/frontier/frontier.htm>

Finally (in more ways than one), there's the **DungeonWorld** module called **Land Of The Dead**. 'Some Doors Should Never Be Opened' says the tagline, ulp, and this sounds true enough, because this module is set in the scary land of a strange afterlife. You can join as a new character, or with an existing character who has died in any of the other modules.

In the **Land of the Dead**, characters try their hands at unravelling the land's mysteries, increasing their entropy levels, adding strange new powers via 'shifts' to their personal reality, and surviving the land's many terrible menaces.

There are factions to join, led by the Dark Masters of Death, who offer tempting prizes for the faithful. But why stop there, when you could ultimately become a lord of death yourself?

One plotline that's currently becoming part of this module is the 'Royal Mission'. Here, characters will accompany the Regent of Bereny in an attempt to rescue the King from the clutches of an ancient pact with death itself. You can apply for a standard **Land of the Dead** power position, or a special 'Royal Mission', via:

<http://www.madcentral.com/Pages/landofthedead/landofthedead.htm>



## ROLEPLAYING GAMES

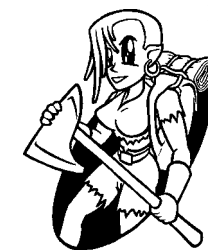
We start with what looks like some bad news, but read on ...

Jade Enterprises have decided to stop running **Absolute Power**, and have offered its players a refund of their credit or a free startup in their superhero roleplaying game, **Absolute Heroes**. Jade's GM, John Davies, explains that 'this decision was not taken lightly and was made because the game had been in a decline for the last year and had unfortunately outgrown the capabilities of the game system.' All the rights to **Absolute Power** have reverted to its designer, Justin Parsler, at Silver Dreamer: there's a chance that Justin will launch a sequel in due course. John says, 'I'd like to thank all those players who participated over the years in shaping the Empire of **Absolute Power**. It was great fun.'

The good news is that John is now concentrating on building up and expanding **Absolute Heroes**. This has been running for a year now, and John reports that it's proving very successful. Because he has more time available following the closure of AP, there are plenty of new positions available in **Absolute Heroes** for new players.

There is also a spin-off game from **Absolute Heroes**, which is about to be launched; it's called **Absolute Heroes: The Golden Age**. This will be similar to the standard AH game but completely separate, and set during World War Two. Anybody wishing to join **Absolute Heroes** or get in at the start of AH: The Golden Age should contact John at Jade Enterprise's address in *Galactic View*.

## TribalGames



Paul Green is still running his tribal game, **Clans II**, and has a limited number of openings for positions in this. The game is free at the moment as Paul is running it as a hobby not as a business, so anyone who wants to play

should email Paul for the rules at:

[clans@warriorgames.co.uk](mailto:clans@warriorgames.co.uk)



## FIRMS cont...

**Spellbinder** are offering their mailing list for sale: 1000 names for £100. It contains

addresses of all have played or contacted them in the last five years, with no names older than that. **Spellbinder's** contact details are in *Galactic View*.

**Spellbinder** have also protested that we were mistaken to put our '\$ = no refunds' sign beside all their games in GV. While they don't refund on Bledian Diary, they do refund on any other game, 'as long as the amount is reasonable.'

**Madhouse** have welcomed Mark Cullup as a new, full-time member of staff. They are employing Mark as a support designer, to work within the framework of their neXus engine, primarily on their new project, **Destiny**, but also on the rest of their range as necessary. Mark seems likely to be a valuable asset to **Madhouse**, as he's the designer and creator of **King's Pirate**, which we reviewed last issue. This game isn't taking new players at present, but **Madhouse** expect it to join their range of games at some time in the near future.

**Madhouse** point out that they offer a comprehensive refugee scheme for any player who's been hit by a bad game fold and who isn't a current **Madhouse** customer. They will offer free credit to the full value that has been lost, with no limits on how much that value can be.

They offer this as 'part of our ongoing commitment to PBM, to make sure that players of this vital and vibrant hobby have only good experiences during their participation.'

Yes, yes, hooray! we cry - but watch out for this little extra note from the **Madhouse Laboratories**: 'Just in case all this nice stuff makes anybody think we've lost our edge. Please do pop by our labs one late winter night and enjoy the screams of the innocent victims as we suck out their brains and replace them with an inky black substance which has much the same consistency as tar.'

## Flagship needs YOU!

Playing a game? - we hope so! :-)



Send in the enclosed Ratings form!

Ratings online at ...  
[www.pbmgames.com/flagship/](http://www.pbmgames.com/flagship/)

## CONVENTIONS



Sad news is that Paul Green's High Street Online firm have decided against running a PBM convention next year. Paul himself is keen and was pleased to see that many GMs supported the idea, but his fellow directors interpreted the low response from players as a sign of apathy.

Hmm, we reckon that players will certainly turn up at a convention if the GMs do, so we don't read a low response as apathy ourselves.

We'll continue to encourage anyone who's ready to take the job on: just get in touch.

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.

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

**DragonMeet 2001:** 1st December at *Kensington Town Hall, Hornton Street, London W8* from 10am to 10pm. Closest tube, High Street Kensington. It's an adventure games convention, and will be double the size of last year's event. We're hoping to run a stall ourselves, and other PBM GMs, including Madhouse, expect to be present (more details next issue).

Ticket prices are £5 in advance (£3.50 concessions) or £6 on the day (£4.50 concessions). On-line ticket ordering and further information, plus maps, the latest news and regularly updated event listings are on the website:

[www.dragonmeet.com](http://www.dragonmeet.com)

Or contact Gameforce Ltd, 18-20 Bromell's Road, London SW4 0BG.

### TowerCon 2002

22 - 24 March 2002, Claremont Hotel, Blackpool, Lancashire. Book before 30 November 2001 and save £10.00! Loads of roleplaying games as well as the usual board games etc. Places can now be booked for any



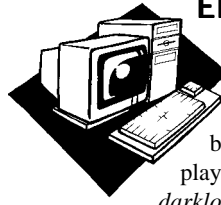
of the Living Environment events. Contact Terry by

email at [dictator@towercon.co.uk](mailto:dictator@towercon.co.uk) or visit the website for further details. ([www.towercon.co.uk](http://www.towercon.co.uk))

## MEETS

**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@sfc.co.uk](mailto:events@sfc.co.uk)

## EMAIL AND WEB-BASED GAMING



Graeme Hay is one of the editorial staff on a new website that should be of interest to all PBM players and GMs. This is:

[darklore.co.uk](http://darklore.co.uk)

and is one of the very few news-based PBM sites.

Darklore plan to cover in-game news and announcements from any PBM game, though at present it's mainly focusing on games from KJC, Madhouse, Crasiworld, Undying Kings and Ulaidh Games, as these are the companies its founders play with. They'll welcome news from other PBM firms, and invite everyone to check them out. This will provide a useful service, as it becomes better known.

News for French-speaking readers is that there's a free French-speaking portal about play-by-mail games:

<http://www.tourdejeu.net>

News from Agema Publications that their power-games **Gunboat Diplomacy** and **La Gloire du Roi** can now both be played by e-mail as well as via the post.

Nick Haynes is running an open-ended, mixed-moderated game with the glorious title of **Moonbiter**. He plans to offer a game world that's large enough to satisfy wargamers and roleplayers, so it's possible to play 'clans, guilds, political positions, legio vitrix, penal battalions, mercenaries, bounty hunters, religious positions, merchant houses, slavers, young sons, badabaskans, the han-dinen tribes, sea clans, sea legions and if there's a position you want and it's not there, we can make it.' It's also possible to join 'Ashapur (the Silken Knot society), the Empire, the Rebellion, the Federation, Cho Tetsu, the Principality of Steel (the Pawn Saints), the Bandit Kingdoms, the Pirates at Hanghaven, the Black Watch, the Free Corps, the Lake Kingdom, the Sea of Grass, and tons more!'

'You can play anything you want to play,' says Nick when we asked about this, 'Yes, there are clans and stuff, but there are also loads more... I would create any position that a player wanted, no matter how small - it only matters that the game is enjoyable for him/her.'

Moonbiter has been running since July, and still has room for around ten players: at the moment it's all free!

[gm@moonbiter.fsnet.co.uk](mailto:gm@moonbiter.fsnet.co.uk)

Here's news of a free wargame, **1914**, which is run by a GM based in Holland who welcomes players from all over the world. As you'd guess, 1914 is when the game starts!

Don't be discouraged by the fact that it's free: 1914 is a fairly complex game. Economics are an important element: the game is designed so that no nation can afford to have a large-scale war at the beginning. First, you'll need to build a solid

economy with the six resources in the game (oil, steel, ammo, supplies, minerals and utilities), as well as cash. Diplomacy is important, too. You've a fair amount of choice about what course to take: trade, research, factory-building, spying or fighting. What limits your ambitions is that if you do things that your people or military don't like their morale will drop, and so will their resource-income. The opposite, of course happens, if you do something your people or military like.

The current players seem to be having fun by adding their own ideas to the game. For instance, says Bob, 'the Swiss player has introduced the World Cup into the game and all nations are playing along with it. The Canadian player starts the World Cup Ice-Hockey soon and Russia will hold the Olympics next year. All these things were made up by the players themselves.' Always a sign of a good game! Details from:

[jagular@wx.nl](mailto:jagular@wx.nl)

**Lords of the Earth** is a game system that's been running successfully for some years now, and was favourably reviewed in *Flagship 75*.

So it's good news that Leslie Dodd is starting Campaign 42 of the game. He welcomes all players, but is especially keen to recruit 'fellow denizens of the UK' as this is only the second active UK-based Lords campaign.

The URL for the campaign-specific webpage is:

<http://www.lordsoftheearth.co.uk/lote42/index.htm>

The URL of the general Lords of the Earth homepage (with copious links to various related things) is:

<http://www.throneworld.com/lords/index.jsp>

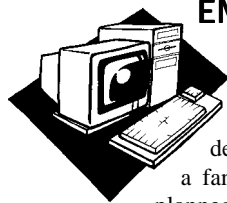
Turn charges are £3 per turn for UK players, or US\$5 for players from the States.

Madhouse send a reminder that their **BrokenLands Online** is 'a completely-free, no-strings, permanent open-ended fantasy adventure game.' A module of *DungeonWorld*, they stress that there's no cut-off point, so players don't need to begin again after a set amount of turns, or to join the commercial game at a predefined point. 'We are happy for players to enjoy a free adventurer position for as long as they wish to participate.'

They report that *BrokenLands* has attracted hundreds of players have and that the game is growing very fast indeed. It is part of the same game world as the rest of *DungeonWorld*, *Bereny*, but players are 'lost in an endless labyrinth of terrible caverns beneath the most inhospitable desert in the world. Can you escape? Can you even survive? Come find out.'

[www.madcentral.com/brokenlands](http://www.madcentral.com/brokenlands)

And entering playtest this autumn will be a new game from Madhouse, **Soulcatcher**. They describe it as a simple game of their own design which will run automatically, and completely free, from their website. This web game will need no special software, running directly from your browser.



## EMAIL AND WEB-BASED GAMING cont...

Players will take the part of spectral beings who must claim the souls of dead folk as they pass from a fantasy world. Games are planned to begin every three weeks, to hold up to 100 active players, and to be completely free.

Harlequin Games report that they have overhauled their dedicated site for **Middle Earth** players. This probably won't have much of interest to non-players, but it's worth noting that Harlequin have put up all the statistics for the Middle Earth World Championships (currently Australia are leading).

[www.middleearthgames.com](http://www.middleearthgames.com)

Flagship is now using the same secure online credit card system as all Harlequin's sites, which should be further reassurance for players who are uncomfortable about using the web for purchases.

There is still time to join Undying King Games' new roleplaying game, **Conclave**. It'll become a complex game as it progresses, but only three turns have been run as this issue hits your doormats, so there's a while to go before things get bafflingly complicated. Conclave follows the same format as Undying King's other recent

games, **Inferno** and **Mammon**, with an individual turn and a general newssheet every time. However, Undying King will be running Conclave by email only.

It's a roleplaying game, but one with a fixed end, lasting for 24 monthly turns altogether. Each full turn covers three months in game time, so the action will move rapidly. (If a monthly turn seems too long at any point, the design allows for individual subsidiary turns.) Orders are submitted as free form sentences, describing how you'll use the six action points (APs) which you're allowed each turn and which can be divided between as many actions as you like.

Conclave has a fantasy setting, with elves, humans and dwarves living peacefully together over two great continents, after ancient wars between them. The game world described by the rules is detailed and varied, and abounding in dangers and mysteries. There are two major religions and an atheistic philosophy, but all these beliefs predict that the end of the world will occur in six years time. Opinions merely differ as to how this will happen and whose fault it will be. Magic is an important element in the game and there are various spells to obtain - but perhaps the end of the world will be the magicians' fault?

There are ten character stats, which you use to create your character by ranking them in order.

They include magical ability, as you'd expect, but some are more unusual: for instance, there's the chance to have a named assistant and the chance to have a group of followers (though you have no direct power over these, so you'll need to think about being able to maintain your influence them). Conclave is a roleplaying game, so you need to follow your own objectives in it rather than beating the other players; however, you can check how you're doing from the ratings in Achievement, Inspiration, Patronage, Magical Power, Political Power and Regard which come out with every turn.

Undying King's previous games using this system have been enthusiastically received. If you're looking for an absorbing new roleplaying game to start now that the evenings are drawing in, Conclave seems a good choice: the writing is excellent and there's the opportunity for plenty of interaction with your fellow players.

Finally, a note from Patrick Gleeson who's been busily gathering information on games of **En Garde!** for this issue's article:

Brian Niemi is thinking about running an e-mail **En Garde!** game and would like to gauge interest. Anyone who's interested in playing should contact him:

[bniemi@bigfoot.com](mailto:bniemi@bigfoot.com)

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# FLAGSHIP



# Competition

We're delighted to introduce a competition as a new feature with this issue! To start the ball rolling, Entertainment Plus More are offering a prize for Flagship readers! Can you answer the following three questions correctly? -

- 1 - Was the film version of *Lord of the Rings* that's due out this Christmas made in
  - (i) New Zealand,
  - (ii) California or
  - (iii) Switzerland?
- 2 - In Terry Pratchett's *Discworld* novels, is an important character called
  - (i) Granny Rincewind,
  - (ii) Granny Mort, or
  - (iii) Granny Weatherwax?
- 3 - Were Lara Croft's opponents in the film *TombRaider* working for
  - (i) the BORG,
  - (ii) the Illuminati, or
  - (iii) SMERSH?

Send your answers in to the Flagship office, please, by October 1st. All correct answers will be entered in a draw to find the winner.

And the prize? It's a free three-turn trial package in their award-winning fantasy adventure game **Adventurers Guild**.

You'll need to have email access to play this, of course, and can find more out about the game from their website:

[www.epmgames.com](http://www.epmgames.com)

## 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

Just too late for last issue, but nice and early for this one, we've received an update from Incubus Designs about their version of **Serim Ral**. As they're the original designers of this game, they'll know what they're about! They report that they have recently finished a complete PC re-write of the game engine. This is intended to retain all the original features that have made Serim Ral such an enjoyable game, while also implementing many new ideas.

One of the major enhancements is the introduction of 'Interactive, Graphical, Point & Click, HTML' turn sheets, including a built-in 'turn sheet navigator', 'order editor' and syntax checker. Examples of the new turn sheets can be found on their recently re-vamped website. The new website contains lots of other useful SR-related stuff including FAQs, message boards, downloadable rulebooks and maps.

To celebrate the launch of the new system, Incubus are now accepting start-ups for three new games of Serim Ral - Players can choose between: *Renaissance* (a classic fantasy wargame), *Deep Dominions* (set in a gloomy subterranean world), and *Keltica*, (heavily steeped in Celtic mythology and based on a map of ancient Britain). Incubus expect Deep Dominions to be the first game to start, with Renaissance and Keltica to follow soon after.

As a special offer to Flagship readers, Incubus are offering a free start-up and four free turns. Simply enter the reference 'FLAG1' when filling in the online start-up form, or contact them for postal start-up details. You'll find the necessary contact details in *Galactic View*.

Harlequin Games remind readers that you'll have seen the Underdark adverts for their version of **Serim Ral**. They've just started Serim Ral 52, but will be taking setups in this game for several months to come. Their Serim Ral players have helped them to design this one, with all new races and a wealth of special actions to do each turn.

Further news from Harlequin is that they have finished their new accounting and frontsheet system for Middle Earth, '*Jester*'. They say that they now have complete control over the details on the frontsheets, plus the ability to include game details in the subject line of the emails they send out.

Harlequin's new Middle Earth scenario **Battle of the Five Armies** has just left the GM playtest stage and is now being tested by some players. It won't be issued on general release until they have ironed out the play balance. The goal is to create a five-player, ten-turn Middle Earth 'Lite' which will provide a simple, fast and furious introduction to the game. They're currently avoiding emissaries, along with most of the more subtle orders. 'The difficulty,' they say, 'is making sure that the game is still fresh and interesting, even without some of

the usual tactical finesse.' Good luck, guys!

We've a further article to assist you with Harlequin's **Legends** this issue, so it's interesting to hear from them that North Island Campaign is quite possibly the most popular module yet. The old NIC was always a firm favourite of older players, they say, but the new module builds on the storyline of the old with a slew of adventures detailed in the book. NIC24 is now just about full, with 95 players.

NIC25 is a special variant, for only 12 players split into two teams, battling over the tiny island of Ur'Rah. All the positions are accelerated into late game strength so that this game will allow some less experienced players to enjoy the thrill of an endgame they rarely get to see. NIC26 will start in late Autumn and will be a standard 100 player game, with slightly reduced setup from NIC24.

The Legends rulebook is mouth-watering, but actually playing this game has always been demanding. Harlequin have been doing their best to make an introduction to Legends as pain-free as possible. Their Legends GM, Sam Roads, acknowledges that it 'may well be the most complex PBM on the market', but reports that the North Island Campaign module features a 'beginner's only' plane 'where new players can get to grips with game mechanics and gargoyles without becoming prey to more experienced players.'

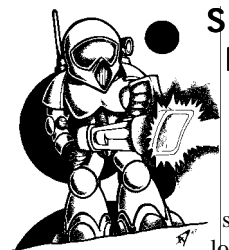
Harlequin have written a '*How Not To Drop Legends On Your First Turn*' guide: 'Which does exactly what it says on the tin.' There's also a new on-going advice service available, where referees examine a player's position and offer help and advice. Harlequin offer phone numbers and email addresses of friendly player-mentors who will be happy to talk to prospective players about how to enjoy the game. Their website is full of advice, and, says Sam, 'our mailing lists resound with the echo of new player's questions being answered.'

Titan PBM also have a special offer, open to all Flagship readers. This invites you to try out their new game, **Throne of Cofain**. You can play the first four turns free in a solo game or a group game. If you don't like the game, then just return everything to Titan and there's no need to pay a penny. Throne of Cofain is a simpler variant of Titan's War of the Dark God. While it is playable in its own right, Titan hope that trying out Throne of Cofain will allow players to learn the rules for War of the Dark God without the full pressure of that game. Let's add that players are now being signed up for game 3 of WotDG, so contact Titan if you feel that you're up to trying this deeper game.

Check out our new website ...

[www.pbmgames.com/flagship](http://www.pbmgames.com/flagship)





## SCIENCE FICTION GAMES

It's good to offer you plenty of exciting news for this section, as science fiction games have long been a favourite genre for PBM players but life's been a bit quiet on the starflight front recently.

Two space operas and a planetary wargame are being fine-tuned and will soon be launched, hooray!

First, KJC report that work is going well on their new version of the classic BSE, which they're renaming **Phoenix**. 'We are testing the code,' says KJC's Mica, 'and a hell of a lot of it there is. All I can say is that I am very impressed. The programmer - who has worked on sending live TV over the internet at realistic speeds - states that this is one of the most complicated things he has done. I hope this gives some idea of the programming going into it!'

But it's not just Phoenix that KJC are working on. They also have an SF war and adventure game in the pipeline, **Space Troopers**, and they expect that they will soon be ready to test this. Their plan is to run a free version to draw players into the hobby, and a pay-to-play advanced version for those looking for greater depth.

So, what's Space Troopers about? KJC's basic description is neat: 'bad-ass marines with big guns and cynical attitudes working for morally bankrupt corporations.' This alone sounds promising stuff, eh?

To give a bit more detail, the world came to be ruled by rival global corporations which from time to time have fought bloody skirmishes with each other. Then humanity started to explore space, and found a distant planet with a mineral, sarinite, that can be used to speed interstellar drives. Because aliens of a roughly equivalent technological level were already mining this, the corporations launched a joint venture to fight the aliens off. They use space troopers for this, as nuclear weapons would damage the valuable sarinite. All went as planned. At first. After a few years, however, the corporations are starting to fight among themselves for the sarinite deposits and, of course, the aliens have returned, this time with covert installations and serious firepower. Each mega-corporation needs its own space trooper squadrons, which have to guard its assets out on the planet, repel alien incursions and crush rival operations, or try to.

Space Troopers isn't entirely a wargame, however. Sometimes rescue missions are needed or officials need to be escorted to secret locations. Scouting patrols into dangerous territory are common. So there's a chance of adventure in the game world as well, which will give an added element of interest and should help to attract a wide range of players.

More details of Phoenix and Space Troopers will appear on their website in due course:

<http://www.kjcgames.com>

Madhouse, too, have been working feverishly on **Destiny**, which they hope to have in beta test by late October. They describe it as an open-ended 'pulp space opera', which sounds fun, and report that many players have been offering suggestions and ideas by email on their design discussion list, which has helped them to tailor their own ideas 'into something which will have, we hope, vast popular appeal.'

They intend to present a game which will be playable on many levels. As well as the usual areas seen in this type of space opera games, they're including a character-based exploration and adventure level and the innovative Boundary position, which is a single-character space dogfight. These different types of position will all co-exist in the same game universe.

Madhouse predict that Destiny will grow and grow, in the same way that **DungeonWorld** has over the past three years, 'to become the monster of all sci-fi games.' It does sound promising stuff! You can find how progress is going from:

<http://www.madcentral.com/Pages/destiny/destiny.htm>

There's more! A new science fiction game is in the offing from Agema Publications, who've specialised up to now in historical settings. It's a wargame campaign, rousingly entitled **The Thumping of Ground 8**. While they emphasise that the game is still in the development stage, they're confident that it's proceeding well. Anyone wanting details immediately upon launch can get them by e-mailing Agema on [agema@lineone.net](mailto:agema@lineone.net) or by sending a stamped addressed envelope to the address in *Galactic View*.

One sf game that's closing, however, is Daredevil's **Polaris**. As Bob McLain forecast last issue, this is because its designer David Jones is moving to America to work on Slow Motion Games new version of BSE. 'Developing the new **US-BSE** program was too good an opportunity to pass up,' says David. Daredevil will continue in the UK, however, run by David's business partner: they're concentrating on the playtest of the wargame **Insurrection**.

We started this section with news of KJC's update of BSE, Phoenix, and end it with news about plans for the American update. It's satisfying to achieve such a neat bit of structuring, but most of all it's good news for PBM SF fans world-wide.

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(credit and debit cards)

[www.pbmgames.com/flagship](http://www.pbmgames.com/flagship)

## CONVENTION REPORTS

We welcome this report from Flagship's founder and ex-editor, Nick Palmer, on this year's GENCON (US):

*'I went to this five-day event in Milwaukee (organised by Wizards of the Coast, best known for Magic and other card games), along with 20,000+ other gamers, including several from the UK. It's a staggering achievement showing how vibrant the overall games industry is, especially as the whole genre of computer gaming was only peripherally involved here. There were, I'd guess, around a thousand different events to choose from, and the temptation was to spend 18 hours a day racing from one to another to get maximum gaming value.'*

*I tried to sample diverse pleasures, going to a couple of National Security simulations (very like the Middle East Peacegames which veteran readers may remember from an early Flagship convention), playing in a Doomtown card tournament and unexpectedly reaching the final, revisiting AD&D (and remembering why I stopped playing that 25 years ago - too much time spent debating if the party should go down this corridor or that), playing an Axis and Allies variant, watching an enthralling preview of the computer games Masters of Orion 3 (hugely tempting) and Civ 3 (a bit samey-looking compared with Civ 2), and getting a bad dose of food poisoning from the truly ghastly offerings in the nearby food hall.'*

*The huge exhibition hall included a few PBM stands, with BSE still going strong under new management (one email position per player offered free), Duelmasters games running throughout the con, and the seemingly immortal Flying Buffalo and Rick Loomis still pushing Starweb and other games.'*

*Recommended for any gamer with catholic tastes, but go to a hotel for the food! (There was a much smaller UK GenCon too, which ran at the end of August with the focus on card games.)'*

## Coming Soon!

Arriving soon from Madhouse - it's now in beta test - is **Spiders**. It's the first close-ended strategy game to be designed using Madhouse's neXus game engine.

As you'd imagine, spiders are what you play in this game - but not just the usual manageable small-scale arachnids. Instead, Madhouse report that Spiders is 'set in a bizarre world, combining real spider characteristics with a warped world of impossibilities'. In the game the spiders' aim is to dominate the garden, by breeding and multiplying, catching flies in their webs, defending their territory and expanding into others. And, eek, they chase miniature humans and feed on their tiny bodies. 'Spiders,' say Madhouse, 'is a fast-paced game of intense action, but remember... They Are Not Your Friends!' Hey, guys, some of us never thought they were!

<http://www.madcentral.com/Pages/spiders/spiders.htm>

# En Garde!

## Great fun, but where to start?

**PATRICK GLEESON** has compiled a helpful overview ...

*In En Garde! a player finds himself born into and educated in a world where social climbing is a way of life, and status is a goal to be pursued over money. It is a world inhabited by Cyrano, Roxanne, Scaramouche, Errol Flynn, Porthos, Athos, Aramis, Rhonda Fleming, Francois Villon, Constance and, of course, D'Artagnan. There are people to be used, friends in high places to be cultivated, enemies to be humiliated, the Cardinal's Guard to be trounced, lackies to be abused, the hand of a fair damsel to be won, and the ear of the King to be gained. Sharpen your sword ... Sharpen your wit ... Take care not to insult a small man with a large nose ... All for one and one for all ... Good luck, friend, and may your swash never buckle!*

(From the back of the En-Garde! rules)

SO HOW MANY games of **En Garde!** are out there? The answer is, a lot! Here are a few reputable games with good GMs which I would not hesitate in recommending to anyone looking to get into the world of En Garde!

### Banana En Garde!

I've started with this one because, although I have never played it, the game has such an excellent reputation. A look at the website will show that this is a reputation which is well deserved. Almost certainly the largest EG game out there in terms of player numbers, Banana also boasts a specially written program to run the game, and a wealth of useful information on the website.

Banana EG has been run as a free, PBEM (play-by-email) game for a number of years now and has had many different GMs and contributors. The rules posted on the website are a good representation of how the game is run, but they are apparently in the process of being updated to more accurately reflect the C++ code used to run the turn. Note that this is a different program from the widely available GM adjudication software used for many of the other games listed on this page.

EG veterans will find the game familiar, though there have been some changes made: for example, the regimental structure has been modified to more rigidly enforce the division into battalions and squadrons (something which will be familiar to veterans of the now defunct Dieu et Mon Droit campaign). The only criticism I would have of this version of EG is that Banana doesn't seem to have regular newsletter: everything being done via web roleplay. Maybe I'm just a traditionalist ...

[www.planetunreal.com/kh/engarde/](http://www.planetunreal.com/kh/engarde/)

### Dangerous Liaisons

This is a free-form En Garde! game set in France of the 1560s, the age of Catherine de Medici and the Wars of Religion. The newsletter comes as a 12-page A5 format zine costing 80p per issue and now up to issue 35. Turnaround is five weeks. It has 15-20 subscribers and is always looking for new players.

Unlike most other EG variants, players can take the role of female characters, the ambitious and devious femmes fatales of the time. They can even masquerade as men, rising high in society before inevitable discovery! DL is primarily a game based on the religious and political rivalries of the times. Characters join factions reflecting these divisions and seek to rise high within them by displaying courage, duelling, organising religious spectacles and propaganda victories or marshalling powerful coalitions at Parlement. Controlling the levers of government is far more important, but social life is intense with nights at the prize-fights or weekends at the

horse-racing as an added element. Then characters can organise and act in plays at the theatre or invest in speculative trading companies planning to exploit the wealth of the world. Because it is a free-form game all kinds of plots, conspiracies and ambushes are permitted, aided by the ability to hire ruffian henchmen and consult seers who can advise about how your plots can succeed or how to guard yourself against an enemy.

In the last issue, Parlement passed a law much to the advantage of the King's younger brother's faction. His response was to order his own guard to dissolve Parlement but the royalist coup was forestalled by an alliance of the rebellious Duc and the Protestant grantees. King Charles is even more the puppet of powerful forces. Paris is in flames ...

Subscribing to DL costs £5 initially, which gets you a character, House Rules and 5 issues. Contact Jerry Spencer, 51 Elm Vale, Liverpool L6 8NY. Tel 0151-220-6630 or email

[italia@gryphon33.fsnet.co.uk](mailto:italia@gryphon33.fsnet.co.uk)

### Delon En Garde!

Formerly La Porte En Garde, this variant seems fairly standard, though with one or two additions such as the Theatre. The website is both attractive and comprehensive (and lengthy!). At present there are about 30 players. The GM is Rich Crofts ([claudedelon@yahoo.com](mailto:claudedelon@yahoo.com)).

[www.chariot.net.au/~duncelin/engarde.html](http://www.chariot.net.au/~duncelin/engarde.html)

### Horse Guards En Garde

This PBEM is a relative newcomer, starting in April 2000. GM Trevor Gillard launched the game with a number of players from his former games club and is now going public with the game. Horse Guards En Garde has now been running successfully for 14 months. The game is set in 1610 shortly after the death of Henri IV. This was a period of great intrigue at the French Court with La Reine Margot as regent for her young son. The game has some aspects not featured in other games including Tulip mania, something just developing in France & Holland at this time.

<http://horseguards.org/en%20garde.html>

### King & Cardinal

Essentially this is a fairly straightforward game of En Garde and anyone who is familiar with the Small Furry Creatures Press version of the rules should not have any massive surprises. At present there are between 25 and 30 players in this free variant. If you wish to join this game please email the GM at [Ian.Coleman@ukgateway.net](mailto:Ian.Coleman@ukgateway.net)

[www.thera.org.uk/engarde.htm](http://www.thera.org.uk/engarde.htm)

### Les Petites Betes Soyeuses

This has to be the oldest game of EG currently running, having started way back in April 1986, it is run, now as then, by Paul Evans (aka Pevans). LPBS has some sixty players and room for more. With this number of players, there is plenty of scope for the scheming and skulduggery that enliven the game. Pevans has tried to stick closely to the published game rules, so there are only a few embellishments to this game.

Each turn is a month in game terms and each month is chronicled in a narrative report - derived largely from the actions of the characters in this month. The report is published along with tables showing what's what in Paris and contact details for all the players. Each player also gets a personal character sheet with a record of the previous turn. The whole thing is published (on paper) as the main part of the postal games zine, *To Win Just Once*, and is also available through the website. Orders are accepted by

e-mail, but the game remains a PBM rather than a PBEM. If you'd like a sample copy of *To Win Just Once*, write to Pevans with your address: Paul Evans, 180 Aylsham Drive, Uxbridge UB10 8UF, or ...

[TWJO@pevans.co.uk](mailto:TWJO@pevans.co.uk)

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

### Orc En Garde!

A fascinating idea, and one that I'm itching to try myself - this free game has a fantasy setting wherein players take the part of a Dwarf, Elf or Human in the land of Praxis. The monthly turn report comes in the form of *The Daily Orc* with a narrative of the month's key events and information in the form of tables and lists. Obviously this setting entails a degree of additional material not featured in other EG variants - magic for starters! There are between 40 to 50 players.

[http://www.geocities.com/orc\\_engarde/](http://www.geocities.com/orc_engarde/)

### Orleans En Garde

A successful game, with over 70 players at the latest count! Orleans En Garde is run by GM Brian Jenkins (aka King Louis) using a semi-automated adjudication system of his design. My impression is that there are more whistles and frills to the game than Banana. These expanded rule allow pursuits as a career in the Clergy, Playwrights, Artists, and even Scientists. The basis of the game remains the accumulation of power and influence.

Turns generally turn around every three weeks. This splits up into two weeks of role-playing on the mailing list and then a week for the GM to adjudicate the turn and publish the *Orleans Picayune* which is basically a turn report set up like a newspaper. Sensibly the GM is maintaining a waiting list to join the game, there being about fifteen on this at the moment. Player turnaround is such that one usually waits about three to four weeks to get into the game once on the waiting list. Once in the game, be prepared for a very busy game mailing list!

[www.hijens.com/engarde](http://www.hijens.com/engarde)

### Slumbers

An EG variant set in Lovecraftian 1920s America with approximately 20 players, each of whom are members of various societies vying against each other. The newsletter on the website (*The Arkham Advertiser*) is well-presented and atmospheric. *'The already somewhat battered reputation of the Miskatonic University took another blow this month, when one of its newer students was arrested in connection with the disappearance of a local child. Young Michelle Fowler, whose parents, Arthur and Pauline reside in Albert Square on the East Side, hasn't been seen for two weeks now, and local detectives fear the worst.'*

<http://freespace.virgin.net/francis.brambley/ArkhamAdvertise.htm>

### The Sun-King

This has a very nice detailed web page, though sadly the game itself seems to have become detached from the web page! As far as I know the game itself is still running under GM Michael Cruikshank, but with no active website it is difficult to get any details on the game.

<http://www.users.dircon.co.uk/~redessa/sun-king/>

### Time of Honour

This is a standard EG variant played via email and web, with a decent looking website. The newsletter, the Parisian Times contains loads of information. If you would like to join the game go to

<http://timeofhonor.com/JoinForm.html>

You will then be placed on a waiting list and contacted when positions open up in the game. This will be on a first come, first served basis. You will be sent a Player Start up form when you are accepted into the game. New players are added to the game according to the waiting list. Death definitely has a meaning in Time of Honour, it will hold you up until a spot opens up for you!

<http://timeofhonor.com/>

### Variable Pig

Variable Pig is a long-standing and varied play-by-mail zine covering many different games. It currently has a circulation of around 60. Subscription is free, but donations of stamps are welcome to offset production costs. The editor and main GM is Jim Reader. The established EG game has just come to an end. However, it's not all bad news as Roy Arnold has offered to start a new campaign. Roy initially offered to take over the existing game, but after some email discussion it was felt that it would be better to start anew. The new game will have an unusual setting, namely the proposition that the French Revolution failed. Details of game information can be found at:

<http://homepages.shu.ac.uk/~rcarnold/vpeg.html>

The following games are of uncertain status, but to be recommended if they are running ...

### Arcadia En-Garde

This game has been temporarily suspended, which is a shame because the website is very attractive. I can't help wondering whether the fact that the game was free has come bearing on the status of the game. EG is such a labour intensive game to run, that in my view a game should be charged accordingly.

<http://www.geocities.com/TimesSquare/Castle/6015>

### Shogun (EG style)

This is a brilliant idea, with players taking the part of members of the various Great Houses in medieval Japan. Unfortunately I have been unable to verify that the game is still active - it was certainly running earlier this year.

<http://www.geocities.com/Area51/Station/5676/shogun/turnpage.html>

And finally, there is the extremely useful ...

### En Garde! Webring

This webring is maintained by Brian Jenkins and is dedicated to bringing together the community of PBEM En Garde Players and GMs. If you currently: are a GM for a PBEM En Garde! game (no matter what the size), or have an En Garde! related site, then you may want to be part of this community. The goal of the EG webring is to bring together those who love the game of En Garde and especially to make it easier for new games to get started, find players, and of course for players to find games. For more information you may email the En Garde! RingMaster at:

[engarde@hijens.com](mailto:engarde@hijens.com)

<http://hijens.com/egwebring/>



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Universe.



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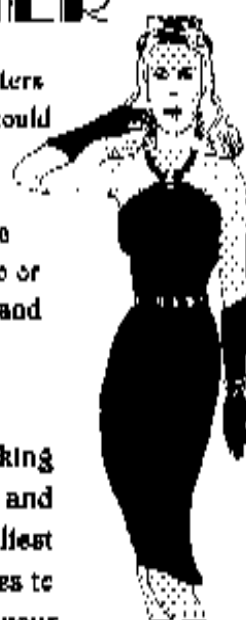
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# His Eminence Speaks

## A brief history of En Garde!

*PAUL EVANS (aka Pevans) remembers it well ...*

NOWADAYS it's best known as a PBM, but **En Garde!** was one of the first role-playing games. Like its contemporary, *Dungeons & Dragons*, it had its roots in wargaming. Both games moved away from military units to individual people - characters - and their abilities and roles. **En Garde!** started life as a duelling system for individual swash-bucklers. The rest of the game evolved to provide a context and rationale for the duels, taking as its inspiration the Paris of the Three Musketeers and Cyrano de Bergerac. By the time the game was published duelling was just one part of the role playing.

The first edition appeared (from GDW in the US) in 1975 and it was certainly available in the UK pretty soon afterwards. I can remember (vaguely) playing the game in my student days - a selection of people gathered round a table in the early hours of the morning. It was fun, but there wasn't that much interaction between the players. Enter the postal games fraternity. With its structure of giving specific orders - inherited from wargaming - **En Garde!** transferred to postal play very easily. And this solved the problem of a lack of interaction as far more people could be involved by post.

As far as I can ascertain, the first postal game was played in the 'zine *Chimera* in the late Seventies. My introduction to **En Garde!** by post (circa 1982) was John Harrington's game in his 'zine, *Take That You Fiend!*. By this time the main trappings of the postal game had already appeared: the 'Greasy Pole' that lists characters by their standing in society, the narrative report derived from the actions of the characters and additional features such as theatre, houses and elections. All of which made it hard work for the GM.



### *Paul Evans at a glance*

Paul did a Commerce degree at Birmingham University before working as a computer programmer, systems analyst and IT consultant for Esso Petroleum, NatWest Bank and latterly as a IT/business adviser for Business Link for London. An expert on board and card games, Paul was a co-founder of SFC Press, former editor and columnist and reviewer for Games Games magazine and is a regular at many board games events in the UK. Paul can be found on most Wednesday evenings at Swiggers games club, upstairs at the Bunch of Grapes, St Thomas' St, London SE1 (off Borough High Street, just south of London Bridge stations) and on most G3 Days on the second Saturday of the month at The Barley Mow, Horseferry Road, London SW1.

During the Eighties there were generally about a dozen games in play in the UK alone, despite the inevitable turnover in GMs. My first experience of running the game came when I proposed a game at TSR's GamesFair convention. The game was a hit, but was extremely labour intensive: the 'GM' was a team of a dozen people. So I put my computer programming skills to work and designed a software suite to handle the administration of the game. You know, recording details such as how much money characters had and what they'd spent it on and automating the production of tables and so on. Several postal games have been run using this approach (some even using my software).

The software allowed two-three GMs to handle a game of 50-60 players with a four-hour turnaround over a weekend. For several years there were two games at GamesFair each year, with over a hundred people playing. And after that there were three annual games at European GEN CON. And I set up my own postal game. *Les Petites Bêtes Soyeuses* started in 1986 with 50 players - it peaked at 80. The game has been going strong ever since and still has a few of the original 50 players. None of the original characters have survived this long, of course, though we have just seen the retirement of a character who lasted nearly seven game years.

Has interest in **En Garde!** waned over the years? There are games still running by post - and more on the Internet. SFC Press, who now own the rights to the game, are due to produce a new edition of the rules. This may provoke a fresh flurry of interest in this venerable game.

# Legends

## Getting more characters

**ANDREW BARTON** shows you how to go further into this complex game ...

NEW PLAYERS in **Legends** are usually advised to start with a Hero position and go lair-bashing for at least the first few turns, to learn how the system works and get an idea of how they want to approach the game. I know when I started, keeping track of two characters was quite enough to handle with all the details of moving forces around, entering guilds to get trained, setting encounter spells, gathering herbs for my spells, identifying loot from lairs ...

It shouldn't be too long before you've got at least the basics sorted out, especially if you've taken the other standard piece of advice and talked to GMs, mentors and friendly players. By that stage, two characters will probably not seem enough for all the cool things you want to do. So, how do you get more?

### ...you can afford to send them off on suicide missions...

Well, here's one way ...

*'Clawdia attempts to read the Book ID# 1993 the Sir Gwaywin Diary. Adventure 1993/ Sir G's Diary contains blackmail material that will force Hiram Halliday to swear loyalty to the holder. View Adventure if interested.'* (Certain names have been changed to protect the innocent.)

I got the Diary as part of the loot from a lair I bashed early in Swords of Pelarn game 24, and used a Read Item order to find out what it said. Those of you who read my last Legends article will remember that I advised reading anything with an ID over 600 that was of type Book or Scroll, and this is an example of why. I did the adventure and gained control of a new character who had some very useful skills and brought with him the guild he owned.

So, keep your eyes open and you may well find one-off ways like this to get new characters. In the new North Island Campaign there are even a couple of adventures like this listed in the module book, but they look as though they need a lot of work to carry them through.

So, for the rest of this article I'm going to talk about the four standard ways to get new characters, which should work in any module and which anyone can attempt.

#### Temps

The two simplest ways to get more characters involve spells to summon or charm creatures. The big disadvantage of these spells is that they wear off at production so you can only use the new recruits for a few turns. Oddly enough, that's also one of the main advantages, because you can afford to send them off on suicide missions like absorbing the breath attack of a Great Red Dragon. You can easily Charm another creature to replace the first one, or you can Summon the same being again next month - it will be alive again and won't even hold a grudge!

### *Legends at a glance*

In-depth fantasy roleplaying / wargame from Harlequin Games. There are several modules and various different ways to play them - both as an out-an-out wargame, and as a character position. Start-up plus 1 free turn is £20, further turns cost £3.50.

#### Summoning Creatures

This is the simplest way to get more characters early on. Two possible problems: most Summon spells need a unit of Silverleaf each time you cast them (exception: Priests who can summon 'minor divinities'), and if someone else has already summoned the creature you want, not only won't you get your creature, you'll still use up all the mana and items that the spell costs.

If you're planning on making much use of Summoning spells you really, really want a character in your position with the skill to Gather Herbs. A Druid, Ranger or Bard can do this.

Some players like to pick a Hero Summoner for their main character and summon a creature (or even two) on their very first turn. This can be very useful if they have cool spells to teach your permanent employees, and lets you do more early scouting or just bash lairs that much harder - you can feel much more confident about attacking a cockatrice when it's an Imp that's going to get turned to stone if things go wrong.

- \* *Tip:* a summoned creature can act on the turn it is summoned, and you can give a B8 order to put it in a combat slot even before you've summoned it.
- \* *Trap:* the rulebook warns against summoning Efreet and Daemons below certain skill levels. In fact characters some way above the 'safe' levels can take damage before the creature submits and does what it's told.
- \* *Trick:* you can send items to a distant ally by summoning a creature, giving it the stuff, then dismissing it for your ally to summon it again immediately after.

### ...I've seen players in their first game apply a little lateral thinking...

#### Charm

Here's a simple example of using a Charm spell. In Swords 24 my Knight/Priest Ritornel had gone off bashing lairs on his own and was doing pretty well until he tried to take on a Guardian Fury. This had a Special Attack of 1,000, more than he could handle, so he had to retreat before coming to hand-to-claw combat.

Ritornel had several monsters he'd captured in earlier fights (so he knew their stats from those fights) and did a View Character on each to get their Prestige values - Charm Monster gets very expensive for high prestige targets. He found a creature that had MAR 4, prestige 2, and was able to Charm it with a spell costing 18 mana - fortunately, as a Priest of Elune with some nice items, he got 9 mana for free.

Unlike Summoned creatures, you can't put a Monster into a combat slot until after you've charmed it. This meant he had to cast the Charm early in the month so that he could give a B8 order on the following turn, before the Charm went away after production.

So, some careful preparation was needed but the reward was that he could put a charmed monster in the front line to take the enemy Special Attack, then finish the job himself and get some very nice loot.

- \* *Tip:* you don't get a normal report on Charmed characters, but a Read Character spell will give you their skills in detail.
- \* *Trap:* if you don't keep casting the Charm spell each month, you might get a message like this: *'The un-charmed monster Torganthas has taken off! It is likely to turn up in a nearby lair or ruins. Oh well - easy come, easy go.'*

\* *Trick:* You can use Charm or Geas spells on characters in module cities or belonging to other players. I've seen players in their first game apply a little lateral thinking and blindside some of the most experienced players around.

## A more permanent solution

So how do you get into longer-term relationships? Two basic methods, Influence and Rite spells.

Anyone can use Influence (except monster races such as Dragon Lords), but Good-aligned characters will have some advantages - the most obvious being that Good Statuses are more likely to give bonuses to your Influence stat. Rite spells are easier for Evil characters and in the newer modules a position with a Good alignment will find using them very difficult.

## How to make friends and influence people

Giving an influence order is pretty easy, you just use a D2 order with the target being the character you want to recruit. Calculating the chance of success is much harder and I advise you not to try - just try one D2 order each on what seem to be reasonable targets and see how you get on.

A lot of factors affect your chance of success and the long list in the rulebook only gives some of them. The basic principle is simple - the more your influencing character is like your target, the more likely you are to succeed. Most of the time, you want to be of the same religion or at least a very compatible one, and the same race or have the target be one of the 'secondary' races of your influencing character.

Often you can change your own or your target's religion with a Convert spell (but this won't work on priests). Sometimes you can also change your race but this is normally only practical for shapechangers like the Shadowlings in Swords of Pelarn.

Your Influence stat is obviously crucial to your chances of success, but it's fairly easy to build up - you get bonuses from Marks, Status and titles and can increase it further with the right spells. Most of the time you don't need to buy any points of influence at setup.

Another crucial factor is whether your target has any prestige of its own ...

## I'm in with the crowd

One of the best routes to power in

Legends is to Influence characters that are already in positions of authority. With the proper preparation you can recruit the owners of guilds and locations to your cause - these are strong characters in their own right and bring their possessions with them. Succeed in influencing a module city owner and you've got an instant economic base and army.

Problem is, those guys have prestige ratings of their own and they won't even look at you if your own prestige is more than a point or two below theirs. Guild owners usually have at least 15 prestige, module city owners vary from game to game but prestige 40 is nothing out of the way.

Owners of ordinary NPC locations are more variable.

To find out these prestige values, send scouting characters and View Character on your targets.

Often you'll be in a race with other players to get enough prestige to influence some crucial character. If you succeed, anyone trying to take your new recruit away from you will have a penalty equal to the Loyalty stat of the character.

How to build up prestige? Marks and titles help, so players intending to rely on influencing often make their main character a priest and aim to get a High Priest title. Guilds give prestige, so build up those you start with and take over existing ones by influence or challenge. The most reliable way to get increases is by conquest. Every time you conquer an NPC location or a lair, you get one point of prestige. May not sound like much, but it builds up over time and unlike most other sources of prestige, it can't be taken away from you. With several armies or bashing parties in the field you can build up prestige quickly - until you run out of targets!

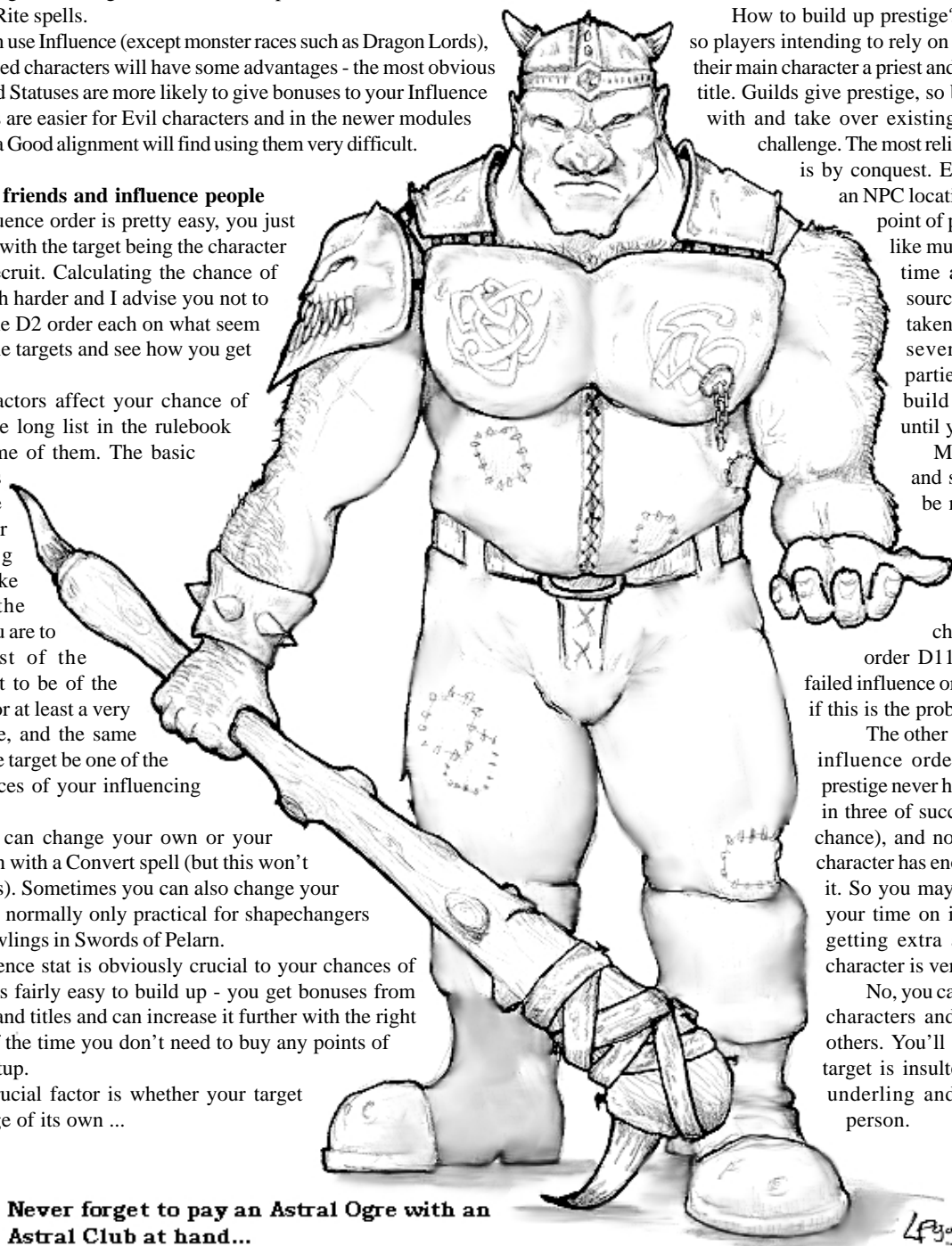
Many module city owners and some guild owners will be members of factions. If you're not in the same faction yourself you probably stand no chance. Find this out with order D11 Discuss Politics, or a failed influence order will usually tell you if this is the problem.

The other crucial limit is time. An influence order on a character with prestige never has more than one chance in three of success (reported as 'poor' chance), and normally only your main character has enough prestige to attempt it. So you may need to spend a lot of your time on influence attempts, and getting extra actions for your main character is very helpful.

No, you can't recruit high-prestige characters and then send them after others. You'll get a message that the target is insulted by your sending an underling and you should come in person.

\* *Tip:* a failed influence order gives you a lot of information about the target. Here's an example: 'Tenebrio

attempts to influence Gorvad Axesong ID# 1122. Gorvad Axesong has the skills of Priest, Axemaster, and Berserker. He is a follower of OM, and has an excellent loyalty rating. Gorvad Axesong has an extremely high prestige rating. Tenebrio talks at length to Gorvad Axesong, but to no effect. Gorvad Axesong gets insulted during the conversation and goes into a rage. He ends up inciting a riot! Tenebrio's wounds taken during the riot: 2 % Gorvad Axesong's wounds taken during the riot: 3 % He thinks he had one chance in seven hells of succeeding in this task.'



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- Colin Forbes



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- \* *Trap:* if either character is a Berserker you may get into a fight, as happened here. Any wounds you take will reduce your chances on further attempts.
- \* *Trick:* you just might be able to stop another player influencing a key character by putting an incompatible status on the target.

### Power to the people

A quicker way to get recruits is to go after characters with zero prestige. You'll find these on the streets of module cities and sometimes in other locations.

These guys won't own any other game pieces, and their skills will often be nothing special, but they will often have quite reasonable Tactics or Influence stats. They may be quite useful for bashing lairs or training troops, and they can recruit more characters in their turn. Sometimes they'll know useful spells.

- \* *Tip:* if you recruit a character from one of your secondary races, you can send them off to recruit characters from their secondary races who might not listen to you.
- \* *Trap:* sometimes a player will put a stealthy or invisible character into a module city, and watch who turns up looking for recruits. They may then kidnap or assassinate your characters, or just track you with a view to later mayhem.
- \* *Trick:* to avoid being spotted, enter a location early in the month with invisibility up, then move into a guild before production. You'll only be seen by other characters in the same guild doing a V4 order. Unless, that is, the guild is owned by a player ...

### Termination benefits

Using Rite spells correctly is one of the trickier aspects of Legends, but they do give you a way of getting control of characters you can't reach any other way - and they also give you Statuses with some cool stats.

The first problem is that Rite spells are expensive and high level - the cheapest costs 20 mana plus the MAR of the intended target. There are items around that help here. Most of these work only for necromancers or certain Evil religions, but you could just use a Seer with a couple of Crystals and a magic staff.

## ...a failed influence order gives you a lot of information about the target...

Then, there are some targets that you can't Rite at all. These include members of some religions, and characters that have a Status you can't remove. If you want to protect your characters against Riting, give them Enchanted or Netherworld or a religious status.



A Rite spell will work on most other targets to restore life, but you have to pass a lot more tests to gain control of the character. It can't own anything, it mustn't have more than 20 prestige, or be a monster or a main character. With Guild owners you can just wait until the character is Long Dead, there may not be much you can do about the others.

One thing that does work very well - a high loyalty character such as another player's secondary will resist influence attempts, but not Riting, and in its new life it will transfer that loyalty to you!

- \* *Tip:* you can cast a Rite spell on a prisoner, then only release it if it becomes loyal.
- \* *Trap:* if you get control of a character with a different alignment, the usual loyalty penalties will apply and you may well end up losing it again after a few turns.
- \* *Trick:* with sufficient effort, you can remove many blocking conditions - Convert a prisoner, Geas or Charm it and make it use an item to change race, remove statuses by magic or with an item - though this may end up being more trouble than the character is worth.

### Final Warning

There may be problems with getting too many characters - for one thing, you can never have more than 40 characters total including Charmed and Summoned ones. In one game I felt I'd cluttered my position up with too many low-level characters and was spending too much time and real-world money giving orders to them. Still, maybe that's the right problem to have... Get out there! Make new friends! Try new cool things!

# DungeonWorld

## Pt2: Running an Estates Position

*ANDY LONDON starts to find land management fun ...*

### Diary of Lanstar Stormhanger: Common Lord

'Dear diary,' I thought to myself as I scratched the words down with my quill. I'll say it was dear, 12 gold from a passing trader, and half the pages have already fallen out.

Having stamped my authority on the Manor, I first decided that the defenders of this fine edifice needed some training. I put them through their paces I can tell you, but the end result was little more than a group of knights, archers and militia who could hardly defend a round of toast, and a cleaning bill that would stretch the coffers of a small empire.

The reeve was sent out into the world; I told him to journey up to the village (there being just one in the lands within my domain) and check that the blighters had paid their taxes. It took him most of the day to get out of bed, and he insisted on checking all was in order before he left. I told him that he'd never get out of the Manor if that was his intention and with a swift boot in the arse, pushed him through the doors.

One of the knights looked keen, Amos, the chap who had greeted me initially. Such a chirpy attitude and a positive manner deserved channelling.

'Amos, I believe that there is a poacher running about the estate nabbing what little game may be about and taking pot shots at the staff. I want you to go out and track the blighter down.'

'Sire,' he replied, 'I am a man of honour; I trained many years in order to make myself worthy of fighting duels and protecting the virtue of maidens. Tracking a poacher down is beneath me, and worthy more of the castle militia than myself.' He stood there, chest held out proud and like a bantam cock was resplendent in his knight's armour.

---

### ... a group of knights, archers and militia who could hardly defend a round of toast ...

---

'Amos,' I said as I placed my hand on his shoulder, 'using the militia is like drinking cheap wine.'

'How so, Sire?'

'You regret doing so the next day, as all you have is a mess to clear up and one hell of a headache. Get going, and get rid of that poacher.'

Having no answer to my piece of prize wit, he made ready to track down the poacher.

I left orders with the Steward as to my plans for the next few days, as I felt the need to go wandering around my estate to see the people thereabouts and look at the prospects in store.

The boundary fence had but one exit; to the west there was a road that led Off. But the fence wasn't that much of a deterrent as anyone with half a mind could climb over without too much trouble. The village was to the north-west, so I decided to take a hike in that direction and see if I could buy myself some equipment, as I realised that the coach had driven off with all of my gear: all I had was 50 gold pieces, my stipend for leaving the army as a commissioned officer, and that was it.

### *DungeonWorld at a glance*

Adventure game from Madhouse; suitable for novices and experienced players. Startup is £5 and includes 2 turns, further turns are £2 each.

As I left, I saw two bedraggled-looking characters nursing hangovers and smelling of manure. My farmers. Well, they say that working on the land makes you resemble the land itself. I guessed that these two had been working in a silage pit for most of their lives. I ordered them to the steward to get some funds to buy some produce. May as well get them tilling the land and planting crops.

All in all I felt pleased with my first full day in charge of my domain, and as I left the gates for my walk, I looked with pride at the new sign.

'Stromhanger Manor' it read. Stromhanger?

'Steward, who the blazes did this bloody sign?!'

---

### ... I realised that I was getting a kick out of being in a difficult position ...

---

#### Turn 4 - Wagons roll!

The wagon was purchased, a mighty 50 gold and a regular upkeep; it'd better be worth it. Not that I can do without it though. Nevertheless I feel the wheels of the estate's economic engine are about to turn.

A couple of fields have been ploughed and planted with corn: all I have to do now is wait for it to grow. I hope it grows quickly.

Lanstar picked up a longbow, leather armour and 8 gold from the spot where the poacher died. Every little helps, I suppose. Now there is another problem: to the north of the estate a couple of goblins keep heading my way. At least now Lanstar can shoot at them, and so he sets off to maintain law and order in his domain.

The jester has been out and about keeping the populace entertained with japes, tricks and a few jokes. I notice that morale is rising, and the fact that the estate is starting to look a bit shabby around the seams seems less of a problem to a happy villeinage.

Another problem is looming though: it will be time to pay the estate taxes soon, a whopping 1000 gold due in a couple of turns. Where am I going to get that sort of money from, and more importantly, what happens when I don't pay?!

The reeve is still administering justice and solving local disputes. He may only produce a few gold each turn, around about 20 to 30, but every little helps. The amount he raises covers the pay for the staff and the wagon.

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### ... the coffers will soon be looking in better shape ...

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#### Turn 5 - We sow the seed, nature grows the seed ...

No crops today; the field shows as being planted and I am letting nature take its course. One of the farmers has ploughed some more fields ready to take the seeds purchased by the other farmer.

The reeve gave some gold to the farmer to enable him to purchase more corn, and also a bit of barley just for variety, then he was ordered off to the castle to drop off some much-needed funds. For the first time the castle funds increased, back up to 303 gold. But it will not be enough: with the reeve as my sole source of income I am barely breaking even!

Lanstar managed to take a few pot shots at the goblins and, being the weak and feeble creatures that they are, killed them. Sporting his (slightly worn) leather armour and wielding the looted bow, his next job will be to

run to the goblin corpses and loot them. Oh the ignominy of it, the estate funded by dead goblins!

Back on the discussion list, and other estate players are recruiting more staff: fence builders, architects and stonemasons amongst them. One player is building some improvements to his keep, a gatehouse and other such defensive edifices. I say nothing, and engage in some merry banter with the other common lords (there are three of us) and compare notes.

It was at this point that I realised that Lanstar may need some help. In each position, there is scope for the introduction of more characters, and so I decide to get Lanstar to get his family involved. As part of my orders, I ask that two new characters be added to the position, Griselda Stormhanger, a female necromancer, and Estrella Stormhanger, female enchanter. Roleplaying-wise, they are Lanstar's sisters, come to help him in his hour of need; in reality, they are sources of some much needed financial assistance and protection.

I had pondered whether or not to struggle on without the need for more characters, but a group of brigands and bandits who had appeared to the north convinced me that it could only help matters rather than hinder them.

Overall, this was turning into crunch time for the position; the coffers were dwindling, slower than initially, but nevertheless going down. There were enemies at the gates (literally) and the taxes were due to be paid. Something had to happen, and happen quickly.

In terms of enjoyment, I realised that I was getting a kick out of being in a difficult position.

#### Turn 6 - Gather the produce & sell it for a whacking profit (we hope!)

Amazingly enough, not one, but two fields of corn are ripe for harvest. One of the farmers is ordered to cut down the crops and bundle them up ready for collection by the wagon. The wagon moves over to the fields to collect the harvest and then take it to the town to sell.

With some careful planning, I make sure that the crops are harvested, collected and then sold in the same turn. The money, however much that will be, will be well received.

I also order the other farmer to embark upon a bit of deforestation. My ploughed fields surround the settlement, apart from one square that contains some forest. Gathering wood can result in the reduction in the level of forest, possibly leaving just rough land, which is what I want. I also hope I can sell the wood for a bit more income. A load of wood sells for 30 gold (so I gleaned from the ever-useful discussion list).

The reeve, continuing his judicial role, waits at the settlement ready to be given the gold by the wagon, having just completed another trip to the keep and dropping off some more gold.

Estrella and Griselda arrive. Initially they were going to go north, but now I see some orcs to the west, so the enchantress will go north (her fire sprite will fare better against the bandit archers) and Griselda will head west.

This turn Lanstar sold the kit that he took from the goblins and the proceeds he gives to the reeve. It was useful having the knowledge that the goblins, although armed with an assortment of weapons, wear leather armour, which brings in 10 gold per suit when sold. The gold is building up,

but at the moment, it is spread amongst the staff and characters.

The jester continues to divert the people's attention away from the fact that the coffers are empty, and the militia unit in the keep has increased to skill level 2. I had been putting in a few training orders each turn; this time they felt the benefit. I am still loathe to bring them out of the keep at the moment, as the last thing I need is another unit to pay for!

So, after checking my orders carefully, as this turn timing is of the essence, I wait to see the fruits of my labour.

#### Turn 7 - The tide is turning

137 gold for each crop of corn!!! 274 gold is a lifeline that I desperately need, and so I shall be getting the wagon to transfer the funds to the reeve to take to the keep.

The reeve also has the gold from the previous turn, plus some money from his law enforcement, so the coffers will soon be looking in better shape than ever.

Estrella has given the bandits a sound thrashing, which should result in more loot, but Griselda took a slight beating from the orcs, who happened to have a couple of goblin archers nearby. Nevertheless, no pain, no gain, and every little helps (to quote some oft-used clichés!).

There is also a healthy pile of wood to be collected, so all of a sudden, production is on the up.

There is money to buy more seeds, some security around the estate, and next turn, for the first time, the money in the treasury goes beyond the initial 500 (by 8!).



#### Afterword

Beyond turn 7, the estate has had its ups and downs. Although the financial situation has eased, the 1000 gold tax has not been paid and that has resulted in fines being imposed by the crown. Morale wavered, but some rampant jester keeps the people's mind off the fact that the taxman is battering down the doors.

Lanstar treated himself to some plate mail with the proceeds of a cull of orcs, and through his acquired experience has gained a few combat skills.

The keep itself suffered its first attack; a hill goblin grunt decided to vent its anger and charge the keep, only to be shot by the archers before getting close. And I've spotted another estate to the north, although I have yet to discover who the owner is.

If you had asked me beforehand about an estate position, I would have been in two minds. Yes, it is in a fantasy setting, but do I really want to be concerned with land management? Ask me now, and I can safely say that I got just as much of a thrill out of trundling my first harvest into town and selling it for a tidy profit, as I do when a particularly hard battle is won.

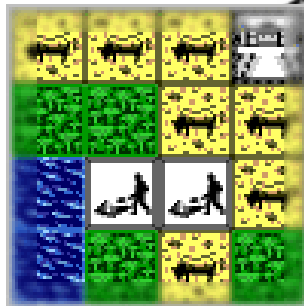
The estate will certainly not be everyone's cup of tea, but as something a little different, it adds a dynamic twist to gaming in a fantasy realm.

Oh, and I still do not know where in the Kingdom the estate is, but then again, I haven't tried to find out really. I've got too many other concerns. Now, should I consider planting more corn or should I try a little rhubarb?

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# Kings of Karadon

## The Finale!

*To ALLAN STAGG's surprise, he rose higher than he'd expected ...*

THE EMPRESS Sharif of Ugbat has been offered the Crown of the Ancients, to make her High Queen of Karadon. The nation of Ugbat has been judged to command the greatest position in the world of Karadon, and is believed to be the most civilised. At least that is the official line, but who can believe that? After all, this is a nation of Orcs we are talking about!

### A brief overview

If you have read my previous reviews of this game, or the comments that regularly crop up in Rumours, you will know that **Kings of Karadon** is a computer-moderated fantasy wargame run by Tom Fyfe of *Hunky Monkey Games*. You control a kingdom composed of different races, following one of twelve different religions (or none at all). The game features a complex economic structure, based on production, taxation and trade, all of which influence, or are influenced by, your popularity amongst your people. If your popularity plunges too low your tax yield and production will decrease, and some areas may even revolt.

You can advance your kingdom by gaining 'techs', which may upgrade some of your people's abilities. You can also send your characters to carry out specific orders; some may even be sent on quests. If your population in a particular area is above a certain level, you can raise some troops from that area. More advanced types of troops can be gained through Research, and your armies will be needed to defend your lands from other players and from Pirates, Thieves and other NPCs. All in all, a rich game of very great depth.

### ... a rich game of very great depth ...

### Ending the game

So how does it end? It is known at the start of the game that the game will end when a nation achieves a Political Influence score above a certain level. At this point, other factors will come into play to decide the winner. Most of these factors are hidden at the start of the game, although each nation has three national goals that it should have achieved by the end of the game.

The national goals for my kingdom, the predominantly Angorn-worshipping Shafik Kingdom of Karst, were to gain control of another Shafik kingdom's capital, to hold the position of Head of the Merchant's Guild, and to possess an Artefact known as the Horn of Angorn. Achievement of any of these goals would add substantially to your game-end score, which would determine the winner of the game. Each turn of the game you are informed of the Political Influence points each Kingdom possesses, and you can see how close the leading player is to triggering the end of the game.

It was evident during the latter stages that I was in little danger of hitting this target - I was languishing mid-table, about 27th of the 50-odd player-controlled and NPC kingdoms. The end came as a surprise, and an even greater surprise was that, due to a healthy boost to my score from sources other than my pitiful Political Influence, I had finished in equal ninth place.

### *Kings of Karadon at a glance*

A fantasy wargame from Hunky Monkey Games. Startup is £5 and subsequent turns £4 each. There's a temporary holdup in the this game following a family bereavement. Games will resume at the end of September.

### Long-term plans

By the time we were 20 turns into the game my nation was small but fairly happy, having overcome the unfortunate economic mismanagement that had led to an unpopular Emergency Tax. I had remained aloof from the wars that other more aggressive nations had become involved in, and my small military forces were only occasionally troubled by bandits and pirates. My economy was developing slowly, I was trading actively (goods and techs) with a number of other nations, and my scholars were making regular discoveries to add to the wealth of my nation and the health of my people.

### ...I can recommend the game, and the service from the GM...

In addition, I had been elected to the High Council, and acted as the Secretary, producing a report each year of the business of the High Council. This was published in the *Miradon Mirror*, an in-game newsletter which was distributed to all players. I also held positions on two religious Conclaves, one Guild and a Secret Society. I had embarked upon a quest to find the Horn of Angorn - a quest that succeeded in the very year that the game ended (hence the boost to my score).

Even though I was not at the centre of the game militarily, economically or politically, I had more than enough to do maintaining my position, and I was thoroughly enjoying myself.

### Is this the end?

In Game 4, the game closed once the victory conditions had been achieved. In two previous games, once the victory conditions had been met, the game continues as an open-ended role-playing game, with greater emphasis on quests, free orders, and developing plot-lines. I can well understand the attraction in this - the game is well designed for this type of play, and you can judge from the continuing contributions to Rumours what the players think about this.

### And finally

I enjoyed playing Kings of Karadon, although I found it at times a very time-intensive game. It is also information-rich - the turn sheets stretch over many pages, and each new tech you discover, or new character you employ, brings its own sheet, giving a description of what it is, and the orders that you can now use.

At the start of the game turnround was fortnightly, with the turns coming back like clockwork. Towards the end of the game the GM ran into real-world distractions which led to significant delays in the game. Tom did keep myself and other players informed of the reasons for the delay, and for his plans to get all of his games back on track. The game did resume, with a more leisurely turn-round, and I found it quite easy to get back into the swing of it.

Throughout the course of the game, Tom Fyfe has been very communicative, answering individual queries, and encouraging communication between players by means of the *Miradon Mirror*, pubmeets and an in-house newsletter. I can recommend the game, and the service from Hunky Monkey Games.

# Lands of Elvaria

*SARAH CALLAGHAN opens her alter ego's diary ...*

## **Sepheri Mirrokin's Diary, entry 1:**

From now on I will: Stop getting into rows with my father and yelling at him that it was his fault that mother left, especially when all he wants me to do is go down the market to get some food for dinner. Say my prayers to Alwane every morning and evening (in the hopes that he'll look on me with favour the next time I smash a glass that I've spent all week making). Finish my apprenticeship as a toymaker, and find a new job doing something a bit more interesting than sewing the wool hair on dolls, and painting varnish on hobby horses. Try really hard to find out about mother, and why she left.

## **Sarah Callaghan's Diary, entry 1:**

Oooh, the main rulebook for **Lands of Elvaria** has arrived! It's really big too, a hundred odd pages in font size ten. Good thing that it got emailed to me, I'd hate to think what the postage costs'd be like for a document that size. Lands of Elvaria is a hand-moderated roleplay game that's been running for the past fifteen years, or so I've been told anyway. You start off with one character, and take them off adventuring in the weird and wonderful lands of Elvaria, where danger lurks around every corner, and you can end up very rich, or very dead. The rulebook is absolutely packed with information, equipment lists, race lists, character class lists, god lists... wow. Enough to give me real trouble doing character generation: the choice is incredibly broad, and I'm far too indecisive!

Well, I've finally chosen a character, and believe me it was a difficult decision! I came within a toss of a coin of playing an Amazon houri (sort of a cross between a courtesan and an assassin), but it was the Human/Cheshire Mancat Imager/Artificer combo that won out in the end. Promptly christened Sepheri Mirrokin, she was established with a mother who'd disappeared when she was little, and a father who's a boring toymaker in the new town of Frontier, on a continent that was only discovered a year ago. Alright, so strictly speaking you're not supposed to have hybrids (characters born from an inter-species union default to their mother's race), so I left that particular decision up to Mark Pinder, the GM. As far as Sepheri's concerned she's human, so the first time the special powers of the Cheshire Mancat manifest (an ability to vanish, and change appearance) she's going to be one suprised little kitten!

She's an Artificer/Imager too, one of the few dual classes that combine without any serious drawbacks, both of them being concerned with the making of things that can do magic stuff. As an artificer she's mainly concentrated on the art of making potions, her imager abilities allowing her to make mirrors that in effect cast spells. And she's also a pious follower of Alwane, god of technology and magic, which also gives her a number of cool magical type abilities. None that she's had call to use as yet, but there you go.

According to my sources (well, past issues of Flagship), Elvaria started off as a heavily D&D-influenced roleplay game where the player actually controls an adventuring group. It's still a game very heavily influenced by D&D, but thankfully now I only have to worry about dealing with one character! And there's so much more to it than just D&D as well: Imagery, for instance, are right out of the #*Mordant's Need*# books, written by Stephen Donaldson. Have to admit, that was one of my main reasons to play an Imager, I'd never seen any game which gave you the the chance to do so before!

## ***Lands of Elvaria at a glance***

A single-character fantasy roleplaying game from Mark Pinder. New-comers welcomed. Startup with 3 turns is £10, further turns are £3 each.

## **Sepheri Mirrokin's Diary, entry 2**

Father says I've finished my apprenticeship, and can now officially call myself a toymaker. So I took today off to celebrate and went into the town to do a bit of shopping. Got myself a new dagger and another set of clothes (nothing wrong with the old set, just felt like I needed a change!) then wandered around a bit to catch up on the gossip...

Frontier's in a bit of a state at the moment, people are whispering that there are Confederation spies everywhere. Supposedly Parlais, the artificer who vanished a while ago, was kidnapped by them and brainwashed into working for them. Not good if they're collecting artificers. But if they are I'm sure they'll go after some of the more experienced ones first.

Got talking to an old bloke down the pub, called Zoal Tark. He works for Universal Exports, and is another artificer. He's a bit doddery, but says he knew my mother, from his studies, not in person. Seems she was a natural Imager of great potential when she vanished. He seemed to say that the Dark Overlord Kelpin Allseer of the Confederation was responsible for her vanishing. The Dark Overlord is an Imager as well, and held a purge to either kill or convert all the Imagery around to his side. Sounds like a nasty piece of work.

Things got really weird when Zoal started telling me about the Dark Overlord's arch enemy: Kelpin Alseer of Shordan. Supposedly the fabric of Elvaria's reality has been severely shredded a number of times in the past, letting refugees from parallel dimensions into this one, not to mention all the bizarre cloning experiments done by crazed mages and clerics .... the moral of the story, be very, very careful who you're talking to!

Zoal offered me a job as well, working for him. I think I'll take him up on it.

## **Sarah Callaghan's Diary, entry 2**

Well, after a bit of faffing and confusion, I think I know how to play the game now. It did take a few turns of spending all Sepheri's time making potions, mirrors and collecting rumours before I had it anywhere near figured out though...

## **Sepheri Mirrokin's Diary, entry 3**

I'm fed up with making potions and mirrors and stuff. Working at Universal Exports is fine, but making magical torches, even though it's good practice, isn't exactly what I'd call fun!

And I knew I should have been a bit quieter asking about the Dark Overlord Kelpin Allseer (henceforth to be known as DOKA). I was walking back to the inn one evening when all of a sudden I sense an incredible amount of Imagery, and see a disembodied head and shoulders floating in front of me, which did the traditional evil thing of gloating, then walloped me with some form of spell or mirror that caused incredible amounts of pain as the shards of glass pierced my skin. Didn't seem to do much damage though, I was alright a minute later. Have to say, though, he's good with the evil threats .... though I do wonder exactly what he knows about my family.

When I went to work the next morning a klaxon went off as I went through the door, and some form of spell encased me until all the glass left my body (in a very painful manner). Looks like DOKA was keeping an eye on me ... (*Note to self: go to temple and make a sacrifice to Alwane. I might need his help before long.*)

Anyway, I spoke to Zoal, and he said there's an adventuring mission going off tomorrow at noon to collect some silk from the lair of spiders in the hills. Seems the silk might be magical, so they could do with my help. And the best bit is, I've been given 2,500 gold pieces to go equip myself for the trip! Shopping time!

# The Displacement Engine

## Chapter 3: A pram, corsets and a gallows!

*Our free game, where things are hotting up ...*

SEARCHING for the missing philosopher Sir Rawley Withycombe, seven Victorians discover that the Displacement Engine they've entered has carried them from 1850 to 1950. They find a smaller Engine, one that Sir Rawley must have used himself: but where is he? They leave Horatio Percy, the vicar, beside their own Engine and Benjamin Garland, the policeman, guarding the smaller one. Returning from a brief search, they find that nothing remains of Sir Rawley's Engine or of Benjamin Garland but a small molten puddle ...

'I was praying beside our own Engine,' gasps the vicar, 'so saw nothing of what happened here. Is this the result of a Divine Thunderbolt? Is travelling through time Forbidden?'

'Has the machine imploded because of a mechanical fault?' asks Adolphus Withycombe, remembering the time his uncle built a submarine, 'Will ours?'

'And poor Garland, gone! Let's keep well away from our own Engine until we need to use it, Dolly,' suggests Patience, stepping back.

'Everything was tested to withstand considerable strain,' protests Tennant, brandishing his tin of paint.

'Perhaps we see an example of spontaneous combustion?' Joseph Rouncewell eagerly turns to Silas Trimmer.

From behind them comes a high-pitched cry: 'Adolphus!' Turning, they're startled to see a black trunk lurching through the undergrowth towards them - but no, it's not a trunk, it's a large perambulator. 'Uncle Rawley!' chorus Adolphus and Patience, as this tips heavily over and the person who's pushing it is revealed. A small, angular, white-whiskered gentleman grasping an ice-cream cornet in one hand: Sir Rawley Withycombe.

'So many of you?' he pants, 'Then I didn't return for my lecture? Adolphus, Tennant, good - I expected you to seek me out! And Patience, m'dear, welcome! My friends, I'm delighted to greet every one of you, all witnesses of the truth of my Displacement Theory.'

They assist him in his one-handed struggle to right the perambulator, which seems to be crammed with oddities. 'I've taken longer than expected, what with finding a pawnshop to obtain the correct coinage, and then selecting the best objects to bring back for my lecture: a velocipede, a cigarette lighter, a musical platter and more, much more... Look at this, an "ice-cream cornet"! We'll put Charles Babbage's nose out of joint, tee hee! But that shouldn't have prevented me from returning in time for my lecture ...' His glee vanishes and the cornet drops from his startled hand, 'Where is my Engine? What have you done with it?'

The others describe what they found, but Sir Rawley has no explanation either. Perhaps they can use the big Engine to travel just far enough back in time to discover what happened? Even to rescue Benjamin Garland? But is it proper to alter events? And is it safe to risk meeting themselves?

Patience fidgets. She wants to discover whether the females of 1950 have achieved suffrage: they're certainly emancipated enough to have discarded bonnets and corsets. 'Uncle Rawley,' she says firmly, 'Whatever you decide to do, I wish you to meet me in this spot in twelve hours time. That will give me long enough to observe the ladies of the future and discover their progress!' 'Let me escort you, Miss Withycombe,' says Silas Trimmer, who also longs to explore this age further. Silas's passion isn't for Patience but for prime numbers: surely their purpose has been found by now? Ignoring Horatio Percy's despairing cry that the women of 1950 are painted jezebels, they both hurry away.

'Patience!' calls Sir Rawley, 'Pray oblige me by returning with a fresh ice cream cornet!'

Standing beside their Engine, the Victorians shiver. A fog, no, a whirlwind is rising just a few yards away. It spins and it thickens and inside it they see three grey figures forming: sinister shapes, whose gaze is fixed upon them.

'Quick, into the Engine!' cries Tennant, who can recognise trouble when he sees it. As they tumble through the door, with Sir Rawley heading for the controls, Adolphus sees that one of the creatures is raising a weapon. He snatches Tennant's paint tin and hurls it with a cricketer's skill at the figure, which recoils. Its would-be victims slam the door and launch into time. A glancing blow rocks the Engine, but they've escaped Benjamin Garland's fate.

'Where are we going? Is the Engine damaged?'

'We should be returning to 1850,' says Sir Rawley, 'but I judge that part of the outer shell has been shot away. I'll surely be able to repair it when we stop, but I can't tell where that'll be. Who were those ruffians?'

'Footpads!', 'Deserters!', 'Highwaymen!', 'Demons!' - no-one knows.

The dials on the control panel quiver, the hands of the large clock spin, the Victorians sprawl giddily.

'Confound it!' Sir Rawley growls, 'We're going past 1850!' He wrestles with the controls until the Engine judders to a halt, 'Gentlemen, I estimate that the year is now ... harrumph ... 1650 AD ...'

Adolphus unbars the door and peers cautiously out, only to shout, 'Quick, quick, we can save a lady!'

They join him, to see terrified people running away, bawling, 'It's the devil, come for the witch! Flee, flee!'

Before them, there's a scaffold. Three people remain standing on this: a clergyman, a hangman and a tall, dark woman - with a noose around her neck. Despite the noose, she takes advantage of her captors' amazement to kick the hangman and to swing her bound arms at the clergyman, so fiercely that both men tumble to the ground.

Then she looks at the Victorians and laughs. 'Rawley Withycombe - at last! What kept you?' ...

### The Characters

Adolphus Withycombe, Sir Rawley's nephew,  
Patience Withycombe, Sir Rawley's niece and Adolphus's cousin,  
The local vicar, the Reverend Horatio Percy,  
Joseph Rouncewell, a fellow-scientist and admirer of Sir Rawley,  
Silas Trimmer, a wealthy student of mathematics,  
Charles Tennant, Sir Rawley's man-servant.

### What happens next? It's up to you ...

- 1 - Who is this woman? A witch, maybe, or a time traveller? What will she want? Suggestions welcomed, and any ideas for her name.
- 2 - How will our Victorians react to her?
- 3 - Is the damaged Engine likely to (i) stay here to be mended, (ii) return easily to 1850, or arrive accidentally at (iii) 50BC, (iv) 150AD, (v) 1450, (vi) 1750, (vii) 2050?
- 4 - Will anyone choose to stay in 1650?
- 5 - Should (i) Benjamin Garland, (ii) Patience Withycombe, (iii) Silas Trimmer, (iv) Sir Rawley's pram be rescued?

Thanks for your ideas, replies to Flagship by October 15th, please.

# THE MIGHTY PEN



## Are Game Prices Too Low?

I agree with Nick Burdock about the low level of fees in PBM - far too low. I suspect the comparison being made is PBM vs books, and on that basis the cost per page from PBM is pretty high. On the other hand, if the cost of a book were born by 10-15 people, there's be pretty few people buying books. PBM isn't a mass market and the prices should reflect this.

I also agree with Nick about the dodgy behaviour of some of the PBM public. I couldn't ask for a better set of *players* in my games, but some of those who write, saying they'd like to play ... My experience is that if the cheque is missing from the first letter, forget it. There's no player there, just a waste of time and money. I wonder whether they would go into Marks and Spencers, and to try on clothes and walk out wearing the clothes. Obtaining game rulebooks etc without paying or returning them if unwanted is just as much theft.

**Chris Morris (Ulaidh Games)**

Nick Burdock was right that most game charges are low for the return, but he must also agree that for most of us, no matter how enjoyable the game is, it is a disposable expense over and above normal living costs. Many of the younger players will be enticed into the games by a low cost, the rest of us by budget constrictions. (What do I pay for - the roof being repaired, or a few turns of a game? Taking the time out to go to a play with a girlfriend, or the game?)

Being on a budget, I've limited myself to what I can afford on a long-term basis. £5 per turn per game once a month I can afford at the moment. More than that, and I would look very carefully at playing.

**Charles Miller**

*[Unfortunately all leisure activities are only worth what people are prepared to pay for the service and product offered.]*

## Prisoners in PBM

In response to previous letters on the subject perhaps I could add some comments as one who knows a few things about prisoners. I am a member of Her Majesty's Prison Service, with some 14 years service in High Security prisons, so I think my credentials are clear.

If you have written contact with a prisoner your address and details will be noted on their files. If you speak to a prisoner by phone, your number and conversation may be recorded. If you visit a prisoner your details and photo may be placed on their file. In the event of police investigation you will be considered to be an associate of the prisoner and may be contacted. If you are a GM and allow a prisoner credit which they then fail to repay, you will have virtually no recourse to get back your funds, as it's nearly impossible to successfully sue a prisoner.

Finally on Colin Forbes' comment that prisoners 'are unlikely to pose any sort of threat', why do you think they are in prison in the first place, Colin? Granted, not all prisoners are involved in violent offences, but they are still people who have chosen to break the laws of society.

Now, in order not to give the wrong impression, I am not some 'flog 'em and hang 'em' screw. Quite the reverse in fact, and I fully support any activity that can assist in rehabilitation and resettlement back into the

community. I have discussed PBM with a number of prisoners - Football ones are quite popular - and even played in a couple of games that I know prisoners played in.

I doubt that any prisoner is going to pay you a call on release, just because you happened to beat his team, party, or PC in a game. But that said, I do think people should be aware of the situation and it is then their choice whether they play with, or contact, prisoners in custody.

**(Name supplied to editor)**

## Leaving a game

I don't want to get involved in the rights and wrongs of any firm's refund policy, or how much players think they should have been refunded. But I would point out to GMs the danger of this sort of negative publicity:

Player writes to Flagship complaining about a PBM firm's refund policy. Following the exchange of letters the player doesn't get his refund, but the PBM firm feels it has fully justified its refund policy.

Initial result - the PBM firm keeps the money!

Actual result - lots of other players think, "Well I'm not gonna get caught like that guy!" and never again play with the PBM firm.

End result - PBM firm loses a hell of a lot more potential revenue through negative publicity than if they had just refunded the player's credit in the first place!

PBM, like all businesses, is a buyers'/players' market and I am sure I am not alone in steering well clear of firms that have these sorts of refund policies.

**Nicc Newton**

Following a letter in the last issue, as an employee of the IRS I strongly recommend all 'professional' GMs out there to take the time to keep proper accounts. It isn't difficult, there are any number of easy to use computer packages which can help with the task. And don't think for a minute that the Inland Revenue isn't aware of the existence of PBM, I know for a fact that it is. At least one large PBM company has, in the past, had some difficulties with the IRS. If you are in doubt as to whether you should keep accounts, there is a simple answer: if the game makes any kind of profit, you are legally bound to keep proper accounts (keeping receipts etc).

Any money you make counts as taxable income, and by not declaring it, you are breaking the law! Once you declare this income, the IRS may at any time ask to see your accounts, and woe betide you if these are not up to scratch!

**Ben Williams**

*[I'd better fess up that I have had some personal experience of how a dumb mistake provoked Hector's interest. GMs don't usually make enough money to be liable for tax, but it can be hard to persuade the Inland Revenue of this unless you keep meticulous accounts and all your invoices. Another GM of my acquaintance was investigated by the Inland Revenue only last year, though in this case there was a happy outcome, it turned out the GM was due a tax rebate! ]*

## Playing in character

I have been pleasantly surprised to read the continuing 'in character' debate in these pages. PBM is essentially an adventure for the imagination, and I am against anything which stifles such creativity. Of course there are occasions when one has to be careful about language and so forth, but the actual gist of a character's actions should not be subject to censorship.

There is a similar argument to be made for diploming 'in character'. In the past I have seen this labelled as 'childish'. Quite the opposite, in my opinion, is true. It's easy to write a letter/email to someone asking them to move their army north, or arranging to meet up with another player's character in square 44/87. It is however quite another matter to carefully phrase a letter as if it were from one character/nation to another. This sort of thing greatly adds to the flavour of a game, and should be encouraged by players and GMs alike wherever possible.

**Duncan Chisholm**



## Your Feedback on Issue 92

LAST ISSUE gained a rating of 8.49. Rumours from the Front came first of your favourites, but close behind were first the *DungeonWorld* article and then *Intrigue in Sumer*. **Duncan Chisholm** says of *IiS*, 'I will miss not reading it in future. Sort of like when a good book comes to an end.' The King's Pirate review followed ('fun!' says **J Thomas**), then *Spokesmen*, then *The Cheviot Chronicles* diary, described by **Mike Scott** as 'a good tale - more to come I hope!' *Kain's RPG* overview followed: 'about time someone found out just how many games are actually running,' says **Larry Deyell**, though **Duncan Chisholm** would have liked more detail on each game and hopes this'll come later. *Mighty Pen* and the *American* news tied: 'Bob McLain is always a good read too, though he's not been too vitriolic of late: give him a vinegar tablet and see what happens!' says **Duncan Chisholm**. Ulp. **Larry Deyell** dislikes this feature, however, even though it topped our poll last time, 'a whole page devoted to (a) People I've never heard of, (b) Firms I've never heard of, (c) Events I wasn't aware had transpired (Not to mention (d) Dead people I've never heard of).' Some of you liked the *StarFleet Warlord* diary, a few didn't; ditto re the *Primvs inter Pares* article. **Charles Miller** speaks for those of you who enjoy it all 'for the info; even on games I'm not interested in.'

Replies differed greatly for question 4, about game charges. 35% of you agree with option (a), that game charges are too low. 'Any charge less than £3.50 indicates that either i) the game is massively automated or ii) the GM is short-changing players by cutting corners or iii) the players are free-loading on the GM's passion for the game. Option ii) doesn't last long in practice, so if it's cheap and non-computerised, the GM's subsidising his players,' argues **GM Chris Morris**. **Duncan Chisholm** agrees in general, but adds that 'many computer-mod games are about right (some are even over-priced!).' No-one voted for (b), that charges are too high. 23.2% chose option (c), that the charge is a reasonable indication of quality, though **Nicc Newton** points out that this is 'generally true, but some firms have high charges and still don't deliver!' and **Terry Crook** thinks that, 'word of mouth usually indicates how good a game is, not cost.' 13.6% thought that the charge is a guarantee of good service, option (d), with **Larry Deyell** adding that 'I don't care if the GM "cares" about me as long as he/she cares enough about his/her game to get the turns out. After all, one doesn't go to a supermarket to make friends with the staff, one goes there to buy food.' However, 26.5% of you warn that (e), price is a major consideration when it comes to choosing a game. **Wayne Yeadon**, for instance, says, 'I consider cost all the time when I come to playing games. The cheaper the better really. The more I can get for my money the happier I am... I am not that well off.' 'I suspect that many people are on a limited budget,' says **Terry Crook**.

A letter praised friends made in PBM, inspired question 5. No-one who replied chose option (c), I'll always try a game recommended by a friend, or (d), My friends don't play PBM games. That split the votes between (a) yes, I've made and kept friends through PBM games, and (b), I'm happy to be friendly while a game lasts, but not beyond it. 71.4% agreed with (a) that: 'I've made loads of friends in PBM and keep coming across couples who have met through PBM and gaming in general. It's a great social activity!' says **Duncan Chisholm**; 'I know a few people through PBM that I can chat with about anything, even though I've never met them,' agrees **Pete Manning**. **Larry Deyell** agrees, though, 'I must admit I do seem to bump into "nutters" in the bigger games quite frequently. Maybe it's a case of like attracting like?' The remaining 28.6% chose (b).

Question 6 tried to find out how much PBM gets played during the summer. No-one who answered feels that the seasons make any difference, with 15.7% who look for new games to start at any time, 16.5% who'll start a new game whenever an old one ends and 67.8% who cry: Summer? What's that? 'There's always enough spare time to play in the summer,' says **J Thomas**, 'after all, this is Britain and it rains!'

Question 7 asked how important it is for you to win a game. Many of those who answered, 61.5%, prefer open-ended games that can't be won. 'But it's nice to do well as you go along,' adds **Nicc Newton**. 5.3% would drop a game if your position can't win; 'hey, why pay to be humiliated? but I'll do my darndest first,' growls **Jack Stephens**. No-one would play

a game once to learn how to win it. But if a game is meant to be won, everyone agrees that victory should be ruthlessly fought for, oh yes.

Finally, here's a query that readers may be able to help with: 'I have never played in a game with set victory conditions, so I cannot comment,' adds **Terry Crook**, 'Maybe I should try one to see if it is as good as they appear to be? I just can't find one that grabs me, although I am open to suggestions?'

### Feedback questions on #92

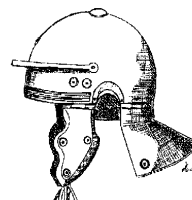
[Choose more than one answer if you wish, and feel free to comment.]

- Please rate this issue from 1 (rambling) to 10 (radiant).
- Which articles/sections did you most enjoy, and why?
- Which bored you, and why?
- Let's pick up the *Tailpiece* discussion about GMs playing in their own games:
  - I wouldn't play a game that its GM is in,
  - I think it's OK if GMs enter their own orders before they process other players',
  - this seems a good way for GMs to spot any problems,
  - I'd expect GMs to run positions in open-ended games,
  - if GMs play, they should always say so.
- We mention lots of playtests in this issue. Do you
  - wait for a game to be properly launched, after the playtest,
  - join a playtest to help advise on the game's system,
  - join a playtest because it's a cheap way to get started in a game that could be important?
- We try to avoid pronouncing in the commercial/free games debate ourselves, but do you
  - only play commercial games,
  - only play free games,
  - play a mixture,
  - have strong opinions either way?

[Replies welcomed by surface mail to the UK office, or by email to [Flagship@flagship-pbm.co.uk](mailto:Flagship@flagship-pbm.co.uk). By October 25th, please.]

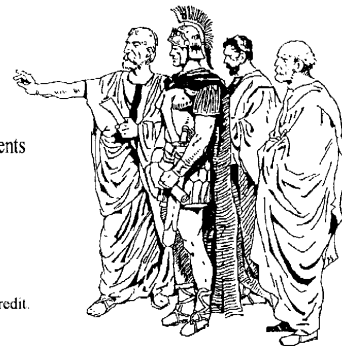
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# Mercenary Action

## MechCommander 2

**MARK GORDON** loads up his computer ....

IMAGINE if Hamlet, somewhere around the middle of the play, tired of eloquently pondering imponderables and stalking the palace halls, suddenly decided to act. Really act. Not to stage a play or pretend to be mad, but to strap himself into a thirty-foot tall, fifty-ton walking tank armed to the snarling teeth with all manner of weaponry. And then really get mad ...

In the Battletech universe, every single person throughout the universe seems to be like this. They all want revenge for something, and the preferred method of vengeance is the BattleMech, a devastatingly powerful thirty-foot high robot. Originally a setting devised for tabletop strategy games, the central event of Battletech's history was the usurpation of the galaxy's ruler by Stephan Amaris, the subsequent quest for revenge by the general of the army, Alexandr Kerensky, and, as centuries of tangled and intractable warfare passed, the struggle of each of the political factions to unite the galaxy under their own rule.

Microsoft's second MechCommander game takes place hundreds of years after this initial feuding. Following the invasion and successful repulsion of Kerensky's fanatical descendants the Clans, the galaxy is in the grip of an uneasy peace, and as a mercenary commander for hire, things are tense enough to mean business is good.

MechCommander 2 sees the player control a small band of mercenary MechWarriors, taking a variety of missions from whichever side's paying. The game is viewed from an isometric perspective, and units are controlled in the time honoured real-time strategy game fashion of left clicking to order movement and attacks.

However, MechCommander 2's simple premise conceals an exceptionally playable and refined game. Graphically, it's entirely 3D, and does full justice to Battletech's distinct and inspired imagining of futuristic combat. As well as weather effects and nighttime missions, the Mechs are well animated, stalking and stamping in a very convincing manner. Less manoeuvrable heavy Mechs plough through trees and fences, while those with jump jets zoom into the air and land just like Jurassic Park's raptors - there's that same creepy jink forward as they hunt for the target.

One of the benefits of using pre-existing and well-developed background material is that the game feels properly involving, and the graphics help a lot in this respect. Although the setting sounds complicated and involved, it is one of MechCommander 2's real strengths, helping to set it apart from other generic Real Time Simulation (RTS) games. The designers have included an on-disc encyclopaedia, a thoughtful touch that helps gamers get to grips with, and get the most out of the game's setting.

Although there's a single mission option (with a level designer), and various multiplayer settings, the main mode is a campaign set on the planet of Carver V. Various political factions are present, observing the fractious truce. Initially you are hired by House Steiner (but after a few missions switch to House Liao) and the story develops through video briefings, news broadcasts and TV shows discussing the political situation. All of these are very well produced, with good scripts and performances, and they act as a compelling incentive to profitably complete each mission.

Technically the game is an RTS but, unlike Command & Conquer, resource management has been totally streamlined in favour of a more action-orientated version of strategy gaming. In the mission itself your options are limited to calling in air strikes, salvage and scout copters, and repair vehicles, as opposed to actually building outposts - but the preparation before launch

is detailed and highly tactical. Before each mission, you choose your Mechs and arm them with what you've salvaged or managed to buy and, as with all Mech games, this is a crucial and fascinating part of the process. Each weapon takes up space, costs, has a different range, and generates a different amount of heat. Certain Mech chassis can take jump jets, have better sensors, or are faster and less well armoured. Balancing all these separate factors is a strategic decision, and crucial to mission success.

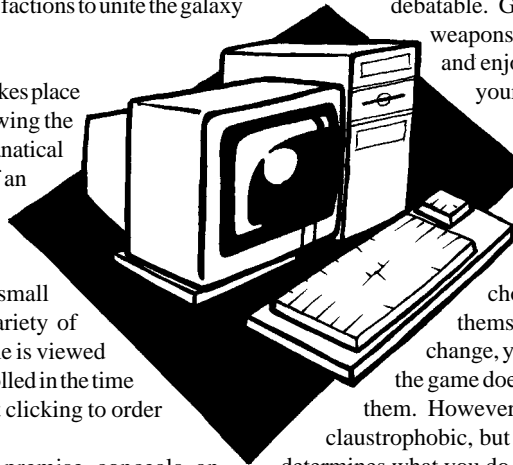
For defensive missions, slow, heavily armoured Mechs with area effect weapons are ideal, whereas for search and destroy, you'll need a good balance of speed and ability to inflict damage. For those missions where you absolutely, positively have to kill everything on the map, the choice between lots of lighter Mechs or just a few bloated powerhouses is endlessly debatable. Given that you're always salvaging new Mechs, weapons and getting more money, it's an endless, elaborate and enjoyable system that allows you to tailor the team to your strengths and style of play.

As well as outfitting your Mechs, you also get to choose pilots for each, all of whom gain experience, medals and skills as missions progress. Indeed, it helps further the story-led part of the game as you become quite attached to your squad. However, with all this freedom of choice beforehand, it's a shame that the missions themselves aren't more flexible. Although objectives change, you must progress through them in a strict order, and the game does try to funnel you into certain ways of completing them. However, it's rare that the game feels overly linear or claustrophobic, but given that money (rather than honour or loyalty) determines what you do, it would be nice to have a little more freedom to behave as you please once in the mission.

A few niggling faults like this stop MechCommander 2 from being an absolute classic. In Battletech and the MechWarrior games, taking down an enemy Mech was often achieved by targeting a specific area, or deliberately using long or short-range weapons. Although it is possible in MechCommander 2 to hit certain areas, and to instruct your Mechs at what range to attack, it's not nearly as integral a part of the game as it could be, and the commands are hidden away on keyboard shortcuts, meaning it's a while before you discover them.

Another minor flaw is that heat management isn't that important - in other Mech games each weapon heats up when firing, and if you fire too much, your Mech overheats and shuts down, making thoughtful play important. Although when you design Mechs in MechCommander you can't go over a fixed heat value, once in game they can fire all day and not shut down. This doesn't damage the game irreparably, but it's one consideration that would have been a welcome addition to the game's already strong mix of strategic variables. Most annoying, though, is that selecting units in combat can become difficult when the game slows down - a frustrating occurrence to say the least. When it does happen, it's not often that it ruins your plans, but that slight delay in switching from group one to group two is an entirely unwanted technical intrusion into the game world.

Given how much fun and how compelling the game is, these gripes are generally minor concerns. MechCommander 2 is a well produced, imaginative and involving 'strike' RTS - what matters is not consolidation and base building, but, like a true mercenary, getting in, doing the mission, grabbing what you can, and getting out. Revenge has never been so rewarding.



# PAFL 4

## The diary concludes

*'It's the end,' cries PAUL HARRIS, 'but this moment has been prepared for ...'*

*[It's been a while since the last instalment of Paul's diary, but we think that you'll pick up what's happening easily enough.]*

SO, WE FINALLY come to the last part of the PAFL diary. Last time, we left the Colts finely poised at 4-3-1 and in position to make a run at the playoffs. So without further ado ...

### Week 9

The Colts travel to Miami and the rematch with Wayne's Dolphins. It turns out to be a tough defensive game, settled by my defense managing to intercept the Dolphin's quarterback three times and sack him six times, including three sacks from Steve Grant. Final score 9-3 in a kicking duel. The result leaves us at 5-3-1 and back to second in the division.

Stats update - Phil Simms drops to 4th in quarterback ratings, Robb Thomas falls out of the rushing top 10 but stays 4th in the combined yardage and tied in 8th on touchdowns. Robert Goff is now 2nd in receiving yards, tied 4th in touchdowns and clinging on to 10th place in combined yardage. Steve Grant now leads the league in sacks with 9 for the season, Ezekial Gadsen is tied for 3rd in interceptions and Anthony Wallace is 4th on kick points.

### ...our defence looks as effective as a chocolate teapot...

### Week 10

Out on the road again, this time to visit the Oakland Raiders. We avoid being shot on the way in, but can't dodge the bullets inside the stadium. It starts well as we lead 7-0 at the end of the first quarter, but trail 14-10 at halftime and are never really in it again, finally losing 28-16. Phil Simms has another good game, but Oakland put on a true team performance to see the Colts off. Our records drops to 5-4-1 and we're back down to fourth in the division. In one week we've gone from looking like playoff contenders to being as mediocre as the acting in Neighbours.

Stats update - Simms claws his way back to 2nd place among the quarterbacks, Robert Goff takes No1 spot for receivers as well as hanging on to his place for touchdowns and combined yardage along with teammate Robb Thomas. Steve Grant maintains top slot for sacks, Ezekial Gadsen hangs on in the interception league and Anthony Wallace slips one place to 5th for kick points.

### Week 11

We get to play at home, hosting the San Diego Chargers. The Chargers take a 7-3 lead at the end of one quarter but the Colts are firmly in control at halftime, 13-3. We score a field goal in the third to make it 16-3 and look to

be strolling to victory. The Chargers have other ideas. A good drive results in a touchdown, then my Colts are forced to punt. A fifty-one yard run, then three more plays which net 11 yards, put San Diego in position to try a game winning field goal on the last play of the game. The kick sails between the posts and the Chargers get a jammy, sorry, well-deserved win, 17-16. The Colts now stand at 5-5-1 and, far from Neighbours-like mediocrity, the season is fast turning to full-on Home & Away disaster.

Stats update - Simms tops the quarterback chart, Goff slips to 5th in receiving and slips out of the touchdown combined yardage tables. Robb Thomas hangs on in combined yardage but disappears from touchdowns scored. Steve Grant still leads the league in sacks, Gadsen is still in the interception top 10, Anthony Wallace stays 5th in kick points.

### ...a must-win game...

### Week 12

The Colts host the rematch with our bogey team, the New England Patriots. We trail 14-13 at halftime, but take the lead with a third quarter touchdown to make it 20-14. But the Patriots' unstoppable running game makes the difference as they score 10 unanswered points in the fourth quarter to win 24-20. Two of the Patriots running backs gain over a hundred yards each and our defence looks as effective as a chocolate teapot. The Colts are left at 5-6-1 by the result, and with four weeks left it's a case of win now or miss the playoffs.

Stats update - Phil Simms is still top passer. Robert Goff and Robb Thomas maintain their positions in the receiving and combined yardage charts. Steve Grant is now in a four-way tie on sacks, Ezekial Gadsen and Anthony Wallace are still hanging on in their top 10's.

### Week 13

A visit to the Pittsburgh Steelers in a must-win game. Having seen what the Patriots did to us last week, the Steelers decide to run - a lot. 48 runs to just 16 passes, with seven different players carrying the ball. It doesn't seem to be working as the Colts cruise into halftime with a 12-0 lead. The Steelers' gameplan starts to work in the third quarter, though, and they pull back to within two points, 12-10. A touchdown in the fourth turns out to be the winning score as the Colts win the game 19-13. The passing game is still working well for us, but the running game seems to be getting worse every week, Robb Thomas carrying the ball 19 times this week for the grand total of 18 yards. The result leaves us at 6-6-1 and still in with a shot at the playoffs with three games to go.

### ...I sense a conspiracy, but Fox Mulder won't take my calls...

Stats update - Simms' good game keeps him atop the passer ratings, Robert Goff moves up to third among receivers. Thomas, Gadsen and Wallace all stay in their top 10's, Steve Grant slips to second in the sacks table.

### Week 14

We travel to New York to face the Giants, currently 6-7 and needing to win just as badly as us to have a chance to make the playoffs.

The evenness of our teams is obvious as we end the first quarter tied at

### PAFL at a glance

Postal American Football League (PAFL), an open-ended American Football PBM game. Run by Chris and Michelle Sheehan of Cleopatra Computer Games to a two-weekly turnaround. £54 per season, minimum of 20 games per season. *[Preceding instalments of Paul's diary have appeared in issues 85, 86, 88.]*

seven. The Giants take a slim 10-7 lead into halftime, but at the end of three quarters it's my Colts leading 14-1, thanks to Ezekial Gadsen running back a punt 84 yards for a touchdown. Guess all the special teams training has paid off.

The fourth quarter starts with my Colts forcing a punt, then disaster strikes. Robb Thomas fumbles the ball and the Giants recover at my 37 yard line. Five plays later they're celebrating in my endzone as they take a 17-14 lead. We can't get across midfield on our next drive and have to punt. The Giants do worse, three plays and out. We copy them on our next possession. The Giants get into my half but an interception ends the drive and gives us another chance. Simms throws incomplete on first down, then on second he hits Robb Thomas with a long pass which gets us into field goal range - but fumbles again. Somehow we manage to come up with the ball this time and we have a chance to at least tie the game. Under pressure, Simms decides to run with the ball - he fumbles for the second play in a row and this time our luck runs out and the Giants get the ball. We get the ball back once more, but our attempts to go down the field prove to be as futile as the one legged man's in the bum-kicking contest. It crosses my mind that in real life Phil Simms was the Giants quarterback. I sense a conspiracy, but Fox Mulder won't take my calls. (Coincidentally I'm not even allowed to call Gillian Anderson thanks to that restraining order.) What excuse can I come up with next week?

Stats update - Simms looks down smugly from the top of the passer table, Goff slides to fourth among receivers. Thomas, Wallace and Gadsen (doesn't that sound like a law firm) all retain their mid table placings. Steve Grant reflects the team best as he drops another place down the sack chart.

#### Week 15

Dallas are this week's opponents, so I armed with 'the man on the grassy knoll' theory just in case we come a cropper again. If we do lose, that's it - we're out of the playoffs.

The Cowboys start off hot, scoring a touchdown on their first possession. Not to be outdone, the Colts carve down the field to score on a five yard TD pass. The 'Boys respond with a field goal for a 10-7 lead before the end of the first quarter. We then exchange punts and my next drive ends with a fumble when we're within field goal range.

We go in at halftime with the score still 10-7 to the Cowboys. I turn the page hoping that my team has had an inspirational talk at halftime. It turns out to be not so much 'I have a dream' as 'Ich bin ein Berliner' (someone should have told JFK that a Berliner is local dialect for a cake, hence the translation 'I'm a doughnut'). So, the Indianapolis Doughnuts receive the kickoff, get nowhere and prepare to punt the ball downfield. Dallas know it's coming and a fab play on their part sees them block the punt. (So much for my special team's training!) With a short field to play with, they quickly punch the ball into the endzone for a 17-7 lead. Futility reigns for the rest of the third quarter, then hope comes as we manage to block a punt ourselves and end up with the ball in Cowboy country. A decent drive snares a field goal with enough time left for a miracle finish. But the Colts prove once again that they couldn't produce a good finish if they were sponsored by Turtle Wax. The final score is 17-10, our record is 6-8-1 and

we're out of the playoffs for another year. Was it the CIA? Was it the Cubans? The Mafia? Probably not, but it's better than believing we just weren't good enough.

Stats update - The playoff picture now looks like this: AFC East - the Patriots and Bills have made it into the playoffs, with the division title to be decided in the last week. AFC Central - The Pittsburgh Steelers have won the division and are in the playoffs. AFC West - the Seattle Seahawks have made it into the playoffs but the division title is still up for grabs. Four teams are in and the last two places will be decided in the final games of the season. At the moment, Kansas City look good for a place with a 9-6 record, then it's a dogfight between three teams at 8-7, the Raiders, Chargers and Jets. NFC East - Arizona Cardinals have clinched the division. NFC Central - Detroit Lions have won it and are in. NFC West - the Atlanta Falcons have wrapped up the division and the St Louis Rams have also booked a playoff spot with an 11-4 record.

So, just the two wildcard places left to fight for, and five teams with 9-6 records chasing them. Everything hinges on the final week for the Eagles and Cowboys from the East, Packers and Vikings from the Central and the Saints from the West.

#### Week 16

We visit the Jets in a game they need to win to keep their playoff hopes alive. Our hopes have already gone and this is reflected in the hopeless way the team plays. We miss two field goals, have a punt blocked (again), give away a fumble and my quarterback throws five interceptions. On the day the Jets prove slightly less inept and manage to sneak a 17-14 win. The Colts season is officially over, with a 6-9-1 record.

Stats update - Despite his horrible game, Phil Simms finishes the season as the league's top rated passer. Robert Goff finishes fourth on the receiving chart and Robb Thomas sixth on combined yardage. Steve Grant ends the season with ten sacks, good enough for a fifth place tie. Anthony Wallace clings onto eighth place on kick points and Ezekial Gadsen takes the same spot for punt returns. At least that's some positives to take into next season.

Playoff picture - AFC - the Patriots, Steelers and Seahawks claim the division titles, with the wildcard places going to the Chiefs, Chargers and Bills. Despite beating me the Jets are edged out of the playoffs on a tie-breaker. NFC - The divisions were already settled, so joining the Cardinals, Lions and Falcons in the playoffs will be the Cowboys, Rams and Saints.

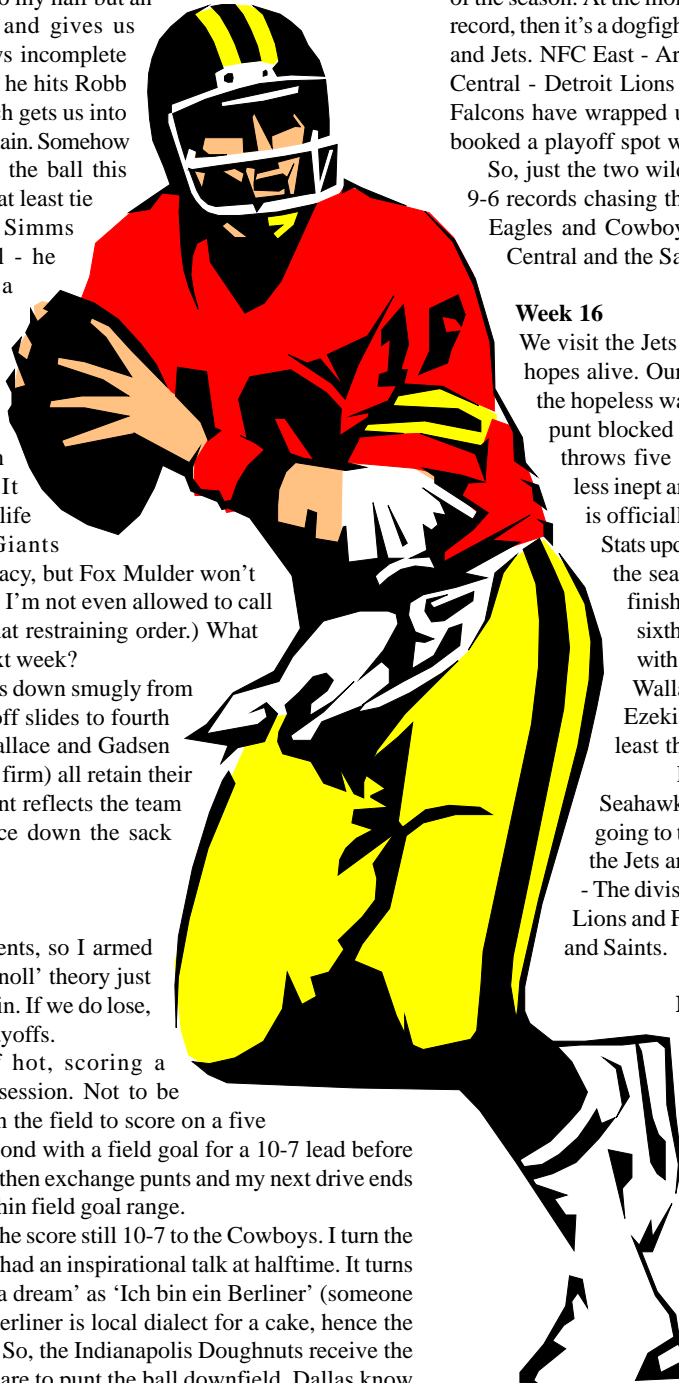
#### End of the Season

So the season is over for my Colts - we've had good games, bad games and games in between. We've failed to make the playoffs once more, but, as Arnie almost said, 'We'll be back.' The draft will come once more, optimism will be refuelled and we'll be out there, giving it another shot at being world beaters once more.

On the subject of world beaters, I suppose you'd like to know who won the Super Bowl. After some intense playoff games it came down to the Seattle Seahawks (coached by Trevor Thompson) and the Atlanta Falcons (Keith Sandle). The Seahawks had control through three quarters, leading 17-3, before the Falcons

made a brave comeback in the fourth. The Seahawks clung on to win though, final score 20-17. Congratulations Trevor!

Well, you've read the highs and lows of a whole season now so ... Pardon me? What did you say? Oh, you would have done better. Really. How? Got a few ideas have you? You know what they say. Come and have a go if you think you're hard enough ... for Postal American Football League.



# Clovenshield

## Lurking in a free AD&D™ PBeM Game

**JIM KEMENY** *explains his discoveries...*

*Trademarks: Please note that "AD&D", "DM" and "Forgotten Realms" are trademarks of TSR, Inc, a subsidiary of Wizards of the Coast, Inc.*

IN ISSUE 87 I wrote a letter in Mighty Pen about this little-known genre of gaming. Our Editor, Carol, encouraged me to write a follow-up article, and, having been observing one game (a form of passive participation called 'lurking') for getting on for a year, I feel ready to report on the experience.

I have to begin by saying that I am a complete novice to AD&D™. I chose **Clovenshield** because I was attracted by the website and the infectious enthusiasm of its Canadian DM™ Bruce Sponagle. The choice was not easy as there were many games to choose between. Most, like Clovenshield, were based on AD&D rules and used an existing campaign module as background. *Forgotten Realms*™ is popular, and Clovenshield is also based on this module. But some were a blend of fantasy and history, like an Ireland campaign or the adventures of the crew of a Viking longship. Some had simple websites, and were solo efforts by a dedicated roleplayer, comprising little more than the DM and three or four players, with text on what happens appearing by email every so often. Others, like Clovenshield, were more complex.

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### ... all these initiatives help create a friendly and open atmosphere ...

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The website can be visited at ...

<http://members.nbci.com/pbemclovensh>

and here you will find a background to the campaign, a set of house-rules, a number of information and technical files and maps to download, an introduction to the DM and the cast of characters, prize announcements for good roleplaying, information on how to join the email discussion groups to both receive the text of the unfolding story and join in any discussion, and much, much more.

The DM has a dedicated team of helpers, two key ones being the webmaster Nitehawk Jarrett and the listmaster Craig Wise. There are five or six main players who interact on a players' discussion list. There is a separate lurkers' list and also a tavern list for everyone. The basic procedure is that the players interact with each other and the DM, and then the results are emailed to the lurker list a chapter a time.

#### Lurking can be active

Lurkers are seen as being important to the game as potential replacements when players drop. Although lurkers can be completely passive and silent, they have followed the story and have various opportunities to develop their roleplaying skills. They are encouraged to submit a character to the DM and await a vacancy. Lurkers can also volunteer to take on bit-parts, as characters who make a temporary appearance in the story. A lurker can also become the understudy of an existing player's character to make suggestions and advise, and be available to take over temporarily or permanently. There is also a separate lurker's tavern, which I'll describe soon, and there are regular polls for best character, and feedback on a range of issues. The webmaster periodically asks for feedback and sometimes help with software and technical matters, and all these initiatives help create a friendly and open atmosphere.

How much lurkers get involved is really up to each to decide. I found that just passive lurking, reading the material, took up quite a lot of time,

and there is a steady flow of emails. I have not actually counted carefully but I reckon that in the time I have been lurking I have received over 500 emails. For the novice roleplayer there is a wide range of options, allowing a rapid and deep involvement or a gradual easing into this genre. The level of activity appears to be quite high. Lurkers who want to take on a part in this game need to be prepared to have or make email contact on a daily basis. It is therefore quite intense, with high levels of involvement.

A commitment to a permanent role is therefore a decision that should not be taken lightly. Rather, ease into the game by taking on a temporary bit-part, especially if you're inexperienced. It is even possible in this game to 'meet the characters' in the main game in a side-show at the tavern. Construct a character and join the interaction discussion list, and away you go. This is a parallel world that won't affect the main game, but provides some light entertainment and a chance to show - or for the inexperienced to develop - your roleplaying skills in interaction with experienced roleplayers.

#### An experimental approach

I submitted a character to the DM fairly early on to see how it would be received. I chose a simple and low-key character, a sort of anti-hero - a middle aged bard - and sent in the description and background. After consulting with his players it was not accepted. I understand from the DM this is because the character's skills were not what was needed in the party at that time. I should add that I don't have the campaign module (it appears to be out of print or difficult to get) and so I was not able to contextualise the character. Several months later the DM sent the lurkers a character description of his own to help them create their own characters for the campaign, deeply embedded and coloured by the campaign context, which really brought the character alive.

Just to give an idea of the amount of work that goes into this game by both the DM and the players, I have been copying and pasting the narrative interaction from the separate emails into a word file. A year later this file occupies nearly a megabyte and is 273 pages and 140,000 words long. And I guess that the adventure is still only in the early-middle stage. Also, the text is backed up by maps and floor-plans of taverns and no doubt other places that remain to be discovered as the quest unfolds.

So much for the technicalities and background. Anyone interested in more detail can obtain this from the website. What about the game itself?

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### ... experienced and enthusiastic roleplayers ...

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#### What's going down

The elf Findor Tallwillow (run by the DM), on behalf of a mysterious employer, has recruited a group of adventurers to escort a caravan from the marshy port of Marsembler to the town of Berdusk some hundreds of miles to the west. This is a time of troubles, when evil forces are stirring and have been responsible for the disappearance without trace of a number of heavily-guarded trading caravans. The adventurers' task is twofold - to escort the caravan safely and to find out who is responsible for the disappearances. The two tasks are not, of course, easily reconciled, and it becomes apparent even before the wagon train departs that there are powerful and evil magic forces at work to destroy them.

There were seven characters at the start. After nine months of play two had dropped by the wayside, but a core group remains of Tebryn, a

high ogre male, Elsbeth, a human female paladin, Dystra, an amazon cleric, Maqlin, a male half-sylvan elf ranger, and Zadi, a half-elf female fighter-mage. Each has character traits designed by the controlling player and as the story unfolds, the character of each of them becomes clearer and they all take on a life of their own. The players are undoubtedly experienced and enthusiastic roleplayers.

This group, together with Findor Tallwillow and the occasional character picked up on the way - like the ten-year old street urchin Jack or, until he died horribly, the thug prisoner Notooth, who turns out to have been the creature of an evil being - are westward bound.

The story opens with the adventurers arriving one by one in Marsember:

*'...Your trip to Marsember could be only described as hellish. This journey has been an eye-opening experience: draining you of your endurance, good humour, and much-needed gold. The "Forest Kingdom", indeed! For the past 2 days, all you have been able to smell is the foul odour of decay. This city, constructed on a bog many generations ago, leaves one to question the sanity of those who built it in the first place.*

*With your gold running low, and little hope of finding gainful employment, you wander through the filthy rat-infested streets of Marsember. Your spirits sink lower, as you realize that you've travelled this distance to meet a prospective employer, yet have no idea as to where he is, or where to begin to look. Every time you have asked any of the natives for directions to the Cloven Shield Tavern, they have seemingly taken you on a wild goose chase. Darkness was beginning to fall as you find yourself standing out front of a rowdy tavern, the sign hanging over the door is that of an ancient wooden war shield, aged beyond usefulness, cut cleanly in two...*

Here, in the tavern which provides a colourful and lively background to the interaction, they meet each other and Findor, who briefs them on their mission before they depart with the caravan.

## ... you will come across a wide variety of styles of game ...

### Favourable impressions

The plot is too complex to go into in detail here, and in any case, the unfolding story can be read on the discussion list. Instead I will finish with some general observations about this sort of PBEM gaming.

The wide choice of games to lurk in means that you will come across a wide variety of styles of game. The written word being the main medium of communication, take note of the style of writing. What kind do you like? Some are fast-moving and focus on combat. Others focus on the subtleties of interaction between the characters. Yet others dwell more on the landscapes and environments in which the adventures are set. Each game is unique and has its own flavour. It is probably a good idea to explore the games on the websites first and see whether anything grabs you. I have found that I just don't have time to lurk in more than the one game.

Another difference is intensity and depth. This, too, varies considerably. Some DMs create detailed and complex worlds with a lot of thought put into them. Clovenshield is one such. Other DMs, just as dedicated but with less time, are playing with a small group of friends, and opportunities for lurkers to get involved are more limited. You just need to choose according to your taste and time available and sit back and enjoy it.

It is easy to get caught up in Clovenshield and the story and wait with anticipation for each episode to arrive by email. It doesn't take long before the characters become familiar and their actions and reactions to each other and to events. It must be even more engaging to be actually playing, and one day when I am less pressed for time I look forward to taking an active part.

*(With thanks to the DM, Bruce Sponagle, for his comments on an earlier draft - Jim Kemeney)*

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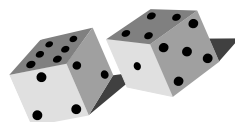
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# StarFleet Warlord 3

## The Death of a Warlord

*And it's the End! But PAUL WEST goes down fighting ...*

*[Paul runs PSI Corporation in the Greater Magellanic Cloud. He's made allies which include Confederate Navy, but this alliance has brought PSI into conflict with the powerful Vengeance Inc ...]*

### Y185 - Losses and gains

This year was very tough. Vengeance came back at us with - well, with a vengeance! We started the year by losing two of the sites we had captured in Vengeance's home sector and one site in sector 39. Vengeance then destroyed a scout in 39 and one of our Orions as it tried to press further into his home sector. He also raided the other two sites in 49 that we had captured, taking away that income. To make matters worse, his F-CF captured our site in our home sector, taking away our sector bonus. Then, when we thought we had heard it all, three of our sites in sector 39 were raided! We had to congratulate our opponent - what a masterful counter-offensive!

Elsewhere, we fought a battle with the GCC Corporation in 28. This was a squatter Corp (similar to NBN) that Planet Catchers had been fighting in the area. Our forces consisted of two Lyran ships and a Warp Gate, while GCC had three Hydrans. We won this tough battle, but lost the L-MS, and the WG had critical damage and was reduced to speed 1. Any chance of an offensive in sector 28 was now significantly reduced in scope.

We recaptured our stolen site in our home sector by the middle of the year, and also took back a site in 39 from NBN. We also captured a new site in sector 49, further disrupting Vengeance's home sector income. Then, at the end of the year, we had our best news. Our D-CW and D-POL tracked down the Vengeance F-CF in our home sector and destroyed it. No more Vengeance ships in our sector!

### ...We won, but my fleet was decimated...

### Y186 - Decisions, decisions

We lost two sites in sector 39 and two in sector 49, and were down to only one ship in Vengeance's home sector. We finally tracked down a troublesome ISC ship in 39, and in sector 19 we hit a Dark Underground base with four ships and a swarm of PFs - more than enough to secure victory. Raiding continued in sector 28 and sector 19, and our western Warp Gate fended off a Dark Underground counterattack, preserving our offensive capabilities in sector 19.

We were now having a tough time deciding what to do. Vengeance was waging war with us in 39 and 49. We had bounced ships off Magellanic Research to our south, and it looked as if Planet Catchers might be headed in our direction once they finished off GCC. We knew that we could not handle these Corps and that our losses were beginning to mount. We had to become aggressive, and we decided that we could not back away from Vengeance - we would ask other Warlords if they could mediate some kind of agreements between Planet Catchers and ourselves, and find out what Magellanic Research planned on doing.

### *StarFleet Warlord at a glance*

A science fiction wargame run by Pagoda Games in the UK. Startup is £5, with further turns at £3 each.

### Y187 - A victory, but at a cost

This year we started out by losing three sites, and Vengeance totally kicked us out of 49. Our heavily damaged Warp Gate in sector 28 was in front of the Planet Catchers fleet, so we scrapped that Branch Office, knowing that we could not mount an offensive against Planet Catchers and Vengeance simultaneously.

Our fleet in 39 decided it was time to put an end to the NBN Corporation so we could concentrate solely on Vengeance Inc. We attacked what we thought was a battle station, but turned out to be a starbase and had seven ISC ships! We had eight Orion and LDR vessels, plus the eastern Branch Office. We won, but my fleet was decimated, losing everything smaller than a cruiser and heavily damaging the survivors. This was a tough battle and really hurt us, but the NBN Corp was finally destroyed - our greatest victory to date!

### ...we decided to fight to the last man...

Magellanic Research had not headed our way yet, so we decided that they were not going to war with us and that we were down to Vengeance and Planet Catchers. We also got a report of a Vengeance WG with two ships crossing sector 39 headed in our direction. Also, a small raiding force from Vengeance was hitting the southern part of 39, and we estimated that in one to two years they would hit the southern sites in our home sector. Plans were set in motion to deal with this threat.

### Y188 - A false ally

The proverbial shoe dropped. We lost two sites in our home sector as Planet Catchers brought a huge fleet across the border. They did not scan us first, so it was apparent that Vengeance was working with them and had supplied them a map of my sector. My understanding had been that Planet Catchers did not like Vengeance and would not work with them. We were misled. Planet Catchers' fleet was at 27 ships and was led by mammoth battleships. We were not even defending against Planet Catchers - my defenses were good, but I had only 19 ships that I could throw up against this mighty armada.

I knew then that the end would come in one or maybe two years. We alerted our allies that we were going to be destroyed. After talking with our trading council, we decided to fight to the last man - no quarter asked and none given. Our Warlord allies cheered our bravery, but we were greatly disappointed. Planet Catchers was supposed to be on friendly terms with Confederate Navy, yet he was working with Vengeance! I was afraid that my allies were in deep trouble now.

### ...a wonderful game that included some of the best players in Star Fleet Warlord...

Elsewhere, we scanned sector 18 and forwarded an emergency capsule to all our allies with maps and layouts. We did a ship scan of sector 39 and found that Vengeance had seven ships in the sector with two heading for our southern border. Some sites changed hands, and we fortified our captured NBN Home Office in 39 and assigned our best Legendary Engineer to it. We repaired our ships and put a new Orion ship out there to raid Vengeance. Though it may have seemed that the end was near, we continued to put our best face forward in the hopes that somehow we might turn aside the



Planet Catchers fleet.

We reviewed our maps and found that Planet Catchers would have to go through some damaging terrain to hit our Home Office this next year. So, we scrapped our damaged ships and started putting everything into making the job as difficult as possible for them. The Galactic Bulletin was alive with well-wishers and support. Plus, it was noted to all that we were set up, but I had half expected that. If I defended against Planet-Catchers, then Vengeance would have waltzed in to hit me. My hope had been that Planet-Catchers would prove to be a true ally to Confederate Navy, but after seeing them work with Vengeance I knew this was not the case.

#### Y189 - No surrender

The year before our predicted demise was busy. We had lost three sites in our home sector to Planet Catchers while Vengeance continued to hit us in sector 39. We scrapped 13 of our aging ships and used the scrap metal to fund our purchases for the final defense of our home planet. Our LDR PFW (which had our best science officer aboard) made a ship scan of our home sector, showing that Planet Catchers had a fleet of 38 ships one hex away from our Home Office. Planet Catchers also had three ships operating independently taking my sites. Against the 38-ship fleet, we were able to field a force of 25. It would not be enough.

Our demise was a sure thing for next year. We loaded the women and children into escape shuttles and sent them to the BGWG Corporation for sanctuary. Everyone said their good-byes to their loved ones, and then we prepared to put up the best showing we could. Our message to the Galactic Bulletin read as follows: 'No surrender - no-retreat - no quarter asked - none given.'

With being hit so hard from Vengeance and Planet Catchers' surprise attack, we had not the income or defenses to remain a viable Corporation in the GMC. We notified the stock board of our planned foreclosure. We feared for our allies BGWG (who were next in line for the Planet Catchers), and for Confederate Navy, who believed Planet Catchers was a friend.

### ...No surrender - no-retreat - no quarter asked - none given...

#### Y190 - Destruction

The end came as foretold by our soothsayers. Our suicide teams were able to irradiate seven sites in sector 39 to prevent Vengeance from gathering income without at least investing in repairing the sites. To rub salt in the wound, we took a site from Vengeance in their home sector, robbing them of their sector bonus. Though this was not a major blow to our enemy, it at least made life a little more difficult for them, and gave Prime-Evil Parakeets some semblance of hope. We also blew up our warp gates to prevent their capture.

Then the Planet Catchers fleet hit us.

We fought to the last man - no quarter asked - none given. In the first hour, we killed two ships and crippled a third, but they had the advantage in both firepower and numbers. Eleven of our brave defenders went down under the guns of the enemy. At this point we were surely doomed, as only the best fortune in the early going could have saved us.

In the second hour, we destroyed twelve of their ships - far more than I had expected. But our own ships were exploding all around me. We lost everything but the battle station, my Lyran flagship BB and the sister battleship completed only last year. We exchanged messages and prepared for the end.

As the third hour began, I told my people that I could never be prouder of a crew as I was today. Then we moved to the attack. Our two damaged battleships moved forward to engage the remaining 20 Planet Catchers ships in a last act of defiance. Our guns blazed and we destroyed two more ships, but our sister vessel went down. With our last gasp we sacrificed ourselves against their flagship, a Hydran Iron Duke, and both of us were destroyed in a blinding flash.

#### Epilogue

As my essence flew through the Galactic void, I was drawn in by the omnipotent A1, who had found in me a worthy Warlord. He restored me in the D12 Quadrant, and commanded me to live and fight another day.

And so the war goes on...

#### Final Note

I am more than happy to share my experiences with other Warlords. My mistakes were quite well pronounced and I think I learned from them, so you should do the same. Here are the major lessons learned - I'm sure you can find more in the story.

When conducting war against a superior opponent with many victories under his belt, don't always expect him to strike directly at you. I was told through what I considered good sources that Planet Catchers would not work with Vengeance and that they were enemies. In fact, Vengeance had faked an attack, and had only skirmished with me. He then sold my scanned home sector map to Planet Catchers. I was so consumed with fighting Vengeance and holding my own that I did not pay attention to Planet Catchers when they ignored my subspace messages, nor did I really consider the implications of the fleet I saw in sector 28 during Y184. I had my fleet poised on the Vengeance home sector doorstep when Planet Catchers came across my sector unannounced. Had I been more flexible in my dealings, and kept a better eye on my other borders, things might have been much different.

D11 was a wonderful game that included some of the best players in Star Fleet Warlord. I would like to thank the following people for making the game enjoyable while playing both the good and evil characters:

*Todd Kagan: Vengeance Inc, Gene Malin: Confederate Navy, Steve Shoots: Planet Catchers, Chris Lerche: BGWG, Kirk Petty: Prime-Evil Parakeets, Ike Baker: Cloudmasters, Jeff Lorenzen: Magellanic Research, A1 (Agent One): Bruce Graw*



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# Sports News

*This issue, CHRIS DICKSON introduces the new and different ...*

THREE VERY different topics this month, so let's waste no more time. The new football season is now well under way; unsurprisingly, it has inspired a new crop of football management games, mostly run by email. Nothing new there. The most influential trend this season is a set of match resolution mechanics used in Robert Filipe's football management game, the self-titled **Filipe Soccer League Simulation**. Robert's game has been running for over eight seasons now; he put up the program he wrote to run it on his site at

<http://ip.pt/~ip200618/index.html> and invited other people to run their own game using it.

The ruleset used is of similar complexity to that of the classic United ruleset. Your team's players are assigned to the traditional four positions of goalkeeper, defence, midfield and attack; outfield players also have a preference for left-sidedness, right-sidedness or neutrality. They also have percentage skill ratings in six aspects of football: goalkeeping, tackling, passing, shooting, speed and fitness. There are no surprises about which positions have particular requirements for high scores in particular areas.

Another slightly unusual feature of games using this ruleset is that they tend to be very open with regard to what everybody knows about each other player's team; the program automatically generates many pages with extensive details on each of the players in the game. This is a practical restriction why this game could only really be run on-line; to print out sufficient detail for postal players to be able to make the same level of informed decisions would involve prohibitive costs of paper and postage.

The financial side of the game is less well-developed. Indeed, Robert's original game completely ignores the financial aspect of management, with all inter-player transactions by way of direct trade. However, other games use a more modern version of essentially the same ruleset with financial aspects incorporated; currently, this is handled with an utilitarian approach rather than as an attempt to add flavour, for there are no attempts to simulate multi-million transfer fees. Instead, the unit of currency is the rather more sterile ampersand.

One other aspect of the game which might possibly prove off-putting is the resolute computer-moderation. Players must submit a program of orders in a reasonably simple pseudo-code; hand moderation is restricted to oversight of checks and balances on the transfer situation. All the same, if this is not off-putting, nor is the fact that these are free games run online as a hobby with all the accompanying lack of guaranteed service provision, then you might well enjoy taking part in a game and participating in the discussions to see the ruleset develop. You may also want to consider the

rather more complex EFL family of games if you want to get your hands even dirtier with bags of numbers.

As well as Robert Filipe's own game, the **Floodlit Soccer League** at <http://www.geocities.com/floodlitsoccer/>

has a Scottish theme, using a version of the ruleset which incorporates the financial aspects briefly mentioned above. The site has a greater graphical focus than most, with team logos making up much of the design. The moderator seems to have a real pride in his work. There's also the **World Online Soccer League** at

<http://www.macroguru.net/wosl>, another member of the same family, though the web site seems to have intermittent problems - probably a bad sign for a purely online game.

Something rather unusual, by comparison, is the **Sportinmail** family of games; you can find their bilingual (French/English) web site online at

<http://www.sportinmail.com/>

Again, the games are run at no cost and are restricted to online play, but instead of managing a football team, players control individual sportsmen and teams in tennis, cycling, golf, formula 1 motor racing, ski-ing and athletics.

The latter five of these games work in very similar ways; you design between two and twenty athletes, depending on the sport, each rated on a zero-to-seven (sometimes two-to-seven) scale in a

number of pertinent abilities appropriate to the sport in question, subject to a total points limit. The formula one racing game requires you to define both your drivers,

your cars and your support team (pit crew and engineering facilities) in similar ways.

Once you have designed your players, you then enter some or all of them in some or all of the various tournaments in their chosen game that take place in the game universe. There are three tours of tournaments for each sport; the world tours take place in more exotic locations and offer bigger prizes in terms of ratings points, but entry is restricted to competitors with certain past achievements already.

Gameplay is simple; for each tournament, you specify a tactic of your choice, selected from a number of options, each with their effects explained. Most sports will give you a number of opportunities to change from one tactic to another at certain points during the race, or during the tournament; you are allowed to make these changes conditional on your performance so far using the first tactic you selected. All players' selections are then compared to produce the results of each tournament, ranking points are awarded accordingly and the games go on to the next tournament.

Apart from your tactical choices in the tournaments, the strategy of the game comes in selecting tournament entries to your maximum advantage, for each tournament has its own characteristics and will suit players with certain specialities. Furthermore, there is a physical condition statistic to



ensure that players who enter every single event will quickly wear themselves out; you also are able to enter training orders to enhance your players' abilities in the various areas.

The tennis game is slightly more complicated in that events are run as proper single-elimination knockout tournaments; for each event, you get to see the tournament grids and follow who's playing whom at each point. The game even automatically generates stroke-by-stroke reports for each of the matches, so you can analyse them, try to deduce your opponents' weak areas and submit tactics accordingly.

The use of the English language throughout the games is imperfect, but easily sufficient to give you a clear indication of what is required. An example is that the abbreviations are clearly based on the French terms, rather than the English language ones. Another is that players are encouraged to contact each other on e-mail mailing lists, but the prevailing language of all the lists is French. The tennis game is the least fully translated of the six.

One other feature of the games that I have not yet mentioned is that there is the promise of prizes to be won; by earning world ranking points in the game, you can also earn gift points which can be redeemed for prizes once the prize scheme starts in October. This could have implications for the continued free running of the game; on the other hand, there are very many web sites which are all about free offers available on the Internet, so it's possible that these are the sorts of prizes which could eventually become up for grabs. I counsel scepticism here - don't believe it until you see it.

I'm not sure that the games do an especially effective simulation of their chosen sports, but they are something really quite different to the vast majority of games available out there and accordingly strongly recommended, prize concerns aside.

Lastly, I raise a question about postal chess and similar games. We

don't talk about them much in Flagship, but a lot of them do go on, still offline as well as online. One reason is that it's not clear where they should go: fantasy war games, perhaps? While I don't intend to dedicate a great deal of space to them, I shall rashly declare chess and chess variants to be a sport, albeit a sport of the mind rather than a sport of the body. Perhaps this is an issue for the Mighty Pen?

The reason I raise the issue is that I have found a tempting-looking abstract chess variant. Entitled **Genetess**, the allusion being to genetically-modified chess. Nine games have been running, the first for almost a year, with recruitment under way for a tenth. Each game takes place on a custom-designed board based on a square grid, though the boards themselves can take very unusual and irregular patterns.

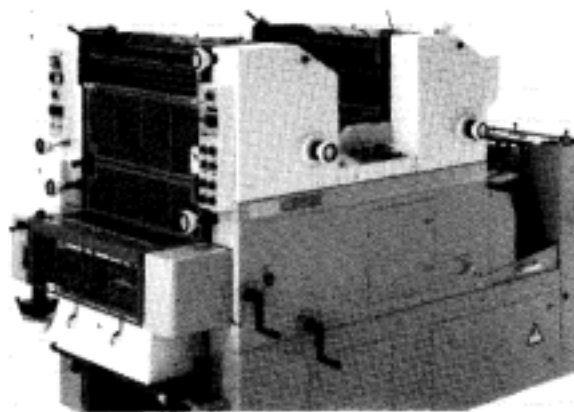
Each player starts off with one piece, a King, which generates energy for a strictly finite reserve. This energy can be used to bid for starting location, for turn order precedence or to spawn off other pieces. Much of the intrigue comes from the fact that you get to design your own pieces from a list of characteristics; unusual combinations of abilities can be combined to produce spectacularly tricky pieces, so you'll have to work out whether it's better to produce small numbers of powerful pieces or many ones which are rather less capable. Another constraint is that fog of war is strictly applied, unless you invest heavily in a piece with enhanced vision.

Again, definitely something a bit different, and different is inherently good. The number of players who have signed up for many games is an encouraging sight. Let's hope that GM Bobby K remains interested and committed enough to continue to offer the game for free; further information is on ...

<http://www.bobbyk.demon.co.uk/genetess.html>

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# The Chevian Chronicles

## Battling the Goblin Horde

**GREG LAMB's Alyx finds the combat getting a bit too close ...**

*THE CITY of Easterngate is threatened by Goblin forces after an ambassadorial mission led by Greg's character Alyx fails to avert war; the mysterious assassination of the Goblin Prince didn't help her negotiations...*

### Sextus 1108 - First wave

The Goblin army takes its time arriving, but word begins to arrive that the outflanking forces led by Ed 'Mac' Bain and Cassie O'Pia have engaged the enemy. Some time later, Alyx hears that Cassie's unit is in retreat, falling back with the help of cavalry support and the flying wizard Ezno Boran. As the retreating company arrives in Easterngate and the first of the wounded are brought to safety, giving Alyx some serious work to do, a vast body of Goblins appears over the horizon and marches in a well-ordered block. The Baron orders the main body of his troops forward. Archers on both sides loose their arrows and the battle is joined for real.

### ...a vast body of Goblins appears over the horizon...

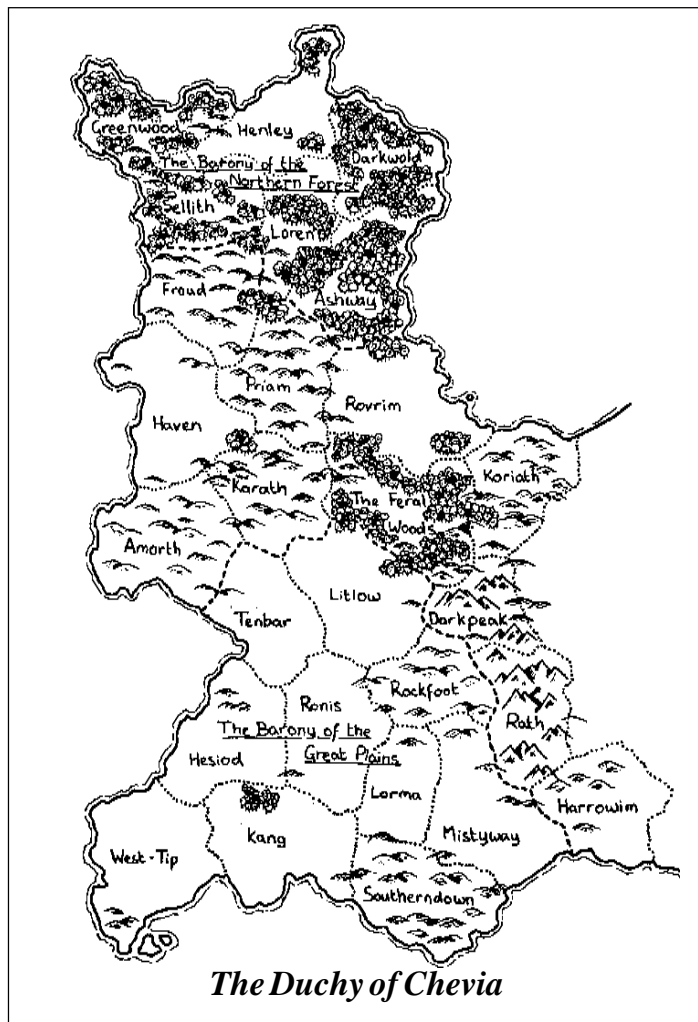
Funny thing - even in the middle of a war all the exciting things seem to happen to other people. Alyx's duties in the temporary hospitals and morgues take up most of her month, while outside the city walls an exciting, dramatic and above all dangerous confrontation is taking place. For some reason I don't pick up any Heal experience from the four weeks of work, but this is later found to be an oversight and the experience is added on next turn. The ritual to speak with the departed Prince goes nowhere fast, as the bangle is too weak a link and the death too long ago for any real chance of success. Other than that, much of the turn is unsurprisingly related to the clash of armies, with the end of the turn seeing a brief lull as the Goblins withdraw for the moment, setting up camp about a mile outside city limits. While the Flashing Spears make it back to the city more or less intact, there is no news yet of the fate of MacBain's heroes.

### ...a slow but steady march up the notoriety table...

As a minor note, the *Herald* contains a note from the prolific Corleth Cloudreader suggesting that the feared criminal known as the Fallen Eagle is actually none other than Alyx DeLibra herself. I hate this sort of gossipy, malicious journalism, especially when the story in question is completely true. I learn the hard way never to start a rumour if you can't deal with the consequences, which in this case involve a slow but steady march up the notoriety table for Alyx. Nonetheless, I manage to convince Corleth that he's on the wrong track for a while with a few well-worded messages. There's also mention of another Elementalist, Constance Bethania, using her powers to guide her to victory in the annual Chevian Games in the capital city of Brightwater. Constance is now on her way to Easterngate to lend her abilities to a more serious cause.

### *The Chevian Chronicles at a glance*

A roleplaying game from State of Mind Games, with turn reports plus a general newsletter each turn. Note that Chevia isn't open for new players now, as it's drawing to its in-built conclusion.



*The Duchy of Chevia*

Next month's actions will largely be more of the same, with Alyx continuing to aid the City Guard. However, with the Goblins getting ever closer to the city, I also decide to put on a brief demonstration of basic self-defence skills for the non-combat populace. I can't do much in the time available, but should the walls be breached anything will be better than nothing. Also, while Tayka is in town, I meet up once more to try out a less direct method of finding the murderer. After the immediate danger passes, I intend to travel into Goblin lands and nose around, for which some kind of disguise would obviously be useful. Since Tayka's abilities also cover the weaving of illusions, we'll see whether she can magically disguise Alyx as a Goblin, or even turn her invisible. Finally, during my shifts with the Guards, I'll see if any Goblin troops have been captured and question them. My grasp of their native tongue may be crude, but as one of the few humans able to speak the language in any form it has to be worth a try.

### Septimus 1108 - The jaws of defeat

The sounds of battle have started again, and Alyx sees the sky illuminated by strange and unnatural lights for a few minutes, clearly indicating something very magical taking place. From outside there are shouts of panic. From what Alyx can hear, the Goblins have reached the city walls, a group of

Goblins have entered the city from the north, and there are zombies roaming the streets.

A group of Goblin shamans have taken out our archers. MacBain's Heroes are still lost behind enemy lines, their retreat cut off by the forces they were sent to intercept. A band of Goblin warriors, apparently accompanied by a human, have circled around the city and broken through a weak spot in the defences. The Flashing Spears and the rest of the army have been forced back until the fighting has reached the walls themselves. The Chevians who have fallen in battle are rising up to strike at the living. Easterngate is history.

### **...clearly indicating something very magical taking place...**

Well, okay, we're not beaten just yet, but things are looking grimmer than ever. The lone note of hope is the message that the newly arrived Constance has been sent out on an aerial scouting mission to locate the missing company, but optimism for their safe return is hard to come by. On a more personal note, my orders fail on pretty much every account too. No Goblins have yet been captured, nor even any of their dead brought in, so an interrogation proves impractical for now. And while Tayka can make Alyx look considerably different to her usual self, changing species or vanishing altogether is beyond her present abilities. Oh well. About the only action which works out well is the impromptu self-defence class, which is not only popular with the city inhabitants but also nets me a few spontaneous donations. Less than I'd get for tending a bar, admittedly, but a nice thought anyway.

First priority is to deal with the Goblins who've made it into the city. I arrange to meet up with a group of guardsmen led by the foppish 'Pinkie' Pimm Purnell who has the same idea in mind. Once they're out of the way, the streets also need to be cleared of the walking dead. A mixed force of guards and militia have been broken off from the main force to handle this threat, with player characters Revek and Pryderi the Pure at the head. I also talk Tayka into tagging along - presumably if necromantic rituals can raise the undead, similar magic can at least hinder them. My main purpose in these encounters will be to get civilians to safety while the fighters do their thing, although as it turns out Alyx will end up doing her share of the messy work as well.

#### **Octavus 1108 - The last stand**

The group has just managed to dispatch the last of the zombies when they hear a cheer go up from the defenders of the city. Word quickly goes out that the Order of the Cleansing Flame has arrived to help, and that MacBain's Heroes have managed to return. Those who are able, sally from the walls, their morale miraculously lifted. The fighting strength of the Goblins, meanwhile, appears reduced - they actually seem tired more than anything else. Alyx goes to join the defenders. Finally, after a few more hours, the Goblin war horns are sounded and a retreat begins. The army withdraws to the east, harried as they go by the cavalry of the Order of the Cleansing Flame and the Northern Forest Guard. When they have finally disappeared over the horizon and the horsemen have returned, there is an almighty cheer which rings around the city. Victory!

### **... there was the small matter of the enemies within our walls to face...**

Whew. Just in the nick of time, a cavalry force turns up at the end of the battle to save the day and take the glory. As opposed, apparently, to joining in at the beginning when they might have been able to stop the situation getting so bleak in the first place. I believe I've found the origins of the US military. Still, all credit to them, as well as to Constance, MacBain, Dame Cassie and everybody else who aided the effort. For now, the threat is over and Easterngate stands.



*The Battle for Easterngate*

Before all this happened, though, there was the small matter of the enemies within our walls to face. The Goblins prove tricky, with Pinkie's troops having difficulty overcoming the solid defences erected by the Goblins while they attempt to set the wood and thatch buildings of Easterngate ablaze. Between fighting the fire and the Goblins themselves, things aren't going too well until a second division of guards led by the giant Tom Littlefoot arrives. Between them, the two units force the Goblins into a retreat, and then a rout as the invaders are cut off and cut down. Eventually only three remain - two Goblins and the human aiding them - and the survivors are taken captive. No sooner is that threat dealt with than Alyx joins the zombie hunt, which proves a much easier task thanks to the intervention of Tayka and her mastery of the dark arts. She manages to slow the creatures down considerably, and since those suffering from rigor mortis are rarely that quick on their feet anyway the fighters are able to make short work of them. May they rest in peace.

So it's all over, then? Well, not quite. A section of the army will remain stationed at Easterngate in anticipation of a second strike, Revek is looking for volunteers to investigate the city sewers in connection with the undead uprising, and Alyx also wants to question the captured Goblins. Before all that, though, the Baron has organised a feast to take place next month in celebration of Chevia's triumph. Let us all take the time to eat, drink and be merry, for who knows what tomorrow holds? Well, in Alyx's case, I do, and her future is not too bright, either. But that will have to wait.

*(Next time - Jailbreak!)*

# Zine Scene

## Milestones and Millstones

**JOHN HARRINGTON and COLIN FORBES look at gaming zines**

This issue, we're delighted to be running an update on the zine scene from John Harrington, who compiles the zine overview, *Mission from God*. If you want to see *Mission from God* itself, order a copy for 10x10p stamps from John at 1 Churchbury Close, Enfield, Middlesex EN1 3UW, or read it on his website: [www.fiendish.games.demon.co.uk](http://www.fiendish.games.demon.co.uk)

### Milestones and Millstones

by John Harrington

Milestones in the zine publishing world are celebrated as avidly as they are in cricket. As in cricket, the big milestone is 100, which might explain why the recent celebratory issues of *Greatest Hits 250* and *Cut & Thrust 200* were devoid of the usual bumper package of reprints and nostalgia.

Issue 250 of *Greatest Hits* was the usual eclectic mix of poker articles, recipes, film and book reviews plus general observations on life from editor Pete Birks. Oh - you thought this was a gaming zine? Well it is, there are games of Diplomacy and Fantasy Football within its pages, but in most PBM zines there is an element of 'chat' from the editor and *Greatest Hits* takes this to extremes. After 25 years of publishing, *Greatest Hits* remains one of the best reads in the hobby.

Conversely, *Cut & Thrust* is a zine with the emphasis firmly on games and lots of 'em. Issue 200 featured three parlour games (quizzes, word games et al), four games of Outpost (like Civilization without the map), one game of Diplomacy, three games of Railway Rivals, two games of Man-Eater (the splendid shark versus swimmers game), two games from the popular 18xx series of railway & finance games, one game of Cosmic Encounter (the game that inspired Magic the Gathering), a horse racing campaign and an En Garde! campaign. Had you signed up for all these you could be playing in 18 games for less than £1 a month for, unlike the (semi-)pro PBM hobby, in the zine-based hobby you pay to receive the zine whilst playing in the games is free, although some zines charge a nominal game fee of £1 per game.

Derek Wilson has been publishing *Cut & Thrust* for 20 years with metronomic reliability and should the world ever suffer from nuclear devastation I expect Derek would find a way to continue publishing even if only cockroaches and rats remain to read it.

Milestones can turn into millstones. Since hitting issue 100 and being voted best zine of 1999, Malcolm Cornelius's *Backstabbers United Monthly* (aka BUM) has run out of steam, although two lengthy interruptions caused by the death of Malcolm's parents have not helped. Zine publishing is a habit, and once something interrupts the routine it is often hard to regain the habit as the editor suddenly discovers all the free time he or she is now enjoying. Issue 114 of BUM may be the last - much may depend on reader response. When a zine folds it is customary for the games to be rehoused in another zine; Malcolm's BUM, as has often been observed, is enormous and too big to be subsumed into a single zine but no doubt the hobby will rally round to ensure no games are orphaned.

*Greatest Hits*, £1 from Pete Birks, Top Flat, 4 Lewisham Hill, London, SE13 7EJ. ([pbirks@btinternet.com](mailto:pbirks@btinternet.com))

*Cut & Thrust*, 65p plus postage from Derek Wilson, 1 Juniper Road, Horndean, Waterlooville, Hants, PO8 0DY ([cut.thrust@ntlworld.com](mailto:cut.thrust@ntlworld.com))

### Zine Updates

by Colin Forbes

#### To Win Just Once

The latest issue of TWJO arrived this morning, and another fine presentation it is too - blue card cover and well produced throughout. The bulk of the zine contains Pevans' En Garde game, Les Petites Betes Soyeuses, though some other games are starting to appear. ([twjo@pevans.co.uk](mailto:twjo@pevans.co.uk)).

#### Psychopath

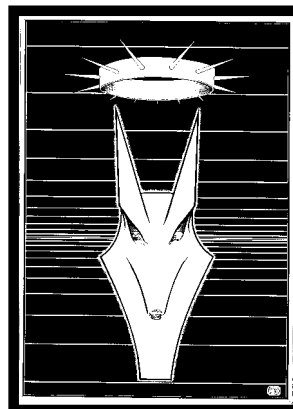
Editor Mike Dean has recently taken the decision to move the whole zine over to a web production, no longer supplying a downloadable PDF. Whilst this means the website ([www.psychozine.co.uk](http://www.psychozine.co.uk)) looks really good, it's always a shame not to be able to browse through a zine. I hope this change won't lead to a reduction in reader input.

#### Variable Pig

I've just seen my first copy of this zine, and am impressed. There are a lot of Railway Rivals style games, but also a new and interesting En Garde! variant getting under way. (<http://fp.sholing.f9.co.uk/Pig.htm>)

## Infinite Threads

**Infinite Threads** is a FREE 'zine and e-zine created and run by experienced players and GM's of Play-By-Mail and Play-By-Email games alike. The 'zine is published once month, with web updates (for fortnightly games) every two weeks. I.T. contains a number of articles and games - at present we have games of Diplomacy (and variants), Great White Hunter (politically incorrect Battleships), Soapbox (political satire), Stockbroker, and two RPGs (Bozisha Miraz and the 44 Nights of Amn).



In addition to all these games, each issue also features a variety of articles and readers letters. We've got plenty of ideas, and would welcome new GMs (you can run your own game, or one of ours).

Check out the website for more information on Infinite Threads - you can take a look at the games, or even download all the back issues.

[www.infinite-threads.co.uk](http://www.infinite-threads.co.uk)

Infinite Threads is published on paper, via email and on the web - it's up to you how you get your copy!

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# Bookstack

## The Crown of Silence

**JASON BROWN** turns the pages of *STORM CONSTANTINE's* new book ...

I HAD BEEN prepared not to enjoy this book: the first novel of The Magravandias Chronicles, *The Sea Dragon Heir*, never credibly came together, its focus poorly integrated, awkwardly and heavy-handedly shifting between characters, point of view and various plot threads, ending with a cliffhanger that was not only precipitous but a complete departure from the previous storylines. It was difficult to detect any over-arching intention behind the multiple, wandering narratives, the story seeming as if inventing itself as it went along, with both the writing and the story being told largely conventional and pedestrian, especially when compared to the author's early work in *Wraeththu*. Further, one of the primary characters, Pharinet, who dominates the first half of the book, was particularly (though perhaps intentionally) difficult to relate to: self-centred and destructive in her obsessions, her characterization would have been more approachable had it seemed to serve some evolving or intrinsic narrative purpose. But by book's end, especially with an almost total shift in the second half of the novel to a character whose portrayal seemed almost a counterpoint as well as an abrupt departure in narrative focus, the purpose behind Pharinet's actions and depiction remained unclear, with little promise of resolution or further development offered by the book's conclusion. Not an auspicious beginning!

Therefore, it was gratifying to discover *Crown of Silence* as a novel in which the author is now in full mastery of her craft, successfully interweaving her multiple plotlines and characters in a manner absent in the first instalment, and with an intention and style that elevates it well beyond the ordinary fantasy. As indicated by the initial book's conclusion, here the author shifts her story away from Pharinet and most of the earlier novel's characters, figures such as Valraven Palindrake and Prince Bayard present only on the periphery of the story, regardless of any potential hinted at for the future.

The story opens with the destruction of a rural village far from the shores of Caradore or the heart of the Magravandian Empire, with the brutal rape of a peasant boy, Shan, and his subsequent rescue by a stranger. This episode will set in motion a series of events that will ultimately lead to a spiritual quest and testing that will eventually divide its participants and announce the existence of a true king who will oppose and destroy the Empire.

Sounds rather familiar, doesn't it? However, there is far more going on here than the conventional quest tale, with its echoes of Arthurian romance. While reflections of the Grail quest and the realm of faery are evident - episodes of the wild hunt; the sacrificial king and his intimate connection to well-being of the land; rituals in the cycle of death and rebirth dressed with holly, yew and ash; a Lady of the Lake as well as Avalon; visual symbols and references that could have come straight out of Boorman's *Excalibur*; even simulacra of the four principal knights of the Grail, Galahad, Percivale, Bors and Lancelot, whose counterpart likewise fails -- in *Crown of Silence* they are differently guised, arising from a far different crucible and circumstance, allegorically serving symbolisms at once ancient and contemporary. The 'angel' that delivers the Grail -- here a crown -- is a far cry from Gabriel, scarred and Promethean, with closer associations with the fallen nephilim than the voice of a Christian god.

In this allegorical tale of spiritual struggle and redemption, more modern day issues such as rape and victimization are equally being explored, along with the destruction of the spirit inherent in self-abnegation and a refusal to embrace and affirm our own acts and experiences, regardless of outcome or motivation. Socratic and Aristotelian beliefs are examined and called into question, along with the potential vacuum of relativism, even though fear

resides in belief, and the responsibilities inherent in personal choice and self-determinism. The author posits that only through acceptance and affirmation of life, embracing both the good and the bad, confronting self-knowledge, 'dancing on both sides of the coin', does an individual participate in life and the world around them, the former's energy the only constant, denial the equivalence of death. In this respect the author has completely recontextualized the earlier Arthurian legends and romance, directing the myth towards a far different purpose, and one that would likely makes its original authors shudder.

On only one occasion do I find the author stumbles, undermining one of her themes. This takes place in the seduction of Shan by the sorceress Sinaclara, though the action is, in many ways, too matter of fact in delivery to be accurately described as such. While I have no problem with sexuality in print or image if it serves a purpose, even one as banal and obvious as verisimilitude with reality, when it becomes gratuitous, conforming to sexual stereotypes -- here a beautiful, older woman seducing a handsome 17-year-old virgin under the guise of instruction, sex lasting all day, writhings on the floor in multiple orgasms and screams of passion that fill the walls of an entire manor and end in a humorous interruption -- it becomes sheer Hollywood, no more compelling than the obligatory, filmic tit. Considering the serious aspect of much of the author's other sexual content, scenes such as this are something she'd be well advised to steer clear of.

Finally, this novel contains some of the best chapters concerning the lessons of a magician's apprentice since Merlyn's instruction of Wart in T H White's *The Once and Future King*. While lacking the latter's often delightfully whimsical and anthropomorphized tutelage, Shan's apprenticeship shares many similarities, as well as a seriousness of intention. Both in manner of portrayal and purpose, these episodes stand well apart from the usual mystic mumbo-jumbo or pyrotechnics normally associated with training in the magical arts -- magic here being as much existential as sorcerous.

Has Constantine redeemed the seemingly halting, peripatetically focused narrative of her first novel with the second? This waits to be seen, and depends in large part on whether she can integrate the events and characters of that novel more fully into those that succeed. *Crown of Silence* is certainly a giant step forward in this effort, and taken singly and on its own, is one of the better epic fantasy novels to have come out in the past year.

*The Crown of Silence, Storm Constantine, Victor Gollancz, 344 pages*

### *Storm Constantine at a glance*

Storm Constantine was born in 1956 in England. She attended Stafford Art College in 1971-72 and worked as a finance officer in Staffordshire. Her writing career began with *The Enchantments of Flesh and Spirit* in 1987. Storm Constantine's other novels include *The Bewitchments of Love and Hate* (1988), *The Fulfilments of Fate and Desire* (1989), *The Monstrous Regiment* (1990), *Aleph* (1991), *Hermitech* (1991), *Burying the Shadow* (1992), *Sign for the Sacred* (1993), *Calenture* (1994), *Stalking Tender Prey* (1995) and *Scenting Hallowed Blood* (1996).

Storm Constantine: <http://members.aol.com/Malaktawus/Home.htm>





*[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 July 15th

David Ames, Jason Brown, Duncan Chisholm, Terry Crook, Larry Deyell, Howard Evans, Patrick Gleeson, Martin Helsdon, David James, Jim Kemeny, Joe McCarthy, Neil Murdoch, Carol Mulholland, Nicc Newton, Nick Palmer, Graham Sproston, Ben Williams

## GAMES FEATURED THIS ISSUE

### En Garde!

**Terry Crook** - 'The Sun King - Going very slowly on the turn around, which is frustrating. I am trying to get my character Cherlux Hommes, a priest, to SL 5 so I can get him promoted to Abbe and then into parliament and a chaplaincy. Awaiting the next turn, which I hope, should be here by the time this comes out!'

**LBPS** - Ha! No such problems in this game: bang on the nail every time and posted on the website within days as well! Here I play a lowly Sub in the Kings Musketeers. After a few months at the front all I have is one MiD and about 1,500 of loot. Hope the coming months see me get the necessary SP to get my captaincy and get away from those awful duties which us Subbies have to do each month!'

### Kings of Karadon

**Jason Brown** - 'Although the turnaround is slower than it once was (the GM has a full-time job) this is made up for by the complex nature of the game which demands a good deal of time. Plots and fiendish and turn material is well presented and copious.'

**Patrick Gleeson** - 'The plot thickens in game 1 with emissaries arriving from off-map. Or is it off-map? There were rumours some while ago that the GM would be expanding the game world. At any rate, it's certainly given me plenty to think about, and with it the realisation that all our plotting in game is but part of the big world-wide picture. I wouldn't drop this game if you shot me in the head.'

**Duncan Chisholm** - 'Although the game has been officially put on hold for a while owing to a illness in the family, game 1 has recently appeared on the doormat with a note from the GM explaining that he will chip away at games anyway. Admirable dedication, and I suppose it's a welcome distraction.'

**Game 1: The Great Winter:** It looks as though we are getting closer to finding a way of countering the magical winter that holds the lands in its icy grip. And just as well too! With agricultural output hitting rock bottom, across the world thousands, if not millions, of people are starving to death. The seas to the north of my land appear to be freezing over too. Interestingly

I don't yet know whether this means I can march troops across, though ships are definitely blocked.

On top of everything else I've been approached by an ambassador from "Across the Western Ocean". This is officially off-map, so it's an interesting twist to the game.

**Game 2: The Return of the Ancients:** I can't really say too much about this game. Not only have I been in it for a mere three turns, but my position is such that I don't want to give too much away. The newsletters seem to be bigger than in other games, even though there are less players. A sign of a healthy game I'd say! The good news is that there are several places available in this game.'

**Ben Williams** - 'Since the end of game 4 I haven't been playing in a game of Karadon, but I have just joined the open-ended game 2. This seems a much more complicated version of the basic game, not so much in terms of the game mechanics, but there are a lot more plots going on and, more importantly, there is much more you can do about them!'

The special actions take this excellent game to a new dimension. I am seriously considering joining game 1 as well (also open-ended, though with different plot lines). I must be mad, Karadon is not a game to undertake lightly as diplomacy can be intense and turns can take some time to write (simply because there is so much to do!) Great value for money.'

*[There's a delay in Kings of Karadon at present; players have been informed. See the note in Spokesmen.]*

## Legends

**Jim Kemeny** - 'The Legends Position Editor allows the exchange of information that greatly enhances alliances and factions. Data can be exported (a file created that can be sent as an email attachment), the exporting player having full control over what to send. This is done by setting toggles ranging from exporting everything to terrain only, or just a few provinces of your mapping.'

Factions normally share all information, and here's where the fun starts. Assume the game has fortnightly turns and there are six players in a faction who process with two-day intervals between them. Player 1's turn shows that a scout has sighted an enemy army nearby. He emails his turn results to his allies. Players 2 and 3 are too far away to send assistance but player 2 has a character who casts a scry spell on the army to find out whose it is and its composition. Player 3 does likewise to see if the army has moved so the date of the enemy player's turn can be identified. Player 4 can put a blocking force in the way, player 5 scries the enemy army to see if it has moved and can send a good mage to cast a blocking spell. Player 6 can get her army there to deal with the enemy.

Over a few weeks players can watch campaigns unfold as armies move across the terrain in move and counter-move. Sharing full turn data makes this possible.'

## ROLEPLAYING GAMES

### Absolute Power

**Nick Palmer** - 'Absolute Power has been suspended, as the GM has decided it's no longer manageable in its present form. (In my opinion it had become *too* open to ideas: you could try anything from psychic power to religious miracles to hi-tech science, with myriad subplots - all very interesting but it must have sprawled out of control.)'

Silver Dreamer is back in the picture and seeking to revamp it with more computer moderation and then do a relaunch. The other "Absolute" games are not affected, and there appears to be no question of players losing their credit - in fact it doesn't seem that the problem was financial, but simply the GM only having N hours a week to handle it all.'

*[We've had this officially confirmed; see Spokesmen for the details.]*

### Conclave

**David Ames** - 'This is a newly started single person, fixed ended fantasy game run by Undying King, currently as an e-mail only option. As the game opens the northern cities are being threatened by a tidal wave of



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## VALKYRIE

attacks from the Barbarian Elves, not only that but the world is dying and the population blame magicians for using up the innate magical energy of the world and so causing the crisis. Player interaction is via the quietish bulletin board but as I have said, the game is not yet fully in swing so I am sure this will hot up.

Still time to join up as the plot is continuing to unfold, but do so quickly.'

## Crack of Doom

**David Ames** - 'Still playing this one with my irreverent Goblin Clan after completing my Flagship review a couple of years ago. The colourful and imaginative writing of the Harlequin moderator (John) keep this one entertaining, as the game lurches from one (in-game) crisis to another. Plenty of fun role-playing to be had on the bulletin board too.

One to sign up for if you like mixed moderation games.'

## Einstein's Lot

**Carol Mulholland** - 'Ooh, er, should I get my character to go in search of one Geraldine Roberts, who sounds as if she could be well in league with dark forces? A terrible hush fell in the village pub when Alison mentioned her name, after finding her visiting card beside the local holy well... Maybe it wasn't such a good idea for Alison to drink from the well? Maybe I should have got her to destroy the visiting card in my last orders?

I'm enjoying this game, though it may move rather slowly for some players' tastes. GM Chris tends to end a turn in the middle of a conversation, so that you can choose further questions for your character to ask, which seems a bit odd until you get used to it. I'm keen to find out more about what's going on, and don't mind taking things cautiously. No deadlines, either, which suits me.

So far, Alison has encountered a chapel with an inscription she still can't translate, and a holy well: conflict between a lion and a serpent is an underlying motif. These creatures are possibly of Egyptian origin, though the symbolism seems to be connected with celtic mythology too.

I find the game intriguing and am in no hurry to find out what's really going on.'

## Xott Grande

**Larry Deyell** - 'Just when Unexplained finished, and I thought life would never be the same, along comes Mr Dunks with a ray of sunshine. Great, long turns, with plenty of action, atmosphere and humour, and the added bonus of other human beings to share the adventure.

At the time of writing, some characters have already been thrown out of an Inn for causing a small explosion in the bar-room. It's becoming apparent that we're in another reality, with the aim of trying to save our own reality - which is keeping us all thinking. On top of that, it would seem that most of our own party have got their own agendas... The only sand in the vase line is the GM's continuing refusal to let my character purchase a pygmy woolly mammoth.'

# HISTORICAL ROLEPLAYING

## Heroes of Olynthus

**Jason Brown** - 'Still going well, and gaining players which is good to see (providing the GM doesn't get too swamped!) I seem to have become caught up in some nasty plotting which is going on in Sumer at present. I'm not sure that I trust the Priests of Nebo, they're up to something, but what?'

**Patrick Gleeson** - 'Oh my god! They always said that knowledge was power, but until now I had not realised how dangerous even a little of the truth could be! Paranoia has struck and Apollodorus the historian is seriously unsure who, if anyone, he should share the awful truth with. Then there's the College of Chaldeans. I think they're a little bit miffed with me. Not too bad you might think, until you realise that these guys wield almost god-like powers.

Turns are meaty and full of detail, but never before has one of my

characters been posed with such a dilemma in a roleplaying game. Enjoyable does not suffice as a description.'

*[There's a delay in Timewyrm's games at present; players have been informed. See the note in Spokesmen.]*

## La Gloire du Roi

**Terry Crook** - 'Set in the 1700s, this is still the best game around of its type for me, although Rosewar (reported later) is a close second. This game has so many layers to it and I am still to discover them all after playing for some two and a half years! There is just so much you can do and try: if you like power games with a capital P then this is the one for you. Alternately if you like RPG, this game has it as well in the form of "For God King and Country", the game within the game, where you take it on in the form of a character and play it as such, the difference being you are also at the mercy/pleasure of the PCs as well as the GM, who control the countries you live in! I played a PC for a while before being offered a powerful position in the same game and my PC is now in the press and going great guns!'

**Nicc Newton** - 'Still enjoying this immensely, there are plenty of developments in the game I play in to keep the interest and anticipation well up. Richard's GMing is excellent, just when you think you have something organised and ready to go he throws in a curve-ball to keep you on your toes. Would recommend it to anyone, in fact I so enjoy LGDR that I started up in ...'

## Gunboat Diplomacy

**Nicc Newton** - 'If anything the atmosphere in this is better than LGDR. I think the range of positions available has allowed players to really get into character and go completely over the top - there are more double barrelled and triple-barrelled landed English gentry than an entire collection of Burke's Peerage; more inscrutable Chinese than in a season of Fu Man Chu movies, more gung-ho Americans than Iwo Jima and more cunning plots than a collection of Agatha Christie, and... I actually seem to be doing quite well too! Well worth a try and thanks to the other players for making the letters and diplomacy so enjoyable.'

**Terry Crook** - 'Another power game, this time set in the 1880s of China and all that goes with it, secret societies, warlords, steamboat captains, mercenaries, etc. I must stress that if you join, then have a game plan in mind, for if not you will soon lose interest. Play the game with certain objectives in mind and it will be much more fun.

One player has opted to become a cable-laying captain on a ship, laying cables between Hong Kong to Shanghai, what ever suits you I suppose!'

*[We'd forgotten to add Gunboat Diplomacy to Galactic View, blush, but have now corrected this oversight.]*

# ADVENTURE GAMES

## Quest G.M.E.

**Larry Deyell** - 'On the point of dropping this altogether, after playing for a good few years now. Maybe it's just me, but the GMed worlds don't seem to have the fun atmosphere of the old ones, (which, admittedly, are still running, but without newsletters, so what's the point?) and as far as I can make out, the only players actively seeing any benefits of having a GM in place are those who've joined an alliance.

Still, I dare say I'll be hanging on for some time to come, just to see if my interest picks up, more than anything else, but it just seems all the joy has disappeared from the game.'

# FANTASY WARGAMES

## Middle Earth PBM

**Patrick Gleeson** - 'I've just re-started this game after a break of quite a few years. First impressions are that the game really hasn't dated at all, it still looks better than most games I have seen and the game system is still challenging enough to maintain one's interest. I decided to go for a three-

week game to give me time to ponder my moves and get to grips with the rules again. Whilst this has also left plenty of time for team communication, I think I shall be sticking to the shorter turnaround games in future.

If you haven't played Middle Earth in a while - perhaps you were put off by the standard of GMing under GAD - then I can heartily recommend trying the game again. Harlequin are the epitome of professionalism, and friendly to boot.'

## Serim Ral

**Howard Evans** - 'Having read the review in last month's issue, I was surprised to read about the problems the reviewer was having in casting spells with his wizards, success with his priests and building castles. I am playing with Incubus Designs in the Renaissance version. By turn 5 I had five castles (this is my first game and with hindsight could have build more) my priests were casting spells successfully from turn 1 and the wizards, once they had received the components, from turn 2. Each turn by praying and building libraries they have learnt more and better spells. I am up to turn 20 and have managed to expand. I am in the list of top ten nations, have large stockpiles and am about to experience combat. Some players have been fighting since very early in the game. I can only assume that Incubus use a different or improved version of the game.

Serim Ral has been around for many years and in my view falls into the category of a really good game, provides thought, careful planning, diplomacy, high anticipation and good and helpful GMs - only one problem: why didn't I try it earlier? Incubus have an excellent web site giving player help, proclamation page and more. So go on, contact Incubus Designs and try a game, you won't be disappointed.'

*[I think all three firms who run Serim Ral are friendly and reliable: maybe prospective players should check all three, to find out who can offer startup positions first?]*

## War of The Dark God

**David James** - 'Really enjoying this one; it's what I think a fantasy wargame should be like, interesting, good depth and atmosphere, with very different nations and powers etc.

GM is also close to saint-like with help with my mistakes, and even let me play Throne of Cofain for free! I'm even happy when I am being wiped out!

The only problem is that it is a team based game, and depends upon a lot of email based communication. Still, that means that there is some useful advice available. The software used is also impressive (and even reliable), complete with colour maps.'

## Throne of Cofain

**David James** - 'A simplified version of WODG, still quite good fun, but the monsters are more of a problem than the other players at first! Possibly less forgiving than WODG because you get no advice from other players.'

## Hand of the Demon

**David James** - 'Very minimalist fantasy war game. Unfortunately (and perhaps unfairly) the maps and turns suffer in comparison with War of The Dark God. Still playing after some time, even if I am not doing too well, so must have something to recommend it.'

# NON-FANTASY WARGAMES

## Crisis

**Colin Forbes** - Thoroughly enjoying my first game, so much so in fact that I've signed up for another game. This time though I won't make all those mistakes that I made first time round! Whilst it would be nice if the game was presented more attractively, the actual gameplay is absorbing and (given enough number-crunching) leaves room for some creativity which has led to several interesting possibilities!

# SPORTS GAMES

## Premier League Fantasy Football

*[This is a game that was new to us until this complaint arrived...]*

**Neil Murdoch** - 'I'm writing about the game Premier League Fantasy Football, run by Graham and Colin Sproston. I joined the game in February, paying for my turnsheets in advance at 2.25 per game; I was regularly paying for four turns in advance. This was all going sweet, with me second from the top with a promise of £125 to the winner, £80 to the runner up - quite a bonus for the average pbmailer. Then, when nearing the end of the season - nothing. Reports came from their HQ that the computers had gone down but they would soon be on-line.

With it being a postal game, surely they should have my details on file (paper-work), as I have received line-up sheets via post from them previously? I kept in contact, got palmed off with excuse after excuse that the game would return as it was etc, etc, I kept patient like the other managers, then I was browsing on the web to discover that they had scrapped the league for that season, without getting in touch with me to explain what was going on and also they still owed me the money that I had paid for three weeks credit.

I got in touch with them to be told that all the managers had decided to offer the prize money to a charity, which I find hard to believe they did, also they claim that they don't have my address, though it was convenient for them to have my address when demanding credits for the weekly turnsheets.

As they are still recruiting new players, I want to warn PBM fans. They even told me that I wasn't welcome because I was playing just for money?! They advertised that it was for prize money, they charged people money every week, so if that was the case, why didn't they do it FREE??

I'm still waiting on them refunding my credit with them, which they said they would do, over a month ago...'

*[We sent emailed a copy of this complaint to Graham and Colin Sproston, offering right of reply...]*

**Graham Sproston** - 'I am glad to hear from you and I am glad that you have a company that judges companies on their service to their customers. Therefore I would be glad if you show people my email address or website address ([www.plff.co.uk](http://www.plff.co.uk)). We have nothing on this earth to hide from.

As for Neil Murdoch: We did offer cash prizes but we were NOT near the end of the season like this person says !!!! We had played 8-9 games out of a full 48 games !! So by my reckoning this is about a fifth of the season so what he says about "almost ending the season" is rubbish. I do owe him three turns which I offered him, but we do not refund turns if players stop playing. In his case the computer did break down and we run a totally different game. I have posted his money to him but as yet this person hasn't received it.

You can say what you want about my firm but we are 100% honest and have numerous people that will say exactly the same. I do understand that you have a job to do and I grant you that. What Mr Murdoch can't understand is that our computer went down and with it his home address !!!! Every other manager understood this bar him (Murdoch, that is). You must know from experience that if your computer freezes then that is goodnight Vienna. I can't just enter my brain cells to cluster up his home address !!!!! This person will get his money and you can say what you want about my company but I personally don't care. We are 100% genuine and if you would like to call around at my address I will gladly talk with you one to one (10 Kent Avenue, Formby, Merseyside, L37 6BE) or telephone me on 017048 70603 and we will discuss the situation. Personally this guy is out of line as I cannot tell the computer that has gone wrong to tell me his home address!

Thanks for your time.'

*[We haven't yet heard whether Neil Murdoch's outstanding credit has been returned. I have, however, replied to Graham Sproston (i) that I hope that this event has showed the importance of keeping regular backups and (ii) that cash prizes are unwise and possibly illegal - C]*

## SCIENCE FICTION GAMES

### Star Empires

**David James** - 'Just couldn't get into this one at all. Lost interest within half a dozen turns.'

### A bright sci fi future

**Nicc Newton** - 'Even though I'm hooked on the historical stuff I haven't hung the Blaster Rifle over the fireplace just yet.'

Two big games are on the Sci Fi event horizon - KJC's Phoenix and Madhouse's Destiny. Having perused the various web sites it looks like the race is on to see who can get their game out first ...

KJC are dumping the brilliant but flawed BSE and replacing it with Phoenix. On paper, or rather digital image, KJC seem to be slightly ahead in the release stakes. However, in Destiny (their incarnation of the long promised Starjammer) Madhouse have the tried and tested Nexus engine, much beloved by all Dungeonworlders, while KJC are having to start programming from scratch. So it could be a tortoise and hare race, with Madhouse coming up fast on the rails ...

Phoenix will include some elements of BSE as background and so that the current players will have some history at the beginning. KJC are also reportedly removing the notoriously fickle GM element which is a much welcomed change. Although, on the downside it seems that new players will only be able to join "affiliations" run by current players, rather than being able to take the independent path, as these groups will be the only source of resources, colonies and ship upgrades. This could be a big turn-off for those who don't want to have their every move dictated by an "empire" of other players. Costs are expected to be similar or slightly less than BSE

Early indications are that Destiny's scenario is going to be much more pulp 50's science fiction, with most things a little over the top: think of all those old sci-fi movies - The Thing, The Blob, etc then throw in a bit of the corporation-run society from Soilent Green and Rollerball.

It will also run on a number of levels, PC crewed starships, colonies and single PC space fighters engaged in a battle with aliens from another dimension, with respective turn fees. Downside seems to be some limits on space combat, but Destiny does promise an innovative starship design. One that has the facility to add on multiple "hulls" or modules to a basic design giving each player an opportunity to have their own unique ship, rather than a standard model.

Which will be the better game? Hard to say at this stage: KJC has the BSE experience and a small group of loyal BSE players to kick start Phoenix, but this could result in it becoming just a re-hashed BSE, with all the old problems ... On the other hand, Madhouse has the nexus engine, an exciting and original design, lots of enthusiasm but with a long way still to go ...

Watch the skies!'

## WEB-BASED GAMES

### Lords of the Earth

**Martin Helsdon** - 'Having recently started playing in a US based Lords of the Earth campaign, I was intrigued to learn of a new game, LOTE 42, being organised by a UK based GM. The game year commences in approximately 1100 AD, a little differently from the majority of other LOTE campaigns, and is intended to be fairly historically accurate. The campaign already has a web site, with detailed and very colourful area maps and a brief historical and cultural outline of most positions.

Not being an experienced LOTE player, I am not in a position to comment on the proposed rule changes (whilst all LOTE games use the same basic rules, there are variants according to GM style and taste.)

The campaign is intended for rookie players, especially from the UK, with old hands being offered whatever is left. The presentation is excellent and bodes well for the future of the campaign.'

### RoseWar

**Terry Crook** - 'You will not see this game advertised in the magazine as it is a labour of love by Sheldon Stevens, but what a game. Set at the time of

the Wars of the Roses, hence the title! It is a little gem and runs to varied turnarounds, but well worth the wait. Costs are very little indeed and the GM keeps an account of how much you have, unlike some! (Read last months Letters for that). You play either a Lancastrian or a Yorkist. You start as the head of a family, in my case the Earl of Shrewsbury, complete with extended family and three set tasks for him/family to achieve. If he dies your next in line takes over, but with a new set of tasks set to his personality.

Currently there are about 20 players, with no room for any new ones, however Sheldon does have a mailing list for when vacancies crop up, unfortunately it is email and first come first served basis. It took me nine months and three attempts to get a position on the game! You can follow the action and read about past events at his web site, which is:

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

*[We're always happy to describe and list games, as part of the PBM community, even if they've no room for more players.]*

### Tribe Net

**Joe McCarthy** - 'The first battle between the Bushido tribe of Staffords and the Host tribe of the Heck'r we resulted in an extremely one-sided victory for the Host. For the loss of a mere 188 dead, the Heck'r we caused 614 battle casualties and captured 751 others in the subsequent looting. That's 1,365 casualties, only a small portion of which are wounded who will heal (maybe less than 100, but no more than 150). The rest are gone. The Staffords were routed in the field. The Stafford army was from the unit that destroyed the Host tribe of SPUDS back in 918 and broke from the Host, becoming apostates and slavers.

The Staffords are also being hard-pressed in the West from a mysterious tribe of fur wearing primitives, who make up in stealth and woodcraft what they lack in technology.

The question now remains, what surprise do the tribes of the Way of the Blue Wolf have in store for the barbarian Bushido tribes? A warrior may fall like a cherry blossom, in the full bloom of life, but once fallen he is no different than someone dead of the plague. He is still dead.'

## NEW GAMES

### Prometheus

**Patrick Gleeson** - 'Game one is under way and is looking like it will be rather fun. The rulebook is well laid out, though at times the English is a little kooky, it comes I guess of being an imported game (from Germany). My original gamestart was truly abysmal and I was worried that other players might have an undue advantage as a result. As things turned out however, I wasn't alone in this and the GM agreed to re-start the game and twiddle with the set-up program to ensure that everyone received starting positions that gave a certain minimum level of resources. I like GMs that listen to players and aren't afraid to admit they were wrong.'

**Ben Williams** - 'I have just started in game one, and I am very impressed. In many ways the concept behind Prometheus seems like a slightly souped up PBM version of the Civilisation computer game, which promises well for the future of Prometheus!

My starting position is small, one settlement with some very basic units. Fortunately there's a fair bit to do on the first turn, most importantly being the need to send out military units to explore the map (others must stay put to guard your town). I started with one Settler unit, and have moved this off and settled it. Unfortunately this appears to have been a mistake, since it is really too close to my existing town. Worse still, my explorers have returned with news of more fertile terrain in the other direction! So I shall have to build another Settler unit, knocking out substantial segment of my town's population. But there is some good news: my work gangs have cultivated the soil of my capital and have built roads all around. Next turn I'm going to chop down some of a nearby forest as I badly need wood for hospitals and other buildings.

A good game, well-presented both on paper and email (I'd personally recommend email play as the maps are in colour and thus clearer).'

**Duncan Chisholm** - 'Just started in this interesting game. If you've ever played the computer game 'Civilisation' you'll be familiar with the general concept of the game. It seems well-designed, with a handy order code system that allows you to achieve quite a lot with a surprisingly small amount of orders. However I fully expect to start running out of order slots later in the game!

*[There's a delay in Hunky Monkey's games at present; players have been informed. See the note in Spokesmen.]*

## FIRMS

### Harlequin Games

**Patrick Gleeson** - 'I felt I had to write in to praise Harlequin games. In my Tailpiece article ('The NPC Debate', issue 91) I mentioned that I had experienced some difficulties with Middle Earth during the time the game was run by GAD Games. No sooner had the issue come out, than a package arrived on my doorstep, along with a very nice letter inviting me to try Middle Earth again. The bonus of a number of free turns was more than I could resist and I have now joined a game, which I am enjoying immensely. Proof that GMs pay attention to what they read in Flagship!'

### Hunky Monkey

**Jason Brown** - 'Pete Thornhill's comments in the last issue seem well over the top to me. I too am down to play in Lords of Morkar, and my experience simply doesn't fit that described by Mr Thornhill. I have been kept fully and regularly informed and am entirely happy with the situation. It looks as if a letter or two has gone astray - perhaps he has moved and not told the GM? It's a shame Pete Thornhill couldn't have contacted the GM before writing such a heated letter. Oh, and game one of Prometheus has started well before the June 2002 date forecast in Mr Thornhill's letter!'

**Patrick Gleeson** - 'So, let me get this right. Someone has waited a while for a game to start, during which time the GM has been sending out regular updates. The updates stop coming through the letterbox yet evidence suggests that the GM is still active. What do you do? Of course, you write to the GM querying what is going on. You do NOT complain to Flagship in an unreasonable manner! In my experience with Hunky Monkey (and Pole Star before them) the GM is unfailingly polite and professional. The GM started a "real" job and explained to all of us that this would mean no new games would start until one of the games of Karadon had finished. Pretty reasonable if you ask me. Clearly not all Flagship correspondents are so reasonable. And as for the crack about Prometheus not starting until June 2002, CLANG! Wrong, wrong and wrong again. We're now into game 1 and everything is running smoothly.'

## ZINES

### Infinite Threads

**Patrick Gleeson** - 'Issue 4 seems to have swollen considerably, which is surely a good sign. More games are under way, and whilst I happen to be a Diplomacy fan, it's good to see that the 'zine isn't reliant on Dippy and its variants. There's an intriguing RPG, the politically incorrect fun of Great White Hunter, some humorous ranting in Hung Parliament and loads more. Ooh, and I'm happy to report that I appear to be winning the stocks and shares game!'

### Psychopath

**Patrick Gleeson** - 'I've only just downloaded this one from the website, and unfortunately seem to have missed all the deadlines for this issue. Never mind, there's always next time! The zine looks really attractive - the editor is clearly a talented man. There's lots of discussion as well as games, and although this can sometimes come across as cliquey, it's usually been my experience with 'zines that this is not in actual fact the case.'

*[Deadline for next issue: November 1st]*

# Hall of Fame

### Battle for the Planets - Harlequin Games

Game 14 ended with a solo victory for the Seekers, commanded by **Wilfred Wijbenga**. An impressive win not only for its speed (the game finished a good 15 turns earlier than is usual), but for being the first time the Seekers have won.

### Middle Earth - Harlequin Games

**Game 19 (TA: 1650)** started with early dominance from the Free, who blasted their way into the heart of Mordor with large armies and pretty much had the run of the military game, with the Witch King out of Angmar and the Dragon Lord out of Mirkwood. However, in the far deserts, the three Neutrals and the southern Dark Servants were playing a game of brinkmanship, leading eventually to a realisation that the game would end in a Free victory unless all three neutrals went Dark. Rhudaur had also joined Sauron and only the Dunlendings went Free. This 4 to 1 imbalance started to overturn the supremacy of the Free, with agent, emissary and curse teams recovering property lost earlier. Eventually the minions of Mordor overwhelmed the resistance and victory went to the Dark Lieutenants played by DS team leader **Kevin o'Keefe**.

**Game 52 (TA: 1650)** finished with a win for the Free People on turn 16. The top 3 nations: Eothraim at 1400 VP, Haradwaith at 1375 VP, Corsairs at 1367 VP. Of the neutrals Rhudaur stayed neutral the whole game, but managed to take out Cardolan on his own (Arthedain(me) was busy with the Witch King at the time :). The rest had joined, or was joining, the Free People. Most of them complained about a lack of response from the Dark Servants, and also heard little or nothing from them during the game, which made recruiting them for the Free People easy. Not sure how many we took out, but at least the Witch King and Blind Sorcerer was in the game, the WK being down to 2305 as his MT left, which was under siege by the Dwarves while waiting for enough forces to capture it. So a big thanks to all in this game, and a very big one to **Michael Kamine** for his excellent play as Eothraim.

**Game 46 (FA: 1000)** was a three team scenario which ended in victory for the forces of the FP. The Individual laurels go to the might of **David Slatter**. Outclassed economically the Neutrals (played by GMs and friends) were playing for a draw (ended on turn 45) but the strategic victory (fought over by both Neutrals and FPs) was eventually taken by the FPs. DS were quickly eliminated from the game. 2nd was **Phillip Quirk**, 3rd **Andy Naylor**.

## Advertisers' Index

Agema Publications .....	2
Daredevil .....	33
Harlequin .....	16
Hunky Monkey .....	20
Infinite Threads .....	38
Interesting Times .....	25
KJC Games .....	52
Leisure Games .....	31
Pagoda .....	12
TimePatterns PBM .....	51
Titan PBM .....	26
Ulaidh Games .....	41
Valkyrie .....	41
Warpstone .....	31
Westpoint .....	35

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



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 listing here and then 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 *Runovers*).

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 GAMES

NEW: -  
DELETED: David Hoare, Lombot Publishing  
CHANGE OF ADDRESS: Undying King, Nick Haynes, Richard Miles  
Total: 112 active UK GMs

#### A&D Entertainment

PO Box 108, Becton, Stowmarket IP14 4RX  
Website: <http://facebook2.demon.co.uk>  
fax: 01449 781916

#### Absolom, Mike

96 Bishopswood Road, Tadley, Hants RG26 4HG  
Website: <http://members.aol.com/SatSouthGM>  
MAbsolom@aol.com

#### Arena Publications

3 Workscop Rd, Off Carlton Rd, Sneinton, Nottingham NG3 2BA  
Website: <http://go.ta.gamla>

#### Andrews, Colin

26 Brown Edge Road, Holts, Oldham, OL4 5QG  
Apex Games, POB 56, Gravesend, Kent DA11 9LT  
tel: 01202 767243 (after 6pm)

#### Bagley, Adrian

28 The Oasis, Lindsay Road, Branksome Park, Poole, Dorset BH13 6AP  
tel: 01202 767243 (after 6pm)

#### Baylis, Chris

67 Mychans, Lee Chapel North, Basildon, Essex SS15 5EG  
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  
1065532107@compuserve.com

#### Burroughs, Martin

15 New Earth St, Oldham OL4 5ES  
tel: 01952 413655

#### Burrows, Pete

Buzzwack PBM, 8 Magnolia Court, Beeston, Nottingham, NG9 3LG  
Website: <http://www.buzzwackpbm.freemove.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

#### Camelot Games

6 Llys-Y-Fael, Caernarfon, Gwynedd LL55 2LU  
Campbell, Alex, Families Centre, 1 BN REME, BFPO 36

#### Carter, Dave

Scorpiogames, 13 Liverpool Rd South, Burscough, Lancs L40 7SU  
dave@clara.net or injelbreck@aol.com  
website: <http://www.scorpiogames.co.uk>

#### Casey, Ashley

16 Willow Grove, Harrogate, North Yorkshire, HG1 4HP  
serpent@ashcasey.co.uk

#### Championship League

PO Box 1966, Kilmarnock KA1 1BF  
tel (Brian Jan, Yvonne): 01563 536515; fax 01563 536565

#### Cleopatra Computer Games

82 Farringdon Avenue, Bromley, Kent BR2 8RU  
Cookshaw, Mark, 10 Ellis Close, Glenfield, Leicester LE3 8DV

#### Cooksey, Dave

2 Penerton Rd, Basingstoke, Hants RG21 5LW  
dmcgames@aol.com

#### Cozens, Richard

16 Fox Close, Boston, Lines PE21 8EE  
r.cozens@ukonline.co.uk  
website: <http://web.ukonline.co.uk/r.cozens>

#### Crawford, 4 Barleyfield

Clayton-Le Woods, Preston, Lancs PR5 8HQ  
andy@crawfordworld.com  
website: <http://www.crawfordworld.com>

#### Cruikshank, Michael

52/4 Bryson Road, Edinburgh  
mcruikshank@ntlworld.com

#### Cydlops PBM

18 Knighton Road, Romford, Essex RM7 9BS  
Daredevil, 178 Hall Lane, Upminster, Essex RM14 1AT  
daredevil@darvorders.fs.co.uk

#### Darker Times

The, 176 College Street, Long Eaton, Nottingham NG10 4GX  
live2game@hotmail.com

#### Draes Games

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derek@draesgames.co.uk  
website: <http://www.draesgames.co.uk>

#### Dunedin Games

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dunedin@crumbie88.freemove.co.uk

#### Dunks, Antony

Far Horizon, Sark, Guernsey GY9 0SE  
sark@xatt.net  
website: <http://www.xatt.net>  
tel/fax: 01481 832926

#### Evans, Paul

180 Aylsham Drive, Uxbridge UB10 8UF  
paul@pevans.co.uk

#### Faraway Games

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

#### Fentris Games

PO Box 46, Rochester, Kent ME1 1JQ  
FentrisGames@compuserve.com

#### Foster, J. Ten to Three

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Fryer, Richard, 6 Flamingo Close, Woosehill, Wokingham, Berks, HP11 1SL

#### Galactic Society Four

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graham@gsgf.com.co.uk  
website: <http://www.gsgf.com.co.uk>

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tel: 020 7720 4117

#### Paul Green

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clara@warriorgames.co.uk  
tel (Paul Green): 01706 881344

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plm@harlequin.com  
website: <http://www.harlequin.com>

#### Haynes, Nic

Flat 4, Brookfield Court, Victoria Road, Chichester, West Sussex, PO19 4GJ  
tel (Paul Hemmings): 01299 860116

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adamhill@cabinet.co.uk

#### Hollindale, Adam

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jonathan.honsdon@ntlworld.com  
website: <http://www.soccerstadios.com>

#### Hunk Monkey Games

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enquiry@kfgames.com  
website: <http://www.kfgames.com>

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Laughing Dog, 31 Leopold Road, Felixstowe, Suffolk IP11 7NP  
tel: 01223 866345

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31 Leopold Road, Felixstowe, Suffolk IP11 7NP  
tel (Sam Bennett): 01594 274452 (7-10pm weekdays)

#### Madhouse

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madcentral@aol.com  
www.madcentral.com  
tel: 01442 252950 (answerphone)

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danny.mcconnell@virgin.net

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andy.mindless@virgin.net

#### Mindless Games

217A Ilkeston Road, Nottingham NG7 3FX  
andy.mindless@virgin.net  
website: <http://www.mindlessworld.net>  
tel (Andy Simmonds): 0115 979 0797 (9.30 18.30 weekdays only)

#### Necrom Games

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ghempal@hotmail.com

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tel: 077 9047 9575 (between 6-9pm weekdays, 9am-8pm weekends)  
enquiries@novagames.u-net.com

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6 St Georges Rd, Dorchester, Dorset DT1 1PA  
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tel/fax: 01305 251451

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order@pagodagames.co.uk  
website: <http://www.pagodagames.co.uk>

#### Parr, Alan

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help@receivedwisdom.org  
bsyja@btinternet.com  
website: <http://receivedwisdom.org>

#### Richardson, Stephen

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27 Bonness Avenue, Didcot, Oxon, OX11 8NF  
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SEV	<b>Seventstar Games</b> , 57 Olympia Gardens, Morpeth, Northumberland NE61 1JQ <i>greensun@nitckelglobalnet.co.uk</i> website: <a href="http://www.sark.net/~sott/greensun.html">http://www.sark.net/~sott/greensun.html</a>	<b>AUSTRIA</b> <b>CSS Fritz Berger</b> , The Vienna Wizard, Hergersgasse 13/1/13, 1030 <i>Fritz.Berger@f150.n3.10.22.fidonet.org</i>	<b>Dahlhausen, Peter</b> , (World War IV, Adventurer Kings, Godfather) <a href="http://www.nc-daghlhase2@netcolnet.de">www.nc-daghlhase2@netcolnet.de</a>
SHO	<b>Shore, Justin</b> , 2 Langport Road, Weston-Super-Mare, Somerset BS23 1YR	<b>Hutner, J &amp; B</b> , Keplerergasse 16/5, A-1100 Wien (Fantaworld)	<b>Hubmann, Thorsten</b> , 30459 Hannover, email <a href="mailto:Thubmann@xyhora.de">Thubmann@xyhora.de</a> (Mandrager)
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GUR	<b>Skidmore, Matthew, Gurr Games</b> , 58 New John Street, Halesowen, W Midlands B62 8HH	<b>Skala, Wolfgang</b> , Kronenbachstr 122/9/1, A-1190 Wien (Magus)	<b>Jahnke, Gerhard</b> , Theuerstadt 16, 96050 Bamberg (Myra) <i>Gerhard.Jahnke.BA@t-online.de</i>
SNI	<b>Smith, Russell</b> , Middleton Cottage, 7 Fennels Road, High Wycombe, Bucks, HP11 1SL <i>smith_russell@hotmail.com</i>	<b>SSV Klapp-Buchler OEG</b> , Postfach 1205, A-8021 Graz (Legends, Epic, CTF 2187, World Conquest, Austerlitz) <i>Klaus.buchler@telecom.at</i> website: <a href="http://www.telecom.at/ssv-graz/">http://www.telecom.at/ssv-graz/</a>	<b>Miedler, Martin</b> (En Gardel): <a href="mailto:goemae@goemae.de">goemae@goemae.de</a>
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SOF	<b>Software Simulations</b> , Georgian House, Trinity St, Dorchester, Dorset DT1 1UB	<b>Sava Valser JPC</b> , 105 Rue Irma Fievez, 7021 Havre (Football Champions, also licensed for France)	<b>PBM Studio</b> , Strahlerweg 33, 76227 Karlsruhe (Spiral Arm, El Mythico, The Weapon)
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SPO	<b>Sporting Dreams</b> , PO Box 5423, Derby, DE21 2ZB website: <a href="http://www.sportingdreams.com">www.sportingdreams.com</a> tel: 01332 726376	<b>FLP</b> , Blaubaerhaven 7-1th, 2980 Kokkedal (Pollux)	<b>Stange, Timmo</b> , Alster Kirchgassee 2, 34369 Hofgeismar (Szenario) <i>Szenario@t-online.de</i>
SQU	<b>Squibb, Geoff</b> , 108 Teddington Park Rd, Teddington, Middx TW11 8NE <i>crusader@tininet.co.uk</i> tel: 0181 287 2592	<b>Morten Larsen</b> , (War of the Dark God, Throne of Cofain)	<b>STS Strategic Taktische Simulationen</b> , Nulsenstr 17, 31848 Bad Muender (Tangrad)
STM	<b>State of Mind Games</b> , 37 Balliol Drive, Didcot OX11 9RH <i>rob@stateofmindgames.co.uk</i> website: <a href="http://www.stateofmindgames.co.uk/">www.stateofmindgames.co.uk/</a>	<b>Jyrki Sundman</b> , Porvarinkatu 8, 65230 Vassa	<b>Wietach, Wolfgang</b> , Beim Schloss 17, 72074 Tübingen (Myra)
STO	<b>Stoker, John</b> , 63 Dunn Close, Eastney, Portsmouth PO4 9TX tel: 01235 211696	<b>Divisio Tactica</b> , Limingankatu 24 B 8 A, 90120 Oulu (Austerlitz, Olympos) <i>eving@netip.fi</i> website: <a href="http://www.netip.fi/~eving">http://www.netip.fi/~eving</a>	<b>Xyhora, J Dreuller &amp; Andr Starkloff</b> , Postfach 900308, 60443 Frankfurt/Main <a href="http://xyhora.de">http://xyhora.de</a>
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TIW	<b>Timewyrn</b> , 9 South View Terrace, Exeter, Devon EX4 6DF <i>timewyrn@timewyrn.co.uk</i> <a href="http://www.timewyrn.co.uk">www.timewyrn.co.uk</a> tel (Colin Forbes): 01392 361086	<b>Yrki Sundman</b> , Porvarinkatu 8, 65230 Vassa	<b>The PBM Locomotive</b> , 6 Via Piscane, 00152 Roma (Adventurer Kings, Godfather, Medievo, World War IV) <i>pbl.locomotive@mcLink.it</i> website: <a href="http://www.mclink.it/com/agonistika/pbm/cover.htm">http://www.mclink.it/com/agonistika/pbm/cover.htm</a>
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ULA	<b>Ulaidh Games</b> , 62 Beechgrove Avenue, Belfast BT6 0NF <i>christian.morris@virgin.net</i>	<b>RIKLAND</b> <b>Jyri Sundman</b> , Porvarinkatu 8, 65230 Vassa	<b>SOUTH AFRICA</b> <b>D Hamp-Adams</b> , 7 Conistonway, Pinelands, 7405, Cape Town (African Simulation)
UKG	<b>Undying King Games</b> , 31 Littlemore Road, Oxford, OX4 3SS <i>info@ukg.co.uk</i> website: <a href="http://www.ukg.co.uk">http://www.ukg.co.uk</a>	<b>Denmark</b> <b>Timo Andersen, Cant-Games</b> , Box 73, 4930 Maribo (European War)	<b>SPAIN</b> <b>Central de Jocs</b> , C/ Numancia 112-116, 08029 Barcelona (MiddleEarth PBM) <i>centjocs@intercom.es</i> website: <a href="http://www.centraldejocs.com">www.centraldejocs.com</a>
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WAY	<b>Wayne, Shambhala</b> , 59 Kilm Court, Newell Street, Poplar, London E14 7JP	<b>Denmark</b> <b>Timo Andersen, Cant-Games</b> , Box 73, 4930 Maribo (European War)	<b>R Bystrom</b> , Box 294, 731 26 Koeping (Trolls Bottom, Heptaechy, Conducting Chaos)
WHS	<b>White, Stephen</b> , PO Box 137, Burnley, Lancs BB10 2UG	<b>Denmark</b> <b>Timo Andersen, Cant-Games</b> , Box 73, 4930 Maribo (European War)	<b>Golser, Thomas</b> , Baecherwiesstr. 76, 8196 Wtl (Andromeda Connection)
WIG	<b>Wightman, Mark</b> , 31 Churchill Avenue, Gilesgate, Durham DH1 1PX	<b>Denmark</b> <b>Timo Andersen, Cant-Games</b> , Box 73, 4930 Maribo (European War)	<b>Matthias Heer</b> , Wasserwerkstr. 42, 8006 Zurich (Diplomacy, Grand Prix, Zueri Connection)
WLC	<b>Wilcock, Tony</b> , 74 College Road, Colliers Wood, London SE19 2BS	<b>Denmark</b> <b>Timo Andersen, Cant-Games</b> , Box 73, 4930 Maribo (European War)	<b>Ledergerber, Andi</b> , Harfenbergstrasse 29, 9000 St. Gallen (United - Swissleague)
WLL	<b>Williams, Mark</b> , 18 Wedderburn Rd, Great Malvern, Worcs WR14 2DG website: <a href="http://www.geocities.com/Area51/station/3676/sat.html">http://www.geocities.com/Area51/station/3676/sat.html</a>	<b>Denmark</b> <b>Timo Andersen, Cant-Games</b> , Box 73, 4930 Maribo (European War)	<b>Meng, Roman</b> , Schwarzarckerstr. 30, 8304 Wallisellen (Battles of Europe II, Universum V, WAR & WAR-X 1-2)
WIL	<b>Williams, Simon</b> , 8 Oster Close, Ely, Cambs CB7 4AY <i>www.chaostrail.co.uk</i> <a href="http://www.chaostrail.co.uk">www.chaostrail.co.uk</a> <i>www.alimatetst/freeservers.com</i>	<b>Denmark</b> <b>Timo Andersen, Cant-Games</b> , Box 73, 4930 Maribo (European War)	<b>Mueller &amp; Misch KG</b> , Postfach 288, 4102 Binningen (Gladius et Plium)
WRG	<b>WORG PBM Productions</b> , 25 Ladysmith Street, Stockport, SK3 8DY <i>pbm@worg.co.uk</i> website: <a href="http://www.worg.co.uk/">http://www.worg.co.uk/</a> tel (Kain): 070 2099 WORG (9674); fax: 0870 052 7521	<b>Denmark</b> <b>Timo Andersen, Cant-Games</b> , Box 73, 4930 Maribo (European War)	<b>Schmittler, Peter</b> , Schuetzenstr. 45, 9443 Wildau (Ashes of Empire)
WRI	<b>Wright, Chris</b> , 10 Fosse Way, Wilby Way, Wellingborough, NN8 2LQ <i>chris@strikeforce.fsbusiness.co.uk</i>	<b>Denmark</b> <b>Timo Andersen, Cant-Games</b> , Box 73, 4930 Maribo (European War)	<b>M.B.O.</b> , Bestekar Sk. 11/15, Besiktas Istanbul 80700 (Futbol 2000, Sultans of Stars)
ZEN	<b>Zen Games</b> , 25 Cromwell Road, Parkstone, Poole, Dorset BH12 2NW <i>zengames@quista.net</i>	<b>Denmark</b> <b>Timo Andersen, Cant-Games</b> , Box 73, 4930 Maribo (European War)	





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Motor Racing								
Raceplan Grand Prix	C-O	M-C	p	£5.00	1	£3.00	-	78a
S4 League Title	C-O	SFO	p	£5.00*		£20.00 for 9 wks	-	60a, 90a†
Rugby								
Rugby League Chal	M-O	CAM	p	Free	0	£1.10	-	87s
Rugby Stats	C-O	M-C	p	£5.00	5	£7.00 for 4	-	41a
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ABPW	H-O	BOO	p	£1.00	0	£1.00	-	
WOW	H-O	SM1	p	£3.50	0	£3.50	-	
British Wrestling Assoc	H-O	TUR	p	£7.00	6	£1.00	-	57a
IWA Wrestling	M-O	FRY	p	£1.50	0	£1.50	-	91a
Phantix Wrestling Synd	H-O	LAN	p	Free	0	£3.50	6a	76a
WorldFlex Wrestling								
Company Commander	M-F	OAT	p, e	£12.00	2	£3.50 £1.50/month	-	89s
Cruaid	C-F	TIM	p, e	£5.00	2	£2.20*	-	68a
Diplomacy	H-F	TIW	p	£10.00	1	?	-	
Warford	K-C	K-C	p	£3.00	3	£2.10	-	7a, 85a†
World War IV	C-F	PAG	p, e	£10.00	3	£3.00	-	61-62d†
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WW IV H2H	C-F	PAG	p	£5.00	3	£1.50	-	74s
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Fantasy								
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Game/GM	Web site	Flagship Ref.
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General PBEM portal (French)	<a href="http://www.tourdjeu.net">www.tourdjeu.net</a>	
AD&D	<a href="http://www.pbem.com/">www.pbem.com/</a>	87p
AD&D	<a href="http://www.epnigames.com">www.epnigames.com</a>	
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# Should GMs play in their own games?

*GLOBETROTTER mulls over this topic; yes, it's a pseudonym, but your editor knows who he is ...*

IN WRITING this article, I don't intend to imply that any GMs are anything but objective as moderators. What I would say, though, is that whenever GMs play in one of their company's games, then 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.

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 a GM is the actual programmer or game designer, the problem becomes even worse. It's almost inevitable that he will have knowledge of things which may 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 is expected to withdraw 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.

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? Come on, there must have been times when you looked at a game and thought, 'I wonder what would happen if I pursued that line of play?' You know, the one which leads to almost certain disaster but which would be a hell of a lot of fun to try. Paying players have a strong disincentive to try such strategies, but if you're not paying for the game the situation is very different.

I would argue that GMs are bound to maintain a strict neutrality and avoid any shadow of favouritism. After all, being a GM is a skilled profession (even if it doesn't pay as such) and a professional attitude is a must. The basic problem with GMs playing in a game is that, no matter the truth of the situation, other players may not be able, or may not wish to, keep the GM's two roles (as player and GM) completely separate. This is a classic case of perceived conflict of interest. No matter how many assurances the GM gives, other players may feel that they have been picked on by an employee of the company, and therefore could conceivably decide to take their business elsewhere because of this. The mere fact of the GM playing could have a negative impact on the company's (already meagre) 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.

I've taken soundings from various GMs on this subject, and I would agree that there are benefits to GMs being permitted to play in their own games. 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.

So what's the answer? Of course, the only way to totally avoid perceptions of conflict of interest is for GMs not to play in games in which they act as a GM. Just promising to keep totally hands-off the particular game in which they are playing is likely to be insufficient for some people. Remember that we're not necessarily dealing with real conflict of interest but perceived conflict of interest. In the end though, it boils down to a question of trust. Players should remember that it is very much in the GMs' interest to keep you playing in a game. Just as you trust the GMs with your money, and you assume that the GM will not give out information about your position to anyone else, so I would argue that you should give GMs the benefit of the doubt should they choose to play in a game.

That said, a word of warning for GMs. You have to be totally scrupulous. If there's even the faintest shadow of a doubt over your honesty, it's going to affect both your player-base and your reputation.

*[I don't myself think that GMs would cheat against their players, but the discussion's an interesting one - C]*

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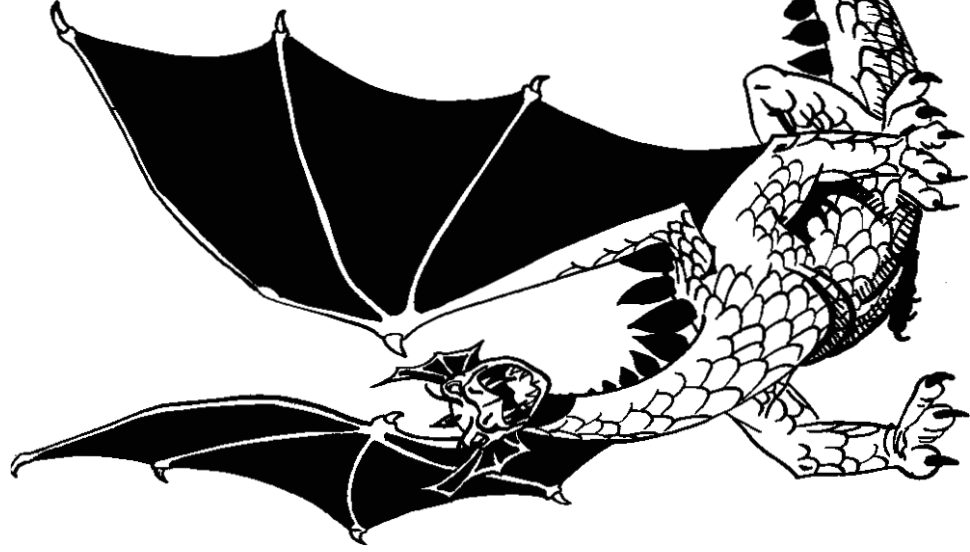
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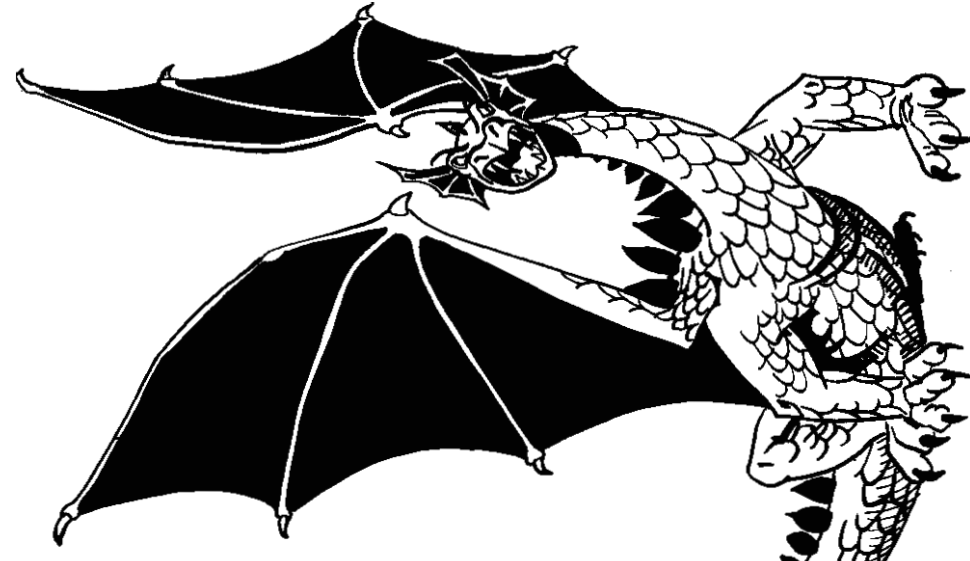
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